Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ARMA JANE KARAER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 19th of April 2004. This is an interview with Arma, that's A-R-M-A and Jane. Is it hyphenated?

KARAER: No, just two words.

Q: Arma Jane. K-A-R-A?

KARAER: E-R.

Q: Karaer.

KARAER: Correct.

Q: All right. What does Arma mean? It's a name I haven't seen much.

KARAER: Well, I never knew until a couple of years ago. A man I ran into a couple of years ago who had spent his adult life in Sweden told me it means "kind." It's possible because I come from Minnesota, and I was surrounded by people of Swedish heritage. My mother has a quarter of Swedish blood in her. Otherwise, you've got me.

Q: All right and we'll come to your last name a little later, but could you tell me now when and where you were born and a little something about your family?

KARAER: Okay. I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on April 17, 1941.

Q: By the way, happy birthday.

KARAER: Thank you.

Q: In two days.

KARAER: My maiden name is Polish, its Szczepanski.

Q: How do you spell that?

KARAER: S-Z-C-Z-E-P-A-N-S-K-I. I thought I was going to get an easier name when I got married, but now I've got another name that nobody can pronounce. My father's mother and father were immigrants from Poland, but he was born on the east side of St. Paul and grew up there.

Q: Do you know where they came from in Poland?

KARAER: I'm sorry to say I do not. I've often wondered why my parents' generation was so incurious about their parents' place of origin, but one time I thought I got an insight into it. I asked my dad when I was at college why he had never taught us Polish, because he spoke Polish until he went to school. He just looked at me. I realized that for him the ability to speak Polish had been nothing but trouble. Of course, I'm thinking oh my goodness, Polish is a hard language and if I'd learned it as a baby that would have been great. Never did.

Q: On your mother's side, where did they come from?

KARAER: Her grandparents on her mother's side came from Germany and on her father's side one came from Sweden and one from Germany. She grew up in a small farming community on the east border of Minnesota with Wisconsin.

Q: How did your parents meet, do you know?

KARAER: I think they met at a dance. They had common friends. My mother was working in a hospital on the east side of St. Paul when she met my dad, he lived there.

Q: Well, dance halls were the place where often they were ethnic dance halls. This was a prime place for young people to meet I think. What about, what was your father doing?

KARAER: My father was a laborer in a meat packing plant, Swift & Company. Now it is owned by another company and that name has gone away, but it was a big meat producer at that time. There was a big meat packing industry in South St. Paul the whole time that I was growing up.

Q: Do you have brothers and sisters?

KARAER: I have five brothers. They're all younger than I am. We were spread out, one was born a year and a half after I was and the last one was born when I was a freshman in college.

Q: I take it then that you became sort of, you had a lot of responsibility as a young girl?

KARAER: Yes, yes, I did and there were times when I definitely felt like Cinderella, but apparently it fits my temperament to be supervising large operations.

Q: Did your family, I would assume, your family, you grew up in a Catholic family?

KARAER: Yes, yes.

Q: Was both the Catholic Church and the Catholic, the Polish side of the church, just the Polish side, I mean was there a Polish hall? Did you grow up kind of Polish?

KARAER: Not really because the mothers of families sort of set what the ethnic traditions are. My mother was not born Catholic. She converted to Catholicism before she married my father. Her side of the family is Protestant and my dad's side is the Catholic side. We always went to church. We were always sent to catechism classes, and I still remain a practicing Catholic, but my father was an American and he was very suspicious of priests. He used to tell me stories about how he would see some of the people at their church of his father's generation who were immigrants who would kiss the hand of the priest. He thought it was terrible. His dad told him, that's the way they did it in the old country, but don't worry you don't have to do it, nobody expects you to do it. He brought me up to think that I should go to church and know the difference between right and wrong, but I shouldn't let them push me around. That is, interfere with my basic constitutional rights. One thing that I always had a deep suspicion of was the "Index." I have always loved to read books. When I was young we didn't have a library close to us, so my mother had to drive me to other communities so I could get library books. I was busily reading everything I could put my hands on and then I found out that the Catholic Church had whole long list of books you weren't supposed to read and movies you weren't supposed to see because they discussed issues that the Church considered immoral. When I first learned about this I asked my dad and he said, oh, forget it. I mean I was a kid. In those days in libraries, it took the librarian a while before she would let me read books out of the adult section of the library and she picked them out and that's how I got to read Ivanhoe because that was in the adult section. Anyway, we had this really neat priest at our church who I thought was cool. I think he probably didn't believe in the index either. One day, totally out of the blue (there must have been orders from headquarters), he had us all stand up at Mass to take the pledge of the Legion of Decency, the folks that made these lists. I looked at my dad. He and I were in the middle of the church. What were you going to do? Not stand up? He leaned over and he said, "Don't worry, if they make you do it, it doesn't count." That's the way we were.

Q: Well, the index also, actually it was rather handy. It gave young people a good list of books to read you know?

KARAER: When I was going to college I worked during the summer in the trust division of a bank in St. Paul. There were other girls working there some of whom were graduates of the Catholic schools in St. Paul. I mentioned that I had just read For Whom the Bells Toll. One of the girls was shocked, "What, you read Hemingway? You know, that's on the index, you're not supposed to read Hemingway." I said, "Why?" Of course she didn't know. They just told her she wasn't supposed to read it. She said, "Well, he was a Communist or something". I told her, It's true that the hero is fighting with the Communist side in the Spanish civil war, but at one point an old Spanish communist, who knows he's about to die, starts saying the Hail Mary. He hadn't stopped believing in God, he had just stopped believing in the Church."

Q: Well, tell me, what was home life like? I mean were you shepherding these five young lads around?

KARAER: Well, of course they were spread out. My mother had jobs that I had to do. I had to clean the house. I had to help with the laundry and with the little kids, changing the diapers and whatever. I learned to cook a little. My dad loved dessert. I always made the dessert when I was old enough to do this. I never really learned to cook anything else until I was living by myself. I was great with pies and cakes.

We lived in pretty much a rural area. In fact the house that we lived in had been a farmhouse with a small barn in back. My father used that for his garage, but it had a hayloft which my parents didn't use for anything, so my brother and I had this big place to play in. My oldest brother and I were very close until I got to be a teenager. In fact we were each other's only playmates. There wasn't anybody else out there. So, we used to put on plays in the hayloft just for ourselves. He liked to play war. He joined the Navy. He wanted to be a Seabee and he got to be a Seabee, but when we were kids he would put up with me and do plays and I'd put with him. We'd crawl through the weeds and be soldiers, but I was too logical for him because he'd be crawling through the weeds and all of a sudden he'd say, "Oh, I'm hit" and he rolled over, and I said, "You know if you're dead, we can't play this game anymore."

Q: There's always a killjoy in the crowd.

KARAER: I know.

Q: Did life outside of St. Paul or even inside St. Paul intrude much? Was there much discussion at home about local politics, international politics or anything like that?

KARAER: No. It was mostly books I read that made me start wondering what other places were like. I remember sitting on the front steps of our house in the summer time. I had this old geography book that my mother had gotten when she had been visiting her parents out in the country. They had cleaned out some storage shed or something and she brought these books back. They were old school books. They must have been published in the beginning of the 20th Century. I remember looking at this picture of a man on a camel with the pyramids and the palm trees behind him and thinking, " I'm going to see that".

Q: Do you recall any book or books that particularly strike you that you know, I mean you might say hit the right chord when you were young and reading?

KARAER: I went of course for adventure, and so I read a lot of books that I think at the time were considered books for boys. I don't remember the names of the authors, but books about the young boys who went to sea and things like that. One book that made me decide what I wanted to be in life, and it wasn't the Foreign Service, because I didn't even know what that was at the time.....

Q: I think there's a book on that.

KARAER: was Betsy, Tacey and Tib. It was three girls who made their own newspaper. And Jo and her sisters, in Little Women, they had a newspaper,. By that time I knew that I not only liked to read, but that I was a pretty good writer for my age and place. I thought it would be a neat thing to be. I wanted to be a journalist. That was what I wanted to do, right up through college. My major was journalism at the University of Minnesota.

Q: Early on were you able to zero in on any one journalist as sort of a role model?

KARAER: No, unless it was Betsy, Tacey or Tib. I graduated from high school in 1958. At that time the goal of most of the women in my high school graduating class was to get married. In fact, a number of them did get married to fellows we went to school with within a year or two after they left high school. The majority of those of us who went to college, and there weren't many, because this was primarily a working class place, went to teachers' colleges. I was very unusual in having this particular idea. When we were juniors, we were given a test to measure our aptitude for various professions. I remember so clearly sitting down with the school counselor who had showed me the chart that came out of my test. Probably because I liked to talk, my highest score by far was for law. She showed me this, and then she said, "But of course that's not a career for girls." Then she said, "And you want to be a journalist (I was high for that sort of thing, too), so this is what we're going to focus on". Years later during the Watergate investigation I noticed that there were a number of women on the legal teams assisting the Senate, and Hillary Clinton isn't that much younger than I am, but in my place and time there were very clear ideas about what women did and didn't do. I was already considered a bit odd, I think, by my friends because getting married was definitely not at the top of my list of things to do. Seeing the world was the most important.

Q: Yes, because at that time, I mean there were three major professions for women, nursing, teaching and secretary. That pretty much was and also a mother and a housewife. Let's go back a bit to the elementary school. What sort of, how did you find it? Well, we were talking about in elementary school and all, did you get involved in activities?

KARAER: Yes, when I was just in the second or third grade, they put me in a combination class with second graders and third graders and then after the first couple of months of the year they put me up into the third grade. We had to be bused to this school which was on the east side of St. Paul, and I lived quite a ways away way out in the country and so we stayed there over lunch. One of the kindergarten teachers asked me to be her assistant. I was to put wet cloths on the clay pots, do you remember? Oh, clean up the paint jars and mostly we'd play, but there was another boy that did some things, so we used to play house in their little house corner. Then the teacher formed groups of kids who needed to practice reading with kids who read well. It was just us, the kids, there was no teacher there. We'd just sit around the table and people would read and the ones that could read better would help them over the stuff that they stumbled on. When I think back on it, it was absolutely amazing. I don't remember anybody ever acting up or not doing what they were supposed to do. We sat there all by ourselves.

I had a wonderful kindergarten teacher, Miss Ambler. I loved school and I guess she loved kids who loved school. After third grade, they moved us to another school. We lived in the same house, but our school district had no school, so they moved us to another school on the east side. There, in the fifth grade, I remember we put on a play and I was the one who found the little script and found the costumes. Otherwise it was singing and square dancing. Every year the city put on something called the Festival of Nations and all the different ethnic groups would present their folk dancing and foods and whatever. We did the American thing, the square dancing. That's as far as elementary school was concerned. That was it otherwise. We had to ride the bus back and forth so we didn't have a lot of time after school and there were no playgrounds. Although we lived across the street from a lake. When we were old enough to manage the boat, my brother and I would go out in the boat.. He liked to fish. I liked to sit there and watch him.

Q: What was the name of the high school you went to?

KARAER: North St. Paul High School. It's now called just North High School.

Q: What was it like or what was its composition?

KARAER: The majority of the families that lived in area at the time were working class people, although we did have some other kids in the schools whose fathers were businessmen or professional people, but relatively few professional people. Big on sports. I spent a lot of time in the choir and in the band. I played the trombone. I think the bandmaster took one look at me and said, "Oh, you have long arms, the trombone is for you." I was in the junior and senior class plays. I was Lady Bracknell.

Q: Oh, yes. You disapproved of people losing their handbags?

KARAER: Yes, but I approved of men who smoked because I always thought a man should have an occupation.

Q: Yes. We're talking about The Importance of Being Ernest, by Oscar Wilde.

KARAER: I must say that in that school the only teacher that I had in that whole time there that was not really down the road, middle class, to whom the most important thing in the world was to keep your lawn mowed, was the speech teacher who was also, of course, the director of the plays that we were in. He was just totally from a different world. This was the difference between having people who taught you the basic stuff you needed to know and someone who was an intellectual who actually talked about stuff you've never heard of before and made you want to go and hunt it down.

Q: It sounds like you got quite a bit from the school. You had to pick and choose, but it sounds at least like there were opportunities there.

KARAER: Another thing about a young woman deciding what they wanted to do with their life. I know my mother thought that it would be nice if I didn't have to go and be a housewife right off the bat. There was never any thought of why don't you have a boyfriend and about getting engaged. The most wonderful thing she could think of for a woman to be was an airline stewardess or a home economics teacher. I did home economics classes right through my senior year. I was the president of the home economics club. My mother never flew in an airplane until I was in the A100 course here and I bought a ticket for her to come and visit me. One of the first things she said to me when she got off the plane was, "You know, I always thought that being a stewardess would be so nice, but they're waitresses!"

Q: What were the dating patterns there at that time at the high school?

KARAER: Oh, well, people had steady boyfriends or there would be group parties that girls arranged. We did not live in the kind of a house that was conducive to having parties. I would go to other peoples' parties, but I was one of the tallest people in my class. I was the brain. I was not dating material at that time.

Q: Oh, it is interesting how things change more by age, not by generation, I think it remains the same. While you were in high school, did the outside world intrude? I mean these were the Eisenhower years and I was wondering whether you know, you thought about events beyond well, in Washington even though it was the Cold War or anything like that.

KARAER: You know, my dad used to insist that we all be quiet at the supper table so he could listen to the news because we always seemed to eat supper when the news was on the radio. I did hear the stuff. I remember seeing President Truman making speeches on the rare times when we went to the movies and we saw the news reel. My dad only had gone through two years of high school and left school during the Depression. He went off to try to find himself a job. He didn't read a lot of other things, but he always read the newspaper from front to back. When I was little he would read me the funnies, I guess I was very impressed by the fact that my dad thought that the paper was so important. My mother didn't and still doesn't. I guess somehow this came into my consciousness because when we were in school I remember wondering why my peers weren't more interested in this stuff. When you ask if the outside world intruded, I didn't realize this until after it, but one thing that annoyed me was the weird way we were taught history, because I loved history. It was stories, right? I wanted to know what happened and where these names that I heard, like Napoleon and Robespierre, and all that, who were they, what did they do? In our history class, we would never seem to get beyond the Egyptians and the medieval period. I swear, they'd make us memorize terms and things like that, but we never even talked about a more recent history, particularly 20th Century history. Afterwards, I wondered if it was because every teacher in the U.S. was scared to death that some kid who didn't like them was going to claim they were Communists.

The week before we graduated from high school, oh, I'll back up a little bit. Another place where I got information was my uncle who was unmarried and lived with my grandparents. He subscribed to magazines like the Saturday Evening Post and Life magazine and when he finished with them he would give them to my dad. I loved reading the stories in the Saturday Evening Post and looking at those pictures in Life magazine. They had a book at my grandparents' house, which was the Life magazine picture history of the Second World War. My father had not gone into the Second World War because he had kids and they didn't draft him. Three of my uncles went and one of his brothers was killed in Sicily, so this was a house where we went to think about the war, which was the way I looked at it when I was a kid. I remember looking at those pictures of the bodies lying on the beaches and stuff like that, thinking wow, this was awful. Anyway, the week before we graduated, I'm sitting at the lunch table with my bunch of friends (we were the clique, the leader girls of the school), we had been taking tests, and one girl said, "Who did we fight in the Second World War anyway?" I was aghast. After all we were the children of the men who fought in the Second World War and here's this idiot..... I told her and, I guess, I got pretty perturbed. My good friend sitting next to me, who was the peacemaker, said, "Now, now Arma Jane, it's not important." "Yes, it is important, " I was almost crying.

Q: Where does your family fit in the political spectrum, Republican, Democrat?

KARAER: Oh, Democrat. Absolutely Democrat. I don't think my mother voted for anybody except a Democrat until Jesse Ventura became a candidate in Minnesota. My dad was a working man. He belonged to a union. He voted Democrat. It was definitely made clear to me that the Republicans were only for business people and the Democrats were for the working man, that was it. My mother's father was a farmer, never voted anything but Republican.

Q: How about your grandparents? Did they fit into the scheme of things?

KARAER: I remember feeling that I had to be very respectful to my father's mother and dad. They were sweet, nice people. They talked funny. It was much later on when I figured out that the reason grandpa always sounded so funny to me was not just his accent, but that he spoke almost totally in the present tense. He had wonderful stories. My dad was very much an introvert. He went to work, came home, read the paper, didn't particularly want to ever go anywhere else. His dad was a party guy, and we used to go to these Polish weddings and they were wonderful. My grandpa would dance and he liked his drinks. My grandma was very shy and sweet and you know, she was the one that did all the cooking and all the cleaning and nobody ever thought of helping her. My mother's father lost his farm in the Depression and he worked different farms that he rented. Eventually both my grandpa and grandma went to work in a furniture-making factory and left farming. I remember going to their farms and riding with grandpa on the tractor and working behind the horses and trying to milk a cow and getting knocked off the stool with the cow's tail and all that.

My mother's mother was very emotional. I mean everything was a crisis for her. So, in a way it was kind of fun. She was the one who, without knowing it at all, taught me that it would be absolutely stupid to ever smoke. I was probably only about six or seven years old and I remember her telling my mother that she was trying to stop smoking, it was so hard, but the doctor said she should and oh, on and on. I was sitting there thinking, if it's so hard to stop, why would you ever start? I never wanted to smoke, never did. Grandma was a great housekeeper, and my mother got the same thing from her. It was really important to be a good cook and a good baker and to sew. My mother taught me how to sew, but I realized again much later that although I didn't develop good eye hand coordination until I was about a junior in high school, my mother had me sewing when I was 12 years old and she is a perfectionist. Without good eye hand coordination, that means lots of ripped out, redone seams. We had this pedal sewing machine. My dad said once, "You know, it's funny that that sewing machine hasn't totally rusted away with all the tears that have been spilt over it."

Q: You graduated from high school when, '59 or '58?

KARAER: '58.

Q: '58. What did you do with the trombone? Did you get involved in Polish weddings and play the trombone?

KARAER: Oh no, I played in the high school band. My musical abilities are definitely limited. I'm not the kind to just automatically pick up a tune. I did it more for the social thing. I love to listen to music, but my ability to make music is definitely limited. Can I go back to something I just remembered?

Q: Certainly.

KARAER: You asked about the outside world intruding. One of my very clearest memories was seeing the Army-McCarthy hearings on television. I'm a Second World War kid who thought soldiers were wonderful people, but there was this general sitting there with sweat pouring down his face and McCarthy's minions are going after him. I didn't know what that was about until much later. I remember being so shocked, wondering how can they treat somebody like that. Then when I was in high school I got a book from the library about Joseph McCarthy, and I understood, but it was really scary.

Q: Well in '58, what was, where you were going or what were you going to do when you graduated from high school?

KARAER: Okay. All through high school my goal was to go to college. My parents agreed with that, but they didn't know anything about colleges and we didn't have any money to go to any special college. It never occurred to me that I would go anywhere except the University of Minnesota. I hoped to get a scholarship and I did. I lived at home for the first two years. I went to college and drove back and forth to the campus, which was a long way. We were way on the eastern suburbs of St. Paul and the University is across town on the eastern side of Minneapolis. The idea was to major in journalism. When I got the catalog to register for classes, I was going through everything. It was so exciting looking at that catalog and all the stuff that was there that you might study. I came across international relations. I said to my dad, Do you think I should study to be a diplomat?" I remember I was sitting at the kitchen table, he looked at me and said, "People like us don't get to be diplomats." Of course up until the Second World War that was pretty much true. I went to the University. They told us it was a very big place. You've got all of the stuff here and all these people for you to draw on, but you have to manage yourself because we're so big, nobody is going to sit around worrying about whether you're doing well or not. If you need help, you have to come and ask for it.. That was it. Having gone through school being the best student in my class all the time I got really scared by the amount of work expected of us. The first week at the university I used to come home, eat my supper, go up into my room and there were all those books piled up in which we had to read three chapters a week. I would sit on the floor of my bedroom and I'd cry for about 15 or 20 minutes and then I'd do what I could do. The next night the same thing again. It wasn't until I got the results of my first exams that I knew that I wasn't going to fail. It was the first time that I was in classes where there were people who were just as smart or smarter than I was. It was overwhelming, and I was so afraid I was going to fail.

Q: How was the composition of the university at that time? Was it a good solid mixture of men and women? Was it quite a Minnesota student body?

KARAER: Yes, well, we had quite a few foreign students there by that time. It was mostly kids just like me. I don't remember there being many blacks, of course there were very few African Americans who lived in the Twin Cities at that time. Now of course there may be more than then, but no, mostly white, except for the foreign students who were there.

Q: How about the courses you were taking? Did any particular ones strike you as sort of opening up the world not necessarily international, but whatever?

KARAER: Oh, everything. We didn't start journalism courses until the second year. The most impressive thing for me in all of the really interesting stuff that I was reading and doing, was the freshman English course. Minnesota had, and I hope still has, this wonderful freshman English course which was really like boot camp for academics. When I was registering they told me that my tests are high enough in English composition that you could skip freshman English if I wanted to, but they suggested that it would be wise not to, and they were right. We wrote a specific assignment every day. The teaching assistant went through it with a red pencil and referred us to the grammar handbook and forced you to figure out what you had done wrong and how to fix it yourself.

Q: Was there a beginning, was there any sort of political thrust or movement within the university at that time? Minnesota of course comes from the more of the liberal side, I mean was it labor or liberal party or whatever it is?

KARAER: The Democrat Farmer Labor Party it was called.

Q: Yes.

KARAER: Hubert Humphrey.

Q: Yes.

KARAER: You know I can't remember the names now and I wasn't involved in it except to read about it in the student newspaper, but there was a lot of free speech stuff going on there all the time. It was much later in the life that I discovered that the rest of the United States wasn't like Minnesota. Minnesota is a very peculiar place in a nice way. There was a really extreme concern about public welfare and the duty of citizens to take care of those who can't take care of themselves, a point of view that that came from the state's Scandinavian heritage. For example, we had beautifully appointed schools in Minnesota. Years later, I went to the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. I was shocked at how the schools were starved and despised there.

Q: Did you get involved in any particular things or activities at the university?

KARAER: Yes, I started as a reporter for the school newspaper. At first I just did my assignments, turned them in and didn't hang around the paper. I took my academic work very seriously, and didn't spend much time socializing with the others on the paper. The University of Minnesota is so huge that if you are going to be in any student activity, you have to kind of specialize in it. If you're going to be in the student theater, you're in the student theater, and there's no time to be in anything else. If you're going to be in the newspaper, you're in the newspaper or in the student government or whatever, but you can't just flitter around from one activity to another. The so-called extra-curricular activities are semi-professional operations there.

In my junior year, the woman who was going to be the editor of the school magazine asked me if I would be her deputy. It was a small operation. The two of us found the articles and art work and handled all of the editing, including last minute changes in the print shop with the fellows who set the type. Only the business side, advertisements, etc., was handled by the student newspaper. She and I became really close friends together with the little group of photographers and artists who worked for us. Then I became the editor of the magazine in my senior year. I ran into political stuff when we published a short story that was a Catcher in the Rye kind of thing. It had a lot of profanity in it. When we published it, the Christian right on campus, which had never been very prominent until then, came out of the woodwork. How could you publish something that took the name of the Lord in vain? Well, thinking back on it, I probably should have considered that. I learned that when you make decisions like that, you may not be the most popular person in the world.

Garrison Keeler was an undergraduate at Minnesota at that time, too. The magazine had a short story contest every year. We collected the manuscripts and gave them to a panel of English professors. They chose the winners and then we published the winning stories. At that time Garrison Keeler certainly wasn't well known. I had never heard of him before. He was just another kid in the school. He submitted a manuscript for that contest, but he submitted it late, and we had to reject his material for that reason. Oh my gosh, was he mad. We were just a bunch of unimaginative rule-follower types, according to him. That's true, that's what I am, but to me it didn't seem fair to just publish a bunch of rules and then not follow them. I then forgot all about him, but he didn't forget about me. I graduated in '62 and I went to India on a scholarship for two years, came back and was going to graduate school in South Asian Area Studies. The international student office asked me if I would ask the magazine's editor if he would put something in about the exchange scholarship program. Garrison Keeler was now the editor of the magazine. I hadn't thought about that guy since. The first thing he said to me when I walked in was "Why aren't you married yet?" This was 1965. The term "male chauvinist" wasn't current yet, but "jerk" was. Needless to say, he refused to put anything in the magazine about the exchange program. Years later, when his Prairie Home Companion on NPR became so popular and people were raving about Garrison Keeler, I was thinking, yes he is a wonderful talent, but there is this sad, mean side to him that comes out in his books. He had how many wives?

Q: A good number.

KARAER: It's not just fun and games with Garrison Keeler. Garrison Keeler has a lot of anger back there, and I just happened to be one of the people who set him off.

Q: Well, while you were there in 1960 at the university, did the Kennedy Nixon phenomenon hit, particularly the Kennedy side had an awful lot of students who particularly sort of signed up on the Kennedy band wagon. Did that hit you or not?

KARAER: When I went to the oral interview for the India scholarship they asked me who is the person you admire the most? I said John Fitzgerald Kennedy, probably not knowing all that much about him, but I was just thrilled and swept away by his wonderful rhetoric-.

Q: Did you ever get, pay any attention to Minnesota politics, Orville Freeman or the others?

KARAER: I knew who the governor was and when they had elections, but no, I didn't pay attention to politics. As I said my family didn't do politics. They voted Democrat because they believed that that was the only way people like us were going to get a fair shake. That was all they needed to know.

Q: What about what sparked this, let's talk about what you were thinking about doing after you got out of the university.

KARAER: My plan was to get the degree in journalism and then find myself a job on a newspaper, but when I was on the magazine, we had an Indian student who wrote a column. He came to me during my senior year and suggested that I apply for the University's exchange scholarship with Osmania University, which is located in Hyderabad, India.

Q: It sounds Muslim.

KARAER: Hyderabad was a Muslim state before it was incorporated into India. A student from Osmania came to Minnesota every year and Minnesota sent somebody to Osmania. Our columnist said, "My friends and I think that you should apply for that." I said, " I'd like to see other places, but I don't know if I'm flexible enough to live in a foreign country." I wasn't big on trying weird food and stuff like that. They said, "Oh, Arma Jane, you would be really good. Go and do it." So, I signed up, and I wasn't picked. I was the runner up. Another woman was picked. Then a couple of weeks later I got a telephone call. She had been offered a scholarship in a graduate program somewhere else, and she had decided to take that rather than to go to India. Now I was it. I told the man who was running the program, "I don't know if my family has the money to buy a ticket to India and back, so I don't know if I can really do this." He said, "Don't worry, we'll apply for a Fulbright travel grant." That's what they did and that's what I got. I got to travel to India with that year's Fulbright group who were all graduate students. In fact they were doing their Ph.D.s on subjects about India. I was the youngest, having just received my B.A. That was the most wonderful experience, and that is what got me into this business.

Q: Well, you were at Osmania from when to when?

KARAER: I was there from '62 to '64. The program was just a one year program, but in the middle of the first year all of the Fulbright people got a letter from the Fulbright Commission saying if you are interested in staying for a second year and if you get a letter of recommendation from your academic advisor here, we will consider providing you with a scholarship for a second year. This was when the United States owned half the rupees in India, remember?

Q: It was huge, huge.

KARAER: Once they paid the dollars to get you over there, then it cost nothing really to keep you there. Oh, I should back up a little bit now. I was so naive, so Minnesota, I guess, that although I had worried a little bit about adapting, I never really worried about the people when I got there not accepting me or not being nice to me. One night the telephone rang and one of the Indian students that had gotten me into this to begin with, announced, "Well, Arma Jane we have arranged for you to stay in Hyderabad with Mrs. Naidu." Previous exchangees had been put up in the dormitory at the university and it was not an easy place to live. Mrs. Naidu was the sister of a man who was doing post doctoral research in zoology at Minnesota. All the Indian students from Hyderabad knew each other, and they knew that Mrs. Naidu was the sweetest lady in the world. They asked him to ask her if she would let me live in her house. So for the two years that I was in India I lived with that family. The father had been the director of public health for the State of Hyderabad and then he retired. The Government of India had brought him back to do the same job in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, so most of the time he lived in Kashmir doing his work and his family stayed in Hyderabad because in India it's not easy to get your kid into a good school and Mrs. Naidu had to stay where their kids were in school. I had a wonderful time. She would talk for hours about anything I wanted to know; about the stories of the religion, the religious and cultural celebration. We'd go to her friends and do all these things that Indian ladies do and it was just great. The Registrar of the University and his extended family, who were friends of Mrs. Naidu's brother, also became my good friends.

Q: What sort of courses were you taking?

KARAER: Since we initially thought I was only going to be there for one year, and there was no question of getting a degree, I picked an assortment of classes that would help me learn as much as I could about India. So, I did one class on Indian political organization.. I did one on Indian history. I tried to do one on sociology, but the teacher never showed up. Actually that taught me a lot about India because that was a big problem for all the Indian students, not having all their professors being really committed to what they were doing. Then I had an Indian philosophy course, which was totally over my head. Just trying to keep those names straight was enough for me, but the course had an interesting professor. I ended up mostly just reading for history and philosophy and then having private sessions with the teacher to talk about what I'd read. I had started out going to the philosophy class, but I was a disruption. I would start asking questions, and the teacher, who had had some training in the U.S., would start talking to me. He enjoyed the back and forth of class discussion, but the other students didn't like it at all. Their examinations depended on the notes they took in the class, which they memorized and regurgitated in the examination. For every five minutes that I wasted by asking questions, they were losing notes. I picked up on that pretty fast and we changed the regimen.

Q: Were all these classes done in English?

KARAER: Oh, yes. It was tough on the Indian students. The teachers all came from the generation that grew up and were educated under the Raj and their English was very good. Many of the people with whom I was studying, had gone to high schools in the rural areas. Their English was not good. They could speak well enough in casual conversation, but they found it hard to read books, and writing in English was pretty much past most of them. I remember one fellow who was in my political science class with whom I we became friends. He invited me to his wedding and took me out to meet the family in the village and all this stuff. He was a Hindu. Our political science professor was Muslim. One night at his home he said, " Rashid (our professor) is prejudiced against me. He's prejudiced against Hindus." I objected. I'd gotten to know Rashid on a personal basis and I thought he was really a fine guy. Rashid was my academic advisor for the paper that I was doing for the Fulbright program, and I told him that this fellow was really upset. Rashid explained "You've been in that class. You know when I ask them to do a paper, a little two page paper, the best they can do is copy out of three books. Then they read what they've copied back to you. They can't even pronounce the words. How can people who can't write a paper for an M.A. program do a Ph.D. program? It would never ever work."

Q: You were there during a particularly auspicious time, weren't you, by Indian American relations because of our support of India during the Chinese Indochinese war?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Did that intrude at all on what you were doing or did people refer to it?

KARAER: Yes. Dr. Naidu introduced me to Krishna Menon when I visited Kashmir. He was a communist and had really beaten up on the United States in the United Nations. We had a lively debate. In those days it wasn't so much that Indians were pro-American. In fact, abroad at least, Indians claimed to feel very superior to us. India might be poor, they said, but it was very moral. On the other hand, according to this view, the United States was running around picking on people and that wasn't good. Of course, just a couple of years before, they had marched into Hyderabad and just taken it away from its ruler, the Nizam, so it was clear to me that India was quite capable of using military power in its national interest.

Krishna Menon represented India's face to the outside world, but inside India it was different. Dr. Naidu was always lamenting the orderliness of the "good old days", i.e. the British Raj, and I was shocked when some of the women at the University approached me early in my time there and asked, "Why did you come here? Isn't America better?" I was really knocked over because the only Indians I knew before were Indian students in the United States who were super duper nationalists.

Q: Did you find yourself in debates or discussions with Indian students about the United States?

KARAER: I don't remember having debates with people about the United States. I think I learned more from them. We had a mock parliament. That was my first exposure to British-style parliamentary debate. On the floor of the U.S. Congress it seems that the more they disagree, the more elaborately polite they become to one another. Everybody takes turns speaking and if it's not your turn, you keep your mouth shut. In the British style everybody is yelling and hollering at the person who is speaking. The Indian students were really into this rowdy behavior. I was appalled. How do you ever get anything done this way?

Ultimately, I didn't teach the Indian students much about America. I don't think they were interested. But, the experience was very important to my education, because, in addition to all that I learned about India, I learned why I believe what I believe. In other words, I learned why an American thinks the way they think. Because it's when you get jammed up against something that is in so in many ways so very different from what you think is right, or true, or effective, it really makes you think about what is good and effective about your own system. Before that I had never reflected much on my own cultural or political values. In the A100 course they had somebody come in and point out to us that there's more than one way of doing things in the world and yours may be a good way, but somebody else's isn't necessarily bad. Why does this work for us and why does that work for them? To me these cultural comparisons were fascinating.

There was another woman in the Fulbright group from Harvard who was doing research for her Ph.D. and who was also based in Hyderabad with me. We spent a lot of time together. We traveled together. It was really good to have another American with whom to discuss these experiences. There were other Americans in Hyderabad too. At the same time that we were there was the first year of the Peace Corps program in India and we had a group of Volunteers teaching at Osmania. One of them was a journalism teacher and I went with him on an expedition out into the countryside one weekend where his students were going to interview villagers who were in a pretty remote place. The idea was to find out what information they got about the outside world and how did they get it. It was a fascinating thing. One of the questions that was asked was whether they had heard that the Americans had sent a rocket to the moon. The villagers said, "yes, tell us about it. " They had heard the story before and they wanted to hear it again. It was like hearing one of the stories of the Ramayana. It was a wonderful, fantastic adventure story. Now if you asked them do you believe for one minute that a man really is flying around up by the moon, they'd probably say, "no, but it was a great story, tell us again."

Q: Well, did you find yourself running across the thing where, I mean one of the great problems between Americans and Indians is they both tend to preach to each other and both are obviously on the higher moral ground, you know. You think of two mountains where they're sort of squawking at each other. Did you run across that?

KARAER: The second year I was there, I was traveling, collecting material for what I expected to be my masters thesis. It was on a river water dispute, which involved a number of different Indian states, and I was interviewing members of the legislative assemblies in the states affected by the dispute. In Bombay I interviewed a Communist member of the legislative assembly. When I had finished with my questions, he said, "Now, I answered your questions. Will you answer mine?" I thought to myself, "Oh, here it comes. The Communists. " He said, "There's a lot of labor unions in the United States, right?" I said, "Right, my father's a member of one." "Why hasn't the revolution happened?" I said, "Because most of the workers are capitalists, that's why." My dad used to talk about how the guys in the locker room, after slinging sides of beef around all day, talked about whether they should buy Minnesota Mining stock or something else. The Indian didn't believe me. That was one of the kinds of experiences that open your eyes, and you think, "Oh my God, people really think that our workers might lead a revolution." What they didn't know was that by the 1960's the only Communists in the United States were a few intellectuals and artists.

Q: Yes. Apparently the movie The Grapes of Wrath was shown in the Soviet Union and showed how awful and downtrodden they were. Most of the people said, look, these poor people have cars which they did, old rattletrap Fords and things, but I mean, you know, it's just a different world. Well, did you find while you were in India, India is one of those places that captures some Americans, you get there and they become so immersed in India and all that they lose sight of almost being American. The sort of the love of India. Did this bug bite you at all?

KARAER: No, I mean I didn't want to not be myself anymore. I found it a fascinating place. I loved my friends. The Naidus were so kind and the Registrar's family was so smart. They were kind, too. They were funny. They were just so, so smart that I just adored them. I wanted to find out as much about India as possible. The Fulbright scholarships paid for travel. If you wanted to travel by third class train you could go anywhere. It was supposed to have something to do with your research, but you know, third class trains hardly cost any money at all. My friend and I went everywhere and I went to some of those places by myself. I think I learned to respect some of their beliefs and the way they preferred to do things that before I had gone there I wouldn't have understood and would have thought was a big mistake, but I knew it wasn't for me. I could understand about arranged marriages and why they worked and what they have in some respects that are much better and safer than the kinds of marriages that we make in the U.S., but it didn't mean that I wanted to have an arranged marriage. I was a Catholic. I went to church every Sunday while I was in India just like I do here and watched the people come into the church and stand in front of the statues in the church and put marigolds in front of them and pray in the same manner they do in Indian temples.

I went to the temples. The '60's was India at its most tolerant. Obviously there were some radical Hindu nationalists around, because one of them killed Gandhi, but they just were not on the radar screen at that time. To me the Indians were just incredibly tolerant. India absorbed religions and philosophies and made them their own, an eternally expanding intellectual exercise. I think the whole time I was there there were only one or two temples that wouldn't let non-Hindus come into them. If you were there and they were doing a puja, the priests would come around and put the sacred fire in front of you, give you the coconut milk in your hand to sip, just as they did to all the other worshipers. We did it. Not because we had converted to Hinduism, but because everybody was doing it. They invited us to do it and we did it, out of respect for them.

We found the young Indians particularly naive about what they believed. I think that's true of every young person, but I remember sitting in a railway carriage once with some students who started telling us about how life in the villages was superior to life in the city because village people were more moral and they had higher moral standards. Then my friend said, tongue in cheek, "Oh, so then after you've graduated you're going to go and live in a village?. They said, so innocently, "oh, no. They don't have running water there." There was another time we were at the Taj Mahal and came across a young man and his wife. Everything except her face was covered by a burqa, and they were holding a transistor radio. In those days, particularly in India, transistor radios were sort of a new fangled thing to have. My friend said, " I've got to get a picture of this. The old and the new, the burqa and the transistor radio." She asked them if it would be all right to take their picture. They agreed and we started talking. The young man told us, "I don't want her to wear that thing." She said, "But, you know, the other ladies in the family would not think I was a nice girl if I didn't wear it." That was a great revelation to me. My daughter and I watched an Iranian film recently that explored how women pressure other women to follow conservative traditions. It's not necessarily the men who are forcing them to do it.

Q: Well, did you, looking at things, as things were in the United States in the 1960s and in India, did you find yourself feeling at all militant about how women were treated? I think particularly in a predominantly Muslim state.

KARAER: Well, one Muslim woman that became a friend of mine was a student at the university and was also planning to be a journalist. She was a very tough minded person and her father obviously had allowed her to go out and do things. She took me to a wedding where her cousin was being married to another cousin. The man she was being married to was mentally handicapped, but they were marrying her to him because they wanted to keep the family property together. I couldn't tell what his mental state was, but she told me all this stuff. We, oh, I should say, I did not personally start to be aware of the women's movement and all of this until after I got back from India, which is totally another story. In India I saw Muslim women who were from or had been from wealthy aristocratic families who were now living in two rooms in the back of a crumbling mansion because they'd lost everything after the partition of India when a lot of the families left for Pakistan. Hyderabad in those days had a very much Gone With the Wind quality to it. You'd walk through the streets and there would be what had once been a fine house with a beautiful garden and now it was some kind of government office and there were goats eating the vines on the porch and stuff like that. Now you go back to Hyderabad and Indian nationalism grabs you by the throat. The airport is in Secunderabad. From there you go across the bridge to Hyderabad. In my day the bridge was just a street with street lights on it. When I came back there in 1988, they had erected very elaborate statues of Telugu heroes, real and fancied, across that whole bridge. Also, when you drive across the bridge towards Hyderabad, on this big hill facing you, which used to have only a radio tower on it, is a beautiful white temple that just glows in the night. You know immediately that the Muslims have finally been squished.

Q: One final question on this period unless there's something else to talk about, did you ever run across diplomats?

KARAER: Yes, that's why I decided to go for the Foreign Service. My girlfriend and I were in Delhi at a party and there were two fellows there who were from the embassy. We asked them what they did. They were political officers. They said they interviewed politicians and then wrote up the conversations for the embassy. I thought, "That's what I'm doing. I can do that. " Of course, by this time I knew that I just loved living in foreign places and finding out about foreign places. When I got back to Minnesota, I also decided that I did not want to do graduate research in journalism because that was like counting how many kinds of particular words were used in 12 different newspapers. I went back to graduate school, but I did it in South Asian Area Studies.

Q: This would be in 1964?

KARAER: Yes, the fall of '64. By the summer of '65 I had completed the class work and I only had to write the thesis. Then a girlfriend, who had been at journalism school with me, called to say they were hiring at the women's page of the St. Paul Dispatch and Press. They hired me and I started working there. So, I was working and then part time trying to make something out of my thesis.

Q: This is tape two, side one with Arma Jane Karaer.

KARAER: I'd made up my mind that I was going to take the Foreign Service examination, and I knew that there would be questions about American culture. I wasn't too sure I knew that much about it. I asked a friend of mine for help who'd been an exchange professor in American Studies from Minnesota to Osmania while I was there. He recommended some books for me to read and I reviewed American history. It turned out that that was exactly the right thing to do, because in those days they wanted to know if you knew American government and American history. They wanted to know if you could write. Then they had some stuff thrown in there about logic and foreign cultures. Strangely enough one of the foreign culture questions asked the candidate to identify a picture from the Buddhist caves at Ajanta and Ellora on the east coast of India. It was the hardest test I'd ever taken in my life. It was a very deeply satisfying test to take. It was meeting those guys at that party that made me get interested in taking the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Where did you take the oral exam?

KARAER: I took that in the Federal Building in Minneapolis the following summer. I took the written test in December of '65, and it was the summer of '66 that they asked me to come for the oral. Now, there we come to the status of women. I read Betty Freidan's The Feminist Mystique the first year that I worked at the paper. It was '65.

The women's movement had gotten underway. I read Betty Friedan in paperback, so the book had been out for a couple of years anyway. Up until that time, to tell you the truth, through college, I had never really worried a lot about discrimination against women. It was like the counselor in the high school. There were certain things women did, and I did not question that. At the paper I was working on the women's page. They did have one woman working on the city desk, but the rest of us, all the other women who worked there, were working on the women's page. That was okay for me, but it wasn't horribly exciting. I didn't really care that much because I'd already made up my mind I was going to try to do something else. I remember having this big hot debate with one of the city desk editors about why they didn't have women doing regular reporting jobs. I said, we're just as smart, we can write well, why can't we do those jobs? He said, "Well, I don't think a woman would like to look at dead bodies" (as though my colleagues looked at that many dead bodies in St. Paul). I responded, "I hope you don't have anybody working for you who likes to look at dead bodies." That was it.

I was beginning to see that the men who ran things were deliberately putting things in the way. I took the written examination and went back to the university to touch base on the thesis with some of the professors. I was so excited. One of my professors was a very well known man and a specialist on south India. Of course in those days it was very fashionable at the university to be anti-government people.

Q: Oh, yes.

KARAER: This was the lead up to our involvement in the Vietnam War. No, we were already deeply involved in the Vietnam War. I was in Cambodia on my trip back from India and waiting for the bus to take us to the airport. I picked up a newspaper, spelled out the headline in my basic French and I said to my girlfriend, "Oh, my God, they fired on an American ship."

Q: The Gulf of Tonkin.

KARAER: The Gulf of Tonkin. I said, " I bet there's going to be a war. We're really lucky we saw this." (Because we'd just been to the wonderful temples in Angkor Wat.)

Anyway, back at Minnesota my professors were critical of government and all of them said to me, "Oh, that's very nice, that you passed the test, Miss Szczepanski, but you know they don't take women." For the first time in my life I was really angry at the establishment. I was so angry. I went into the oral interview thinking, "Okay, they're not going to take me, but by golly, they're going to spend the time interviewing me. "

Now, I also knew that we had passed the Civil Rights Act. I wondered how this was going to impact. I went in there and they started asking questions about my background. I had worked for one summer at the Department of Agriculture as a summer intern. They wanted to know how this had taught me about America, American policy, the American economy and so on. They asked me personal questions mostly. They asked me if I was engaged and I said no, I wasn't. Well, they kept coming back to that, asking in different ways, was I planning to get married. I said, "You know, gentleman, if you want me to say that I don't like men and that I'm never going to get married, I won't, because I do, and maybe one day I will be married, but I haven't predicated my life on it." The head of the panel said, "Now, now, we like young ladies." I thought yes, right, as long as they don't get married. Then they started the actual questions of the test. It was great, because having got that off my chest, I wasn't nervous anymore. Because along with being told that they never took women, I had also been told all those stories about how they tried to trick people during the test.

Q: Dribble glasses and have a smoke and there's no ashtray.

KARAER: Right. Right.

Q: I used to give the test. We sometimes would tell people we don't play these games.

KARAER: I really enjoyed the test. They were interesting questions.

Q: Do you remember any of them?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: I'd like to get the feel of them.

KARAER: The one that I thought was most interesting was how do you think the world would be different today if the Louisiana Purchase had never taken place. I got myself into trouble with one, but I really respected the testers. They asked, "Pretend you're in the embassy in Nepal and the ambassador has been off on a tiger hunt for two weeks. Now he's come back, and he wants you to brief him on what's happened in the world while he was away." Well, I was prepared for that. I'd been reading the paper and Time magazine every day. I started rattling off all these things and mentioned that they had devalued the British pound. Then the next question was, "Tell me Miss Szczepanski, what does devaluation mean?" I knew it had something to do with making prices different, but I did not really know. I had not taken economics in college. I had no idea, so I admitted, "I don't know." Then the man who asked the question briefly explained to me what it meant, and I said thank you. I thought that was great. I thought, "These are the kind of people I want to work with, even if they don't want me there.

Q: I'm trying to recapture that time. The general presumption was, it was almost the fact that if a woman became a Foreign Service Officer and married anyone, I mean another Foreign Service Officer or a foreigner or an American, they were expected to resign. That stopped about five or six years later, but at that time, so the general feeling was that if you took a woman on you were displacing somebody who would probably have a career in the Foreign Service. It was a fallacious thing, but I mean that was the mindset.

KARAER: Although it was the general belief that you had to resign if you got married, that wasn't true, because men didn't have to resign if they got married. The problem was that they would apply the being available for worldwide service rule very strictly. So, even if you married another officer, they had no program to try to keep you both officers in the same place. If the Department said, "He's supposed to go to South Africa and you're supposed to go to Iceland. Suck it up or resign." That's what happened. There were some female officers in the Service who were married, but they were married to men who were retired. One I heard was an artist, another one was a writer, men who could take their careers on their backs with them. Of course there were very few women officers and most of them, as you say, resigned once they married. Anyway, after the question period was over, they asked me to wait outside of the room for a little while. Then they called me back in and they told me right away that they were going to recommend that I be hired. I was called to go to Washington the following January. So, my A100 course started in January of '67 and that was my entry into the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll put at the end of the tape so we know when to pick it up. We're going to pick this up in early 1967 when you joined the Foreign Service. Something that I didn't ask, but I'll ask the next time, what did your parents and family and friends think about this new thing. We'll talk about that.

Q: Today is the 30th of April 2004. Arma Jane, what did your parents think?

KARAER: Well, they were pleased that I got the job that I wanted to get. They had gone through the whole thing about daughter going off to strange places when I had gotten the scholarship to go to India. Although they never raised any objection or question about going to India either, I knew that they had some problem because just before I left for India, there was a family gathering at my father's father's house. Before we got there, my mother told me, "No one has told grandpa yet that you're going to India, so you better tell him yourself." Coward. Coward. Grandpa was in the kitchen getting his beers and shots of whiskey ready. That's what he always served to all the grownups. I went out there and I told him that I had gotten a scholarship and that I was going to go to India. I think totally unexpectedly as far as my parents and my aunts and uncles were concerned, my grandfather said to me, "You're a good girl.. You should do these things when you're young." Then I realized that of that whole bunch, except for my uncles who had been drafted and had gone to the Second World War, my grandfather was the only one who had ever gone anywhere when he was young. He was all for it. Nobody else in the family ever said anything, although once I got into the Foreign Service I was sure that none of my relatives except for my mom and dad really understood what I was doing. They thought I was a secretary. I mean what else could I be? I went off to work for the government. The fact that my business card said "Third Secretary " didn't help anything, so I'm sure that my father's oldest sister to her dying day was convinced that I was a secretary.

Q: Well, you came in in 1967 to the basic officer course. What was sort of the constitution of your particular class?

KARAER: Well, I don't remember the actual numbers, but it was mostly men. Just very few women. Maybe about seven or eight of us. Of course there were USIS people. One of the officers who had come in as a State Department officer in the middle of the A100 course got a better offer from AID and took the job with AID. He's still a friend of ours.

Q: Were you there, were your antennae looking at how women were being treated in this atmosphere or not at that time?

KARAER: I don't remember being treated or thinking that we were being treated any differently by the training. On the other side of the coin, I don't think they sent any women to Vietnam in that group. Quite a few of our classmates were sent to Vietnam. From that point of view I guess we were treated better than a lot of the men. No, in the class we had the same treatment as far as I could tell.

Q: I'm not trying to make a point, I'm just trying to capture the atmosphere. Speaking of atmosphere, what about Vietnam? This is again relatively early times in Vietnam, but things were beginning to heat up. How were you all thinking about this?

KARAER: Well, being the good, go-with-authority person that I was, I had accepted the government's explanation for why it was necessary for us to be in Vietnam. I think a lot of the people who got assigned to Vietnam were not terribly happy about it. Here they were, having gotten their deferments until then by going to college, and now they ended up going there without a gun, you know? I'm trying to remember. I honestly don't remember any deep discussions at that point about being against the policy.

Q: How did you find the early training?

KARAER: I remember really liking the officers who did the training. I was really impressed with their knowledge, their sense of humor. Some of it, as I recall, was pretty mind numbing, going through all the history of the State Department and FAM's. One of the things I remember is how bad the air circulation was in those rooms in that building. Those were the days when 90% of the population smoked. I remember that, the tiny minority of us who didn't smoke having to sit in there for a month or more. We did ask timidly if maybe there was something to be done about improving the ventilation and we were told, well, if you don't smoke, you could sit in the row next to the windows and open the windows a crack and of course that would pull all the smoke directly toward us. We just shrugged and went on. Many years later, when I went to the War College, it was the smokers who were driven into the outer darkness and everybody else got to breathe. The last part of the training was the consular training since most of us were going to be consular officers. This was before they had thought up Consulate Rosslyn. Consulate Rosslyn was a very good idea because what they did in those days was fundamentally introduce you to the FAMs.

Q: Foreign Affairs Manual.

KARAER: Right. They let you know that the FAM's existed, which one you were supposed to look into if you needed an answer to a question, and then pretty much said we'd get on-the-job training at post. Well, for most of those who got what they needed at post that was great. For the rest of us we had to sort of educate ourselves.

Q: Yes. I can remember sitting in Dhahran and having a ship's captain call me up and saying I have a mutiny on my hands. I said, well, tell me about it captain as I was thumbing through the manual, mutiny, mutiny. It wasn't a mutiny. I hardly ever had anything to do with ships' captains. Did you have any thought, were you picking up what you wanted to do, were people pretty well tracked at that time?

KARAER: Oh, no, you see they didn't invent the cone system until a couple of years later. So, it was the personnel system that decided what we all wanted to do. Looking back on it, definitely the Department had decided that consular work was women's work. That was clear later on.

Q: And in personnel.

KARAER: Personnel and consular, right. At that time, the Foreign Service gave all its candidates the same test. We were all supposed to be generalists. You were assigned to wherever they wanted to send you and you did whatever they told you to do. I did have an interview in personnel just before the assignments were made, and the gentleman who interviewed me asked me what I saw myself doing at the end of my career. What was going to be my goal? I said, "Oh, didn't anybody tell you? I'm going to be the ambassador to India." He looked and me and said, "Well, since you've already been to India, maybe we'll send you somewhere else." That was it and they assigned me as a consular officer in Istanbul. A place that I knew absolutely nothing about. There was a couple in my class, former Peace Corps Volunteers, who had served in Turkey. It was from them and whatever reading I could do really fast that I learned what I knew about Turkey before I got to Istanbul. That was just perfect for me. That was a very romantic unknown place to go. That was what I wanted.

Q: You were in Istanbul from '67 was it or '68?

KARAER: From about July '67 until June or July '69.

Q: What was the consulate general like in those days, the staff and the consul general and all?

KARAER: First of all the consulate general itself was in this wonderful old mansion on the eastern side of the Golden Horn. It had been as I recall the mansion of an Italian businessperson who had built it in the previous century. There were wonderful murals of sparsely clad nymphs flying across the ceiling of the second floor that had been the ballroom I guess, which had become the central area for the consul general's office. At one point earlier in the 20th Century some prissy consul general's wife had had them paint over the murals, but they managed to remove the paint without destroying them. The nice rooms on the lower floor were divided up by wallboard partitions to make the consular and commercial sections and a waiting room. My little office had a wonderful marble fireplace, carved marble beauties holding up the mantelpiece. Initially, the consular section was in a separate building across the parking lot, but in 1967 they came up with one of our periodic money saving exercises..

Q: I think it was called BALPA or something like that, balance of payments, exercise. We weren't going to spend much overseas.

KARAER: Well, as a result of BALPA, they moved USIS into that building and they moved us over to those little rooms in the bottom of the now somewhat destroyed Italian villa. Oh, by the way, these two buildings were next to the famous Para Palas Hotel in Istanbul which is the place that Ataturk liked to hang out in before he escaped from Istanbul and went off to inspire the revolution.

Another thing that happened because of BALPA was that some really wonderful FSNs, who by that time were well past the American retirement age, had to retire. One of them was our senior FSN, Abdur Rahman Bey, who was in the style of the Ottoman dragomans. Believe, me of all the diplomats that passed through that place, nobody looked more like an ambassador than he did. He was perfect. He knew everybody, he knew how the system worked and he was wonderfully helpful to young officers that were there. Another person that retired then, that worked in the consular section was a white Russian who had escaped from Russia to Istanbul when she was a young woman. In my time in Istanbul there was a rapidly aging white Russian community. She told wonderful wild stories about her life as a young woman in a wealthy family in Russia. Half of the FSNs in the consulate said she had to be lying. Of course the younger people loved the stories. I decided to choose to believe her. She lived with her cousin. She said he was her cousin, anyway, who had been gassed in the First World War, so she supported him and they lived in a little tenement just down the street from the consulate. She knew many languages and that was one of her fortes. Oh, by the way, I should say that the State Department decided to train me in French before they sent me to Istanbul. It was primarily to get me off of language probation, so I passed their test and I went to Turkey and of course hardly anybody spoke French around there except for the occasional Frenchman. We had Turkish classes that you could take at the Consulate, and I went to them every afternoon. One day, after I'd been there about a year and a half, I decided that in order to help Americans who needed visas for other countries, we really needed to know what the business hours of the other consulates were, since most of them did not stay open as long as the Americans. I wrote a form letter to all of the consulates in Istanbul, in English of course. I certainly didn't write French well enough to do it in that language, and it never even occurred to me to do it in French. I got answers back from all of them, most of them in English. The French wrote back to me in French. That was fine. When that French letter came through it was sent to yet another FSN, an elderly Greek gentleman whose primary task was to translate diplomat correspondence. Well, when that French letter hit his desk, it hadn't even come to me yet, he found out that I had mailed out all of these English letters. He came down and he lectured me that all diplomat correspondence was to be done in French. I thought, "Well, I think those times have passed", but I listened to him respectfully. Of course he was protecting his own job, and he too had to retire because of BALPA.

Q: Who was the consul general when you were there?

KARAER: When I first came the consul general was Lansing Collins. He was a direct descendant of Secretary of State Lansing. Mr. Collins was extremely interesting. He was writing a book on the Lausanne Treaty. He was very interested in archeology and liked to collect interesting objects. I didn't have a great deal to do with him, but there is one thing I will never forget, and this too is connected with BALPA. The embassy had instructed the consulate to follow the Department's instructions about retiring our overage FSNs. Mr. Collins did not want to lose the services of Abdur Rahman Bey, and I don't blame him because it was really hard to replace all of that knowledge. Finally, I don't know if that was the only issue, certainly a junior officer in the consular section didn't know this stuff, but the DCM came from Ankara and it was clear that his job was to get Mr. Collins underway. A lunch was held and it was held at the consulate, not at the consul general's residence. I was asked to attend this lunch. The consul general was at one end of the table. The DCM was in the middle of the table, where there were the eight people seated altogether and I was at the right of the consul general and next to the DCM. A very strange seating arrangement. However, once lunch was underway, I found out what my function was. My function was to be the person to whom the consul general addressed himself when he wanted the DCM to know what was on his mind. It was weird.

Q: They were talking to each other directly.

KARAER: Well, the DCM was willing to address the Consul General directly, but the Consul General wasn't willing to talk to him. I was told, by somebody in the admin section, that the consul general had fought bitterly to keep Abdur Rahman Bey, and the answer that eventually came back from Ankara was that if the consulate general in Istanbul couldn't operate without the services of one FSN, then perhaps we had better close the consulate general. I always remembered, as I went through my career dealing with FSNs and with personnel arrangements, that however indispensable you may think you are or someone else is, you're not.

Q: What was consular work like?

KARAER: Istanbul was an important stop on the hippie trail from the United States and Europe to Nepal and India. Everybody came through Istanbul. There were two things that definitely marked consular work in Istanbul, leaving the visas aside, but as far as Americans were concerned. One, we dealt almost exclusively with very young people. Secondly, they were either arrested for drugs, had "lost their passports" for which there was a big market in Istanbul, or they had snapped psychologically somehow or other.

Q: Kids were playing with a lot of drugs in those days, too.

KARAER: Yes.

Q: I mean, what I mean is on the mental side.

KARAER: Yes, in some cases it may have been drugs, but Istanbul did things to some fragile people. In the spring of 1968, there were big student riots in Paris. Two Life magazine reporters turned up in Istanbul at the end of that. They wanted to do a story on the hippie trail. They came to talk to me and I saw one of my own bon mots in Life magazine, although I was not credited for it. The reporter asked me why I thought that young people broke down mentally when they get there. I said, "Because this is where the world changes." They were hanging on as long as they were in Europe in cultures where they could recognize themselves, but once they stepped across the border everything changed. This is where the church is replaced by mosques. Where the food is different. Where everything is different from what they're used to, and I think that's what makes them lose it. The fact that they were using drugs certainly didn't help, but we had several spectacular mental health cases. We had a lot of arrests. We had one arrest and death of an American citizen. He was a major drug smuggler in a shoot out at the police station.

I spent a lot of my time visiting jails. Because while I think that Midnight Express, the movie, was a really vicious slander of the Turks and the way they treated people in jail, it is true that Turkish authority is willing to use brute force pretty quickly. There's the rules. You obey the rules. If you don't obey the rules, Bam! Particularly these young kids. Some of them weren't so young, but they were people who thought the rules were for everybody else but them, and that's why they had decided that they were going to get rich by bringing a kilo or two of hashish back to the States or to Europe. I realized that if I didn't show up very frequently at those prisons, and if the people in charge didn't think I was going to show up frequently, that some of the smart mouthed American kids might get slapped around. So my Turkish assistant and I went every couple of weeks to see everybody. I am certain that none of my people were maltreated while I was in Istanbul. I also learned an important thing about the psychology of consular officers while I was there, something that could be applied to policemen or social workers as well. By the time I had spent a year and a half in Istanbul, I had a very low opinion of my fellow citizens, about their common sense, their ability to take care of themselves. It wasn't until later that I realized that, of course, almost all of the ones that I saw were people who couldn't take care of themselves and that there were hundreds if not thousands who passed through who were taking care of themselves just fine and I never laid eyes on them. I remember reading things after I left there about the whole concept of burnout. What this does to people who are in that kind of service job, policeman, social workers, stuff like that and that helped put these experiences into perspective for me. I tried when I was supervising consular sections to make sure that the people who worked for me got some relief from this sort of thing so that they could handle it with more equanimity than I think I was able to do. It bothered me a lot. I wanted to take care of these people, but at the same time my respect for them as individuals got lower and lower all the time.

KARAER: My worst case from the point of view of justice was a kid who had a half a gram of hashish in his pocket, but Turkish law, at least at that time, didn't have room for nuances. If you had it, you had it and then you would be arrested. The police were very good about calling us when they had an American. Somebody from the consulate would go down right away to see them. We would tell them that the next day they would be taken to see the public prosecutor and he would try to determine whether there was cause to hold them for trial. We told them that when they were asked if they knew what the hashish was, they were to say that they thought it was Turkish tobacco. Somebody just gave it to them. In fact in the case of the kid with the half a gram, someone had given it to him. The dealers would give samples and then come back later to see if they could sell more. If the arrested person was asked if he had ever used drugs, he was to say never. If they had a small amount on them, that story might get them released. It wasn't worth trying if they had a large amount, and then they would be jailed. We would provide them with the list of attorneys. We had one wonderful attorney who was really good at spinning out sad tales in the courtroom. We would generally get these people released on bail unless they had a very large amount of this stuff when they were caught. Once they were out on bail, of course their passports had been taken from them, we would try to get them out of the country before they had to go back for trial. What we could do with the boys at least, was put them on the train to Thessaloniki. The train tracks pass through a part of Greece before re-entering Turkey and arriving at the border where passports were checked. The train went very slowly through the little piece of Greece, so the idea was to jump off the train there and then throw themselves on the mercy of the Greek border guards. It was a cinch that the Greeks would never send them back to Turkey. Their story in Greece was, "I lost my passport. I need to get home. Just tell me how to get to the consulate. They would let them go to the consulate in Thessaloniki and they could get a new passport. That worked for a number of them. So I'm not kidding when we said we sent them into your consular district.

Q: Oh, yes, this is the consuls prayer, " oh, Lord, please not in my district."

KARAER: We figured, we had a good share of our own strange ones and could spare some for you. I had a mental health case that was truly sad and is a mystery to this day. I wish I knew the explanation. We were called by the Turkish police saying that they had picked up an American citizen, an African American who had a passport, but no Turkish visa, and who had been wandering around naked in the old part of the city. They had taken him to the state mental hospital on the outside of Istanbul in a suburb called Bakirkoy. No one knew how he got into the country. He did have an airline ticket on him and the ticket was to Adana, in southeastern Turkey. Now, you know Adana is where the Incirlik Air Force Base is.

Q: Yes.

KARAER: So, we thought, maybe he knew somebody there. We quickly found out he was not a G.I. They asked around in Incirlik and nobody knew this person. We then sent the telegrams to the Department. Our practice was to take mental health cases to a private mental hospital which was called the French Hospital in Istanbul, something which had always worked out really well for me. We'd get the person there. They would have very good individual care while we were getting their families notified. The families would come and get them and take them home and pay the bill at the French hospital. So we moved this poor guy there, and then we sent the telegrams in and the Department searched around and got hold of his relatives who said they didn't want to have anything to do with him.. By this time we'd run up something of a bill at the French hospital and you recall there was no money for the government to pay this stuff. I thought, "Oh boy". So we had to have him moved back to the state mental hospital, which was clean and kind, but it was just a holding place. They simply didn't have the resources to help these people much. I then started to try to figure out how to get this guy back to the States.

In the meantime, a very fine elderly lady in Istanbul, who was Turkish, but who had over the years developed a close relationship with the American community, went around and asked businesses for money so we could pay that bill at the French hospital.. The Department then came back and said, "We don't think we should have to pay for his repatriation. After all the airline that brought him there, brought him there without the visa, they should take him back. Unfortunately for us he had gotten to Greece on Pan Am, but for some reason he had taken Olympic Airlines from Athens to Istanbul. Olympic shrugged their shoulders and said, "Not on our dime", Then the Department said, well, the Turks ought to deport him. He didn't have a passport. Now, okay, he didn't have a visa. This was the other thing. It was really hard to get through the airport in Istanbul, to get past all of the checks you had to go through to get into the country. The Turks were pretty paranoid. This guy somehow had managed to walk around all of the immigration checks and get into the city. I went to see the head of the immigration police about this problem. I sat out in the waiting room of this man's office and he had this secretary, a very attractive young woman who literally was sitting at the desk doing her manicure while I waited. (I should add that female diplomats were a new and interesting thing for the Turks and a lot of the rest of the world. People asked me if it was hard to do my job in a Muslim country. My answer always was, "Heck, no". My male colleagues might have to cool their heels for days before they would get an appointment, but the officials always wanted to see the woman consul). When I got in, I explained what I wanted, and he said, "Well, you know, now" (talk about not in your consular district) "he's at the mental hospital now. It's their problem." Of course he wasn't going to get any money from anywhere to pay for a ticket all the way back to the United States, and he wasn't going to try. Then he said to me, "You know, it was very nice talking to you. Perhaps we could have dinner together sometime." (I was in my late '20s and he must have been at least in his '50s), And I said, "Oh, that's very kind of you. I would love to have dinner with you and your wife sometime." I didn't hear anything more about that.

So, back to the Department and there it sat. What were we going to do? The Turks weren't going to deport him. Olympic Airlines wasn't going to take him, now what? While I'm waiting for the Department to cogitate over this, a Peace Corps volunteer showed up in my office, very irate and self-righteous. He was volunteering his time at the mental hospital and he wanted to make sure that I knew that a citizen was there. I told him yes, I know he's there and we've been trying to get him back home for some time, but nobody wants him. Then he said, "But this is terrible. Don't you know at that hospital they can't do anything for him to help him get well?" He's banging on my desk, and so I went to the filing cabinet and I got out the file on this guy, which by now was six inches thick at least. I slammed it on the desk in front of him and I said, "Well, this is what I'm trying to do about it. Now, if you've got a better idea, you tell me what to do." He then backed up and left my office. I sent yet another telegram and said, "This is getting ridiculous. This is wrong. We can't keep this man in this place."

Oh, in the meantime, I'm going out to visit him. "Of course he doesn't recognize me or anything. At least we know that he's in good physical condition. Finally, the Department comes through and says we've got Pan Am to agree to fly him back from Athens so we're sending you the money to buy the ticket from Istanbul to Athens, but he'll need an escort. My Turkish assistant said, "Hey, we're in luck, there is a doctor who has just gotten a visa to go to study in the United States" to do his post-med something. "Maybe he'd agree, you know we'd pay for his ticket and he gets the free ride. He'll escort this guy." So, the man agreed. The day comes. We collect the patient from the hospital and the escorting doctor. My assistant goes with as far as the immigration check. Goodbye. My assistant is no more back in the office than the doctor is on the line. The patient has wandered away from him and can't be found. I was ready to jump out the window, but they eventually did find him. The Turkish police scooped him up in some corner of the airport and they got him back to the United States. I hope the poor man is well somewhere,

Q: These young people who got arrested and let's say who went through the process, but had more than a minor amount of hashish, did they end up spending quite a bit of time in jail?

KARAER: I think the longest time that anybody spent that I had anything to do with was about three years. Let me tell you about the kid with the half a gram. When he was arrested, he was arrested with two British subjects, young people also. My assistant got to him right away and told them what to tell the public prosecutor. Well, apparently when they went in there the Brits told the public prosecutor they didn't know what it was, never used it in their lives, and he let them go. The American, who was really a nice kid and must have been taught that honesty is the best policy, said he'd smoked marijuana once in college. I think that was the truth. It probably was all he'd done, but that was it as far as the Turks were concerned. He was convicted. His father came out for the trial. His father was just devastated, of course. They put the boy in a prison on the opposite of the Bosporus from where we were. I would go over there. These visits would take up almost the entire day, because there were no bridges across the Bosporus and you had to go over on a ferryboat. The warden in that prison seemed to be a pretty nice man. They brought the prisoner into the warden's office to talk to me, but he would not talk to me. He'd answer the questions I asked him, but he wouldn't say anything else, and then I started to worry. I was reading about stuff that was going on in the Cook County Jail at that time, what happens to young boys when they get thrown in with the criminals. I'm imagining that he's being raped and he won't tell me. I tried to impress on him that I was his only connection with the rest of the world. I told him, " I will do what I can to help you, but I can't do anything for you if you don't tell me. Is anything bad happening to you? You can tell me." " No, I'm all right." Okay. So, after a few months there they transferred him to a prison in Ankara which was a special place for foreigners who were not convicted of violent crimes. Then I got a letter from him. He said, " I wanted to tell you that I'm here and that it's quite nice. They've given me a job, which I learned in five minutes. It's sewing notebooks together. There are other foreigners here, people I can talk to. I want to thank you for everything you did for me. I know you worried about me. Nothing bad happened to me there. I was just so shocked that I had ended up in this situation that I just couldn't speak to anyone." That was a huge relief to me.

Q: Oh, yes.

KARAER: But, I had the one case where everybody in the consulate was concerned about the survival of our citizen. It was around Christmas time. I was having a Christmas party at my apartment. The Marine guard called me and said, "Miss Szczepanski, the consul general wants you to come down to the consulate right away. We've got somebody in trouble." So, goodbye party and down I go in my miniskirt. I remember that because the consul general commented on it later on. I was told that earlier in the afternoon, a young woman had shown up at the consulate and told the Marine guard that her boyfriend had been kidnapped by some thugs down by the waterfront. The Marine guard called the duty officer. The duty officer, who fortunately was a political officer who spoke Turkish, went with her down there. By the time they got down to the waterfront, which was where the cruise ships come in and dock in Istanbul, there was a huge crowd in front of this building. As soon as they arrived, the people in the crowd started pointing at them and saying, "She was with him, she was with him." The police grabbed both of them. The consular officer identified himself and asked what was going on. It turned out that what she hadn't told the consulate was that her boyfriend, whose first name was Gary, was a big time drug smuggler and they had been going across Europe doing his thing. They passed through Istanbul, made some contacts in Istanbul, and then had gone further east, picked up a bunch of drugs and came back to Istanbul. These same contacts had then met them again at a cafï¿½. She said the contacts took them to a hotel where they proceeded to beat up her boyfriend, whereupon she ran away and went to the consulate for help.

She believed the contacts were drug dealers.. What really happened was that his contacts were plain clothes narcotics police and the seedy "hotel" that they had taken them to was the narcotics police headquarters. Admittedly, if I were an American in there for the first time, I would have mistaken it for a seedy hotel. It was on the second floor over the arrivals area of the port. I remember going up and down the stairs many times, the orange peels on the stairs and all this kind of thing. At the top there was a desk and a room with a bed in it for their duty officer to sleep in. It didn't look like any hotel you ever saw before, but it sure didn't look like a police station either. Apparently when they brought him into the police station, they neglected to search him well. They got him into this room where the bed was, I guess, and started questioning him and slapping him around, whereupon, and this she knew, but she hadn't told anybody, he pulled out his gun and she ran. Well, when she left, he started shooting, they started shooting and in the end I think three policemen were killed, one of whom was the deputy director of the narcotics police in Istanbul, somebody that we had trained in the United States. In his effort to escape, Gary broke through into the next establishment, which was a very nice restaurant, but where he broke through was like the cloakroom where the waiters changed their clothes. Some poor waiter got in his way, he shot him and he went up onto the roof of the building. I'm still waiting for somebody to make a movie out of this one. By this time our DEA agents from the consulate had been called by the police and they got down there just in time to see Gary fall down into the center courtyard from the roof full of lead and totally dead.

Now, back to our poor duty officer and the girl. The police accepted that he was a diplomat. They let him go, but they took her into custody. The consul general told me to get down there right away. He was afraid that something might happen to her because they, of course, were really angry. They knew me at the police station and they let me in, but they wouldn't let me talk to her. Well, we needed to know who she was. Okay, well, when they could figure it out, they'd let us know. I told them we'd wait and sat down on top of the desk in the middle of the room. A huge number of journalists were there by now. Then I realized that all of the journalists were being let into this room where she was, but not us. In the middle of this, another young woman comes in, American, long hair, long skirt, and they bring her over to me. They want to know if she has something to do with it. She was a tourist who had left some paintings to be sold on consignment with a souvenir shop next to the port. She was on her way out of Istanbul and, because of the shootings, the shop was closed. How could she get her property back? I explained to her what had happened and I said, "These people are just looking for somebody else that they can arrest and, unfortunately, the way you're dressed, you look too much like the person they've just arrested. I said, if I were you, I'd forget the paintings and I'd just get out of here. She said, "Right"! And away she went like a bullet.

Another half-hour passed and one policeman came and dumped on the desk in front of me five, six, seven different I.D.s that they had taken off of this girl and whoa boy. We looked through all of them and there was one American passport that looked quite genuine. I called the consul general with what I had. He said, "Arma Jane, you're right, that's who she is. We just had a call from her father. It's already been on television in California." We waited some more, and finally they started hustling her out of that room and off to jail. I stood up on the desk in my miniskirt and yelled and told her who we were and that we knew she was there and that we would be able to see her in the jail the next morning. That was the beginning of a long relationship with this young lady who, in spite of the fact that she was in such dreadful trouble, was so smart mouthed, so 'I don't care about anybody or anything,' it was hard to feel sorry for her. Her lawyer tried hard to sell the story that she was simply in this man's thrall and didn't have anything to do with the drug trafficking, was just being dragged along by him, but they convicted her and put her in prison.

Right in the middle of all this her parents, who had mortgaged their house again so that they could pay the legal bill, had talked to some Turkish friends they knew in California and the friends had suggested the name of another lawyer. Now, the lawyer that she had chosen from our list was our good old lawyer who had done all these other drug cases before. The guy her parents chose was not a criminal lawyer, he was a business lawyer, but agreed to take the case. He went to see her and oh, he said his wife wanted to go with me to visit her. They thought it would be more comforting. I thought oh, boy, this is not going to work. I don't know how many upper class Turks you know, but there are the hanim effendis, the wealthy women who are always beautifully, perfectly groomed, and their fingernails are gorgeous because they never have to clean anything. Their maids do it all for them. And here I am with the hanim effendi in the biggest prison in Istanbul, a hanim effendi who is probably about the same age as the mother that the girl had run away from in the first place. And what do you think she says to the girl, right off the bat? " Don't you think you should cut your hair?" Now, this is, of course, a very practical suggestion since the girl was in prison, but it was not the right thing to say to a rebellious girl in 1969.

When I got back to the States I was going to get married and I was going to marry a Turk, so they needed to assign me to Washington so that he would have time to live here and get ready to get naturalized. They assigned me to, what did we call it, CSA? I don't remember what the letters stood for.

Q: Affairs? Anyway, it was basically dealing with people in prisons.

KARAER: No, everything, people who were sick or dead, federal benefits people and all this. They assigned me to a job to handle the arrests on this end of the cases. I picked up where I left off with this gal and talked to her dad frequently. Finally the day comes when she's to be released. I must have been back here about a year by the time this happened. Her father called me. They'd sent her money so that she could come home. She took the money and she disappeared again. The parents were left to pay for their house again. Do you see why I didn't really like these people?

Q: We were seeing the tip of the spear and this was a particularly bad period. This is don't trust anybody over 30 and anybody under 30 had been born without original sin and was completely free to do what they wanted and that was the right thing. You know, it was a peculiar era. Did you try to do anything about warning Americans, I mean going there, saying don't mess with drugs?

KARAER: We contributed suggestions to the Department about it. This was about that time that the Department started putting out flyers that they still put out saying, "Remember when you get arrested in a foreign country, you're going to stay arrested until you get proven innocent." Of course, these people never came near us until they got into trouble. There were just dozens and dozens.

Q: What was the political situation like in Turkey and in Istanbul from '67 to '69?

KARAER: There was a lot of left, wing nationalistic definitely anti-American stuff. I don't think we had more than one ship visit while I was there and that was a real problem. There had been many ship visits before. I mean these aircraft carriers could go right up in the Bosporus and anchor right off Dolmabahce Palace. That visit, I remember, they were concerned about anti-American students attacking the sailors. I remember there was an attack on a boat load of sailors with students throwing rocks, and the whole time there was a big contingent of riot police standing right behind the football stadium across the main drag from there not doing a doggone thing about it. It was not nice.

Now, as an individual American there, everybody was as nice as pie to me. I was convinced that the Turkish police were cracking down particularly hard on the American kids there because they looked down on the hippie types, the men with long hair. What Turk would ever think of doing that? They looked down on them and thought this is the way we can show the Americans how strongly we feel about dealing in drugs and so we'll go after these kids with a half a kilo, bust them in these dormitory-style flop houses by the Blue Mosque where people stuck their luggage under their beds. Frequently it was not clear whether the bag of hashish found in a police raid belonged to the guy who was actually sleeping in the bed, or to the much smarter guy in the next bed who shoved it under his neighbor's bed just to be on the safe side.

At that time one of our big issues with the Turkish government was trying to control the trade in opium. This was the time of the French Connection. The opium was grown in Turkey, smuggled to France, turned into heroin in France, and sold in the United States. This was a real political problem for the Turkish government which had laws, very strict laws, about possessing what they called hashhash in Turkish. Hashhash can mean anything from opium, to heroin, to hashish. A drug is a drug is a drug. They were not very good at controlling the production of opium poppies. Farmers who grow opium poppies legally must register the amount of hectares that they plant with the government, and government inspectors are supposed to check on how much they produce. Everything they produce must be sold to the government, not to anybody else. Then the government sells it to the pharmaceutical companies. That wasn't very well controlled. Of course, as we know very well, growing opium is far more lucrative than growing potatoes. We were providing some money to encourage them to grow alternative crops, but that was difficult. Any government in Turkey that tried to enforce this of course was going to lose votes among those farmers and so that was a problem.

These were wild and woolly times not just from the hippies. We had two DEA agents stationed in Istanbul. They had their offices right down the hall from the consular section. My husband, who at that time was the receptionist in the consular section, was used by them a lot as a translator when their snitches would come in. Of course he much preferred translating for the DEA than he did working at the consular section desk.

Q: You mentioned you had federal benefits. Were there problems there because I know in the interior around Antalya, they had a hell of a problem with federal benefits because they had some people there who almost create families in order to keep getting checks and all that. Did you have any particular problems in federal benefits?

KARAER: I don't remember. I know that we had to investigate and actually see people in the flesh before checks could be mailed to them. I'm trying to remember. I think it was during the time that I was in Istanbul and as a result of BALPA that the personal delivery of benefits checks was stopped and then everything was mailed. I mean one of the reasons that I decided that I wanted to marry my husband was how sweet he was with these elderly men who would come in to collect their benefits checks. Usually they had gone as younger men to the United States. They had worked at some manufacturing job, earned their social security benefits, but then had never married, came back when they retired and now were living with their nephew, niece, whoever, who was taking care of them, and they were contributing their check to the family pot. I just remember my husband down on one knee talking to one of these old men, listening to his story, and taking care of him and thinking, "What a nice person he is".

Q: Tell me a bit about the background of your husband's family and all that.

KARAER: Oh boy. Well, he was born on the Black Sea in Kara Deniz Eregli, where there's a big steel mill. His father worked for the post office. He was a lineman for the post office. His father was considerably older than his mother, maybe as much as 14 years older than his mother. His mother was from a family in Istanbul that had been well to do and had owned a lot of land in southeastern Anatolia, but like so many Turkish families during the First World War, they lost their money. In her case, her father died when she was very young. To this day the family has the deeds to several villages in southeastern Anatolia, but nobody who values his life would go in there and try to get those deeds recognized, because the people occupying would shoot anybody who tried. Anyway, she could remember as a little girl being taken to the Dolmabahce Palace to play with the children from the harem. Her grandfather was a pasha. He was some kind of administrative officer, maybe a governor, in the Arab part of the empire in Beirut. She lived in Beirut for a short time, but again as a very young child. Anyway, after the war was over, her father was dead and her mother was married again to a man from the Black Sea so she went up there with them. Then when she was 14 years old she was married off to my husband's father. She had a number of children. Her first two were daughters. They're still very much alive. The boys died as infants or very young. In fact the first one died when he was five years old, I would guess probably from meningitis because what she described was he was perfectly healthy and fine in the morning and by the night he had a high fever and he died. When she told me this story, it must have been 40 years after the date, she still wept and I wept too. Anyway, my husband was born when she was about 40 years old, and he was named Yashar because that's the name you name your children in Turkey if you've lost other children. "Yashmak" is the Turkish word for " to live", so "yashar" means "he lives" or" she lives". By this time my husband's father had retired and he decided to return to his hometown in central Anatolia, Chemishgezek in the province called Elazig.

Q: This is tape three, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. Yes, go ahead, you were talking about.

KARAER: So, they moved to Chemishgezek and lived there for about 11 years. My husband remembers his father had a donkey that was very uncontrollable and kicked him off more often than not, but that was his means of transportation. He remembers going to a primary school where the teacher beat all the boys regularly if they didn't know their lessons. My mother-in-law was a tiny woman, and, when I knew her, always dressed completely in widow's black, who said her prayers five times a day, but she was quite a strong willed person. By the time my husband was 11 years old, she told her husband she was taking her son and going to Istanbul. She'd already sent her daughters off to be educated as nurses and one of her daughters got a job in a village on the Turkish border with Bulgaria. In those days young women who were nurses or were teachers could get assigned to places like that, but they were expected to go with a family member as a chaperone. A family member had to go with the daughter and my mother-in-law said she wasn't staying in the middle of nowhere any longer. She told her husband, "The boy needs to be educated, the girls need to work. I'm going. Are you coming with me or not?" I'm imagining this was the conversation anyway. So, they went back to Istanbul together. They were very poor and my mother-in-law worked cleaning houses for other people. As soon as he could manage it, Yashar did everything like, Do you know simit? Those bagel looking breads that they sell on the street? He sold simit, he sold lemons in the fish market. He did all kinds of jobs like this. After he finished high school he wanted to study at the merchant marine academy..

By this time his mother was a widow. She objected because the life of a merchant officer was dangerous and not good for family life. So he didn't pursue it and enrolled in law school at Istanbul University. During this time he met some American GIs. We had a big army base not too far outside of Istanbul and we had a lot of military services like a big PX and so on in Istanbul itself. There were some navy corpsman assigned to one of these detachments in Istanbul, and they were looking for a place to rent an apartment in my husband's neighborhood. They couldn't speak a word of Turkish and the neighbors wanted to be helpful. Yashar was in the coffeehouse with his friends and the neighbors said, "Yashar, you know some English, you come and see what these men want." The Americans were tipsy and swearing a lot apparently, and he didn't understand the swearing because, of course, they hadn't taught him that in high school. Anyway, he tried to point them in the right direction, but they just left. The next day one of these guys turned up at the coffeehouse again, sober. He found Yashar and apologized and asked him to help them find a place to stay. He did, and then he became their guardian, so to speak. In Istanbul there are seedy bars, called "pavyons" where girls will sit and drink with the customers. Usually, when the bill comes, it's outrageous, and if the customer doesn't pay up, the bouncers beat him up. Well, when these sailors went out drinking, Yashar would wait outside the bars for them until they came out and make sure they got home safely.

After two years of law school he was drafted. In Turkey, every able-bodied man between the ages of 18 and 40 has to do military service. When Yashar went into the military, the Turkish army said that if a man had a high school diploma, they would assign him as a teacher in a district where they couldn't get civilian teachers to work. After the recruits did basic training, they were sent to be teachers with a month or something of instruction on how you're to be a teacher. They sent Yasar to Manisa Province up in the mountains. All of the teachers found that the villagers were pretty resistant to sending their children to school because the young boys were good for watching the animals and the girls all made carpets. Sending them to school was a waste of time and money in the villagers' opinion. Yashar had to figure out how could he get them to agree to send the kids to school. Well, right away it was obvious that one of the things these people needed a lot was some kind of medical care. His sisters taught him how to give injections and the American medical corpsmen, totally illegally, gave him some basic stuff, aspirin and antibiotics and stuff like that. So, when somebody in the village had a headache or cut themselves or whatever, Yashar would help them out but he wouldn't accept payment. Just send your kids to school. Well, he never could get them to send the girls, but they did send the boys, and he ended up with quite a class. He should be telling this, because he's had such adventures in his life.

Toward the end of his assignment there, when he had gotten in really well with the villagers, they would invite him to the village room where the men all gathered in the evening to talk and everybody would bring a dish from home, but usually it was rice and beans, beans and rice, because that's what they ate. Yashar would bring the sugar for the tea or he would make a pudding or something that they didn't have at home very often. They liked him a lot. One night he was just going to bed and there's banging on his door. It was the mayor (muktar) of the village. "Get up. (Somebody, I don't remember his name, say his name was Mehmet.) Mehmet has been stabbed." Yashar opened the door to find the mayor and other villagers with their guns. "Bring your medicine. Mehmet has been stabbed". Yasar goes with them and finds one of the villagers, an older man, lying on the ground. He'd been stabbed several times. There's blood bubbling up out of his chest from his lungs. Yasar objected, "Muktar, this man is really badly hurt. I can't do anything. I'm not a doctor. If I do something and he dies, the people will say I killed him". The Muktar said, "Nobody will say anything". My husband said he looked at these guys with their guns and decided that he had better do something for Mehmet, or he might need medical attention. So, he put all kinds of antiseptic cream on this man's wounds.. He bandaged him as tightly as he could, and, in the meantime, some other villagers had ridden off to get the police. The police came and took the man to the hospital. This is an example for all those people who say that life in the villages is morally superior to life in the city. What happened was that the man who was stabbed was married to a woman who was much younger than he was. She was having a love affair with the Imam's son or grandson or somebody like that. Anyway, a close relative of the Imam (local prayer leader). They decided that they were going to kill the husband so that they could be together. When the husband went out in the evening to go to the privy, the wife let her lover into the house and he hid behind the door. When her husband came back in, she threw her charshaf, the veil that the women wrap around themselves, over his head so he couldn't see, and the lover stabbed him several times with a shish, you know, the thing you make shish kabob with? Of course they were caught immediately and went to prison. The tough old husband, thanks to Yashar's bandaging, lived, and came back to the village again.

Q: How did he get involved with the consulate general?

KARAER: When he got back to Istanbul, he got a job at the PX, because he could speak English and his English had gotten better because of his association with those GIs. He ran the drug store in the PX. All of the Americans who used the PX knew him and could see how conscientious and personable he was. Eventually, the admin officer from the Consulate asked him to come work for him. He was working as the receptionist in the consular section when I came to Istanbul.

Q: How did it work, I'm thinking of in a Muslim society and all this of your dating somebody and eventually getting married to somebody from Turkish society?

KARAER: First of all, this is Istanbul and Istanbul is, you know, two-thirds European and one-third not. Our first "date" was a trip to the beach. I was very leery of getting involved. Although I thought Yashar was a very nice person, I was skeptical about getting involved with somebody from such a different culture and a different religion. I had seen the bad side of those relationships when I was in India. I wanted to be really careful. Besides that, I was sort of his boss, so I didn't want to get really deeply involved with him. He was so earnest. I took a Turkish neighbor girl along with us to that thing at the beach. Then one night, I was supposed to go to a party that a secretary at the consulate was giving. I'd been to her flat before, so I thought I would have no problem finding it. But I drove all over that part of town and couldn't find her apartment. Everything looked the same. I asked the doormen who were all sitting outside the apartment buildings along the street. This girl was very noticeable in the neighborhood because she was an African American. Nobody knew who I was talking about. I could not find her place. I went back to the consulate and the Marine Guard didn't have any address. There I was, all dressed up and nowhere to go. I thought well, maybe Yashar and I can do something instead. He had showed me where he lived and it was easy to find. As I knocked on the door, I was thinking "Oh my God, what is his family going to think when I show up here like this?" But it was too late to back out. His mother opened the door, this little tiny lady all in black. I thought she would probably kick me out. But when I asked for Yashar, she just smiled and she took me upstairs. Yashar was just flabbergasted. While he was getting ready, I sat with his mother. At this time, I knew very little Turkish. I could ask for Yashar in Turkish, but I couldn't have a conversation with anybody. His mother was just sitting there beaming at me. Starting from then we went together. I like to tease Yashar that his mother was overjoyed to think that she might get him off her hands!

At the end of my first year in Istanbul, Yashar got an offer to work for the Turkish military attachï¿½ in Washington. About the time I arrived in Istanbul, Yashar had had another job offer from a friend to work in Vietnam. The man who had been his immediate supervisor at the PX had gotten a job with a company that had the contract to sell diamond engagement rings in the PXs in Vietnam. He was now in Vietnam and he needed somebody that he could trust to work with him because some of the employees in the Saigon PX were taking the real diamonds out of the rings and putting fake diamonds into them. Yashar was all set to go. Adventure called. His mother said, "Oh my God, if I'm not going to let you go into the merchant marine, I'm certainly not going to let you go to Vietnam. Haven't you heard they're shooting at people there"? Okay, can't go to Vietnam. Then he got this offer to work in Washington. It came through a woman who was the Ambassador's secretary. She had worked for the consulate before she joined the Turkish Foreign Ministry. She knew Yashar, and she knew what a good person he was.

By this time Yashar had talked about marriage with me. I had told him I didn't want to marry anybody else, and that I really liked Turkey, but I that I liked Turkey because I was living there as an American on my own terms. I didn't think that I'd be a very good Turkish daughter-in-law and that I didn't think it was a good idea for people from two different cultures to get married until they had seen one another in each one's country. He said, well, I could live in the United States. I said, you don't know that. Some people really don't like to live in the United States. I can't get married to somebody and then find out that they've changed their mind. Then this job offer came up, and he went to Washington. After he'd been there about three months, I asked him what he thought of the place? He said, "Let's face it. It's a lot easier to get used to a place where you're more comfortable than it is to get used to a place which is less comfortable than you are used to." After the end of my second year in Istanbul, I returned to the United States and we got married the following month.

Q: We're going to stop about this time, but I thought just to finish this part. What was the situation vis-ï¿½-vis the Foreign Service at that time in 1969, if you get married to a foreigner, particularly a woman, things have changed, but.

KARAER: I don't think it made any difference if you were a woman or a man as I understood it, the rules were you had to inform the Department and you had to provide them with information for security clearance for your prospective spouse. I did all that far in advance of my departure from Istanbul, but by the time I got back to Washington, I still hadn't heard from the Department about the clearance. I didn't have any worries about this, I mean after all he'd worked for us already, and I knew he wasn't a security risk. So, a week before we were supposed to leave for Minnesota to get married, I inquired at the Department and learned that they hadn't done anything with my application. The problem was that Yashar currently worked for a foreign government and if I was going to keep my security clearance, he would have to leave that job. Our plan at the time was that Yashar was going to keep his job and then enroll in college here once we got settled. However, in order to get the clearance to get married, he quit his job the same day.

Q: All right, well, we'll pick this up the next time. You're back in Washington at; you're working in consular affairs, is that right?

KARAER: That's right.

Q: Who was head of consular affairs when you were there?

KARAER: I can't remember any names now.

Q: Anyway, we'll pick this up. You were doing that in '69 to when about?

KARAER: Oh, the head of consular affairs. That African American lady.

Q: Oh, Barbara Watson.

KARAER: Barbara Watson, yes. She was the head. I'm sorry. I was thinking of who was the head on my particular division. Yes.

Q: Okay. So, we'll pick this up next time from '69 to when were you there?

KARAER: '69 to '71.

Q: Okay and you're newly married?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

KARAER: Great.

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Q: Today is May 21st, 2004. Arma Jane, let's move on. What part of consular affairs did you have?

KARAER: Well, for that first two years, I was in the division that handled arrests. My Consul General in Istanbul, Douglas Heck, had recommended an assignment there, since I had had plenty of experience with this sort of thing. So I ended up in that office; the Washington contact between the relatives and the consular officers that were handling the arrests.

Q: What were you doing?

KARAER: I was the one who received messages from the field about arrests or the status of an arrested person and kept the file on these people. I was the one who was called if they wished to have some relative called or if a relative called us, which happened a great deal. I kept them up to date on the case, let them know who they could talk to at the consulate or embassy that was handling the case, and explained to them about what was possible as far as helping their relative was concerned. I got a fair amount of outrage that foreigners could dare to incarcerate an American citizen, the usual thing.

Q: Where stood the privacy act?

KARAER: It didn't exist.

Q: How, I mean we tried to inform the family without getting permission of the incarcerated ones?

KARAER: We had to get contact information for the family and that had to come from the individual in most cases. If the person was somehow not able to provide that information, the information was there in the passport records. But, of course, if people said they didn't want anybody informed, as far as I'm aware, nobody overrode that. Very few didn't want help from their families. I mean, it's scary. Most were young people that were being arrested.

Q: What type of arrests were you dealing with?

KARAER: A very large proportion were for drugs.

Q: I take it these were not big dealers in drugs really. I mean these were kids picking up something that they thought they could live off when they got back to college or something like that?

KARAER: Yes. I mean if big dealers got arrested, I doubt that they even asked to see the American consul.

Q: Yes. Well, where were you doing this thing did you have any particular cases that are memorable for you?

KARAER: Gosh, that was an awfully long time ago. I think we talked last time about follow-ups to cases that I had handled in Istanbul and of course those I remembered the best. I remember one conversation with a relative of a man who had been arrested and convicted of an automobile manslaughter in Bulgaria. Of course it was a Communist country then. I think he got a three year sentence or something like that. Now, of course we know that in countries other than the United States, hitting somebody and killing them with your vehicle because you were found to be driving too fast or carelessly or something like that is a crime, and you do get punished rather severely for it. In the United States you don't, for the most part, and so it was very hard for his family to understand the three year sentence. They thought that these Communists were abusing him because he was an American. I had to explain the law and that the law on vehicular manslaughter is common in Europe. Our embassy didn't find that he had been treated unfairly by Bulgarian standards. It made me think a lot about the U.S. attitude. I have never understood why, in this country, that although, if you go out in the street and shoot a gun wildly and you kill somebody you'll go to prison, but if you drive a car wildly and you kill somebody, not much happens to you.

Q: Were there any particular areas that were trouble spots that caused a lot of problems of people being incarcerated? One always thinks of Mexico.

KARAER: Yes, one of the things that I remember as far as those cases in Mexico and Latin America, well, everywhere as a matter of fact, was getting suggestions out to the posts about visiting these people as frequently as possible to insure that there wasn't any gratuitous mistreatment of them. Of course, the difficulty was that in many cases we were dealing with governments of very poor countries. What Americans expected as a minimum standard of care of prisoners, living conditions, the quality of the food and so on, was higher than the living conditions of a lot of the honest hardworking, not law-breaking, people in those countries. Of course, in most of the countries with which we were dealing, if the American prisoner could get money from their families or from some source, they could have meals brought to them from the restaurants near the prison. They didn't have to put up with the beans and the bread that the other prisoners had to eat in prison. Also, we were working then on making agreements with foreign countries to allow American prisoners to be transferred back to the United States to serve their sentences.

Q: Had any of those treaties taken effect when you were there that you recall?

KARAER: I can't remember for sure. I know we were working on them, and I know I had strong questions in my mind about the concept. The way we were representing it to the foreign governments was that if you let them go, they will serve their sentence out in the United States. I was wondering how you could do this because in the United States you can't incarcerate somebody who wasn't tried and convicted by an American court. Of course the press often gets this stuff badly muddled, because its technical and they tend to take the information they get from prisoners or ex-prisoners rather than from the bureaucrats who are handling it, but I've read articles over the years referring to these agreements that implied at least that once the citizen got out of the foreign prison and came back to the United States, he/she was free, or became free very quickly afterward. I don't know if that's right or not. Frankly I don't know how it worked because after that, in those countries where I had supervisory responsibility over consular officers, we didn't have anybody in jail fortunately.

Q: Were we, I think it became a requirement at some point, I may be wrong on this, that we were having trouble sometimes getting prisoners visited by busy consular sections and something, they gave it a relatively low priority. At a certain point I believe it became a requirement that every two months or what have you, you have to go see a prisoner and check off that you've seen a prisoner. We didn't have a system like that when you were there.

KARAER: I know that to the extent that I was able, I encouraged that, but I don't remember that it was a requirement. I certainly believed based on my experience in Turkey that it ought to be. Another thing I remembered about the reactions that I would get from families, semi-hysterical parents saying, "My child is being held incommunicado"! "Incommunicado? How did you find out that he was arrested"? "Well, I talked to him on the telephone". I realized that "incommunicado" to many Americans at that time meant that you could not make a telephone call anytime you wanted to, to whomever you wanted to. That was "incommunicado". We needed our consular officers at the jails on a regular basis to sort out these allegations, to determine what was true abuse and what was the hysterical imaginings of the people back in the United States.

Q: Did you run across any really professional criminals?

KARAER: I told the story last time about that Gary who got killed in Istanbul. I never met him, because he was dead by the time I even knew he existed, but that is the only case that I ever dealt with that I believe involved a truly professional criminal. Like I said, the people that we followed in that office were mostly kids, or people who had been in or who had caused a traffic accident or something. The professionals, they got lawyers and they stayed away from the U.S. Government. The last thing that they wanted to deal with was the U.S. Government. A couple of guys who were arrested when I was in Istanbul were GIs stationed in Germany. They had come down to Istanbul to make a drug buy. Now, the Drug Enforcement Agency knew about this. They were informed. We had two DEA guys assigned to the consulate in Istanbul. They had informed the Turkish police, and the Turkish police picked the to two fellows up as soon as they made their contact. After they were arrested, I was called. I went to the courthouse. The building was huge. These two fellows were at the end of the hallway, and my assistant and I came up the stairs at the other end. As soon as we appeared, one of them started yelling at me, "You're from the consulate, we don't want to talk to you. You're the one who got us arrested." I looked at him and I said, "I did not have you arrested. My job is to help you get in touch with a lawyer or anybody you think might be helpful to you, but if you don't need my help, that's fine, just say so and I'll leave." His other friend, who had more sense, said, "No, we want to talk to you." They weren't career criminals. These were guys who had a not so great idea in Germany that they could make themselves a few bucks by taking this quick trip down to Turkey for hash to sell to the GI population back in Germany, and they got caught.

Q: How many people were dealing with arrest cases, officers? Were you it?

KARAER: I was the only one who had that specific duty. There was a more senior officer in that office who coordinated what we all did. We had people working on, oh, let's see.

Q: Welfare I suppose?

KARAER: Yes, welfare and whereabouts.

Q: Health problems.

KARAER: My immediate supervisor would help with some of these, but none of the rest of them had had the jail time I'd had.

Q: How about weekends and all that, did you get called very often?

KARAER: I don't know how FCA does it now, but in those days, the duty officers for FCA were just the people who worked for 40 hours a week in the office. Then we had a roster on which we took turns being available on the weekends to get telephone calls. Well, sometimes of course we got calls through the Ops Center from the embassies and consulates, but other people were calling the State Department number. Citizens would call the State Department number and then they would get put through to our number. We got comp time for the amount of time that we took that duty. That was pretty exhausting because you'd work all week long and then it would start on Friday night and go through the weekend and then you were off, well, no, sorry. I guess it started on Wednesday and it went through Tuesday or something like that. Then if somehow somebody got your personal number, they would assume it was the number of a special office that was open 24 hours a day and they'd still be calling you at 2:00 in the morning even after your duty was over. That really was rough. I hope that the Department has adopted a better system than that now.

Q: In '71, what did you do?

KARAER: Then I got transferred to the visa office and I worked there until '73. My particular responsibility was visa waivers for people who were on record or who admitted that they had been members of the Communist Party. That was very interesting. It wasn't nearly as rough as working in FCA. For one thing we didn't have to have a duty officer like that. In the early 70's, people applying for those waivers had been identified as Communists not too long after the Second World War, and so they had been in Europe for the most part never having come to the United States. When we got the applications for waivers we had to get their records from the intelligence agencies to find out what kind of Communist this person was. How dangerous might they be? I was appalled, because first of all, the records were not at all detailed. Somebody back in the '40's walked in and said Suzy Q is a Communist, and that was it. The allegation got put on the record and those people never got visas. Now, maybe for some of them it didn't make that much difference in their life, but there were some people who were engaged to American citizens, who weren't never allowed in the United States and therefore they never married that person. There was an awful lot of guess witch hunting.

It was the McCarthy period when these records were made. I'm afraid that a lot of the officers who handled these accusations thought it was the better part of valor to accept the allegation, refuse the visa, saying no to this person and get the applicant out of his/her life. By the time the waiver application came to me, most of the applicants were elderly people who wanted to visit relatives in the U.S. I can't remember the details now, but while I had that job, I re-wrote the FAM regulations for handling waivers. I remember feeling very strongly about it because until the rules were changed, the waiver was done in such a heavy handed, time consuming way. We decided to change the rules because it was clear that a whole lot of those people that were ineligible for that reason either may never have been communists or were a communist like the Baathists in Iraq who had to be a Baathist if they wanted to get a job as a school teacher.

Q: Yes, I know during this period I was consul general in Athens and I had taken over from a Greek American who had been consul general and like a good number of I don't really recall hyphenated Americans, but somebody who came out of that thing, they were 110% American and anybody who lived in these villages which had been communist dominated during the late '40s and early '50s and the civil war going on in a lot of these villages and the guerrillas would take over and say you're all communists and you were either that or you got shot. They really were getting shot.

KARAER: You don't have to read Eleni to know that story.

Q: Yes, absolutely. Anyway, I think we were all over the place, kind of rewriting the book on this and I had served in Yugoslavia for five yeas running the consular section and we'd had the same thing. I mean you learn to discriminate between the real communists and the ones who were kind of nominal or belong to the labor movement. If you've got a job you belong to a labor movement. Anyway, I mean it was a period of sort of revamping the rules.

KARAER: One of the things that we were doing in that office was trying to wipe out the ineligibilities of cases that came to our attention for which there was no fundamental proof that the person was ever a communist or was, in any sense, dangerous to the United States. Another thing that made me sensitive to this problem was a task that I undertook when I was in Istanbul. In my office there were two three-drawer filing cabinets with big bars and padlocks on them. Upon inquiring I found out that they contained files of refugees from Eastern Europe who had been processed in Istanbul through the Refugee Relief Program. INS had taken whatever they wanted from those files and left years before, but my immigrant visa clerk, who was the world's greatest pack rat, didn't want to destroy them because she thought they might contain some original documents, like birth certificates.

Of course this is now 20 years later. If they haven't missed their birth certificate by now, they're probably not going to need them, but I'm conscientious too. I went through every one of those doggone files, six drawers full, not a single original document in any of it, number one. Number two, I learned a lesson about refugees trying to get to the United States. Most of them claimed to have left their home countries because they were anti-Communist. Anti-Communist? These guys were taxi drivers. What did you do that was so anti-Communist? Well, I just am, and that's why I left and that's why I have to go to the United States, to fight the communists. So much of it was so fluffy, but that's what they needed to say to get their visas for the U.S., so they said it. Of course we've got that still. When I was on the Turkish desk I was got routine inquiries sent to me by immigration courts about people who were Turks of Kurdish background who were illegal aliens here. They were being tried by the immigration court. Do they go back or do they stay? Every single one of them were said they had to stay in the United States because their life would be in jeopardy if they returned to Turkey. Not true. They were economic refugees, not political refugees. There were even some Armenian Turks who had left Turkey just in the previous few years who were claiming that as an Armenian if they went back to Turkey they were in fear of their live, which was all a bunch of bunk.

Q: Yes. Well, did you while you were doing this, did you run across any true believers who were saying you're letting a bunch of commies in. I mean I'm thinking either from the FBI, CIA or within a visa office or not?

KARAER: No. I mean certainly if I had come across a file of somebody where there was enough information to show that the person clearly was very active in the communist party, I would have enforced the law, but most of the time that wasn't the case.

Q: By that time the whole issue had died down. How about, did you get involved with the IRA business?

KARAER: That was interesting. Actually I had a lot of fun on that job because I had daily contact with the guys in INS in Washington, D.C. We had to coordinate the waivers. There was a question about, yes, people who were terrorists and what do we do. At that time, we're still on the cusp of our deep concern, our justified concern about the Muslim terrorist movement. Then our problem was visa applicants who were convicted of terrorism in Ireland by British courts, but we had powerful politicians in the United States who wanted these guys to be able to move around and see their relatives and so on.

Q: Particularly from Massachusetts, Edward Kennedy in particular.

KARAER: That's right. Now, there were questions about IRA people and if they were convicted, the law said they had to apply for waivers, but of course waivers were being given pretty liberally because everybody was claiming that they were the best guy in the world at that point. I remember thinking that at least they were raising the question about the IRA. How about the Israeli terrorists, the ones that blew up the King David Hotel? The ones who got elected prime minister?.

Q: Sure. Yes, we're talking about you know, I mean the Stern gang, Begin and company. These guys were part of the Stern gang.

KARAER: Nobody ever raised a question about any Israeli applying for a visa, so I don't know if none of them ever tried to apply for a visa to come to the United States or if that was just ignored in our embassy in Tel Aviv.

Q: Of course, there's always the thing, somebody's freedom fighter is somebody else's terrorist.

KARAER: Yes, well, at the time killing British officers was as much terrorism as killing American officers, right?

Q: Sure.

KARAER: I know. I mean that's what makes this whole thing very subjective and why it's important to have a masters degree in history if you're going to be a consular officer.

Q: Part of the thing, too, is this whole thing between terrorists and freedom fighters gets very political, depends where we are on our point of view. Right now we're fighting a very nasty war in Iraq and the term often used is terrorists, people shooting at our troops, but at the same time we're occupiers, so one could at the same time. You know, quite legitimately say, no, these are guerrillas fighting to keep the occupiers out who happen to be us. It's a very iffy thing. Well, did you I mean did sort of the Muslim fundamentalist terrorists, did they come across your radar at that time, or was this not an issue?

KARAER: At that time we were worried about airplane hijackers, some of whom were champions of the Palestinian cause. I don't recall anyone talking about Islamic fundamentalists then. After I left the visa section, I went to Melbourne, Australia, as head of the consular section. By the time I got to Melbourne, the Department had adopted a rule to try to protect against hijackers which was against all my understanding of what the United States was supposed to be about. The rule was that if an applicant was born in one of a number of Middle Eastern countries, we had to send a special telegram so that security name checks could be done, because of course we didn't have all these wonderful computer systems and everything. Australia is an immigrant country and Melbourne is a big city. There were a fair number of people living there who were born in the Middle East. We only did tourist visas in Melbourne. The big problem with the name check procedure was that it took a long time. People would waltz into our office thinking they could leave the following weekend for their trip, or even to transit the United States, because we were requiring transit visas on anybody at that point. Then I'd say, "Oh, well, I'm sorry, we're going to have to hold your application and we'll let you know in about five days." "Why?" We couldn't tell them. There were a number of times when I couldn't tell just from the name whether the person was an Arab. Now, some of them clearly were Jewish names. Others weren't clear, so I had to send them in. Oh my goodness. Clearly you're discriminating. There were crowds of people applying who were able to pick up their visa the next day and walk out of there. People with Italian or a Hungarian or a British surnames were flying out of there, but the group of people with Arab names had to wait. I found it embarrassing, because we weren't supposed to say what we were doing. I really hated that.

Q: But the instructions were essentially people of Jewish ancestry were not questioned?

KARAER: No, it was supposed to be an Arab name.

Q: Okay. Well, let's move. You went to Australia in '73?

KARAER: Yes, in February of '73.

Q: Your husband by this time, had he received naturalization?

KARAER: He got naturalized early just before we went.

Q: You were in Melbourne from '73 to when?

KARAER: To '75. My first daughter was born there on October 23rd, '75. We had to wait to leave until she was allowed to travel by airplane, and by that time the fellow who was replacing me had arrived and had taken over the consular section.

Q: What was Melbourne like when you were there from '73 to '75?

KARAER: Oh, it was wonderful. It was a lovely place. Before we arrived, the consulate had gone through lots of demonstrations because of the Vietnam War. By the time '73 came along, we and the Australians had left Vietnam, and the consulate had been moved from a building that was a ground floor easy access place, but at which everyone had thrown rocks, to a multi-story office building. We were on the two top stories of that building. During the time I was there, we didn't have any demonstrations about the Vietnam War, but in 1974 we had things thrown at us over the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. There were a lot of southern Europeans of all types that were immigrants in the Melbourne area and therefore there were Turks, Greeks and Cypriots of both types. A demonstration by Greeks and Greek Cypriots took place outside our building on a weekend when we were closed. They threw rocks and shoes, of course.

Q: Shoes, oh yes.

KARAER: They were so angry with the United States for not having stopped the Turks. They broke some windows in the premises of the insurance company that was on the lower floor of the building, but we didn't get affected by that at all. Then they went away. I always wondered about the history of that particular incident. Of course you know, I lived with a Turkish-born person, and so I hear the Turkish side of the story, but we know what politics went on before that whole thing happened. Our Ambassador was killed in Nicosia before the Turks invaded.

Q: By the Greek Cypriot police actually.

KARAER: Right. We know that what was going on there was an attempt to take over the government and to incorporate Cyprus into Greece, which was completely against the treaty that Britain and Greece and Turkey had made when Cyprus became an independent country. Looking back over all the episodes when there would be tension between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus, it always seemed to me that the international situation there was similar to a little skinny, bratty kid, Greece, and a big, tough, older kid on the other side, Turkey, and the bratty kid would stand on the corner and throw rocks at the big guy and say, " Nah, nah". Then, when the big kid started to come after him, he'd run and hide behind his big Uncle Sam. "Save me"! And we always did, except that time. The Greeks throughout the world were just furious at us.

Q: Yes, I have to say I had just left Athens the first of July and the thing happened I think on the 14th of July, '74. It was a very nasty show on the part of the Greeks. The Cypriots named a guy named Samson who was a...

KARAER: Who was a real thug.

Q: Who was a thug, I mean who was I think had been an assassin, a sort of a nasty assassin who went around and killed British women and things like this.

KARAER: And lots of Turkish people, too. Lots of Turks were killed on Cyprus.

Q: Yes. You talk to particularly Greek Americans and Australian Americans even today, they have complete amnesia about what happened that instigated the Turks sending troops in. I mean it all starts somehow, the Turks did this to the poor Greeks. It's a very peculiar thing. Very representative of as you say the little kid throwing rocks at the big kid.

KARAER: The lesson that foreign policy makers are supposed to take from that kind of history is that big, strong Uncle Sam has to be so careful about the signals that he sends to his erstwhile allies about what kind of behavior he expects from them. For example, "We'll protect you Taiwan against the Chinese, but you better not indulge in rock throwing." It's not easy to control those situations.

Q: It's a very hard thing and also American ethnic politics get heavily involved.

KARAER: Absolutely.

Q: The Greek American lobby is second only to the Israeli lobby and the Jewish American lobby as being very powerful when it kicks in. Anyway, but in Melbourne what sort of, who was your consul general?

KARAER: Okay, I've been trying to remember the name of the first one and I can't. I had two while I was there.

Q: Do you remember the other one?

KARAER: Robert Brand was the second one.

Q: What was the atmosphere of the post?

KARAER: When I first arrived there the Labor Party was in power in Australia for the first time in a long time. They had been very anti-United States and their own government's involvement in Vietnam. The people in our embassy and consulates who had to deal with the government there had difficulty with some of these guys who had partly built their image as anti-American.

Q: It sounds like the leftist movement in British, the labor types.

KARAER: Right, exactly. As far as individual Australians were concerned, their attitude toward the United States depended a lot on their age. My husband was enrolled in an Australian technical university. The students he knew were considerably younger than he was. They hadn't fought in Vietnam or any other war and were very much into the line that Americans were warmongers. Our neighbors were older than us, Second World War generation, and they loved the Yanks and everything about them. In fact, the people who were getting it in the neck from the older generation of Australians were the British immigrants. It was a sort of cruel teasing more than anything else, but every time an Aussie opened his mouth he had some wisecrack about the Brits.

Q: The POMMIES.

KARAER: They just loved to pick on them because they believed that the Brits had looked down on Australians for so many years. Anyway, as far as my job was concerned, we had a city that was full of people who were relatively recent immigrants to Australia. While 99% of them were well settled there, and so well settled that they were now getting ready to apply for tourist visas to visit their relatives in the United States. The only people who I believed were real risks of not returning from a visit to the U.S. were people who were relatively new immigrants to Australia and who in many cases had relatives who had successfully immigrated to the United States. Some of these folks were still country shopping.

Oh and the other thing that was a true shock and a revelation to me was the custom of the young, Australian-born citizens who all took long trips abroad before they settled down to a career. They could get special visas from the British Government which allowed them to work in the U.K. temporarily. Of course their travels eventually took them across the United States as well. They usually said they wanted to stay for three months in the United States. Not an unreasonable thing when you're traveling around the world and usually it was going to be at the end of their trip. They were going to go to Britain, work, now they didn't have the job yet, but they planned to get a job there and with the money they made, they planned to travel all over Europe. Then they planned to go to the United States and spend three months there. Great plan, except that we wanted to know how they were going to have enough money to live in the United States without working. Now, I was not born yesterday. I knew that all of them were going to try to work when they got to the United States. I figured the best I could do was to have something in my hand that said there was a reasonable reason to believe that the applicant would not have to work while he was in the United States. Usually a letter from their father saying he would pay for it was acceptable. When I got that, I would send them merrily on their way with their American visa. If they couldn't or wouldn't give us some evidence of support, and sometimes it was just pure stubbornness, we refused them and told them to apply in for their U.S. visa in London after they got the job they hoped for and could show they had enough money to travel in the U.S. without working. Of course that made our officers in London very angry. I got a couple of nasty telegrams about that. I told London, look, either he's got the money when he leaves here or his travel in the U.S. is going to be paid for by his job in England. If it's the latter case, then he's got to show you guys that he's got the job. He doesn't have it here. Anyway. Oh my God. I got calls from newspaper people about what a bitch I was, and why on earth did I think that any Australian in his right mind would want to stay in my country when they had this wonderful country to come back to and all this stuff.

Also, the other thing that was new, compared with my experience in Turkey, was that travel agents would bring in the applications for the tourist visas. They would come with big stacks of passports and applications that had been signed in their offices and leave them with us. Actually that wasn't unreasonable, because, like I said, 99.9% of these people were eligible for tourist visas. A lot of the calls I got asking why the visa wasn't issued without question were from travel agents. So I asked to speak at one of the monthly meetings of the travel agents' association. I ended up talking to a great big gang of these people. I explained our law and pointed out that Australia, which is also an immigrant country, potentially had the same problem with illegal aliens as the United States. Of course Australia at that time hadn't yet had that many illegal aliens. It was just too hard to get there and get into the country. Now, they're stopping shiploads of illegals trying to get in. But then they didn't have that many. Also, for crowd control, I set up a system of numbers, like in a bakery, because Australians, while they are the world's greatest people when you meet them traveling, in their big cities they act like anybody else in a great big city. They're extremely aggressive. The only place in my life I literally got shoved off the sidewalk just walking down the street was in Melbourne. They come in there and boy it's just nose to nose and my people across the desk from them. The number system helped maintain some order.

When I first got to Melbourne that consular section was a real mess. The man that I replaced had had a serious alcohol problem and had drunk three years away in Melbourne. He had literally closed himself inside his office after lunch and slept while the Australians ran the office. I discovered when I got there that the FSN's were making the decisions about who got visas. Not only that, but they had no system for the huge amounts of passports and applications that were being handed in every day. On the desk in the front of the room were just heaps of passports. They didn't bother to check the lookout files before they issued the visas, and we had a fair number of applicants on the lookout list who had been members of the communist party because they were active in the labor movement in Australia. After the visas were issued, they put stacks of passports in a big heap in the middle of the desk. As each Mr. Travel Agent Messenger came in with the list of passports he was supposed to pick up, they pawed through those stacks and looked until they found the ones they were looking for. Of course this was very slow and the FSN's were totally stressed out. The customers were always angry because of this mess. On top of everything else, the visa card file was not in alphabetical order anymore. They just jammed the stuff in there helter skelter. God knows why they bothered to keep it. When I noted that we needed a system to keep the passports in alphabetical order, they said, "Well, the admin officer offered to make us a box with slots in it for the alphabet letters, but it was so big and heavy we couldn't use it." Because of security, at the end of the day all of the passports and applications and so forth had to be moved into the big communications vault and locked in there in case a mob got up there and got into the consulate.

Anyway, the big wooden box was way too heavy, couldn't be moved around, and so they couldn't use it. I said, "In the United States, in the stationary stores, we have these manila folders. They open up like an accordion and they have A, B and C on them. Do you have stuff like that in Australia?" "Oh, yes we've got that." I took out my wallet and I gave the guy some money and I said, "Please go out and buy us four of those." We used those folders to collect passports by the initial letter of the last name and to organize the visaed passports we were returning. So at least when somebody came in looking for Mr. Anderson's passport, we only had to look in the A slot. I found that of all the strange and new cultures that I lived and worked in, Australia's was the hardest for me to get used to. The reason was they looked like me, they talked like me mostly, but they did not organize their business the way we do, and stuff that I had taken for granted as basic to management of keeping stuff moving in offices were alien concepts to those folks.

Q: That's very interesting. I mean you would think that, it's just astounding to hear that.

KARAER: Well, what astounded me was that they had moved that consulate just the year before I arrived. We have a lot of forms in consular offices. Now we can print them off the computer, but in those days you had to buy them from a supply place and they got shipped to you. Those forms were moved from the old consulate to the shelves of a storeroom. My employee would be back in that room for 20 minutes just looking for the form. The first two months that I was in Melbourne I'd spend the whole day processing visas and then I'd stay after work, just me, going through that mess in that room finding the forms. I put a filing cabinet in for forms. During those first months in Melbourne I just didn't do anything but work, and it was stupid, housekeeping stuff like that.

Then on top of everything else, by the time I got to Australia the Department had decided to require that every person transiting the United States had to have a transit visa, something which we hadn't required in the past. Before if you were transiting within three days you didn't have to have one. Every Australian in the world goes to Europe or to the UK all the time. They all cross the United States in order to do that. The word had been put out to the travel agents about the transit visa requirement, I was told, but certainly the travel agents out in the outback hadn't gotten the word. Every single weekend the duty officers would call me. Oh Arma Jane, there's somebody who doesn't have a visa, he thought he was going to leave today and they turned him back at the airport because he doesn't have a transit visa to the United States. You have to go down and issue him a visa. I did that miserable thing for a year. I tried, I mean I sent out more reminders to everybody and I was getting tough on some of these folks if it wasn't emergency travel. I told their travel agent, let them wait until Monday. You're supposed to have told them about this. Nevertheless, there were people with genuine emergencies. Finally when Brand came there as consul general, I said, "You know, every American who is assigned to this consulate has got a consular commission, and I will be very happy to teach them how to operate the visa machine. If they're the duty officer and they think that somebody should come down here and issue a transit visa for somebody, then they can do it themselves. They've got the authority." Oh boy. Was there a huge drop-off of telephone calls from the duty officers about issuing visas. And they didn't issue any either. They managed to convince the person they were talking to that they had to wait until Monday.

During three months after I got there we had an inspection. Now, they told me that we were scheduled for the inspection when I first arrived. Here I was with this mess. I mean everything was wrong, but I was slowly getting the office fixed up and the procedures rectified. As you know, inspection questionnaires include a package that the section heads give to the C.G. that includes all the questions about how things are arranged in your section, but then there's a sealed envelope in which you respond to personal questions. The first question in that second set was, "How is your morale?" I responded, "I feel as though I were sent here not as an officer exercising my judgment to enforce the laws of the United States, but as somebody to take the blame when something goes wrong, and something is going to go wrong because of the chaotic situation here." When the inspectors arrived, I was told that the consular section was going to be one of the last places inspected. I went home one night during the inspection and I said to my husband, "You know, I think I'm getting paranoid because it seems to me every time I pass one of those people in the hall, I feel as though they're looking at me after I walk by. I don't usually have those feelings." Finally,. the inspector came to my office to start the inspection of our section. She asked, "Do you want us to transfer you?" I said, "No. I put three months into getting this place back into shape. I don't want you to send me back." She said, "Well, from what we read, we thought that you must be terribly unhappy." I said, "Well, I'm terribly unhappy about the situation. Somebody bad is going to get through our visa process here unless we put our files and our procedures straight." In their report the inspectors said that the Department should get another officer out to Melbourne as fast as they could and until that officer arrived the Embassy had to make some arrangements to get somebody else out there to help. It was up to the Embassy to figure it out, but they had to have somebody else down there to help. Well, there were no extra consular officers anywhere in Australia. Then they said, well, there should at least be an American who could assist in the consular section. This was long before they let civilians issue visas. Well, the embassy couldn't send anyone and told the consulate to figure it out. The only two people in our consulate community who had previous experience in consular sections were the admin officer's wife and my husband. The admin officer did not want his wife to work. I don't know, maybe she didn't either. I didn't discuss it with her. I said, "Well, Yashar is available, he can do it, but isn't that against the nepotism rules?" "Oh, that's okay," The Admin Officer said, "Don't worry. This is a special thing and we'll take care of it." They did. Yashar was hired for three months and one of the things he did was put our visa file back into alphabetical order, so it could be checked.

During that time I discovered that one of my employees, a very pretty young woman who, I at first thought was just not too bright because she got such strange things wrong. One day it dawned on me, and I said, "Heather, have you ever thought that you might need glasses?" Because when she typed she made mistakes and didn't correct them. She wouldn't get the filing right, although she certainly knew the alphabet. She admitted, "Well, yes. I have glasses, but I don't like to wear them." I suggested that she get some glasses to wear at work. Sure enough all of a sudden she could type, she could see where she was putting the papers in the filing cabinet.

Oh, another interesting thing that happened there. When I first arrived in Melbourne, the admin officer had a little party for me to meet the FSNs. In the consular section all of the employees except one were women. I had talked to the young man, who seemed quite pleasant and happy, but when we got home my husband said, "You're going to have trouble with that guy." I said, "Why?" He said, "After he had had a couple of beers, he made it clear that he didn't like the idea of working for a woman.".

Q: This is tape four, side one with Arma Jane Karaer.

KARAER: I decided to begin my assignment there by having every employee come in to speak with me individually. I asked them what they liked most about their job, what they liked least, and whether they had any difficulties with their work. I could get to know them that way and also get to know about perceived problems in the section. When the young man, and after we had gone over the other question, I asked if he was worried at all about working for a woman. He looked at me and said, "Not anymore." We got on just fine, and he was one of my best people. I was so glad that my husband had picked that up and let me know about that.

Q: Did you find for example Australian society I mean I've never served in Australia, but I've heard people talk about it say it's the damndest thing that when on social occasions, all the guys go off to the bar and drink beer and all the women go off to the other side and there really isn't much intermixture between the men and the women on social occasions.

KARAER: I think you could say that about American society, too. Actually what was strange to us was the whole idea of "mateship", of mens' men friends being their most important relationship. For example, when you went out in the evening, back in those days, you'd see a few married couples like yourself going to the movie, but otherwise it's all young fellows together, and young women together. You didn't see young couples. Women's rights, women's lib, got to Australia a few years later than it got to the United States and open war between the sexes was beginning in Australia.

At first, my husband wondered out loud if all of these guys were gay. I told him that I didn't think so. That it was just the culture. Later, in my husband's conversations with the young guys in his class, they explained that, fundamentally, women were good for only one thing and that didn't take very long. leaving plenty of time to hang around with your mates. One of the women's lib issues that erupted while we there was the male/female integration of the public bars in the pubs. Each pub is divided into a public bar, which at that time was men only, and a lounge, where ladies or entire families could drink and eat meals. The same food in the public bar cost significantly less than in the lounge. So the young feminists organized sit-ins in the public bars. They had bottles thrown at them by the other patrons, and, if anybody got arrested, it would be the women for trying to cause trouble.

Now, of course this has all changed. The last time I was in Australia men and women were in the public bars without any trouble at all. In Australia there is this fixation on beer. Not too long before I arrived in Australia, they had liberalized the hours that pubs could be open. Before this happened, men would come into the pub after work and drink as fast as they could in order to consume the maximum beer before quitting time. Of course a lot of people would just make themselves really sick and throw up all over the place. This led me to another interesting comparison between my culture and theirs. I'm not much of a bar person, but those few that I'd seen in my life in the United States were dark, really dim. If they had furnishings it was black velvet or red velvet curtains.

Q: Blue tinted mirrors.

KARAER: Yes. When you walked through that door in America, you knew you were engaging in some kind of vice.

Q: Yes, absolutely.

KARAER: Now in Australia, what are the pubs like? According to the book The Lucky Country, because of the frequent throwing up that went on in them, the floors and the walls, up to above your head, are usually covered with white tile. The bars looked like nothing more than public toilets. They looked like a place where you performed a necessary bodily function. At the same time, there are hard core teetotalers in Australia as well, particularly when it comes to hard liquor. Once when my husband and I were traveling in South Australia we had gotten a room in a motel owned by some German immigrants who were about our age. They invited us to go with them to the town's Oktoberfest. Afterward, back at the motel, our host had another drink of whiskey, and left the bottle standing on the buffet in the motel's breakfast room. While we were eating our breakfast the next morning, an Australian family came in, and the lady spotted the whiskey bottle on the sideboard. "Spirits!" she hissed to her husband in a stage whisper. For all the beer that gets drunk in Australia, spirits were considered evil.

Q: Well, I have to say this about the male, female thing, from '69 to '70 I was consul general in Saigon and troops would get their R&R and a significant number would go to Australia. Our guys would come back just glowing because they said these stupid Australian guys don't know what they have. There's gorgeous girls and nobody pays any attention to them. Of course our guys when they went there were essentially trained killers in the art of dating.. They would zero in on an attractive young woman and pay a lot of attention to her. Of course the Australian women would lap it up.

KARAER: Sure they did. The young woman that was sent out to be the second consular officer in Melbourne was single. Margaret was a very pretty red haired girl. She spent quite a bit of time in Latin America and certainly knew how to take care of Romeos, but when we were there she was flummoxed by Australian men. Once she came to my house after dinner about something. She said, "I've had it with this guy." This Australian she had been dating would show up at her house every evening just before mealtime. She'd offer him some food. He'd eat it, they'd sit and talk for a while and then it would be okay, see you, and off he'd go. This had been going on for a couple of weeks. Finally she said, that's it. He showed up the next day and she said to him, "Just exactly what are your intentions?" A terrified Australian fled her property.

Q: Given the state of the society at that time, did you find being a woman official, a female official a problem? Did this cause problems or not?

KARAER: No more with them than it did with my own American officials. No, when you identified yourself in your official capacity, they would treat you in a proper way. It wasn't on the official basis that there was a difficulty. It was on a man/woman, sexual basis. I warned my daughters, that Australians are tall, they're handsome and for the most part, they're great people, but remember that as far as women are concerned, their attitude is only slightly to the left of the Saudi Arabians. Now, hopefully things are changing in Australia.

We had a big naval exercise with the Australians at the time that I arrived in Papua, New Guinea. There were some bar fights in Australia during those exercises because the Australian men didn't like the American sailors talking to their girls. Now, I'm told that the Australians weren't talking to the girls. They were doing their usual thing, talking to their mates, watching the footy, but they didn't want the girls paying attention to the Americans. They treasured their women only when somebody else might be take them away apparently.

Q: Had the Australians changed their no Asian rule for immigration by this time or not?

KARAER: They had, but it was still very much controlled, but they had. The Labor Party changed it, as I recall. When I was there there were a lot of people coming in who worked for organizations that were handling Vietnamese babies being adopted in Australia. There were some forms and stuff that we had to deal with there. Oh, this is not answering your question, but that reminded me of something else that maybe one of the worst experiences I had while I was there. It was so sad. A family came in, a young woman, her mother who was a real witch, and the young woman's child who was a mixed race. The child and the young woman were applying for a tourist visa to visit the boy's father in California. The father was married and had a family in California. The child had been conceived when the man was on leave in Australia from Vietnam. The young woman applying for the visa didn't have a job. She lived with her mother. I had to refuse the visa. And I couldn't issue a passport to the child because in California the only way you can legitimize a child is to marry the mother. Then her mother, who had insisted on coming into the interview as well told me that I was a racist. I'm thinking to myself, "Lady there is a racist in this room, but it's not me." I thought, "Oh, that poor little kid. The child's mother seemed to be kind to him, to love him, but grandma was not a nice person to live with. Then in due course I got a letter from the father's congress person asking why we didn't let his son come to join him in the United States. I explained to them what I understood the law to be and asked them to let me know if they knew of another way to legitimize the child. Never heard from anybody again.

Q: You were there at the time things collapsed in Vietnam?

KARAER: No, it had already happened. The Americans were out of Vietnam by the time I was there.

Q: But in '75? The beginning of the boat people. Did that have any effect on you all?

KARAER: Only, as I recall, that many more people came in regarding adoptions of Vietnamese children. We discovered another interesting thing there that ended up contributing to our bureaucratic procedures. Because a fair number of Americans emigrated to Australia over the years and married there, we had an unusual amount of citizenship questions to deal with. I took the correspondence citizenship course after I got there so that I could deal with these problems better, and I really got to be quite an expert on all this stuff. In the course of doing these things, I discovered that in Australia in order to protect the identity of adopted children, when they were adopted, they were issued with a new birth certificate that showed their adoptive parents as their birth parents. Our whole operation in Australia had been cruising along for years totally oblivious to this. I don't even remember how I found this out. I think an American woman who was applying for a passport for a child that she'd adopted volunteered the fact that the kid was adopted. My assistant confirmed that that was the law, and I had to tell everyone that the child had to get an immigrant visa. That wasn't a happy situation. Then I informed the Department and the Consulate in Sydney which was the overall supervising consulate for Australia, and we designed a special form that we had to have every American parent sign when they were applying for passports for their kids that this child was their birth child and not adopted. It looked so odd. It was so hard to find proper wording for something like that.

Another thing was police reports. If an applicant indicated that they had been convicted of something in the past, we needed the details in order to determine if it was a crime of moral turpitude and therefore excluding. I had form letters that I sent off to the police departments in my consular district, which was the provinces of Victoria and South Australia for this information. One day the Consul General, not Brand, it was the first guy whose name I can't remember, came into my office. I must add it was one of the few times he ever showed his face on our floor, much less in my office. He said he had gotten a call from the South Australian police complaining about my letters. I didn't know it until that moment, but he had had trouble with the authorities in South Australia which had a labor party government, and had made a rule that the only person in the consulate who was to deal with the police in South Australia was the administrative officer, and I had broken his rule. Of course nobody had told me there was such a rule. I told him that he knew what my job was and that it included contacting the police on official business. If he wanted someone else to do my job, he should have told me. His response was, "Well, now you know," and off he stomped. That was the kind of thing that just made you hate to be a consular officer, and considering that he presided over that consulate the whole time that the alcoholic was there letting the place be run by the Australians, really made me angry.

Q: I guess this is probably a good place to stop for this time. How did your husband fare there?

KARAER: Oh, he enjoyed it. He got a certificate of graduation from the Melbourne Institute of Technology in radio and television communication repair. All of our holiday time we spent driving around Australia camping. We got to go to the Barrier Reef twice and we had a really good time. As I said, the Australians are absolutely superb people when you're dealing with them out of the big cities. The country of course is magnificent. We never got further west than Ayers Rock and Alice Springs. We took our car on the famous train, the "Ghan." We saw cowboys in northern Australia and people mining for sapphires in northern Australia.

Q: Good. Well, then we'll pick this up the next time in '75? Was it '75 when you left?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: I would have thought you would have tried to stay longer. Could you?

KARAER: No, well, I had the baby.

Q: Oh, that's right.

KARAER: Well, who knows. I was one of the people who, I thought the rules were there because they really enforced them, and I never questioned their rules. This was before they had the bidding system worked out so you still just corresponded with your personnel officer. At that point I told them I would like to get the economic course at the Foreign Service Institute because my idea was that with my consular experience, I should shoot for being a consul, the head of a consulate, a principal officer. I thought the other thing you needed for that would be a background in economics and business. Well, you know our personnel system. After reading my carefully thought out career plan, they asked me if I would like to go to the consular section in Lebanon. Well, things were just starting to get bad again in Lebanon, and here I am with this new baby. I was almost in tears. I showed that to Robert Brand and he said, "You tell them to go to hell. They don't have to send you to a place like that." That's when I learned that if you do a good job, the Department is likely to send you to a difficult dangerous place, but if you screw up, like the guy I replaced in Melbourne, you get a cushy job - he went to Malaysia.

Q: So, we'll pick this up in 1975 when you're off to the Foreign Service Institute taking the economic course?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Great. Well, we'll talk about that then. Great.

Q: Today is the 1st of June 2004. Arma Jean, you took this economic course, is that right?

KARAER: That's right in January, 1976.

Q: How did you find it?

KARAER: Oh, it was very challenging and very complete. I had never had economics courses in college, so this was a brand new thing for me. It was very difficult in one respect, because I have a very poor background in mathematics. In that course they take you from adding and subtracting up to integral calculus in just a few weeks. I just barely squeaked through that part of it, just barely.

Q: For an awful lot of Foreign Service types, I mean the reason they got into the Foreign Service is they took everything but math and that almost predicated their careers because all of a sudden you're up against this. How were the others in your class? Were some having the same problems you were?

KARAER: Oh, I'm sure there were, but it is the Foreign Service psychology not to go around letting everybody else know that you're having a hard time. In fact, perhaps the most interesting thing that I learned in that course had nothing to do with economics. It had a lot to do with the psychology of my fellow Foreign Service officers. The class was divided into study groups of four persons to a study room. John Sprott, who was the director of the course at that time, explained to us that we would all do much better if we helped each other rather than competing as individuals. Working together, he said, was not going to be easy for most of us. I wondered why, but I plunged in. I was lucky I guess because in my particular study group there was a fellow who was a CIA analyst and he was in as deep water as I was as far as mathematics was concerned. There was another Foreign Service Officer who was just really brilliant and he certainly knew his math. That was nothing. He was so smart that while everybody else was just really grinding away at this stuff trying to understand microeconomics and all this really weird stuff, he hardly ever cracked a book, but still he was doing just fine. He was also very kind, and he offered to help the two of us. Now, there was a fourth guy in the room who came in, sat at his desk, did his thing and never said a word to the rest of us. He was the kind of person that Sprott had been talking about.

Midway through the course Sprott congratulated our group because, he said, we were the first group in a long time that had arrived at mid-course without one of the students trying to attack one of the teachers! Apparently this happened because large numbers of officers who took the course had always done very well at whatever they did in the past, but, as you said, they probably had deliberately avoided things, like math, that they knew they weren't good at. Now they were being forced to do heavily math-related work and they couldn't take the stress. In any event, either we had more talented mathematicians, or we were a cooler group, but we had the distinction of being the course that didn't attack the teacher.

Q: When you came out of that course what do you think that you had? I mean as a tool.

KARAER: I did really understand macroeconomics, and I found that that was the theory that I needed to do the reporting that in the end fell to me in my assignments. We did quite a bit of marketing studies which was useful in my work as a commercial officer. It taught us what kinds of information businessmen expected us to help them gather. I was going to be a commercial officer. I knew that already. They were sending me to Zaire to do that work. I found the developmental economics part very interesting, but that of course was non-math. Microeconomics, which is very mathematical, is still a total mystery to me. Except I can do supply and demand curves.

Q: Well, as a practical measure, how much did you, would you think that somebody in a position from ambassador on down would be called upon really to move into the mathematical analysis? So much of this sounds like something that would be taken by people in Washington and playing with these things or did it give you a, the fact that you knew about this gave you a better feel for the country?

KARAER: Okay, you're right. The math part, once we got beyond basic algebra, wasn't very useful for me, but if I had decided to try to get more deeply into economic analysis, I certainly would have needed to be handle higher math. When I was in Zaire, one of the junior officers in the economic section was Allen Larson who is now the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. Allen is one of the nicest people you ever want to know, and really, really brilliant. Very, very kind. Always trying to be helpful. I remember him sitting in his office in Kinshasa trying to work out a regression formula that would be used to try to project what was going to happen in Zaire economically.

Q: Well, regression, although I realize it is a mathematical term, sounds like an apt term for just Zaire.

KARAER: No, it's a technique that really can only be used very efficiently now that computers are available because it's just an incredible number of mathematical formulas that show the interaction between different variables in an economy. Of course, it is only as good as the data you put into it. The way it works is that you have a string of formulas into which you plug different information about an economy, anything that you can reduce to numbers. In the sense that politics and social systems are part of how economies work, you have to assign a number to the level of governance and the amount of social interaction and so on. It can end up being garbage in garbage out, but if you are very rigorous, it is a useful tool for projecting what's going to happen in the future. Allen is such a brilliant mathematician. At the time, he only had finished his undergraduate work when he joined the Foreign Service. They sent him later to Harvard to do more and to get a master's degree there. If I ever knew anybody who started as a foot soldier and worked up to general who deserved to get the position that he has now, it certainly is Allen Larson.

Q: You went to Zaire in what late '76?

KARAER: No, let me think, middle '76.

Q: Middle '76.

KARAER: Yes, I think August, July, August.

Q: You were there until when?

KARAER: I was there for three years. We left in the summer of '79.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived there?

KARAER: Mobutu was very much in charge. Zaire itself was politically peaceful. There were no rebellions going on. Although you probably know that earlier in the decade there had been an attempt on the part of the people who lived in Shaba Province, where the big copper and cobalt mines are, to break away and form their own country.

Q: There was Shaba One and Shaba Two.

KARAER: Well, that comes later.

Q: Oh. So, Shaba One had happened.

KARAER: No. The independence of Zaire was extraordinarily painful and bloody. The Belgians who had been the colonial power there had really not thought about letting go there until much later than they actually did. But by 1960, they just were not able to hold onto the country anymore. They left very suddenly, after which the place just fell apart into all kinds of warring, ethnic factions. I can remember reading the stories in Life magazine when I was in college and looking at the pictures of the murders of the nuns in towns along the Zaire River A lot of people were killed, Europeans and many more Africans. There were people participating in this bloodletting that believed in magic, that if you had a special charm hanging around your neck the bullets couldn't hurt you. They did awful stuff to one another.

At independence, the name of the country was Congo. Its economy at that point was based 2/3s on the export of agricultural products and about 1/3 on the export of minerals. It's a very big country and extraordinarily wealthy if it is run properly. When the Belgians left and law and order broke down, the Westerners who were operating the plantations had to flee and the Africans who were the workers on those plantations either were killed or had to run into the bush to save their own lives and so almost all of the plantations went back to jungle. In Shaba Province, which abuts Angola and Zambia, there are incredibly rich copper and cobalt mines. Because of the mineral wealth of that province, the people down there thought that they could break away from the rest of Congo and make their own country, but they failed. Mobutu, who had been an army officer under the Belgians, took over the country. Through a mixture of threats, murder, imprisonment and exile he kept the country peaceful and his own hand in the till. Although he did have people killed, his main technique of control was to arrest people who were a threat to him politically and then have them exiled, sent them off to Europe, let them sit there and stew for a few years, and then offer them a position in his government. Those who accepted the offer could become the minister of whatever and have a chance to participate in the incredible theft that was going on under the Mobutu regime. Now, by the time I got there the export economy of the country had flip flopped from the colonial days and now they were earning about 2/3 of their export from minerals and 1/3 from agricultural products.

There were a small number of very wealthy Zairians, many of them related to Mobutu by blood or coopted, as I described before, and lots of poor people. Kinshasa had this glorious skyscraper that was just a block from the embassy. It soared up into the heavens over what otherwise was a disintegrating African city with miles and miles of shantytowns on its outskirts which were called, collectively, Le Cite. Of course that means The City in French, but in Kinshasa Le Cite was the slums as opposed to the central part of town and one nearby suburb where the few Westerners and Europeans still lived.

The U.S. was providing a significant amount of developmental aid to Zaire, as were the Belgians and the French. There were quite a few embassies in the city. One Turkish lady, whose husband was working there for an international organization, once said, "I have a job too. My job is shopping for food." It was true. Keeping your larder stocked was a full-time job. Our embassy was so big that we had a commissary for which we imported food from South Africa and Europe, but if you depended on the local economy like the Turkish lady did, shopping was a real adventure. Some days you'd go into the big supermarkets and there might be milk, but there wouldn't be any cereal or meat or chicken. Another day the place would be full of chicken, but there wouldn't be any milk. During the holidays though - and this showed you how the elite of Kinshasa both European and African lived - there would be a huge assortment of French cheeses available. There would be champagne and when the Nouveau Beaujolais came out in France, it was in Kinshasa the next day. The gap between the luxury things that only very wealthy people, by Zairean standards, could afford and everybody else was just incredible. In the market there were locally grown vegetables. There was a huge section of caterpillars for sale, because the folks on our end of Zaire like to eat caterpillars. I'll never forget taking a newly arrived African American couple to see the markets and, as we turned the corner into the caterpillar section, the lady stepped back and said in horror, "What's that?" She had been looking forward to getting back to her roots, and she got back with a vengeance I'm afraid. My husband was the one in our family who spent the time picking out what he could find in the market to eke out what we were able to buy at the commissary.

The town was lawless to a certain degree.

Q: You're talking about, this is Kinshasa?

KARAER: Yes. There were police, but we were warned by the security officer, "Some will say that the police are as bad as the criminals. But I don't agree. The police are better organized and better armed." In other words, if you're in trouble, don't call the police. Of course, calling anything was usually not an option because of the nearly inoperable telephone system.

Q: This is well before the advent of the cell phone and all that sort of thing.

KARAER: That's right. In fact, our first experience with radios was in Kinshasa. Everybody in the embassy was assigned a radio to communicate within our own organization. Also, the Marine Guards would patrol our residential areas and check with our house guards so that there was some backup presumably relatively close by if there were attacks on our houses. There were attacks on houses. The American embassy did not have such a big problem, primarily because we had this huge guard program that was coordinated well by our own people, but some of the people who worked for the international organizations for example, had attacks on their houses where they were beaten up or daughters were raped. It was very scary. I thought it was interesting, because the U.S. had just emerged from the Vietnam, anti-war, anti-government era. During those years young Americans demonstrating in the streets called the police "pigs." After I was in Zaire for a while, I thought those American demonstrators had no idea what it was like to live in a place where there are no police, or not any that count for anything anyway. The time in the U.S. when there was "no law west of the Pecos" was ancient history as far as Americans were concerned, but as far as people who lived in places like Zaire, it was their daily life.

Now, American policy there. Mobutu was a bad guy. In fact he had kicked out our previous ambassador.

Q: Who was that?

KARAER: Deane Hinton. Apparently Ambassador Hinton had told Mobutu once too often that they didn't like what he was doing and Mobutu told him to get lost. He was removed, and Walter Cutler became ambassador. Lannon Walker was the DCM, a really brilliant team actually. I was the assistant commercial officer. That was the first year that the Foreign Commercial Service was in operation, but they still had no personnel of their own, so State Department Officers were still doing commercial work. Commercial work was a joke in Zaire, of course, because nobody had any foreign exchange in Zaire to buy anything. I would go around to all of these companies trying to find out what we might be able to sell in Zaire. There were a lot of textile mills in Kinshasa and plywood manufacturing operations. They would show me equipment that was 20 years old that was American and it was running like a charm. They liked it, it was good stuff, but they couldn't buy it because they couldn't get credit and nobody was about to offer credit in Zaire. Anyway I did my duty and reported all this stuff.

Now Cutler's job was to get Mobutu back on the right track economically so that Zaire could start being the kind of a place that it had the potential to be, but without alienating the Zairean government on which we depended for two things. One, the United States was the biggest end user of cobalt. The only other big producer of cobalt in the world at the time was the Soviet Union, and, of course, we weren't buying it from them. The trade statistics didn't show any cobalt going from Zaire to the United States, because it all went to Belgium where it was processed and then sold on. We need cobalt to make steel which withstands the high temperatures in jet airplane engines. We needed the cobalt, so we wanted the mines to keep operating. Second, the war was going on in Angola and we were providing assistance to certain factions in Angola via Zaire. That was the balancing act that our ambassador had to perform there.

As for my job, I spent the first year just getting up in the morning, looking at myself in the mirror and saying, "Try not to make too big a fool out of yourself today. " because we had to speak French to do our jobs. There were a handful of people at the top of the Foreign Ministry who spoke English well. Just about everybody else that we had to deal with spoke only French or one of the local languages. I had gotten basic French, three months at the FSI. I must say I admire whoever teaches French to their colonials because while I still have a hard time understanding English spoken by a lot of Nigerians, for example, the educated folks who spoke French in Francophone Africa spoke it very well and with a very good accent. At least I had a fighting chance because I could understand their accent, but there were so many new words, and I was so scared every time I opened my mouth. Eventually, after about a year of just suffering horribly and feeling really like a fool, I was able to operate pretty smoothly in French, although I know that I made lots of grammatical errors. I know that because even though I was able to communicate with everybody about just anything, short of atomic science, the FSI teachers they sent out to test us at the end of the second year only gave me a half a point higher score than when I left the FSI, because of my grammatical errors. I understand the FSI has changed its policy a lot since then. Now it's ability to communicate rather than perfect grammar that they prize.

I had a couple of my biggest adventures while I was there. Kinshasa was very claustrophobic, because it was almost impossible to travel outside of the city. You could only go as far by car as you could carry enough gasoline to get you there and back again, because there weren't any dependable gasoline supplies in the country-side. Also, almost all of the roads were totally destroyed. The Belgians had had a policy that was very much hated by the Africans, but had worked very well as far as maintaining the infrastructure goes. They had built roads all over that big country. One of our drivers at the embassy told me that when he was a young man his first job after he got a drivers license was to drive an American in a Buick all over Zaire. At the time he told me that story that trip would have been absolutely impossible. The only road that was open on a regular basis and kept maintained was between Kinshasa and Matadi, which is the port on the Atlantic Ocean.

I reread Joseph Conrad's short story Heart of Darkness while I was there and I thought we really, really haven't progressed very much, or at least they'd progressed, and then they fell back to pretty much the same situation. The way that most people traveled into the interior was by air, which was totally unreliable. Everybody referred to Air Zaire, which served the interior of the country, as Air Peutetre, in other words, Air Perhaps. Maybe it would go, maybe it wouldn't. I found out that not only it might not go when, it might not go where. I had two colleagues who had bought tickets to go to the northeast of Zaire, got on the plane, spent the entire day flying, were taken to Kenya where they were not allowed to get off the plane, saw large pallets of cigarette boxes being loaded on the plane (smuggled), and then the plane came back to Kinshasa and that was the end of the trip.

The other way that most of the Zaireans traveled was on the river. That's the Congo River, which is the biggest river in Africa after the Nile. At that time the river was called the Zaire River. My husband and my little daughter and I took a trip from Kinshasa to Mbandaka. It's only about 500 miles; it took us three days to get there. We, and a few other cabin passengers, traveled on the pousseur, which is a tug boat that pushes, rather than pulls. The pousseur pushed three large barges on which the rest of the passengers traveled, slept and did business. Along the way, villagers would come out in dug out canoes with whatever they had to trade and the market ladies would hang over the side of the barge, bargain with them for their wares - smoked monkeys, fish, and stuff like that. All of this went on while the boat continued upstream. That was an interesting trip.

A Zairean businessman friend of mine had invited us to visit his home in Mbandaka and to see the sorts of businesses that they were running up there. He had helped arrange our reservation on the boat. Well, you can imagine what a mess that would be to get that done. So, only people who knew who to see and what to do could get those reservations. When we arrived at the dock and were shown to the cabin, we found two men and their baggage already in possession. Fortunately my friend was there. He had a word with them and with the captain and they were removed.

My little daughter was about 2 or 2ï¿½ years old when we took this trip. When we got to Mbandaka, my friend, who had flown up there, met us at the hotel to take us to his house for dinner. Now, if you're anybody in Zaire, you have a Mercedes. His had leather seat covers. In Kinshasa, we, on the other hand, were driving this really rattle trappy second-hand Jeep. My daughter, who always has had a taste for fine things, slides across this leather backseat, looks around and says, "This is a nice car." Yes, the car was nice, but Zaire is Zaire. We missed our plane to come back because the plane took off two hours earlier than it was scheduled to leave, so we were nowhere near the airport when it left. It took us three more days to get back to Kinshasa.

I went back to Mbandaka again the next year and the result was a report that I am particularly proud of. The main reason that Zaire's agricultural productivity had fallen off so drastically was because of gross mismanagement by the Mobutu government. The main thing that the Africans in town ate was "fufu", which is cassava. They eat the leaves and they also eat the root which is soaked and pounded into a kind of flour and made into a pudding-like stuff. Rice is another staple food. Zaire has a huge area that has always been rice growing and Mbandaka, the town that I was visiting, is the capital of Equator Province, which is the center of the rice growing area. Now, in order to try to help feed the people in the city, the United States had provided wheat from the United States, which was ground in a mill owned by an American company in Matadi, and then it was shipped up by rail to Kinshasa. There was always French bread to eat in Kinshasa. In fact, the lunches of the workers in town seemed to consist of a bottle of Coca-Cola and a baguette. In addition, the United States, together with the other major aid donors, was pressing Mobutu to lift the price controls on locally produced foodstuffs. He had put price controls on what the farmers were paid for what they grew. Then he'd give licenses to his nearest and dearest to buy that produce and market it in the city for whatever they could get, which was considerably above what they paid for it. Prices for food were high in town, but they were low in the provinces, way below certainly the world price for rice. What we were trying to do was to get the agricultural sector operating again. About the end of the second year I was there, the donors persuaded the government of Zaire to take the price controls off of rice, and immediately the prices shot up in the city. The ambassador took a trip up to Equator Province using the military attachï¿½'s aircraft. First he was going to call on the governor there and then he was going to go to one of the big Lever Brothers plantations that grew oil palm. He took me along on this trip and to his meeting with the governor. After preliminary small talk, the ambassador said something to the governor like, "Well, you know the price of rice is going up." The governor said, "Yes it is." The ambassador said, "Well, is the production in the countryside going up as well?" The governor said, "No. The production is going down." The ambassador's jaw dropped. When the meeting was over, the ambassador said, "Well, Arma Jane you're not going to the plantation. I want you to stay here and find out why rice production is going down." Off he went to the plantation. I started going around calling on the bankers and the merchants trying to see what was happening. It wasn't hard to find out.

I ended up writing the report that I was most proud of in my entire career and it was called "The Case of the Backward Bending Supply Curve." Now, backward bending supply curves in economics are theoretical for the most part. Normally, as the price of a commodity goes up, the more is produced, so the curve rises at an acute angle. But in some rare cases as the price goes up, the supply goes down and the curve on the graph bends back on itself. Now why did that happen in this case? Because Mobutu had not only ruined the price structure of agricultural products with his bad ideas, but he had also ruined the distribution system. In the mid to late '60s, he made a trip to China and was very impressed by their controlled economy. He said, okay you've got all these poor people and the government decides how things are going to be run. I think I'll try something like that when I get back. He didn't communize businesses. He "Zairianized" them. Almost all of the businesses in Zaire at that point were owned by foreigners. There were Jews from Rhodes, there were Lebanese, there were Indians, Pakistanis from East Africa, there were Greeks, there were Portuguese and they owned everything from the big textile mills in the city to the small trading operations out in the interior. Those trading operations were the key to encouraging the farmers to grow more than they needed for their own consumption. When he Zairianized their businesses, he took the business and he gave them to Zaireans to run. The people who got the businesses were supposed to repay the original owners from the profit that they made on the business. Well, in theory, maybe that should have worked, except the people to whom the companies were given had no idea how to do business. It takes more to run even a small trading operation than just the truck and the goods. You need to know how to trade. They didn't. What happened in almost every case was that once the truck broke down and the goods that were on the shelves at the shops were sold, the new Zairian owners closed the place and left. When that happened, the farmers had no way to get their excess crops into the city where it could be shipped down to Kinshasa and there were very few goods available to buy with any money that they might make. When the price of rice went up, they discovered they only had to produce a third of what they had produced the year before to make enough money to buy what was available to buy. It was clear that they were not going to grow any extra rice until there were more goods in the interior that they could buy with the extra money they would make.

I think one of the first lessons in our economic course addressed the question of where the value of money comes from. This was an outstanding example of how money is absolutely worthless if there is nothing to buy with it. Anyway, it was just a perfect example on the backward bending supply curve. The AID director got very grumpy with me when that report was sent out, because apparently all of these brilliant agricultural economists had been coming in and making plans for special projects to grow more crops and all this. Nobody was working on the distribution question at all. That was a huge lesson for me in economics. I always said it was the perfect thing for my education that I had that course at the FSI and then went to a country where the government was doing all of the textbook things to do to ruin an economy and then I got to go the next time to a place where a government had decided to adopt all of the textbook things that you do to make an economy take off.

Q: How did you find let's say as a commercial officer, what would you be doing?

KARAER: That was a good question actually. I did market research on stuff that my predecessor had identified as those things that were most likely to be salable in Zaire, like textile equipment and wood working equipment. I also gathered basic information that visiting businessmen needed, who to see, who was in charge of the office, what their telephone number was, where the address was, how you got around, and put it in a big loose leaf folder that was easy to use and to update. I also took the opportunity to train the Zairean Foreign Service Nationals who were working for the commercial section. We had a separate little building in which we maintained our commercial library where the local folks would come in to ask about ordering things from the United States. I had three Zaireans working there, and only one had the slightest notion of the procedures that the Commerce Department expected us to follow. The Commerce Department had training courses by correspondence and I knew that just getting the courses and handing them to the employees was not going to accomplish anything. I had to have classes with them. Every week we would have certain days and hours when the library was closed. We would sit down and do the lessons together, so they would understand this stuff. When I left Kinshasa, the Commerce Department had the basic information that they could use to assist American businessmen who went to Zaire and they had some trained employees.

Q: Was there a feeling of particularly on the economic side of you know, real frustration of being there? We were pouring a lot of money in with aid and all, you almost had the feeling we were pouring it in here and there's a chute and it came out in Zurich into numbered accounts or something. What was kind of the spirit there?

KARAER: Well, there was real unhappiness between the economic section and the AID people. Economists were always pointing out exactly what you just said, and AID didn't like to hear that because, after all, their job was to try to develop the economy. I don't know if what went into the Zurich accounts was our money per se. Of course money is fungible, but we had, I think, decent controls over how the aid funds were used. Let's face it, most of the money in these aid programs is paid to Americans who do surveys and make plans. It wasn't so much our money that was being stolen as it was the monies that the Zairean government made from the sale of their minerals.

A really funny thing happened while I was there. I was trying to improve my French, and, in addition to reading newspapers, was trying to read novels in French that would be interesting enough to keep me going and keep me opening up the dictionary. I had read some stuff that the DCM's wife gave me from her library and then a friend of mine, one of the Indian merchants, gave me a thriller. I found out later that it is part of a whole series of trashy spy novels that are sort of James Bondy. The key word in the series is "SAS" and it stands for "Son Altesse Serene". The fellow who is the hero is a French nobleman and so he has that title, but in fact he is a real James Bond character in every respect, the women, the daring do. I don't think he had as many weird contraptions to work with, but the other hallmark of the series was that the name of the country in which SAS did his thing was in each title. The name of the book I read was "Panique au Zaire". Well, it was really interesting, because the author's technique was to go to the country that he was going to write about and hang around for a couple of weeks, a month maybe, and get all of the gossip about the people who ran the government and the economy and then make up his characters based on that. Well, in this book there were some pretty evil Zaireans all right, but the most evil character was a European. There also was a discussion of the CIA Station Chief and where his house was. After I read the book, I asked my friend, "Okay, now we can see that this Zairean character is really this guy and the other Zairean character is that guy, but what about the evil businessman? He isn't real is he?" He said, "Oh, yes he is." Then he started telling me about it. While I had spent quite a bit of time meeting and researching the backgrounds of the top Zairean businessmen, I really had had nothing to do with the Belgian business community. I didn't really know them. What my friend was able to tell me was that this writer was absolutely spot on. This guy probably was capable of doing all the awful things that he did in the book.

Q: Zaire is you know in our profession we know the certain countries that are CIA countries, that the CIA dominates and certainly Zaire. How did you feel about the CIA there?

KARAER: I didn't want to know. I mean I knew who the Chief of Station was, but I didn't want to know what they were doing. The "need to know" thing is a very smart policy. The person that I did get to know quite well, because by that time he was a representative of a big American business in Zaire, was Larry Devlin. Ever heard that name?

Q: No.

KARAER: Larry Devlin was one of the top CIA officers in Zaire in 1960 at the time of independence. Larry got stood up against a wall twice by the rebels and just got reprieved in the last minute. When I was there he was in the country representing the interests of Maurice Tempelsman.

Q: Oh, yes, the diamond man.

KARAER: Larry told us a lot about the background of the powerful Zaireans who had come and how they had risen to power. He told us a lot of war stories about the 1960s, which were truly scary and helped explain something about the Zaireans that I got to know. I really think that I was able to be what I considered friends with three Zaireans while I was there. One was a neighbor who was married to an American woman just down the street from us. One was my French teacher, a wonderful man, and the third was a young government official.

Q: This is tape five, side one with Arma Jane Karaer.

KARAER: We got the third fellow one of those USIS travel grants to see the United States and that's how I got to know him pretty well. After he returned, I continued the friendship. He had a child that was a little bit older than mine and we were able to actually get invited to his house. An invitation to a Zairean's home was a major coup in that place. When people got to know you well enough to trust that you weren't going to run out and blab what they had said, they would ask, "Why won't you Americans get rid of Mobutu for us? He's a terrible person. You should get rid of him." Of course they knew we had helped him get the presidency, and they figured we should help get rid of him. However, when you asked them who they thought would do a better job of running the place, they'd kind of back down. They were really afraid of falling back into the chaos that had existed in Zaire in the early 1960s. Thanks to Mobutu's very clever way of either eliminating or co-opting any real rivals, there was nobody that anybody could think of that was capable of replacing him for the better.

Well, then you mentioned Shaba One and Shaba Two. Those were the names of two invasions of the country from Angola into the Shaba Province. The tribe that exists contiguous to Shaba in Angola are the same people as the tribe that is the majority in Shaba. That was part of the reason for the invasion. They said that they wanted to liberate their people. Those people had always been very restless under Mobutu's government. They had tried to make themselves independent in the early '60s and that had failed. Mobutu was keeping a very strong hand on that area. For example, Zaire was building an electric supply line that went from a big dam on the Zaire River, at a point just between Kinshasa and Matadi, all the way to Shaba, 1,000 miles over jungle. It was being built by Morrison Knudson. They were great engineers. I mean they could do this crazy thing because they, like the American military during the Second World War, could do everything for themselves. They built their own airstrips. They had their own airplanes fly their stuff in and out. Mobutu wanted his finger in Kinshasa on the switch for the electrical supply to the mines and everything else in Shaba, and that's why this thing was set up that way.

When those invasions took place and a number of Africans and Europeans were killed there, those of us in Kinshasa knew what was going on, but it didn't affect us at all really. For a while people thought that the Shaba invasion might be the event the pushed the rest of Zaire into getting rid of Mobutu. Most diplomats in Kinshasa thought that any other group of people would have revolted long before, but not the Zaireans. Of course one of the reasons was that they were so fractionalized. Each tribe had its own loyalty to itself and was very suspicious of the others, so they couldn't cooperate with each other. The other thing was that having come from the army himself, Mobutu did the classic thing that all army dictators do. He had broken up the army's ability to cooperate with itself. He kept it poorly supplied. He had encouraged rivalries between various commanders so that if there was any loyalty at all, it was to him, not to the army or to each other. When the invaders came across the border into Shaba, it was a real threat to his regime because if he lost the income from the mines then he probably wouldn't be able to feed the country, but at the same time the Zairean army really wasn't able to put up a defense. The French and the Belgians sent in paratroopers eventually and got rid of the invaders. There was a lot of fear among the foreigners in Kinshasa, however. They thought, " Mobutu's going to go and then this place is going to back to what it was in the 1960s, and then how are we going to get out of here"? Everybody who knew anybody at the American Embassy was coming to call on us and asking, "When you leave, you'll take us with you, too won't you"? Well, that wasn't necessary because they got rid of the invaders.

Q: Were our other non-governmental agencies working in that area when you were there trying to make conditions better?

KARAER: Oh, we had the Peace Corps.

Q: How were they doing?

KARAER: You have to ask the Peace Corps about whether they felt that they accomplished much there. The only thing I remember about the Peace Corps while I was there was a deep concern on the part of the people who ran the Embassy and the Peace Corps whether our volunteers out in the countryside would get enough food to stay reasonably healthy. In Kinshasa, food was not exactly scarce, but so unevenly available and so expensive from the point of view of the Zairean people, that the Embassy had started a project using money that was earned by our employees association. We had a restaurant and a tennis court and a swimming pool and all this stuff. People paid money to use these things. The Embassy used some of that money to start a food bank where our Zairean employees in addition to their salaries, would also receive a food package for themselves and their families every payday. Canned fish, rice, that kind of stuff so that our own employees at least would have something to eat. We were very concerned that the Peace Corps Volunteers that we were sending out into the villages in Zaire were not going to get enough to eat to keep them healthy. The few Peace Corps volunteers that I saw come through the embassy, however, looked ok to me.

Q: On your commercial side, were you ever looking at the Zairean women, the people who ran the market place and all this. Was this strictly local or was there any chance of tapping into that as a source of selling American goods?

KARAER: No, because what they dealt in were consumer goods and consumer goods were not something that the United States was going to sell to a place like Central Africa. The sort of thing that the United States could be competitive in, desirable in, was machinery.

Q: What about with the Department of Commerce, your job, were you working at that point essentially directly for the Department of Commerce?

KARAER: I'm trying to remember. Somehow I think I wasn't working for Commerce until I went to Ankara. While we worked closely with them because these programs were Commerce's programs, I think we were still State Department officers during that time.

Q: Did you feel any, I mean in reports back, obviously we're supposed to list trade opportunities and things like this, trade opportunity being to tell Commerce to let American business know that there's an opportunity to do business. I mean with a place like Zaire, was the feeling really we couldn't in good conscience tell any country to do trading unless there were very particular circumstances.

KARAER: Yes, well, we did do the trade opportunities, but as one of my colleagues in the economic section used to joke, today's trade opportunity is tomorrow's trade complaint. So, of course one of the things that when anybody would come to us and say oh, I want to buy this or that and let the companies in the United States know that I am interested, we would look as deeply as we were able to into how they were going to finance the purchase. In some cases it was peculiar means, but they appeared to have the means to do it. It was just that everything was so criminal the way people saw the people that were getting ahead there. They were doing this through dishonesty. In some cases necessarily because the laws were unreasonable and unfair, but in other cases because if you were going to get the money that you needed to capitalize something that you wanted to start, you were going to have to do something dishonest. What we were concerned about was that at least the part that they had to do with the American company was honest.

Q: Well, did you feel too that you were dealing with a deep rooted Belgian I don't know if you want to call it a Mafia cartel or something, in other words the Belgians had a lock on a lot of the stuff that was going on?

KARAER: Oh, absolutely. I did my best to lay out in the marketing reports that I wrote who owned the companies and who their traditional suppliers were. On the other hand, for whatever reason, American companies had not tried to develop this market either. For example, you can't just sell a big complicated spinning machine or a weaving machine or textile printing machine and say, "okay, fine, you got your machine, I got my money, see you later". There has to be some system for maintaining the thing, getting spare parts, etc. That was the other big complaint that these companies had, and it was justified. While they knew that the machines that were being sold by the United States were good ones, American companies weren't interested in dealing with the vagaries of Africa. Remember this was still when Commerce's big thing was to encourage American companies to export at all. We were not exporting because most of our companies were very happy with the American market and not worrying about exporting. Also, exporting was still set in colonial patterns. The potential customer was saying, "If I buy a machine from Europe, the representative comes through here once every three months to see how we're doing, but if I buy something from the United States I'm never going to see anybody and I don't want to take that chance". I think that at that time American companies probably had similar networks of service and representation set up in Latin America like the Europeans had in Africa. Nevertheless, as far as I was concerned my work was very interesting and I could happily spend all of my time getting marketing information and feeding it back to Commerce. Now, whether my efforts sold a single pin is another question, but hopefully I helped educate people about what you needed to do to do business in Africa, this is what you're going to have to consider.

Q: How did you find the banking structure, the people to give out credit to people to buy things?

KARAER: There wasn't any.

Q: You were giving me a blank look there.

KARAER: Citibank had an office in Kinshasa and that was the one bank where I knew I could talk with the directors and get their take on the economy, what was possible and what was impossible. Although, I think probably its main business was with the embassy and with AID. Another project I undertook was to do biographical sketches on the ten leading Zairean businessmen. The one at the top of the list was Uncle Lito. He was Mobutu's uncle. He was the one who raised Mobutu. Mobutu's father died when he was a very young boy and so Uncle Lito had brought him up and he felt obviously a very deep obligation to him. He had given Uncle Lito a big chunk of the Zaireanized companies and one of the things that Uncle Lito owned and was the source of tremendous wealth was the main trading company that dealt in foodstuffs, that imported foodstuffs from overseas. Oh boy, the whole time I was in Zaire, the stories I heard about Uncle Lito were just absolutely horrendous and these were all coming from the European or Indian merchants and business people that I had met along the way. Uncle Lito, according to them, was the source of all evil, but he was on the list to interview, and I had to go see him. I made an appointment, and when I left the office I said to my secretary, I said, "Well, if they throw me into the crocodile pit, you know where I went and you can send them looking for me." I think the crocodile pit was one of the things that was featured in that trashy novel that I read.

Anyway, I get there and Uncle Lito couldn't have been sweeter. Now, I'm sure he did all of the dishonest things that they said and more, but he was absolutely thrilled that the American Embassy wanted to know about his life. In fact, John Heimann, who was the head of the economic section, had said he didn't think I would have any trouble getting to see these people. "All you have to do is bat your eyelashes and say, tell me how you got to be the great man that you are today." He was absolutely right. It worked every time. I didn't even have to bat my eyelashes. "You're such a successful man. Tell me, how did you get to be a success?" It was again, a great education that helped me understand people in other developing countries that I went to later.

Until independence there were almost no educated Africans in Zaire who had gone beyond primary school. A handful of people had university degrees, and almost all of those who were educated were priests. When I asked Uncle Lito what he wanted to be when he was young, he said, well, when he was a young man, what he wanted to do was to become a priest. I almost fell out of my chair. Then I thought, of course, in his youth, that was the only way open to an ambitious Zairean man who wanted to get beyond being a clerk in some warehouse.

Q: There was something in 1960 when Zaire or the Belgian Congo was being given independence, something like four college graduates or three college graduates or something.

KARAER: Yes, it was very small, six sticks in my mind. Uncle Lito wanted to be a priest, but that didn't work out, because he had to take care of his family and on and on. I must say he was so sweet. He was so forthcoming that I reminded myself that I had better stop and think about the motives of some of those people who told some of those stories about him. On the other hand, he really was an old crook. We were getting to a crisis at that point in the Zairean economy. The World Bank and the major donors had really put it to the Zairean government that they had to bring the management of their own resources under control. The World Bank sent a retired German central banker out to become the head of the Zairean Central Bank and the IBID sent a Turk who had been in the Ministry of Finance in Turkey out to be the chief advisor to the Minister of Finance. I got the following story from the German, so this is true. Uncle Lito arrived at the Central Bank with these big metal trunks that the traders used to move stuff around in Zaire. He sent them into the bank and said, "Fill them up". He didn't get them filled up that time. As you can imagine, the World Bank reps had to have protection, because the Zairean leadership really wanted to get rid of them in the worst way. I got to talk to all of these people and find out how this program was going, so it was a tremendous education for us.

Q: Did you find, I mean when you're dealing with a country like Zaire which is almost the prime example, but where corruption is so big, we have other fish to fry. We wanted to keep it from disintegrating. We wanted to keep the cobalt. We wanted to keep the Soviets from messing around there. There were border questions and other things going. If you write back reports about how awful the corruption is on sort of a weekly basis which this stuff can leak to congress and newspapers and really screw things up by showing that we're supporting as we do a corrupt regime. I mean did you feel inhibited or something or think well, everybody knows that, so I'm not going to report that anymore?

KARAER: I wasn't writing that stuff every week as you were saying. It wasn't as though our government didn't have the information and wasn't keeping tabs on these guys. Cutler's job there, together with the other major donors, was to find some way to corral Mobutu, not to destroy him, because, as you say, in the absence of a more viable government, they needed him to keep Zaire together and to get the cooperation they needed for these other things. At the same time there needed to be a way to keep the thefts under control. They were succeeding to a certain extent, but the great mass of the people still remained horribly poor.

Another thing I continued to learn in Zaire, adding on to what I'd learned living in India, is that while much of the poverty of developing countries stems from misgovernment or from serious imbalances in the economy, a lot of it comes from the inability of the old social structure to deal with the modern world and the modern economy. Zaire needed the foreign exchange that it was earning from its minerals businesses that had to be run in a first world manner by people who understood the machinery and the marketing in order to build the infrastructure to provide the education and the medical treatment and other things that their people needed. The people for the most part were still operating on the basis of their old tribal family rules that made it very hard for a person who understood the modern world to move in both of those worlds. I have two examples of that. You talk about corruption. There was one man in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with whom I had very long, frank conversations. He would tell me about how family members would come for help, and when we say family we're talking about a really extended family. We're talking about lots of potential petitioners who come to him and say, "You have a big job in the government now. You control jobs. You control money. I need help. Help me. Give my son a job. Give me some money for whatever. He has to refuse, because neither the money nor the jobs are his to give away. That's the kind of corruption that, for the most part, we're talking about. Of course Mobutu is socking away billions in Switzerland, but who's he helping? Uncle Lito. He's the first one who gets help from Mobutu. So, trickle this down through the entire modern government structure. Every single one of those people who had any kind of influence over jobs or over money had tons of family members coming to ask for his help, and if he didn't give that help he was considered a really bad guy. Now, this is not just your unfortunate brother-in-law, like we might have in our society, this is lots of people. People who are very close to you.

My French teacher made his living tutoring American Embassy employees in the embassy language program. He had a steady income, but it wasn't huge. He lived in a neat little one-room house in the Cite. He lived with his sister, who was unmarried, and with his little daughter, who was the same age as my daughter. Before he invited us to come to his house for dinner, which was a really big honor for us, he told me the terribly sad story about what had happened to his wife. He'd been married, of course, that's where the little girl came from, and he had decided that since he had a low income that he would limit his family to one child, so that he could educate and care for her well. Now, this was a horrible risk, because disease is rampant there. In fact during the time that I knew him, his child had gotten malaria and had almost died and there was very little medicine available in the city. The hospital was a joke. However, he stuck to his decision. Then one day his wife's family came to them and said, "Our uncle has 12 children. He lives upriver somewhere in a small place. He can't afford to send them all to school. You have a good job. You live in a big city. You have your own house. We're going to send two of his children down to you to take care of". This meant that he would not only feed and clothe them, but he would pay their school fees and take care of them until the time came for Uncle to take them back. The French teacher told the relative, "Look, I didn't ask Uncle X to have 12 children. I can only take care of my own family and my sister. I can't take care of anybody else's children". His wife was so mortified that he had taken that position that she left him. Now, it's so easy for Americans to sit back here and look at the amount of money that AID sends out and say, "Why don't these people pull themselves together and do what's right". But in order to do what we think is right, they have to pay a terrible price for rejecting their cultural demands.

Q: Is there anything you want to add?.

KARAER: Yes. Oh, one thing I wanted to add. I had read all the classified reports that came across my desk about Mobutu. Just before I left we participated in the Kinshasa Trade Fair. Now, Commerce did not want to give us any money to do this, because they knew by this time that there was no way that participating in this fair was going to sell any American products, but it was one of Mobutu's pet projects. If an ambassador wanted to show that he was cooperating, he participated in the Fair. We had hardly any money to do it with. I can't even remember where I got the money that I used. I guess a couple of the big companies gave us some funds. We had a General Motors assembly plant there and we had a Firestone Tire factory. I think that they did give some money just to be good guys and our own shop put together some plywood booths and stuff and painted them red, white and blue. We had some catalogs and some pamphlets and things to hand out.

Well, on the first Sunday of the fair, Mobutu came to tour it and we were at our display to shake his hand. That was the first time that I really understood what "charisma" means. I knew all this awful stuff about this man. He was very tall, still very handsome. He came down the line. He looked down at me with his big eyes, shook my hand and said, "Bonjour, Madame." I said weakly, "Bonjour, Monsieur." Wow. His personal magnetism was incredible. That was a real revelation to me, how some people just have this thing. I guess it's what they say Bill Clinton has. People can find fault with him, but everybody who has ever met him says you just can't resist him.

Q: Yes, well, luckily you weren't put to the test.

KARAER: No, I got out of there fast.

Q: Anyway, we'll pick this up next time in '79. Where did you go?

KARAER: In 1979 I went back to Washington to study Turkish in order to go to Turkey to be the head of the commercial section in Ankara.

Today is the 14th of June 2004. Arma Jane, how long did you take Turkish and how did you find it as a language?

KARAER: Let's see. I think we took Turkish for six months at that time. It's difficult, because, unless you already speak Farsi or Arabic, it's a totally new vocabulary. On the other hand, although it has a very complicated grammar, it's a very regular one. I mean, it's unlike French or English, where you learn all the rules about the verbs and then you learn about all the verbs that don't fit the rules. In Turkish, once you know how to form a tense, every verb gets formed in that tense the same way. From that point of view, it's quite a precise language. Modern Turkish had evolved so quickly. Ataturk gave a speech to the youth of Turkey in the late '20s or early '30s which is engraved on walls in colleges everywhere in Turkey. Our teachers told us that that speech, which was in Ottoman Turkish is to modern Turkish as Chaucer's English is to modern English. Just think what a huge difference that makes. Our teacher had a cartoon on the class bulletin board commenting on the rapid evolution of the language. The cartoon was from a Turkish magazine and it showed a young boy and his father in the foreground. They were speaking German to each other. The mother is standing in the background explaining to the neighbor in Turkish that her son and husband have to speak German to each other because they can't understand each other's Turkish anymore. That actually happened to my husband when we got to Turkey. He was looking for an address in a far part of Ankara and asked a young man passing by where this place might be. The fellow said, "I don't know," but he said it in modern, newly created words that my husband couldn't understand. My husband was starting to wonder whether the man was a foreigner. The reason that that happened was because Ataturk wanted to reform Ottoman Turkish so that it could become a language that was intelligible by the entire population. During the Ottoman Empire, the language of government and well educated people was very heavily laden with the Persian and Arabic words. The firmans (decrees) of the Sultan literally had to be translated by the local officials so that the farmers out in the countryside could understand what the new rules were.

Ataturk did two things. One was to create a Turkish Language Commission that exists to this day. It reviews the language and tries to expunge foreign words and replace them with words with Turkish roots. In other words, it makes up words, but it's easy to do that in Turkish because the same root can then be manipulated to become a noun or an adjective or whatever you need. Also, he called in linguists from all over and had them create a new alphabet for Turkish, because, until he took over the government, Turkish was written in Arabic script and this Arabic script isn't really suited to Turkish because in written Arabic they leave out vowels. It works for the Arabs, but in Turkish it became very confusing and very difficult for people to learn to read. Also, of course, he wanted to modernize Turkey, and by adopting the Roman alphabet with some adjustments to match the Turkish sounds, he was able to create a method of writing Turkish that is very easy to read. Unlike English, where vowels have several different sounds depending on the word, in Turkish every single letter has only one sound and you memorize that and you can read.

We decided to send our oldest daughter, who was just turning five when we got to Ankara, to a Turkish elementary school, so that she could learn to speak Turkish. I was amazed. Those little kids start first grade in September just like ours do. By Christmas those children can read any word in a Turkish newspaper. They may not know what the word means, but they can read it and pronounce it properly. It's so easy.

Q: Did you find that you were coming home and speaking Turkish? Arma Jane's husband was born in Turkey.

KARAER: Unfortunately, no. I think this may be true in lots of marriages. My husband couldn't help but give long disquisitions on whatever mistakes I made in the middle of something I was trying to tell him, so it just became unbearable. I spoke Turkish to other people, but not to him.

Q: I understand. I can't make the bed with my wife. She keeps telling me what I'm doing wrong. I just won't make the bed with my wife. Well, then you went out to Ankara in what, would it be by '80 then about?

KARAER: Yes, it was 1980.

Q: You were there until when?

KARAER: 1983 summer. When we got there, there was a near civil war going on in Turkey between the far left and the far right. People were getting shot in the streets and a number of Americans working for companies there also had been killed by the leftists. I had responded to a recruiting telegram that the Department had sent out the previous year looking for people to volunteer to go to Turkey. As a consequence they gave me a choice of three different jobs. I wanted to volunteer. First of all, I feel very much at home in Turkey obviously. I'd already done one tour there. My husband's family lives there. I wanted to get the Turkish language training. I chose to be the head of the commercial section in Ankara.

Q: How did the quasi-civil war affect you all?

KARAER: When we arrived in Istanbul, our plan was to stay with my mother-in-law for a few days and then take the train to Ankara to take up the job. The first night of the day we arrived the sun was going down, and my husband said he was going to go out to visit his old friend who lived a couple of streets away. We could hear these pop, pop sounds outside like firecrackers, and my husband stopped at the door and said to his sister, "What's that?" She said, "Oh, they're shooting. As soon as the sun goes down they start shooting." He took off his jacket and said, "Well, I guess I'll wait until tomorrow morning." When we got to Ankara and moved into our apartment we were sort of halfway up the hill that leads to the area of Chinkaya which is where the President's house is and where the ambassador's residence is, so our neighborhood was quite a nice one, but every night when we were going to bed we opened the window and heard the gunfire in the working class neighborhood at the bottom of the hill. We got there in August. A month later the military took over. It was the last military takeover in the series of such takeovers in the history of republican Turkey. While the takeover in 1980 was a great scandal as far as Europeans were concerned, and yet another excuse not to let Turkey into the European Union, the relief of the Turkish population was palpable. The Army put a curfew into effect after the takeover, but the first night, people were still out in the neighborhoods walking around just enjoying the fact that they could count on not be shot by accident. A lot of innocent bystanders got shot in this feuding between the left and the right. Well, two things happened as a consequence of the takeover. The Turkish military has been very wise in their takeovers. They do not put military officers in charge of the government. The head of the Turkish military resigned his position as general and became the president, but the other positions were filled with technocrats. The reason that the Army took over was that while this internecine fighting was getting worse and worse, the two major political parties could not cooperate with each other, kept changing positions with votes of no confidence every few months, but it didn't matter which party was in charge, neither one of them could get enough cooperation from the other one to get enough votes pulled together to do something definitive about the violence.

The other thing that happened following the takeover, and the thing that became most interesting to me as well during the time I was there, was that the man who was the head of the Turkish Government's office of economic planning, Turgut Ozal, came to the forefront with a number of economic reform policies that the new government adopted and really pushed forward. By 1980, in addition to all of the political violence, the Turkish economy had just about crumbled, and they had almost no foreign exchange whatsoever. This was shortly after the invention of OPEC and oil prices had gone up tremendously. Turkey's economic policy, until Ozal's reforms were adopted, had been pretty much "We can go it alone. We can do it ourselves. We don't need trade and foreign investment." Up to that point, industry was primarily owned by the government. This had started during Ataturk's time when he couldn't get investment from outside the country, so it was only the government that was in a position to create modern industry. But by the 1980's, this "statist" economic policy had gone too far. State-owned companies had become places where people would be hired just to soak up unemployment. Therefore these companies never made any money. Furthermore, the goods that they made were shoddy, and they couldn't or wouldn't export them. They had wonderful agricultural products to export, but their market was Europe and they had to go either through Bulgaria or Greece to bring those products to the market. Since those governments weren't friendly to Turkey, their customs guards would leave Turkish trucks sitting at the border with tomatoes and oranges rotting in them. Turkey had a lot of basic raw materials and could pretty much go it alone as far as trade was concerned, but it didn't have oil. That was the major thing it needed to import. When the price of oil went up, Turkey's foreign exchange just disappeared.

Q: The mid '70s was when the big oil price increase hit.

KARAER: Right. Well, the winter before I got to Turkey, 1979-80, things had been so bad that there was no heating oil for the buildings, and in Ankara it's really cold in winter.

Q: The Antalya plain with all sorts of wind whipping down from the north.

KARAER: Yes. In fact that winter, the President of the Republic went to work in his overcoat and his gloves because even his office wasn't heated. Up until that time, Embassy housing was the old system that we had in most countries where each officer got a housing allowance and then you went out and found your own apartment. We had people living all over Ankara in apartment buildings where there was one American and 50 Turks. Even though the American government could get heating oil through the NATO pipeline and was able to heat the embassy and the ambassador's residence, for example, they couldn't very well buy enough oil to heat buildings that would heat one American and 50 Turks. Our people were truly miserable that winter because, you can imagine, with no heat the pipes froze and then there was no water and the electricity was very much off and on. When we got there, my husband was offered a job in the general services office to help them find housing. They had decided to start a new program under which the Embassy would rent whole buildings, put our people in those buildings and provide the housing directly. That way they felt that they could make sure that those buildings had heat, water and electricity. My husband did a terrific job, getting landlords with half-finished buildings to adapt the layouts to American standards and then sign long-term leases with the Embassy

Q: When the military took over, did the war between the right and left stop or how did that work?

KARAER: Oh, you bet. The Army just swept through and arrested a whole lot of people. You know that the Turkish government has had a long struggle, with our government to a certain extent, and certainly with the European community, over human rights violations. Certainly there's no question that the Turkish prison system and the Turkish military can be very rough on people and in many cases it stepped over the line totally. On the other hand, Turks respond to strong leaders who enforce the rules strictly. My husband points out that in his childhood, when the villagers took little kids to school, the father would tell the teacher, "The flesh is yours, the bones are mine". What that means is that the teacher has carte blanche to beat the kid if he doesn't behave. That's the general attitude in the society. When authority tells you to do something, you do it and no questions, otherwise you expect to get whacked. That certainly was the Army's attitude toward misbehaving students and others who wanted to shoot people because they didn't share their political views.

There were soldiers on the streets with guns patrolling just to make sure that there weren't people planting bombs and so on. Everything got a lot more orderly in a hurry. For example, when we first arrived, whenever we drove down the main street of Ankara, I had my heart in my mouth, because you'd have these folks in from the countryside and they would stand in the middle of the block, watch the traffic going by and then they would just grab their kids and rush into the traffic. It reminded me of the Turkish soldiers, who cry "Allah, Allah," as they charge, hoping to survive or go to heaven when they get to the other side. When the military took over, one of the first things that they did was station a soldier about one every ten feet all along the sidewalk and along the main street. Nobody dared to cross anywhere except at the intersections. After a couple of months everybody crossed at the intersections.

Q: Had much of the trouble had been coming out of the university in student groups and all that?

KARAER: There was one group of leftists that existed at the time of my first tour in Turkey, called Dev Sol (Revolutionary Left). The rightists had their own organization called the Gray Wolves, a sort of fascist thug thing. During the mid to late '70s these groups took over entire campuses. If you went to a particular school or particular faculty at one of the schools, you had to at least pay lip service to the controlling political group or they would beat you up, or worse. Even though there were a lot of students who just would have preferred to stay out of it, if you wanted to go to school you had to go along with them. They were using young people as their foot soldiers, but there also were older men, politicians who the military had managed to keep out of the political system up until then, who were also getting a lot of support in the countryside. In Turkey, ever since Ataturk's time, there had been two cultures, one in the big cities, like Istanbul or Izmir, where most of the inhabitants were westernized. In the countryside, people still remained very religious, very Islamic.

During the '70s more and more people were coming into the big cities from the countryside, and the big cities had really expanded tremendously at this point. It was amazing when I got there how much bigger Istanbul was than when I had been there the first time. The rightist groups were holding rallies in the smaller towns like in Konya in central Anatolia. People were anticipating a military takeover for a long time before it actually happened. The military had shown great reluctance to step in one more time. Then the rightists had a big rally in one of the Anatolian cities, during which they were flew green banners with the Arabic on them, generally giving the impression that Islam was going to take back the country. That did it. In addition to the thugs and troublemakers, the military also arrested the leaders of the two main political parties. I thought this was hilarious, because they put them under house arrest in an otherwise untenanted seaside resort. These two men hated each others guts, and they had no one to talk to except each other. It was their fault, both their personal animosity and political rivalry, that this thing had gone this far.

Q: What was sort of the feeling in the embassy saying, well, he is I mean thank God they've done it, or did they look at it somewhat askance?

KARAER: I think that the embassy took it in a very practical way. The military takeover was expected for a long time, now the question was making sure that we were able to deal with the military and the new government and to maintain our influence. We certainly didn't want these extremist groups to take over the government in Turkey. If the military took over the government, we would want them to behave in a way that would keep Turkey inside of NATO. Turkey has the second biggest army in NATO after ours. We had a lot of difficulty managing the relationship between the Greeks and the Turks in NATO, but primarily because of Greek agitation. Turkey was guarding a huge section of the Soviet Union's border with Europe. In addition to that, we had very important listening post stations in Turkey that we needed to keep up. So, we had a big military assistance program there and our relationship with the Turkish military was extremely close.

Q: In other words, we weren't spending all our time protesting?

KARAER: No, no. We didn't want human rights violations to get out of hand. They didn't actually. I think the Army took a very moderate approach, although they did lock an awful lot of these people up. The other thing that was very gratifying for us was that this government let Turgut Ozal do his thing with the economic reforms. For me, Zaire had been three years of watching a government do everything that your economics 101 textbook says will ruin an economy, in Turkey I got to watch a textbook reform of an economy. It was very gratifying because the Turkish economy, although it is fairly large, is still small enough so that when you make major changes, you can see the effect very quickly, unlike ours where it may take five years before you actually see the impact.

Q: Before we turn to that, talk a little bit about the embassy, who was the ambassador, DCM and was there an economic section and how you found the embassy.

KARAER: When I first arrived there, our ambassador was Richard Spain. He was very much liked by our FSNs and well known to the Turkish bureaucrats. He had been an officer in Turkey before. He spoke Turkish. He went out boar hunting with the Turkish officers and all this kind of stuff. A very nice man. His DCM was Richard Boehm, who later became our ambassador to Cyprus and our ambassador to Oman. The head of the economic section was Clay Nettles. Clay had been the head of the economic section in Zaire and he was the one who brought the telegram to me that was recruiting people to go to Turkey. He already had decided that he was going to try for the economic position in Istanbul, in Ankara. We knew each other very well and our two sections were able to work together really well.

When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, Ambassador Spain was replaced by Robert Strausz-Hupï¿½ a political appointee and long time Republican supporter. He had helped write the Reagan foreign policy positions. He'd already been ambassador to Sweden, to Sri Lanka, and to NATO. He was a student of geo-politics, very much a believer in the theories that geography dictates your political position and your international political position. A brilliant, elderly man. A month after he got there he turned 80 years old. He stayed in that job the whole time that Ronald Reagan was president. While I admired his intellect very much, he was one of those stereotypical political appointee ambassadors who is very suspicious of the career Foreign Service. Dick Boehm stayed on as the DCM, for which the rest of us were grateful, because he knew how an embassy was supposed to be run and provided a buffer between the ambassador and the rest of the Foreign Service staff. I sometimes thought he must have had mental black and blue marks from that period in his career. It was difficult for a lot of the people on the staff to work with the ambassador.

Q: Well, how then did you find, what were, I mean as the commercial officer, what did you find was the status when you got there and could you talk about the changes?

KARAER: Yes. The status was that an awful lot of stuff that had been sold to Turkish companies on credit a few years before had not been paid for and so there was a very big debt owed. The Turkish government was slowly working out the means to repay these debts. One of my principal jobs was to pursue these payments. Companies would be informed, for example, that the $3 million owed to you will be paid over such a period of time and the first installment of so many hundreds of thousands of dollars will be whenever. Only the payment schedule didn't always work smoothly, and so the company would say, "Whoa, we didn't get our money on time". To try to keep things on track and be able to give our companies some reliable information, I would call on the gentlemen who had responsibilities for these payments in the Central Bank. We worked up a good relationship. Sometimes foreign exchange that they thought was going to be available, and sometimes getting the computer records straightened out was a huge problem. I remember one time going in there about a missed payment and he admitted that the payment hadn't been made on time, but according to his latest computer printout it would be paid on such and such a date. As I was leaving, I said, " I'll come back to see you next month, I hope that the company will have gotten their money by then". He responded, "Inshallah". Now, Inshallah is a common expression throughout the Islamic world, which means" if God wills it", and I said, "Ali Bey, I don't like that word".. He said, "It just means if God wills it". I said, "Right, but God didn't make this debt, So no Inshallah, let's be real sure that this is going to happen".

Q: I was told when I was in Saudi Arabia that Inshallah was the equivalent of Manana, but without the same sense of urgency.

KARAER: There's a wonderful story. Do you know the Nasreddin Hoja stories from Turkey?

Q: No.

KARAER: The Hoja is a folk hero who is very clever. In one of these stories, he gets up in the morning and he tells his wife, "If it doesn't rain today, I'm going to work in the field, and if it does, I'm going to repair the horse's harness in the barn." She replies, "Say Inshallah." He objects, "Why should I say Inshallah? I've got a plan to suit either contingency." He goes out and is working in the field when a troop of soldiers happens by. The officer asks him, "Which of the forks in the road do we take to Konya?" He says, "It's that one." They start to beat him and they say, "You show us." They make him run in front of them all the way to Konya to show them the way. By the time he gets back home it's after dark, his field hasn't been plowed, his harness hasn't been repaired. He scratches at the door and his wife says, "Who is it?" He says, "It's me. Inshallah."

Q: I mean did you find yourself as a commercial officer as a debt collector almost?

KARAER: Oh, well, that was one of my jobs. The other thing was to assist American companies in making business contacts. Of course that wasn't something that we expected to have a lot of in a situation where the Turks still were trying to repay other people that they hadn't paid before. However because of Ozal's policy, they had drastically changed their policy on foreign investment, and for the first time ever the Turkish government was actively courting foreign investors. They had a problem, however, in that they not only had to convince the foreigners that they really meant it this time, but they had to convince the rest of the Turkish bureaucracy as well, because Turkish bureaucrats had up until then had believed it one of their main functions to protect Turkey and its resources from being raped by foreigners who they had imagined were just sitting on the borders of Turkey drooling over the prospect of what they could get from the Turks. For years their job had been to make things hellish for any foreigner who was trying to invest money and thought he ought to earn some kind of a return on his investment.

I hadn't been there for even a month when one of Ozal's top aides came to call. This young man was very serious, as Turks tend to be. He said, "Mrs. Karaer, we have a new investment policy." I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "Well, why haven't any American investors come?" This investment policy was what, a year old maybe? I said, "Well, why should they come"? He started reeling off their five points of why Turkey was a great place to invest your money, and I said, "Yes. We understand that that's your position now, and we are sending that message out to our people explaining that, but they don't know whether they should trust you, because the Turkish government's reputation has been totally different in the past and they wonder if perhaps the government will change the policy again in a few months." "Humph", he says, "well, okay, fine we understand each other" and away he goes. I'm sure he got similar receptions in other commercial sections around town.

As I made my calls around town I would find people who were really anxious to be as cooperative as possible in assisting people who were expressing interest in investing there. In other places, the response was very bureaucratic. "Oh, you can't see me unless you get the appointment through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I told one fellow, "Look, It's not my country that's going to lose money if your business people aren't able to follow this export plan. It's your exporters. If you don't want to see me that's fine." He said, "Oh, well, I think you can come this afternoon." I really do like Turks, and because I knew Turks well personally I knew that when I was dealing with these officials I could talk to them that way. Their brusqueness was on the surface, and if you made them understand that you really cared about them succeeding, then they would talk to you and cooperate with you.

Q: Well, did you find that there was a strong cadre of people within the economic sector of Turkey who really knew what was going on because I think of bankers and you know, Turks have been involved in European banking for years and I was wondering if there were people coming out, getting their Ph.D.s at the University of Chicago or the like. I mean was there a cadre of European/American trained economists in Turkey?

KARAER: It was starting. You see, another group that was coming up in Turkish society and of great importance in the Turkish economy were private businessmen. Until then the government really was mostly concerned with the government-owned companies. As far as the bureaucrats were concerned, private Turkish businessmen were almost as suspect as the foreign businessmen. They were all potential crooks in their eyes, so the bureaucrats made the business licensing provisions as difficult as possible.

Q: Had the business people been before Ataturk essentially Greeks, too?

KARAER: Oh, before Ataturk, yes, but there were important Muslim Turkish private businesses well established there by the time the Ozal reforms were taking place. One thing that Ozal wanted to do was to get Turkey to export. One thing he pointed out to the rest of the world, including us, was that the money was in the Middle East, and, guess what, we're Muslims, and so it's easier for us to do business with those people. For example, he directed his agricultural exporters toward a very lucrative market in the Middle East so now a lot of fruits and vegetables were going to Saudi Arabia instead of fighting with the Greeks and Bulgarians to get them into Germany for example.

The other thing was that the Arab countries, OPEC, was now making tons of money. Saudi Arabia was building everything and they were letting out contracts to foreign companies. Turkish companies were already making good quality building materials for the domestic market. As Turkish contractors became involved in big contracts in the Middle East, these companies were also able to export their goods. This development interested us. If these guys could export goods and services, then they could earn foreign exchange and buy stuff from us and their internal market became more interesting to American investors.

The two types of American investments that really expanded quickly there after the Ozal reforms were adopted, was banking, because they made it much easier for foreign banks to operate there. Also, they were paying real interest for the first time ever, and so, instead of buying gold jewelry or investing in real estate, Turks were finally putting their money in banks. The other early investments came from oil companies. Oil companies were being allowed to explore and American companies were among them. The far east of Turkey, which is contiguous with the oil producing areas of Iraq, were interesting to them. We had people coming to inquire about investment in Turkey over the three years that I was there, like people who canned food products. The southern part of Turkey grows oceans of tomatoes, most of which rotted on the vines because they had nowhere to export it up until then. American companies, like Hunts, that would make tomato paste for example, would build factories there. We really didn't get a substantial investment outside of banking and oil until about three or four years after the adoption of the economic reforms. It takes that long for the companies to be convinced that the government is not going to flip on them and let them build factories and bring all the money and then say, "Oh, we've changed our mind, now you can't export your earnings".

Q: Was the embassy trying to read the Turkish government because as you say governments can flip and change and were you seeing fundamental changes that seemed to be that okay in the military back in the barracks which was I assume was expected they wouldn't go back to protectionism and all?

KARAER: Well, besides talking with the people who ran the economy as much as we could ourselves, we got them together with our business community. The ambassador asked me to arrange for the American businesses that had representatives in Ankara and Istanbul to come to a meeting at his house with Ozal, while he was still the czar of planning and economic reform. We did things like that that would bring the community together because Ozal had to sell this himself and the government had to behave in such a way to show that they were in fact supporting him. The more frequently that a prospective investor got real cooperation from the Turkish government, the more inclined everyone was to trust them. For example, they set up an office that was supposed to be a one stop shop for prospective foreign investors where, instead of running all over town dealing with 15 different government offices, they could deal just with this office that was devoted to promoting investment and would run interference with these other offices. It didn't always go very smoothly for them either. There still were people buried in the bureaucracy who were going to do everything they could to dig in their heels, because they didn't really believe in opening Turkey to foreign investment. However, Ozal's guys stuck with it. And their construction companies came to us to help them get in touch with our big construction companies, like Parsons Brinkerhoff. We encouraged them to go to the U.S., visit those companies and show them that Turkish companies were very twentieth century. I'm afraid that for a long time most Americans thought of Turks only in terms of flying carpets and turbans. In fact, these guys had engineering degrees from American universities and spoke English well. We were helping them with contacts with American companies who were doing business in places other than Turkey, but in the end that effort would make a loop coming back to benefit us as well.

Q: This is tape six, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. What about the German connection for decades now Turks have been going to Germany as just gastarbeiters. Were they coming back with skills that were being used or were they staying I mean was there a German connection there?

KARAER: They weren't coming back from Germany. That of course still is a big issue in German politics. You see the Germans who did the recruiting didn't recruit educated people. They recruited people to work in their factories, to do stuff in Germany that the Mexican immigrants do in the United States. One of the things that the Ozal government did was to change the banking regulations, so that if you were an overseas Turk who was earning foreign exchange, you could open a foreign exchange account in a Turkish bank, send your marks, your dollars, your Australian dollars, or whatever, to that bank account and be guaranteed that you could withdraw it in foreign exchange if you wanted to. Of course Turkish workers were also sending money back to help support family left in Turkey. Many of them built homes out in the countryside that they would come back to for the summer vacation. So, when you drive through the Turkish countryside now you find little German chalets in the middle of nowhere. Every summer the workers would come back, driving their Volkswagens through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria piled high with all the goodies they were bringing back home. Again, the government had loosened the import regulations so that if you could show that you were a Turkish citizen working outside the country earning foreign exchange, they'd let you bring all these household goods in duty free. Before Ozal, if you tried to bring a bag of coffee in, they would charge huge duties on it. That, too encouraged the workers to bring back stuff that they had invested in with their foreign exchange and helped improve living conditions in Turkey.

Q: Well, was your section at all promoting Turks going to Harvard Business School, you know, I mean the major business schools in the United States at all?

KARAER: No, there had been Turkish students at Harvard for a long time. When I was in Istanbul, my first tour in Turkey, a lot of young fellows that were graduated from the Turkish Technical University and from Robert College, the American missionary-founded school, came in with I-20s from Harvard and MIT and places like that. That had been going on for quite a while, but we were not promoting that, no. What we were trying to promote was the sale of American goods and services.

Q: You were there at the time when the commercial service was being taken over by the Department of Commerce?

KARAER: It had been by that time.

Q: It had been taken over. How did that from your perspective, did you feel that you were serving two masters or was it a pretty smooth operation? How did that work?

KARAER: It worked well in Ankara. I had great cooperation from the DCM and the economic section. I had one other Foreign Commercial Service Officer working for me whose office was in Istanbul. He was a Commerce employee. He was not a Foreign Service Officer. He and I got on fine. He did a good job, but he asked me for help with a potential conflict that was developing between his office and the consul general. The Consulate General had just lost the senior FSN in the economic section. There had been a reduction in force, but the Consulate depended very heavily on that person to collect economic data for them. So the C.G. informed the commercial officer that now the senior commercial section FSN was going to do that work instead. The young fellow who was working for me said, "I want to get along with the consul general, but I need these people to do the work that we're supposed to do." We were collecting a tremendous amount of information on Turkish companies and building a database for the Commerce Department. After all, the Commerce Department was paying these people now. I told him I would come to Istanbul, talk to the C.G. myself, and to the DCM, if necessary. In the meantime, I asked him to make his FSN available for a limited period of time to help out with the economic data collection, which, after all, was also used by Commerce.

Also, in order to take over this resource, the consul general had said that he since the commercial officer worked in the consulate, he wanted to write his efficiency report. I of course couldn't possibly have that. I went to the DCM and said, "I'm going to go there and explain to the consul general that this is a non-starter. But, one thing that might make this easier, if its all right with you, is to allow him review that EER rather than have it reviewed by you." Of course who doesn't want to get rid of an EER, you know? Also, Dick Boehm really is a great Foreign Service Officer and really knew his stuff. He agreed. I explained to the consul general that the Commerce Department expected to see a return on their investment and that State couldn't take over its resources. However, in a pinch, they had agreed to be as helpful as they could, but their work had to come first. I also told him that I would be writing the commercial officer's EER, but if he wished to review it, he certainly could. After that, I don't know if the DCM spoke to the consul general or not, but in any case we didn't get any more static out of him and the commercial officer was fine. They didn't bother him.

Q: What were some of the major elements of interest from American commerce in Turkey? Was tobacco still an item, or was that long gone?

KARAER: I can't remember. They may have been exporting some tobacco, but I know that everybody wanted to smoke American cigarettes. Have you ever smelled a Turkish cigarette? Yuck. One of the things that I had to deal with there was the American companies that wanted to sell to Turkey, but get paid by AID money. In other words, get guarantees that they would be paid. I remember a General Motors salesman coming in to see me, just having come from Egypt where we had a huge aid program. I should add that about this time Turkey was about the third biggest aid recipient in the world from the United States after Israel and Egypt. The Turks needed buses and trucks, but our deal with the Turks was different from the deal in Egypt. For one thing, we knew we could trust this government to manage its money well and the deal with them was that their aid money would just be a green U.S. government check. While we would talk with them about their economic policies, they got to spend the money the way they wanted to. Which meant that there were no US government guarantees for the GM truck salesman. So, I had to ask that gentleman, "Have you got a credit program for these international buyers?" He said, "Oh, my company is not interested in that." I said, "Well, then tell your company that they can save money on your airplane ticket here, because no credit, no sale."

Oh, another thing was that Ozal started this huge infrastructure project at the same time. He said, and I think we certainly agreed, it was needed if Turkey was ever going to catch up economically with the rest of the world. Secondly, he needed to convince the people in eastern Turkey, who are primarily Kurds, that they really had a stake in Turkey and were not just going to be a poor minority forever. His great idea was to harness the water and the power in the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, which both start in Turkey. They ended up building this enormous dam on the Euphrates River which is called the Ataturk Dam with a huge system of irrigation canals that turned the southeastern tip of Turkey into an immense cotton producing area that had only supported goats before. When I was there, they were beginning to plan this project and starting to put out bids. That was a major thing. Of course American companies wanted to be in on that.

They had another huge coal power plant project. Turkey, infamously, has huge deposits of soft coal. I say "infamously", because that was the coal that was being burned to heat the buildings of Istanbul and in Ankara and had caused a horrible smog problem. Ankara is built in a bowl surrounded by mountains. In the wintertime, when all the smokestacks are belching, this black yuck from the soft coal would just sit over the city. It wouldn't go anywhere. That's the one time that I lived in really horrible smog. The air turns yellow. What they decided to do, was to go far away from any cities and build a huge electric power generating plant that was close to the coal mines. That was another project that American companies were interested in.

Q: I'm not sure if there's any connection, but did you get involved in the poppy substitution?

KARAER: I wasn't involved in it, but that was going on during my first tour in Turkey. That was back in the late '60s. That problem was pretty well taken care of by 1980. We still had Drug Enforcement Agency people working out of Turkey with the Turkish government, but I think we had real cooperation with them. Unlike Pakistan, where I worked later and where the military was deeply involved in dealing in drugs, the Turkish military was very much involved in making sure this stuff did not get around.

Q: Did you see evolving a solid small business class with these sort of governmental economic dinosaurs being disassembled during that time?

KARAER: They were trying very hard to sell them off. In some cases they were able to do it and, in other cases, it just wasn't possible. In some cases they just had to close things down. There still are a couple of these places in operation. I think they're textile companies. Although there are a number of private textile manufacturers now. Selling off the state owned companies was difficult, because private buyers didn't want to keep on the excess employees that had been accumulated in them by the government management, and the government couldn't afford to have a lot of people suddenly thrown out of work.

Q: Well, this was, I was in Italy and they had these steel mills. The main reason for being was that they employed 5,000 people. The steel wasn't particularly needed. Well, now, did you find in the commercial field, was there competition over anything say with the French or the Germans or the British from your perspective or were you all trying to encourage people to invest?

KARAER: Well, everybody was trying to do it. I don't remember having any particular problem. I mean unlike Zaire where the Belgians pretty much figured they had the foreign trade sewed up in the country and that was difficult to break into. In Turkey, the competition was in finding representatives to represent your company's goods. That was not difficult. There was no under the table deal going on with somebody else. It was whoever could offer the best price for the deal.

Q: Corruption at all a problem?

KARAER: At the time as far as I was aware, it wasn't. I mean there always was some going on somewhere, but my concern was helping businessmen who wanted to set up companies or offices there and because of the great importance that the government put on assisting foreign investors I don't think anybody would have the nerve to put his hand out at the time. That didn't mean that Turks didn't have to deal with it elsewhere. I remember a wonderful joke that the Drug Enforcement Agency head's wife told me. When they were stationed in Istanbul, she went to a lady's luncheon. The Turkish ladies were discussing how hard it was to get a driver's license. She said, "Oh, I didn't find it hard to get a driver's license here." One of the ladies looked at her and said, "Oh, but you know how to drive." In other words, the difficulty was what price you pay for your driver's license.

Q: Were there any big concerns like telephone telegraph outfits or anything trying to take or set up a telephone system or something like that from America?

KARAER: At one point we were trying very hard to sell a particular kind of radar system for airports. Every country that develops this stuff develops some sort of a system that can't work with anything else. If you adopt that then everything else that goes with it has to go with it. We had those sorts of things.

Q: Nuclear developments. Any?

KARAER: No.

Q: How did you find living in Ankara?

KARAER: We had a very nice apartment, but during the first winter it was cold, even though by this time there was fuel oil available. We lived in an apartment building where there was an American from the embassy on the ground floor, I was in the middle, and the Turk who owned the building and had built it was on the top. He managed the heating system at the time. His idea of being conservative was to turn off the heat when he and his wife went to work and his kids went to school, and then turn it on again at night. I was at work, too, but the maid was there with my daughter. By the time the building got warm, it was time to go to bed when I didn't want it hot. But the Turks, they're the ones who wrap up their babies in woolen sweaters in July, so they loved to be really hot. However, as the embassy's housing program got underway and we were renting more and more buildings which had only one Turkish family or none, the embassy started providing fuel for the houses, and we worked out something where the house would be reasonably heated all day long. Then they started installing generators, so we would have electricity. At that time, partly because of the fuel shortage, electricity would be turned off at different times of the day during the week. The government would announce a schedule for blackout hours in the newspaper, but it never seemed to actually work according to the printed schedule. Not only didn't you have electricity all the time, but you never knew when the heck it was going to be on. They put gas stoves in our kitchens and took out the electric ones. Then they put the generators in, which prompted a big ethical moment at the American Embassy. We agreed that it really wouldn't be very diplomatic for us to turn on our lights during a blackout, even though we could, because it would look like the mean Americans could sit there with all their lights on and everybody else had to sit in the dark. We all agreed that our policy would be that if the electricity went out, we would still use our electric stoves and our hot water heaters would work, but we would just use candles. My husband is great on kerosene lamps, which, by the way, are great. Kerosene lamps you can read by. We always had our lamps ready, and I was fine with it.Well, our new policy went into effect. The next time all of the lights went out in the neighborhood, we looked out the window, and where are the lights blazing away? In the apartments of the Turkish families that live in the buildings where the American generators are located! Within a year and a half or so, things were quite comfortable again. I really enjoyed living there so much so that when I got back to the States and was living in a suburban development in Montgomery, Alabama, I felt so isolated. I mean, living in the typical American suburb you couldn't buy a bottle of milk unless you got in your car and drove to the shopping mall. In my neighborhood in Turkey any service or commodity that you need for your everyday living was within a two-block walk.

Q: How did your daughter do?

KARAER: Fine. I think I mentioned that we decided that we were going to send her to a Turkish elementary school so that she could learn to speak Turkish. She was just five years old when she started school there. I expected that I was going to get a lot of complaining from her during the year because of difficulties with the language, but I never heard anything. It was as though one minute she couldn't speak Turkish and the next minute she could. Now I know that there was a period when she was bibble babbling away and she wasn't communicating a great deal, but it didn't seem to bother her at all. One day she was playing Barbie dolls with the little girls upstairs and my daughter was talking a blue streak. She had learned quite a few verbs, but she didn't know very many nouns. The word in Turkish for "thing" is "shey." She's telling these kids, "shey" this and "shey" that, " thing" was doing and going, etc. Finally, one of the other kids looked at her and said, " I don't understand a word you're saying." It didn't bother her. Within three months she was speaking everything. The older American children would ask her to come down to translate for them with the Turkish children in the street. There was no place to play in the neighborhood except the street, and when the American and Turkish kids would get into squabbles, they would ask Alex to come down and sort things out. Little Alex would go down and tell the Turkish kids what the American kids wanted them to understand and vice versa and then everybody would play well together and Alex would be the great interpreter. No, she was fine. She did really well there. However, one day I realized she might be slightly out of touch with American culture when she asked me what that "funny ball" that the American boys threw around was for. It was an American football.

Q: Then you left there in '83?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

KARAER: Something else important happened to me while I was there. I had another baby. She was born in October, 1982. In those days they normally would send pregnant women from the embassy either go to a U.S. military hospital in Germany or to the American military clinic at Incirlik Air Force Base in Adana. However, in both cases you had to leave home quite a few weeks before you were due to deliver, and I didn't want to do that. I found a sympathetic American military doctor in Ankara who had talked to the people at the Turkish military teaching hospital in Ankara. The doctors there very much wanted to provide medical services to the American official community, because through NATO arrangements, we provide a lot of medical treatment for Turkish military officers at our military hospitals like the Walter Reed. They wanted to reciprocate. The American doctor who was doing my prenatal care was pushing the idea that we should be willing to use the facilities if we wanted to. Of course one of the big drawbacks was hardly anyone at the Turkish hospital spoke English. The head of the obstetric-gynecological section spoke English, because he was trained at Johns Hopkins, but the rest of the doctors and the nurses didn't speak English. I said, I'm going to have my baby there. I'm not going to go far, far away.

Another young woman who had just arrived in Ankara had talked it over with me and decided she was going to have her baby there, too, a week before I did. For me it was neat. In Turkish there is an expression, "gechmish olsun" which means "may it pass," and which covers everything bad that happens to someone short of death. We had just arrived at the hospital the night the baby was born. We were going up in the elevator, I was in labor, with my hands and teeth clenched. A young doctor got into the elevator, took one look at me and said "gechmish olsun." Perfect.

Americans are often so sure that American medical care is better than anyone elses. Not necessarily. I had had my prenatal care at the American military clinic in Ankara. About a month before I was delivered, I went to the Turkish military hospital to meet the head of the obstetrics unit. The doctor there looked at my medical file and said, "Mrs. Karaer, this is serious. We're going to have to arrange for transfusions." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you're blood type whatever and your husband is this and so the baby will probably have transfused." I said, "That's not correct. I'm A positive and I've got my card in my wallet that shows it." He said, "Really? Well, this says something totally different." He wrote something in Turkish on a note and he gave it to me and he said, "Take this down two floors. There's a man in the courtyard sitting at a table, give it to him and he'll take some blood from your finger." I go down and there's a man sitting at what looks like a card table on which there are four white tiles and some little bottles of reagent. I show him the note. He [tested me A]-positive. The American clinic had wanted to send me to Germany earlier on to have an amniocentesis because I was almost 41 years old when I had this baby. I had refused, because I don't believe in abortion. Later I thought if they got the blood test wrong, what would they do with an amniocentesis. I was really upset with those military orderlies.

Q: I take it everything came out all right?

KARAER: Oh yes.

Q: What was the child's name?

KARAER: The child's name is Ceren Jeanette Karaer. Her name in Turkish means gazelle. I named her after a heroine in the Yasar Kemal novel that I was reading just before she was born. Her middle name is after her grandmother. When my husband went to record her birth at the Turkish birth registry office (you don't exist in Turkey unless you have the "nufus" card that they issue), the fellow there told him he couldn't register a foreign name unless he had permission from the attorney general's office. My husband wasn't going to bother with that, so in her Turkish records she's just Ceren Karaer, forget the Jeanette. When he came back and told me that I said, "See, that's why these people are going to have such a darned hard time getting into the EU. It's those little nationalistic nastinesses.

Q: I used to be baby births officer in Frankfurt, Germany and this was back in the '50s and we had a lot of troops there. I registered over 300 baby births a month. Americans would come in and they'd name their sons Pretz or something like that. I'd say, "Our rules won't allow you to name a child after a title of nobility or something like that."

KARAER: The Germans?

Q: The Germans wouldn't. We got around this or we would put something else and they would have the thing, but you run across these things. Germany was not that benign.

KARAER: Yes, okay, but in Turkey this meant that anybody who wanted to name their child something other than a Muslim name, and there are non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, were being given a hard time.

Q: Oh, yes, oh boy. Well, anyway, is there anything else?

KARAER: If there is.

Q: You can add it. So, we'll pick this up in 1983 and whither?

KARAER: The Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up 1983 and 1984 when you were at the Air War College.

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Great.

Q: This is the 25th of June 2004. Arma Jane, Air War College. I haven't interviewed anybody that's been there. I don't know why. It's always the luck of the draw, we always had somebody and it seems sort of an obscure place. Talk about the Air War College because it, how did you find it?

KARAER: Well, when they were going to assign me to one of the war colleges, they sent me a list of programs and asked me to indicate where, if anywhere, I didn't want to go. The assignments to the schools in the States were all for a normal school year, and my daughter would be able to go to school normally while I was in the program, so I said I wasn't interested in the NATO war college, which is in Europe and is only a six-month program. I had checked the National War College, but it was fine with me to go to Alabama too, if that is where they wanted to send me, and, in fact, they did. I was the only Foreign Service Officer there, which is probably why you don't run across very many. They're probably only sending one person a year. You say it's rather obscure, well, it's not obscure for the Air Force. It's located at Maxwell Air Force Base just outside of Montgomery, Alabama. It's difficult for the people who run it to get the full panoply of speakers that they want to get from Washington and elsewhere because it's not easy to get to. Anyone coming from Washington would have to come through Atlanta and then change planes to go to Montgomery. The trip is a real commitment of time on their part to fly in there. We probably didn't have some of the top rank speakers that they can attract more easily to the National War College, but we had a good bunch. It was a good program. For me, in addition to the knowledge imparted by the program, it was really interesting living in a military environment and dealing with the military psychology. I had of course worked with military attaches in passing in my previous assignments. I hadn't done any direct work with them, so this was my first time living with people to whom wearing their uniform is so incredibly important and to whom rank is very important.

For example, a very funny thing happened to me the first day we were there. There were about 235 people in that class. There were a handful of civilians and, out of the whole bunch of us, there were only five women, civilian and Air Force. After they had gathered us for our convocation, they sent us off to this big study hall where each of us were assigned a study carrel. As I'm settling in, a colonel at the end of the row stops and says, "Well, Arma Jane, what do we call you?" I said, "Arma Jane?" He said, "No, no. Do we call you FSO Karaer?" I said, "No, that would be ridiculous." I still didn't understand what he was after. He kept insisting, so I said, "Mrs. Karaer, Citoyenne Karaer." He looked blank. Finally he asked, "What's your pay grade?" I thought, "Aha! He wants to know if he outranks me!" I got my little cheat sheet out of my wallet and, thank God, my pay grade was that of a full colonel.

Q: I know I was with the senior seminar and we went to several bases and we had a great time planning out what rooms we got because half of us were Foreign Service Officers and very obviously somebody had gone around and figured out within our ranks which most of us were I think FSO-2s in those days, career minister counselors, I'm not sure, but anyway and there was a differentiation between us, that we never felt then or felt again, so we were all sort of giggling. How did you, in the first place, how did your husband work in this environment? It must have been difficult for him I would have thought because it was sort of male oriented and all?

KARAER: Yes. The Air Force was just beginning to wake up, Rip Van Winkle-like, to the fact that women were now officers and the way they'd been doing things forever had to be adjusted. During the time we were in Montgomery, my husband did not work "outside of the home," as they say. Our baby daughter was only a little over one year old when we arrived there, so he stayed home and took care of her. Our other daughter went to school there. Before we arrived, I got this great big orientation packet with an envelope in it for my husband from the people who organized the wives' activities. They still call it the "wives' activities." The invitation to the first meeting was printed on pink paper. Now, my husband by this time had really sort of been a pioneer in getting into the Foreign Service wives' thing, and the Foreign Service had rapidly gotten the message and changed its reference to "spouses." But this was too much for him. He said, "I'm not going to go to anything that is on pink paper." I said, "Well, up to you, but they are just trying to be friendly. Come on, this is going to be a learning experience for them just like it is for you." He was the only husband that was there.

The class was broken down into small "seminar" groups. Within each group they tried to make sure there was at least one civilian and a foreign officer as well. We also had a small group of officers from other U.S. services. In my seminar, in addition to the male Air Force officers, there was an Army officer and officers from Sudan and Turkey. The spouses also organized around these seminar groups and so the wives and the spouses in the seminar would organize activities and entertain each other in their homes. Yashar worked into that, but he mostly stayed home and took care of our little girl.

Q: How did you find the dynamics worked because the air force has quite a different sort of look at things, I mean basically looking down on things.

KARAER: What? Were you in the army?

Q: Actually I was in the air force, but I was an enlisted man in the air force and I stayed on the ground, thank you very much. Those things up there can fall down. I never quite trusted aerodynamics and all, but what, I mean did they seem to have an air force outlook did you find sort of what they were talking about, they were relooking at things a different way than you had?

KARAER: No, for me it was the military way of looking at things that was somewhat different than the way I was used to, so that's the culture that I was getting used to. I found within the Air Force there was a huge difference in the personalities of the fighter pilots and the transport pilots and the other officers. The transport pilots were steady, dependable kinds of guys. The fighter pilots, while they were a lot of fun, they were also nuts. I guess maybe in order to be a fighter pilot you have to be a little bit nuts. One fighter pilot in our class was always teasing me about how diplomats want to talk (big surprise!) when only a good punch in the nose will show the Russians and the Chinese what's what. At the end of the course he brought a strategy board game to class. He and I had to play it with the others looking on. He'd set it up so that Russian forces were threatening Europe and Chinese forces were threatening Russia and nuclear weapons were bristling everywhere. I moved cautiously and suddenly, "boom", he blew up the Russian troops with a nuclear weapon. I said, "You are absolutely crazy." He said, "That's what you have to do. You have to show them what's what." Actually I found that most of them were very thoughtful people. I realized how conservative in general the military officer corps is. I felt truly sorry for the person who came to speak to us from the Washington Post.. There was very little understanding in the group about what the proper rule of the press was, and very little wish to understand.

They were very good to me. At the graduation they named 10 or 15 people "outstanding officers", and I was one of them, as well as the only woman who received that honor. I really appreciated that. I wrote a letter to the director of the school when it was over and told him I understood how difficult it must be to get people down there to talk to the group, but that I would hope that in the future they would get more people who did not represent the current administration's policy. People who questioned that policy. They had almost none of that. Other than that it was very interesting.

Q: Did you find just playing the role that Foreign Service people seem to play at some of the other war colleges and that is you served as somebody who explained the role of diplomacy and all to the military. I mean you're learning about the military, but were they able to use you to, or were they interested in how diplomacy works?

KARAER: Yes, about a quarter of the course is on management and policy and certainly how diplomacy works is part of that, so that was always in the discussion. I remember very early on in the course they had a professor speak about foreign policy. His thesis was that foreign policy should be developed to operate over the long term, to protect the country and its interests. The nation's policy should be consistent. When he was finished talking I raised my hand and asked him if he thought that it was possible to have that sort of foreign policy in the type of government that we had. He said, "No." If I hadn't asked the question he never would have admitted it.

Q: How much of a role I mean was this '83 to '84, you know, in less than 10 years things have changed considerably, but at that time, how much was this very much a Cold War period that people were looking at?

KARAER: The war that dominated the thinking there was Vietnam. Almost all of those officers had been in Vietnam and we had at least one who had been a prisoner of war there. For example, I remember one of the last exercises that we did was a war game. The solution used by the team that won is now the famous Powell Doctrine, which is whatever assets, you have, you throw the whole thing on the enemy early on and wipe them out. Don't sit around and worry about losing assets. You hit them with everything you've got as fast as you can. That was a new idea for most of them, until we changed it in Iraq.

Q: What was the feeling about the Vietnam War? Was there a feeling that they'd been sold out or they'd been put in the wrong war or to do it again they could have done it better or was there any of that?

KARAER: I think it was pretty much the standard at the time that they had been let down by the Congress, by the press. It was the press that made the American people decide not to support the war. It was that kind of thinking. Since my background had initially been in journalism, I found that very disingenuous, but they really believed that.

Q: Then going from there, oh, first, did this war college experience, did you find yourself growing on this in your later career aspects?

KARAER: Well, it certainly helped in my dealings when I was a DCM with the military attaches understanding what their job was and also understanding what assets they could bring into our overall program to get the support of the host government. I think I had a very good relationship with the military attaches in all the places that I was in. Of course a lot of the course is on military strategies, so personally it helped me understand things that these fellows say and do and what the press reports about what's going on in my job. There was a significant section on management and leadership that is useful to anybody who wants to be a manager in government. In policy, to the extent that I had a chance to put my two cents worth in, I guess it helped as well.

Q: Well, then, 1984? Whither?

KARAER: Then I went to the Turkish desk in the Department. I had been recruited to do that job. My cone was consular, although by that point I hadn't done consular work for quite a while. My second specialty was commercial. However, I was approached by the deputy director of EUR/SE (Turkey, Greece and Cyprus), who was concerned because none of the new people coming into the country directorate had any experience on Turkey. The new director was a China hand. The other officer on the Turkish desk was a fellow who had worked in the POL/MIL area and knew a lot about the Pentagon and the military assistance programs, but he didn't know anything about Turkey. They wanted somebody who had Turkish background, so that was what I did.

Q: You were on the Turkish desk from '84 to?

KARAER: '84 to '86, yes.

Q: At the time you went there, in the first place, did you, was the southeast Europe thing, did it fall along the lines that happened between the Greeks and the Turks? I mean I'm talking about the American personnel there. Was there, did you find it a pretty objective bunch or did you see kind of that division within people who are looking at that area off of our side?

KARAER: No, I think that they were objective. The Greek government truly was being difficult. At the time we had a real terrorism threat against our people.

Q: November 17th group, but anyhow.

KARAER: Yes. So, that was their main focus as I recall. Turkey was the big, big issue, almost the whole time that I was there. About the time I arrived, then California Congressman Tony Coelho had introduced a bill in the Post Office Committee of the House of Representatives to declare April 25th or April something. Genocide Day. The purpose, ostensibly, was to help the American people recall the people who were lost in the so-called Armenian genocide. Why the post office committee? Of course this is a foreign policy thing. If the U.S. Congress says that their government committed a genocide, it would enrage the Turks. However, there were a lot of Armenian-Americans in Mr. Coelho's congressional district, and apparently whatever makes the Turks unhappy, makes them happy. He probably couldn't have even got it onto the schedule of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, but he thought he could slip this through the Post Office Committee, which is in charge of declaring national pickle day, national rose day and things like that.

Mr. Coelho is famous now, infamous, for his money raising abilities, so he had a lot of friends on the Hill. This thing had just popped up on the Department's screen when I arrived. The Turks had informed the Secretary of State that if that bill got passed, something awful was going to happen in the bi-lateral relationship. They didn't know what, but something awful was going to happen. The Secretary had told the Assistant Secretary who told my boss, "Stop it." Well, fortunately, we were able to find some members of the House who, although they didn't know very much about this piece of history, were peeved with Coelho for trying this end-run around the Foreign Affairs Committee. Whatever the justice of his claim it didn't belong in the Post Office Committee.

I worked very closely with one of the senior aides to one of those Congressmen. This man was a master of House procedure. This was my next great learning experience - how much of what happens or doesn't happen on the Hill depends on finessing procedure. What they wanted from us primarily were lots of short speeches. Three minute speeches, two minute speeches, that they could pass out on the subject on why this was a bad idea. Why this could not or should not be done. We, mostly me, spent hours writing these little speeches that could be given to members to use from the floor to speak against this proposal. The Turks had belatedly learned that they had to lobby Congress. They had for many years just sort of sat back with their typical chip on the shoulder attitude. " We know that we're great. We know that you need us. That should be good enough for everybody. Why should we go around hat in hand to your legislators?"

It took them a long time to understand the power of members of Congress in this country. I think that they looked on our members of congress as equivalent to their members of parliament which is not the same thing. They thought that if they dealt with the administration that was all that should be necessary. By the time the Coelho bill came up, they had already been convinced that this wasn't the case. They had hired a lobbyist that was giving them advice on things that they could do - primarily not stick their feet in their mouths too often. There was an American professor who was a specialist in Turkish and Ottoman history who got together a bunch of other academics in the same line. They too were putting out public statements that the version of history supported by the Coelho bill was not as clear cut as it implied. One of the big problems with this issue is that so much of what has been written in English about the Armenian massacres in Turkey in the early 20th century was written by Armenians or Armenian Americans. Our main line of attack on this whole thing was that yes, something really horrible happened in Turkey in what was then the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, but whatever happened there was not a genocide.

We did get a certain amount of support from the Jewish lobby. They don't particularly want to share the genocide label with other groups. The gratuitous killing of a lot of people is an ugly thing. You don't like to be picking nits over language. But the word genocide means a particular thing, and the history does not support the charge that the Turks were trying to wipe an ethnic group. From their point of view, they were trying to stop a minority group from breaking off another part of the country. While many people died in Eastern Turkey, the Armenian communities in Western Turkey, who were not engaged in rebellion, were not touched. The Turks had already lost a large portion of their empire to rebellion by the Greeks and the Bulgarians who had won their independence with the help of the Russians. The Armenians in northeastern Turkey, in their old homeland contiguous with Russia, tried the same thing. They formed militias and, with Russian help, attacked Turkish villages in the same area. This was all happening about the time that Turkey entered the First World War on the side of the Germans and Austro-Hungarian Empire. Russia, of course, was on the other side of the conflict. From the Ottoman Government's point of view, not only were those Armenian groups rebelling, they were making common cause with the enemy. The army put down the rebellion and then rounded up all of the Armenian villagers, pointed them towards Syria and said, "Start walking." There was no attempt to provide any sort of food or even any real protection. There were Kurds and bandits who had preyed on these villages for centuries, just waiting in the hills. When these unprotected convoys came along, they did what they always did, they attacked these people and killed them and raped the women.

What we know about what actually happened comes a great deal from the oral histories that were collected of people who lived through that period and ended up in the United States. A lot of them were young children at the time that this happened and some of them were still alive at the time that I was the desk officer. There are at least three Armenian newspapers in the United States. I think two of them in English and one of them in Armenian. We used to get all of these papers and read this stuff. Every issue would have an interview with some grandmother or grandfather who remembered what happened to them when they were a child. Now, how did they survive? Almost all of them survived because a Turkish family had taken them in and taken care of them until Christian missionaries arrived looking for these kids and then they gave them to the missionaries. A lot of the information that was published in the United States at the time of this event was provided by American missionaries who were working in that area. The history of Christian missions in Turkey is rather a strange one in my view, because while everybody was out there to try to convert someone to their particular brand of Christianity, they had very little luck with the Muslims. Almost none whatsoever. So, then what did they do? They proceeded to try to convert the Armenian Catholics to their particular Protestant denomination. Of course many missionaries had a very biased view of who was right, who was worthy of saving, who was worthy of having their freedom and so on.

I found some books in the Department library written by a man who was our consul in Izmir. He was there at the end of the Turkish independence war where Izmir is burned. Reading what he wrote in the mid-1980s was shocking. According to him whatever the Muslims said or did was wrong and they were all liars and whatever a Christian said was good and whatever they said was the absolute truth. This was the kind of stuff that was being fed to the U.S. public.

Q: In a certain respect, I've looked into this a little bit, only from a consular point of view I think this was the consul I can't think of his name, did quite a heroic deed when the Greeks were pushed out and he saved a lot of lives.

KARAER: Well, there's no question that these people did the job that they were sent to do, but the fact is that he and others like him were so incredibly partial to one religion and so anti-Turk. This is one of the reasons why the Turks, Ataturk and others, felt that the whole world was against them, and this remained the theme in Turkish diplomacy right up until the time that I was working there.

Q: No, I understand this having served in Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia where everybody was against the Serbs and that has just been reinforced. Did you find, I mean you know in your tools when you're trying to prove something like this, you're up against I would imagine up against the Greek prejudice against the Turks, anything the Turks did was horrible. I would think there would be a natural meeting between the Armenian lobby and the Greek lobby, was that happening?

KARAER: Yes, well, there was, certainly there must have been anybody who had a constituency in the House of Representatives who had a large Greek ethnic group was also going to be partial to their point of view. I don't know if there were many congressmen who deliberately wanted to be harmful to Turkey. What they wanted to do was to satisfy their own constituents. When I was on the Turkish desk, the Greek issue was that we had this formula that whatever amount of military assistance was given to Turkey then Greece had to receive I think it was 2/3 of that?

Q: Something like that.

KARAER: It was ridiculous, because at that time Turkey was the third largest aid recipient in the world after Israel and Egypt. Even though it was considerably less than what Israel and Egypt were getting, we were talking about hundreds of millions for Turkey where we're talking billions for those other guys. Greece didn't need and couldn't use that much, but it was tying up this money, so it couldn't be used elsewhere either. There was a huge pressure on us to reduce the Turkish aid, not because we didn't think in the context of our NATO relationship that Turkey needed it or could use it properly, but the USG didn't want to waste the money that would be tied up in the Greek account.

Our issue with the Coelho gambit was not to try to say that the Ottoman government hadn't done something awful. They had. What we were focusing on was the genocide language. I remember once my boss and I went to call on the man who was the Vice President's chief political advisor. They didn't want to get in trouble with Coelho, but they didn't want to rock the boat with the Turks either. He said, "Now, why is this so important?" I said, "It's the genocide thing. These people want their own state. Armenian territory right now is a part of the Soviet Union. The rest of what the Armenians claim as their homeland would have to come from Turkey, and they will never ever agree to that. We need their cooperation in NATO and elsewhere and that's why we're siding with them. If the Armenian group can get respectable organizations like the Congress of the United States to say, in effect, that the Turks committed a genocide, then they can get others in Europe and so on to do the same thing and their next step is going to be pressure to compensate. See that's territory so we can have our own homeland and this will never happen to us again." The man we were talking to said, "Oh, that's ridiculous." I said, "Why? It happened before, didn't it?"

Q: Well, you know, speaking about the word genocide, I was watching public broadcasting yesterday, last evening, the Lehrer Report which is the sort of the preeminent public broadcast in TV. They were talking about problems in the western province of the Sudan called Darfur and there was a discussion of I know that you're not using the word genocide. I can't remember what it got sort of esoteric about why they weren't using genocide, but were using ethnic cleansing and I think it's the same thing. Genocide is a term that everybody is very careful about because all sorts of things get kicked in if you use genocide.

KARAER: Yes, that's right.

Q: You know, it strikes me that one of the problems in congress has happened in the last 30 or 40 years or so is there's no adult minding the store there anymore. It used to be that you'd have the speaker of the house or something to take a look and say, look this is affecting our military ability to resist the Soviet Union. It doesn't get anywhere. Kids knock it off, but there's nobody to do that at this point I take it.

KARAER: In fact it came to the floor of the House for a vote, and I'm telling you this was one of the most exciting days of my life. We were sitting in the Department in somebody's office who had a nice big television watching CSPAN and our guys stood up and said what they had to say and they did and we got Steven Solarz to speak against the bill. He was great because he got up and said, speaking as a Jew, that he had great sympathy for peoples who had suffered in this way, but there was a serious question as to whether this could accurately a) be called a genocide and b) about the effect such an action would have on our foreign policy. Anyway, they took a vote on an amendment to the bill, which was a stalking horse to see how many votes they had that might be for or against this resolution. When they saw how it was going, the person in charge of the floor called it off and removed it from consideration. There never was an up and down vote on that resolution, but we did manage to stop it for the time being. They got another one through a few years later.

Q: What about on this issue were you having problems affecting you of an outfit, I haven't heard of them in a long time now, but called the Armenian National Army or something? I mean these were, somebody killed the Turkish consul general in Los Angeles back in the '70s I think and there were attempts and maybe I think was it Boston or anyway, were Turkish diplomats under threat in these days?

KARAER: They were and particularly in California and they wanted a lot of protection from the diplomatic protective service or whatever we call them now. They did have some, they wanted more. This was one of the big issues in California. During the time I was there the Turks were going to bring a group of folk dancers that was scheduled to have performances in several cities in the United States. They had to cancel the one in California because of threats against it. I had acquaintances in the Turkish diplomatic corps who were willing to serve anywhere except Western Europe because Armenian radicals were assassinating Turkish diplomats there.

Q: How about Cyprus, how did this play in your time there in '84 to '86?

KARAER: Our deputy assistant secretary was the special negotiator on Cyprus. He, by the way, was Richard Haass, whom I'm sure you've seen if you watch Jim Lehrer. He is one of the smartest guys that I have ever worked with, no question. He and my boss and the Cyprus desk were working on those Cyprus issues, but the Turkish desk didn't have much to do with the issue except for putting points on Cyprus into the endless talking papers that we wrote. We had a huge number of high level visitors to Turkey during that time. Believe me, I would get to the office at 7:00 in the morning and I'd work there until 8:00 or 9:00 sometimes 10:00 at night. That was probably the hardest time on my marriage of any assignment that I had in the Foreign Service. We just had bosses who were very smart and knew the issues, but it was the typical State Department thing where no matter how much the manager is doing and how much his staff is being asked to do, he would always take on another job. Nobody cared about what was happening to the people that worked for them. After that experience, I decided that when I was a boss, I'd make darn sure that a job was critical to national security before I made people work overtime. Sure there are times when it is really necessary for everybody to be working long hours and to be coming in on the weekends, but in fact you know, those times seldom occur. If the fact that your people are working for 12 hours a day is because everybody up the line has got to rewrite what somebody down the line wrote and changed one verb to another verb, then something is badly wrong. That's got nothing to do with how effective our diplomacy is. That was a major problem for me in that job, but as far as the issues were concerned, it was interesting. I certainly became an expert on Turkish history in that period.

Q: It's interesting in our business how often history intrudes. I mean right now we're involved in Iraq and I think we have to know Iraqi history very well and the area history. Certainly in the Balkans, everything is history and with Turkey it keeps coming back.

Q: This is tape seven side one with Arma Jane Karaer. How much attention did you feel that you were getting from sort of the European bureau heads and all? Was this kind of a sideshow or something?

KARAER: Richard Burt was assistant secretary the first year that I was on the Turkish desk and John Kelly was the senior deputy assistant secretary. They were very involved in the Armenian genocide thing. Richard Haass was close to Burt and my boss worked with them. Except for escorting a couple of Turkish visitors up to call on the Assistant Secretary, I didn't have anything much to do with Richard Burt. Yes, they were the ones who were giving the instructions, whatever you've got to do, do it because you cannot let that thing be adopted. In the second year that I was there, the Turks had asked us if we could have a high level economic meeting between representatives of our government and theirs. By this time Ozal was the Prime Minister of Turkey and he was putting all his efforts into improving the Turkish economy. I spent many hours with the Trade Representative's office. The big exports for Turkey were clothing/textiles and steel. They were very successful, but these were the sorts of items that immediately would have import limits slapped on them. Now this was also the Reagan administration. We were preaching to the world that it isn't aid that you should be looking for, it's trade, and that's exactly what Ozal said he was trying to do, but every time he had something to trade, we'd slap a quota on it. I found it hard to defend such a hypocritical policy.

I had a constant correspondent in our economic bureau who worked on the textile imports I was forever arguing with him because we would both have to clear all these papers that were being sent upstairs and he said, "Arma Jane, we have to protect the jobs for American workers in the textile industry." I said, "Okay, I understand, but you know, isn't it time to move on if you're an American sewing shirts." Then one morning I was going through the newspapers and found an item about how a lot of illegal aliens had been found working in the garment sweatshops in California and the owners had defended themselves by saying that they couldn't find Americans willing to do the work. I cut that out and I sent it down to my pal, asking, "Whose jobs did you say you were protecting?"

Another embarrassment occurred when I was helping arrange an official visit to Washington by Ozal. The under secretary for economic affairs was going to entertain him at the Cosmos Club. That was his club. I was given the budget for how much could be spent on this dinner. I knew how many people might eat it. I had to take the absolute cheapest thing on the menu so that we could have enough money to pay for these people to dine. So they had chicken and consommï¿½ or something like that. It was so embarrassing, but at least I didn't have to eat the dinner. I was way too far down on the totem pole to get invited to any of these things.

Q: At least it was a lousy meal.

KARAER: Oh, yes. Believe me I was so exhausted I didn't want to go. I don't know how good or bad it was. The other thing was dealing with the assistant secretary's secretary, because the Cosmos Club at that time was one of the last bastions of male only in this town and our assistant secretary was a female.

Q: Who was she?

KARAER: Roz Ridgeway.

Q: Oh yes.

KARAER: I called the under secretary's secretary and said, okay, this is the program. She said, "Women aren't admitted to the Cosmos Club." I said, "For heavens sake, she's the Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs. We can't tell her she can't go." She said, "Well, perhaps they'll make an exception this time." If I hadn't been three floors away, I would have strangled her right there.

Q: How was Ozal, how do you spell his name?

KARAER: O with an umlaut, Z-A-L.

Q: He was very highly thought of wasn't he at the time? I mean was he a force unto himself do you think within our diplomat receptions because usually Turkish leaders don't have much following in America one way or another.

KARAER: First of all he has a great reputation because he deserves to have a great reputation. He's, first of all, a brilliant man. He had worked for many years for the World Bank and so he knew the United States. He was not at all prepossessing. He was short and fat, but he was very friendly, very nice. Not standoffish, as Turks tend to be - "We're sufficient unto ourselves," chip on the shoulder kind of thing. He wasn't like that at all. Now, of course how can you not like the guy? He is doing everything that the U.S. leadership is saying you're supposed to do if you are the leader of a country trying to develop its economy. Also, he was the one who opened Turkey to foreign investment. That's what we wanted. He was the one who was pushing trade, not aid, which is what we wanted. He was leaving the NATO policy to be developed by the military in Turkey. That was okay with him. That was fine with us. Also, from a social point of view in Turkey, he was a practicing Muslim, which, up until that time was unusual in modern Turkey. The military was terribly afraid that the religious right was going to take over in Turkey. Well, later on it got much more powerful, but the political party that Ozal started had opened itself to people who thought that religion was important, but it was by no means a religious, right wing party. It was, however, more to the right than the two big parties that had so abysmally messed up Turkey in the years before the last military takeover.

This is a good example of why they really needed somebody in our office who knew something about Turkey. My boss came in one day and said, "Arma Jane, I was just up in the Assistant Secretary's staff meeting, and he said that a Turkish businessman that he'd been talking to had told him that Ozal was dangerous because he was limiting sale of alcohol in Turkey. The Assistant Secretary wants to know more about it." I said, "Limiting the sale of alcohol in Turkey. His party has passed regulations in the big cities like Ankara and Istanbul which forbid anyone under the age of 18 to buy beer in the grocery stores. That's the only limitation on the sale of alcohol that I've heard of. Does that rule sound familiar to you?" He said, "What?" I said, "Yes, until now, you could send your six year old kid to the grocery store to buy beer for you if you wanted to and they'd sell it to them. Now they can't." He said, "Why would this guy get so excited about that?" I said, "Because he knows what pulls our chain. He didn't tell the Assistant Secretary the real limitation. He made it sound like Ozal was going to go totally over to the traditionalist Muslim camp."

Q: Where did you, were you seeing or was sort of joining the European I guess council, it wasn't European, community I mean at that time, was that an issue and were we involved at this time?

KARAER: Yes. We had the subject in our talking points with European leaders, because Ozal certainly wanted EU membership for Turkey, and we wanted to encourage the Europeans to be open to them. Turkey had frittered away its opportunities when the European Union was organized. Turkey was a candidate for membership early on, but at that time they were in their " the heck with the rest of the world" mode and didn't want to adjust their trading policies to fit EU requirements. So, by the time Ozal came along and emphasized the importance of membership, the Europeans argued that Turkey was not really democratic, that they just had come out of another military takeover. Ozal said, "Well, we'd like to be part of the European Union, but our real home is in the Middle East, that's where we've got a special edge," He was right. They were getting big construction contracts in the Arab countries, where Turkish workers were more acceptable that non-Muslims. They were even selling bottled water to the Saudis.

Q: What about the Kurds during this time? Were they an issue to Ozal? Wasn't there a Kurdish sort of I don't know a Trotskyite Kurdish thing going on?

KARAER: Yes, the guy is in jail now fortunately. The Kurdish rebellion in Eastern Turkey was starting to build up. As far as the U.S. was concerned, it was a human rights issue and, as I recall, our main concern was the use of American-provided weaponry against the Kurdish rebels. I don't remember much about that except that.

Q: It wasn't something on the front burner?

KARAER: No. The real war between the government and the Kurds started after I left there.

Q: Where did you go afterwards, I mean in '86?

KARAER: In '86 I went to Karachi where I was the deputy principal officer at the consulate general.

Q: You were in Karachi from '86 to?

KARAER: To '88.

Q: Let's talk a bit about.

KARAER: There's one thing connected with that.

Q: Oh sure.

KARAER: As much as Bill Rope exhausted me with the never ending projects that would take us until midnight to complete every day, he was a very thoughtful boss as far as helping his people get the kinds of assignments that they wanted. He had written a number of notes to people about me, pointing out that I had done a lot of political work on the desk. Now, in addition to my consular and commercial experience, I also had political reporting experience. He suggested that I meet with the Assistant Secretary and get her advice about how to get ahead in the Foreign Service as a woman. He got the appointment for me.

Q: This was Roz Ridgeway?

KARAER: Roz Ridgeway, yes. Her fundamental advice was, "Don't let them make you the permanent assistant. That's what this organization tends to do with capable women. They've got all kinds of good reasons not to make them the boss, but they can't do without them as the assistant." Then she told her own story of what had happened to her when she was in the fisheries office in the econ bureau. We were having the tuna wars at the time. Apparently, if I remember her story correctly, she had been brought in to be the assistant in this office and worked at it for a couple of years. They negotiated some major treaties and agreements with Latin American countries. Then she was supposed to go on to the Senior Seminar or something like that, something important anyway, a training thing and they said, "No, no, we've got to keep you here because the boss is leaving and we haven't found another person to take over the office." She stayed in there for several more months and they're still saying, "Well, you're doing a great job and we're still looking for somebody to be the head of this office." Finally she said, "Obviously, I'm the one who is qualified to be the head of this office. Either I get the job or forget about me staying here at all." So, they were like, "Oh, okay fine." That was her advice to me. Watch out for that.

Q: How did Karachi come about?

KARAER: I had always wanted to go back to the subcontinent. Remember, I told you I had been a student in India long before. When I saw the job in Karachi, I asked the person in personnel who was supposed to be helping me and he told me that the Bureau already had someone in mind for that position, so I didn't pursue it. I had been visited by the man who was the Department's choice to be the next ambassador to Madagascar who was looking for a DCM. I wanted a DCM position if I could get one. Bill, my boss, wanted me to go back to Turkey to take the economic counselor's position. I told Bill, "Absolutely not. First of all, another Turkish assignment is going to type cast me. Secondly, I would be replacing an absolutely brilliant economist." That would be professional suicide, because I'm not even a mediocre economist. I can barely keep my head above water when it comes to theoretical economics. The African bureau offered me the DCM position in Madagascar, but we found out that the Department wouldn't let my husband go there. Someone had talked to the Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA about me. He wrote a note saying that I had a lot of background on the subcontinent. They asked me to come up and the DAS said, "It sounds like you'd be perfect for this job." I said, "I'd like to do that job, but I was told that you already had somebody else in mind." He said, "Nah." I don't know what that means, but that person probably went to Madagascar. That's how I got the job in Karachi. It wasn't a DCM position, but Karachi was one of our biggest consulates and much bigger than a lot of embassies, so as deputy principal officer I got a lot of experience similar to that of a DCM. When I was trying to get that job, I was just learning how important it was to go out and beat the corridors to find one. This business of just send in your list and keep your fingers crossed, particularly after you go up to a certain level, was not going to get you much of anything unless it was an accident. Certainly Bill Rope knew that, and encouraged me to go out and sell myself to these bureaus.

Q: You were in Karachi from when to when?

KARAER: From '86 to '88.

Q: Today is the 29th of June 2004. Arma Jane, what was Karachi like in '86 when you arrived there?

KARAER: When I arrived, Karachi was just on the brink of falling apart ethnically and politically. The government of Pakistan was sitting very hard on that particular province of Pakistan. Karachi is the capital of Sind Province. The Sindese are ethnically different from the Punjabis who were running the country at the time. Their language of course is different and they are the ethnic group from which the Bhutto family comes. Benazir Bhutto had just been allowed to return to Pakistan after quite a lengthy exile in England and she was busy revving up her political party, which was her father's political party. to challenge the government. The existing government had also adopted before I got there a policy of encouraging religious sentiment in the country, that is conservative religious sentiment. I think that the president was himself a genuine practicing Muslim, but.

Q: Who was the president at that time?

KARAER: Zia ul-Haq. Zia had adopted Sharia law for Pakistan, and this had really encouraged the very conservative Islamic types. One of the things that really disappointed me when I got there, and it was a direct result of this resurgence of very conservative Islamic thinking, was the effect that this conservative outlook had on the accessibility of Pakistani cultural performances. I had missed the subcontinent so much since I'd left there when I was a student. I really wanted to come back. I found the cultures there absolutely fascinating and wonderful. Well, one of the results of the Zia religious reforms was that there could not be any performance of traditional Pakistani music or dance in a public venue in Karachi while I was there because if there was, the very conservative types would have gangs out in the streets threatening to burn down the theater and that sort of thing. The only performances that we were able to see of really fine music, and Sindhi musicians are some of the very best, were given on the grounds of foreign consulates.

Also, shortly after I arrived, Pakistan saw the emergence of the ethnic political parties that were supposedly defending the rights of the group that are called the Mohajirs. Now, the Mohajirs are Muslims whose forbearers were refugees from India at the time of Indian independence. They speak Urdu. They tended to be a much more educated group of people than Sindhis and Baluchis who were native to the provinces that made up Karachi's consular district. The Mohajirs had quickly taken over most of the government jobs and were the professional people for the most part. Now, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, but just as there has been a struggle in India over making Hindi the national language and therefore, disadvantaging the southerners that speak languages that are a totally different language group than Hindi, there was this same argument in Pakistan. The Sindhis and Baluchis found that they were being disadvantaged because of the dominance of the Urdu speaking people. And there had been a backlash against the Mohajirs. In 1986, some very violent young men started a political party that claimed to represent the Mohajirs, and they started demonstrating and burning and shooting on their behalf.

The Russians were still in Afghanistan and we were engaging them through the mujahideen. In Pakistan, the U.S. government's principal concern was getting the cooperation of the Pakistani government in providing weaponry and support to the Afghans who were fighting the Russians. As a consequence of the war, there were quite a few Afghan refugees in Karachi. Additionally, since Karachi is the biggest seaport in Pakistan and the biggest industrial city, it also attracted people from all over the country who were coming there to find work, particularly the Pathans who are the major ethnic group in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. The Pathans were very much resented by the Mohajirs and the Sindhis. They are ethnically different, much taller, stronger looking men. Their complexion is much fairer. Their language, of course is different, and they would come to Karachi for the construction work and to work in the famous ship disassembly industry.

In addition to the intra-Pakistani feuding groups, there were those who were feuding elsewhere in the Middle East, particularly Iran, who were in Karachi and were busy assassinating each other there as well. It was a very dangerous place, but at that point Americans were not being targeted. Our main security concerns were to keep ourselves from getting caught in the middle of somebody else's feud. The stuff we're taught about, changing your route to work every day, came in handy in Karachi.

Karachi in my opinion is a very ugly city. Probably the only semi-beautiful thing in the entire place was the memorial built to the founder of Pakistan.

Q: Jinnah.

KARAER: Yes, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In the two years that I worked there, and I am not exaggerating, it only rained twice and then it was just a sprinkle. The dust was so thick on the leaves of the trees that I really wondered that they could survive at all. My youngest daughter, who was just four years old when we got there, spent those two years living in eternally sunshiny Pakistan. Later, when got to Swaziland, where it rained periodically, she was as mad as a hornet. This was not the way God meant the world to be.

My instructions from the consul general were that we were to....

Q: Who was the consul general?

KARAER: Larry Grahl. We were supposed to keep a distance from the opposition parties. He told me the Embassy didn't want us to get the government upset by talking to the political opposition.

Q: Who was the ambassador? Deane Hinton?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Well, you know, I mean you're supposed to have contacts.

KARAER: My sentiments exactly. Well, the consul general and I had something of a tussle over this, but I convinced him that just calling on some of these guys was certainly not going to cause a big fuss. Some of them were Communists or they were left leaning rhetoric type guys which was normal for the subcontinent. I was finally able to make appointments and call on these people. They were very interesting and nothing bad happened as far as our relations with the Pakistani government were concerned. Benazir Bhutto sent a number of her people over when I first got to the country, because I had been written up in the local newspapers as the first woman to have ever had that position at the consulate..

Q: You mean the deputy consul general?

KARAER: I was the deputy principal officer, yes. However, being a woman anything doesn't count for much in Pakistan. A reporter from one of the conservative Urdu newspapers interviewed me because my husband was a Muslim. The first question he asks me was "What's it like being married to a Muslim? I didn't tell them that my husband is not a practicing Muslim. He is a child of the Turkish revolution. The last thing in the world he does is pray five times a day, but I didn't tell the reporter that. I did tell him that I married a man, not a religion. Anyway, Benazir Bhutto sent several people over to see me over the first few weeks I was there to say that she would like to meet me. I certainly wanted to meet her, but the consul general told me that she was his contact and I was to stay away. Okay, fine. I only ever met her just in passing at receptions to shake her hand.

Q: What were you getting from the Americans and maybe some of the other consulate people from other countries about the Bhuttos, Benazir and all?

KARAER: Okay. Politics in Pakistan is pretty medieval. The leaders of political parties tend to be the heads of big landowning families and each of those families runs its own estate like a feudal fief. As far as the people who live on those properties are concerned, the law of the country doesn't exist. If they want to stay on the estate, the law is the landlord. Politics in Pakistan are not based on political philosophies, they are based on old rivalries between these families. In Pakistan, if the Bhuttos live on this side of the river and your father's fiefdom is on the other side of the river, regardless of what your political viewpoint might otherwise have been, then you're going to belong to the party that opposes the Bhuttos, because you've always been against one another. Also, as I mentioned before, intra-Pakistani ethnicity was also a big factor in politics.

There was a tremendous amount of kidnapping and ransoming of sons in Sind between these families, for example. Very few if any ever got killed as far as I know, but this was a major problem. The Sindhis felt repressed by the Punjabis, who were running the federal government. Benazir is a Sindhi. The Sindhi supported her Pakistani People's Party (PPP). She would tour through the countryside in a caravan of four wheel drive vehicles, and she would be greeted as the second coming by all of these villagers. In a sense she was a second coming, because the Army had hung her father when he was prime minister.

For us at the consulate, particularly for the consul general and for me, there was a really huge burden of social life in Karachi. I say it was a burden because I have never worked anywhere else where I knew socially so many incredibly rich people. They would constantly have parties. They were business people for the most part. A lot of them had American green cards or British passports, which they kept close at hand in case the tumbrels starting rolling and they had to get out in a hurry, but they really lived in Pakistan. They had their businesses there. Since nobody paid taxes much, all the money they made was theirs to keep and to spend. Now, because the Sharia was the law of the land, no liquor was sold in public places. These people had their suppliers and they would have one big dinner party after another where the liquor flowed like water. There were rules for the poor, and then there were rules for the rich.

I believe that they thought that having the heads of the consulates particularly the big western consulates, the British, the Americans and the French, at their parties gave them a cachet. My husband and I went to these parties because that was orders from headquarters, but I think there were only two families that we knew there who were our friends because they wanted to be our friends and not because they saw a great big American visa standing in front of them whenever they looked at us. Those two families we met in a totally different way than through these rich peoples' parties.

It would be so bad that there often would be three invitations for the same evening, and no one would take no for an answer. You had to stop at each house for drinks or dinner. This was really exhausting. Although the invitations always said 8:30, dinner was never put out anywhere near that time. The dinners were always big buffets, of course, because nobody ever knew who was going to show up at their party. The food would never be served until 10:30. Then, this is typical on the subcontinent, after you eat, everybody gets up and goes. We'd come stumbling home at no better than 11:30. The Americans had to be in the office at 8:30 in the morning, because that's when you start working. The Pakistanis of course didn't come dribbling into their offices until 11:00 in the morning.

Once, after I'd been there for a while, I thought that some of these gatherings are such mob scenes, nobody will ever know if I don't come. One man's son was being married and we were invited to the wedding. We just didn't go. There must have been, conservatively speaking, 2,000 people at that wedding reception. The next time I saw that man, he said, "Why weren't you there? Why didn't you come to my son's wedding?" Oh, Lord.

The reason we were supposed to go to these was that the hosts and their guests were supposedly good contacts who had the inside skinny on what was going on in the town, and a lot of them did. Some of them were owners of newspapers and friends of the owners of newspapers and whatever, but for me it was something of a problem, because at a lot of these places, even among the sophisticated, they tended to have totally separate areas of the party for the ladies and for the men, and the only time that people would come together was when they were actually eating. I thought well these ladies are nice ladies, but they are not the people with the information..

Q: Yes, you were saying, you're not going to spend.

KARAER: Yes, I mean there were women that I cultivated and talked to and had to my house for lunch that ran human rights organizations and women's rights organizations, but they normally didn't get invited to these parties. I would just stick there with the men so I could talk with the men and nobody ever really tried to stop me from doing that.

I also got to know my counterparts at the other consulates. When I first got there I paid courtesy calls on my counterparts at the other consulates in town. There were quite a few. I've been thinking lately a lot about one young man who was the deputy at the Iraqi consulate. He was assassinated while I was in Karachi.

Q: Who would, I mean was this an Iranian or Baath thing?

KARAER: It could have been an Iranian thing. There were a couple of different Iranian groups that were busy shooting each other and I suppose they could go after Iraqis as well. I don't know. We only knew that he'd been killed. One morning we literally got blasted out of our beds. There was this tremendous explosion. Fortunately quite a distance away from our house. One Iranian group had set off a bomb near or in the apartment building where their opponents were living and it was right next door to an apartment building where a lot of the people from the Russian consulate lived. A number of Russians had their eardrums pierced, but none were killed.

Then the second year that we were there the Russians left Afghanistan and we enjoyed glasnost. That was truly interesting, because one of my counterparts in Karachi that I really liked was a Russian. His bosses were sort of grumpy, gloomy looking gusses.

Q: Old KGB?

KARAER: Yes, the bosses may have been, but I checked and made sure that he was truly a diplomat. He wasn't a KGB guy. They had plenty of them there and of course we didn't have much to do with each other except on an official basis up until the Russians left Afghanistan. In fact just before the evacuation of Afghanistan, they had their national day and we had instructions that we were to send only one person to the national day and it should not be the consul general and it shouldn't be any of our military people. That year the junior officer that worked for me laughed and said, "Oh, Arma Jane, do you get to be the one who insults the Russians this year?"

Now the Consulate's 4th of July party has a guest list of hundreds. We knew a lot of people in that town. But when I walked into the ballroom of the hotel where the Russians were having their reception, I couldn't recognize a soul in the entire room. I mean, their contacts were so totally separate from our contacts. Anyway, I'm standing there feeling very sore thumbish and then some pretty ladies in beautiful Korean kimonos came fluttering through the door. I thought, "At last, somebody I can talk to. " Dumb me. I walked over to these people and I introduced myself. They stood there like they were frozen to the ground with looks of absolute horror on their faces. Then I realized I was talking to North Koreans.

Oh, I mentioned before that I thought that all of this affection that we were being shown in all of these invitations that we were being given were primarily because we were the dispensers of visas to the United States. Certainly the consul general's office was absolutely bombarded by telephone calls from all of the great and good of Karachi who were calling to ask if we would give a visa to whoever this contact of theirs was. The best we would ever do for these folks, of course, was to get them an appointment so they wouldn't have to stand in a long, long line outside of our consulate. Those were the days before we had adopted our present visa fee policy, which makes applying for an American visa extremely expensive. In those days all these unemployed young men had to do was stand in a line in front of the American consulate and maybe they'd get lucky one day. So, I had some real run ins with some of these people. They would speak nicely to the consul general, but some of them ordered me, "You will do this for my friend." When I found out that the friend had already been turned down for a visa by a consular officer, I'd refuse. We were not all that popular, but they kept right on trying.

One of my most interesting contacts was a man that I met sort of halfway through one of the big parties. He was called the mango king of Pakistan. Oh, Karachi is an ugly place. It is a violent place. It is a dirty place. But Pakistan produces the best and largest variety of mangos anywhere in the world. In all of my assignments, no matter how otherwise deprived the country might have been, I always tried to identify at least one thing that was better there than anywhere else. And it was mangos in Pakistan. This guy had a huge estate in central Sind, just north of Hyderabad, where he grew sugarcane and mangoes. Almost all of the fruit produced on the estate was shipped to Europe. After we met, he sent us a crate of mangoes. So, we tried to send something back as a thank you. He wouldn't accept, which my husband, being a Turk, wouldn't accept. " This is about my honor. I have to give you something in return. So, if he would take whatever my husband brought, then he'd send some more of something to eat over to our house. Finally I wrote him a note asking, " Have you ever heard of a potlatch? I think we're engaged in a potlatch, and we're never going to win."

The second year that we were there, his son was kidnapped, but in his case it was much worse than kidnappings suffered by other families, because his son was only 12 years old. In the other cases the sons of the reminders, as these landowners are called, who were kidnapped by political rivals, would be grown men. This was the first time that such a young child had been kidnapped, and he'd been taken right from the front of his school. Well, normally, the ransom is paid and the son gets returned. This man refused. He told the provincial government, and everyone he knew, "I know who kidnapped him, and I know the Chief Minister of the province knows who kidnapped him, and I expect the government to get him back unharmed." I was amazed at the reaction of all these other wealthy, vulnerable people with whom we were socializing. Most said. "What a terrible man he is that he won't pay the money to get his son back. " He said, "This political nonsense has gone far enough, and I expect the government to do this." He told us that he knew that the man who had kidnapped his son was a neighbor who had borrowed money from him before and not paid him back. When the fellow tried to borrow more money and he refused, the neighbor's next step was to kidnap the kid. Our acquaintance did get his son back after a while, but his refusal to pay ransom put him squarely in the anti-government camp in town.

Shortly after we met him, my father died, and I went back to the States for my father's funeral. Then I brought my mom back to visit with me for the last three months that we were in Pakistan. She came to all these parties with me and she was amazed. My mother is far more observant, particularly of the way people dress, than I am. I remember coming back from one party at which I had introduced her to this man, and she said, "Arma Jane, did you see his watch? It was covered with diamonds!" I said, "Well, frankly, no I hadn't noticed, but I did notice the buttons on his shirt." The long shirts worn in Pakistan are called "kurta" and they have removable buttons. If you're wealthy, you usually have gold studs in your shirt. Our acquaintance was a tall, big man, and when I was talking to him my eyes were level with his chest. He had diamond studs in his kurta.One late afternoon on a Saturday, my husband and I ran into him at the shopping area near our house. He was just running out of the grocery store. He'd come to buy some shoe polish he said. He was wearing the diamond studs in his shirt even then.

He invited us to come and visit him at his estate. This was momentous for us, because during the whole time that I had been in Karachi, I had almost never been able to leave the city, unless I had gone on a trip to the Embassy in Islamabad. Although I applied several times to make a trip to the interior of Sind, the Pakistani government had always turned me down because they said it was too dangerous. Now, I'm not a fool, and I had worked out these trips with the senior Pakistani FSN so that I would be going from one reminder's estate to the next where I would be seeing villages and talking to people. I wouldn't be staying overnight on my own in some small place, and I'd be under the protection of these reminders in every area that I was going to, but that was not good enough for the Pakistani government. I knew why. They did not want diplomats traveling in Sind. They didn't want us to see what was going on out there.

The ambassador had made a rule that we were not to defy the government's instructions, but since other American citizens could travel there for tourism without getting the permission of the government, if we were going for purely personal travel, or if we were going to an American installation, then we didn't have to ask for the Pakistani government's permission. At the time we had a USIS library in Hyderabad. So I made one trip up there to call on our library staff, who made a luncheon engagement for me with a number of the journalists from up there. I'd also met a woman who was a member of the legislative assembly. She was very friendly and invited us to her house a number of times for small family gatherings. She also invited us to her daughter's wedding, which was held on their family's estate near Hyderabad. We went to that and stayed overnight there. One of the best photographs I have in my family album is of my husband and my little daughter standing on the porch of the little cottage on the estate where we had spent the night. Flanking them are very tall men with bandoleers over their chests and rifles in their hands. They had been assigned to guard us during the night.

The government people let me know that they knew that I'd been out there wandering around, and I didn't make any excuses. Anyway, the trip to the mango king's estate was going to be my last chance to make a trip into the interior. In the meantime, my husband had become close friends with a brilliant young man who had gotten a Ph.D. in nuclear physics from MIT, returned to Pakistan, turned down a chance to work for their nuclear program, and went into business for himself building satellite dishes. Satellite dishes were a new phenomenon in Pakistan at the time, and he was able to build them locally and install them for people. My husband was running the American club in Karachi, and so he bought a dish for the club so that we could get the Armed Forces television network and the sports programs that they broadcast. In the process of buying this thing and having it installed, he found out what a delightful person this man was, and we became very close to him. My husband spread the word about what a good product he had for sale. Consequently, our host, the mango king, engaged him to make a satellite installation for the house on his estate. We'd already sent our kids to Turkey, because we were about to leave Pakistan, and so the cavalcade set out for the interior of Sind, our host, my mother and I in his Mercedes followed by my husband and our Pakistani dish-making friend in our Volvo. In front of our host's car was a four-wheel drive vehicle loaded with men with AK-47s and behind my husband's car was another Jeep loaded with men with AK-47s. Halfway to Hyderabad, our host stopped for gasoline. While he was out of the car, my mother, who had slipped her shoes off and was running her toe along something in the carpet under her feet, said, "Arma Jane, I think there's a gun under here." I said, "There probably is a gun there. Did you see all the guns around here?" We get to the estate and this is something out of Beau Geste, honest to God, except instead of sand we're surrounded by acres of sugarcane, and rising up above the sugarcane we could see the walls of a mud fortress.

Q: Like Fort Zinderneuf in Beau Geste.

KARAER: Is that the name of it?

Q: Yes.

KARAER: This Fort Zinderneuf had watchtowers in every corner and a man with an AK-47 on each wall. We passed through big wooden gates into a large lovely garden with three modest rambler-type houses and a swimming pool in the middle.. We arrived just in time for lunch. Dessert was a sample of about 20 different kinds of mangoes that are grown on the estate. "Just take a sliver," our host said, "because you won't be able to eat all of these." It was like a wine tasting. In the middle of the meal, a man joined us who was introduced as our host's half-brother. Our host's father had three or four wives, so there were a number of brothers, but he is the eldest and the boss. The half-brother at the lunch table had a stick with him about eight inches long mad of ebony. The top was encircled with diamonds. When he left, he left the stick lying on the table next to our host. Following lunch, our host invited us to tour the estate in his jeep. He took the stick with him, and when we get into the jeep, he was driving, he threw this diamond-studded stick on the dashboard. The men with the guns got into their Jeep behind us, and as we started off I asked, "Is that a scepter?" He said, "Oh, yes, that's something our mother had made. When I'm not here the workers on the estate know that whoever has that is the one who is in charge, and they have to obey his orders."

Q: Oh boy.

KARAER: Oh boy, yes. The whole time we were there, we had a nice time. We'd sit out on the terrace talking in the evening with our drinks. Standing well within complete eyeshot, but out of earshot, would be a man with an AK-47.

Q: Did the government play much of a role there? I mean it sounds like in this area the government wasn't a player?

KARAER: We were never were able to find out just what sort of role the government played, because we weren't able to talk to any of the government officials outside of Karachi. My boss, the consul general made a couple of trips every year to Baluchistan. That was his thing. He went up there and made the rounds of officials in Baluchistan, so I never had a chance to go there myself, but those were really wild and woolly places. Baluchistan is still very tribal and Sind appears to be governed, estate by estate, by the landowners. Believe me, you don't want to be a Hindu villager in those places. I mean that has got to be the least civil rights situation that anybody would ever want to be in.

Q: Do they have something an untouchable situation there?

KARAER: Although Islam has existed in that area since the 8th century, Hindu culture remains a firm underpinning there. Even if you're a Muslim, you don't marry just any old body, you have to marry within the right family connections and that, in Hinduism, is called the caste system. Oh, that was another interesting revelation, not so much for me, because I'd seen it already when I was a student in India, but for my husband. Not too long after we got to Karachi, we saw Muharram, the Shia festival commemorating the death of Hassain and Hussein, the sons of Ali. As part of the observance of the holy day young men in every Shia neighborhood build towers made out of sticks and tinsel shortly before the date of the festival. They put them on push carts, like the vegetable sellers use, and they push them around the neighborhood. People admire the towers and give them money. It's sort of like trick or treating in a way. The young men use the money to buy food and make some kind of big stew with rice. They feed whoever wants to come and eat.

The eve of Muharram, this type of celebration is at its peak. Now the Shia neighborhood of Karachi that we saw this in is one of the poorest places in town, and that's pretty darn poor when you're talking about Karachi. We weren't supposed to be there. The Consul General had been ordered that during Muharram, all the Americans were supposed to stay in their houses in case rioting broke out in the city. We had many flashpoints in Karachi, when the religious sects or ethnic groups would clash. We were supposed to stay in our houses, so that we wouldn't get caught up in anything. But I had seen Muharram celebrations in Hyderabad in India, and I knew it was something important to see. So, when the senior local at the consulate asked, "Mrs. Karaer, would you and your husband like to see the Muharram eve celebrations?" I instantly agreed. That night he and his friend picked us up. His friend was a young businessman from the Gulf, and he was driving the car. My husband was sitting in the front with him and the Pakistani FSN and I were sitting in the back. Seeing the towers and the stuff the people were doing, both my husband and the fellow from the Gulf were saying, "This isn't Islam." The Pakistani and I were laughing, because they were right. These practices are peculiar to Pakistan and they are Hindu. You know what they do with those towers after Muharram is over? They take them down to the seashore and they drown them in the sea. Do you know what they do with the images of Ganesh after the Ganesh Puja in Bombay? They take them down to the seashore and drown them in the sea. Anyway, both of them got their eyes opened that night. Yes, we're all Muslims, but some of us are more Muslim than others. In fact, Islam as it is practiced around the world is very much affected by the culture in which it was planted. Therefore, the type of Islam that's practiced in India is very Hindu say compared to the type of Islam that you see in Turkey or that you see in Saudi Arabia. Just like Christianity is practiced very differently in different parts of the world.

That night was fun and not a thing happened to us as we went around. That night was my one chance to go through a Pakistani slum at night and see all of these totally drugged up people lying on the corners. The only way these homeless laborers can get any sleep because of the noise and commotion that's going on all around them is to take some kind of drug and go to sleep.

Q: I imagine one of your briefs there at the American consulate general was to keep an eye on fundamentalist Islam and its offshoots, how it was being taught in the Madrasa and all that. Were you getting that?

KARAER: No. I mean the only thing that our brief, as you say, touched on, was the relationship of Islamic law to human rights questions. As far as I know, the USG was totally oblivious to the possible impact on us of the spread of conservative Islam in countries like Pakistan. I remember reading the reporting on the mujahideen groups in Afghanistan and thinking that these guys that we were arming against the Russians were so much further removed from our basic values than the Russians ever were. When and if they won, what was going to take the place of the Communists that we wanted removed? In Pakistan, as I already mentioned, the conservatives had already pretty much closed down any kind of expression of their own culture as far as music and theater was concerned. I had always found this puritanical, Wahabi view of Islam, which forbids any kind of pleasure, to be ridiculous, inhuman. I had been introduced to Islam in India, together with all of the wonderful music and dance and poetry that was introduced by the Mughal emperors. What was beautiful in Pakistan was their inheritance from that period of Islam.

Q: You might explain what a madrasa is.

KARAER: That's a so-called Koran school where little boys memorize the Koran and don't learn much else. On the other hand, sending children to school is an expensive thing on the subcontinent, because you have to buy shoes and school uniforms and books and poor families find it hard to afford schooling. Speaking of schools reminds me of the university. The university was always in a commotion and there was a lot of accusations of cheating there to the extent that the invigilators, the staff members who were supposed to monitor the exams, would get beaten up and thrown out and no one had much confidence in the value of the degrees that were coming out of that place.

One of the opposition politicians I interviewed was an attorney. He offered to have his son pick me up. The young man studied law at the University of Karachi. I asked him, "Does it bother you that people are cheating? Are they actually learning the law? Can you learn anything there." He said, "Oh, it doesn't make any difference, because like all my friends, after I get a diploma, I'll go into my father's practice, and that's where I'll learn".

Q: What about the work of the consulate in dealing with the mayor and the government in Karachi. How did you find that?

KARAER: I didn't have anything to do with that. We didn't seem to have any difficulty with anything we needed to have done. No problem.

Q: How about the hand of the embassy on your operation?

KARAER: The consul general interpreted his instructions as not to do anything that would lead the people in the government in Islamabad to think that the U.S. government was trying to encourage their opposition. We would contribute to the human rights reports, but the final report was written in Islamabad. I always thought that their hand was quite light, but then their concern was far more about our ability to cooperate with the government than elsewhere. I remember the first time I went to Islamabad, because I had visited Pakistan when I was a student in India, but I had not gone to Islamabad or Rawalpindi on that trip. I was amazed because in 1979 our embassy in Islamabad was attacked by a mob and burned.

Q: I think it was '79 right about the time of the takeover in Iran.

KARAER: Right. At that time some Shia militants had attacked the great mosque in Mecca. Immediately the word was circulated that the Americans were behind the attack, and so a mob that had been collected in Rawalpindi, which is a half hour away by bus from Islamabad, gathered around our embassy. The government didn't send any police or military to disperse it and, in the end, some of our people were killed. The mob set the place on fire and the rest of our staff ended up in the communications vault, eventually crawling out onto the roof to escape the smoke. One of the officers that had worked with me in Zaire had gone on to Islamabad after that assignment, and he was one of the guys in the vault in Islamabad. When he and his family got evacuated from Karachi, I was still in the States, and he told me about his experience. In Karachi the consulate general is right smack in the middle of one of the busiest parts of the city with big hotels around it. We always talked about what we would do if we ever had a mob attack threatening the consulate. The consul general and I agreed that if we assumed there was even a hint that something like that was going to happen, we were going to evacuate our people. We had no intention of trying to defend the building.

I had rather imagined that the embassy was in a similar situation. Not so. Islamabad is like a beautiful, big, green park. It is like the monumental part of Washington in a way. There are big government buildings, but separated by large expanses of lawn and trees and gardens. Our embassy is at the end of a road in the middle of one of those big green expanses. In other words, it took a lot of doing to get a mob there. The only people who lived in Islamabad at that time were middle class government employees who certainly weren't in the mob. Bringing all those people there took a lot of time. The first time I visited the embassy, I realized what a tremendous betrayal of the American trust in the government this had been.

Oh, another thing that happened while I was there. I was talking to someone in the political section on the telephone one day and he said, "I'm sorry. I think I'm going to have to call you back. There seems to be something firing on the embassy." I thought oh my God. We're on the radio listening to all this. An ammunition dump blew up on the outskirts of Rawalpindi.

Q: I remember reading about that.

KARAER: The outskirts of any subcontinental city is surrounded by the shanties of the poorest of the poor. The explosion appears to have been a genuine accident. I don't think they ever found that anybody had done it on purpose, but it was really the height of carelessness to have kept such a big ammunition dump so close to a heavily populated area. These shells were screaming up into the air and crashing down all over. The American school was hit. Fortunately no Americans were harmed, but other people did get hit and killed in Islamabad.

Q: Did the 50 year old confrontation in India play at all in Karachi from your perspective?

KARAER: Only to the extent that while I was there I took two trips to India and it was just about impossible to arrange a trip to India from Karachi. You could arrange a trip to Beijing, but not to India. Other than that, no, things were relatively quiet in that regard. However, Middle Eastern politics impinged. About the second month after I arrived in Pakistan, a Pan Am airliner was hijacked on the ground at the Karachi airport. It was loaded with passengers. They had started the flight in Bombay and they had already loaded the passengers from Karachi, which included three children of one of our senior FSNs. The hijackers were Palestinians. The boarded the plane and said they were taking it over.

Q: This is tape eight, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. You explain or repeat that. You said the pilots.

KARAER: The pilots had escaped from the airplane, and so the hijackers couldn't get the plane off the ground. They said they wanted pilots or they would shoot some passengers. The Pakistani government decided not to comply, and the hijackers killed one man after a while. He was an Indian with an American green card. They threw his body out of the plane. That was quite an experience in a crisis exercise for our consulate. We had an operation running in the consulate for about three days straight. We would take turns getting some sleep and going back.

I had to deal with a newspaper reporter who tried to trick me into giving information that we didn't want made public. He pretended that he was someone from PanAm, but mostly I just wrote telegram after update telegram. In the end the electrical generator ran out of power and that caused the lights on the airplane and the air conditioning system to go off. Though at that point nobody was trying to attack the aircraft, the hijackers thought they were being attacked, and so they started to spray the cabin with automatic gunfire. They killed a number of people and very badly wounded one of the children of our senior FSN. Then the cabin crew and the passengers just started jumping out of the 747. A lot of the injuries that occurred after that were people with broken legs, because, can you imagine jumping out of a 747? There were Pakistani troops at the airport and they took over and got the hijackers. There weren't all that many American citizens on the aircraft, and I think one of them was slightly wounded. I mean the Palestinians were after Americans in particular, but it was mostly Indians and Pakistanis who were the ones who ended up being killed or injured.

In the aftermath, we were trying to get the welfare and whereabouts information on all of our citizens. Everybody was out checking hospitals and hotels. The Marine Guards were recruited to go out to the hospitals and the different places where the injured and the survivors had been taken to find the Americans and find out what had happened to them and so on. But they were being buttonholed by all of the Indians who wanted us to take care of them too. I'd get these long lists with maybe one or two Americans on them and a whole bunch of Indians. It turned out that the Department did handle all of the notifications of all of the green cardholders that we came up with.

Q: Oh boy, what happened to the hijackers?

KARAER: The hijackers were tried and put in prison in Pakistan. I think just a week or so ago, I read in the paper that one of them who'd been released from prison in Pakistan was now being sentenced in an American court. They're going to put him away for life. The FBI got to Karachi the day after the plane was released and worked with the Pakistani authorities. I don't know what happened to the other two hijackers, whether they're still in prison in Pakistan or if they've all been released.

Q: Did you have drug people, FBI, CIA and all attached to the consulate?

KARAER: We had the Agency and we had the Drug Enforcement Agency and Customs people, yes.

Q: How were relations within the consulate?

KARAER: Fine. The DEA guys were probably in the most danger of anybody on the staff. There was terrible, huge drug traffic going through Karachi and Baluchistan. The Pakistani army was right in the middle of it. Being able to actually do anything about this was pretty slim. As far as relations with the rest of us, it was fine. The consulate in Karachi at that time was I think the second or third biggest American consulate in the world because, in addition to the other agencies I mentioned, the Library of Congress had a large staff there collecting all books that are published in that part of the world. We had a group of communications technicians who were based in Karachi, but they traveled almost incessantly, fixing and installing equipment all over the Middle East and South Asia. The Consulate was bigger than a lot of our embassies, so the consul general's job as a manager was a bigger job than a number of American ambassadors would have, and the deputy principal officer's job, in some respects, was like that of a DCM. One of the things that made my job interesting in managing that place was the different cultures within our consulate. On the one hand, we had people who were really intellectually interested in the local culture, we had the just-out-of-their teens Marine Guards, and we had technical people who wanted to spend all their extra time at the club bar watching American football games. I called them the "beer and skittles group."

We had a wonderful American school there. It was really an outstanding school, and I think my kids were really lucky to have been able to go to it. Only about a third of the kids in the school were Americans, and of that third only a tiny fraction were other than ethnic Pakistanis. There were a lot of American teachers and their families there. One of the biggest communities of Americans in Karachi were teachers. My husband was running the American club, which was managed by our employee organization, but it also was the only bar in Karachi. Long before we ever got there, they had adopted a policy that anyone that had an American passport, businessmen, even merchant seamen, could use that club. It had a restaurant and a bar and a room where they showed movies. These old membership rules created a very delicate situation while I was there, because there were now quite a few ethnic Pakistani-Americans living in Karachi, running their own businesses. They wanted entry to that club. We were really worried, because as long as the place kept a low profile and nobody went stumbling drunk out into the street, the Pakistani authorities didn't give us any problem with it. We were afraid, however, that if a lot of ethnic Pakistanis began using the club, and drinking there, we would have a problem. That was never really resolved in a very satisfactory manner, although by the time I left we didn't have any real issues with the government on it.

My husband had a challenge trying to find programs that would meet the desires of such a diverse community. On the one hand, you had the beer and skittles group who only wanted a well stocked bar, access to the U.S. sports programs and darts. They wanted happy hours. My husband said, "Happy hours? They're getting drinks at the prices of duty-free booze, what on earth do they want a happy hour for except to drink too much?" Then we had the businessmen, who were using the club's restaurant as a place to entertain their contacts and wanted something a bit formal. On the other hand, you had all the teachers with their little kids who wanted a place to get hot dogs and hamburgers. Anyway, I think my husband did a great balancing act, but someone was always unhappy.

Q: How about movies because this could be a real problem because I imagine you're getting American movies and you'd find that people.

KARAER: I don't remember anybody except Americans coming to see those movies to tell you the truth.

Q: Was there any pressure to let the British or the German consulate people come in or not?

KARAER: Not when I was there. I think the British had their own club. People could bring guests, and we had a wonderful party that my husband and the Pan Am director brought off. It was an Oktoberfest party. Pan Am flew in a German oompha band and oh, boy did people have fun at that thing. Sauerkraut, the whole thing, it was really great.

Q: How about the missionaries? Were they a factor?

KARAER: I don't think we had any.

Q: I thought a couple of years ago some missionaries were killed where a Christian school was going and they tossed a grenade.

KARAER: No, that was in a church in Islamabad.

Q: Oh, it was in Islamabad.

KARAER: A State employee and her daughter was killed in that. Yes, under the circumstances that existed in Pakistan at the time, I think you'd have to be a pretty undercover missionary to be a missionary. I used to go to mass at a little Catholic Church that was near our house. I think everybody who went there were people who'd originally come from Goa.

Q: Which had been Portuguese.

KARAER: Everybody had Portuguese names in that community. All of my household help was from that community. Nobody was bothering the church, but you certainly didn't see anybody going out proselytizing outside of their own community.

Q: Was there ever any discussion among the officers there maybe with the officers at the embassy and all about why was it that India seemed to be with all its problems, it still had that multiplicity of ethnic groups and religions and all, it still seemed to have a viable democracy and Pakistan just didn't seem to be going anywhere. It just seemed to be almost descending rather than rising.

KARAER: Yes, of course, people always wondered about that. I think tribalism explains a lot of it. In Pakistan, after Jinnah died, and he died fairly shortly after the creation of the country, ethnic divisions among the Pakistanis arose almost immediately. The Sindhis and the Baluchis had always resented the incursion of the refugees from India, the Mohajirs. I think they were looked down on by the Mohajirs who were for the most part much better educated. The inclination to a military lifestyle too might have something to do with it.

Q: Well, then you left there in 1988?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: What were you looking to do?

KARAER: At that point I really wanted to get a job as a DCM. I had investigated that possibility before I left Ankara in 1983, and our DCM had encouraged me to apply for DCM positions at the time. Before I filled out my bid sheet, I looked up the DCM's listed in the current "Key Officers" booklet. We had only one female DCM in the entire Foreign Service at that time, and she was in Congo, Brazzaville.

Q: Oh boy.

KARAER: I said whoop-de-do. Then I got my chance to go to the War College, so I didn't worry about that at the time. The chance to be a deputy principal officer and do more political reporting in Karachi was a good opportunity for me, I thought, because I always had taken the position that if I wanted a job with more responsibility than what I already had, I had to sell the idea to personnel that such an assignment would be advantageous to the State Department as well as to Arma Jane Karaer. I asked for jobs to improve my knowledge of a language, or learn a new set of skills. By the time I was ready to leave Karachi, I had done every type of job in the Foreign Service except admin. I was supposed to be a consular cone officer. The Consul General was an admin cone officer. He knew through the grapevine that Mary Ryan had been named to be ambassador to Swaziland. He had written to her that she might be interested in me. Mary very much wanted to support the idea of women getting up into higher ranks. She asked for me as her DCM. I went out to Swaziland to work for Mary after I left Karachi.

Q: You did that from when to when?

KARAER: From 1988 until the summer of '91. I was there three years.

Q: All right. Well, I think this is probably a good place to stop here and we'll pick this up in 1988 when you're off to Swaziland which I would have thought was you know, you might say you're DCM which sounds great, but you've had a hell of a lot more responsibility as deputy principal officer in a very large consul ate general.

KARAER: But a DCM is a DCM, and you get to be the ambassador when the ambassador is not there. As it turned out, I was Charge there for nine months.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up at that point.

Q: Today is July 7th, 2004. Arma Jane, Swaziland in 1988. What was it like? What was Swaziland and what was going on there?

KARAER: Swaziland is a tiny little country that no one else has ever heard of, but at the time it was a very interesting place to be because South Africa was an important place as far as American foreign policy was concerned and Swaziland is surrounded on three sides by South Africa. The fourth side is covered by Mozambique which was another important area of instability. Swaziland was a place from which to watch South Africa. It was also a unique place because it's one of the very few genuine kingdoms left in the world. The concept of African kingship was a very peculiar thing and I had to read up on it as fast as I could when I got there in order to understand how the monarchy affected the thinking of the people there and their reaction to the movement towards genuine democracy that was going on in South Africa.

Q: Well, tell me, what were you getting about the king and his subjects and all that at that time?

KARAER: At the time, the King Mswati III was a rather new king. He was just barely 20 years old. His father, King Sobhuza, was legendary, had ruled for many years and was much loved by his subjects. He had been quite clever in handling the relationship between the South Africans and the British, who had been the colonial power there. When King Sobhuza, who had 50-some wives and countless numbers of children, died, it was decided that this particular boy was the one that was best suited to be the next king. This is decided by the royal family and their advisors, the people that I call "the old men in skins" because they wore leopard skin loin cloths and feathers in their hair. They were truly something out of Rider Haggard. The boy had been sent to England to high school. The original idea, we were told, was that he would stay there until he had at least passed his O levels and was mature enough to take over as king, but when Sobhuza died, there was a lot of palace intrigue over the succession. Fearing that there might be some kind of palace coup in favor of another of the many many princes that were available to be king, they brought him back to Swaziland early. What they had here was a sweet-natured young boy who had just barely finished two years of high school. Swaziland, perhaps uniquely in Africa, has a well-educated population. The majority of the people below 35 had at least a high school education. Swaziland is not a wealthy country, but, until AIDs came along, it was a very comfortable little country. It has enough export crops to make a good income for the country, and most of the people at that time were still living in rural situations, but they had their own cattle, their own fields and everybody had enough to eat. Basic government services, like education, were available.

The royal traditions were fascinating. If you remember any Rider Haggard that you may have read....

Q: She and King Solomon's Mines.

KARAER: She. Remember She was a beautiful queen. In Rider Haggard's books, and in the movies they made out of those stories, she was a beautiful woman...

Q: Helen Gahagan Douglas I think was in the silent one.

KARAER: ... and not only beautiful, but white and beautiful for some weird reason.

Q: Of course.

KARAER: Well, those stories have a basis in African tradition, but none of the queens were white. According to southern African tradition, the kings' mothers have certain powers, particularly power over the rain, which in an agricultural society is extraordinarily important. There are a lot of ceremonies that are done every year around the king and around the queen mother, whose title in Siswati, their language, is "The Great She Elephant." Now you know that in the United States some in the African-American community have created a celebration at the end of the year called Kwanza. This idea is taken from African tradition. Every year, at the time of the full moon that comes between Christmas and New Year, they have ceremonies that go on for several days. In Swaziland, at least, the purpose of the ceremonies is to renew the spiritual and temporal powers of the king. The fertility of the land, the fertility of the cattle, the fertility of the people depends on the success of these ceremonies. Most Swazis belong to some Christian sect or another and Mswati's mother is a practicing Methodist. However, when Mswati became king, the old men in skins decreed that he could not belong to any particular church or religion because that would be wrong for his people. He was the king of all his people who belonged to many different sects. He had to concentrate on the beliefs of the ancestors. One of the great things about serving in that place was to be able to see those ceremonies. The great ceremony at the end of the year is called the Mqwala.

Q: You gave a nice little click in there.

KARAER: Well, not so nice, but it's sort of like that.

Q: Is it a click language?

KARAER: There are some clicks in it. Their language has absorbed some of the ingredients of the other surrounding languages. At the Mqwala men come from all over the kingdom with the great cowhide shields. They tie cow tail decorations on their ankles and their wrists, wear tremendous feather headdresses, and carry spears. They dance in the king's cattle corral. The cattle corral is the focus of the nation's togetherness you might say, and also had been the focus of the economy of the Swazi community before they were introduced into the industrial economy of southern Africa. During the first days of the ceremony, the king is kept secluded in a special hut built for this purpose. He really gets to see no one during a great part of that time except the old men in the skins, who rub him with strange stuff and make him drink potions which apparently are something akin to "eye of newt, tongue of frog." In reading the history of Swaziland, I began to see that Mqwala was a time when the traditionalists in Swazi society had real control over the king. There was one point in the 19th Century when a young king, who had been quite brash and stupid and had allowed some people to be killed on his behalf, was in danger of being arraigned for murder by the British colonial authorities. The old men in skins got very worried that he was going to destroy the monarchy. No one will ever know what actually happened, but at the Mqwala that year this young, healthy man just dropped dead. Well, if I were in a position where I had to drink 20 mystery potions, I would be seriously concerned that they could and would poison me if I didn't do what they wanted me to do. That is always hanging over any king's head.

They also started marrying him. The kings of Swaziland are supposed to have a number of wives. In the past, southern African kings married many women for political alliances. By the late 20th century, this tradition had become pretty much just a way for these traditionalists to control a very young king. Here is a 20-something who gets the pick of all the pretty girls of the kingdom. Which one do you want? Well, the first one that he married was the daughter of an Episcopal priest. She appeared to be quite intelligent and strong minded. In the beginning, the young couple said they were not going to follow the tradition. The King was going to be monogamous. After a while he was persuaded that that was not going to be good for the kingdom, and he needed to have more wives. Usually the wife is chosen at the Reed Dance. All the young, unmarried women gather at the queen mother's cattle corral and they dance. They're absolutely lovely. Swazi women particularly, when they're young and they haven't gone to fat yet, are truly beautiful women. They wear pretty feathers in their hair and for ceremonial occasions are always bare breasted. They dance, the king watches, and picks the one he likes best. Traditionally, his representatives then go to the girl's family, make an agreement and bring the girl to his mother's home. He then visits with the girl until she becomes pregnant, and then, and only then, does he marry her. Wherever the king goes for ceremonial purposes, his wives and pre-wives accompany him. The married women wear a particular headdress, and the ones who aren't married yet a little halo of red feathers, so you know which one is which.

Recently, according to newspaper articles, Mswati has been accused of taking girls whose parents weren't all that willing. They say that girls are just being snatched, kidnapped and taken away. In fact recently there were a couple of paragraphs in our newspapers about a girl who was taken right from her school and her mother said she had never agreed to this. In the end, the girl said she wanted to stay with the king.

As the years have passed, it appears that Mswati, who started out as a sweet, wide-eyed boy, just became fatter and was sucked into this wine, women and song thing. If this in fact is what has happened to him, its really sad. Even in my time there, the educated people of his own generation in Swaziland, the university students for example, didn't respect him. They had much more education than he did. This too was a problem. However, during the time I was there I think things got much worse.

Q: How old was the king when you were there approximately?

KARAER: Well, we went to the big 21st birthday bash that they had for him.

Q: Oh, so he was young.

KARAER: Yes, he was about 20 when I got there. I think he was about 22 when I left. The Department's policy at that time was to foster stability in that part of the world. Well that's fine in theory, but the very existence of the United States of America and everything it stands for is in total contradiction to stability in a South African monarchy. Secondly, whatever the United States may say or do, once real democracy came to South Africa, and the black South Africans were truly free to choose their own government, the people in Swaziland were not going to be satisfied to be told what to do by an uneducated king and a bunch of old men in skins. We were already seeing signs of this bubbling up. However, even when we talked to some of the most radical leaders of those who wanted to have democracy in Swaziland, while they were critical of the king and the way that the country was being run, they didn't really want to get rid of the king. This was because the existence of the monarchy was the thing that made Swazis special, that differentiated them from the great mass of black African groups all around them. They were torn between wanting to keep this thing which made them special and wanting to have a true, democratic government.

Q: I must say looking at the neighborhood, irrespective of South Africa, Mozambique had a horrible civil war going. You had presidents for life up in Zambia and Zimbabwe was not great. These weren't any great examples of democracy at work.

KARAER: Yes, but there was this tremendous expectation in South Africa. While I was there, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the reforms started in South Africa that led up to the elections that turned South Africa into a real democracy. That was a thrilling time to be there. I remember the speculation about whether or not they going to let Mandela out. The capital of Swaziland is Mbabane. It's a tiny little town with one modern shopping center. One Saturday morning I was walking through the shopping center and overheard two of the shopkeepers talking. One was a British South African lady who ran a gift shop and the other was a British South African man who ran a bookshop. His bookshop specialized in books about Southern Africa. Right in the front of her store was a table that had a selection of T-shirts that all had "Free Nelson Mandela" printed on them. I heard her say to him, half jokingly, "What are we going to do if they release Nelson Mandela?" because they'd made careers out of leading the campaign to set him free. The day that De Klerc, the president of South Africa, spoke to the parliament about his decision to release Nelson Mandela, I drove over to the FBIS office to watch the session on television. (FBIS is the US government agency that collects intelligence from open broadcasts and publications. The office in Mbabane covered all of southern Africa.) Until then, I didn't realize that speakers in the South African parliament would switch back and forth between English and Afrikaans as the mood struck them. I don't speak Afrikaans, so FBIS was the perfect place to go. During the broadcast, I'd watch De Klerc speak in English on the television set and then, when he switched to Afrikaans, I'd stand behind the translator who was typing out the translation as he heard it on the earphones and follow the speech that way. It was really thrilling. That was the same year that they were tearing down the wall in Berlin..

Q: '89.

KARAER: The world was full of people just wanting to be free. It was really exciting.

Q: What were we doing or what were you doing and we as a country doing in Swaziland?

KARAER: We had quite a substantial AID mission there, an AID mission that was really fun for everybody to work with, I think, because Swaziland was a pretty well run little country and so the aid programs that we were financing there were accomplishing something. The Ambassador would just go from the opening of one project to another, talking with the women who were the projects. She could just move all over the country seeing all this good stuff that was going on.

We had a small USIS operation. I had a chance to meet and hear some wonderful American choral groups perform because in Southern Africa, that's the favorite musical form for Southern Africans. Well, that and reggae. They have wonderful choral music of their own and we got to see Sweet Honey in the Rock when they came here under the USIS program. I mentioned last time that I ended up being the Charge there for quite a long time because around the end of the first year that I was there, Mary Ryan was asked to come back to Washington to be the senior deputy in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Q: You were saying Mary Ryan was called back?

KARAER: Yes, they asked her to come back to be the senior deputy in consular affairs. She left around just the beginning of the year. She had to take at least two trips back to Washington for those consultations. It was during one of her trips that the Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerby.

Q: Scotland, yes.

KARAER: I always listened to the Voice of America while I was eating my breakfast. That morning, the day after Mary had left us, I turned on the radio and they were announcing this disaster. I thought, "Oh my God!" I didn't know what the number of her flight was. As it turned out, I think her flight was one or two just before the one that had been targeted. But I was sitting there crying over my cornflakes and trying to get the admin officer on the phone to see if he knew what her flight number was. Anyway, she agreed to go back, and the Department was not in a position to send a new ambassador out right away because this was very unexpected as far as the African Bureau was concerned. I ended up being the Charge there for about nine months until Steve Rogers, who had been the head of the economic section in Pretoria, came out to take over.

Q: At the time you were there, where did Swaziland fit into the confrontations business with South Africa, the bordering states of South Africa?

KARAER: The Swazis walked very cautiously in this regard. The three most important missions in Mbabane were the South African one, the British, who'd been the former colonial power, and the Americans, because of our big AID mission and Peace Corps mission. The Swazis followed the policy that King Sobhuza had followed. You don't knuckle under to the foreigners, but you didn't prod the sleeping lion either, so to speak. They knew what South Africa could do to them if they tried to make any trouble. There had been incidents of South African political activists who had tried to run away and hide in Swaziland and who were pushed back over the border. They said, no, you go fight your own fights. On the other hand, there was definitely resentment of South Africa in the Swazi population. This got poor Steve Rogers into a momentary pickle. He ran. That was his sport.

Q: Like jogging or running.

KARAER: Yes. The South African embassy sponsored a run shortly after he got there. He participated in it. A lot of people did, including Swazis, but the local newspaper criticized him for participating. The local newspaper being among those who were pro-democracy and pro-reform in South Africa. We had a very interesting diplomatic corps. In addition to the ones that I mentioned, there was an Israeli ambassador there, Swaziland being one of the few states in Africa that had recognized Israel. We had a Taiwanese ambassador there, so we had to be careful that we didn't go to the home of the Taiwanese ambassador, for example, and that we didn't accidentally accept invitations to some sort of Taiwanese national celebration.

Q: I imagine, how about relations in Mozambique?

KARAER: They were fine. They had an ambassador there and they also had a number of refugee camps. The Mozambiquan refugees were quite quiescent, well-behaved folks. Toward the end of my stay there were some people who came up from Natal, South Africa, who declared themselves refugees and this caused a lot of heartburn in the Swazi government. As I recall, these people moved on voluntarily up to Zambia before it came to the point where the Swazis had to tell them they had to go back to South Africa. The Swazis did not want them staying there. One of the places that I visited several times while I was doing political reporting was a camp in central Swaziland run by CARITAS. The Mozambiquans would come in with their families and settle down and be grateful for what they were given. But the minute that these young rebels from Natal showed up it was, "What, you expect me to eat this kind of food? Only peasants eat this kind of food." That kind of stuff. It was really touch and go. Of course the people running the camp had nothing to say about it, but they certainly didn't want to see these young people sent back to the arms of the police in Natal. On the other hand, the rebels right away tried to agitate among the Mozambicans.

Q: How were our relations at that time with South Africa as reflected in Swaziland?

KARAER: They were all right. I got on. I didn't have any problem with the South African high commissioner. We went to all of the ceremonial occasions and vice versa. Of course this was during the De Klerc regime. De Klerc was really loosening the place up, getting them ready for the idea that apartheid could not stand. In fact we and the Swazis needed the help of the South Africans. For example, a group of young people from an evangelical group in the United States had come to Swaziland during summer vacation to work with villagers and refugees. They had barely gotten there. I don't think they had been in town for a week, and they were taken on an excursion to see one of the beautiful waterfalls just below the mountains. One of these young men walked out to the edge of the waterfall, got swept over and was lost. I had my consular officer out with the police who were searching the banks of the river trying to find the body. A group of amateur scuba divers in Mbabane had offered to search the pool around the bottom of the waterfall, but they realized that, since it was a very high waterfall and the pressure of that water coming down is tremendous, they did not have the skill or the equipment that was necessary to search the very bottom of the waterfall where the body was probably still trapped. I called the South African High Commissioner and asked him whether rescue squads from South Africa might be able to help. I had checked this with the Swazi Foreign Ministry, and they had no problem with the South Africans coming to help. The South African divers came in and found the boy's body. It was that kind of cooperation.

Mbabane was a very pleasant place to live, not only because the Swazis are lovely people and it's a comfortably off little country, but also because their trade was almost totally with South Africa. They have no sea port of their own. In our little shopping center we had all the goodies that you could find in the cities of South Africa.

Q: What about you had the Peace Corps there?

KARAER: Yes we did.

Q: I would think this would be a great place to be a Peace Corps volunteer.

KARAER: Yes, I think the Peace Corps volunteers thought so too.

Q: What about did you get African Americans coming there as a?

KARAER: We had African Americans on our staff and on the Peace Corps and in the AID staff. I don't think USIS had any while I was there.

Q: I was wondering more of coming from the United States. It wasn't, it had not been a source of forced migration slavery to the United States, so there wasn't that kind of tie there. What about visitors? When you're in a nice place with beautiful scenery and all I would think you would get quite a few official visitors who just have to see.

KARAER: We didn't have that many. When the king had his 21st birthday, they invited the President to come and President Bush decided to send a friend of his who, as I recall, was a businessman and a very sweet man. I remember thinking that if the President's friends are all as nice as this man, President Bush must really be a nice man too. He stuck it out with Mary in the VIP section up there in the stadium when we had all the ceremonies for the king's birthday.

Q: When visitors would come, I mean with some official rank or something, would you take them to meet the king and all?

KARAER: Yes, those people met the king. We had some people from AID doing research on further projects that might be done there. We met with the king. The British had provided the king with the services of an aide de camp who was a young officer in the Gurkha Rifles. He had served in a couple of other exotic spots and he was sent to sort of be the voice of the modern world in the palace. I think he did a good job. He called me one day after Steve Rogers had had his hearing with the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. The local newspaper had published the gist of the interview. Steve had been asked about the human rights situation in the country, and he had given a general and correct statement about how things were. You know, in short, not terrible, but could be improved. Well, the aide called me up and said, "Arma Jane, the king wants to know what this is all about. Why is the new ambassador appointee saying these things?" I said I'd be happy to explain.

The king has palaces, but they're just like big houses. I met with him at the main "palace." The only other person in the room was the aide. The king was sitting on his "throne", a nice chair on a slightly raised dais, and I had a chair next to him. I explained first of all why these senators are concerned about human rights all over the world, not just in Swaziland, and what the ambassador designate had meant by what he said. I explained to him that the idea of freedom of speech is extremely important to us. We think that's the core of our democratic freedom, and that freedom of speech is necessary everywhere where there's a democracy. "You should be very proud that you have such a high rate of literacy and level of education among your people, but one thing that we all have to remember is that if you teach a man to read you teach him to think. Once he starts thinking for himself he wants to be able to express his own thoughts about how he thinks things should be. That's why freedom of speech is so important, and that's why this has become very important in Swaziland, too." He said, "Well, I let my people say what they think. We have " the peoples" parliament." This is a public gathering held at the grace and pleasure of the king, to which every adult in the kingdom men and women, can come and say whatever is on their mind. The king, or his representatives, and its usually his representatives, the old men in skins, sit there and listen. The pledge on the king's part is that nothing that you say there will cause you to have any problem with the government. You can say whatever you think. King Mswati already had a couple of them in the time I was there, which was unprecedented. Anyway, when he said, "I have the peoples parliament, " I said, "Yes, you do, but we think that freedom of speech is so important that you can't just save it for special occasions. It has to be all the time." In the end we agreed to disagree, but it didn't affect Steve's appointment.

Q: Were there any other either incidents, visits or occurrences that happened while you were there? It sounds just too idyllic.

KARAER: Just before Mary left, the king had let the Embassies know that he was open to invitations from them to come to their homes for dinner. The first person to have entertained him that way was the British High Commissioner. One of Mary's last instructions to me before she left was, "Don't forget to have the king to dinner." We had a dinner at the ambassador's residence. At first I thought, "Oh, dear, what am I going to serve this man?" Because the Swazis, Southern Africans in general, love meat. If all you do is serve them meat, that's going to do it for them, but the British had already had the roast beef, so what were we going to do. My husband said, "Why don't you have an American Thanksgiving dinner kind of menu?" So, we got a turkey and tarted up some mashed pumpkin. He loved it. He brought some of his brothers with him as well as the British aide. All the people at the table with us were used to eating with foreigners, but we'd been warned by the aide that the drivers, page boys and the police who came with him as his bodyguard would also have to be fed. We fixed them a big beef stew and served them on the porch behind the kitchen. We were also warned that they would ask for alcohol and that whatever else happened, there was to be no alcohol for them. I had told my servants, "I don't care what they say, you don't give it to them and if there's more than you can handle, you come and see me, and I'll talk to them." They did, but the staff handled them well.

I had also warned the ambassador's cook, a sweet man who, when he was sober, was a pretty decent cook. As soon as we knew the king was coming, I went over to tell him that we were going to entertain the king and that my cook would come to help. "However", I said, "While we're getting ready, you are to have nothing to drink. I don't care what you do when the party is over, but nothing to at the party, do you understand me?" "Yes, madam.." His bad habit was that when the half-empty glasses were brought back into the kitchen he would drink what was in them.

Q: Well, of course.

KARAER: We had a good time that night with the king.

Q: Did he bring any wives?

KARAER: Not to that. He started sending his wives to the national day receptions, but the wives couldn't just mingle. They had to have a special place. The king, himself, didn't come to the national day receptions. He sent a representative. In my case, I had the reception in the garden, but the wives were entertained inside the house. Those poor young girls had very little chance to go out and see the world. Let's see what else did we do? Oh, the Peace Corps invited the king to a dance they arranged at the USIS director's house. It was well known that the king had dance parties at the palace where he and his wives and young people that they invited played CDs and danced. Then it became even further known that the old men in skins thought that it was unseemly for the king to do that kind of dancing. The poor king then became the first disc jockey of the nation, and he played the CDs while everybody else danced. Anyway, the king came with his entourage to the Peace Corps party. The Volunteers had assembled music that they had heard that he liked. Rap was pretty new at that time, and he liked rap.. I'm an old lady. I'm never going to get used to rap, but for three or four hours listened to this stuff, bang, bang, bang. I told the USIS director, "The things I do for my country!" Of course the king was accompanied by the old men in skins, who sat around in a semi-circle. When my husband asked one of the king's brothers what we could offer them to drink, they said, "Milk toddies." This is milk with whiskey in it. I'd never heard of this one before, but fine, we had milk, we had whiskey, so there they sat primly on the edge of their seats drinking their milk toddies.

Q: Did the young Peace Corps ladies get offered marriage?

KARAER: No, no. That was only the Swazi girls.

Q: How about the old men in skins. Did you see any change in them? In other words, were some educated people entering those ranks?

KARAER: Well, not the old men in skins per se, that is the ones who hung out at the palace and supposedly were his advisors, but the king was also advised by his brothers and uncles, some of whom were well-educated, fine men, and some of whom were awful crooks. Some of the chiefs were important too, in fact as well as in theory. In the Swazi feudal structure the king names the chiefs. Their positions are usually hereditary, but nevertheless, they have to have the blessing of the king. All the land in the country belongs to the king in theory. He can give it to others to use, but he can't sell it. He apportions the land to the chiefs to administer. So if a man comes tells a chief, "I will be your man," then the chief gives him a place to build his house and to make his vegetable gardens, and he has the right to graze his cattle on the common ground that belongs to the whole chiefdom. That's the traditional way things are supposed to work. I had read enough history of Southern Africa to know how these chiefdoms worked before the Western powers took over these countries. If you read the history of Shaka, the founder of the Zulu nation, one of the things that apparently made Shaka such a sociopath was the way he and his mother were treated because she bore a child out of wedlock to a prince of the nation that they belonged to at the time. This was a very uncommon thing, because, while men and women had sexual relations out of wedlock, and that was okay, they were supposed to tale steps to make sure that there were no pregnancies, or, if there were, the man would marry the woman and take her in as part of his harem. Well, I don't remember the reasons why Shaka's father didn't do this, but anyway, she was thrown out of her community and they were looked down upon for this.

By the end of the 20th century there were a tremendous amount of children born out of wedlock all over Southern Africa. The men took the traditional attitude that the more children and women that I can show that I have, the greater man I am. On the other hand, the cultural pressures had dissolved that had made these men take care of their families in the past. Secondly, having a lot of kids in the 20th Century economy was a totally different story than it was in the 19th Century economy, because the more kids you had in the 19th Century economy, the more kids you had to take care of the cattle and to take care of the fields. The more women you had, the more working hands there were in the family. Now, in Swaziland, having a lot of kids had become a huge economic burden. You had to send those kids to school and you had to pay for their books and their shoes and their uniforms, and so, all of a sudden, having a lot of children was no longer an advantage. So, things were falling apart. They were finding abandoned newborn babies. There was a lot of dismay and preaching about the dissolution of our society, but not much else was being done about it. However, one of the chiefs tried to use his authority to bring some order to his community. When a girl was found to be pregnant, she and her parents, if they lived in his domain, were brought before him and he wanted to know who the father was and who was going to take care of this baby. He was making all of this public, using shame to try to force people to be responsible. In Mbabane modern Swazis said he was old fashioned and narrow minded., but I thought that he was a man who was trying to keep some responsibility in the community.

Of course the Swazis have a government and a parliament. The parliament got elected and met. The trouble was that nothing that they did stuck, unless the king agreed to it. The government included some very capable people. There was a wonderful prime minister that was chosen by the king while I was there. He had been active in the labor unions for a long time, which was something that was not approved of by the old men in skins or the foreign investors who had businesses in Swaziland, and he had dropped out of political activity for a while. Then one day they needed a new prime minister and this man was chosen. The embassies were all calling each other. Who is this guy? Nobody knew him. I went into my shabby little file room and thought, "well, we keep these darn files forever, let's see if anybody knew him. One of the things that made this task difficult is that about ï¿½ of the people in Swaziland have the same surname, Dlamini. So, I dug among the hundreds of Dlaminis in the bio-file and found out we had sent him to the United States on a USIS travel grant, but so long ago that nobody currently in the Embassy remembered him. Thanks to my farsighted former colleagues, I was able to tell the other embassies who he was. Following his appointment, we were all were invited to come and meet the new prime minister. When I walked into his office, this man who I'd never met before, said, "The United States. I love the United States!" One of the best things we have ever done to further our ability to do useful diplomacy around the world is that program. However Americans may be perceived when they're overseas, they're really good at home, and to have people see us at home doing our thing is the best advertising we could ever have for our country and our way of life.

Q: Absolutely. Well, then, having left this high pressure post, what happened?

KARAER: Oh, well, I had asked for my next to be in the United States, because my oldest daughter had finished two years of high school in Swaziland and now she really wanted to experience an American high school.

Q: What sort of school was there?

KARAER: Waterford Kamhlaba, which is one of the United World Colleges schools. It's an international school that was founded by a British organization. It had been originally set up as a quality high school for black South Africans. By the time we got there, most of the kids in the school were African, but were from pretty much all over Africa, and then there were a handful of European kids and some American kids from the American Embassy and some missionary families.

Q: So, what'd you get?

KARAER: I took a job with INR, the Intelligence and Research Bureau, that provided special administrative services. It gave me the opportunity now to work in the fourth cone. I had already done consular, economic and political, and now I did fundamentally administrative. When I first came into it, I thought, "Oh, good grief, what am I doing here?" But my forte, if I say so myself, is management. I really had a great time working with the people who were running the administrative offices of the Department of State and some other government agencies. There are a lot of fine people in the admin cone, and learning how to manage our rules and regulations and actually get something done was quite a revelation to me.

Q: Well, you did this from '91 to when?

KARAER: '91 to '93 and then in '93 I went to Helsinki.

Q: During this time from '91 to '93, this is the sort of the, this is still the Bush I years essentially.

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Were you feeling the pinch? You know, during the Bush I years and the Clinton years the State Department was not well served by secretaries of State as regards resources and all. Maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong, but James Baker and then Warren Christopher were far more interested in foreign affairs than in running the Department and Congress was not very interested in giving us money. Did you feel this?

KARAER: Well, in fairness to the Secretaries of State, I think it was the policies of the Presidents at that time to slim down the government which was to blame. We were supposed to make government smaller and more efficient. The huge burden that was put on the State Department at that time was that while we were all for efficiency, I think, it was also the time when the Soviet Union broke into pieces. It was also decreed by our political leaders that we were to have representation in all of the new countries that sprang out of the former Soviet Union. We had a tremendous drain on resources, because we needed to run the programs and embassies that we already had and at the same time set up new embassies in places that were very difficult to live in.

Q: The Stans and all that.

KARAER: Yes, right. That was hard. I was working in INR when the wars in the Balkans broke out in the former Yugoslavia, and trying to get people out there in a big hurry to deal with these issues was something that my office dealt with. I need clearances on just about everything that I did at that time from the desk that handled Yugoslavia. I think those people must have worked 24 hours a day during that period, but so often there was nobody in the office. They were at meetings, but I would have a guy from another agency on the telephone screaming that he had to get people a plane by tomorrow, but I couldn't get the necessary signature because the staff were meeting about some horrible crisis that had just arisen. One time I found myself standing in the middle of the office in the European Bureau's administrative section just screaming saying, "What do you mean he hasn't had time to sign this yet? This has got to be done in an hour. I want a signature!" The executive director came our and said, "Arma Jane, calm down." It was like that. Some people were sort of droning away, business as usual in little cubbyholes, and you had this feeling that out there in the greater world something awful was going on and we had to get moving.

I also had I had a lot of G.S. employees working for me.

Q: This is civil service?

KARAER: Yes. They worked an eight-hour day, and the first couple of months that I had that job, I had this horrible feeling of guilt as I walked out of the State Department at 5:30 knowing that upstairs all of these people were going to work there until 8:00 at night. On the other hand, it was foolish to say, "We're going to sit here in solidarity, because you had to work with all of these other administrative offices, and if they'd gone home, you couldn't do anything useful anyway. It introduced me to the issue of the great divide in the State Department between the Civil Service employees and the Foreign Service employees. All of the bosses in my section were Foreign Service, and I believe that they truly wanted to connect with the Civil Service employees. But the Civil Service employees had a chip on their shoulder, claiming that they were looked down on by the Foreign Service. When they were invited to an all-Division office party they wouldn't go. "They really don't want us there." I did a lot of staff meetings with my people showing that I wanted to be with them, and then I'd bring my boss into the meetings so he could meet them and they could see each other. I don't know how much of this was just based on reality and how much of it was something that was built up in people's minds on the basis of very little. It was a major management thing that I had to deal with.

Q: I know how, I was sort of hit when I came back and I was dealing with civil service. Granted these are basically secretaries, but the fact that I'd hear them chatting. They'd talk about how many hours of leave they had and you know, I mean, in the Foreign Service you never really think about this because you're not counting hours. You just kind of work until the time is done and sometimes overly long I have to say. I thought it was quite a different attitude.

KARAER: But, you know, Stu, I think too the Foreign Service had a ridiculous attitude, too and this was.

Q: Let me.

Q: This is tape nine, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. Yes?

KARAER: You know that there was this tradition in the Foreign Service when you were overseas that on the weekends, for example, officers were just expected to show up in their offices, even if they didn't have anything to do except read the newspaper, but they were supposed to be there just in case somebody wanted to see them. If you weren't there that implied that you weren't important. Okay, that's number one. Number two. We had distinct family problems throughout the Service to a certain extent because of this attitude. You've got family members very often living in situations that are very difficult for them to deal with, and while the employee can go to the office and work with Americans essentially in an American environment, the spouse is out there 24 hours a day in something that's not an American environment. That was very hard on a lot of people and on a lot of marriages.

Then top that with the dominant self-selected personality trait found in the Foreign Service. I'm not making this up. Someone did research based on the Meyers Briggs personality evaluation. There's a very high percentage in the Foreign Service of personality types who have the attitude that there's nothing they can't do. They believe that there's nothing they can't accomplish, and they will always take on more and more tasks. That's wonderful, except that means that if you are the boss, you are taking on those tasks for everyone who works under you. Everybody works longer and longer hours all the time, often preparing briefing books that get written and written and rewritten at every stage they go up the clearing process. Pretty soon you are making up things that do not need to be done anymore. I made up my mind, having suffered through that sort of situation when I was on the Turkish desk, and watching this sort of thing go on in the embassies that I served in, if I ever had the responsibility, I am was going to make sure that when we worked, we worked for a reason, and when there was no work to do, we wouldn't come to work. That was my philosophy. When I was the DCM in Helsinki, when I was the Ambassador in Port Moresby, that if I saw people staying after hours I would talk to them. "Are you here because there's really something to do? You didn't tell me there was something to do. How come I don't know about it? Go home to your wife." Some of them stayed because they didn't want to go home, I guess.

Q: I was a consular officer and I was in Belgrade and I had some very high powered people who were junior officers including Larry Eagleburger and others, all of whom became ambassadors and I didn't, but I was in charge of the consular section. I would come in when there was a problem on the weekend. Other than that I could go home, but they waited around for the DCM or the ambassador. Somebody would say, the ambassador's not coming. Everybody would shut their newspaper and leave. This was on a Saturday. It was crazy.

KARAER: Yes. We've had more discussion of this problem in the Foreign Service Journal and in training courses. It's the responsibility of the DCM and the Ambassador to make sure that there is good morale, good family life and a good mental health situation at post. Not just having everybody bowing and scraping just because you happen to be in the office and you expect everybody else to be there.

Q: After this INR experience, did you get any feel for where INR at this particular time fitted into the policy, the rest of the State Department, vis-ï¿½-vis the geographic bureaus and all that? I mean as far as allocation of resources, did this come up at all or not?

KARAER: We were a very special mob in my particular division, and we were serving other agencies who never seemed to be without money.

Q: Well, then in 19 when, 1995 or 6 or when did you go to Helsinki?

KARAER: '93.

Q: Oh, '93 you went to Helsinki?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point and then we can pick it up how you were selected and when you went and all that.

KARAER: Okay. Yes.

Q: Today is July 14th, 2004. How did you get the Helsinki job? It was DCM, wasn't it?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: How did that come about?

KARAER: Well, I had applied for the DCM position in Helsinki as well as a number of others. The DCM Committee put me on the list for Helsinki and for Cameroon. Then I got a call in late November asking me if I would be interested in being nominated for the senior seminar. They said that the seminar was already full, but that people always dropped out at the last minute, so I would have a pretty good chance, but if I opted for the seminar, which might not be decided until spring, I could be dropped off the DCM list. I decided to take the chance on the senior seminar. Shortly afterward, the ambassador-designate for Cameroon offered me her DCM position, but she said she could wait until the end of December for my decision. Well, about two weeks later, a friend in EUR/EX asked me why my name had been taken off the DCM list for Helsinki, and a couple days later I get a call saying, "Oh, too bad, the senior seminar is no longer an option, but we understand that you have been offered DCM in Cameroon, so it's okay isn't it?" I said, "Hey, wait a minute. I thought this was going to take a while to see if anybody dropped out of the senior seminar, but that has been resolved as soon as my name was dropped from the Helsinki DCM list. What's going on?" Then the personnel officer said something that I thought was fishy. He said, "Well, I didn't have anything to do with it."

I was pretty mad, but I had no idea what to do. Instead of stewing, I went downstairs to cash a check at the Credit Union. I think my guardian angel was watching over my shoulder, because in the Credit Union I ran into Mary Ryan, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary in EUR. I told her what happened. I said, "Maybe I'm just being paranoid, but I think something's fishy." She said, "So do I." She talked to the people in the Director General's office, and she called the ambassador in Helsinki. John told her that his first pick for DCM had taken a job elsewhere. His second pick was me, but that the Department had told him that I was no longer available, and guess who the next person on the list for Helsinki was? It was somebody who worked in the Director General's office. She told the senior DAS in personnel that she thought that I was owed an explanation. When I talked with him, he swore on a stack of bibles that there was nothing fishy about all this, but if the Ambassador in Helsinki wanted me, they would assign me there.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

KARAER: John Kelly, who was formerly the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs in the Department. I called my husband, and I said, "Look, we've got a choice of good weather and little civilization or bad weather and a lot of civilization, what do you think we should go for this time?" He said, "I think we should try civilization." We'd done more of our share of developing countries. That's how I ended up going to Helsinki. That was the one and only time that I ran into high jinks in the personnel system. There's so much going on under the surface that the people who are bidding on their jobs don't know about. The system can be fiddled with.

Q: I'm trying to think back. You know, I've done hundreds of these interviews and I think I ran into one man who was lodging a suit about that. He claimed he was being discriminated against because I think it was Kelly had said he wanted a woman to be his DCM.

KARAER: I never heard about this.

Q: Okay, it may be my facts are wrong, but that because by putting in a telegram that he wanted a woman was obviously sex discrimination, however you want to do it. It was called a reverse discrimination suit and I don't think it went anywhere, but you never heard of that?

KARAER: No, not a thing.

Q: And maybe I'm wrong. It may have been another time, another place.

KARAER: Yes.

Q: Anyway, your suspicion is that somebody in the director general's office was trying to manipulate things so that he or she could get the job.

KARAER: It certainly looked that way. They said that it was just coincidental that it had come up like that, but the fact that they had immediately whisked me off the list for Helsinki, but left me on for Cameroon, I thought was indicative of bad faith. Anyway, this was going to be my first time in Europe although I of course had tours in Turkey. I went with a little bit of trepidation, because I had worked in EUR when John Kelly was the senior deputy. John had a reputation for having an extraordinarily short fuse.

Q: Yes.

KARAER: But, I was assured by the man I was replacing that he had mellowed considerably. He was right. I had an extraordinary experience from the point of view of learning to run an embassy from working in Helsinki. For the first half of my three-year tour I worked for John Kelly who was the quintessential professional. After John left, the Clinton administration appointed a man named Derek Shearer, who was a professor at Occidental College in California, to be the next ambassador. Derek is a genuine FOB (Friend of Bill) and had worked on Clinton's previous campaigns, including the campaign that elected him. I think Derek was a good example of how a political appointee can do well in an embassy. He let the Foreign Service people do their jobs. At the same time, he used his connections both in academia and in the press to further U.S. policies in Finland. His brother is a journalist and their father was the original editor of Parade Magazine, so they had a lot of personal acquaintances among the top-level press. Derek used the people that he knew, "Come and stay with me in my beautiful house in Helsinki," and when they came they would get worked to death holding seminars. We used to laugh, because he'd bring all of these top bureaucrats or journalists or business people or whoever from the Finnish community over for a talk and a lunch, and then he'd hand out all kinds of articles that he'd had copied for background reading. He ran it just like a professor runs a seminar. He's a very charming man. Actually it worked out well. He had special contacts that a person who had spent their entire career in the Foreign Service wouldn't necessarily have, and at the same time he let each of us run our organizations the way our organizations expected them to be run. I worked really closely with the military attaches and with our USIS office on programs that supported our country program in Finland.

Q: Well, let's start, 1993 when you arrived, what was the political and sort of international system as regards Finland?

KARAER: Well, of course, now the Soviet Union was gone and the Finns found the international relations shoe on the other foot. During the Cold War they had been very careful not to offend the Soviet Union, but now Finland was in the ascendant in that relationship. By 1993, more and more Russians were coming into town looking for stuff to buy and Finns were exploring new business relationships with the Russians. They were the ones that had the goodies and the Russians didn't. At the same time, the Finnish economy was in very bad shape. Their unemployment rate was between 14% and 16%, really bad, but because of their very lavish social safety net, the impact of that kind of unemployment wasn't as apparent as it would have been in countries that didn't have so much unemployment insurance.

The reason that the Finnish economy was in such poor condition, was because prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, they had had a lot of trade with the Soviet Union, but it was barter trade. The Soviets would barter oil for Finnish manufactured goods, so Finland was making stuff that Finland shouldn't have made, like shirts and shoes, and it was not good quality stuff. As soon as the Soviet Union was finished, the barter trade was finished. The Finns couldn't sell those low quality consumer goods anywhere and those factories closed. Fortunately, Nokia was rising. Nokia was a company that had made a lot of stuff over the years, including rubber boots at one time, but by the 1990's, it was quickly developing a specialization in cellular telephones. It was an obvious focus for a country like Finland, with highly educated people who should be making high tech stuff.

It was hard for small businesses to get started again, even though there were obvious things to do that would meet the need from the former Soviet Union for goods and services, because the very social safety net that was rescuing the unemployed workers made it extraordinarily expensive to employ anybody. Employers were reluctant to hire people because they had to pay huge social security costs for every employee. This is the problem that most of Europe has, finding a balance between their preferred social safety net and creating jobs.

We had two major issues that we worked on. One was to work with and through the Finns to persuade the Russians to be good neighbors. For example, both we and the Finns wanted them out of the Baltic States sooner rather than later. Getting the word on this from the Finns was easier on the Russians that having to deal with us directly. We were also trying to persuade the Finns, who were seriously thinking of joining the European Union, to join NATO. All through the Cold War, the United States was very popular with the Finn-on-the-street. In Finland, I found some of the most active American friendship associations that I ever found anywhere in the world. I think the Finnish American Society there did more square dancing than Americans do. As far as the teenagers went, the kids looked exactly like our kids, except maybe there were more Finns with spiky hair dyed green and fewer baggy pants. However, as far as policy was concerned, NATO was a dirty word for a lot of Finnish politicians and journalists.

We had a great program that was funded by the United States Information Service and backed up by our military guys under which we took a couple of groups a year of Finnish military, bureaucrats and politicians on NATO tours. I was one of the escorts on one of those tours. We took them to be briefed by people in London and Belgium on NATO policy and organization, and, on the trip I participated in, we took them to Aviano Air Base, near Venice to see NATO in action. We and other NATO air forces were flying missions over Bosnia from there.

One of the things that we toured at Aviano was a UK AWACS. When we got back on the bus, one of the fellows from the Finnish Ministry of Defense was very impressed. He said, "Boy, I'd like to have one of those AWACS." I said, "I know how you can have a whole bunch of them." i.e., in NATO, those AWACS are for all the members. Only about a year before, the Finns had decided to buy a new generation of fighter aircraft and, although they had bids from the Russians, from the French, and Swedes, they chose McDonnell Douglas FA-18's, our naval fighters.This decision was taken as a demonstration of their independence from the Russians. Following the purchase, we had people representing McDonnell Douglas in central Finland helping to supervise the assembly of the planes.

Q: In the first place, why was the bureaucracy and the media opposed to NATO had they been over the years come out of the left? I mean was this where they were coming from? Or was there a nationalist being neutral type thing, what was it?

KARAER: It was a neutral sort of thing and NATO was seen as unnecessarily poking the Soviet Union in the eye, and anything that made the Russians nervous made things difficult for the Finns. However, while the Finns were being very careful about joining an alliance that, from their point of view, might make them satellites of yet another great power, we were trying to figure out how to expand NATO without frightening the Russians too much. I remember once being at a dinner at the home of the Chinese DCM and having this passionate debate with the Polish DCM who wailed, "Oh, how could you betray us?" The Poles wanted immediate full NATO membership. We were offering an intermediate relationship, called Partnership for Peace. There were a lot of questions we needed to settle with the former Soviet Bloc countries before we could agree to full membership. Clearly they weren't able to uphold their membership economically, and I don't think we were sure that we could trust them not to provoke the Russians once they thought they had NATO's full protection.

It was fascinating reading the progress of this policy. We were opening up our NATO headquarters for visits not only from people like the Finns, but to the Russians as well, to try to get them to see that we were not threatening them, and apparently the Russians were amazed at what our capabilities were. Another thing that amazed me was the lack of Russian capability. We had been so fearful of them, and they were, in fact, a mess. For example, in order to get the Russians to move their troops out of the Baltic States, we needed to help them build places for these people and their families to live. Also, we and the Finns were concerned about the state of the Russian nuclear submarines and what leaky, horrible hulks they all were, together with our concerns about the state of their nuclear weapons, which were also leaky and dangerous. I remember sitting next to the Finnish army chief of staff at a dinner at the ambassador's and we were talking about how incapable the Russian military was in so many ways. I said, "These are the guys we were afraid of for so long?" He replied something along the lines that you have to be careful about kicking a bear. Nowadays, we're very critical of our intelligence agencies. They underestimated the Islamic militants, but they greatly overestimated Soviet capability.

Q: Nuclear weapons and they had a very good air force. It was not, even looking back on it. Well, now tell me, what was the sales pitch that you were giving and the ambassador was giving for NATO at this time? Was this just sort of a convenient method under which all the armed forces would go so they could rationalize what they were doing for protection and protection against whom?

KARAER: We said that we no longer saw Russia as an enemy, but that Europe needed to have a defense system. This was the time when the French proposed that the EU should have its own defense program. We were concerned, because unless the EU put much more money into their military budgets than they had been willing to do since the end of the Second World War, they'd depend very heavily on us for intelligence and for transportation. We were not about to just say, "Okay, you can use our stuff and you can tell our units what to do." Nor did we want to see NATO fall apart and lose our influence on the continent. Clearly, the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe were afraid of the Russians. We had to find a balance between reassuring them and making sure that the Russians, or anybody else who might have bad ideas, would have us to contend with if they tried anything. On the other hand, we didn't want to take these folks in wholesale, who, in their enthusiasm at now being free, would then start thumbing their noses at the Russians and causing unnecessary problems. Also, their economies were nowhere in a position to support a real contribution to NATO. If we weren't careful, we could end up having member countries that were likely to provoke some kind of military reaction on the part of the Russians, but wouldn't wouldn't be able to do anything about it themselves if in fact they were crowded or attacked.

Q: Finland had been neutral and rather conveniently so for all of us. Was it any great push to bring Finland in or was this just sort of an after thought?

KARAER: I think that the fact that Finland had chosen our aircraft and that the government was promoting the idea of joining the EU were good progress for us. You may remember there was an election held during that period to see whether a number of countries wanted to join the EU and the only one that rejected it was Norway. You also have to remember that while the Finns were very careful about how they dealt with the Russians, they didn't like the Russians. People from the eastern part of Finland, which is called Karelia, believed that the Russians had taken and kept what should be part of the Finnish homeland.

Q: It did. Well, I mean I'm sure due to claims, but after the winter war, at the end of the winter war, they took Karelia up the peninsula.

KARAER: Yes, well, the thing was that the Finnish government did not want Karelia back, although there were Karelians who wanted it back. As the more level-headed often said," Who wants more trees and a lot of poor people?" No, I'm afraid a lot of Finns thought of Russians in general as thugs and thieves. In small shops in Helsinki there would be signs in English that said, "No more than one Russian allowed inside at one time." The implication was that any Russian was a thief, so they only wanted one in the shop at a time so they could keep their eye on them.

On the other hand, Finns also have a very delicate relationship with the Swedes who were their imperial masters, before the Russians were their imperial master. Although there are Swedo-Finns, that is people whose mother tongue is Swedish, and the street signs in Helsinki are in both languages, those who speak Swedish and have Swedish names definitely feel themselves second class citizens in Finland.

Of course we wanted to have the capability of these countries in our military protective umbrella over Europe. Visiting our military installations was wonderful for these guys. Once, we were at a queen's birthday celebration at the British embassy. The Finnish admiral had just that day returned from a NATO visit with our ambassador. They had visited an American aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean and had flown on F-18s. At that reception, the Admiral couldn't talk about anything else. It was like a little boy describing his first bicycle.

Q: Was the Soviet Baltic fleet doing anything in those days?

KARAER: Leaking.

Q: Well, I mean you looked blank at me. I take it was not.

KARAER: Another thing about the attitude of the Finns toward the Russians. When we mentioned to people in Helsinki that we were planning a holiday trip to St. Petersburg, we were warned to be careful. There are so many thieves, they said. If you're on the train, be sure to lock your compartment, because at night they'll gas you and rob you. It was the kind of stuff we used to hear about possibly happening to you in very Third World places. When we got to St. Petersburg we were absolutely enchanted. The Finns are great people, but they have a deserved reputation for being extremely noncommunicative. After a cocktail party in Finland, I'd come home feeling as though I'd been carrying bags of cement, because just getting people to make small talk was almost impossible in that country. They were very kind, if they saw that you needed help, they were right at your side to be as helpful as they could, but no chitchat. In fact, one Swedo-Finn told me that, "Finn-Finns think that we Swedo- Finns talk too much, and therefore we are untrustworthy." I guess that's part of the way you get brought up. In St. Petersburg, the Russians were chatty and jokey. The Russians were totally a different kind of personality.

We used to visit Tallinn. My husband made quite a few trips there. He is a great collector and he loves brass and copper, which comes from his Turkish heritage I guess. He discovered Orthodox crucifixes made of brass in the Tallinn antique shops. He collected a whole bunch of these things. I am sure he is the only Muslim on the face of the earth who has a collection of Orthodox crucifixes. He also bought some icons there. When we were in Russia they were selling things like that, but you could not take them out of Russia. You couldn't even take a samovar out of Russia. But the Estonians couldn't get rid of Russian stuff fast enough. We ended up with icons and crucifixes. My front room looks like an Orthodox chapel.

Q: Did you attempt the Finnish language?

KARAER: I did. If there is any language that is closer to a secret code than that one, I haven't run across it yet.

Q: Is there no relation to the Turkish language there?

KARAER: There is a surface similarity in that its built similarly to the Turkish language. Verb tenses are formed by putting endings on the verb root, for example. There is some, but not the same, vowel harmony that they have in Turkish. However, although for many years linguists thought that there was a relationship between the two languages, now they say they are totally different language groups.

Q: What about the media? How did you find the media there?

KARAER: Although I attempted to learn basic Finnish while I was working there, I did not read Finnish, and therefore, I only got the news as it was translated. We had a translator who would give the ambassador and me a summary of the press every morning. The press was good. It was certainly not hostile to the United States, and at that time it was almost totally taken up with their economic problems, as it should have been. I did not deal personally with many journalists, so I can't really tell you more than that. I did, however, have a chance to meet a number of Finnish female politicians, who were very interesting, and also bureaucrats, of course. While the Finns, like the other Nordic countries, had rules, laws, about getting more women into political parties and into the parliament and so on and they had many more in parliament than we do, still the bureaucracy did have a bias against women. I remember talking with a woman who was a political activist that sat on the board that picked people for the Finnish Foreign Service. She said they Board always worried about whether a woman would get married and leave. The same stuff that we had gone through quite a few years before.

Q: How about Finnish society were women getting married early, men dated, did they communicate with each other? You think of the people drinking a lot of vodka and sitting around in saunas or something like that.

KARAER: Oh, they did a lot of sitting around in saunas, all right, but not together. The men sit in their sauna and the girls sit in theirs. We were warned by Americans and Finns that drinking could get out of hand and that it was necessary to be careful if you were hosting a party. But I think the excessive drinking had gotten under control by the time we got there. Maybe because of the economy, people just couldn't afford to buy as much alcohol and certainly it was very heavily taxed there. Drinking was not something that you took up lightly in that country. On the other hand, they still celebrate Vappu.

Q: Midsummer's Night?

KARAER: No, Midsummer's Night is June 21. This event is in May. Usually the snow has melted by then, but it's cold and it's rainy. Everyone gathers in the middle of town and a lot of people drink all day (and night). Its fun to go down in the late afternoon and participate by just walking around. Some people wear masks. Students and people who have been students wear the white caps that students wear in Finland. It's a lot of fun until the people who just want fun go home and stay in the house and everybody else keeps drinking and things get a bit out of hand. Other than that celebration, I didn't see really any more excessive drinking there than I'd seen in the United States. I think folks were getting that in hand. A Finnish lady married to an American told us that the problem in the past was that people had had the attitude that if you opened a bottle, and that was usually vodka, that you couldn't stop until you'd drunk the whole thing. I guess by the time I got there people had learned to put the cork back in.

Q: How about students? Was there much of a turn towards going to the United States to get educated? We'd had of course Minnesota is full of Finns and Wisconsin I guess people dealing with the wood work, the lumber industry, but I mean was there much of a cadre of Finns that had gone to college in the United States and come back?

KARAER: Well, there were. I don't remember it being as obvious as it was, say, when you met people who'd gone to college in the United States in places like Turkey or India, for example. Of course in Finland, if you can qualify to get into the university, you not only get a totally free education, but you also get a stipend. One Finnish man who was at a dinner party at my house said, "I don't know what our government thinks. My son (who was a college student) is moving out. He was living at home, but he discovered that he could get a bigger stipend if he lived on his own and so he's moving out and getting an apartment!" Of course when they joined the EU, then their students also had the option of studying anywhere in the European Union, and since most of them learn very good English as well as French or German before they get out of high school, they have the whole of Europe available to them.

Q: Were there any sort of anti-American movements or anything like that going on when you were there?

KARAER: If there were, they sure were quiet.

Q: How about guest workers? Did they have I know in Sweden they have quite a few people who come up from Yugoslavia and all working at the Saab factories and all that, did the Finns have this?

KARAER: No, but because even Finns couldn't get jobs then, it was not a particularly good place for immigrants. I wanted to tell you about. saunas. It's a great institution, and it's very important to the Finns. There's something almost quasi-religious about saunas there, and it's a way that they entertain as well. I had a sauna on the grounds of the house that I lived in, which was right on the shore of the Baltic. If you wanted to, you could do the real Finn thing which was jump into the sea right from the sauna. Some of our neighbors did. I remember our kids saying when we would be canoeing in that area, they'd say, "Oh, Mommy, did you see that lady?" I said, "Don't look. Not supposed to look." I used my sauna, but I did not jump into the Baltic, both because I'm shy and because I'm a wuss. I couldn't stand such cold water. I understand that my predecessor used to entertain in a very Finnish style by having dinners to which he would invite only men. They would start with a sauna and come in to dinner afterward. Some of those same gentlemen who were on my guest list spoke fondly of those occasions, but I'm afraid I couldn't oblige them.

I remember once when the Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. William Owens, came to call on the Finns. The ambassador was out of town, and so I was the Admiral's host for everything together with the Finns. The last night that he was there was a dinner at my house. The previous night, his counterpart in the Finnish navy had entertained him. They have their military academy on an island right off of the city of Helsinki and they had a stag dinner there. When he and his wife arrived at my house the next evening, he told me that the night before they'd done the sauna thing. He said, "Then everybody got up and ran across the lawn and jumped into the sea. We had to do it, too. While we were doing this, a tour boat was going by." Clearly the Americans were embarrassed and sure that every tourist in Helsinki had seen them naked. When the Finns arrived, I asked them about the tour boat. "Ah," said one Finn, "they didn't see anything."

During a visit by our Finnish desk officer, who was a woman, we were at the Ministry of Defense for a briefing, to be followed by a lunch. There were two Finnish women on the ministry staff who were also in the meeting. When the briefing was over, the host said, "Okay, you ladies do your sauna first and then we'll do ours and then we'll meet for lunch." We ladies looked at each other, and I said, "Fellows I'm sorry, this is the middle of the day, we can't do a sauna now." "Oh, but you know it's the Finnish thing." "We know and we understand and we can't." The other ladies said, "We'll go and have a tea or something and you guys go and do your thing." After the men left, the Finnish women said, "They don't understand that it's different for us." The Finnish women like to have their saunas as much as anybody else, but if women have to sit there in the heat with their hair uncurling and then dress up in their business clothes again and continue with the day, it just doesn't work.

Q: How about the political system there? Was this anything of interest to us other than the usual watching brief?

KARAER: Yes, since there were no political parties that were a problem for the United States, the most interesting thing that happened politically while we were there was that the woman who was the Minister of Defense ran for Prime Minister in that election. She was a Swedo- Finn. We thought that while she was personally popular and a very talented woman, that she couldn't expect to get much of a return because of her ethnic background. Well, were we ever wrong. She got the second highest number of votes in the election. The Finns surprised themselves, too. The younger generation in Finland apparently didn't care that much about ethnic differences anymore. They were more concerned about a candidate's general political position than they were about who the candidate's grandfather was.

Q: Yes. What about how did you find the Finns looking at I don't know whether it was part of the European Community or the European Union because there were rumblings at this time about the bureaucracy which has only gotten worse as far as rules and regulations and all this which made some countries a little bit hesitant to get involved in this.

KARAER: Oh, no, membership was very important to the Finns because of the trade advantages to being in the European Union. Of course, it must have really been fun for the European Union to have to get Finnish translators. No, the people supported it in the referendum and the government certainly was in favor of it.

Q: Was there any or much interest from the United States in Finland? In other words, did you have people from the European bureau or elsewhere quizzing you?

KARAER: No. What we wanted was the help of the Finns. You mentioned before about how we had found their neutrality useful. Well, certainly their contacts with the Russians were still considered useful, and Helsinki had been the site of a number of high level....

Q: The Helsinki Accords were very important.

KARAER: Yes. Shortly after I arrived in Helsinki, they were having the tenth reunion meeting of the Helsinki Accords. But we have also had high level meetings between US and Russian presidents and foreign ministers in Helsinki. While I was there, Warren Christopher met with the Russian foreign minister. It was neutral ground where you could have a meeting at short notice, something that wasn't planned months in advance.

There's a wonderful, true story about the meeting between President Bush, Sr. and Gorbachev. First, let me give you an idea about the difference between the way the Finnish government works and the way we do things. At the time of story, the President of Finland lived in a small "palace" in the middle of town near the water. He also had his offices and reception rooms in that palace, as well as his private quarters. The Finnish President's aide told me that one Sunday morning, the telephone rang in the President's office. There was nobody else there except the president, so he picked up the phone and said hello. On the other end of the line was a U.S. army communications sergeant calling from the White House. He asked if this was the office of the president of Finland. Yes it was. Well, he was calling to alert the president's office that the President of the United States was planning to call the President of Finland at such and such hour later in the day and would the President be available to speak with him? The President of Finland said, "Well, yes, he'll be available." Bush was calling to ask if Finland would host him and Gorbachev. The Finns are friendly and accommodating, but they are firm. When I was involved in making the arrangements for the Warren Christopher visit, we had to talk to the Helsinki security chief. He was very courteous, but he made it very clear right away that the Finns would provide security and the Finns would run the security, full stop. Like it or lump it. Apparently there had been a real to-do between the Secret Service and the Finnish police during the Bush, Sr. visit, and the Finnish police were still smarting from being told they had to just get out of the way and let the Secret Service do their thing.

The other thing that we depended on all the Nordic countries for was that every time we had a favorite cause that we needed extra money for, they were on the top of the list. The demarche would arrive. You'd go in and ask them to support the Palestinians or the Rwandans or whoever. It seems that I was in there almost every week asking for money. When John Kelly was ambassador, John made the demarches, and I went along as his note taker. John never put up with anybody's secretary telling him that she wasn't sure if he could get in right away. John's response was, "This is the American Embassy calling. Do you understand that?" And he got in. John's wife is Finnish, a lovely lady and I'm sure one of the main reasons that if he calmed down at all it was due to her. He could get very steely, very fast. Ambassador Shearer, on the other hand, was a professor who liked to persuade and educate, but he was not into demarches. I don't think he ever came across a demarche that he liked. He did one, and he was extraordinarily uncomfortable. After that he had me do them.

Q: Did Finland have an active program in Africa?

KARAER: They did. Like the other Nordic countries they contributed quite a respectable portion of their national income to relief and assistance to Third World countries. I remember sitting in their AID office waiting to make one of my countless demarches and reading about their different projects, so they definitely were active there, too.

Q: How about communications in this period of time? Was the embassy closely connected to Washington by this time through faxes, telephones, e-mails, that sort of thing?

KARAER: Yes, we had all the modern stuff there. We also had a big warehouse operation from which secure building materials and furnishings for the embassies we were building in the former Soviet Union countries could be shipped. These warehouses were on the other side of town from the Embassy. Just before I left Helsinki, the person who was in charge of those warehouses was transferred and needed to be replaced. The Department ordered us to take a blind officer. We protested. The main responsibility of that officer was to insure that the warehouses were secure. We had contract guards there, but the warehouse manager had to insure that no one who had access to those buildings was risking their security. It seemed to us that that officer had to be able to see what was going on. We eventually learned that other embassies had already refused to take this officer, other embassies with more clout with PER, I guess, because by the time the assignment got to Helsinki, the Department wouldn't take no for an answer. I left there being feeling very badly about the situation that our admin officer was left in, because if something went wrong in one of those warehouses, it would be the admin officer and the DCM who would be held responsible, not the personnel officer in Washington, and not this hapless officer who was sent there without the ability to actually do the job that they were supposed to do.

Later on, when I was in ambassador's training, and the personnel people were doing their pitch, saying how closely they worked with the ambassadors to get the kind of people they needed, I demurred, and cited the case in Helsinki. Later on, while I was in Port Moresby, the blind officer filed a grievance against the poor admin officer for limiting the other officer's opportunity to perform. The embassy apparently had had a problem because the blind officer had to rely on a contract person to read, and the officer had given the contractor access to the APO mail, which was illegal. The Department asked me to comment on the situation, since, according to them, I had been DCM in Helsinki during this problem. I explained that this person hadn't even arrived in Helsinki before I left, but I can tell you that the admin officer is a very capable man and both of us had tried to tell the Department that the job they were insisting on sending this officer to was not appropriate for a person with that kind of handicap. I said that blaming the admin officer was not fair, and that I hoped that the Department would take its responsibilities, belatedly, in this case.

Q: I'm sure the Department stood up firm and strong. We're both laughing. Well, then you left there. It sounds like a very interesting and good time.

KARAER: Oh, let me tell you about one other thing that we did there.

Q: Sure.

KARAER: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Department had begun asking us to make an occasional joint demarche with our Russian colleagues. Since we were supposed to now work with these fellows, I thought it would be a good idea to get to know them better, as we did with our other colleagues. I already had introduced myself to the Russian DCM, and checked to make sure that he was in fact an honest to God diplomat and not a...

Q: KGB type.

KARAER: ... KGB guy. After my political officer, economic officer and I had made some of these joint demarches, I asked John Kelly if he would have any objection if I invited the Russian DCM, political counselor and economic counselor to a lunch at my house and have my two colleagues, the political counselor and the economic counselor join us there. He said, no, that would be great. We invited them and the idea was to convey the idea that now that our governments asking us to work together, let's have some normal collegial contact the way we do with the Germans or the British. I mean we didn't say that to them in so many words, but that was the point of this thing. Of course the minute that the word got out in the embassy that this lunch had been arranged, another colleague showed up in my office and said, "You've got to let me come, too." I said, "No, I'm not going to let you come, too because I really have issued this thing in good faith." He said, "Well, their economic counselor, we think he's KGB." I said, "He may be. We'll keep that in mind when we're talking to him, but if they're cheating, we're not going to cheat on this. This is going to be just us." It didn't make me very popular for a couple of days, but that was okay.

Q: Did the weather bother you there, the long winters and darkness?

KARAER: Not at all, but then I grew up in Minnesota. Minnesota is still considerably further south than Helsinki, but I was used to long gloomy days during the winter. I think for those of us who were working the weather didn't make that much difference. I hardly had a chance to look up from my desk anyway. It didn't make any difference whether the sun was shining or not. I think that the people in the embassy community who were bothered by the dark winter were the spouses. Not mine, he was too busy bopping around, but some of the wives said that they were bothered by it.

However, used to it or not, everyone celebrated the return of the sun. I had a chance to go to a midsummer's celebration. I think it was my second year there. The summer solstice, the longest day of the year is the 21st of June. At that time it still is coolish and rainy in Finland, but if it's going to be a decent summer, its getting warmer. I remember my mother was visiting me and the plan was to go out to an island near our house where one of the big public midsummer celebrations was being held. From what I knew about it, there was going to be a big bonfire. I knew people would do folk dancing and stuff like that. That day it rained on and off. We kept changing our minds, are we going to go, aren't we going to go? Finally, as evening came on, I said, the heck with this, it's stopped raining now, let's go and take our chances. I'm so glad we did, because I never would have understood. I thought that the midsummer holiday was an excuse for a picnic, like the 4th of July is for the United States, but it's much more than that for the Finns. As the sun was going, well, the sun doesn't go down then, but it was dimming. They lit this big bonfire on the lake, and the people all stood around the edge of the shore and they sort of linked arms and they started singing. They were singing in Finnish, so I don't know the songs, but they were obviously special midsummer songs and this was something really deep in the Finnish soul. I'm sure that before the people in that part of the world became Christians, this was a major thing, just like the celebration that they had at the end of the year to bring back the sun. Well now the sun definitely had come back and it was going to be back with them for a while. It was quite something. It was like being at a picnic and at church at the same time.

Q: Then where did you go afterwards? In '96 you left there.

KARAER: One of the visitors that we had in connection with the celebration of the Helsinki Accords was former President Ford. At the same time, Strobe Talbot came to visit us. Strobe Talbot is Derek Shearer's brother-in-law and at that time he also was the Deputy Secretary of State. Right around the time of that visit, the ambassador asked me to do a bullet summary of my career. This was around the time that we were writing EERs, and I tried to get him to postpone this little task. He said, "I guarantee you won't be sorry, just do it." Okay, okay. I wrote this thing up and I gave it to him. He had recommended me to be considered for appointment as an ambassador. I didn't know about this until I got word from the Department that I had been selected by the Ambassadors' Committee of which Talbot was the chairman, that I had been nominated as an ambassador. Of course, since I was so famous and so capable, I had my choice of two places, Mali or Papua New Guinea. Before I committed, I wanted to check the post reports. The thing I had to be most concerned about was the education for my daughter.

Q: How old was she at this time?

KARAER: She was finishing the 8th grade. Helsinki had a very good international school, with a combination American and British teaching staff. I found that in Mali you did home schooling. In Papua New Guinea there was an international high school. Also, I did lean towards Papua New Guinea, because years before when I'd served in Australia, Papua New Guinea had become independent and there'd been a lot of stuff about it in the paper. At the time I thought, this place sounds really Foreign Service-ish. This is the kind of place that I wanted to see when I joined the Foreign Service. I told the Department that I would prefer Papua New Guinea because of the availability of a school. They said, "Well, you know, you can home school your children." I said, "I really don't think I can be my daughter's high school teacher and the ambassador at the same time." I left Helsinki on midsummer 1996 and went back to start my training to become an ambassador.

Q: That's a good place to stop I think and we'll pick this up in '96 you're coming back and you're getting trained to become an ambassador. We'll talk about the training and what you thought about the program.

KARAER: Okay.

Q: Today is the 19th of July, 2004. Arma Jane, do you want to talk about how one was trained to be an ambassador back in that period?

KARAER: I suppose they still do it pretty much the same way. Ambassador Teresita Shaffer and Ambassador Tony Motley were the leaders of the seminar and there were ten of us in this group, including Wendy Chamberlain, who was getting ready to go to Laos, Genta Hawkins Holmes, who was getting ready to go to Australia. She had been in Namibia before that. Others in this group were Congressman Pete Peterson, who was getting prepared to go to Vietnam, and other distinguished people, but I don't want to make a whole list here.

Q: How was the mix between political and FSOs?

KARAER: I think there were just two political appointees in this group. One was Vernon Weaver, who was going to be the U.S. representative to the EU, and Pete Peterson.

Q: Yes. How long was the training?

KARAER: It was two weeks. Two intensive weeks. We were briefed on all of the major parts of the Department and the intelligence agencies and so on, things that I already knew and I'd dealt with before. Of course part of the training was preparing us for our hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. At the same time we were in that training, we were also being briefed by our own country desks and practicing for our interviews with the Senate. Now, we had a huge letdown in this process, although our hearings were held in September, 1996 as scheduled, the day the Senate was supposed to vote on our nominations, we were told that the Senate had decided to stop all of its considerations of all presidential appointees. It wasn't just ambassadors. It included judges, and judges were the main problem.

Q: Well, this is election, or just before an election?

KARAER: Yes. Congress was getting ready to close down and go off to campaign. We would have to wait for a new congress to be elected and vote on us. We would probably hear from the new congress sometime in late January 1997. So, here were all of us ready to go overseas, no place to live, no other job, and told that we had to stick around for four months or so. That was quite an exercise in being flexible, to say the least. Some of the people in my group, who had been assigned to Washington, still had their own homes to live in. Others, like me, had come to Washington from overseas. My house was rented and there were tenants in it. We were living in those furnished apartments you can rent around here, but my lease had run out on the one I was in, so we had to scramble around. We lived in four different places during that time we were here for training. I began to feel like I truly knew what it was like to be semi-homeless.

Q: The training, did you get the feeling, I mean if you were going to a place that was not in the public eye all the time which Papua New Guinea would obviously not be, but in many other places, too that sort of do your own thing and you're not going to be closely watched or was it almost sort of or like a bookkeeping lawyer type of thing, you've got all these responsibilities and we're going to be watching every expenditure or every move you make? How did you feel about it?

KARAER: Policy is the focus of the desks and the bureau. What the seminar covered was not policy, it was management. How you spend the government's money, whether you're in Moscow or in Port Moresby, is covered by the same rules and regulations. Your main problem in a place like Port Moresby is that it is extraordinarily hard for the Department to get people to agree to go to work there. So, if you get people with good skills, you're very lucky. In many cases you get people that don't have such good skills.

Q: Let me just stop here.

Q: This is tape ten, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. Yes?

KARAER: I think that for ambassadors going to small embassies which have spotty staffs, in many cases, the management responsibility of the ambassador and the DCM are even more important than it is for someone who is being sent to Paris, who should expect that he or she has got top notch administrative officers and experienced people who can do their jobs without a lot of oversight by the ambassador. Also, the Department doesn't always treat Ambassadors who have no personal political clout, with much respect. When I was in Papua New Guinea, the Undersecretary for Management was looking for places to close or downsize. We had "visitors" and out-of-schedule "inspectors" who would write reports that had absolutely nothing to do with what we had told them or shown them, and everything to do with fulfilling the Under Secretary's agenda.

One thing that I would want the trainers in the Department to know, although I don't know how this will ever be fixed, is that you get a lot of gospel statements from the Bureaus who are briefing the ambassadors, like Diplomatic Security [DS], for example. They will say, these are the services we can provide you, but the way we do things at your post is up to the ambassador to decide. Not so. I had made it a policy that personal guns were not to be brought to Port Moresby. There was no hunting there, but there were dangerous people. We provided security for our people, but I wasn't going to have every staff home become a personal Fort Apache. However, when a security officer was assigned to the post, I learned that she had brought in her official weapon, without telling anyone. I told her that we had to get the permission of the Government of Papua New Guinea, which I believed we would receive. However, when I talked with her supervisor in Washington, he said that DS never asked the permission of other governments to bring in official weapons. I was stunned. They had never told us that in Washington, and I couldn't believe that we had an arsenal of Marine weapons in Helsinki that the Government of Finland had not approved. The DS supervisor told me that my options were either she had the gun without GPNG's permission, or she had no weapon, and would have to go out of the country periodically to practice shooting. I told him that our biggest crime problem in Port Moresby was car jackings. If she was car jacked on her way to the shooting range (by the way, DS said she had to practice shooting with her own weapon, not one rented at the shooting range), and her gun was stolen, how would I explain that to the GPNG? It wasn't as though we needed a gun-toting security officer. Any big-wig that visited Port Moresby brought along their own security or we got security from the local police.

Personnel also said one thing and did another. Every year ambassadors get a telegram from Personnel telling them what procedures to follow if they have to send somebody away from post. I did have a situation like that, unfortunately. The geographic bureau was calling me and telling to get that person out of there. She was new, and causing a lot of other personnel problems at the post, but I had told her that we'd give her three months to get her act together, and the three months aren't over. I wanted to be fair to her. When the three months were up, and she had not seen the error of her ways, I sent in the telegram asking for her removal which we were told we could submit if both the employee and the ambassador agreed that the person would leave the post. That kind of telegram didn't give all of the nasty details, details that the employee wouldn't want on their record. After I sent this thing in, I got a telephone call from PER saying, "Well, because this person hasn't been at post very long, we need to have the specifics of why this person is going." You know, none of this is unreasonable in my opinion, it's just that the stuff they put on paper is very different from the way it actually works. I resented that. I resented that for myself and on behalf of the employees that were being affected by it.

Q: I've heard people come back and talking about this was not a nice place to live and all. What were you getting on that?

KARAER: What I was told right from the beginning was that this was a really dangerous place. There was a lot of crime, and that it was a very difficult place to live in. Now, I had spent a good chunk of my Foreign Service career working in developing countries. In Pakistan there were people out on the street who would just as soon kill you as look at you. In Port Moresby I found that this wasn't the case. Yes, there was a lot of street crime, but nobody was going to attack us because we were Americans. They might try to attack us because they wanted to hijack our car, for example, but they would have done that to anybody who gave them the opportunity.

As far as the living conditions were concerned, they were not bad at all, really, for a developing country. We were so close to Australia. The supermarkets and drug stores had all the stuff in them all the time that anybody would want. The basic things that you need to live a healthy, comfortable life were there. Our houses were nice, air-conditioned. We had good maintenance services. All of these things that had been big problems in other places that I had worked and lived in was not the problem in Papua New Guinea. There it was just a question of being alert street to crime. In the three years that I was there we had five hijackings. Two of them targeted American members of the mission, only one was injured, and that was the wife of my political officer. She was car hijacked in the middle of the day. She said that thugs had set up a roadblock and she overturned her car as she was trying to avoid them. She did injured her ear and her hearing was permanently affected. Because of this she and her husband left the post right afterward. The other hijackings were of embassy drivers in places where they were waiting and were open to be hit. Other than that, we didn't have any thefts. We had guards on the houses. Lots of razor wire on the walls, that kind of stuff. My point is that while yes, there was crime and you did have to be alert and you did have to have a good security system, that compared to many of our other posts in the developing world, this was not anything unusual. In fact because there was no terrorist problem, it was a lot more secure than a lot of our posts might be.

I remember once coming back here for annual briefings at the Department. My husband and I were checked into a hotel in Crystal City. The morning before I went over to the Department, my eldest daughter called and asked, "Mom, are you guys okay?" I said, "Sure we're okay. Why shouldn't we be okay?" She said, "Because on the news this morning, it said that a man was shot in that hotel." Oh really? This hotel is right next to one of the flyovers of the highway that goes right up around Pentagon City. Apparently some idiot had driven along the highway and fired a gun just randomly toward the hotel the night before. Some poor guy on the fifth floor was bending over unpacking his suitcase and got hit, fortunately in a part of his body where it didn't do too much damage. The police said it was a random shooting. It wasn't inside the hotel. That morning, one of my meetings was with the deputy secretary for diplomatic security. He and I had worked together before. He said, "Arma Jane. Glad to see you. You know, we really worry about you out there." I said, "Well, I've got something to tell you. I worry about you people here." The reputation of Port Moresby had a bad spin-off, because first of all it wasn't an important place as far as policy was concerned, so all the ambitious young things in the Department who were looking for jobs that would make their name were not looking for a place like Port Moresby. You couldn't get many eager beaver types for the most part to agree to come down.

The other thing was this reputation of insecurity, which was a good excuse to refuse an assignment there, saying I can't bring my kids, I can't bring my spouse. We really had a hard time filling our positions. I had to actually go out and recruit people to come to post and that meant anyone who was willing to take the job. I also found when I got there that there had been a serious case of overkill as far as the security situation reporting that was coming from the post. I stopped that.

Q: You know there's a usual post report which is designed to justify danger pay or the equivalent?

KARAER: Well, we were getting danger pay and that kind of stuff. Yes, that thing had to be rewritten. I rewrote it myself. The old report said stuff like, "There are rats in the gutters." At that point I'd lived there for over a year, and I hadn't seen any rats in the gutters. I'm sure that there were rats, I mean after all we were in a developing country, but it wasn't as though we were living with open sewers and stuff like that. I toned that down. The DCM and I talked this over, and I said, "Look, I do not think this is going to affect the premium pay that people are getting here, but if it does, so be it, because this exaggeration is not right." What I was primarily concerned about was the effect that this kind of stuff had on our ability to recruit people to work there.

The Australian Embassy in Port Moresby is enormous It is their biggest embassy in the world. Their security people put out a regular report of security incidents affecting Australians all over the country. They had lots of people out in the hinterlands, mining people, you name it, working out in places where the local folks were still just barely out of the Stone Age. There were folks with bows and arrows who didn't like strangers and that kind of stuff. I told the people on my staff who were preparing our security report, and who had been quoting liberally from the Australian report, that we were only going to use security incidents that had affected Americans, our government staff, our missionaries, or our business people. All of a sudden PNG didn't sound so wild and wooly in Washington anymore.

The embassy is in a building that had been the old central bank building in Port Moresby. The new central bank is built right next door. We had leased the old building and then refurbished it. I must say that that building was the nicest office situation that I worked in in my entire career in the Foreign Service. It was so nicely done. We sort of rattled around in the place, because when they started that project they had a military attachï¿½'s office there. They had a USIS office there and they even had an AID rep there. By the time they finished the project, AID was gone, the military attaches had left and the USIS closed its office about three months after I got there. We had a really nice office building, but we had lots of empty rooms in it and that caught Washington's eye. Too big for your operation. We eventually were able to make the argument that you're right, too many rooms here. We don't need them all. On the other hand, given what we've already invested in refurbishing this building, its cheaper for us to stay here than to go to a far less secure, far less satisfactory place that we have to rent somewhere else in town. They finally left us alone in that regard.

One of the results of our personnel problems, was that the Bureau had decided that they were going to make Port Moresby an experimental project for a communications system that they said we could run on our own, that would work just like e-mail. Of course I was deeply suspicious, because computers are never as easy to use as the geeks say they are. However, I couldn't prove that the system wouldn't work and everyone in the Department said it would be a cinch. It was clear that we didn't have any way to argue against this plan, and the Department had already decided that it was not going to recruit another communicator for Port Moresby. The guy who was there at the time had one more year to go, and by the time he left, they were going to install this new system that we were supposed to be able to run ourselves. "Just put the diskette in the machine and press the button and away it goes," they said. Oh my God. Now, me, I couldn't have even tried, because I am so clueless when it comes to anything beyond turning on the machine and starting to type. My poor DCM was good with computers and when this thing started to not work, like right away, he would spend far into the night and the whole weekend wrestling with it. It would work for a couple of messages, and then it would start sending, or receiving, gibberish. In the meantime, of course, on a world-wide basis, the Department was telling posts that they had to be in touch with Washington all the time for our own security. Unspoken was the understanding that ambassadors who let themselves be out of touch with Washington would be blamed if anything bad happened at their posts. We had to depend on the telephone. Technicians came over from Australia on a regular basis and they fiddled with our commo gear, tell us that it should work and leave. It would work for a couple of hours and then fall apart again.

Finally I sent a telegram addressed to everyone in the Department who had any responsibility for PNG, saying, " I know that you're tired of posts whining. We're not whining, we're screaming. This is absolutely not acceptable." Then I got flurries of e-mail saying, oh, we're sending some more people out there. It ought to work. The guy who had assured me that this system was going to work so well was the executive director of the bureau. He'd say, "You know, it will be just like e-mail, Arma Jane. It will be real easy." I mentioned this to one of his staff who came out on an official visit while this was going on. She started to laugh and said, "Do you know, the only person in the entire office who doesn't use e-mail is him?" Anyway, finally, a technician figured out what was wrong. When they installed this system, they installed the wires that connected it to the electric supply too close to the telephone wires. Even I know that basic physics tells you that there is going to be interference in a case like that, and that's all it was. Their hopes of talking the other ambassadors in the small embassies in the region into accepting this system failed, because I'd put all of those embassies as addressees on my messages, so they all knew what was going on and could protect themselves.

Q: Well, we're picking up some of the things here. We'll come back to sort of the main training theme.

KARAER: Yes, right. It seemed like a small thing at the time, but Ambassador Motley had passed out early on in the course a two page computer printout. In big letters, the first page said, "WHO'S IN CHARGE?" On the other side, It said, "YOU ARE AND DON'T YOU EVER FORGET IT." I kept that paper in the drawer of my desk, and I can't tell you how many times I took that out and looked at it. When there were times when my staff didn't want to do something, or Washington was pressing us to do something that I thought was truly stupid, I just needed to look at it to regain my courage. If in the end what I decide to do turns out to be stupid or wrong, then I take the responsibility, but I am not going to sit and whine, and say, "they said that we should do it that way," because that's not what ambassadors do. Ambassadors take the final responsibility.

Q: Let's move back and then we'll talk about some of these cases, but first let's sort of set the stage. Tell me about Papua New Guinea when you went out there in '97 would it be?

KARAER: Yes. I arrived there in March '97.

Q: Tell me about the sort of country and the government and economy and all and then we'll talk about what we were doing there.

KARAER: Of course, well, first of all, our embassy in Port Moresby is accredited to three countries, to the governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Vanuatu used to be called the New Hebrides before it became an independent country. I was really thrilled to go there, because one of the main reasons I joined the Foreign Service was to see the exotic part of the world. I'd spent a certain amount of time in Helsinki worrying that I didn't have the proper table manners to go to work in a European country that had so much silverware. I had spent most of my career in countries where you ate with your fingers. Frankly I was far more comfortable in that sort of a place. I loved learning about these cultures.

These three countries were among the last places on earth colonized by Europeans. European colonizers had stayed away from these places for a long time because they had a very scary reputation. That was because the indigenous folks were cannibals for the most part. If you got shipwrecked or you were a missionary who wandered too far from a European base, you ended up in a cooking pot. When I was a kid I saw cartoons about cannibals and I thought that this was supposed to represent somewhere in Africa. Well, I don't think there were many cannibals in Africa, but there definitely were cannibals in the South Pacific. Of course by the time I got there, everybody had been converted to one form of Christianity or another, and nobody was eating anybody anymore, but a lot of these communities in the interior really hadn't been in touch with the 20th Century for very long at all. In fact one of the biggest concentrations of population on the island of New Guinea is in the mountains. These people did not come into contact with Westerners until the late 1930s, when some young Australian gold prospectors sort of stumbled across them. The first wheels those people ever saw were on airplanes. They helped the prospectors build the runways for those airplanes to land in their area.

All the troubles that we saw there as far as governance was concerned are typical of tribal cultures. I always had to remind myself and my staff and the people that came to visit us that these problems weren't a sign of failure. In fact, what they had accomplished was a remarkable success. If your grandfather had never seen an outsider before, had never seen a wheel before, and now you have gotten at least a partial college education and you are doing your best to run a government agency, then good for you. It's just amazing. I talked about this with the man who was the director of the PNG central bank. He said, "My grandparents did not know what money was, and here I am running the central bank" and he was doing a pretty darn good job, too. We had to keep that in mind. The governments of all three of these countries were democratically elected. They had parliaments. The parliaments were run in the Westminster fashion and parliamentary procedures were, in my opinion, often grossly abused. They hardly did anything in parliament except have votes of no confidence against the government. Too many of the politicians had joined the side that they thought would get elected, so they could get elected. Once they were in government, however, they were constantly plotting and planning to join others and destabilize the government. That was terribly frustrating, mostly for the Papua New Guineans and also for those of us who were trying to deal with them. I found the people, the ministers, the prime ministers, the other officials, head of the military and so on, quite interesting and cordial to deal with. I can't say that we were able to get lots of work done. On the other hand, we, the Americans, did not have much to offer either. These governments see foreign relations as a conduit for foreign aid, and we didn't have much to offer. We had removed all of our development aid from the Pacific countries. The only thing that I had to offer there, weirdly enough, was a sizable Peace Corps contingent and some military assistance, not equipment, but training. Also, the military have civil affairs projects through which we could provide some material goods. Once I got a ton of treated mosquito nets that I could send out to a group in very mosquitoey part of the country to try to protect their people from malaria, for example. I had no military attachï¿½, but the attachï¿½ in Canberra was also accredited to us and he came there frequently and his office worked very well with us on these things.

I got myself slightly off on the wrong foot with the man who was the prime minister at the time that I had my confirmation hearings. One of the things we were taught in our training was how to deal with the press, how important it was to come up with good sound bites. I found I had a certain talent for that, but pithy statements, I learned, don't make you popular with everyone. When I was being interviewed by the senators, one of the senators asked me why there was so much crime in Port Moresby. I said something to the effect that, "Papua, New Guinea, like most other developing countries, has the problem of too many young men, too few jobs, too many guns and too much beer." I heard this guffaw in the audience behind me. I knew there were no Papua, New Guineans at the hearing, but the hearing also included Genta Hawkins Holmes, who was going out to be ambassador to Australia. Of course there were Australian press there because of Genta. Guess what? An Australian reporter thought that my line was great, up and put it into an article. He said that Genta was really happy to go to Australia and that Ms. Karaer was happy to go to New Guinea, but doesn't have any illusions about what she's getting into, and then he quoted my sound bite. The poor DCM e-mailed me to report that he had heard that the prime minister was upset about what I said. I said, "Did I say something that wasn't true?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, we'll just have to take it like it is." Nothing came of it.

In fact, it turns out that the Prime Minister had much worse problems than young men with beer. Three days after I arrived in Papua New Guinea, the head of the Papua New Guinean military, which we had been helping to train, by the way, led a coup against the government. Now, he didn't want to become the head of government, he just wanted the prime minister of the moment to resign and for the parliament to choose a new prime minister. He was upset because the Prime Minister had hired a private British Security firm called Sandline International to deal with a long term rebellion on the island of Bougainville. Bougainville is part of PNG and the military was really being beaten up there. The Prime Minister claimed that Sandline had been employed only as advisers and trainers, but they were equipped with attack helicopters. The Australians and our military people agreed that it looked like they were planning to use this much heavier fire power against the Bougainvillians. Even worse, from the PNG general's point of view, the PM had used money in the government budget that was intended to support the PNG military to pay these mercenaries, who were Brits and South Africans. Both his authority to control the military and the money to equip his troops was being turned over to these foreigners. The PNG army wasn't the greatest military force in the world, but the government hadn't supported them properly either. The soldiers weren't paid regularly, nor were the troops on Bougainville fed regularly. Most of them had to depend on local people for their food.

The prime minister did resign in the end. He tried to get the Australians to bring in Australian military to put down the mutiny, but they refused. We were concerned that the mutiny might foment general public unrest, but, aside from some looting right around the military base and hoodlums showing off for the TV cameras, that didn't occur. Crowds did gather around the parliament building, which scared the lawmakers, but everyone went home quietly after the prime minister agreed to resign.

Q: You had just arrived there?

KARAER: Yes, three days before. One thing I learned from that is that in situations like this, it is necessary for Embassy management to strike a balance between keeping its personnel safe and finding out what is really going on. The advice we were giving the rest of the American community was to stay in their houses or offices, not to travel around town. The political officer had attended a briefing by the PNG general the day after the coup started, but the instinct of the rest of the staff was to stay hunkered down in the Embassy. We kept being told that gangs were gathering here and there and could be ready to start mob action. Well, after a day or so on television we kept seeing footage of people jumping up and down and trashing small trading shops, but it was always in the same part of town.

Also, you could see that while there were some soldiers with guns, they were sort of running down through their base towards the street, not out on the street. The police had stayed faithful to the government, and they were doing what they could to control the crowd in the street, but the real worry was that the military would get the police to join them and then there would be even a greater problem. You could see on these television pictures that while some soldiers were trying to threaten the police with guns, their officers had their pistols out and were making the soldiers go back and stay well within the boundaries of the base. I thought, "Now wait a minute, this is not a South American military coup here, this is something different." Of course we had already protested very strongly to the government of Papua, New Guinea for bringing in the mercenaries, and the general had arrested the mercenaries and their leader. They had shipped the mercenaries out of the country right away. The Brit who was in charge was still being held in jail. They finally agreed to release him to the custody of the British High Commissioner who just lived down the street from me. I went to make my courtesy call on him in the middle of all this, and he said, "Would you like to come to dinner at my house and meet this guy?" I said, "Sure, but don't expect me to be nice to him."

I discussed my impressions with the DCM. True, we had to keep our people secure, but we, me, the DCM, the political officer had to do what we could to get information that's not just second hand from the Australian Embassy, or the TV, so that we could make a real judgment for ourselves whether or not our citizens were insecure. I pointed out that while the Australians were saying, stay where you are, nobody is telling their people to leave town. They haven't sent any transport planes to take their citizens out of here. After having collected any information we could, we decided that it was okay to just warn our people to try to stay off the streets and wait this thing out. We would let them know if we thought that it was necessary to leave the country. The coup presented no problem in the interior at all. This had nothing to do with those places, and that's where most of our citizens were.

In the middle of all this, I was told that a courier was arriving at the airport in the middle of all this with a classified pouch. The GSO said, "But we can't go and meet the plane. The roads to the airport are blocked and dangerous." I said, "There must be more than one way to get to the airport, isn't there?" I didn't know. I first saw the map of this place when I got there. "Well, there is a back road, but we don't know it very well." "Well, don't our drivers know it?" "Well, yes." "The communicator and you go with the driver and meet the plane." I was pretty sure that the rioting was confined to the main road, but was sitting there thinking I hope I don't end up having them knocked over the head or something. They went and got the pouch, and I praised them for being such great heroes and everything. Nothing happened to them at all. It also showed that we weren't cut off from the outside world at all.

In the end we ended up with a new prime minister. I argued very strongly that we continue our very small military assistance program with the military commander. Even though what he had done was not totally according to Hoyle, what he had done was very understandable. What the prime minister had done, import mercenaries, was even less democratic than what the commander had done.

Q: Just to get an idea how this works, did you get your political officer and others out sort of in the street to find out what was happening? How did you go about that?

KARAER: We stayed away from the areas where we knew rioting was going on. It would have been stupid and unnecessary to go into the middle of a crowd. We didn't need to see those people. They were dancing up and down for the television cameras and were burning Chinese shops. What we needed to do was probe the other areas of town and see whether other areas were also being attacked. It turned out no. Nobody was doing anything bad there. It was just the area near the military base where there was any violence. We had the political officer go to the meeting of parliament where the prime minister finally stood up and said, "Okay, I'll resign." We got the reporting from that.

Our relationship with the Australian embassy was a very good one. I really respected the high commissioner, and he was very generous with his time and his opinions. Other people on my staff cultivated acquaintances with their people. However, I found I had to warn my staff to remember that we have to have our opinions, too. Probably it's true that 90% of the time we're going to be absolutely in agreement with the Australians, but our interests here are not exactly the same as theirs. While we certainly don't want to get in their way, we want to also get information from the New Guineans about what's going on, as well as from the Australians, and there was a problem there. It was really comfortable to have a beer with an Australian and hear all about what they believed was going on in town. It was not quite as easy to get an appointment with and get the information out of a Papua New Guinean and figure out what side of the political equation he was on at that particular moment. But that, of course, was more interesting, too.

Q: What was the parliamentary structure? You're saying that once they got elected on a slate, they immediately became their own creature more or less.

KARAER: The constituencies were ethnic, language groups. So if you belonged to a group that was the biggest or one of the biggest ones in the area, then you could expect to get the votes of those people. But you had to give lots of presents as part of your election campaign. That's the way tribal leadership works.

Q: You were saying, once elected....

KARAER: Once elected these guys did not want to have another election until it was required by the constitution, because getting elected was an expensive undertaking. But because they were operating within a Westminster parliamentary system, there could be any number of votes of no confidence and, therefore, changes in who was the prime minister. The Prime Minister chose the ministers in the government, and a ministerial position is what everybody wanted. They wanted to have a ministership because ministers got lots of perks, and also, most ministries had chances at kickbacks as well. That was the game that was being played.

In these island countries there are many small political parties, so they almost always have a coalition government, and then the parliament chooses who will be the prime minister. Whoever garners enough votes in the parliament, regardless of party, gets to be prime minister, but then he proceeds to spend his entire incumbency fighting off no confidence votes. It was sort of a game.

PNG has important mineral deposits. Chevron was there exploring for and extracting oil. They also were trying to do a big gas contract. There was plenty of natural gas. There was an attempt to build a pipeline that would take this gas to markets in northern Australia for sale there because there just wasn't enough industry in Papua New Guinea to use that amount of natural gas. There are gold mines there, and there's some copper also. Then there were certain much smaller, but still important, agro-industrial things like coffee. Even cattle was being raised in the northern part of New Guinea. That was a big business for some people. The infrastructure in the country was not good. There were fairly good roads in the northern part of the country, main highways to connect the major towns, but there was no highway connecting the very important highland areas in the center of the country with Port Moresby and its sea port. The failure to build a connecting highway had been a deliberate decision on the part of the government. Building such a highway would have been difficult and expensive, because the center of the island consists of razorback mountains. But the principal reason for not building the highway was because the people on the coast, who are ethnically different from the highlands people, didn't want all these highlanders to find it easy to come down there. The highlanders are a very aggressive people, and very self-confident. They have a real entrepreneurial streak in them, despite the fact that they hadn't been engaged in modern commerce for more than two or three generations. The coastal people just wanted to keep their area as highlander-free as possible. The policy also meant that the lowlands were fresh-vegetable-free to a great extent. The highlands are a perfect place to grow garden produce, but because there was only air transport from the highlands to Port Moresby, it was not competitive to bring things like tomatoes and lettuce from the highlands. Instead fresh produce came from Australia. An awful lot of stuff that really should have been produced in Papua New Guinea, for their own markets, was imported from Australia.

Q: How did some of the Port Moresby officialdictate the policy of the government? In other words, this supposedly was an election throughout Papua, New Guinea including the highlands, but did the Port Moresby people more or less run things?

KARAER: No. Prime Ministers have been elected from all over the country. Although, the man who was prime minister most of the time I was there actually was a mixed race man who was born and grew up in Port Moresby. He couldn't control politics unless he made common cause with leaders from other areas, otherwise they were going to form coalitions inside the parliament to get him out of there. In fact, they eventually did do that.

Q: I remember as a kid I learned an awful lot about that because I lived in Annapolis and I followed all the battles. Was there a road up and over the Owen Stanleys, there was lots of fighting. The Japanese almost got down there.

KARAER: There was a path you could walk. Hardy tourists from Australia, and occasionally the U.S. trek it with guides. That was the path that the soldiers took to get up over into the north country.

Q: Both sides were fighting up and down on that.

KARAER: Yes. During the War, we brought U.S. forces by sea and by air into the northern part of New Guinea, but before we could get there, the Australians had started up the trail to meet the Japanese who were coming from the north down toward Port Moresby. The Japanese goal was to capture the capital and its airfields. The Australians met them kind of halfway up. That was a horrible thing to have to fight at a 90 degree angle. One of the great bonuses of being assigned to Port Moresby was that you could revisit the World War II sites in this whole area.

Q: There were a couple of major battles fought on the other side of the Owen Stanleys and MacArthur took over.

KARAER: That's right. The house where the Governor General of Papua New Guinea now lives is the house that was MacArthur's headquarters while he was in New Guinea. I had a chance to visit a number of places throughout the country. I arranged my own trips. I would just get on the telephone and start calling governors' offices, businesses and missionary societies. The Catholic Church is very well established in the northern part of the country. For example, when I visited Aitape, where the Tsunami hit in 1998, I stayed with the Franciscan sisters there. On these trips I was able to not only meet some of the provincial politicians and administrators, but I could talk to the missionaries, many of whom were American citizens, about how they saw what was going on there.

One of the places I visited was the province of Manus, two relatively small islands north of the main island of New Guinea. It had the absolutely best governor in the whole country. A really smart man with a genuine concern for his people. He was an inspiration to work with, I might add. Talking with the people on Manus was fun. Although most of them were my age or younger, so they would have been very small children, at most, during the Second World War, but it was if the War had happened yesterday as far as they were concerned. They would say, "My father told me that there were so many American ships in the harbor, that you could just walk from one to the other without getting your feet wet." We had three airfields, building an airfield in these islands is a trick, because there's almost no flat land. One of the places where we had a runway, not an airfield, but a runway, was on a tiny island just off the Manus main island. That was one of the places that they took me to visit. When we built this place, we removed the villagers that lived there onto the mainland, and then pretty much paved over the whole thing. The island is long and skinny, so it was just right for a landing strip.

Well, after the war, most of these folks came back and the village was rebuilt. When they met me there and showed me around they asked, "Ambassador, do you suppose that you could help us because you see it's very hard to grow anything except coconut trees here." Yes, if your whole place has been paved over, it sure is. When I got back from my trip, I talked it over with the military people, and they eventually sent a team up there to take a look. I said I know you can't remove the runway, but maybe you could do a water system or something that would help the place become a little more livable.

Another place they showed me was an even tinier island which had been used as a dump by the U.S. Navy. Even all those years later, you could find vintage Coke and beer bottles and stuff like silverware from the mess halls. Plates and things like that were there. One of the villagers gave me a navy Corning ware coffee cup. He said that that was one of the souvenirs he'd picked up, but he wanted me to have it. They had an American flag that had apparently flown over the place at the time that it was a base. It was all in tatters, but they had neatly tacked it to a plywood board and kept it. That was part of their heritage. After I got back to Port Moresby, I looked at the coffee cup, and I thought, "This is neat, but what on earth am I going to do with it?" We had a little display case in the embassy of various bits and pieces of things that ambassadors had picked up here and there, where it could have gone, but shortly afterward, a member of Congress come through on a visit. I think he was from New Jersey. He is an African-American and was enchanted with the place. He said what a lot of Africa-Americans said when they first came there, "Where did all these black people come from? I never knew there were black people somewhere other than Africa." Anyway, he had a great time visiting with the Papua New Guineans. He then mentioned that he was going on to a conference in Australia and that one of the people he was meeting there was another member of Congress who was from the family who established Corning Glass. I said, "Take him this cup. Take him this, and tell him the story about the people on Manus. Maybe he can think of a way to help these people". I never heard anything more about it, but he happily took the cup and away he went.

Q: Was the cargo cult still going anywhere?

KARAER: Oh, yes.

Q: You might explain what that was.

KARAER: The cargo cults actually started with the first contact with Westerners in the islands, not just in New Guinea, but elsewhere. When the local folks saw white people coming with all this great stuff, the iron knives and the vehicles and the stuff they didn't have and had never seen before. They wondered why they didn't have it, too. Some of the smarter guys sat down and philosophically worked it out. The gods, they said, had intended for all mankind to have these wonderful things, but somehow the white man had got it all for himself and kept it. This had something to do with the religion he practiced, they thought, so if the islanders would do certain rituals and show the gods that they too were worthy, these things would come to them too. How would the gods send this? Why they send them in airplanes, because, obviously, airplanes came from the heavens and the stuff came out of airplanes. These cargo cult groups sprang up all over the islands. In some cases, the Australian authorities, and the British before them, had found them to be threatening to the powers that be, and had locked up some of the guys that were preaching this stuff. In most cases, however, it was pretty benign.

I didn't come across any active cargo cult beliefs in New Guinea, but a strong cargo cult political party exists in Vanuatu. It's called the John Frum Movement. Now the cargo cult idea was already current in the islands and then World War II happened. Well, I saw photographs of what the docks in Port Moresby looked like during the Second World War. Mountains of crates of everything. I read about what the docks in Vanuatu looked like. The main island of Espiritu Santo was a huge naval base. That's where Tales of the South Pacific, Michener's books, are based. There was just this incredible mountain of manufactured goods, of everything that our military used, piled up around there. And who was picking this stuff up and moving it from point A to point B? The islanders were. Did you need anymore confirmation than that that the cargo cult people were correct about their belief? Anyway, the story in Vanuatu was that at one point an American showed up on Tanna Island, a large volcanic island south of Espirito Santo. He told the islanders that he was John Frum. Now nobody knows for sure where this man came from, but you can imagine that an American would say, "I'm John from Philadelphia," or something like that? Anyway, John Frum, they say, told the people that if they followed certain rituals faithfully, that he would return from America and bring all of the things that they needed. And then he went away. The John Frum Movement has syncratic religious rituals. Some are Christian, but its mostly folks sitting around singing hymns that they have made up themselves. They put crosses on their meeting buildings, but its not the kind of Christian crosses that you see on churches around the world, it's the cross the Red Cross uses, that square one.

I learned soon after I got there that while the John Frum Movement was a religious movement, it was also a political party on Tanna, and that there were two John Frum members of parliament from that island. I said I wanted to visit Tanna and try to pay a call on the John Frum chief. During my farewell visit to Vanuatu, my husband and I flew to Tanna, where I called on the chief administrator and went to see the island's active volcano. The John Frum village is on the sea at the foot of the volcano. It was a Friday, but we saw people walking all along the road carrying baskets of food and young men carrying guitars. They were all going in the same direction we were going. Our driver said, "Oh, yes, today is the John Frum day and so they're all going to the big John Frum meeting." Oh, whoop-de-do, I had picked the right day.

We got there in the middle of the afternoon, and I went to meet the chief. He was a sweet old man with maybe half of his natural teeth in his head, wearing a very faded baseball cap and a clean, but slightly ragged T-shirt. We came up to the gate and I told the man who we were and what we wanted. The chief was very pleased to meet us, but he said, "Oh, Ambassador, I wish you had let me know you were coming because we would want to do something special for you." I said, "No, I just wanted to say hello to you and to see your village." Oh, yes, wonderful, well, here we'll take you around. It was a very pretty, clean place. The houses were built in a semicircle going down toward the beach. In the middle of the semicircle was a big grassy area, sort of the town square. Now, at the gateway, there were flagpoles with a Vanuatu and an American flag on them. Further away, on the other side of that grassy area, there were three tall flagpoles. There was an American flag, an American naval flag and a Georgia State flag with the stars and bars on it. Woo, what's going on here? Well, it turns out that the chief and one of the John Frum members of parliament had been given a trip to the United States on a USIA travel grant about three or four years previously. One of the places he'd visited was the Jimmy Carter Center and the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta. It was while he was in Georgia that somebody presented him with the Georgia State flag, and that's what was up there. The American flag was in tatters.

One of the other things he had been taken to visit in the United States was a Ford truck factory, the idea being, I guess, to show him where our consumer goods really come from. Now, this chief didn't believe that this stuff came from the gods in the sky. They had gone past that phase, but the movement still was a religion and a political party. The chief invited us to stay and see their religious service, but first all the men would gather at the meeting house. He apologized that he couldn't invite me to that gathering, but my husband was very much invited. I stayed with a group of teenagers who were watching all the babies, so we sat and played with babies for about an hour. They eventually brought my husband back, and the chief asked us to come down to where the religious meeting was going to be. The women and the young men with the guitars were already collecting down there. They told my husband he could video-tape the meeting, but my husband said, "Arma Jane, before we go down there, I've got to sit down. I can't see very well." I said, "What happened to you?"

Well, you've heard of kava. Now this is a drug that is made from the root of a plant found in several of the South Pacific islands. It is not used in Papua New Guinea or in the Solomon Islands, where they chew beetle nut. But Kava is very important in Vanuatu and in Fiji, which are further south. It's not a strong narcotic; in fact it's imported into the United States with no controls on it and it's sold in vitamin pill shops. For commercial purposes, the root is ground up and dried, and then soaked in water to drink. It is a traditional ceremonial drink. In fact it was even served to me when I presented my credentials to the president of Vanuatu after we had made our speeches. It looks like dishwater, but it doesn't taste nasty. It just tastes very green. It tastes the way your lawn smells after you've cut the grass. However, traditionally, kava is prepared by the young men, who chew it and spit what they've chewed into a cloth. Then the chewed fiber in the cloth is squeezed into a pot and the juice is then served to all the people at the ceremony. Well, that's what was going on in the men's gathering that my husband was cordially invited to. Of course, since he was the guest of honor, guess who got to get the first sip of this stuff? I don't think that Yashar had ever had kava before. I mean I've only had it in a very diluted form at the credentials ceremony. This was the real thing. He said all he was thinking of was, "Oh my God, I hope these people don't have tuberculosis." But always polite, he drank some. After just a couple of minutes, his head started to spin, and he was just having a really hard time walking straight. It took about a half an hour for this effect to wear off, and he didn't have much of it. I've concluded that if you're going to take a drug of some kind, it certainly is better to use kava than alcohol, because while alcohol will make you feisty, kava just makes you mellow, mellower, fast asleep. That was his experience. I must say this was one of the many times that I was thankful that I was a woman. I didn't mind the kava served to me at the presidential palace, but drinking up somebody else's spit is not appealing. I'm happy to report that my husband hasn't developed tuberculosis.

Oh, I should say that that day my husband also happened to be wearing a baseball cap that he had bought at the White House gift shop which said "White House, U.S. Government." When the chief said he had visited the United States and we saw all these American flags around the village, my husband said, "Well, I think that you should have this." He replaced the chief's faded baseball cap with that nice new one with the White House insignia on it. Then when I got back to the office, I sent the chief a couple of new American flags for his flagpoles.

Q: Maybe this is a good place to stop I think. Some of the questions I want to ask next time is what was the revolt in Bougainville all about. Missionaries; what was your impression of what they were doing and all? Why we didn't have AID in the country? I mean we had been such a major presence, the greatest war effort we had in land in the Pacific was fought right around there including Guadalcanal and up in Bougainville and all as well as right on the island itself. What was the Peace Corps up to? The Tsunami. Any reflections from the Indonesian Western I guess it was called? What we were seeing from the role in Western and all that and then obviously there will be other things, too.

Q: Today is the 30th of July, 2004. Arma Jane, let's talk. Again you were in Papua New Guinea, from when to when?

KARAER: From March 1997 until May of 2000.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Bougainville war. What was that about?

KARAER: Well, an Australian mining company had built an enormous open pit copper mine in the middle of Bougainville. I had a chance to visit there before I left and saw both what had been the level of sophistication of the infrastructure that this investment had brought to the island as well as the extent of the devastation that the rebellion caused there. The mine is just about in the center of the main island of Bougainville and it is just enormous. We flew over it in a helicopter. At the foot of the mountain where the mine is located, is what is left of a fully modern, small Australian town, Kieta. The people of Bougainville over time grew to resent this intrusion, particularly the environmental degradation, the excavated earth from the mine washed into the streams. Before the mine was built, the main industry there was cocoa cultivation. (One thing that we were able to help with after the cease fire was the reconstruction of the cocoa culture.) The Bougainville people, tried to get the central government, which, of course, is located on the main island of New Guinea and which run primarily by people who are not Bougainvillians, to get a better deal for them. They wanted the mining royalties earned by the Government of Papua New Guinea to be used for the development of Bougainville itself. They also resented the influx of other Papua New Guineans from the main island, particularly the industrious and aggressive people from the highlands.

When you look at these internal rebellions, one thing to remember is that while from the outsider's point of view, everybody is a Melanesian, from their point of view, they are many different nations all expected to get along under one flag. Over 700 languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea. Ethnically these people are very different. The Bougainvillians are very dark black people. They call the people from the mainland, who are a sort of brown, "redskins." They feel very superior to the people on the mainland, and they don't know why they should take any kind of orders from them.

When I visited Bougainville, I was put up by a representative of the UN Development Organization to which the United States Government had given a significant amount of money to help with the restoration of the cocoa plantations. The idea was that after the cease fire, all these young men who had never known anything except fighting in their lives and consequently had no education, didn't know how to do anything except get what they wanted with a gun. The UN development program, helped by the European Union, the Australians and a little bit from us, was trying to help them get the plantations going again, so they could have a legal means of employment and some way to develop their economy. By 2000, most Bougainvillians were pretty darn tired of the fighting. They just wanted the killing to stop, and they hoped that the island would be able to negotiate some kind of autonomy that would allow them to get their fair share of development financing. The key rebel, however, was still holed up in his village near the mine, refusing to make any concessions whatsoever.

I visited Bougainville in November, 1999. It looked like the movies you see about the end of the world. What had been a very large industrial area outside of Kieta was almost totally destroyed, just pulled to pieces. You would see vehicles, including vehicles that were meant for very specific purposes, big trucks to move things for the mine, running around the roads. They obviously had been "liberated" by the local population and were being used for personal vehicles. The vines from the jungle covered everything else that wasn't in use. Huge power pylons, which had been erected to bring electric power, which was generated in the town up to the mine, had been blown up and pushed over. I mean everything was wrecked. There were some houses left in one piece in the middle of the town, and that's where the NGOs set up their operations.

When you look at this, and you see all the surrounding natural beauty, the wonderful blue sea and the gorgeous trees hanging over these high hills, it makes you think that nature must abhor a paradise, because human beings had done everything they could to absolutely ruin it.

Q: Were there, did you see any remnants of the Japanese airfield complex and all that?

KARAER: Not the airfield, but they did have a Japanese tank set up along one of the main roads which led to the port of Kieta, which they were just getting opened. Some ships were still sunk in the harbor, but they had opened it enough to bring in some small vessels that could take out some of the cocoa production. I should add that the Japanese were very active in development projects in Papua New Guinea. I'm sure that getting things refurbished to remember the Japanese veterans was high on somebody's list who wanted to get some more Japanese assistance.

Q: In Bougainville when you left there, I take it the whole copper thing was completely written off?

KARAER: Oh, totally.

Q: Was anybody going back to do anything or was basically Bougainville written off?

KARAER: Oh, the political leaders of the community still had ideas that they could make it as an independent or, at least, a semiautonomous entity. When I met with them, they wanted to talk about what the United States could do to help them be an independent entity. I told them frankly, "Don't even think like that." I asked them if they knew what was happening in Bosnia.

Q: This is tape eleven, side one with Arma Jane Karaer. Yes?

KARAER: I pointed out to them how Washington and Europe had reacted initially to what was going on in Yugoslavia. I told them that if our countries could have built a big fence around Yugoslavia and forget about it, they would have much preferred to do that. They couldn't do that in Europe because they were afraid that the fighting would spread to other areas. I said, "Well you folks have got a big, blue fence around you already. You had better make your peace with the government."

Nobody wanted to even talk about reopening the mine. The Australians had abandoned it at least ten years before, and it had taken that long for the government of Papua New Guinea to become serious about its attempts to negotiate a settlement with the Bougainvillians. The trouble on Bougainville wasn't confined to Bougainville. They had the mutiny that I described earlier, which had been inspired by the government's wild idea to bring in mercenaries with the kinds of weapons that would have totally blasted away entire villages in Bougainville if they had actually ever used them. The mutiny was an eruption of the bitterness of the Papua New Guinean soldiers about the way they were sent over there and then pretty much abandoned by the government. There were times when these guys didn't even have food to eat. They had to get food from the local population. A lot of people died on Bougainville because of lack of medical care. The government had an embargo against shipping things there.

Q: Was the rebellion trying to establish a Republican Bougainville there or was it against the government in place or a little more share of the power?

KARAER: The original leader of the rebellion had wanted to get the foreigners out and make Bougainville one people. And by "foreigners" he meant the Papua New Guineans from the mainland as well as the Australians. Well, before the colonial period, Bougainville consisted of many, many tiny groups of people all around the island that were deathly afraid of one another, either hiding from each other or killing each other. Cannibalism was rampant on the island. It was a beautiful place, but for the human beings that were living there, it had been a very cruel and violent place. During the colonial period this had been brought under control, people had gone to school, and things were safe. But as soon as the rebellion started, nobody was safe anymore.

While I was there we ran into some Red Cross people, who told us that they had just told the Bougainvillian provincial government that if they didn't do something about the bandits, they were closing down their operations. What happened was that the young fellows with the guns would come to these NGO installations and raid them, mostly to steal the solar panels that ran their generators. Now, the Red Cross was vaccinating kids against polio and measles. Of course the vaccine had to be refrigerated. The bandits would steal the solar panels and then take them up to the mountain to run their own generators so they could watch rugby on TV, or whatever it was they wanted to do. The NGOs would bring in another solar panel display, and the bandits would come back and do it again. The Red Cross told the provincial government that if you want what we're doing here to be done, get control over these guys, because we're not going to be robbed indefinitely. It was a combination of an attitude on the part of the local people of "here we are, poor us, the world should take care of us", but little effort on their part to control these hoodlums walking the streets. They'd have red do-rags tied around their heads and just saunter around arrogantly. They had nothing to do except to take what they wanted, and there was very little authority there to stop them.

Q: What were the missionaries up to?

KARAER: One of the biggest groups that was the Summer School of Linguistics. It's an international organization that translates the New Testament into local languages. Mostly Protestant churches participate in this, but I did run into some Catholics who had also done work with the organization. They had a big compound up near Goroko, which is the capital of the Highlands Province of Papua, New Guinea, a huge place. Once you walk across the border of their compound, it's as if you're in small town America, little rambler houses, a super market, a nice big school, and a big central area where they did their editing and printing. Of course with 700 obscure languages, Papua New Guinea was going to give them work forever. I mean, either the New Testament got printed, or the language would die out. The translators were usually a husband and wife team, sometimes more than one couple, that would live in a particular area for several years, learn the language, and then do the translations.

There were other missionary groups that were running schools and parishes. The Catholic organizations were particularly active in the northern part of the country. The Catholic Church was established there very early on when the Germans were the colonial power in the northern part of the island. They had big schools, hospitals. Where the tsunami occurred, the first coordination of a rescue effort was undertaken by the Catholic Bishop of that area. They had the radio network and they had the facilities to house the survivors and hospitals and so on.

One of the Catholic installations I visited there had originally started out as a hospital for leprosy victims, but now there's almost no leprosy left in the South Pacific. It had just been slowly turned into a place for people who needed artificial limbs. There were many children who were crippled or who had lost limbs in the tidal wave. This place already had a workshop where they made artificial limbs. They also taught people how to use them. They anticipated that this service would be needed for many years in the future, because the victims were little kids, and as they grew they needed new artificial limbs and training to do some kind of work. When we were there, we stayed with Franciscan nuns who have a convent in Aitape. There was an American nun there who had come out to Papua New Guinea about a year and a half after I got to Port Moresby. I had gotten a letter from someone in Washington who was her friend and who asked me to meet her and help her get on her way. Well, actually they had a better organization to do that than we did, but I did meet her at the airport with her fellow sisters. She had invited me to visit their house in Aitape, so when I decided to take this trip, I wrote to her and asked if there was somewhere that we could stay, and they invited us to stay at the convent where they have guestrooms. Sister took us around to visit the resettlement villages.

Q: Did you use the missionaries as sort of a source of information or as a practical measure was there much you needed to know about what was going on in the interior?

KARAER: Oh, sure. Well, for one thing, when we recruited American citizen consular wardens for these places, we had recruited a number of missionaries, particularly Catholic missionaries, up in that area, because they had radios and contact with the rest of the community. They were the wardens for our system, and so I would always go looking for the wardens. When I would make my arrangements, I would write to them or call them and ask them if we could get together. They were always happy to do that, and they would gather what there was of the American community for me to meet, and we'd have some kind of a picnic or tea party. We did that on the island of New Ireland. The warden was a priest at a boys' vocational training school that they ran there. He invited the Protestant missionaries, who were working elsewhere on the island, to come to the school and meet me. We saw the school, met the boys, had a nice American picnic and found out what it was like for them to work there.

Q: What about, let's talk about the tsunami. When did that happen and how did that impact on you and what happened?

KARAER: It happened in the summer of 1999. The embassy, having lost half of its American personnel, including the DCM, to transfers and not having gotten our new people yet, was getting ready to receive the Secretary of State, who had agreed to stop in Papua New Guinea for two hours on her way from the Philippines to Australia and meet with the government of Papua, New Guinea. We were in a real panic, as you may imagine. Then this horrible tidal wave hit the northern coast of New Guinea. It hit right at supper time and it washed away whole villages that were built right on the beach.

Q: There had been no warning?

KARAER: No, there wasn't. After the tsunami, we got to be very familiar with the earthquake and volcano warning systems that exist around the Pacific and some of the money that was donated by the United States was used for refurbishing one of the big stations that records all of the underground earthquakes and movements in the region. The seismologists decided that in this case, the undersea earthquake occurred so close to the shore that there was no advance warning of any kind. Everything was fine one minute, and the next minute people were being washed away.

Some nuns had a house built on a hill just on the edge of the village that suffered the most devastation. From there, they saw what had happened and they were high enough so that they were not washed away. They radioed the bishop, and the bishop alerted the authorities. Then all kinds of organizations, particularly the Australian government, provided a tremendous amount of assistance. The oil and mining companies sent in helicopters to help with the evacuation. My impression was that the great bulk of the assistance given to the people was given by foreigners who were organized to do this kind of thing fast. The government caught up later on, but they were slow.

Q: How many were killed? What were the estimates?

KARAER: There were probably around 1,000 people who disappeared, and many others who were horribly injured. People were picked up by the wave and just thrown against the trees further inland. Most of the buildings were thatched structures, so they just washed away. An American organization has dogs that help to look for cadavers came within a couple of days, but by the time they got there they said that it was just bodies floating in the water. The ones who were still alive had been found right away.. The rest were dead.

Q: Did you get involved in the rebuilding and that sort of thing?

KARAER: When the Secretary of State came, she told the government of Papua New Guinea that the United State government would contribute an amount of money, I think it was $500,000, for rehabilitation. We gave some of that money to the local Red Cross for training local people to deal with displaced people. Some of the money was used for replacing and refurbishing equipment at the volcano research center in Rabaul.

I was also able to use the disaster program that is administered by AID. When there is a natural disaster, ambassadors can ask for assistance. Then AID sends an expert out to take a look and make suggestions about what we might be able to do. Right after the tsunami, we sent one such message and as a result we got a C-5 in from Hawaii with all kinds of emergency gear like plastic sheeting and water containers.

We asked the Red Cross to distribute those supplies.

Q: Was it hard to get to where the tsunami hit from Port Moresby?

KARAER: Well, you had to fly, because if you think of the map of the island of New Guinea, Port Moresby is at the middle of the bottom of the island and the tsunami hit to the west of the center of the north of the island. So, everything had to be flown in. The roads were awful. When we were up there and we went out with that nun to visit these installations and resettlement villages, the roads that they had just pushed through to make the resettlement villages were just barely passable Road building is a problem in these countries, because the soil is sandy and you get really heavy rains. When it rains, little trickling streams become huge torrents, and they just wash everything away. Roads don't last. You have to keep building them and fixing them constantly, and the local governments don't have the equipment and the financial wherewithal to keep up with that sort of thing.

That was why the villagers were living on the beach to begin with, because you could paddle along the edge of the shore and get from place to place without too much difficulty. You didn't need a road. But the trouble with living on the beach is that waves can wash you away.

Q: Do you want to talk a bit about the Madeline Albright trip and how that went and your relationship with the staff and all that?

KARAER: First of all, why did Madeline Albright come to Papua, New Guinea to begin with? That was because our Assistant Secretary, Stan Roth, had been a staffer on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the senior aide to the head of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. About four years before I went out there, that subcommittee had sent a study group to the region to report on the situation in the islands. The report had argued very strongly for more developmental assistance there. Of course, during World War II, the importance of that part of the world to the United States was huge. But now the war was long over, and their report was ignored. The United States government had decided that it was going to limit its developmental assistance to certain things, like the Middle East, and that the South Pacific was not important to it anymore. The Australians, New Zealanders, Japanese and Taiwanese, however, were very active. The European Union had an active program development program there also.

Anyway, the US had closed down all of its aid programs in the Pacific, and our embassy didn't have any development money unless there was a disaster. That certainly made it difficult for us to get attention from the government, because, as I kept writing in my reports, the attitude of the government there was that diplomatic relations were a barter situation. Their attitude was, "We support your position in the United Nations, for example, and you provide developmental assistance." While everybody was polite to me, and I think I was still able to trade somewhat on the reputation of the United States in general, we just didn't have anything for them at all. The attitude of many of the ministers was if you're not bringing us something, why are you wasting our time and yours?

Anyway, I think Stan felt the shame of the United States not being more of an active participant in building these little countries, having had such a close relationship with these people during World War II. Since we had no money to use for projects, he made it a point to schedule luncheon meetings on a regular basis with the ambassadors of those countries in Washington, which was quite a hit, because they had been so thoroughly ignored for such a long period of time. Then Rea Brazeal, who was our Deputy Assistant Secretary, came out to visit me. I think it was toward the end of '98, and the Japanese had just finished a nice airport for Port Moresby. The one that they had been using before, and the one to which I had originally arrived, was just a slum. This was a lovely new building.

We were sitting in the VIP lounge waiting for her flight to be called, and she said, "Arma Jane, if the Secretary were to agree to a short stop here do you suppose that we could receive her? She could meet the government officials here in this building." I knew the Papua New Guineans would be so thrilled to have the Secretary of State visit them that they'd do anything to make it work." She said, "Well, one of the things Stan had suggested to her was to see how we might get the Secretary to agree to make a short stop in PNG." She wasn't going to spend a lot of time, but if it could be done without a lot of security fooling around, Papua New Guinea would be a really interesting place to visit even if it was only for two hours. So in due course we got the notice that the Secretary would like to stop there, and I informed the government. They were overcome. I must say, for folks who were pretty lackadaisical about many things, when they wanted to put their mind to it, they did the right thing. We had very good cooperation. We got whatever we wanted. We set up the visit at the new airport. Well, this planning was perking along, and I was sort of overwhelmed, because I had only three other Americans on the staff at that time, no DCM, no American secretary, and we were getting boiler-plate telegrams by the bushel instructing the post on all the stuff that had to be set up for a Secretary's visit. It didn't seem to make a bit of difference that she was only going to stay for two hours instead of two days. We're supposed to have a special room set up with computers and copying machines and you name it, all the stuff that you'd need to conduct World War III from that place. We needed a room for a press conference with particular instructions about the podium and the microphones. Oh, and telephone lines for the press of the world who were going to come with this thing. Of course the press was traveling with her, so they knew there were going to be press people at this thing. We also needed to provide a special place for her and her staff to withdraw to and a room for the meeting with the government.

We asked if she would meet with the embassy staff and their families and the Peace Corps director asked if the Peace Corps Volunteers who would be in town could come also. She agreed. They wanted somebody to transcribe in shorthand everything that was said at the press conference. I pointed out that we didn't have an American secretary so there wasn't anybody to do this. Eventually they sent me a USIS officer from the States to supervise that part of the thing, and they sent us a lovely young man from the GSO's office in Jakarta to assist my poor admin officer. We were getting underway with the preparations for the visit and the tsunami struck.

I made my economic officer the tsunami man. He had to send in the daily reports and deal with the AID people who came through. While he was doing that, the government of Papua New Guinea came up with its program for receiving her. Part of her reception would have groups of dancers representing different ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea performing in the outdoor area at the entrance to the VIP portion of the airport. Well, I sent all of this in to Washington. Our program was measured down to the minute, and about two days before the Secretary was to arrive, I got a telegram saying, "Cancel the feathered dancers." They made it sound like Las Vegas. Cancel the feathered dancers, because it wouldn't look good to the American press if they saw her being received by dancers when all these people had died or were suffering in the north. Oh and by the way, they're wondering would it be possible to arrange for her plane to fly over the devastated area.

I went to the Foreign Ministry with this message. I told them that I was ready to explain what their customs were in this respect, but I wanted to tell you what they said. The Chef de protocol said, "Ambassador Karaer, we can't cancel those dancers. The other Melanesian people would hear that we didn't have them, and they would say that we were ashamed of our culture. It's not like we're celebrating." So, I sent a message back saying what he said, but it didn't make any difference. "We don't want them." I just sat back and thought, "Well, too darn bad, because they're going to be there." I stopped arguing.

In the meantime, fortunately for us all, I guess, the bishop at Aitape had a memorial service for the victims of the tsunami which was caught on Australian television and carried on CNN. And guess who carried the gifts down the aisle to the alter and led the priests to the mass? It was feathered dancers, of course. After that broadcast I received a message saying, "Well, we guess dancers will be all right, because they participated in that memorial service." I thought, "Right, you'll believe television, but you won't believe the ambassador!" That is the kind of the thing I'm sure every ambassador grates their teeth over, that Washington just does not pay attention to the judgment of the people they have sent to work in the country, who, after all, do know something about how the culture works in those places.

Anyway, the Secretary arrived. She obviously was enchanted by the feathered dancers. The prime minister took her around to all the groups and told her about who everybody was and where they came from and what they were supposed to be representing. Then he escorted her to the meeting rooms. where we had the meeting with the government and the press conference. We were informed by the Secretary's staff that there could be only one picture with the embassy staff and that if the Peace Corps was going to be there, then the Peace Corps would have to be in that one picture, the Secretary wouldn't have time for two to be taken. Now, this then turned out to be a pretty big gang, so we have got a picture all right, but its quite a crowded picture with everybody with the Secretary. We presented a small gift to her. Then those people who had no time to have more than one picture took her off to the retiring room, where they sat and ate canapï¿½s and talked to each other, while the people at the Government of Papua New Guinea reception downstairs hung around and talked to each other. The French ambassador walked out very indignantly, unfairly blaming the PNG government for having brought him out there just to see Madeline Albright walk by and not mingle with the crowd, when in fact it wasn't their fault at all. I was embarrassed. The Secretary was charming for the couple of minutes that any of us had to talk with her, but the policy was to just blow us off, us, the Papua New Guineans and their guests. When it was time for the plane to leave, they brought her down, she walked through, shook a couple of hands, reviewed the dancers again and left.

I was really proud of my staff, the way a small number of inexperienced people had handled the visit. I was very grateful that the Government of Papua New Guinea was so cooperative and understanding. But I really wondered about the insensitivity and the arrogance of the Washington staffers who dictated how everything was to be done and cared very little about the impression they were leaving about the United States or the Department's attitude toward its employees. For example, I thought my GSO was going to burst a blood vessel. He had slaved to convert a room at the airport into a mini emergency communications center, just as Washington had instructed us to do. He told me that the Secretary's staff had glanced into the and said, "Oh, look at all the stuff you've got in here," and then walked into the withdrawing room. I'm not terribly proud of those people at all.

Q: Did you get any feel, did anybody ever tell you, I mean was this, I mean sometimes you get the feel that Madeline Albright was overly controlled, not on policy matters, but by her staff who were kind of throwing their weight around?

KARAER: Well, certainly that was the impression we got, because when we were able to deal with the Secretary herself, she was perfectly charming. She didn't act as though we were wasting her time, but those iron maidens who dictated how things were going to be done were just not going to be moved, and were not the least bit interested in sticking their head out the door to see what was going on down in that reception.

Q: Well, moving on to why no AID? You arrived there the AID had stopped? Why had we just not had something going?

KARAER: Well, there had been projects. In fact when our building was renovated, there was a whole suite of rooms for the AID office, but by the time the building was finished, AID had already been withdrawn from the Pacific. The whole Pacific no longer had AID.

Q: It was a Pacific thing I guess?

KARAER: Yes.

Q: What about the Peace Corps? What was the Peace Corps doing?

KARAER: They were mostly teaching English or science. It was a difficult situation for them. I think we had about 50 volunteers at any one time in the country, and there were smaller groups in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Of course Papua New Guinea is spread over several islands, and it's difficult to get transport wherever you're going. It was tough for most of these volunteers. They were welcomed by the people in the villages and, as far as I could tell, most of them had very close relationships with their host families. But it was difficult, and sometimes dangerous, for the women who were in remote places without any male volunteers.

The trouble was the lack of security in those places. For example, two young women were originally assigned to teach on one of the islands in the Trobriand chain. Peace Corps had to remove them after a few months there because, although they were okay when they were in their town of assignment, when they had to travel to buy groceries or get medical checks or whatever, they had to go in these little local boats that other people traveled in, and they had some bad experiences on those trips with men trying to molest them. It was that kind of a problem. Wherever I traveled, if we had Peace Corps people there, I went to visit with them and for the most part they were grateful to the schools that they were working with. A female Volunteer who was assigned to a girls' school in Port Moresby, which was supposed to be so dangerous, was really enjoying herself and really had a good experience there whereas some of the others who had to go to very far off places had difficult, if not scary, experiences.

The Peace Corps training center in Papua New Guinea is in the town of Goroko, in the highlands. I got to swear in a couple of different Peace Corps groups while I was visiting during the same time that they were being trained there. I was impressed by how sweet and how welcoming the local people appeared to be who had been Peace Corps host families. During the training period, Peace Corps sends the trainees off to live with a local family for a week or so. Wherever I've been, I've found that the Volunteers form a very strong bond with those families, a bond that remains long after they've left the country. It seemed to be the case there, too. When you think about how the people in the villages live in Papua New Guinea, that is really a test of one's adaptability and willingness to be of service. For example, fruit bat is considered a delicacy.

Q: In the first place did you have a Peace Corps director with you or did one come around from somewhere else?

KARAER: Oh, no there was a resident Peace Corps director in each one of our countries. They were good people, and the Embassy got on very well with them. However that reminds me of another incident that I didn't appreciate that rose out of Washington that exposed the fiction that ambassadors have got great authority and the ability to run things in their own countries the way they want to. I got a message from the country desk officer saying that the then undersecretary for administration had met with her counterpart from Australia, who was visiting Washington, and had told the Australian that the U.S. would like to put its embassy in Papua New Guinea into the Australian Embassy building in Port Moresby. This was the first the desk officer had heard of the idea, and it certainly was the first that I had heard of it.

The country director asked me to find out if this would work. Now the Australians had just opened a brand new embassy building in Port Moresby. It was a big place that was built out in the middle of a big empty area with tall fences around it, so their security was as good as they could make it. I thought, well, we'll ask, but I think this is a rotten idea. I had my admin guy inquire about whether they had extra space, and he was told they had no extra space. In fact they were still renting offices outside of their compound for their GSO, because even though the new place was a big building, they needed the whole thing. I told the Department that even if the Australians had room, it was a terrible idea. What was being suggested was to intimately associate us with the former colonial power. While we have many interests in common with the Australians, we have a number that are not, especially our commercial interests where we are competitors. Why would we want to have any Papua New Guinean who wanted to see us have to pass through Australian security in order to get to see us?" The message I got back from the desk was "Well, how can you make this work?" I said, "Why should we even try to make this work? Does the Assistant Secretary agree with this?" Then I sent a copy of that message to Rea Brazeal, who was traveling in Australia and due to visit us. They answer I got from her is that the Assistant Secretary though it was a lousy idea, and nobody was going to do it.

Apparently the administrative area of the Department thought that they would save money by moving small American embassies into shared quarters with another friendly country. Their question was, "Well, if it doesn't work with the Australians, is there some other government where you could share quarters?" We replied with a list of the countries that had diplomatic establishments there and why we thought the idea wouldn't work with any of them "What about all the security that we've been hearing about?," we asked. "Who is going to be in control of security if we have shared quarters? Are we going to give up security, or will other people have to put up with what we require?" Well, nobody in Washington had thought that one out yet. Then I proposed, "But, I admit we've got plenty of space in this building, and this building has its own generators. It has its own water supply. We are quite free of most of the problems that afflict the rest of the city of Port Moresby. The Peace Corps rents property in another place that is continually running out of electricity and water and is in a pretty dangerous part of town. Why not have the Peace Corps move over here? They can have the whole ground floor. We'll move our consular officer upstairs, and they can have the whole ground floor. It would be easy for their people to come and go." This wouldn't work, we were told, because the Peace Corps has a policy that it does not want to be associated with the embassy, so that they will not look like they are somehow an arm of the executive of the U.S. government. Okay, understandable, but if it is okay for us to look like the coat closet annex of the Australian embassy, then why is that better than having the Peace Corps in the American Embassy? I mean, I didn't argue this, I just laid it out there and said, "This is a very good possibility that will save everybody a lot of money." Washington just dropped the idea

Q: What about in the first place the Indonesian representation in Papua, New Guinea and then the relationship with Irian Jaya and all, what was going on there?

KARAER: Well, there was a fairly large Indonesian embassy in Port Moresby and I don't recall there was any particular thing that came out in public anyway that was memorable about the embassy's activities. All of their ambassadors were retired generals. On my visit up to the provincial headquarters of the Papua New Guinea province that's right on the border with Irian Jaya, the district commissioner arranged for me to go to the border where we met there the Indonesian commander. We all walked across the border and they showed us their customs and immigration facilitates. The Papua New Guineans were in the process of opening a similar facility on their side of the border to facilitate the recent increase in border trade.

There were Irian Jayan refugees in Papua, New Guinea, which was an issue for the Papua New Guineans. They would not shove these people back across the border, but, on the other hand, they did not want them to do anything inside of Papua New Guinea that would annoy the Indonesians. There were some political activists in Port Moresby who did stuff like put up signs once in a while outside their office building saying, Irian Jaya forever, or something like that, and then the cops would come and take them down. This would become a freedom of speech issue for some Papua New Guinea human rights activists, because the indigenous people of Irian Jay are Melanesians, too and those people who bothered to think about them at all in Papua, New Guinea were sympathetic to their problems.

The biggest issue for any Melanesian is land rights. Anything or anybody that threatens the traditional land rights of a particular group is going to get a lot of fight. That was one of the things that happened on Bougainville. In Irian Jaya the Indonesian government, besides having brought in huge mining interests, had brought in a lot of farmers from Java to settle what was sort of like the American West. From the Javanese point of view, they were settling empty, uncultivated lands. The indigenous Melanesians didn't consider the land empty at all that. It was their land and they didn't want these "foreigners" around. Irian Jaya was like the Ohio Valley in the early 19th century. Farmers would get massacred and then the Melanesians would get massacred back. It was pretty nasty over there, but that was not my portfolio. We did some reporting on the refugee situation. My consular officer, who was a very talented first tour junior officer, took a couple of trips to the refugee camps to see what was going on there.

By the way, I was very pleased about how the assignment of consular officers to Port Moresby was worked out. The position there was classed as mid-grade position, but the Department had a hard time finding someone to fill it at that grade. I said, "I'll take a brand new officer who can take the responsibility." I'd been a consular officer. My DCM had been a consular officer. We could provide supervision. So, we got this great officer who wrote really well and appreciated the chance to have his own section and political reporting responsibilities as well.

Q: Did you have any contact with our embassy in Jakarta in particular?

KARAER: No, except for that lovely GSO who came and helped us with the Albright visit.

Q: What about with our embassy in Canberra?

KARAER: Oh, yes. First of all, our military attachï¿½ was the military attachï¿½ in Canberra and had accreditation to the governments of the three countries that our embassy was accredited to. The fellows from his office would come up regularly. They had a plane, so a couple of times a year they would fly to one of our areas and then either I or the DCM would hitch a ride with them to visit parts of our "parish" that would be otherwise hard to get to. I took a great trip with them in Vanuatu and saw the point on the north end of the island of Espirito Santo where at the end of the Second World War tremendous amounts of U.S. equipment were dumped into the sea. I'd read in history books that the U.S. military authorities waited for a time after the war ended, thinking that the French planters would buy this stuff, bulldozers, refrigerators, you name it, but they didn't. Apparently the French planters thought that if they waited long enough, the Yanks would go away and leave it to them for free. Obviously they didn't know how stubborn Yanks can be. The US military pushed it all into the sea. To this day, you can walk out onto a rocky outcropping and look down into this beautiful clear water and see all this stuff. It's like the lost continent of Atlantis.

Q: This is naval ships going down up and down the bloody, you know.

KARAER: Your referring to "the slot" in the Solomon Islands. Not anymore. The only U.S. naval ships there now are under the water.

Q: How about divers, did they cause a problem for you?

KARAER: No, although there were some people who dove all around the area. In Port Moresby there is a commercial diving operation that has a decompression gadget, whatever they called those things, for people who ran into difficulty. One diver did get seriously injured in Vanuatu. An American citizen who has a business there helped this guy get the medical attention that he needed.

I started a dialogue with the Department over appointing consular agents in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, because while the resident Americans that we knew and worked with there provided emergency help to Americans out of the goodness of their hearts, we thought it would really be much better if we had someone in each capital who had an official appointment. Before I left I was able to get an appointments for Keithie Saunders in Honiara, and I had requested an appointment for another businesswoman in Port Vila. The lady in Vanuatu, in case you ever go there, runs a wonderful restaurant called Jill's; her first name is Jill, and she serves American style goodies, hamburgers, hot dogs, tacos and it's really good stuff. The best French fries you'll ever have anywhere in the world.

Q: As a kid I read all of Jack London's stories about the area there and the ships. Did you have any sort of drifters, American drifters going off and living with the, I mean creating a family or just being nere-do-wells or was that all passed?

KARAER: My consular agent in Honiara in the Solomon Islands had a guy that just sort of became destitute there and didn't seem to have any desire to help himself. The local folks said, "Well, he can sleep in the jail. She thought, "Oh how can an American do that? Being more hard-hearted, I told her, "You watch it, or you're going to have the whole world coming to your doorstep to be fed." He came and he went. She helped him get some money and get a ticket and get out of there. No, there weren't many, because it's just so expensive to get there, I guess.

Q: Had Pidgin English disappeared by this time?

KARAER: New Guinea Pidgin is the lingua franca of the country. There is some English, German, local words and syntax, and Australian slang. The verb in New Guinea pidgin for "to break" is "bugger up." It's a perfectly respectable verb.

Q: Just like a Korean mechanic who told my wife when our car wasn't running in the middle of a little village in the middle of Korea, he worked for the army at one time, and he looked at the water pump and he said, "Your water pump is all f_cked up." He was right, it was f_cked up. Were you ever invited for "long pig?" A long pig being a human being.

KARAER: No, there is no more cannibalism in those countries anymore. As far as the local folks are concerned, it's not a joke to refer to that old custom. Although at a national day reception, the Fijian Ambassador surveyed the crowd of the good and great of Port Moresby, leaned over to me and said, "You know, my uncle was eaten here." His uncle had been one of the islander deacons who had been trained by the foreign missionaries to act as sort of the first wave into these unproselytized areas like New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The idea was that perhaps they would be more acceptable to the local people than the Europeans would be. He was one of the folks who bit the dust there, but that was the only reference I ever heard made to that part of their history by a South Pacific islander.

That doesn't mean that people aren't realistic about their history and their culture. Before coming to the islands, I had read a number of newspaper statements by Melanesian leaders about the Bougainville conflict to the effect that Melanesians should be allowed to resolve these conflicts without outside interference, that there was a "Melanesian way" to peacefully find a resolution. I asked a Papua New Guinea politician about that. He said, "Ambassador, the "Melanesian Way" to resolve conflicts is to hit the other guy over the head." Before I left Papua New Guinea, the Speaker of the PNG Parliament, who is a wonderful man, had gone on a trip to South Africa, where the UN was sponsoring a meeting on preservation of traditional cultures. He made a speech there, which was reported in the Port Moresby newspapers. He was brutally frank. He said something like, "We in Papua New Guinea understand the importance of preserving our culture. We're proud of our culture. But there are some things that were not good about the old culture and that nobody wants to preserve." He mentioned cannibalism. Then he said, "For example, if I stood before you today in my traditional costume, you would have me arrested for indecent exposure."

Q: Do they wear those penal gourds?

KARAER: They do. I came across that when I made that trip up to the northwest coast. When my husband and I got off the little plane, there was a dancing group to meet us arranged by the local government authority. These were the most nude of all of the dancers that we had seen so far. These guys were wearing these long, curly gourds on their prized possessions. I had read about this custom, of course, but stupid me, I had assumed that the goal was for some kind of modesty, but of course it's not. As soon as I saw them dancing around, I knew that it was simply an enhancement.

Q: Well, then you left. Is there anything else we should talk about do you think about this?

KARAER: No, I guess not.

Q: Well, you'll have a chance to work on this and you can also enhance the report with or without gourds. Well, you went back when 2000?

KARAER: May of 2000.

Q: Then what?

KARAER: Then I retired at the end of June.

Q: Was there much interest or did anybody ask you what was going on out there or did you just retire?

KARAER: Mostly I just retired. I had a kind goodbye from A.S. Stan Roth, whose support I really appreciated, considering all of the other things that he had to worry about. His real concern for the US to keep our reputations in the south Pacific, I thought, was impressive. Shortly after I went out to Papua New Guinea, the Department reorganized the Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific and what had been a separate country desk for the Pacific Islands, had been integrated into the existing desk for Australia and New Zealand. This proposal was made before I left, and the Islands country director, who would inherit the new package, asked me what I thought about the proposal. I told her that it would be nice for her, but not for the ambassadors to the islands. Obviously Australia and New Zealand were far more important to the United States government than our little countries and we were going to get pushed by the wayside. I think that's pretty much what happened too.

Q: Did you get any feel, you know the CIA is supposed to cover everything. I'm talking about a station chief, but at least, do you think anybody was kind of watching the store at Langley or not?

KARAER: There were folks in other, bigger places that had that responsibility, but I think they relied mostly on the Australians for what little might have been of interest for them there. Actually I saw more of the FBI. They had investigations going on in Vanuatu. Vanuatu is a center for internet banking and internet gambling. There were also questions about dodgey Asian banks that have branches in those places. You asked me earlier about American nere-do-wells that I ran across. I can't say that they were beachcomber types, but there were some questionable people doing questionable things in Vanuatu.

Oh, another group of government agencies that we saw a lot of were the people who recover remains for the military.

Q: Oh, yes.

KARAER: We would get groups of those folks out there about once every three months. They went to some pretty remote areas. You stop and think what happened with our WWII servicemen's remains. As a nation we did everything we could to retrieve remains in Vietnam and in Korea and then decided to go looking for what was left after the Second World War. You can imagine, there wasn't very much left. One of my sharpest memories is returning from church one Sunday morning and finding a gentleman standing at the top of my driveway holding a backpack. He clearly was an American. He said he had come out there to look for the remains of his uncle, who had died in a military air crash in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War. He hadn't found his uncle's plane, but he had found another one. The bones associated with that plane had been picked up by the local people, put in string bags (bilims), and hung from the branches of a tree near the crash site. He thought since the remains had been disturbed already that it would be better to bring them to me. He was catching his plane in a couple of hours. I asked him in and I gave him a glass of orange juice. He had gotten the tail number of the crashed plane, and then he went merrily on his way, leaving his bag of bones in the middle of my living room. I called my political officer, who was the one who coordinated things military, just to let him know and to ask him to send a message to the proper authorities on Monday morning so they could pick up the bag the next time they came through. I said, "In the meantime, I'll put this bag in the closet in my guest room." He said, "Oh, no Ambassador, I'll come and get them. I'll come and get them right away." I said, "Your closet, my closet, what difference does it make?" He said, "No, no. This might be some bad karma I better come and get it." So, even though I leave concerns about karma to my Hindu friends, he took it away. My DCM went on at least one trip with a recovery team, climbing mountains through the jungle in northeastern Papua New Guinea, which, he said, was quite a workout for him.

I butted heads some with the Department of Energy, too. When I was in Manus, my husband pointed out some Caucasian men in the hotel dining room and told me that he thought they were Americans. A little later one of these men approached me and he asked if I was the American ambassador. He said that he and his colleagues were from the Department of Energy servicing the installation they had at the airport." I said, "The U.S. Department of Energy has an installation at the Manus Airport?" "Yes," he said, "would you like to see it?" I said, "Oh, yes, I'd love to see it."

Outside of the tiny Manus Airport is a collection of shipping containers with doo hickies sticking out of them like a Mars space station. It was fundamentally weather equipment. They were measuring the amount of radiation in the atmosphere. Since Manus is practically smack dab on the equator, it was a good place to do this. They showed us the computers inside of the shipping containers which record the data on tapes. Someone from the Papua New Guinea meteorological department who works at the airport had the responsibility of collecting the tapes and shipping them back to the United States and putting new tapes in the machines. Then the Americans would come periodically to service the equipment. There was a sign on the fence that said what it was. Obviously the Government of Papua New Guinea had no problem with it. My problem was that I had never heard about this before, ever. I told these fellows that their installation was great, glad you're doing this, sounds very interesting, but when you come, please let us know that you're here. You're supposed to get permission to come. We're never going to say no, but we need to know you're here. We just had a tsunami, people got washed away. If you got washed away, we wouldn't even know it, would we? Oh, they said, well, we'll tell the people in our office that we're supposed to do this. I said, thank you. Then I went back to Washington and asked whether the Department even knew about the installation. Nobody in the embassy knew and none of us had ever been briefed on it. The Department never responded, but eventually a representative of the Department of Energy stopped by to explain that he would try to make sure the Embassy was kept informed, but that it was hard to get the scientists at the national labs to follow the rules. "They're so smart," he said, "the don't think the rules were made for them." I guess that's so. I came back to the U.S. to the great Wang Lee scandal at Los Alamos.

When I was in Helsinki I used to see a fair amount of traffic on that subject. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the national labs just came rushing in to Russia to start doing things with Russian labs. In some cases the Embassy in Moscow bitterly complained about them not coordinating this with the embassy or with the State Department.

Q: One last question. Did you get any impression about what the Papua New Guinea embassy was doing in Washington? Was it effective? How the hell did it work?

KARAER: I had a very good relationship with the Ambassador. I don't know that they had much of anything to do. The desk didn't seem to talk to them much. As far as any of our requests for cooperation from the PNG government were concerned, we were asked to go directly to the government in Port Moresby. I think that their Washington embassy thought they were doing well to keep their office in repair and pay their bills.

Q: I'm sure they were. Well, then you retired in 2000?

KARAER: 2000.

Q: 2000. I know right now you're working with us in doing some oral history interviews.

KARAER: Well, I did all of my business with the Department and signed all the papers I needed to get my pension and then left without any plan to go back there for any particular reason. I had no desire to hang out in the office and watch other people work. My retirement became effective at the end of June of 2000. Shortly after that the infamous letter was sent to retirees by diplomatic security, informing us that for the security of the United States we would need to be escorted if we ever came into the building. I was so surprised at the strength of my reaction to that. If you had told me in advance that something like that, theoretically, could happen, I would have said, "Who cares? I didn't want to go there anyway." But when I held that paper in my hand and thought of all the places I had been, all the clearances that I had gotten and all the secrets that I had kept for those people, to be told that I was no longer trustworthy enough to go into that building without an escort almost made me cry. I just took that letter and smashed it up and threw it away. I gather that that was the reaction of a lot of other people as well.

Q: Oh, yes, and this happened as sort of one of the last blows while Madeline Albright was there, which did not set well at all. In fact Colin Powell came in and immediately rescinded that.

KARAER: Well, he adjusted it to a sensible procedure, I think.

I really wonder about how thoroughly people think these policies out. I remember the last chiefs of mission conference that I attended, which was in the summer of 1999. One of the people who spoke at that conference was the newly appointed head of diplomatic security. I recall he came from the FBI. It sounded like a very impressive credential. I was prepared to be very impressed, but then in the question and answer portion, in response to our ambassador to Indonesia, who was asking about the problems that he had had getting a new chancery approved, the new director of security explained that we had a new policy to incorporate our embassies into larger buildings instead of having individual buildings sitting out in the middle of nowhere with a fence around them. This, in fact, was one of the things that the Department had tried to push on us when I was in Port Moresby. Then somebody said, "I don't understand. On the one hand, we're being told that we have to increase security. We even have to block off the city streets. On the other hand, we're supposed to be in a building with others that we have no control over at all?" He said, "Well, yes. The idea is that terrorists might be after us, but they wouldn't want to harm unrelated people in the building." Everybody sat there with their mouths hanging open, because, of course, by this time our embassies in Nairobi and Tanzania had been blown up. Relatively few Americans were hurt or killed, but many, many Africans were. What world are we all operating in?

Q: All right, well I want to thank you very much.

End of interview