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

AMBASSADOR DAVID N. GREENLEE

Interviewed by: Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 19th of January 2007. This is an interview with David N. GreenleeWhat does N stand for?

GREENLEE: Nicol.

Q: You didn't get into the "leigh."

GREENLEE: I'm not sure. Maybe way back it was "leigh."

Q: You go by David. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

GREENLEE: I was born in White Plains, New York, June 3, 1943.

Q: Let's talk first about your family. Let's take your father's side. Where did the family come from originally?

GREENLEE: I don't have detailed knowledge of my father's roots. My father's father came out of Philadelphia. He was born in Pennsylvania. My father was part Irish, part German, and I think part Scots-Irish as well.

Q: If you can go back a bit, on your father's side, do you know what your great-grandparents were involved in?

GREENLEE: I only know as far back as my grandfather, who died when I was about seven years old. My grandfather was in real estate and was a gambler in real estate, and I think a gambler in horses. He made a great deal of money before the depression.He was said to be a very colorful guy, a sharp dresser, somebody who people around him liked a great deal. I think he had a fairly tense marriage with my grandmother, who was very strong-willed. She had a German background. My father was their only son. After my grandfather died, my grandmother came to live with us.

Q: With a German grandmother and the only son, was she the fuehrer?

GREENLEE: She was very assertive. She was bright, but not very well educated, no college. She was a strong presence in our family when I was growing up. Looking back, I realize that I carry some of her opinions-biases-today. There was often an angle to her comments and views that was destructive and created collateral damage in her personal relationships. She liked to play against type. For example, she was of pure German descent but was prone to say things like the Germans "started all the wars" and every German male should be "castrated." She said this kind of stuff in front of Germans. She was particularly vivid in condemning the holocaust. She liked to say she contributed to Hadassah, the Jewish women's charitable organization, although she was not Jewish. From time to time, though, she would let slip in an anti-Semitic comment. At the same time she was a strong supporter of human and civil rights, at least in the abstract. That influenced me greatly.

Q: How would you describe your father's upbringing?

GREENLEE: For most of his youth, I think, his family was quite well-to-do, and as an only child he was doted on. He grew up in a Philadelphia Main Line community and attended a prep school called St. Luke's, which later merged with or became the Haverford School. The family had a small yacht, a motorboat large enough to have a captain, and my father cruised to Maine a couple of summers. He went on to Williams College and Harvard Law School. As a young lawyer he was with the firm of Donovan and Liege, and from there was recruited for the Office of Strategic Service during World War II.

Q: Wild Bill Donovan.

GREENLEE: Yes. My father was sent behind Japanese lines in Siam (now Thailand). His exploits were written up in a couple of books. One was Sub Rosa, by Stewart Alsop. My father never talked about what he did, but I understood from what I read that he was involved in setting up a guerrilla network from the King Regent's palace in Bangkok. The King Regent was nominally with the Japanese but actually with us. My father was commissioned as a major in the U.S. Army and awarded a bunch of U.S. and Siamese medals. To me he was a heroic but sort of distant figure. He stayed involved with the intelligence community in some fashion until he died in 1965. For example, one of his law clients was Radio Free Europe, and he traveled frequently to Munich.

My father loved being a lawyer, but in the decade after the war he tried to branch into other things. He got involved with an oil-drilling venture, for example, and we used to have a bottle of the oil that his company pulled up in our pantry. It was probably the only oil. He also bought and ran, with my grandmother's help, a sports car outlet in White Plains called Shamrock Motors. After that he got into German cars through a law client who was the distributor for Mercedes Benz in Brazil. We had a 220 S and a 300 SL gull wing coup, today a real classic.

Q: I had a 180.

GREENLEE: We had a 180, too. That was our first one.

Q: That was a sort of taxi.

GREENLEE: Yes, small but boxy. My father loved cars. When he had the dealership he used to run a supercharged MG TF at the track in Lime Rock, Connecticut. He didn't drive it himself, but it was part of his identity.

Q: It was also an era of sports cars. They were much more around then.

GREENLEE: The British ones were particularly stylish and part of their appeal was that they were rough and wet in the rain.

Q: The open thing. And it had luggage straps all over the treads and that sort of thing.

GREENLEE: The other thing about that time was a house my father bought, I think largely with my grandmother's money, in Bay Head, New Jersey. It was a large summer cottage, without central heat. My grandmother presided over the house from May through September and we spent our summers there for a number of years. I was an avid sailor, racing a small planing hull called a Jet 14 as much as three times a week. I was the junior national champion of that class in 1961. My father was not a sailor. His experience was with motorboats. But through me he became interested in sailing and towards the end of his life acquired a 28foot sloop, which we sailed together for several summers. We would go off shore through the Mannesquan Inlet and, in the fall and spring, we would sail from Larchmont, New York, up and down Long Island Sound, as far as Newport and Block Island, Rhode Island.

In November or December of 1964 my father started to feel ill, with shortness of breath. He checked into the hospital a couple of times, but the doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong. In late March of 1965, my senior year in college, he became very sick. He had an operation to drain fluid that had built up around his heart, but died in the recovery room. It turned out he had a rapidly spreading cancer that probably started in his lower intestine.

Q: When did your father graduate from Williams?

GREENLEE: He graduated in 1934.

Q: Do you remember if he was in a fraternity there?

GREENLEE: Yes, but I don't know which one. The story was he was almost blackballed for wearing a yellow tie, but it turned out okay because the tie was a Sulka.

Q: I was asking that because I was a 1950 graduate of Williams. Williams, particularly prior to World War II was known very much as one of these small, elite, gentlemen's schools. The people who mattered got what was known as "gentlemen C's," and they didn't take their education too seriously. They had very good social connections. That changed quite a bit. There's always been a good education, but after the war you had the GI Bill, and a very serious group came in.

GREENLEE: My father was not socially connected. He was, I think, considered an Irish Catholic.

Q: That would put him down a couple of notches.

GREENLEE: He was a Catholic who became Episcopalian when he married my mother, who had been a Presbyterian. My grandmother was Episcopalian, although she raised my father as a Catholic in deference to my grandfather. My mother also became Episcopalian and my brother, two sisters and I were raised in that church.

Q: We'll come back to both your mother and your father, but let's go to your mother's side. Go back as far as you can. What do you know about your mother's side of the family?

GREENLEE: I know more about because me mother's side because she was interested in genealogy. She grew up in a tradition where people told stories about their families. My mother was born in Appomattox, Virginia. Her father was a small-town doctor in Appomattox whose name was David Nicol Twyman. My mother's mother died of pneumonia when my mother was an infant. My mother was brought up by an aunt in North Carolina. She had two older brothers who stayed with her father. The brothers both became alcoholics and died of alcohol-related diseases. My mother always was wary of drinking in the house, and reminded us children frequently that alcoholism could be in our blood. But she and my father both drank in the suburban tradition.

My mother died in 2001. She was a very strong and balanced person. She came out of a Scottish-Welsh tradition. Her ancestors arrived in Virginia in the seventeenth century. She also was connected with the MacGregor clan and established descent from Rob Roy. She was a Daughter of the American Revolution and had forebears who fought on the Confederate side in the Civil War. She tried to interest her children in becoming Children of the American Revolution, but we wanted no part of it. My grandmother at that point was hammering away that the DAR was un-American and reminding my mother that it had blocked Marian Anderson, the great African-American opera singer, from singing at Constitution Hall in Washington.

Q: How southern was the tradition in your family? Appomattox, can't help thinking what happened there, Lee's surrender....

GREENLEE: My mother was very southern in her roots and culture. She attended a little college, Flora MacDonald, which has since disappeared, and was briefly a grammar school teacher. But she escaped the south. She went to New York City and became a sales clerk. She loved New York, the freedom of it. That's where she met my father. But she remained connected to the south. Once she took my brother and me to visit some of her relatives. Some were fairly sophisticated, but others were appallingly racist. I was in my early teens then and remember wanting no part of the south.

A few years after my father died, my mother moved from Scarsdale, our family home. She came to Reston, Virginia. But she always said she missed New York-New York City.

Q: Was it also an era when New York was very accessible. Prices weren't that high. I remember when I was a kid going to New York. I could go to shows, I could stay in a hotel by myself, and walk around. You could go there without spending a lot of money. It wasn't a big deal. Everything was open, and it was a vibrant place at the time.

GREENLEE: New York City was very accessible when I was growing up in Scarsdale. But I went there mostly to have lunch with my father or for some event, like a Yankees game. Later, as an adult, I lived in the City for a few months and I could see what my mother meant. There is no place like it.

Q: How were relations between your mother and father?

GREENLEE: The relations between my mother and father were very good. I never saw tension between them. The wild card in the house was my grandmother. My father kept my grandmother at arm's length, leaving my mother to deal with her.

Q: That's a usual pattern!

GREENLEE: My mother was very resilient. She put up with plenty, but never undercut my grandmother. After my father died my mother cared for my grandmother in Scarsdale until my grandmother died of a stroke in 1972. That was a period of about seven years, with no children around.

Q; Where did the various members of your family fall politically when you were growing up?

GREENLEE: My father was a moderate Republican, and my mother voted the same as my father. They voted for Eisenhower and for Nixon over Kennedy. After my father died, though, my mother said she was raised as a Democrat and had no problem voting Democratic. But frankly I don't know how she voted late in life. We were close, but we didn't talk politics.

Q: You're second in the family. How did you grow up. Let's take Scarsdale. That's where you grew up.

GREENLEE: I grew up in Scarsdale, and I went to grammar school and through the ninth grade in the public school system there. Until pretty late in my teens I was very much under the shadow of my brother, who was a year older. I was scrawny and small. My brother was not. My brother was a very good athlete; I was at best a scrapper. I always felt I had to try harder. But I did not resent my brother. I was proud of him. I also had two sisters. They were three and four years behind me. I did not relate as much to my sisters. In retrospect I was, because of my own insecurity, rather cruel to them.

My brother went away to school in the tenth grade, to The Hill School, in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. I went to the same school a year later. It was a very good school, although quite conservative, even for that time, the late '50s and early '60s. I played hockey, as did my brother, and in my senior year I was on the varsity team. I became a favorite of the headmaster. He was the hockey coach and also the honors English teacher. At that point I was the only person who had ever played varsity hockey and was also in honors English. My brother went on to Williams College, and my father wanted me to go there as well. I was on a pre-acceptance list for Williams, and also for Princeton. I didn't want to keep following my brother and father, and didn't want to go to Williams. But my father didn't want me to go to Princeton, for some reason.

Q: Princeton had a reputation of being the Ivy League school of the south.

GREENLEE: Maybe that was it. It became an issue with my father. I told the headmaster about my dilemma and h said, "How about Yale."

Q: Your headmaster said, "How about Yale?"

GREENLEE: He was connected with Yale and had leverage in the admissions process. Even though the books were technically closed, he arranged for me to be interviewed there, and I was accepted. That kind of thing could never happen today.

Q: Let's talk about the academic side. Were you much of a reader?

GREENLEE: I became a reader, but I was not an early reader. When I was at The Hill School, I became interested in learning how to write well. I was a poor writer. But in my tenth grade year, my sophomore year, I became more interested in reading, in reading poetry as well as fiction. The summer before I entered the honors English course, I read a bunch of books on a reading list, Tolstoy through Galsworthy-the classics.

Q: Who was the headmaster?

GREENLEE: A man named Edward T. Hall, a great educator and a very impressive man.

Q: By any chance, was The Catcher in the Rye a book that caught your attention?

GREENLEE: I read The Catcher in the Rye. But the best prep school book, in my opinion, was A Separate Peace, by John Knowles, which came out a few years later.

Q: How about foreign affairs? I'm still sticking to the time you went away to college. Did you get interested in any place outside the U.S.?

GREENLEE: In prep school I studied Latin and had no interest in modern foreign languages or really the world outside our borders. In college, though, I realized I was narrowing my options and began taking Spanish in my freshman year. In my sophomore year, during spring break, I drove to Mexico with a couple of guys from college. I realized on that trip that Spanish was more than an academic thing-that it was functional, that it opened up a new world. About that time I got interested in taking a junior year abroad. I was actually talked into this by a roommate. He suggested we both go to Spain. I thought, why not? He quickly dropped the idea but I stuck with it. I managed to convince Yale that I should be able to go, not as a Spanish major, where I lacked credits, but as an English major. That wasn't an easy sell, but it worked. I joined a program under the auspices of Smith College. I was one of four young men in a class of about 20 women. It was in Spain that I became interested in finding a way to live abroad, and in the foreign service. That year in Spain was an eye-opener in many ways.

Q: Franco vs. civil power.

GREENLEE: Yes. This was 1963-64. The truth, though, is that I was not interested in politics. I didn't pay much attention to the dictatorship and the Spaniards were careful not to talk about it. I was interested in the culture, in the art, the music and in the cafï¿½ and night life. Spain, even in the Franco period, was fun, a lot of fun, as long as you didn't try to stir things up. When I returned home, after a summer of riding a motorcycle from Madrid to Sweden and Norway and back, and after running with the bulls in Pamplona, I mentioned to my father that I thought I might be interested in the foreign service. He said, "You would get a lot of respect, but there's no money in it." He wanted me to be a lawyer.

When my father was dying, I visited him a last time in the hospital. My mother told him that I had been accepted for Peace Corps training to be an English teacher at Roberts College in Istanbul. Just about his last words to me were, "David, that would be a big mistake." In the end I went to Bolivia, not Turkey, in a community development program. I did that with the idea of deepening my Spanish and maybe eventually trying to get in the foreign service.

Q: You mentioned Kennedy. The election of 1960 was a rather pivotal election. A lot of people were turned on by the election, both for Nixon and for Kennedy. You were still at The Hill School. How did that hit you, or did it?

GREENLEE: I wasn't the least bit political, and I wasn't yet old enough to vote. I watched the debate and thought probably that Nixon had won it. That's not the way people see it now. The Kennedy election was exciting. He generated a feeling of freshness and energy. I remember Ned Hall, the headmaster, saying later, "I didn't vote for him but I wish I had." At Yale, I became fascinated with Kennedy through the political debates between Norman Mailer and William Buckley, and from their writings. I remember particularly a piece by Mailer about the election campaign that I read in Advertisements for Myself titled, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket." It was vibrant, personalized writing about a time of change.

Q: People then knew the names of all the cabinet members! You were talking about culture. Tell me about Yale at the time.

GREENLEE: I didn't take advantage of Yale as I should have. I am an "introverted, intuitive, thinking, perceiver," an INTP, on the Myers-Briggs personality indicator scale. I tended to be bookish and to hang out with just two or three friends, who were also pretty reclusive and on the cynical side. I should have taken advantage of more of what Yale had to offer, which was a lot. I was not interested in fraternities and did not try to position myself for a secret society. In fact I bailed out by going abroad my junior year. I spent a lot of time drinking coffee with a couple of guys every night at a place called George and Harry's. I did too much of that. Spain imprinted more on me in one year than Yale in three years.

Q: Where did you date?

GREENLEE: I dated sporadically at Yale. It was a men's college then, and we met women at mixers. It was not very satisfactory. Abroad, in Spain, I had two different girl friends, and stayed close to one of them when I returned to Yale for my senior year. The relationships in those days were pretty platonic compared to now.

Q: Did business ever intrigue you at all?

GREENLEE: It didn't, and I think for the wrong reasons. What I knew about business was from reading books like Babbitt and The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit. And from what I thought were the boring lives of the men who lived in Scarsdale and commuted to and from New York City each day. I wanted no part of it. I didn't want to be a corporate guy, always having to wear a white shirt.

Q: This is a period where there was a great deal of looking at people in business, not as villains, but as cogs in a machine.

GREENLEE: Yes, the people in our neighborhood in Scarsdale, the fathers of my friends, in many cases were corporate, organization men.

Q: Advertising and...

GREENLEE: Certainly that as well. People would move to Scarsdale when the man of the house reached a certain rung on the ladder, and then would move to Florida or some place else when it was time to retire. It was not a town of second generations, and I feel no nostalgia for it.

Q: How did you look at law?

GREENLEE: I did not have negative feelings about the law, as I did about business. But since my father was a lawyer, and my brother was headed that way, I wanted to go in a different direction. I thought that if I went to law school, it would close my options, rather than open them. I changed my mind later, after a stint in the army, and actually began going to law school at night, at the University of Santa Clara. I quit when I joined the foreign service, but if I hadn't become a diplomat, I would have stuck with the law.

Q: You graduated in 1965. The Peace Corps was right there for you?

GREENLEE: It was right there. It was an easy way not to make a decision about a career. It opened up to me naturally. I don't remember quite how I first thought of it, but it was a way to consolidate my Spanish, to go abroad again, to see a new place-which ended up being Bolivia. I declined the invitation for Turkey.

Q: Was Vietnam at all a cloud on your horizon?

GREENLEE: It was not a cloud on my horizon, but it was certainly something we were all aware of. I was of two minds about the war. I remember my father saying before he died that he didn't think we would stay long in Vietnam, because it was in Asia and we wouldn't want to get stuck there. The draft was not a threat, then, at least when I was in school. But I did not go to the Peace Corps as a way of avoiding the draft. And, as it turned out, I was drafted after the Peace Corps anyway.

Q: The Peace Corps: You went in in '65 and came out in '67?

GREENLEE: Yes.

Q: Talk about your impression of the Peace Corps: the people you were with, the training, at that particular time.

GREENLEE: I trained in Columbia, Missouri, at the University of Missouri. Our group was headed for Bolivia and there was a group going to Nepal that we trained with to some extent. I was impressed by the training. It was pretty rigorous, with a high psychological content. About a third to a half of the trainees were "selected out." A psychologist shadowed us everywhere. I met people who were quite different from those I knew in college. There were people from Texas and Minnesota, some very prepared, some not. I think, in fact, I and one other guy from Yale were the "exotics."

The interesting thing about the training was the psychological component, because we were being tested in ways that we didn't quite realize. For example, we did something called "drown-proofing." It was a technique developed by a guy who survived for about 12 hours bobbing in the Caribbean without a life vest after his boat went down. When you learned to do it, you could bob up, take a breath, then go down, repeating this process even if your arms and legs were tied. That's what we had to do, tied up, for about ten minutes each. Some could do it, some couldn't. For example, one heavily muscled guy didn't have enough body fat to bob up and sunk to the drain. He had to be pulled up, water heaving from his lungs. How you handled the challenge was one of many factors that determined whether you became a Peace Corps volunteer.

Q: Just the thought of it gives me chills.

GREENLEE: It wasn't that bad. And it was good training if your ship ever goes down.

Q: Any other examples of people selected out?

GREENLEE: One person who was selected out was a quite attractive young woman who handled most things very well. But the psychologist apparently told her that she knew how to turn the guys on, but not how to turn them off. [laughter]

The group was winnowed down. One guy, a real strong athletic guy, had played football at Brigham Young. He was not a Mormon and he turned out to be a nasty drunk. He got in a few fights and finally was selected out. Later we learned that he that he had a felony record that hadn't turned up until late in the training cycle. Another person dropped was a woman who was determined to win all the foot races against the men. It was too important for her to win, or so it was said. Of 60 people or so in our group, we ended up with about 30. It was pretty brutal. Some people left in tears.

Q: Had you picked up anything about Bolivia before you got into the Peace Corps?

GREENLEE: Actually, not. I didn't know anything about Bolivia. When I was accepted for training, I did a little reading about Bolivia, and I knew that it was in the center of South America and there were high mountains. The rest I mostly learned about in training.

Q: What was the impression they gave you in training about Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Training was an interesting experience because it was the first time I had been connected in any particular way with something that was related to the federal government. My previous experience had always been with educational institutions and professors who were either smart or thought they were smart. I knew the level of competence of people who ran educational institutions.

I was impressed by the organization that went into Peace Corps training and the standards that were set in the training. There were people, though, who were brought in on contract to talk about Latin American culture and who, in retrospect, were not very professional. They came out of the academic community. By and large, though, I thought the training was quite good, and there were a couple of Bolivians there. One, particularly, made an impression on me. His name was Joaquin Ferrufino and he taught me Quechua. Several of us took Quechua, because we already knew Spanish. By coincidence, Clara, the woman I later met and married, turned out to be related to him.

Q: When you went there, were people saying, "Oh, my God, you're going to Bolivia!" or, "Gee, that sounds great"?

GREENLEE: It was more "that sounds great!" The volunteers, the candidates to be volunteers, were all very enthusiastic about Bolivia. There were no negative vibrations at all.

Q: You went to Bolivia when?

GREENLEE: In September of 1965.

Q: And when did you leave?

GREENLEE: In September of 1967. It was a two-year hook.

Q: How would you describe the situation: political, economic, social, whatever, in Bolivia, in '65?

GREENLEE: We learned in training was that Bolivia had undergone in 1952 one of the three significant revolutions of Latin America. The first was the Mexican Revolution. The other, besides Bolivia, was the Cuban revolution. We learned that Bolivia had had, in effect, conditions of chattel servitude until 1952. In the land reforms of 1953, large agricultural holdings were broken up and divided among the indigenous poor, the campesinos. There was a problem of political correctness in translating that term. No one wanted to quite say "peasants," but that's probably the closest English sense of it. The academics called them "countrymen," which didn't make any sense at all.

The indigenous poor who had worked as chattels on the large estates were granted parcels of land which were too small, in most cases, to support more than subsistence needs. The program I trained for was rural community development. There was a whole theory behind it, a theory that was also being tried or implemented in Vietnam. It was aimed at finding ways to empower the rural poor based on their "felt needs." The idea was that they would identify what they needed and what they could do for themselves. The y would demand assistance from the central government for the rest. The Peace Corps volunteers would work with the campesinos. The USAID people would help the central government deliver. This would stimulate development and social integration. It was a sweet theory. It didn't work in Vietnam, and not very well in Bolivia.

I was sent to a mostly Quechua speaking town called San Benito outside the city of Cochabamba. It was a highly politicized area. I was to partner with village-level workers who were supposed to be chosen directly by the people. That was rarely the case. The first thing was to help them conduct a survey to find out who was out there and what their problems were. The idea was that we would always deal with felt-needs that the people would identify. We would work with the village-level workers to develop a request for help from one of the central government ministries, for example the Ministry of Agriculture and Campesino Affairs. The Ministry, with USAID behind it, would provide materials and engineering support. The campesinos would put in sweat equity. Some volunteers were successful in their areas. I was not. I lived in a little adobe house with a tin roof on the outskirts of town. One room, no electricity, no water. I had to go into town to get water and carry it out in a pail. I had a latrine and a Petromax lantern. The town, at night, had about 200 people. By day it was empty. I didn't work there, but in the area around it. I started out with a bit of uneasiness. How should I start? What should I do? The people identified as my village-level counterparts were by and large appointed by the local political leadership. They had little interest in the program. They just wanted the goods. It was interesting dealing with them, but in all but an anthropological sense, for me, it was wheel-spinning.

I felt pretty much alone out there. In town the person I talked to most was a Spanish priest. He had a good setup because he had access to water and a few hours of electricity, and he got meals from a lady next door to his church. He was a Catalan, and a pretty interesting guy. I don't think he was terribly religious. Once in a while other Catalan priests would visit. They would talk Catalan. I had lived a few months in Barcelona, the summer before my junior year abroad, and could understand some of it. After about ten months in San Benito, I took a vacation trip with that guy. We stayed at seminaries in Lima and Colombia. The talk there was of liberation theology. This priest drank quite a lot. He wasn't gay, or anything like that, but was afraid to be around women. He seemed always to be fighting off temptation. I found out much later, after I returned to Bolivia, that he eventually bolted with the adolescent daughter of the woman who served him his meals. He left the church. They got married and settled in Barcelona.

Sometimes I'd go into the town of Punata, a regional center. A key figure there was another priest, a Bolivian, who had a couple of kids. In that environment, if you were from a poor rural town, there were two routes to possible advancement. One was the military and the other was the church. A priest lived comparatively well, and usually had a Toyota Land Cruiser or a pickup truck. If you got some rudimentary education, you might become an engineer, but that was kind of a long shot. If you were just out there tilling the soil, you weren't going to get any place. You would be working behind with a primitive plow behind an ox. You would look 60 before you were 40.

One thing you had to worry about in the countryside was the culture of drinking. At every gathering, at every meal, you were expected to drink and to drink until you were staggering drunk. The drink was a kind of beer chicha-made through the fermentation of corn. The classic chicha was made by women who chewed corn into pulp and spit it into a jug of water, which was boiled and then left to ferment. The only acceptable way to avoid having to drink it was to claim to be an evangelico, a protestant evangelist, which seemed to command a measure of respect. It gave you a pass from having to become drunk.

For a while I had a horse. But the horse kept getting away and eating alfalfa from some guy's field. It was a problem. Once I rode the horse with some Bolivian guys who also had horses to a town far up a mountain trail. We chewed coca, with a lye-like catalyst called lejia. The lejia, mixed with saliva, separates alkaloids from the leaf and produces a mild stimulant. This is not cocaine. It doesn't create a high, only a deadening sensation. It's what the miners and workers chew to ward off cold and increase stamina. In Bolivia, particularly in the higher altitudes, like La Paz, most people drink infusions of the coca leaf, which has a milder effect. It's part of Bolivian life, with strong cultural overtones.

Q: I have this vision of Bolivia, of the altiplano, with these barren mountains, where there is mining, and indigenous people in the lowlands. Were they the same Indians as on the altiplano?

GREENLEE: There are many indigenous groups, but two large ones: the Aymaras and the Quechuas. These are probably more linguistic designations than ethnic ones. The Aymara are mainly in the upland areas, on and around the altiplano, which has been described as a desert at 13,000 feet. The altiplano stretches from La Paz south to the old silver-mining city of Potosi and beyond. There are Quechuas around Potosi and mainly in the lower valleys, around Sucre and Cochabama, where I was.

People often think of Bolivia as being mostly mountainous, but only one-third of the country is mountainous. The rest, to the north and east, is rolling low lands and middle-altitude valleys. Two-thirds of the population lives in the mountains and valleys. Bolivia is twice the land area of France. It now has only a little over nine million people. In those days the population was just over about four million. At that point the second largest city, after La Paz, was Cochabamba. I lived about 35 kilometers to the east of Cochabamba. The daytime temperature was about 70-75 degrees, eternal spring. But at night, where I was, it could get pretty cold.

I lived beside the only road at that time that went to Santa Cruz, over 300 kilometers to the east. I usually moved about on trucks. You could flag down a truck and get in the back, atop sacks of flour or sugar, with a bunch of chickens and other passengers. It took about 12 hours to reach Santa Cruz. Today it is a thriving city of over a million people. Then it was a cow town with a population of well under 100,000. Santa Cruz is a very old city. In those days the streets were of dirt. The sidewalks were about a meter high off the ground, with hitching rails on the main square for horses. I went to Santa Cruz for carnival in 1966. It was raining all the time. I remember these absolutely stunning women in party dresses walking under covered walkways. At the corner of the main plaza they would take off their spike heels and walk through the mud puddles to the other side. Then put their shoes on again. In the morning you would see horses coming into the plaza with milk cans hanging on their sides. It was like a movie of the old west, really quite wonderful.

Q: Was there a division when you were in Cochabamba between indigenous and Spanish people?

GREENLEE: There were definite class distinctions. Some were very obvious. San Benito, my village, had a mestizo population, with a base in indigenous culture. They were cholos. They would look down on the "indios," the purely indigenous people, and the urban elites, in the city of Cochabamba, in turn would look down on them. The women where I lived wore white stovepipe hats. Around La Paz the chola women wore derby hats. The men tended to wear fedoras. The deeper campesinos, the indios, wore clothes hand-made from crudely spun alpaca wool. They were much more rustic. The urban middle class, and up, dressed like people in the developed western world.

The cholos were quite enterprising. They owned stores and trucks. The indios, on the other hand, were treated like beasts of burden. They did very menial work. They were paid little, or they bartered for goods in exchange for work. They would come in from the deep countryside and were around in greater numbers on market days.

Near where I lived in the upper Cochabamba valley were the ruins of old estates, ransacked, crumbling, windows broken. Before the land reform, just 13 years before, they had been thriving. The people in my town would not talk about their relationship with these estates.

In the cities it was often hard to differentiate class by skin color, unless the skin color was very light. Many dark-skinned people had resources, a good education and power.

Bolivia, in fact, is mostly mestizo. I couldn't always tell where someone fit on the social scale, but Bolivians knew right away. It involved accents, schools, cuts of clothing.

Q: The Brits have trouble classifying Americans. You can't tell who we are because of our accent. Did the Bolivians try to put you into a category or were you a creature from beyond?

GREENLEE: I was definitely a creature from beyond, and I was assumed to fit a stereotype of what an American was. When I didn't seem to fit, someone would say, "You're not like the other Americans." But for the most part they didn't know any other Americans, at least personally. They knew stereotypes-the way we tend to know them.

I remember one guy talking about his heroes. He said that on his wall he had two pictures: One was of John F. Kennedy, the other of Nikita Khrushchev. He said these were the two great men of the world and that I was coming as a representative of Kennedy. Of course, at that time it was Johnson. He said, "You have come from the United States. You, a millionaire, have come to be with us in all this poverty!" I tried to explain that I wasn't a millionaire, but that didn't matter. They knew that I'd come out of a certain world, that for a while I would live with them and break bread with them, but that I would eventually go back to my world and they would stay in theirs.

Q: This first assignment, were people saying, "OK, fine, you're here. What are you doing for us? What are you really doing?"

GREENLEE: Right. That was exactly part of the problem: You are here, it's wonderful you are here, we need things, we want you to deliver. They could never quite figure out what I was supposed to be doing because, in fact, it was hard for me to figure it out. Ascertaining their "felt-needs," and how these could translate into the possibility of solid projects and getting resources through the government ministries, was too theoretical. The campesinos I worked with were used to handouts, usually just before an election, and broken promises. What was I bringing? Where was it? When would it come? That was the mindset.

Q: Sometimes Peace Corps people or AID people act as intermediaries. They say, they need more rice or cement, and I can help. Were you playing that role at all?

GREENLEE: I was, but none of the projects that we talked about really delivered to expectation. I think other volunteers, in some cases, had better results. But I learned a lot, an awful lot.

Q: To put this in perspective, you were early Peace Corps. The Peace Corps came in about '62, and we're talking about '65. The idea was great. In a way it was an idea looking for structure.

GREENLEE: That's right, and, as I mentioned earlier, the concept was nation-building. It wasn't people-building. Later generations of Peace Corps volunteers had more realistic roles. The programs today are much more practical and productive.

Q: While you were there, just to get a little bit of the life. Here you are, a young, unattached man. What about girls? Were they no-no?

GREENLEE: No, there were no prohibitions. Initially, I had pretty intensive relationships with a couple of Peace Corps girls, but they did not go anywhere. The Bolivian girls in Cochabamba were quite beautiful, quite exotic, and I suppose Peace Corps volunteers seemed different and exotic to them. But I was rarely in Cochabamba, and I wasn't about to try to kindle anything in the rural areas where I lived.

Q: I was wondering if it was one of those things you could look but if you touch you might either get married or get a knife in your rear.

GREENLEE: There was a little bit of that. I had a friend in a rural part of Santa Cruz who got into a deep but temporary relationship with a local girl, and had to leave town in the dead of night. But that was not my story. I didn't want to get mixed up in anything I couldn't get out of.

Later, when I transferred to La Paz, I met Clara, now my wife, at a "happy-hour" kind of setting. She was there with a friend, who was dating another Peace Corps volunteer. La Paz after the rural Cochabamba valley seemed like Paris or New York. Clara was really beautiful and serene, really serene. Our relationship developed and we were married in New York, when I was in the army, in 1968. We now have four children, all out on their own, and four grandchildren. So in answer to your question I did get involved, in the end, with a lady of the country, and have lived to tell about it.

One thing I should mention about life in the Cochabamba valley is Chagas disease. This was a nasty fact of life. The disease is carried by a parasite on a beetle, a large ugly reduvit called the vinchuca. These beetles are all over the Cochabamba valley and certain other parts of Bolivia and South America. About half of them carry the Chagas parasite. The vinchucas are slow flyers, and slow on their feet. They suck blood to live, usually chicken blood. If you are around chickens, as I was, you would be around vinchucas. They live between the chinks of the adobe buildings. You won't see them during the day, but they come out at night.

My town was full of vinchucas. If you were sleeping and you did not have any protection against them, they would look for a place-a soft part of your body-to bite. They usually would bite under your eye or under your elbow, where the skin is soft. They would suck your blood, and you would not notice because you would be asleep. They would defecate over the wound before moving on, and there was a danger you would rub the parasite into the bite without realizing it. If you got the parasite, you had a good chance of getting this Chagas disease, and there was no cure for it. They could transfuse you, and maybe that would help. But there was a real danger you would eventually die of a blood clot to the heart or brain.

That was something we were really worried about. Where the disease was rampant, we slept in special netting. The netting went under as well as over the mattress and zipped along the side. You would keep it zipped during the day, and at night you would zip yourself in. I always wondered whether I might have zipped one of these bugs in with me. Once I saw a vinchuca on a book in my little house. What I was supposed to do was put it in a matchbox for testing. Instead, I smashed it with a hammer. Blood spattered all over. I didn't know if it was my blood or some other blood.

Q: You said you got tested.

GREENLEE: Yes, when I left Bolivia at the end of my tour. I was clean. I didn't have Chagas disease.

Q: You lived in La Paz as well as the Cochabamba valley....

GREENLEE: Yes, I asked to be transferred after about a year. I felt stalled. I went to La Paz, an urban setting, and I did a lot of different things. I lived with a couple of volunteers, quite interesting people. I worked for a time with a linguist who came to Bolivia to develop an Aymara dictionary. We worked with local native speakers and put together a program of dialogues that was subsequently used to train other Peace Corps volunteers. I also taught English at a local school, and to members of a taxi union. I spent a lot of time riding around the city with these taxi drivers. That was interesting and fun.

The linguist I worked with liked a good time. He was always partying, and drank too much. It was fun talking with him and dealing with him, but he was always pretty close to the edge. He was in any case a serious linguist and an expert on Chomsky and transformationism. At some point he came to the attention of the local director of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Q: This is his major evangelical program.

GREENLEE: Yes. The SIL director supported missionaries based in a place called Tomechuqua, in a jungle area of northern Bolivia. They were religious linguists who translated the bible into native languages. My friend was offered the chance to visit this outpost and one of the Amazon-basin tribes called the Chacobo. The idea is that he would update the missionaries on transformationism. Another Peace Corps volunteer and I went with him. The Chacobo were like the Amazonian tribes you would see pictures of and read about in National Geographic. They had bones through their ears and feathers through their noses and no eyebrows-shaved off-and red mascara-like stuff smeared all over them. And of course very little clothing. The Chacobo had not been in contact with any Spanish settlers or colonial period Bolivians until the Bolivians started to build a road out there. That was probably about 100 years ago. The Bolivians massacred these people when they found them. The Chacobo escaped back into the jungle and remained isolated for years. Eventually they were located by these missionary linguists. The missionaries sought to convert them to Christianity, but also to give them rudimentary skills so that they could eventually integrate into Bolivian society, which was fast encroaching in any case.

We flew up to Riberalta, close to Brazil, and from there went to Tomechuqua in a little Swiss-built plane, a HelioCourier, which could land in small patches of jungle. Then we flew out to this tribe. What surprised me was the change in behavior of this kind of crazy linguist, who could be a real wild man. He was like a choir boy. He could relate to these missionaries and really talk with them. We had a terrific experience with the Chacabo. It was a real privilege, because we were interacting with a people not much removed from the stone age, who were not really a part of Bolivia but were within the geography of Bolivia. We traded with them. We gave them fishhooks, for example, in exchange for ironwood bows and bark dresses, things like that. My linguist friend also slipped them a few packs of black tobacco cigarettes, which they appreciated, but the missionaries I am sure would have been appalled if they had known.

Q: How did you find Peace Corps work in La Paz? Were you supervised or were you cut loose?

GREENLEE: If anything, we were under-supervised. I mentioned this trip I took with the Catalan priest. I don't think I even told the staff where I was going. I didn't know I had to. I wasn't closely tracked, as volunteers are today. Every once in a while there would be a conference or a meeting, and we would be asked how things were going. But we were not closely evaluated. In La Paz I had a little bit more contact with staff, and we would get suggestions about new things to do.

Q: In Cochabamba or in La Paz, did you have any contact with the State Department, with the consulate or the embassy?

GREENLEE: I had a little contact. There was at that time a consulate in Cochabamba. I met the resident consular officer, who I got to know a bit. He lived in a different world, lived very well. He was dating a Peace Corps volunteer from my group and later married her. I saw this guy once or twice later, after I joined the foreign service. In La Paz I would meet people who worked at the embassy, usually in bars or informal social settings. I was aware of the embassy, and when I was working with the syndicate-the taxi union-I met the labor officer at the embassy. I think there had been a suggestion that it would be good to have a Peace Corps volunteer out there, but that was all. The idea was to be helpful to the Bolivians.

Q: Did you have any thought about the foreign service at this point?

GREENLEE: I did in the sense of the interest that had been sparked my junior year in Spain. Whenever I asked about the foreign service, though, I heard it was impossibly hard to get into. The tests, written and oral, were said to be daunting. I did know one volunteer, a year ahead of me, who entered the foreign service right after the Peace Corps. That was Robert Gelbard. Bob had a very distinguished career, which included being ambassador to Bolivia. I was his dcm (deputy chief of missions) for about a year, from 1988-89. I don't think the Peace Corps ever realized how unique this was-an ambassador and dcm, serving together in the country where they had been volunteers. It was really remarkable if you think about it.

Q: Bolivia had the reputation of having revolving governments. There were coups and what have you. What was the situation when you were in the Peace Corps?

GREENLEE: There was a de facto president, an air force general named Rene Barrientos. He took over the government ostensibly to carry forward the 1952 revolution, to clean out the corruption. He was very charismatic and really connected with the people around Cochabamba. He came from a little town called Tarata and spoke Quechua. Toward the end of my tour as a volunteer, Che Guevara was roaming about with a rag-tag bunch of Cubans and Bolivian revolutionists. He had been seen buying asthma medicine in a place called Samaipata. In fact, I met in La Paz a journalist, an Anglo-Chilean guy, who had made contact with Guevara and had been held hostage for a while. He had been associated as well with Regis Debray, a Frenchman who claimed to be a journalist, but was also a revolutionary theorist. Debray was captured and held by the Bolivian authorities. There was a lot of drama around Debray. Finally, a French delegation including his mother managed to get him freed. He not long ago re-emerged as a French minister of culture, I believe.

Q: I understand that Che ended up in a remote area with people who didn't want any part of him...

GREENLEE: Right, he badly miscalculated what he could do. He was hiding in a jungle area in eastern Bolivia. He had a few Cubans, some hardcore Bolivian communists and some romantic students with him. They were turned in by the locals. When Elvis Presley died, someone said, "Great career move." It was like that with Che. Today he is iconic. Many Bolivians now see him as someone who was trying help the country.

We can talk about Bolivia in the political context, but Bolivia is historically probably the most turbulent republic in the world. There have been more presidents and changes in government than there have been years of existence as an independent country. Just to give you a sound bite, when I was in Vietnam listening to a radio broadcast, I heard Paul Harvey say, "In Bolivia, where anybody can be president and practically everybody has been, there has been a coup!" The coups sometimes didn't last long. The coup I heard about on the radio that time lasted only a couple of days, and then there was another coup. Historically, there have been lots of them.

Q: I have the vision that at a certain point you had these miners who were running around with sticks of dynamite stuck in their belts and being very unhappy and causing all sorts of trouble. Is there an element of truth to that? Did that impact at all when you were there?

GREENLEE: It did not impact on me when I was a Peace Corps volunteer. Where I was it was relatively quiet. In La Paz we would see miners. They would come into town. I think there may also have been some demonstrations, but nothing like when I returned to Bolivia with the embassy. The miners were classically the macho political actors, the proletarians in a Marxist sense. They were a factor of governance. If they didn't support the government, the government wouldn't last. It was the same way with the military. It used to be said that the U.S. embassy was another pivotal factor.

The miners were emblematic of Bolivia's culture of machismo. I remember one guy in La Paz. He sold newspapers. He was missing a hand. The bones of his forearm formed a kind of fork. Into that he stuck a newspaper. He apparently had been a miner, and the word was that his hand was blown off in a kind of game of Russian roulette with dynamite caps. The challenge was to hold the burning stick as long as possible before passing it to the next guy. Well, this guy lost.

Talking generically about the miners, they used to be more powerful politically than they are now. But they can still shake things up. In 2003, when I was ambassador, there were two or three different demonstrations one day when I was calling on the minister of the presidency. There were several staccato blasts in the street. He kept talking, and I said, "Those are the miners, right?" He said, "No, no. Only the students." The students were throwing these small explosive charges called matasuegros, literally mother-in-law killers, which were like super-sized cherry bombs. About five minutes later, there was a window-rattling explosion. "Those are the miners," the minister said. [laughter] So yes, they can still make their presence felt.

Maybe this is a good time to talk a bit more about my wife. She comes from a historic family and one which, on her mother's side, lost a lot in the '52 revolution, a lot of land.

Q: She's Bolivian.

GREENLEE: Yes, and a descendant, on her father's side, of this first martyr of independence of Bolivia, a man named Pedro Domingo Murillo. Murillo is her surname. This guy was hanged by the Spaniards, and his head was put on a stake outside La Paz. He was the child of a union between a Spanish priest and an Indian woman. This is my wife's lineage. My wife's father died of a heart attack before I met her. She had been a medical student at the University of San Andres in La Paz, but had to drop out and study to become a teacher to support her family. When I met her she was doing what's called a provincial year, a requirement of new teachers to work in a rural area. She lived in La Paz but would spend several days each week teaching at a school at a tin mine, Milluni, in the high Andes outside the city. She also taught in the city, English and French. I went out to Milluni once to visit. It was bleak and cold. But in those days the mine was a going-proposition. When I returned to Bolivia as ambassador, we took our children, now grown, and two of our grandchildren to see where my wife had taught. The mine was abandoned because the tin had pretty much run out. It looked pretty forlorn.

Q.The mines made Bolivia. The silver of Potosi, for example...

GREENLEE: Yes, the cerro rico was the main silver mine for the Spaniards. The legend was that you could build a bridge from South America to Spain with the silver of Potosi. When I was deputy chief of mission in Madrid, my wife and I visited the cathedral in Seville, the second largest Catholic cathedral in the world. I said, "Look at all the silver. Isn't it magnificent!" But my wife was furious. She saw it as plunder from Potosi. You know, Potosi in the seventeenth century was bigger than any city in Europe except Venice: bigger than London, bigger than Paris. It had some magnificent buildings, some still standing and partially restored. You can see what it was. It is part of the cultural memory of Bolivia. They once had all this stuff, and now they don't have it.

Q: How were Americans viewed when you were there with the Peace Corps?

GREENLEE: In the mid-sixties there was not the kind of resistance to Americans that there is today. Americans were seen by the governing classes as being necessary for the stability of the country. The U.S. embassy was perceived-again I'm looking back to when I was a Peace Corps volunteer, but it was the same for years afterward-as being the essential prop for the government. It was understood that if the Americans withdrew their support, Bolivia would really suffer-because it depended on outside assistance, and the U.S. was the key to that. When I was in the Peace Corps, it was the height of the Cold War. I am not sure if Bolivia had relations with the Soviets at that time, but they certainly did when I returned a few years later. They learned well how to play the game of using the Soviets as a foil to get more assistance from us. Students, though, tended to be anti-American. It was part of their culture.

Q: I interviewed one man who was ambassador there-I can't remember which one-saying that when he arrived at the airport, as he went down, there were signs painted on rocks saying, "Death to the American ambassador." This sort of thing wasn't going on?

GREENLEE: No, it wasn't, or at least I didn't sense it to the extent I did later. There was a clear change by the early seventies, when, in fact, the Peace Corps was kicked out of the country. It didn't return until the nineties.

Q: How did this romance between the Bolivian young lady and the Peace Corps volunteer go?

GREENLEE: My wife is stunningly attractive, a very beautiful woman. I was drawn to her first that way. We had similar family experiences in the sense that my father had died recently, as had her father. My mother didn't seem to know what to do next, and her mother didn't seem to know what to do next. We had that sort of thing to talk about right away. My wife had not been around Americans. She didn't know them. She once told me that she had been anti-gringo. Nixon once visited Bolivia, and she claims that she lofted an egg at his motorcade. She wasn't political, though, and she didn't know Americans. I think she had some friends who were English. I think I was probably the first American she knew. We dated and became very close that second year I was in Bolivia. When I left the Peace Corps, she came up to visit me and my family in New York, and, after I go drafted, and was about to go to officer training, we decided to get married.

Q: You left Bolivia in 1965.

GREENLEE: No, 1967.

Q: What was on your agenda at the time, or did you have an agenda?

GREENLEE: I did not have an agenda. I mentioned earlier that I went in the Peace Corps to consolidate my Spanish and to live abroad again. I didn't have a firm idea of what I wanted to do. I didn't think I wanted to go to law school or anything like that. I thought I'd like to be a journalist. I thought it would be an interesting career because it was portable. You can move around. Through a connection I got a job as a writer at Newsweek. It was really a tryout, and the tryouts lasted usually two weeks. But I stayed on in that status for several months until I got drafted.

Q: Just the Newsweek thing. I know that at least back in the loose days, Time had a very distinct way of writing. Did you pick up any tricks of the trades at Newsweek?

GREENLEE: There is a way to write for Newsweek or Time. The writers at Newsweek and Time were sort of interchangeable. They would go back and forth: They'd write for one magazine, then the other.

Henry Luce and Britton Haddon developed what has been called "Time-style." It was more extreme than Newsweek-style, but similar. They didn't do backward running sentences as much at Newsweek, but, as with Time, the idea was to make a report into a kind of story, to make it end with a bang. In a newspaper, you've got your lead, and the facts follow in diminishing order of importance. An editor could lop off the copy anywhere he wanted, to make it fit. At Newsweek you wanted the whole thing to hang together, to have information of almost equal weight right through to the end.

I wrote for the foreign department at Newsweek. The foreign editor was Bob Christopher. One thing that dogged me not just at Newsweek but throughout most of my foreign service career was that I never wanted to let anything go. I would never let anyone see my first cut. I'd work on it and I'd work on it and work on it. It would never look right to me. In the beginning at Newsweek this was a particularly acute problem for me. It's an interesting crucible, because-and people have written about this-there is a kind of curve. You get completely edited, and think you will never get it right. At the same time, you are not writing from your own sources. You work from a file, a report, sent in from a correspondent.

This was really hard for me. The reports came in just about letter perfect, but far too long for the magazine. You had to write from scratch, drawing on the information and maybe a quote or two. I forget how many words made up a line, but the foreign editor would say, "OK, David. We're going to give you this story. See what you can do with it. I'm not sure we'll run it this week, but give it a try. You have 170 lines." This was before computers. I'd start working on my typewriter, and I didn't want to let go. So it would be Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Then he'd come in and say, "How are you doing with your story?" I would say, "I'm working on it. I'll give it to you." Then he might say, "We're going to run it, but you have to get it into 87 lines." I'd be anguished! I'd finally hand it in. He'd sit down and I'd hear nothing in his office for a while, maybe 10 minutes. Then I would hear his typewriter going, loud and fast, and after 20 minutes or so he would give it back to me. He would have put a whole new lead on it and changed it all around. There would hardly be anything left of what I had done. But gradually I improved, and toward the end, before I left for the army, I got a couple of stories in almost unscathed.

Q: Did you have a feel for a Newsweek point of view, or were you more into the style of writing, how to shape the story?

GREENLEE: There was a sense that Time was a little too glib. Time was Henry Luce. Time was conservative. Newsweek was a little less conservative, maybe a little more like Avis trying harder, possibly in that day a more serious magazine.

Q: There was Time,, Newsweek, and there was something called U.S. News and World Report. Anybody who was anybody-you paid attention to them.

GREENLEE: Yes, you did. There was a trick to writing for them. The trick-and the foreign editor told me this-was not to be too creative, but to be facile. You needed a kind of facility. I thought after a while that I was starting to get it. But it was hard for me. I wasn't really good at it. I saw that. But it was great training.

Q: Then you're off to the military.

GREENLEE: Yes. I wasn't terribly upset with that because I thought, "Well, this is one more adventure."

Q: This would be '68-ish about?

GREENLEE: I knew I'd be drafted in early 1968. The way the draft boards worked, you were given a designation, an indicator of where you stood. I was 1-A, which meant the clock was ticking on me. Peace Corps service meant nothing to my draft board, although some other boards would have given it credit. Mine didn't. I thought about going to graduate school, but didn't pursue it. In the end, I left myself open, and got tapped.

It wasn't an easy time in another sense. I didn't believe in the war. Few did who were following what was going on. By the time I was drafted there was real anguish about how we had gotten into the war and about where it was going. The objectives were changing all the time. In the beginning it was to stop communism, then it was to support some vision of democracy, and then it finally got down to credibility. It was, "If we cut and run, who will ever believe us again?"

Q: That sounds familiar!

GREENLEE: Yes, quite familiar.

Q: Our commitment in Iraq.

GREENLEE: Right. When I was drafted, there was hope that there would be a new shakeout, in part because LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson) wasn't going to run in the '68 election. There was the hope that Bobby Kennedy would run, that he would have a way to get out of the war and that somehow this thing could be turned around. Meanwhile, I was being drafted.

I was certainly not enthusiastic about the possibility of going to Vietnam, but I was shadowed by the thought that my father had been in the OSS and the army-he had a commission-and that my mother was of quite a patriotic bent. It would have been difficult for me in my family context to say, "Oh, I'm going to go to Canada," or, "I'm going to protest," or "I'm going to be a conscientious objector."

Q: Were you in contact with your Yale classmates?

GREENLEE: None of them I knew well went. Hardly any of them went.

The question my friends put to me was, "What are you going to do? You've got to find a way out. We know you don't like this war." I was wondering what to do, but I kept thinking that my tradition was that you go with the military if you're called. The army would be one more experience. It would let me postpone longer a decision about what I really would want to do in life.

I went through basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Then I was trained as a clerk typist at Fort Knox-that was my military occupational specialty as a draftee. But I didn't want to do that. So I went on to infantry OCS (Officer Candidate School) at Fort Benning, Georgia, the most extreme thing that I could have done. But I did it, and I kept moving toward a situation that was not going to be morally comfortable. But I wasn't thinking in moral terms. It was more an existential thing. I was against the war, but there I was training to be an officer heading for Vietnam, and that was that.

Q: We'll talk about Vietnam. But let's talk first about OCS training. The people that were training with you, did you find yourself estranged with some of them? How did you feel?

GREENLEE: In basic training, I was at the older end of the spectrum. In 1968, I was 25 going on 26. The people with me were just out of high school, most of them. There was one guy who was a lawyer and had somehow got caught up in this thing. But for the most part these were people without a college education. I learned from them, dealing with them, but I wanted something else. OCS was easier for me than basic training in that the people I was with were much more motivated. The candidates would talk about being two-year college men or in some case as four-year college men without a degree. There were a lot of junior college-level people. There were twenty-one year old second lieutenants in those days serving as platoon leaders. But they were motivated.

I found two training experiences in my life very educational: One was Peace Corps training and the other was OCS. OCS was a very serious endeavor, much more serious, we were constantly told, than ROTC . OCS really had less talent to work with, and less time to produce officers. There was a lot of stress. You were carrying around an M-14 all the time, a rifle that weighed more than seven pounds. You often had to carry it extended in front of you. It was intense. But I thrived on training.

A couple of guys I was with, special forces guys, had been trained as medics, but had not gone to Vietnam. They wanted to be officers. One of them suggested to me that we run an extra few laps on the track in the 30 free minutes we had before lights out. I thought he was nuts, but started this extra running with him. We were the only guys of more than a hundred doing this. It gave me a lift to know that we were exceeding the training requirements. It helped me understand that the more you put in, the greater the payoff. It was a good lesson.

On commissioning, I was assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington. I was an east coast guy. I had only been married a few months and had had six months of officer training. The deal was you could count on at least four months of command time in the U.S., and then it was a lottery what would happen to you. Off we went. It was nice out there. Our first child was born at the Madigan Army Hospital. I ran an M-16 rifle range and a grenade range. There was a great view of Mt. Ranier. In four months, give or take, I was called in and told, "Greenlee, your name has come down on levy. You're going to Vietnam."

Q: You went to Vietnam...

GREENLEE: The question was what would happen to my wife and newborn son when I was in Vietnam. Clara could stay with my mother, but that wouldn't be a solution for her. So I took her and our son Patrick to Bolivia, where she could stay with her family. I didn't tell the military. I probably should have told them, but I didn't think about it-the need for special orders. From Bolivia, I flew to Travis Air Force Base, near San Francisco, and got on a military charter for Vietnam. I postponed R&R (Rest and Recuperation) until the eleventh month I was in Vietnam and then met my wife and child in Hawaii. From there I went back to Vietnam and Clara and Patrick went to Scarsdale and stayed with my mother. That's the way we worked that out.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

GREENLEE: From September '69 to September '70.

Q: What were you doing there?

GREENLEE: The way it worked was you went into a personnel pool when you arrived at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon. You were supposed to write down any particular thing in your background that would help place you. I put down that I had been a writer at Newsweek. So instead of them saying, "OK, infantry officer, you're going to get a platoon with the First Division," they said, "You're going to be a public information officer with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. I went from Saigon to a place called Quan Loi, which is right below where Cambodia angles into Vietnam like a fishhook-the An Loc/Loc Ninh area . The 11th Cav was an interesting outfit. It was the only pure armor unit in Vietnam. My job was to put out a newspaper but also to go on operations and to escort photographers and reporters in the field. Technically, perhaps I didn't have to go, but I did. I took the same share in the field as the guys under me.

Q: Let's pause for a while. Let's talk about Vietnam. What was taking place out there? The fishhook got rather important a little later. I was consul general in Saigon during part of this time. In the first place, talk about the 11th Cav and what it was doing, and what you were doing.

GREENLEE: The 11th Cav had medium battle tanks and, among other track vehicles, what were called ACAVs. These were APC's (armored personnel carriers) configured as firing platforms. They were mounted with a .50 caliber machine gun in the front and two smaller, M-60 machine guns on each side. The tanks of the 11th Cav were old Shermans that weighed 52 tons and lighter Sheridan tanks. There were also helicopters, Hueys, Chinooks, light observation helicopters and Cobra gunships-a lot of firepower.

Q: I flew in one of those....

GREENLEE: On May 1, 1970, the 11th Cav, together with a part of the First Cavalry (air mobile) went into the fishhook of Cambodia. I went in on the second day, in and around a Cambodian town named Snuol. I ended up writing up this so-called "incursion" for The Black Horse magazine-our unit was called the "Black Horse." I was interested in how Newsweek would handle the same story. My headline was, "Taking the Barb Off the Fishhook." Newsweek had "Sanitizing the Sanctuaries."

I went into Snuol on the back of a tank. The place was like a ghost town. Everyone, including the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, had left. The 11th Cav stayed in that area of Cambodia several weeks, until the monsoon rains began. I went out there several more times from our base in Quan Loi. The North Vietnamese (we were never around Viet Cong) started coming back in small groups configured as tank-killer teams. They would ambush and run. On June 19, 1970, I was out there with a photographer from Life magazine. We were on the bustle rack of a tank. This guy had been the personal photographer for the Beatles. One of the killer teams came out of the jungle and fired an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) at us. It hit the turret, knocking this guy off. The round itself didn't explode, but it threw shrapnel. I wasn't hurt. The tank stopped, and the main gun started firing into the bush. I got behind the tank. This guy was gone. I didn't know where he was. I looked around for him. Someone else was also on the bustle rack. Everybody rode on top of the tanks because of mines. I thought, "Shoot, this is it." There were bullets flying all around. I didn't have my M-16. I had a side arm, a .45. I took this damn thing out and started shooting, not seeing anything to shoot at. The idea was to put down fire and keep moving slowly forward. Finally, we found this guy, the photographer, about three tanks back. When we were able to regroup, I took him in a medevac helicopter to a field hospital. He lost about three feet of intestine, but survived okay. That was the kind of thing that could happen in the field, but, except for that time, I had a pretty soft ride. The greater concern for me was random incoming fire. Every once in a while a round would land nearby, sometimes misdirected "friendly" fire.

Q: What was the reaction-you were on the PR (Public Relations) side-back in the United States. This is when National Guard troops opened fire on protesters at Kent State.. On my own account, I was in the National Guard, but I didn't have the sense during the Korean War to stay in the National Guard. I enlisted! Given my experience, I thought the students were damn stupid to be throwing rocks at National Guard.

GREENLEE: Well, some people felt a lot of indignation. The Vietnam era was strange. It was said that we didn't have 12 years experience fighting there, but one year 12 times. Basically, people were there for a year. You arrived and started counting the days you had left. The draftees mostly just wanted to get out. The career sergeants and enlisted men were different. The officers above first lieutenant, the ones who were going to make a career of it, the ones who wanted command time-they were more gung ho. They wanted to kick ass. They would talk the way the senior politicians in the administration would talk. For the rest of us, it was like, "Let's do our duty, but let's not be heroes." This was the sense of it. Platoon leaders on patrol would negotiate what to do with their troops. Many times they didn't go where they were supposed to go. Before firing artillery, commanders would ask the guys out on patrol to fire off a smoke grenade so they wouldn't be hit by mistake. There was a lot of non-compliance, a lot of racial tension, a lot of pot smoking. I was not involved in that, but there was a lot of it. There was also a lot of anger. Once I was in an officers club and was just walking out when there was a huge explosion. It turned out some guy, an enlisted guy, didn't like the pizza he got at food window outside. So he threw a grenade on the roof. That didn't seem unusual at the time.

Kent State happened when I was out there. It started as a protest against the Cambodian invasion. My reaction to it was that the National Guard guys who were shooting and the protesters were pretty much the same people. Maybe they were all equally against the war. But the National Guard guys clearly weren't well trained. They shouldn't have shot. It was crazy.

Q: As a practical measure, the protests ended when the draft ended.

GREENLEE: That's right.

Q: That's true today.

GREENLEE: That's true today. In any case, that was my experience. I got to feel very close to some of the guys who were under me. When I left Vietnam, I thought-and I said this to one of the guys-"This is the best thing I've ever done." You get committed to the people, committed to doing your job as honestly as you can do it. But the policy wasn't right, and we knew it. What worked for me on one level didn't work on another.

Q: How did you see the racial problem with the troops?

GREENLEE: I saw it more from a distance than up close. A couple of black guys worked for me, and everything was fine. You could see it, though, in the way people stood together, the way they greeted each other. There was this black handshake, a complicated handshake that involved tapping hands and touching elbows, and some of the white guys sometimes tried to bond with the blacks by doing the same handshake, but it wasn't the same thing, it seemed forced.

There were more things where I was that I read about than I actually saw. The farther back you went toward Saigon, the more you would see the informal structure of separation. You'd go forward, and all the uniforms were dirty, everybody wore peace symbols. I did. Everybody did. I think I had something around my neck, a St. Christopher's medal, and I think I had a peace symbol some place. There were peace symbols on the tanks, on things that killed.

Q: Did you have much contact other than hostile with the Vietnamese?

GREENLEE: No, we didn't, because we were not a MAC-V unit. We rarely worked with Vietnamese units, with the ARVNs.

Q: Republic of Vietnam, ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). You left there when?

GREENLEE: In September of 1970. About a month after the Cambodia operation we re-deployed from Quan Loi to a place near Long Binh, close to Saigon. I felt as if I was almost on the way home. The last six months I didn't go out in the field as much-that was sort of the rule of the thumb. You started counting the days "and a wake-up" before you would leave Vietnam. But I was out there on May 1 and I thought, " I don't have to keep doing this." In the last few months it was pretty rear echelon stuff-not enough to do during the day, people more interested in saluting and the uniform being clean. These things I didn't like so much, but I lived better and felt safer. I was no longer in a dugout or with sandbags all around. That's the way I ended up.

Q: You went back to the States in September of 1970?

GREENLEE: Yes.

Q: What happened then? Where did you go?

GREENLEE: I could request any U.S. geographical area assignment I wanted. I wanted to go to California. I asked for Ford Ord, in the Monterey area, and got it. I left Vietnam in September, and I had until April to stay in the army.

Q: Fort Ord. What were you up to there?

GREENLEE: I was assigned to a public information office. There was very little to do. There were too many people for the office. Toward the end of the morning, I tended to go upstairs to another part of the building, and there were a bunch of people who just sat around talking, playing word games and things like that. That's how I finished my time in the army.

Q: What were your plans, your greater scheme?

GREENLEE: I didn't have a greater scheme except that I thought I would still like to be a journalist. I looked around in Monterey, and there really wasn't anything, but I still wanted to stay out there. We had a little apartment a few blocks above Cannery Row.

Q: Were you near the Presidio?

GREENLEE: Yes, we were adjacent to it.

Q: I spent a year in Barracks 6, Company 5 there.

GREENLEE: We were on David Avenue, right at the crest of the hill. We were right next to the Presidio. I looked around Monterey for work, and I found very little. I even tried delivering newspapers for a while, but I wasn't cut out for that. I kept missing the lawns.

I eventually got a job with Honda of Monterrey, a place that sold motorcycles and the early version of the cars, little boxy things. I was not a good salesman, but I had had a motorcycle when I was in Europe, and I liked motorcycles. At least the equipment was congenial. I did that for four or five months, and then they downsized, and I lost my job. I was worried, but my wife was delighted. She didn't see me as a seller of motorcycles.

I looked around, but the only thing I could get was employment in the darkroom of the hospital between Pacific Grove and Carmel. It was the Carmel Community Hospital. I was a darkroom technician, developing X-ray film. Sometimes I was able to watch the procedures. I stayed behind a special glass window. Most of the time, though, I was in the dark. I found that if I came into the light, it took a long while for my eyes to re-adjust to the dark. I would come out for a break, usually at mid-morning, I'd get a bite to eat, and then I'd go back into the dark for most of the afternoon. I would leave the hospital when it was getting dark outside, so I didn't see daylight for a long time. I was like a mole for about a year.

I was frustrated. I didn't have a deep curriculum, but I'd done things. I'd graduated from college; I spoke Spanish; I'd been in the Peace Corps; I'd been in the army. But it was a bad time for employment. I was looking around, though, and I finally stumbled into a job I liked. I applied to be the public relations person for the Monterey County Sheriff in Salinas. The sheriff had already settled on someone, but he directed me to the Public Defender's office, where they were they were looking for somebody who spoke Spanish.

I was actually hired as a minority. It was interesting. I'm not a minority in any sense, but there was something called the PEP (Public Employment) program. This was extended to Vietnam veterans, so I was hired as a Vietnam vet, with federal funding. I loved the work. I was not a lawyer; I was an investigator. I investigated all kinds of crimes....

Q: This was from when to when?

GREENLEE: This was from March of 1972 until February 1974. My job wasn't really to investigate the crime, but to try to substantiate the alibi. Our clients were people who said, "I didn't do it," or "These were the circumstances. You gotta believe me." I would go find the person who they said could verify that they weren't in the place the police said they were or could provide some mitigating information. I got around the county a lot, and I investigated aspects of crimes and alibis that related to all kinds of crimes-from petty thefts to first-degree murder.

Q: Which county was this?

GREENLEE: This was Monterrey County. Monterrey County had two public defender offices. One was in Monterey, where I lived most of the time, and the other was in Salinas, which was about a 35minute drive from the town of Monterey. That was the office I worked from.

Q: A farming area.

GREENLEE: Salinas was John Steinbeck country.

Q: It was artichokes?

GREENLEE: Castroville, nearby, billed itself as the artichoke capital of the world. I used to go there. There was a little one-room courthouse, presided over by an old guy who had never been an attorney. There was a sign nearby for "topless" artichokes, when that adjective had an entirely different connotation. I investigated alibis or crimes all the way from King City in the south to Prunedale in the north. I once tried to check an alibi at the Esalen Institute, a well-known "head shop" in Big Sur. We had a lot of very interesting clients. Some of them were migrant workers. We also had defendants from Soledad Prison, "the joint," which was in our jurisdiction. There were assaults and murders and "shank" cases.

Q: These are stabbings...

GREENLEE: That's right, with a pointed instrument of some kind. I would go over to the prison sometimes. There were people who had appeals and were trying to get out. It was very interesting work. I had to testify a bunch of times. Sometimes I was called in to be an interpreter in the court. Eventually, my wife and I-by this time we had two children-moved to Salinas, so it was a little bit more convenient.

I had a two-track strategy for the future. One was to take the foreign service exam and see whether I could get into the foreign service. The other was to go to law school and maybe become a public defender myself. I had the GI (General Issue) Bill. I had used some of it for a few courses at the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies, but there was more I could draw on. I decided to go to law school at Santa Clara. This would not have been possible from Monterey; it would have been too far. As it was, I'd drive well over a hundred miles round trip after work three nights a week. I did that for a full semester. I would have kept doing it for four years and gotten a law degree, and probably stayed in Monterey-Salinas area as a lawyer. But in January I heard from the State Department.

Q: What was the area like?

GREENLEE: There were retired people and military people or people who had been associated with the military in Monterey and Pacific Grove. Carmel was getting to be very upscale. It was Clint Eastwood country, and there was Seventeen Mile Drive and, of course, there was the famous Pebble Beach Golf Course. Carmel was artsy and rich, with little bungalows that cost a lot of money. Monterey was not so upscale, but it was moving in that direction.

Pacific Grove had some wonderful properties around Lovers' Point. You could buy a house near the water for about 14,000 dollars in those days, but not on the GI Bill-because of termites. These properties were being bought up quickly.

Closer to Fort Ord was Seaside, more run-down. Salinas was a few miles inland. There was ago-business in the Salinas valley and it was the time of labor actions, and the strife between Cesar Chavez's United Farm-workers Union and the AFL-CIO over who should organize the workers. The agricultural land lay between the two low mountain ranges that Steinbeck described so well in his writing. Down the valley it was all farming country, with a lot of very poor migrant Mexicans. The wineries hadn't come in yet. They were just starting to plant the grapes that are now all over the valley.

King City, at the southern end of the valley, had a different feel. It was dry and away from the coast. On the other side of the western range was Big Sur, on the coast. Above Salinas was Prunedale, with a lot of rural poor, whites mostly, many of Okie descent, families that had migrated to the area in the 30's because of the dust bowl.

The crimes varied. There were hippies involved in crimes everywhere, although, as I recall, more on the coastal side than the Salinas valley. In Prunedale there was dog fighting, a rural white thing. There was a guy who had a pit bull, and he was using it for fighting. He brought the dog to a veterinarian after a bloody fight. The vet turned the case over to the authorities because he saw that the dog had been abused. The kid was arrested-he was about 18 years old-and was facing a felony charge. The kid was upset. I forget what happened to that case, but he was later re-arrested for burning the vet's house down, another felony.

There were all these complicated cases, and we kept seeing the same people again and again. There were a lot of Mexican migrants or Mexican-Americans involved with drugs and mayhem. I didn't know what the crime of "mayhem" might entail until I investigated an incident in which a guy bit off another guy's ear in a fight. That was "mayhem." And there were gang problems in Soledad Prison-Black Panthers and a white Neo-Nazi group and the Mexican "Mafia" and another Mexican group called the "Nueva Familia." There were a lot of interesting characters. Near the courthouse we would go to lunch at a Mexican restaurant called "La Revancha." We would see there the prosecutors, the public defenders, the defendants and their families, and the people who had been victimized and their families. They all would be sitting at adjacent tables.

Q: What were the politics of Monterey County?

GREENLEE: The county was pretty split. The congressman for where I lived was a Republican. But there was a strong progressive and counter-cultural element in the county. Many who lived in the upscale Carmel valley were progressive Democrats. Leon Panetta eventually won a congressional seat from there. Pebble Beach and the tony parts of Carmel were conservative, I believe, and probably heavily Republican. The people I worked with were for the most part quite liberal. Some professed to be socialists. It was the time of the "counter-culture." I was conservative in my habits, but I was attracted to the iconoclasm of the counter-culture. I sympathized with some of the criminals in the "joint." I could see they were products to some extent of their environment, their upbringing, but I didn't go so far as to consider them "political prisoners" or anything like that.

Q: The Armenians, were they there?

GREENLEE: I don't remember Armenians, but there was a mosaic quality to the county. There were fishermen of Portuguese and Sicilian origin. There were Mexicans. There were whites who had fled big-city life. The head public defender was of Korean origin, and spoke English without bothering to use articles like"an" and "the." His name was Harkjoon Paik, and he was famously brilliant and known for having won high-profile cases that were thought to be losers.

Q: What was your impression of the justice system?

GREENLEE: Some called it a railroad station-where you got "railroaded." The truth is the system was overwhelmed. I doubt that has changed. There were people who were obviously committing crimes. They were picked up sometimes in association with crimes they didn't commit. They were usually guilty of something, but not always of exactly what they were said to have done. Very few cases went to trial, in part because the risk for somebody going to trial, whether they did the crime or didn't do the crime, was often much greater than simply copping a plea. There was a lot of plea-bargaining, which in the best of worlds wouldn't have been the case. I found the people in the public defender's office very idealistic, but with a real edge of cynicism because they could see what was going on. They never met socially with their counterparts, the county prosecutors.

The attitude of the people in my office was that the people on the other side were the enemy. There were police officers who cooked their testimony to influence a jury or judge for a guilty verdict. Our clients tended to build alibis that wouldn't stand close scrutiny. Some judges were characters in their own right. We delighted in telling each other stories about the judges, stories about the clients, stories about the prosecuting side. It was a very rich environment for gossip. It was sort of fun in that respect.

Q: Were there bail bondsmen and lawyers looking for work?

GREENLEE: There were lawyers who hung around the court house who would be assigned overflow cases that the public defender wouldn't get or couldn't handle, and they would be paid by the court. I don't know how much, but they made a little something that way. There were also more high-priced lawyers, graduates of the public defender system or the prosecuting side, who set up law offices and defended clients who could pay. If a person accused of the crime could afford a private lawyer, he couldn't use the public defender. There were all these characters around the courthouse. Bail bondsmen, sure. There were bail bondsmen. There was at least one office right adjacent to the court. It wasn't quite like "Dog the Bounty Hunter," but there were those kinds of people.

Q: What attracted you to the foreign service?

GREENLEE: I'd been attracted to it since I was in Spain. My wife is Bolivian, and she doesn't mind living abroad. I always thought it would be nice to get back into a situation such as I experienced in Madrid when I was a student, or when I was in Bolivia. I passed the written exam on my second attempt, and then I was convoked-I can't remember when it was; it was probably after I'd started at the public defender office-to San Francisco for an oral exam.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions?

GREENLEE: I didn't know enough about the procedures for entering the foreign service to be worried about the oral exam. I had been caught flat-footed the first time I took the written test, because I thought I had passed it, and I didn't think it was all that challenging. Since they grade the thing on the curve, I didn't pass it, and I was concerned about that. I squeaked by the second time, and I knew that the hurdle for the oral exam would be higher. But I figured that when I got in the room with people, either I could do it or I couldn't do it. I wasn't terribly concerned about it. I didn't think I would necessarily pass the oral, but I wasn't viewing it with much trepidation. I thought it would just be an interesting encounter.

It was in a federal building in San Francisco. I went into a room that was like an office but without any desk, only a rectangular table with several chairs. At the table there were, I believe, four foreign service officers, examiners. I don't think there was any outside member. It wasn't like the horror stories that I later heard about how they try to put you off balance, how they'd ask you if you wanted a cigarette, encourage you to light up and then not give you an ashtray-the folklore. I think what they wanted to do was put me, and I assume others they interviewed, at ease, and start with where I felt comfortable. They asked me about my background. They were interested that I had been in the Peace Corps and developed that a bit. They asked about my military experience, and then they started to get into substance.

There was a guy on the panel who I found out later was a geographer. He said, "Let's talk about Bolivia." I thought, "OK, this is fine. Let's talk about Bolivia." He said, "Can you describe to me the terrain between La Paz and Antofagasta or between La Paz and Arica on the Pacific coast. Tell me what plants you see. Tell me what the terrain looks like." I hadn't spent a whole lot of time on the altiplano, but I had taken the train once to Arica. I was able to tell him what I saw, how it felt to descend through the Atacama Desert on the train. I could tell him about the raimundi or century plants-they flower once every 100 years-that I had seen near the mountain pass at Charaï¿½a, the highest point on that route.

Then he said, "What about oil? Is there oil?" I said, "Yes, some oil." He said, "Does any of it go out of Bolivia?" I said, "There is a pipeline that goes down to Arica." I was pulling this stuff out, things that I hadn't paid much attention to. He nodded, and I thought, okay.

There was a woman-I forgot her name-who said, "Let's talk about diplomatic history a little bit. Can you describe for me the origins and the impact of the Monroe Doctrine from 1823 to the present?" I had done a little studying. I had read the federalist papers, and I read about the Monroe Doctrine, too. I started out fine, and then I skipped ahead to how it was used by Teddy Roosevelt and the Roosevelt Corollary. I talked about how it had been invoked here and there, and I talked about how we wanted to keep this hemisphere free of foreign colonization and interference.

Everything I said was accurate, but there was some little thing about Venezuela that I did make a mistake on. I should have stopped with what I knew, but I ventured out. I stumbled. The woman looked puzzled. I could see her face cloud over. I said, "I'm really not so sure on this one, and I'm going to leave it alone." They nodded. I was asked a couple of other things about Vietnam, and then I was asked to leave the room. After about five minutes they called me back in.

They said, "We're going to put you on the roster. We'd like you to come into the foreign service, and you did fine. We think you'll make a good foreign service officer." I said, "I'm relieved. Thank you very much." They gave me some papers to fill out. We shook hands and as I left, the woman said, "I only wish you'd known a little more about the Monroe Doctrine." Once out of the room I asked the secretary whether many had passed the exam. She said, "No, you're the first. You're the only one." They had had this thing going for a week or so. I tried to figure out why I passed. I met others subsequently who were very bright who didn't pass. All I can think is that the examiners didn't really challenge me. They could have nailed me on substance.

Q: When did you take the oral?

GREENLEE: I took it in early '73, probably around January. What I'm getting at is that I think I conformed to a kind of stereotype of what they were looking for. I don't mean this in either a positive or negative way, but I'd gone to Yale, had been in the Peace Corps, had been in the army. Very few people had the Peace Corps/military combination. I spoke Spanish. I don't think anyone was trying to fail me.

Q: I can tell you from the other side of the desk because I think the year '75, I was out in San Francisco giving the oral exam, maybe early '76. We didn't have many candidates in San Francisco. In fact, we normally passed one out of three back here in Washington. In San Francisco, we couldn't understand what was happening because we had Yales and Princetons, and the whole thing. All I could think was they'd been in California too long. We were giving a standard exam, and we weren't out for anybody. We were supposed to test people essentially.

GREENLEE: Well, I passed. My wife had just become naturalized. She was a citizen, but I had to fill out lots of papers for the background checks. They took longer than they do today. I was told it would take about a year, and it did. And I couldn't be sure my number would ever come up on the roster. Maybe the line would be drawn above my name, so I had better have something else. That's why I went ahead with law school. I t was a hedge.

Finally, after I had done a full semester at Santa Clara, I got the call. It was an invitation to come to Washington in two weeks. I turned to my wife and said, "We've got this law school thing going, and the foreign service just came through. What should we do?" She said, "Let's go." It was what we both wanted.

Q: You came into the foreign service in 1974. How would you evaluate or describe your basic officer course, the people who were in it and the introduction to the profession?

GREENLEE: The entry process had changed a little bit, I think, starting about a year or two years before I joined. We had to state a preference for which "cone" we wanted to be in when we took the exam. That is, for the consular, political, economic, or administrative cone. I was competing in the consular category because I'd been a public defender investigator, and I figured maybe I could get in more easily that way than competing for another cone. But I didn't know what to expect, coming in as a consular officer. I didn't know whether this would be my permanent cone or whether I could change cones later. I had no idea what would happen.

I went to the A-100 course. There was a good mix of people, and they didn't know what would happen, either. There were consular officers, political officers, economic officers, and administrative officers, I guess about 25 all together. It was kind of a protracted seminar. People would come in and explain things about the system and the service. It was hard to put any of this into a matrix based on experience because we hadn't done anything yet.

Many, probably most, didn't have a foreign language, so it was expected that they would go to language training before being assigned abroad. I had Spanish. I didn't know what would happen with me. Mike Yohn was the course director. He had been an embassy officer in Bolivia. I hadn't known him there, but we knew the same people. About three weeks into the course-and I guess it lasted about six weeks, maybe eight-he came over to me, and said, "How would you like to go to Peru as a political officer?" I said, "Sure, I'd like to go to Peru as a political officer." I' had traveled Peru, knew a little about it, and my strength was Spanish. And it would be interesting to start as a political officer. I said, "Why would you offer me that?" He said, "There was a woman in the previous A-100 class who was slotted for Peru as a political officer, but she decided she didn't want to do it. We need to fill the position."

I went to Peru as a political officer, but it was actually a rotational position. I spent a year in the consular section, six months as an economic officer, and six months as a political officer. Let me skip ahead. I then went back to the State Department , to the operations center. After that I needed another assignment. I decided that I wanted to go to the Soviet Union as a consular officer because that's what I was.

I went to see the consular personnel counselor and said, "This is my preference. I want to learn Russian." She started thumbing through her papers, and said, "You're not on my list. You're not a consular officer." I said, "Sure I am." She kept looking and looking and finally said, "Oh, I see you did come in as a consular officer. You have a consular commission." I said, "OK, why won't you consider me as a candidate for Moscow?" She said, "Because you're not on my list." She got to be quite disagreeable. I kept saying, "What list am I on?" She said, "You're on the political list. You're a political officer." I said, "No, I'm a consular officer." She started to get angry, and I thought, "Why am I fighting this?" So I went across the hall and talked to the personnel counselor for junior political officers. He said, "Yes, you're on my list." To this day I can't figure out what happened, but I think I was assigned the job code of the woman who had originally been slotted for Peru. Whatever, I remained in the political cone from that time forward.

Q: Don't try to figure out personnel! You went to Peru. When you were in the A-100 course, did you get any feel for the type of service you were getting into, and how did it seem to you?

GREENLEE: I didn't know what serving in an embassy would be like, but I'd seen two embassies. I'd seen the one in Bolivia, and I'd seen the one in Madrid. I was very pleased to be on a professional track. I realized that if I had continued as a public defender investigator, I'd always be an investigator. I had to become a lawyer or I had to become something else. If I had stayed in the military, I'd have been on a professional track, but I knew it wasn't for me.

This was the first time I was in something with a ceiling that was very high, and I could keep going up to that ceiling. I saw people around me who were very bright. I thought this was an environment in which smart people were doing things that I would like to do. I was comfortable and impressed. Also, coming to Washington, I had per diem. They gave us enough money, an advance on salary, so we could get into a little apartment, rent furniture, and then, going to Peru, we had to take our own stuff, so we got another advance on salary.

Q: You were in Peru from when to when?

GREENLEE: From June or July of 1974 until June or July of 1976.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

GREENLEE: Robert Dean. The dcm (Deputy Chief of Mission) was Malcolm "Dick" Barnaby.

Q: What was Dean's background?

GREENLEE: Dean had been deputy chief of mission in Mexico before he went to Peru. I don't know much about his career before that. He seemed to be a very solid ambassador. The dcm was a very professional guy. Barnaby was good.

I went right into the consular section. What I found was a mess. It was understaffed. There was one woman who was very committed, a very tough, sound officer. I think she was a staff officer originally. She was very professional. Her name was Murrow Morris. Then there were burnouts. One guy knew his stuff but basically drank away his afternoons. There were junior officers, like me, trying to deal with a disorderly crush of applicants who arrived in a chaotic stream each morning. It was very uneven- the procedure for interviewing. It was exhausting. Some visa applicants were able to avoid the interview process altogether. A big chunk of passports always came in from the defense attachï¿½, particularly. There was a lot of scope for fraud.

We had at the beginning a very good consular counselor, the head of the section. He left about a month or two after I arrived. He went to Hong Kong and then retired. His name was Willard Devlin, a good man. Then some guy came in-I don't want to get too much into personalities-from Europe who didn't speak Spanish and who was apparently a good consular officer in Europe. But he had no interest in Peru, no interest in Lima, no interest in being head of this busy and dysfunctional section.

I worked on the visa line for several months, and then moved to the protection and welfare office, which was more congenial for me. It was a little bit like getting back to the public defender office, because there were interesting cases: death cases and people needing help, destitute people, people in jail. I then rotated to the economic section and finally to the political section.

Q: Do you have any particular protection and welfare stories?

GREENLEE: Oh, yes, a lot of them. I really didn't know how to do this work. There was no real preparation for it, although I did go through something called ConGen Rosslyn before leaving Washington. But nothing prepared you for the reality of the work. Protection and welfare-I was just put in an office with a foreign affairs manual. There was a Peruvian lady who had been in that office a long time and in theory should have been able to do some things, but she was not very competent. People would stream in with their problems.

One case involved somebody who had died. This guy had been elderly and retired. He had been a passenger on a container ship. I think it was the Santa Mariana of the Delta Line. He got off the ship in Valparaiso, Chile, and flew ahead to Lima and then out to Cuzco. He went to Machu Picchu, and then back to Lima, where he booked into the Bolivar Hotel. He was going to rejoin the ship in the port city of Callao, but, instead, dropped dead of a heart attack on the floor in the lobby of the hotel.

When I got the case, no one knew anything about this guy, except that he had been on the ship. So I went to the ship in Callao. I met with the purser. He knew all about this guy and was clearly saddened that he had died. He said, "I think he knew something might happen to him. He loved being on the ship. Before getting off in Chile, he wrote a codicil to his will, and he left it with me." The purser showed me the document. It said, in essence, that if he died on the trip, he wanted to be buried at sea.

So here's the situation: There's this guy who's dead. A funeral home has his remains. There was some money in his possession, or on the ship, when he died, but not much. There was a document, a will, really, saying he wanted to be buried at sea. We tried to find his next of kin, but there were difficulties. I think he had been divorced and we could only locate his ex-wife-but we couldn't get much out of her. We figured we should honor this guy's wish to be buried at sea, and she had no problem with it.

So we did our research. We went through the regulations. I consulted the embassy lawyer, a Peruvian. The ship had its own manuals conforming to U.S. maritime law. According to the protocols-I forget if it was Peruvian law or how the ship did it-the remains would have to be cremated. That was one step. It wasn't committing the body to the deep, like in the movies. It would be scattering ashes from the stern, or something like that. So the remains were cremated.

The next thing was that the ashes had to be put into a certain kind of box. The funeral home director said it had to be zinc-lined, which cost a lot more-but there wasn't any reason for a zinc-lining if there were only ashes. Too late, he had already built the box, and he wouldn't release the ashes unless we paid for it. But there weren't funds to cover the added expense. By this time a daughter, the real next of kin, had been located, and she wanted to know why her father had been cremated and why he was going to be buried at sea. Then she didn't want to pay the extra money for what she considered, justifiably, to be a shakedown by the Peruvian funeral director. I don't remember how we finally cleared all this up, but I do remember the mahogany box, zinc-lined with the ashes inside, sitting in my office until the next Delta ship came through. That was a typical consular story.

Q: What sort of visa cases did you have?

GREENLEE: There was a socialist revolution underway in Peru at that time. The president was a military dictator named Juan Francisco Velasco Alvarado, who aspired to a leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement. People with property, normally good visa cases, were trying to leave, along with the usual hoards of economic migrants. It was hard to sort out the bona fide from the non-bona fide applicants for non-immigrant visas. The standard was that you had to be convinced in your mind that they were not intending to immigrate. Many who had resources and on the surface prima facie reasons to return to Peru in fact were trying to relocate to the U.S. It was easy to identify the economic migrants. There would be these young guys from poor areas of Lima, like Rimac, saying they wanted to visit Disney World. You would ask if they were married. They would say, "Yes, and I have two children, but they don't want to go." Those were the easy calls. But it was hard to know about the relatively well-to-do.

I remember, when Bill Devlin was the consul, I said, "I don't know how to do this except by guessing." He said, "That's all you can do. Frankly, you could take a pack of applications and go through them and blindly give one out of three a visa, and you'd probably hit it as well as through the interview process." It was like the monkey throwing darts at stock charts, and doing about as well as the brokers.

One of the more interesting cases was that of novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. He was a self-professed socialist and was listed in the "look-out" book as not eligible for a visa without a Washington waiver. The cultural attachï¿½, Frances Coughlin, asked if I could help. I did. I gave him the visa. I am not sure I strictly followed procedure, as I heard later that other consular officers had refused him. That was Cold War era nonsense. Frances later invited me to a reception in Vargas Llosa's honor, and identified me as the person who had given him the visa. I had done the right thing, but I may have exceeded my authority. Not for the last time.

Q: Were there strong social divisions in Peru?

GREENLEE: Yes. With the military regime at the time, the goal was sweeping economic and social change, and many Peruvians believed they had been victimized by the U.S. and the developed world. Peru was deeply split by racial and economic stratification. Lima, the capital and main city of the country, had been dominated by people of European stock, people who were generally pretty cosmopolitan and well educated. But in the decade or so before I arrived, the city had become surrounded by shanty-towns, called pueblos jovenes, with poor people from the countryside. They were the main support for the populist military regime. The core of Lima had a population of about two million. But the pueblos jovenes had another two million. They lived in houses made of straw-thatch. Velasco Alvarado, the de facto President, established his political base by extending potable water and services to these people. It was good politics, but there was little economic development.

Q: There was no "Shining Path"?

GREENLEE: No. This was before the Shining Path. The processing of social protest was through the military-led revolution and its affinity with other Third World movements. The Shining Path, "Sendero Luminoso," was a little later. It was Maoist and rural and ethnocentric. The sparks that flew during my time in Peru were from events like the nationalization of foreign-own property- like a copper mine that belonged to the Marcona Corporation. That became a complicated bilateral issue.

Q: At this time, you and your wife were young. I would think you generally would be attracted to the universities or were these anti-American hotbeds?

GREENLEE: They were hotbeds. I guess that's one way to put it. We did not frequent the University of San Marcos or other universities. We had friends in the Peruvian community, but they were post-university. We lived in a community that was far out of town. The people we knew always had reservations about the U.S., about our role in Latin America in general, and our role in Peru in particular, but would always treat us as though we were different like, "Your country does this, your country does that, but we know you are different." That put me in the uncomfortable position of defending policy but also preserving friendships.

Q: Can you contrast Bolivia and Peru from your perspective?

GREENLEE: Yes. They are different countries in some ways but similar in other ways. Bolivia used to be connected to Peru, and the countries remain close historically and in other ways. Bolivia was originally Alto Peru, High Peru, but it split off early in the independence process. There's a part of Peru and a part of Bolivia which are indistinguishable from one another. It's the part around Lake Titicaca, on the great upland plateau called the altiplano. The populations of both countries speak Quechua and Aymara. Where they overlap they are a single community, a nation , really. The people around the lake pay little attention to the border. Culturally they are totally integrated.

Peruvians and Bolivians generally look at each other as cousins. A lot of Peruvians are married to Bolivians. Bolivia traditionally-historically-has a proclivity, an inclination, to be in league with Peru. Peru and Bolivia together lost territory to Chile in the War of the Pacific in the late nineteenth century. Bolivia lost its seacoast to Chile. The Chileans sacked Lima in that war and took a chunk of the Peruvian coast. There's a natural alignment between Bolivia and Peru, but Peru is more prosperous than Bolivia. Aristocratic Peruvians tend to patronize Bolivia. Unlike Peru, Bolivia does not have a real aristocratic class- it's more racially mixed.

Q: When you were rotated to political and economic work, what sort of things were you doing?

GREENLEE: Dick Barnaby, the dcm, had a project for me and I think for all the junior officers who rotated. It was to write up the country team meetings. It was sort of practice political reporting. I tried to be aggressive in developing contacts and being involved in things, and I also drafted cables. I was a slow writer, but, for a junior officer, I think a competent one. There was a Non-Aligned conference, and it was quite a circus. I was responsible for writing the main cable. There was a breakdown in the system, and I was told to get a reporting cable out without front office clearance. I showed it to somebody, and he made a couple of changes. But basically it went out as I wrote it. Part of it was quoted in a book by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a book about his time as ambassador to the UN.

Q: Were there a lot of heavy weights, like Tito, at that conference?

GREENLEE: This was a ministerial conference. Tito wasn't there. Peru was trying to be a big player in the Non-Aligned. It was trying to be at the vanguard of South America. Under Velasco Alvarado, it made some headway.

Q: What role did Cuba and Castro play in that?

GREENLEE: It's hard to talk to Latin Americans about Cuba objectively because Castro's the guy who stood up to the U.S. Castro's the guy who was never defeated, never overturned. Castro's the guy who stuck his thumb in our eye. Castro was going his own way, no matter what the U.S. wanted. Peruvians and others seemed proud of Castro.

We also had a visit by Henry Kissinger when he was Secretary of State. I worked a lot on that, at the basic planning level, with the Peruvian foreign ministry. I figured with all the background noise about U.S., imperialists- "We don't like you guys, we're Non-Aligned, look what you did to Vietnam, etc.-it could be a rocky visit. In fact, Peru had even kicked out the Peace Corps. But when they found out that Kissinger was really coming, the Peruvians were thrilled. There were banner headlines in the press. I thought, well, I've missed something here. I was listening too much to the chatter and not to the yearning for a real connection with the U.S. at a high level. And I saw a real respect for Kissinger as a person who could move things, impact the world. He exemplified U.S. power.

Q: How did the whole Allende-Pinochet-Chile thing look from your vantage point in Peru?

GREENLEE: When I joined the Foreign Service, Pinochet had been in power for less than a year. Pinochet was very much in control of Chile. There had been a very brutal coup-but the economy was beginning to turn around. The coup was not much discussed, at least in my circles, although when it came up, there were questions about the U.S. role, about whether we had a hand in it.

In Peru the issue with Chile was more geopolitical. There was the legacy of the War of the Pacific. The Peruvian military was arming up. They were getting Soviet materiel and some French equipment. The chatter on the social circuit was that Peru was readying for war. I remember a Maryknoll priest, an American, remarking that he thought Peru would at some point attack Chile and retake what it had lost, down to Iquitos.

One day, I think an anniversary date, the Peruvian air force put on a public demonstration of their capabilities. Off the coast of Callao they anchored a couple of ships. A squadron of Mirages was to fly over these ships and strafe them. This was clearly a demonstration for Chile. The Peruvians wanted to show the world they were tough and no one could push them around. But the planes seemed to miss their targets, and in fact one of them crashed, over the horizon, into the sea. There was a reporter for the Associated Press who wrote this up as a big flop, and she was then expelled from the country. We were making sure that she was treated OK, but off she went, this reporter. That was the level of sensitivity.

The government spokesman explained to the press that the planes weren't supposed to sink the ships; they were just supposed to hit the area outlined by the ships, and the plane that fell from the sky, well, that was waved off as irrelevant. I think the AP reporter's lead was something to the effect that the Chileans had nothing to worry about.

Q: What about the border between Ecuador and Peru? What was happening during your time there?

GREENLEE: During my time there was border tension with Ecuador and an issue over whether oil drilled on one side could suck oil from the other side. But it wasn't an active dispute at the time. It was just there.

The thing I remember about Ecuador was that Peru had these wonderful big coins, "one Sol" coins, over an inch in diameter. They were made of a brass. They were yellow. There were currency controls in Peru, and a black market. We couldn't be involved in the market, at least those of us who worked for the State Department, and living in Peru became quite expensive. But with inflation, the one-Sol coins became more valuable for their metallic content than for what they could buy. These coins started to disappear, and the word was that they were going to Ecuador, where they were bored out for use as washers.

Our ambassador wanted to make sure that we all toed the line and exchanged dollars only at the official rate. The people from the other embassies, and all the Peruvians we knew, thought we were nuts, and many people in the embassy-probably half the people-started exchanging on the black market anyway, and they thought people like me were nuts. Later, after I left, this changed and the embassy found a way to exchange at a realistic rate without offending the Peruvian government.

Q: Was there concern in Peru that maybe we were trying to destabilize the Peruvian government? We were certainly accused of doing something to Allende, and so I would think they would be looking at us the same way.

GREENLEE: I think there was always a suspicion of that. It was a de facto government and we wanted democracy. But we were not involved, as far as I know, in any plotting. But there was plotting inside the Peruvian government, and there was a palace coup when I was still there. Velasco Alvarado was kicked out, and another general named Francisco Morales Bermudez came in. He was a little less radical.

Q: Did the Japanese Peruvian community and Fujimori play any role at that time?

GREENLEE: Not Fujimori. He was totally unknown politically, as far as I know. There were Japanese-Peruvians. It was a substantial community, and there were Chinese- Peruvians as well. They were not political factors as far as I am aware.

Q: Were the Soviets a factor?

GREENLEE: Yes. With the military government there was quite a substantial Soviet presence. They would always be looking at us, and we'd be looking at them. An example was when I was on the visa line there was Soviet guy who would come in every once in a while and bring some people with him, presumably to get visas. They would always be looking at us. There was a lot of talk about it. The Cold War was at its height and Latin America was emerging as an area of competition. The Soviets were increasing their exposure in Peru and other countries. There was very much a Soviet factor in our relationship with Peru.

Q: How did you and your wife find the social life there?

GREENLEE: Very easy and very good. The Peruvians are very nice people. We did not have an active social life before the foreign service, so it was a change for us. We were invited out a lot. We lived in a community outside of the main part of Lima where there weren't any Americans. We had neighbors we saw all the time. We had little kids, so that limited some things we could do.

Q: Where did you go after Peru?

GREENLEE: I went from Lima to the State Department operations center. The dcm, Dick Barnaby, recommended me for that assignment and strongly urged me to take it when it was offered. My family and I left Lima in the (northern hemisphere) summer of 1976. We were able to take a U.S. flag container ship, first class accommodations, from the port of Callao to San Francisco. By that time we had a third child, a daughter, Gabrielle. Her brothers were Patrick, then seven, and Daniel, four. We took some of our home leave in Monterey, California, our home of record. We then bought a house out in Sterling, Virginia, all we could afford. We bought it with help from the GI Bill. It was far from the Department, but I had a parking pass while working at the op center, and could drive in, because of the shift hours, when traffic wasn't heavy.

Q: You did it from when to when?

GREENLEE: I was in the operations center from about August of 1976 until the summer of 1977. It was a one-year tour in those days. I think since then it's been expanded a bit. I was a watch officer, which basically consisted of sitting at a console answering phones, calls that came in from posts and from the public, and, depending on the hour, passing issues off to the offices that could deal with them. That was one part of the job. Another part was reading immediate precedence cable traffic. Those were the days before texts could be brought up on computer screens. Our printers were always spewing out cables. We would have to decide whether they were urgent enough to be passed directly to the principals.

Q: When you say the principals, whom do you mean?

GREENLEE: the secretary of state, the deputy secretary of state, and down to the under secretary level. The printouts came in about six copies, something like that, and we would slug them S or D or S/P, for policy planning, P, for secretary of political affairs, and so forth, depending on the subject. We would stick copies of these cables into an out box. It was tiered at different levels, and the staff aides of these different principals would come in and scoop up the copies for the principals.

Then there was another aspect of the job, on the night shift, summarizing key cables for the principals. We would also clip from newspapers the most interesting foreign policy related articles: from the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, the LA Times, and a bunch of others. The op center as not intellectually taxing, but it gave us a view of how the State Department worked, who were making things work. Once in a while there would be some interesting phone calls.

Q: Can you think of anything that particularly engaged your interest?

GREENLEE: I can think of something that didn't engage my interest. Having heard staff assistants repeatedly saying how important it was to be a staff assistant in order to move up, I realized that I didn't want to do that. It much more interesting for me to be in the field than to be sorting cable traffic. But at least the experience of summarizing the cables was useful. The morning shift would read the summaries, and would nit-pick them. They used to call this process the "nit." They would go over the summaries, find typos or whatever, and circle them, and put exclamation points after them or write comments in the margin. This kept you on your toes. The motives of the people editing were not always kind, but it was the one time when people would look brutally at your work and give you unfiltered feedback.

In the op center there was a rotation through a 24-hour period so that you weren't always on the same shift. You would do a morning-afternoon shift for two days, then move to the next shift for two days and then the next. Then you would have three days off. This was hard, and you were always catching up on sleep. It would have been better to have two 12-hour shifts, but we didn't do it that way.

Q: Often a job like that leads to being a staff assistant. That is the traditional course, to be a staff assistant to a principal.

GREENLEE: I had been connected with the ARA bureau (American Republics Area), having been in Lima. One of the staff assistants for the assistant secretary of state did approach me, asked me to come down for a cup of coffee. He was moving to a new assignment and suggested I try to replace him. This was John Keene, who much later succeeded me as ambassador to Paraguay. John had preceded me as a rotational officer in Lima, in fact. Well, I thought about it, and talked to the executive director of ARA as well. But I finally decided that I didn't want to be a staff assistant. What I wanted was to go back abroad.

There were a lot of reasons for that. Partly, I didn't want to be the guy who got the coffee in the morning and had to nag desk officers for the late memos. I didn't see myself in that role. About that time I got the assignment I wanted-which was to be a political officer in Bolivia. I got that-I think I mentioned this in an earlier tape-in an interesting way because until that point I had thought I was a consular officer.

There was an interlude, though. I didn't go to Bolivia until November of 1977, and I left the operations center around August. I spent three months as an acting desk officer for Honduras. That was an interesting time because President Carter was organizing-or his administration was organizing-the Panama Canal Treaty signing ceremony.

It was also a time when Jimmy Carter decided that he wanted a new way to set goals and objectives for the foreign service- for the embassies and the State Department. He had seen something that was submitted by some ambassador. I don't remember from what post. We saw at the operations center a copy of that with a note in the margin from Jimmy Carter. The note was directed to Cyrus Vance. Carter wrote, "Cy, I want one of these for each embassy." When I was the acting desk officer for Honduras, I was tasked to come up with goals and objectives for that country. I, frankly, didn't know much about how to communicate effectively with posts. Also, the assistant secretary, Terry Todman, was worried about the cost of phone calls. So I came up with goals and objectives for Embassy Tegucigalpa without even talking to the embassy. The embassy was confused about what was going on. But when they saw my product, which was washed through the system of Central American Affairs-the office director was Wade Matthews-they thought it was OK, with only a few changes. That project was educational. I started to realize that one should be very tightly connected with the post from Washington, and with Washington from the post, and that it was important to relate the two systems. It seems obvious, but in practice it's not so simple. In my Lima tour I had not had to speak directly with Washington very much. Others, higher up, did that.

In November of 1977 I went back to Bolivia.

Q: Excuse me, when did you leave Bolivia? I want to have that at the beginning.

GREENLEE: I was in Bolivia from November of 1977 until December of 1979. In those days it was 25% hardship assignment, that is, a 25% increase in pay. Some people, I think, were reluctant to go to Bolivia because it was turbulent. Also, La Paz is at a very high altitude, about 12,000 feet. For me it was serendipitous. I loved Bolivia and my wife, of course, was right at home. She had family there, not a large family, but cousins as well as her sister. Her sister has since died, but she was married to a guy who was active politically and part of a political party. I was very well connected going in, and, frankly, much better connected in many respects than others at the embassy.

The ambassador was Paul Boeker-he died a few years ago. He was a very young ambassador, a smart guy who had been part of Kissinger's inner circle. I found him to be a good man to work for, and I found the political section interesting. The political counselor was supportive, but I had to be a little careful of how I...

Q; It sounds like it must lead to trouble.

GREENLEE: It could have, but I tried not to grandstand. I went through the system. As I started to hit the nail on the head, I think my information was particularly appreciated. I would not put stuff in cables immediately. I would write memorandums for the files, and the memorandums would be distributed around. I would get notes back from the ambassador, so it was a heady thing for me. Some of the other section heads-not my boss-resented my access to the ambassador. I started to learn about careerism.

I had trouble at first writing the cables that I really wanted to write. Sometimes they were substantially rewritten, either watered down or elaborated on so much that the focus was lost. Another thing was that I was a slow writer. I mentioned this before. I always wanted to get things exactly right, and I wanted to write with verve, with a kind of snap. It took me a long while to write. I remember one time the political counselor came in and said, "You write good stuff, but sometimes you're in there with your door closed, and you produce a mouse." [laughter] One thing that I learned in La Paz was the importance of contact work. I wasn't an eight to five or nine to five officer. I was working all the time and working lines that the embassy didn't have easy access to.

Q: Let's talk about the political situation and the lines that you were working.

GREENLEE: Political turbulence is the norm in Bolivia. It was still the Cold War, but Jimmy Carter as president wanted to promote human rights, which was a new concept for the region and especially novel after the Kissinger period. Bolivians, at least those in the established political class, were not too interested in our views on human rights. They thought it was interference in their affairs.

The other thing was democratization. Jimmy Carter wanted to see elections and wanted a reversal of the trend that had produced de facto governments throughout the region. He wanted to have it go the other way. In fact, the week that I arrived in Bolivia the de facto president, Hugo Banzer Suarez, an army general, announced that there would be elections and that he would not be a candidate.

The elections were held about seven months later, and there was massive government-driven fraud. Banzer had designated as his successor an air force general, Juan Pereda Asbun. Pereda supposedly won, but everyone saw the fraud. People rose up in the streets-the leftist opposition-and the election was annulled.

Pereda was pushed aside soon after he was sworn in. Another general came in as de facto president. Eventually new elections were organized. These ended in a dead heat between the two main presidential contenders, Victor Paz Estenssoro and Hernan Siles Zuazo, the two grand old men of the 1952 MNR revolution. Congress couldn't decide the outcome. There was an absolute deadlock. But the Bolivians, historically, are good at working their way back from the brink. The congress finally came up with a way to break the stalemate, which was to elect as president neither of the deadlocked candidates, but rather the president of the senate. His name was Walter Guevara Arze. He was president a couple of months, and then there was a coup and another military guy came in, Alberto Natusch Busch.

That coup was smothered by the international community, which threatened to cut off aid, within three weeks. Then the president of the lower house, a woman named Lidia Gueiler Tejada, was selected by the congress. That was about the time I left. She was pushed out several months later in a particularly nasty coup led by an army general named Luis Garcia Meza, who is now languishing in a Bolivian jail.

I was in Bolivia as political officer for two years, roughly. Two years and a month or so. During that time there were two general elections, the annulment of the first of those elections. There were three coups and, I believe, seven presidents. This was a great way to learn how to write about politics. This was not long after the Freedom of Information Act was promulgated. There had to be a system for declassifying cables and making them available to the public. The way they initially tried to do this was to have the drafter or the person responsible for the cable identified as the classifying officer. At some posts this was always the ambassador or the dcm, but in La Paz it was the drafter. It was quite good for my career because people in Washington said, "We're waiting for the Greenlee cable." It gave me some currency with the front office, and we would get kudos occasionally from Washington.

Q: At that time, what was America's interest in the drug situation?

GREENLEE: This was before Bolivia moved seriously into coca/cocaine production. There was some of that, but the problem was not as grave as it would later become. Here was a country that had been on the skids for years, into which we'd poured a lot of aid. We wanted to see it develop politically, as a democracy. But Bolivia historically is the most turbulent republic in the world. It's had more changes of government in years of existence as a republic. It was almost a laboratory for political theorists. People wanted to see democracy work, but democracy was also seen as instrument for consolidating power and a cover for abusing it. Our main interest was trying to stabilize the country and help it become more viable. In the late 1970's, the anti-drug effort was secondary.

Q: Why did we care?

GREENLEE: We cared because Bolivia was in the center of South America, bordering on five countries. When I was a Peace Corps volunteer, Che Guevara was trying to make the country a focal point for revolution. There were two active communist parties. There was Peking-line party and a Moscow-line party. There were socialist parties and right wing groups as well. There was a dance we were doing with the Soviets, and the Bolivian governments, left and right, were adept at playing us off against them. The Bolivians would say, "We don't want the communists. We don't like them. But we need more help to keep them at bay."

Q: How about the universities?

GREENLEE: The universities were and are today very left wing. There was a lot of pro-Soviet and pro-Cuban-and anti-U.S.- sentiment in the universities. There were some right wing elements, but the dominant tendency was towards the left, and even the totalitarian left. Bolivia is one of those countries that had and still has Trotskyites. They were a very strong element in Bolivia. I know they exist in Mexico also, but you don't hear about them in the U.S. or Europe.

Q: Is Bolivia one of those places where the young tend to be Marxists or communists but when they grow up they go into business?

GREENLEE: Yes, there is an evolution there-just like in some cases here. They start out being idealistic, leftist, against everything, but as they try to make a living, they change. Sometimes they want to protect inherent privilege. Sometimes they come to the conclusion, intellectually, that a traditional economic system ultimately works better for the country. But there is a hard-core intellectual left. They become university professors or politicians. They, more than the businessmen, are the opinion-shapers.

Bolivia, being a country that does not have a seaport, that's locked away in the center of South America, is inward-looking, provincial in many ways, and susceptible to populist appeal and nationalist appeal. It is easy to stir things up in Bolivia. It is also the most indigenous as well as the poorest country in South America. Today 65% of the population describes itself as indigenous, and about 65% of the population lives below the poverty line. This is also a source of political turbulence and political opportunity for strong nationalist populous leaders.

Q: Where did your wife's family fit in?

GREENLEE: My wife's immediate family was not a factor. Her father was deceased. She had a brother who was not in politics. My wife had a first cousin who was married to a former army general who was politically connected on the right and another cousin who had been, in the Banzer dictatorship, a minister of interior. But I did not use those connections. My wife's sister's husband, however, was a good interlocutor, somebody who could keep give me reality checks. That was a valuable connection. I worked around the political spectrum partly through him. But I would also make cold calls on pivotal figures that the embassy wasn't talking to. I'd say, "I'm from the U.S. embassy. I'd like to sit down and talk with you." They would always say yes.

My wife has an interesting family history. On her father's side she is descended from the first martyr of independence in South America, in 1809. This fellow, Pedro Domingo Murillo, rose up against the Spaniards. He was a Creole. In fact, he was the son of a Spanish priest and an Indian woman. He was caught, hanged and decapitated. His head was put on a stake. He was said to have said something like, "I die, but the torch I have lit will never be extinguished." A decade and a half later, Bolivia finally achieved its independence, but Clara, my wife, is a direct descendent of that guy, a great-great-great, however many greats, grandchild.

Her mother's side was more of a pure Spanish line. They had extensive properties and had been wealthy before the agrarian form, in 1953, when they lost everything. My wife grew up partly in a world of privilege but her father died, in 1964, when she was just beginning medical school in the university, and she had to drop out and study to become a teacher. When I met her, she was holding her family together. She was also, for me, an interpreter of Bolivia.

Q: At that time, how was the indigenous population looked upon, and what was their role?

GREENLEE: Bolivia is a mestizo country. There are very few of pure European stock. Even the people who are comparatively well to do and who in those days were running the country take pride in having indigenous blood. But there are very sharp class distinctions. The poor of Bolivia-and I mentioned this in the Peace Corps part, when we were talking about that and the deep, indigenous people-had lived in conditions of chattel servitude until 1952. They remain today excluded from opportunities, from avenues that could lead to prosperity.

Then and to a large extent now, many of the poor work almost as beasts of burden. Many of the men are bent over, hammered down from a very young age. There are linguistic divisions, too. There is an indigenous lower middle class, the cholos-with resources, like trucks, a kind of in-between class. Bolivia is one of those countries-Guatemala is another one-where there really is a particular kind of culture, a rich culture that is not a knock-off of European culture or U.S. culture. It's very specific, very unique.

The women in the indigenous lower middle class wear voluminous pleated skirts. In the upland areas, around La Paz, they wear derby hats. In Cochabamba, where I was in the Peace Corps part of the time, they used to wear white stovepipe hats. Those hats have been modified a bit in recent years. Bolivia has a little bit of everything. Recently somebody described Bolivia as a medieval country, alongside a colonial country, alongside a modern country. It has all of those elements, and they become inter-meshed. In those days, though, in the 70's, there was much less that was modern.

Q: During the two years that you were there, were there any crises or developments that stand out in your mind?

GREENLEE: There were the crises of the coups and the elections. There was plenty to try to understand and plenty to report on. It was an adrenalin trip, the whole of those two years there. There were a couple of things that stand out. One was the last coup,which was run by a colonel named Natush Busch, a coup that lasted only 16 days.

We knew that this coup was developing, and I had a lot of information about it. The coup actually happened on the last day of the 1979 OAS ministerial, which was held in La Paz. Just before it broke, the ambassador sent me over to talk to a prominent MNR politician named Guillermo Bedregal. He was a contact of mine. I told him that we had information about what might happen and asked him to help head it off. This was not out of line, because we knew he was involved. He acted like he didn't know what I was talking about. When the coup happened, he became foreign minister. Later, after it collapsed, he denounced me, publicly, for interference in Bolivia's affairs, and accused me of being the "station chief." That charge became attached to my reputation, and if you Google me you see it there. This was a coup from the right, but this guy's accusation against me was later exploited by the left, when I returned as ambassador.

Q: At that time, as a foreign service officer, you saw coups up close and reported on them. But did you find that back in Washington the attitude was, "So? What's new?"-an attitude like, "Who cares?"

GREENLEE: Washington certainly cared, at least briefly. They cared because the push to consolidate democracy was faltering. Remember, we started out with the de facto president declaring that there would be elections, and then we had all these problems. There was some explaining to do. "How is it you guys are promoting democracy and the people aren't ready for it?" Attention was paid at the State Department. But not much. It was really just a blip among other, larger concerns. The Natusch coup was a 16-day blip.

Q: What were you doing in those 16 days?

GREENLEE: Talking to the new opposition, the people who had been trying to form a government before. The ambassador was the one doing the heavy lifting and the dcm and political counselor were certainly active. There was a lot of pressure and the coup collapsed.

Q: What about the Bolivian military? What constituted it? What was its role?

GREENLEE: The military conducted coups. It was a factor of power and could not be ignored. When the military understood that it couldn't sustain itself in government, it stepped back. But it remained an important factor of power.

One of the things we had to contend with was a perception in Bolivia that although Jimmy Carter and the State Department wanted democracy to succeed, the Pentagon had a different view and was willing to tolerate a de facto government to keep the Soviets out. It was not a correct reading of the thinking of the day, but it was what I think most Bolivians believed. There were in fact some issues with people connected with the defense attachï¿½ office in Bolivia. There was at least one guy who never understood why it was important for us to promote human rights. He would always be saying, "It's their country, why can't they do it the way they want?" I think he probably said a bit of this to the Bolivians. We didn't have as coherent a policy line as we should have, but some of the Bolivians who wanted to see military intervention were eager to detect splits in our policy that didn't exist.

Q: Human rights. This was one of the main focal points of the Carter administration, and it was new on the horizon, more or less on a worldwide basis. How much of a problem were violations of human rights in Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Human rights were a concern not just in Bolivia but certainly in Chile and in Argentina. There were massive violations of human rights. When Carter insisted on human rights as an essential component of democracy, it seemed a novel position. I think Bolivians on the left didn't quite know what to make of it. Maybe they thought we were being cynical. In fact, through our position, we carved out a base for the left to develop.

What really was eye opening for me was how powerful our human rights policy turned out to be. It was powerful because it made sense to us, it tripped easily off our tongue, and it was powerful because you have to have human rights if you're going to have respect for rule of law and for the institutions of democracy. It didn't surprise me when, after Carter lost the election to Reagan, the policy continued. Now nobody thinks about it. It is a component of what everybody understands to be necessary for democracy. But it wasn't always so.

Q: Was the military government beating up and imprisoning a lot of people? You mentioned Argentina and Chile, where there were"disappearances." How about Bolivia?

GREENLEE: The de facto military governments had no compunction about using lethal force. Bullets sometimes flew, and opponents were rounded up. People were killed. What happened in Bolivia didn't get as much publicity as what happened in Chile and Argentina., and happened on a much smaller scale There were things I found out later, such as Banzer's participation in "Operation Condor," which was about hunting down and assassinating left-wing figures in those countries.

A former leftist president of Bolivia, an army general named Juan Jose Torres, was assassinated in Argentina as part of Operation Condor. Torres was president for a little while in 1970, and later sought asylum in Argentina. My brother-in-law was connected with a party of fairly young people. He was identified as a leftist and under Garcia Meza and was threatened with death. He was taken out, put against a wall, and I think bullets were shot over his head. He was told he would be killed if he didn't leave the country. And he left for about ten years. The military operated that way.

Q: What about the neighbors, the countries surrounding Bolivia? Did they interfere?

GREENLEE: Bolivia had lost territory to each of its five neighbors, but the most significant loss was its outlet to the sea during the 1879 war in the Pacific. Banzer, as a right-wing de facto president, had a kind of affinity for Pinochet and came close to making a deal that would have given Bolivia a sea outlet through former Peruvian territory. There were discussions with Chile and a real effort to resolve the dispute. Bolivia wanted a territorial concession, but the Chileans wanted Bolivia to give up an equal amount of territory in return. There were also problems in the arrangements with Peru. So a promising effort ended up being a setback in the Bolivia-Chile relationship, with repercussions that continue.

Q: You mentioned this Operation Condor. Was this a South American right wing operation or was the CIA (Central intelligence Agency) in it subsequently?

GREENLEE: I knew nothing about Operation Condor when I was in Bolivia, and I know nothing about it from my work in the U.S. Government. I only know what I've read in the newspapers. It is clear from media reporting that there was such as thing as Operation Condor. It is not at all clear that the U.S. had anything to do with it. In fact, what I've been given to understand is that the U.S. was not involved in Operation Condor.

Q: Did you get any feel for American business interests in Bolivia at the time?

GREENLEE: There were U.S. interests in the mining sector. I knew people involved there. Being a fledgling middle grade political officer, I had no particular role in trying to defend U.S. business interests. It wasn't until later, really until Larry Eagleburger became secretary of state, or a little before, that, U.S. diplomats, particularly ambassadors and senior-level people, were ordered to be very conscious of U.S. business interests and to promote and to support them. This became a large part of our responsibilities as I went on in the foreign service.

Q: How did you find your social life? Was it useful professionally?

GREENLEE: In Bolivia, first of all, there's always a very active social life in the family circuit. Families are always doing things with one another and their circles of friends, and social life can be very intense. We were entertaining people a lot and we were going out to barbeques and receptions. There was also the school, the people connected with the school. We had an active social life. My wife loved it, and I found it to be useful for my professional interests, my political reporting interests. There are few secrets in Bolivia. The trick is to separate what is real from rumor and gossip.

Q: Were there any other events while you were there? Did you get any feel about how well Bolivia was represented back in the States, their embassy? Some embassies really know how to play the game. Did you get any feel for this?

GREENLEE: I did not get a good feel for Bolivia's representation in Washington during that particular tour, 1977-79. I had a better feel when I want back '87-'89 as deputy chief of mission. Then Bolivia was very well represented. Bolivia has a problem that many other countries don't have- that Israel doesn't have, the UK (United Kingdom) doesn't have, and even Brazil doesn't have-and that is that it is a small country without a U.S. constituency. If the ambassador in Washington isn't really good, there isn't much he can accomplish; it's hard for him to make an impact.

There have been two ambassadors that I am aware of who made a difference. One was Victor Andrade, who was able to convince Washington that the 1952 revolution was not an ideological threat. The other, in the late 1980's, was Fernando Illanes, who negotiated a complicated debt buyback, a model of its kind. But most Bolivian ambassadors in Washington pass unnoticed. Bolivia's best lobby has been via our embassy in La Paz. That is so today.

Q: I take it there wasn't much of a Bolivian ex-pat community in the United States.

GREENLEE: No, there wasn't and there isn't. Such as it is today, there are Bolivian workers, a lot of them around Arlington. It is not an ex-pat community, really. Most of them are illegal and don't try to make a political impact. They keep their heads down. There are also prominent Bolivians here, often treading water until conditions improve and they can go back.

Q: You left there in '79.

GREENLEE: I left in December of 1979, and I went to Tel Aviv. It's interesting how I got that assignment. I was a very active political officer in Bolivia. I was quite inexperienced, but I was getting a lot of exposure, and it was a heady time for me. I didn't know what I wanted to do next, but I wanted a good follow-on assignment. I wasn't finding anything I really wanted, though, so I sought a six month extension, which would have put me into the summer cycle the following year. But around that time the Department sent out a worldwide cable soliciting bids for an assignment to Israel. It said the candidate should be and an FSO4. An FSO4 is today's FO2, since the system has been restructured.

Q: That was a lieutenant-colonel level assignment?.

GREENLEE: Yes. The other requirement was that the candidates speak Arabic and Hebrew. The job would be representing the ambassador at the working-level sessions of the Camp David autonomy talks with Egypt and Israel. I saw this cable and thought, "This can't have anything to do with somebody like me." But my section head, Bob Fouche, said, "You ought to apply for this." I said, "There's no way I can get something like this. Why would I waste my time?" He said, "Put your name in. You never can tell." So I did.

About two weeks later, Ambassador Boeker asked in a staff meeting whether anybody needed any personnel work done, because he was going up to Washington. I told him afterward that I had put my name in for the Tel Aviv job, but there was nothing in my background that would qualify me for it. Boeker must have been gone three weeks, a month, and I didn't hear anything. Then I got a call from M. Charles Hill - Charlie Hill. At that time he was the deputy director of IAI (Israel and Arab- Israel Affairs) in NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs). Charlie said, "Are you interested in this job?" I said, "Yes, but I don't have the background." He said, "Don't worry about it. Are you interested in the job?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Paul Boeker was up here talking about you, and we'd like you to take it."

I was flabbergasted. I heard later that they had had 14 bids on the job, and there were Arabists, and there were Hebrew speakers. What I later learned about NEA was that people tended to walk on different sides of the aisle. The Arabists cancelled out the Hebraists and vice-versa. I was the only one left standing, and got the job. They wanted me right away. They wanted me to go up there and learn Hebrew, but Ambassador Boeker wouldn't let go of me that fast. I stayed in Bolivia another four months, finally leaving in December. During that time our fourth child, Nicole, was born. We left Bolivia in December of 1979, and arrived in Tel Aviv three weeks later.

Q: You were there from when to when?

GREENLEE: I was in Tel Aviv from January of 1980 until July of 1982. Two and a half years.

Q: What was the situation in Israel at that time?

GREENLEE: The Camp David Accords had been concluded, and there was peace with Egypt, but no peace with the other Arab states and no way to resolve the problem of the Palestinians in what the Israelis called the "administered" territories and the world called the "occupied territories"-the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians didn't want to be involved in the Camp David framework. Part of the deal with Egypt was that there should be a way to address the Palestinian issue. The Palestinians wanted a Palestinian state, but Camp David only provided for Palestinian autonomy. To achieve that there had to be talks that logically would involve the Palestinians. The Egyptians negotiated on their behalf. The U.S. was a party to the talks. We were the facilitators, suggesting ways around obstacles that arose. There was a team from Washington, and representatives from Embassy Tel Aviv and Embassy Cairo.

I went out to do that job, to be involved in those talks- not as a negotiator but as an observer for the embassy. In fact, when I arrived in Israel, that wasn't my role, not immediately, because there was already somebody doing it. I folded into the political section and became the guy who went down to Gaza and reported on Palestinian thinking there, and also on the policies and actions of the military government on the West Bank. I didn't do things directly with the Palestinians on the West Bank, as opposed to Gaza, because the West Bank, with the exception of the military government, was the responsibility of the Consulate General in Jerusalem.

I don't know if you want me to get into the Israeli stuff now, but I can. It is fascinating.

Q: I do.

GREENLEE: It was a jolt coming from Bolivia to Israel, which was of hyper interest to Washington and the media. It was quite a change. Embassy Tel Aviv was a high-pressure place. The demands were heavy. The ambassador was not just a Type A, but a Type A Plus. So were most of the officers there.

Q: Who was the ambassador.

GREENLEE: A very competent man: Samuel Lewis. He was ambassador for many years in Bolivia, probably six-plus years. He drove people hard. Before I arrived, the embassy had a reputation for door-slamming. When I go there, though, the atmosphere was calmer. There was a new dcm, Bill Brown, who was very low key, and Charlie Hill had migrated out to the be the political counselor. Hill was extraordinarily competent, and a pleasure to work with. He hired me for the job, and Sam Lewis let me know that he had personally vetted me. It was a way of saying if you don't perform to expectation, you will be letting us down.

Ambassador Lewis was an incredibly quick and literate drafter. He dictated his cables and they were sent out without any editing much of the time. He might do three or four cables a day, some of them with "no distribution" or "eyes only" caveats. He was like an entire political section by himself. Charlie Hill often wrote first-person cables for the ambassador, and he was like another whole political section. He would be the note-taker for the ambassador's meetings with Menahem Begin, for example. Charlie wrote with a meticulous hand, very clear print, and it was wonderful stuff. This would be the high-level input that would go to Washington every day. The rest of us ground out cables, of course, but our output paled next to Lewis' and Hills'.

There were also high-level sensitive phone calls. The secure phone in the front office was in frequent use. The calls wouldn't usually go to the officer director. They would go to the under secretary for political affairs, or the deputy secretary or secretary. They would go to the NSC (National Security Council). That was what happened at the top, but there were things going on at my level, too. I became the reporter for the autonomy talks and I also took frequent turns at internal political reporting, which was not my primary responsibility.

I had an office without windows, and I would go in and shut the door and type. Word processors, "Wangs," didn't come in until I was leaving post. I never had one. I was working with an old typewriter-an IBM Selectric-in this office with no windows. I would grind away. I was a good reporter, but I was a slow. What happened in that embassy was that the people who could write without the need of much editing got more and more of the burden of the section. I ended up being one of those people. I wrote slowly, but I didn't need much editing. So I was given as much as I could handle. It was exhausting. My chronological file was about six inches thick at the end of a year.

Q: What were you writing?

GREENLEE: I was writing color pieces on the political scene, developments affecting the peace process. I wrote about border issues, water issues, the Israeli Arabs, the Arabs who were citizens of Israel. I wasn't the internal reporting officer, but I would cover the Knesset debates sometimes, depending on what was needed. I would collect and report, as in Bolivia, but much more up-tempo.

To give you an example, I went one time to the foreign ministry, shortly after arriving in country. The Israelis were delighted that I was not an Arabist. They saw me as a clean slate. I talked to a guy who was explaining how Israel was handling the situation on the border with Lebanon. The problem in those days was not Hezbollah, but the PLO. The Israelis in fact were working with the Shia against the Palestinians. This guy told me that although the Shia of south Lebanon were sworn enemies of Israel, they could work together against the PLO. He said, "You know the patterns of political relationships in the Middle East are kaleidoscopic in nature. They change with every turn of the wheel." That was an interesting way to put it. A year later, after I understood things better, I went back and talked to this guy again. I told him that I was grateful for this kaleidoscope metaphor. There was somebody else in the room, another Israeli foreign ministry guy. He said , "What was the metaphor?" So I told him. Both these guys looked puzzled. They looked at each other and said, "Something's missing." Then one of them said, I know: "The pattern changes with every turn of the wheel, but the colors always remain the same." [laughter]

I wrote on all that stuff. I wrote on the problems in the Bekaa Valley, the problems with Syria and Syrian influence on Lebanon, as the Israelis saw it. I learned about how to write for Washington, and I learned it much better after I left Israel and went to work on the Israel desk and when I was deputy director for Egyptian affairs. What I learned was that it was not what you wrote that was important, but what was read. The trick was to be read. I think we understood that better in Tel Aviv, and in NEA/IAI, than the reporters at the Arab posts and Arab-affairs offices in Washington. But I am sure people who worked in those places would disagree.

There were cables that many times-and this also happened with the consulate general-seemed to be about feelings, about injustice, about how the Israelis were trampling on the rights of the Palestinians. But they were not cables that were going to change policy in Washington. They were probably not going to be read. One thing I got from Charlie Hill was that if you want to change policy in Washington, it's possible to do so, but you don't do it by slapping Washington in the face. You do it by slowly turning inside the gyre. Write your cables in such a way- write your summaries in such a way- that they will be read. That was a valuable lesson.

Q: Could you talk about the consul general in Jerusalem? Who was consul general there, and how were relations?

GREENLEE: Relations were always good when I was at the embassy, but previously I think they were somewhat strained. Brandon Grove was the consul general and Jock Covey was his deputy. The word was that they were sent to Jerusalem in part to strengthen the relationship with the embassy. One of them would come each week to Sam Lewis' country team meeting.

Q: Were there divisions in the embassy on how people viewed Israel ?

GREENLEE: The ambassador was so dominant, and the senior part of the embassy was so powerful, Charlie Hill and Bill Brown, that what might be called divisions elsewhere were not evident. There were different points of view sometimes, but not divisions. There was almost a total absence of people who had served at Arab posts. U.S. policy was to support Israel and that's what the embassy did. There could be heated exchanges with the Israelis over aspects of the bilateral relationship, and the Israelis could be testy and difficult. But we were committed to Israel's security and well-being. I didn't see people saying, "Should we really be so hard over with the Israelis? Shouldn't we be more balanced?" I didn't see it in Tel Aviv, but I did see it back in Washington. And of course the views of people at the consulate general in Jerusalem tended to be quite different from ours at the embassy.

The Arabs would talk about the importance of the U.S. being even-handed, but the Israelis considered that a code phrase for stacking the deck against Israel. We were supposed to support Israel, not take a neutral position. The Arabs would talk about the need for Palestinian self-determination. The Israelis saw that as a code word for an independent Palestinian state. In those days the Israelis wouldn't consider anything beyond "autonomy," which was the word they insisted on including in the Camp David Accords. There were these little keys that you always had to be aware of. Words counted. If there were a slip, particularly at a high-level, the Israelis would catch it and worry about a shift in U.S. policy.

You had to know the theology of the peace process, and it took a while to get it down. You had to know UN Security Council Resolution 242, and you had to know Resolution 338, and you had to know what was emphasized by the different sides. I got to be quite a theologian of the process. Camp David is a framework, but 242 is a basis for negotiation. It was the foundation of Camp David. The Palestinians accepted 242, but not Camp David, which they saw as limiting 242. Resolution 242 calls for Israel to withdraw from "territories occupied." The Arabs interpreted this to mean "all" the territories occupied in the 1967 war, including East Jerusalem. The Israelis, on the other hand, underscored the absence of the article "the" before territories and insisted that this meant Israel would have to withdraw from only part of the occupied territories, and only in exchange for peace and security. These nuances were crucial.

Q: Did you have the feeling when you got there that you would be scrutinized by the Israelis, that they would be wary of a pro-Arab bias?

GREENLEE: Yes, I did. But I was sympathetic to their situation. I didn't ever think, "Should Israel exist as a country?" I saw Israel, as a Jewish state, being essential in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I felt that and I still feel that. I think some of the Israelis assumed I was Jewish.

Q: The name Greenlee might give that impression.

GREENLEE: It could possibly. The one conversational exchange I had with Ehud Olmert, who became Prime Minister, touched on that. He was then a member of the Knesset. I had met him sort of randomly and at one point I said, because he was considering my last name, that I wasn't Jewish. He said, "I know that. If you were Green, maybe, but Greenlee, never." But the truth is a lot of Israelis assumed I was Jewish. Also a lot of people in the Department.

There were some odd experiences. I knew pretty well an Israeli who was originally from South Africa. He's a very good contact. He looked to me like an Old Testament prophet. He had a beard and very Semitic features. We went to a restaurant in Tel Aviv where they served a lot of dishes based on eggplant. It was a wonderful restaurant. We sat down and I was given the menu in Hebrew. He got the one in English. Israel is such an interesting place! It really is a cosmopolitan place. My wife, who is copper-skinned and has jet black hair, looked very much like an Israeli from Yemen. With reddish hair I looked like an Israeli from Poland. We fit in there better than in any place we had ever been in terms of how we looked as a couple.

Q: Did you ever think, given Israel's occupation policies and the growth of population and arms proliferation on the Arab side, that Israel's future could be problematic?

GREENLEE: This was constantly on the minds of the Israelis. They wanted to make sure they retained a technological edge in military equipment so that they could counter the Arab advantage in population. And their enemies are very close. Damascus is just over the horizon from the Golan Heights, which the Israelis have held since the '67 war.

It doesn't take long to reach Tel Aviv from neighboring Arab states by air. The Israelis were constantly thinking about that, and we were constantly thinking about it. We were always committed to making sure that Israel had the level of sophistication in their equipment that they needed to defend themselves. They would then tell us that we, the Israelis, are a great asset to you, the U.S., because we've developed certain systems that you can employ in defense of your own interests-conformal fuel tanks to extend the range of tactical aircraft, for example, or upgraded electronics. There was a very active political military dialogue.

Q: How did you see Israel's attitude toward a negotiated peace?

GREENLEE: The problem in the Arab-Israeli negotiations was that they were seen as "zero-sum," and neither side ever wanted to yield. Some thought that if the Israelis gave way on settlements, then you could have a break-through on the other side. So pressure would build on the Israelis. But if anything the Israelis would become less flexible. They don't respond well to pressure. The Israelis, I'm sure, want peace, but they don't want to risk being flexible in ways that they think they won't be able to recover from.

I've had a lot of conversations with Israelis about settlements. The position of the U.S. government was always that settlements were "unhelpful" and obstacles to peace. We would sometimes say to the Israelis, "Just when things look like they could have gotten better, you guys start establishing new settlements." The Israelis would say, "You are wrong to think the settlements are a lynchpin for everything. We could get rid of all the settlements, and would still have the same problem. The settlements aren't the issue."

Q: Talk about Israeli democracy. How did it impress you?

Israel is a really active democracy. It's the kind of debating-school type of democracy. There are actors within Israel who have considerable leverage and weight even though they are not numerically significant. Sometimes the settlers are in a position to be the "balance wheel" of a coalition government. That is also the case with the comparatively small religious party. Their price of support for an otherwise wobbly coalition government would be, for example, the requirement for all hotels to maintain kosher kitchens. The settlers, who often came from places like Brooklyn, would also have substantial political input. Narrow interests had a way of becoming national interests.

Q: The settlers from Brooklyn were extremists...

GREENLEE: That was certainly the perception, at least in regard to many of them. Meir Kahane, of the Jewish Defense League, for example, was from Brooklyn. You would talk to Israelis, and they would say, "Yeah, these guys are nuts." But then, as you got into it a little, there would be this sense that they weren't entirely nuts. I remember there was this general who was on the Israeli delegation for the autonomy talks, who would say that the essential point was that the West Bank should never be what the Nazis called "Judenrein"-that is, denied to Jews. A lot of the Israelis saw the settlers as ensuring that interest. And there was a strong religious component to that interest. Unlike in Gaza, there were highly significant Jewish religious sites on the West Bank. The Israelis wanted to make sure they would always have access to them.

If you were insistent on the need for Israeli to freeze settlement activity, you would begin to touch nerves. You would find that as an American you could only go so far. The Israelis would say, "We know these Arabs; you don't. We know what they're up to." There were exceptions to that, of course, like the "Peace Now" group, which was opposed to settlements. There are so many dimensions to the settlement issue, and many different kinds of settlements. Some are vast apartment or housing complexes. Some are tents on a hillside occupied by just handful of families. There are settlements along the Jordan River put down by the Labor Party after the 1967 war, strategic settlements. There is a large settlement dating from before the Israeli State. It's too facile to lump them all into a single issue, to say, simply, that they are "unhelpful" or "illegal" or even "obstacles to peace." Like everyone involved with the Middle East, we can get caught in our own rhetoric.

Q: I never dealt with Israel, but I would think that they have the ability to push buttons in congress....

GREENLEE: The Israelis have a remarkable ability to push buttons in congress, as well as in the executive branch, at the most senior levels of the State Department and the White House. We understood that at the embassy in Tel Aviv. It was part of the terrain on which we operated. I remember once Prime Minister Menahem Begin didn't like a position that we were taking. He might have picked up on a talking point to "press" the Israelis on some issue. He said publicly that if we wanted to "press," he would know how to "press back." That was a credible comment. That was what we had to deal with. But Israel isn't the only country whose interests figure in our internal politics. There's a domestic component to our policy with respect to many countries, for example, Greece.

Q: Ireland.

GREENLEE: Yes, Ireland is another example. Our citizens have roots in many places and they frequently make their interests in support of those places known to their congressional representatives.

This is a major factor in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. There are people with a lot of economic and political power who are committed to Israel-Republicans and Democrats. It's almost to the point where when you talk about the U.S. national interest as it relates to Israel, you're also talking about a U.S. national interest as it relates to internal considerations in the United States. I used to tell people who would ask why we support Israel so strongly that -and this sounds a little over the top, I know-it is almost like dealing with an interest that might pertain to the state of New Jersey. It was that hard to disentangle from our domestic politics.

There are other examples of this. Look at our Cuba policy. Try to separate that from the internal politics of south Florida and arithmetic of our national elections. The Cuban exile community is passionately interested in the way we relate to Cuba. So whether it's Israel or it's Cuba or it's Greece or Ireland, there are domestic components to our foreign policy.

Q: Did you find that the Israelis were quick to accuse people critical of their policies as being anti-Semitic?

GREENLEE: The Israelis don't want to undermine their own historical arguments, but they are quick to pounce on what they perceive as anti-Semitism. They sense it sometime in people who are simply putting forward positions, who don't consider themselves in any way anti-Semitic.

I often saw this in the way Israeli officials sized up people at the embassy or official visitors from the U.S. They would make up their minds quickly about whether people were sympathetic to their situation or not. I could almost see it registering in their eyes when they met people. It was important for them to know where people stood, whether they understood certain fundamental issues-security issues, especially-as Israelis understood them.

If the Israelis didn't trust you to be committed to Israel's security and well-being, which was U.S. policy, then they would wonder whether you were really representing U.S. policy or whether there was a weakening of U.S. policy. It was important in talking to Israelis to make sure that they understood that, if you had a disagreeable message, it was not rooted in a fundamental shift in policy or in something deeper, like anti-Semitism. That was often difficult.

It also was difficult sometimes in Washington when people didn't buy into policy. I can give you an example. There was a very powerful person in the Reagan administration who came in from the outside and was at the National Security Council. This was when I was in the office of Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs at the State Department. It was interesting that the nomenclature for the office was Israel-Arab-Israel affairs, not Arab-Israeli affairs. They changed that now, but at that time the distinction seemed important. Political theology was very important.

In any case, the Israelis, probably the prime minister, wrote a letter of complaint about something that required a response. We drafted the response, which included the assurance that the United States remained committed to Israel's "security and well-being"-standard language. The senior official at the NSC, however, struck this sentence from the letter as being inconsistent with the tone we wanted to convey. We had to say, "Wait a second. If you don't have that phrase in there, you're going to open up a whole different issue. You don't want to go there." He reluctantly backed down, and the phrase was restored. It shows you the kind of level of detail you had to use when dealing with the Israelis. Also, the basic commitment that, "We're here behind you. We don't want you to disappear. We want you to keep your military edge. We may disagree on this or that, but we don't disagree that you ought to exist as a country."

Q: Were the Israelis comfortable getting so much assistance from us? I would have thought that, as a proud people, there would be a certain resentment about being so dependent..

GREENLEE: They never quite expressed it the way that you have expressed it. They liked their big friend being there, and they needed their big friend. At the same time, they went about things their own way. They made it very clear to us that they would never ask a U.S. soldier to shed blood on their behalf. They'd do their own fighting.

I remember very well that one guy I dealt with-in fact, he became a very important person in the Israeli context, both as a diplomatic representative, as a representative in their legal system-told me, "You know, we have lots of issues with the United States, but the United States is honest. These other countries-meaning the Europeans-are not honest." I think that what he really meant was that, "We know at the end of the day that you're not going to abandon us, and these other countries are going to go their own way."

Israel is a very small country but it punches over its weight. Its human resources are extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary. For years it had a significant military edge over its Arab neighbors. When it struck, it prevailed. But its situation began to change in the early 1980s. As I left Israel, they were getting mired in Lebanon. Before that, they would do these very precise strikes, whether it rescuing hostages from Entebbe (Uganda) or winning militarily in the '67 war and '73 wars.

There was a lot of ï¿½lan in the country, a sense that, "We need help internationally, politically, and we need resources, and we need access to technology, but we can do it ourselves." In fact, there was much more of that than certain other countries that I've been involved with where they really can't do things by themselves.

Q: You talked about American not shedding blood for Israelis. What immediately comes to mind is the USS Liberty. I don't understand why the Israelis attacked that American naval vessel. It is clear that it wasn't a mistake. There was obviously no mistake.

GREENLEE: It was not something that was discussed much when I was in Israel. I was at the embassy from January 1980 until July or so of 1982. The attack on the Liberty happened during the '67 war, but there was a book published when I was out there, by somebody who was on the Liberty. I didn't read the book, but there was a buzz about it. The author said the U.S. flag was clearly visible, but the Israelis attacked again and again.

The theory behind the attack was that the Israelis were trying to knock out the U.S. listening capabilities so they could do certain things without our knowledge. There was the suggestion that they were trying to lure Jordan into the conflict so that they could seize East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Maybe that was so. I don't know. The Jordanians did come in when they should have stayed out.

I think that none of us who served in Israel had any illusions about what the Israelis would do when it came to pursuing their state interests-even if it meant inflicting U.S. casualties. I can imagine circumstances where we might do things to the Israelis. I know there were some very difficult moments in Lebanon in 1982 at the field command level, for example, that could have erupted, but fortunately did not.

Q: How did we talk with the Israelis about defense issues?

GREENLEE: There were significant political-military talks with Israel. When I was on the desk, after leaving Tel Aviv, they really got underway in a formal sense. I was not involved in the information exchanges about technologies or weapons, but I was aware they were taking place. There was a lot of interest in the way Israelis were employing U.S. technology, and how they were modifying it for their specific needs. The Israelis maintained that their modifications and upgrades gave us reciprocal benefits that we did not always fully appreciate. That was a political position, certainly, but I think it was more than a talking point for, say, the U.S. Congress. My sense-it is only that-is that we learned from the Israelis just as they learned from us.

Q: You were there from '79 to '82?

GREENLEE: I was there from January of 1980 until early July of 1982.

Q: How was the Iranian hostage business playing then?

GREENLEE: I was not involved in talks with Israelis about the hostage crisis, but I felt, as I think we all felt at the embassy, that we should be able to do more to get our people back. The operation that Carter mounted to try to rescue the hostages happened when I was in Tel Aviv. Its disastrous failure, the collision of the aircraft in the desert, was depressing. It was admirably ambitious but seemed militarily inept. The Israelis were sympathetic but critical, at least in the press. One officer who had been involved in the planning of the Entebbe operation was quoted as saying that it was inexplicable that the U.S. had no back-up plan. Later, a team came out from the Pentagon and gave a through briefing to the Israelis. I was not there, but I heard later that it was professionally done and that the Israelis were impressed by what we had attempted, and the planning that went into it, even though it ended in failure.

The hostage crisis was something that certainly angered all of us, and we were waiting to see how it played out. Then there was the election of 1980 and Carter lost. The Iranians gave up the hostages as Reagan prepared to take over.

Another thing that happened when I was posted to Tel Aviv was the Israeli air action to take out the construction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor. This was the summer of 1981. I was on R&R (rest and recuperation) in Greece, and I read about it in the International Herald Tribune. There was a big outcry internationally and in the U.S. media. How could the Israelis have done such a thing? I wondered how we would handle it at the embassy. I expected a firestorm. But that was not the case.

When I got back to Tel Aviv, I got the sense that the U.S. administration was basically content with the Israeli action, at least at the top levels, although we formally condemned it. This was a time when the Israelis never seemed to fail at these high-drama military strikes. I recall that they used Kfirs and F-16s or F-15s with conformal fuel tanks to be able to go the distance. They dropped the extra fuel tanks over Jordan. The first planes bombed the reactor roof and the others put bombs through the holes. It was technically quite impressive.

Q: The nuclear issues remain problematic. I'm not quite sure where Iran is in the development of a nuclear capability, but I suspect there will be trouble if things continue as they are.

GREENLEE: Maybe so. The Israeli nuclear capability has always been a sensitive matter as well. There were open secrets-I shouldn't say secrets-but assumptions about what the Israelis had. People would speculate about their facility in Dimona, in the Negev desert. In Dimona, they would say-that's where they turn out the warheads. There was a lot of speculation in the press, especially the international press. Israelis officials would not admit to a nuclear capability but at times were provocatively Delphic. I'll give you an example. The official Israeli position was that Israel would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons to the region. But I remember one time a cabinet minister, at a particularly tense time, added, "And Israel will not be the second."

Q: Were you there during the invasion of Lebanon?

GREENLEE: Yes. I was, but I was there for only about a month after it started. It was an invasion foretold in many ways. I remember that I took notes at a briefing many weeks before the invasion by Ariel Sharon. I think he had the defense portfolio at the time. This must have been in about February or March, as the invasion was in June. Sharon had a map of Lebanon with a series of plastic or acetate overlays. He would show the current situation, with the Syrian troop deployments and other factors-PLO enclaves, where the Christians had influence or the Druze. Then he would flip back to a chart showing how the areas of influence of the different groups looked years earlier, then back and back-trying to make the point that things were better before.

The implication of the briefing was, "Why can't we go back to how things were, when the Christians were really in charge? Why do you need these other influences? They don't have to be there." As I looked back on it after the Israeli invasion Sharon was signaling, "This is what could happen. This is what we and the Christians might do." It was all there. It wasn't an announcement, but it was a clear articulation of the Israeli rationale to act. So when the Israelis went in, it wasn't surprising. It wasn't a shock.

It was interesting to see Israel mobilize for the invasion. I was not in Israel during other conflicts, but I had read a lot about how the nation came together in 1967 and 1973. I remember an American tourist telling me how Israeli Kfirs flew over Tel Aviv in a star of David formation when the Israelis pre-empted in the '67 War, and the emotion it brought. In the '73 War the Egyptians attacked on the Jewish day of atonement, on Yom Kipur. The Israelis were caught off guard but were able to rally quickly since all the reservists were at home and easy to locate. In 1982, I saw the mobilization. Israel is a small country. The Lebanese border is only a couple of hours from Tel Aviv by road. In the afternoon before the invasion there was a line of long-bed trucks carrying tanks covered by netting. At intersections as they headed north, school girls handed flowers to the drivers. At that point there was no secret about what was going to happen.

The Israelis rolled in with little opposition and were in Beirut, sitting in cafes drinking coffee with the Christian Phalange within a week. It began as a walk-over. I think the Israelis shot down about 90 Syrian planes, with the loss of only one. But later it got very complicated.

Q: What was going on with Egypt?

GREENLEE: The great achievement of the Camp David Accords was peace with Egypt. The saying was that the Arabs couldn't make war without Egypt, or peace without Syria. Syria wasn't caught in the net, and there wasn't a broad peace-but at least there was a peace treaty with Egypt. This took Egypt out of the mix of belligerents.

I was in Israel during the final phase of the Sinai withdrawal. It was a three- phase thing. Egypt had diplomatic relations with Israel. Some Israelis visited Egypt. You could drive through Gaza and across the Sinai, or you could go through Elat and Sharm el Sheikh and there was also a commercial air link. There was an El Al flight and an Egyptian charter flight. This was consistent with the peace accord.

The Israelis loved to go to Egypt. In the beginning there was a lot of Israeli tourism there, but none the other way. The Egyptians didn't visit Israel. What the Israelis wanted above all was to be accepted in the region, as a country among other countries. They made a step toward that with the peace treaty, but they wanted more. They wanted what they called a warm peace. What they got was a cold peace-and they complained about that a lot. They still have a cold peace with Egypt, but at least it is peace.

Q: How was Sharon viewed at the embassy by the time you left?

GREENLEE: Sharon was a real tough guy, and there were several Israelis in leadership positions like that. When I was in Israel Menahem Begin was the prime minister. Begin was involved in blowing up the King David Hotel during the British occupation-what today we would call a terrorist act. I took notes in some of the meetings with Begin. He was a very aggressive, sharp, interesting guy. He had the credentials to make peace with Egypt. It was like Nixon with China. When I was still on the Israel account, Begin fell in his bathroom and broke his hip. He seemed quite frail after that. He also became despondent after his wife died. One day Begin declared in a cabinet meeting that he couldn't continue and disappeared from public life. Yitzhak Shamir became prime minister-another real tough guy. He had been in the Stern Gang.

Q: He was an assassin, wasn't he?

GREENLEE: Right. That was said to be his background, a "shooter." Then there were others from that generation of founders, like Moshe Dayan, who had more the image of what foreigners wanted Israeli leaders to be like. Dayan died when I was out there, and I attended his funeral along with a few people from the embassy. He was buried at the moshav where he grew up. It was a very simple ceremony. His coffin was a plain pine box covered by the Israeli flag. It was a funeral with a kind of Israeli mystique.

But back to Sharon. He was probably the best known warrior of the '73 war. What happened then was that the Israelis were caught off guard. The Egyptians stormed over the Suez Canal and overran the Israeli positions in front of the Canal. They pressed through the Sinai, and some say could have penetrated as far a Beersheva in the Negev. Sharon led an Israeli counter attack back across the Canal. His tanks surrounded the largest part of the Egyptian army and could have annihilated it. That became Israel's bargaining chip in the armistice talks that followed.

I always heard that Begin looked at Sharon with particular respect. It was one tough guy deferring to another. Sharon held different ministerial portfolios, always pushing his interests, like settlements, aggressively. There was a swagger about him, a tank-like, forward pitch to his walk. He was formidable.

I remember a reception at Ambassador Lewis' residence. Herman Wouk, author of War and Remembrance, was there with his wife and son. I admired Wouk's writing, and was talking with him. It was a kind of thrilling moment in my early diplomatic life. All of a sudden Wouk, looking over my shoulder, saw Sharon. "There's Arik!" he said, and bolted away. He left me in mid-sentence.

Q: When you left Israel, where did you go?

GREENLEE: You know, I found work in Israel very, very hard. I wasn't burned out, but I kept thinking that my real career would be in Latin America, not the Middle East. I started angling for a good onward assignment in Latin America. But I had lost my leverage with the Bureau of American Republics Affairs. They had forgotten about me. The Near East and Southeast Asia Bureau, on the other hand, wanted to keep me on board. In personnel terms, it seemed to track people better.

Charlie Hill had returned to Washington as the Director of the Office of Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs. He and his deputy, Bill Kirby, put the arm on me to work for them in Washington. Hill went on to a front office position almost immediately and then to be executive secretary of the Department and later Secretary Shultz' executive assistant. But I worked closely with Kirby and to some degree, in a direct arrangement, with Hill after that.

At IAI I became one of a team of people who worked on what was called the Reagan initiative. This was an attempt to drive the Camp David process forward by giving more clarity to our views on how the final status arrangements should look. The Reagan initiative was presented when I was on home leave after Israel and before reporting for duty in IAI. I called Charlie Hill right after the Reagan Initiative was made public, and I said, "This new initiative sounds interesting. Do you need me to come in now?" He said, "No, just take your leave. You'll have plenty to do later." That was the case. I worked really hard.

Q: How long were you working on that? When did you start and when did you finish ?

GREENLEE: I left Israel sometime during July, and I started in September in IAI. This was 1982. I was on the desk from '82 until '84, and I went from there to be deputy director of the office of Egyptian affairs. I had a particular role in IAI. It was in some ways a very exciting role, and in some ways quite an uncomfortable role. First of all, there was a lot of personnel turbulence, and I don't mean by that sparks and such. I mean people moving around.

When I got to IAI, Charlie Hill was already gone. Bill Kirby was swamped, and working mostly on the peace process. Wat Cluverius was the deputy assistant secretary in charge of our area. I knew all these guys because they used to come to Israel for autonomy and other peace process-related talks when I was at the embassy. Everything was pretty chaotic at first, with lots of people moving up or to the side. Then it settled down.

I had nominal responsibilities, such as human rights, Palestinian issues, etc., but my real job, increasingly, was to work on the peace process with Kirby and the others. I also got swept up in the Lebanon problem, the fallout from the Israeli invasion. At that point Washington was trying to figure out how the shift in the dynamics in the region could be used for the peace process, but we were also worried about the downward spiral in Lebanon itself. The Israelis were bogged down. There was the massacre of Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatilla camps by a Lebanese Christian militia group, which the Israelis, knowingly or not, did nothing to stop. All this cut across our relations with Israel in many ways. I had to give briefings to outside groups. I was doing a lot of writing and staying in the office until 8:00 p.m. many times.

IAI gradually stabilized with new arrivals, including Miles "Kim" Pendleton, who came in as office director. Kirby moved to a separate office and Ed Abington came in as deputy director. I had a good relationship with Ed, but he was the same grade as I and for a time I considered moving on myself. But Kim Pendleton was very supportive and the next year both Ed and I were promoted. So it all worked out. It was understood that I would work on the peace process, in addition to my other duties. But the peace process sucked up more and more of my time.

Charlie Hill eventually became Secretary Shultz's executive assistant. He had tremendous leverage there. Charlie later became a professor at Yale, teaching a course on "grand strategy." One of his students there wrote a book about him titled The Man Upon Whom Nothing was Lost. The title sums him up.

Charlie one day asked me to undertake a special project and not to tell IAI or the NEA bureau about it. He gave me several articles to read and asked me to turn them into a brief integrated paper for Shultz. The aim was to describe Israel strategically as a buffer on NATO's eastern flank. I had trouble pulling it together, but I took a stab at it. I worked on an old-style word processors, a Wang and it was constantly going down or "crashing."

Kim finally asked me what I was working on. I said, "Look. I'm in a really difficult position because I've been asked to do this by Charlie. I'm not supposed to tell NEA about it." He said, "Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you told me. You had to tell me." He didn't ask any more about it. I told Charlie that I had to tell Kim. He didn't seem concerned. That project didn't go anywhere, but later Charlie asked me to do another one-this time on what our strategic posture should be in Lebanon. I developed that paper within NEA, but the key office, the one responsible for Lebanon, thought it was off base and didn't want to clear it. In retrospect they were right. I didn't know enough about Lebanon.

Q: That sounds as if you had a problem.

GREENLEE: What Charlie wanted was the argumentation for a stronger U.S. posture that he apparently wasn't getting from the system. I knew how he wanted it to come out, but didn't know enough about how to put it together. I had about two days, and I talked to some people, including within the bureau. I finally wrote a two-page paper and showed it to one of the big thinkers, an office director, on the Arabist side-if I could put it that way. He read it and shook his head. He said, "You know, it's not that it's completely wrong, but it's partly wrong. You could fix it." He gave me some suggestions. The problem was that they changed the bottom line. I said I would go with my version.

I gave it to Charlie, and I didn't hear anything from him for a couple of weeks. I asked him whatever happened to it. He said, "I put it in front of the Secretary. I think it did some good." I thought, "Oh, Jesus!" I don't think I had anything to do with what went wrong in Lebanon, but in retrospect I don't believe that the way I thought through the problem was right. But that's the way I was used as a drafter. I also did a lot of drafting on the peace process. I became better at it as I went along. But it was basically shaping positions that had developed above my pay grade.

Q: What essentially were you advising George Shultz to do?

GREENLEE: As I recall, the question was how the Marines should be utilized around Beirut. This was before their barracks were blown up, with 241 lives lost. Should they be hunkered down or moving around on patrol? They were peace-keepers or rather a kind of "presence" to witness the cease-fire But the question was, could they be mobile rather than static peace keepers? That was the thrust of it. Again, I don't know, I'm sure my little paper had no particular impact, but it might have reinforced certain things that other people were telling George Shultz.

Q: You mentioned the Reagan initiative. I go back as I've been doing these oral histories, there's the Joe Gossen plan. The Rogers plan. You keep going; I'm sure there is a plan today. The situation is worse now than probably it ever has been.

GREENLEE: I think that it was better then than it is now, in the Bush 43 administration. I'm not sure there is a plan now, but I'm not close to it, so I don't want to pre-judge what people are doing.

The big breakthrough was Camp David. That was a very big deal, and it took Egypt out of the picture as a belligerent, and it provided a context to go forward. It didn't exactly blaze a path for it. The Reagan initiative tipped our hand a bit about the outcome we expected. But nobody ever wanted to be too precise about the final status because that had to be determined by the parties through negotiation.

The Reagan initiative wasn't really a plan. A plan is something you carry out. An initiative is something that opens the way for something more tangible. What the Reagan initiative did was to suggest our preferred outcome within the Camp David process. The preferred outcome in those days was not an independent Palestinian state. Our theology dictated that such a state would be inherently destabilizing. It would create problems for both Israel and Jordan. What we wanted, and the Israelis preferred, was a permanent autonomy for the Palestinian people but with a role for Jordan. There were different components to it. In the worst case it was a way to keep something on the table as Camp David ran its course. Autonomy talks no longer worked. The Egyptians were wondering what ever happened to the Palestinian piece. The Palestinians were confused. They didn't see anybody paying enough attention to what they wanted. The moderate Arabs were saying there should be an independent Palestinian state. The Reagan initiative was to put a little bit more forward from our side.

There was initiative within the Reagan initiative that was also quite interesting, and I was part of this as well. It was the Shultz"quality of life" initiative. Shultz decided one day, looking at the situation, that the Palestinians couldn't play a constructive role because they didn't have hope. The question was how to help them feel more confident about their lives and where things were headed. Bill Kirby, Peter Rodman, who was head of Policy Planning, and I traveled out to the region. We talked to the Jordanians and Israelis, as well as the Palestinians. The thrust was, "What can we do with the Israelis and you to improve quality of life in the West Bank and Gaza?"

The good thing about the Reagan initiative and the Shultz quality of life initiative, beyond any intrinsic value, was that we had something on the table. We were engaged. We could say with assurance that the U.S. was interested. We could be an honest broker. We could help achieve a lasting peace. The theology was that since the Israelis trusted the U.S., only the U.S. could have significant influence on the Israeli positions. That was our card with the Arab side. Without the U.S., a final settlement, lasting peace, would always be elusive. That era of tentative hope ended when the Clinton effort collapsed in 2000. The Bush administration's hands-off approach has made things worse, much worse.

Q: They made it very apparent they weren't going to deal with it.

GREENLEE: Yes. I think that the Bush people made a huge mistake by doing nothing because it left a void. Up until that point, we'd always had something out there. We had high-level negotiators, special coordinators, the president himself-all seriously engaged. What is key to relations with Israel and the peace process is that you can't allow drift. In the bowels of the system people have to be working constantly, and periodically, the highest levels have to get involved, sometimes for a sustained period. That is the reality of the problem. Without that there is too much looseness and too much room for real trouble.

Q: Before Shultz, how did you see Alexander Haig as secretary of state?

GREENLEE: I had this sense that Haig wasn't really quite up to it, but I don't know, some were impressed by how well he was picking up the nuances. I took notes on one or two of the Haig visits when I was in Israel. We used to take verbatim notes. From the Kissinger period, this was how it was done. I never felt confident about Haig. I never dealt with Shultz in the field, only in Washington. But Shultz was impressive. I had a good feeling about Shultz's sense of geo-politics and how to handle the different aspects of the relationship with Israel. Shultz knew how to say what needed to be said, while keeping the big things in focus.

Q: He knew the area, too. He came in with a...

GREENLEE: He'd had all these cabinet positions before.

Q: He had a background in business, as well.

GREENLEE: Yes. Bechtel. The secretary of defense, Cap Weinberger, also came out of Bechtel. Some said that increased rather than diminished the normal tensions between State and Defense.

Q: What the hell were our marines doing in Lebanon? We pulled them out, then after the slaughter in the Palestinian camps, almost out of guilt, we put them back.

GREENLEE: That's right. There was that stutter step. A lot of things went wrong. There was factional and confessional fighting. I think we sometime lost our compass. I remember one of our senior people saying one time that the control of a little mountain pass at a place called Souk al Garb, near the Beirut airport, was in the "vital interest" of the United States. Think of that. It was crazy. There seemed to be a role for the marines, but it was not well thought out.

There was considerable hesitation about sending in the marines in the first place. Before I left Israel, I was at a lunch hosted by Jerusalem Consul General Brandon Grove for Senators Chris Dodd and Carl Levin and Ambassador Lewis. I remember Lewis making the case for the marines to be deployed as peacekeepers in Lebanon. I was only a note-taker, but I certainly agreed. But Dodd, who was a very young senator at the time, said, "You know, those kinds of commitments are very serious. You really expose our people to all kinds of things." Lewis emphasized that peace-keeping was both necessary and honorable. I left thinking Lewis was right and that there was really no other choice for us. But Dodd's reservations turned out to be all too realistic.

Q: What did the U.S. do when Lebanon really seemed to come apart?

GREENLEE: Well, it was really became the Phil Habib show. I remember it being said that before Habib got involved, nobody took charge, that there were the voices of the embassy in Damascus, the embassy in Tel Aviv, and people chiming in all over the place. Habib got hold of things. He said, "Here's what we've got to do. Let's do this. Let's do that. He was shuttling back and forth, he was talking to Reagan and bonding with Reagan. He was very much in his element. Habib was moving around and cobbling things together.

When I was in Israel, before the Israelis went into Lebanon, there was a lot of cross-border shelling. Katusha rockets were coming into Israel. I went with Bill Brown, the dcm, to show a U.S. presence in the areas where rockets had been falling. I think he was chargï¿½ at the time. We had an American flag on the fender. We drove up to Metulla, Israel's most northern point. We saw fields on the hillsides burning where Katushas had fallen. We went to a kibbutz and talked to people; we visited an underground shelter with a play area for children; and we talked to the mayor of Metulla. He showed us a Katusha fragment that he kept in his office like a twisted piece of abstract sculpture. This was the view from the Israeli side. Later I made a similar trip with someone from INR, the Bureau for Intelligence and Research. She was not sympathetic to the Israelis. She was angry when we drove around. Her mood didn't improve when an Israeli officer blocked us from driving on a border road close to a large cluster of electronic equipment. I was sympathetic to Israel and she was sympathetic to the other side. We talked about the shelling into Israel, and she said, "But do you have any idea what Israeli bombing has done to Beirut? What's happened here is nothing compared to that." I didn't have that picture.

Q. How was the workload in IAI?

GREENLEE: It was very heavy. I would be in the office most days until 8:00, 8:30, and it was grinding. Tiring. But despite the load, it was heady stuff. There was a feeling that we were doing important work, that what we did mattered. And also a sense that a lot of other people wanted our jobs.

We were working all the time, and a lot of people were reading our stuff. You could be a drone on a European or Latin American desk and nobody would pay too much attention to what you wrote. Routine stuff. But our stuff was read. We felt relevant. I must say it was tiring, very intense, and very tricky bureaucratically. We in IAI thought that we were the cutting edge of NEA, but the Arab affairs offices thought they were that. It's like two sides of a coin. One thing Bill Kirby did was to remind everybody that we were all in the same bureau. But the reality was that there were different ways of looking at the issues-like blind men touching a camel and trying to imagine the whole.

Q: Did you run across the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC?

GREENLEE: Yes, I did. I didn't deal with them at a high level. The office director, Kim Pendleton, did that. I would deal with their groups. There would be a group from-I don't know-Newark, for example, that would be brought over by someone attached to the White House, and I would give them a policy brief. I was a sympathetic briefer, but some of the groups were pretty nasty. I remember one time the White House handler told me, "Watch out for these guys. They're pissing in the sinks, they're ripping the toilets out. They're really rough." That was the tenor of the thing. Our policy was pro-Israel, but for them not pro-Israel enough. It was as if we were a bunch of Saudis.

Q: What else were you involved in?

GREENLEE: There were the talks on the Taba issue. Taba was a little slice of beach in the Sinai, on the Gulf of Aqaba, right next to Elat. When the Israelis withdrew from the last third of the Sinai, they tried to hang on to Taba. There was a luxury hotel there and a beach resort run by a colorful one-armed guy named Rafi Nelson, a resort with a nude beach. The territorial dispute actually dated from the time of the British mandate, when the area was demarcated. T.E. Lawrence was involved then. It was complicated because a rock cairn marking the Sinai border at Taba was missing, or had been moved. If the cairn was in one place, Taba would fall within Israel. In another place, it would be in Egypt. So when the Israelis pulled back, they did not leave this little enclave, and the Egyptians protested. The Israelis insisted that they had a legitimate claim.

In the Camp David Accords there is a dispute resolution mechanism. It provides for disputes to be resolved through a process of conciliation, mediation or arbitration. Conciliation is a consensual process. Mediation involves a third party. Arbitration is a more hostile process. The Israelis were banking on our help to resolve the problem without going to arbitration. The Egyptians had most of the evidence on their side, a key map, I believe, and ultimately won an arbitral settlement. But at first there were talks, protracted talks, and I was involved at a mid-level for a couple o f years. This was a kind of side-show to the peace process, but it sucked up a lot of time and energy. Long after I left the Egyptians, frustrated, pulled the trigger on arbitration-and won.

Q: OK. How did you move over to the Office of Egyptian Affairs?

GREENLEE: It was unusual. Why do you take a guy with no experience in Egypt and who is not an Arabist and make him deputy office director for the largest Arab country-a job that a lot of well qualified people wanted? The reason was that the bureau wanted me to continue working on the peace process and there was no specifically dedicated slot for that, at least at my grade. So I really had a split portfolio. I had arrangements with the director that I would brief him on what I was doing outside the office, which was about one third of the time. He was a good guy, David Dunford, and it worked out well.

Q: When did you make this move?

GREENLEE: It was in the summer of 1984, and I was deputy director of Egyptian affairs from 1984 for two years until 1986, and then I went to the war college.

I was very familiar at least with the U.S. view of Egypt's positions on various peace process and peace treaty issues. I was not familiar with the more nitty-gritty aspects of our relation with Egypt, but I got to be.

Q: When you took over, how would you describe relations between the United States and Egypt?

GREENLEE: Relations were good. Egypt was a full partner in the Camp David process, and there was a kind of triangulation between our relationship with Israel and Israel's relationship with Egypt. The peace treaty was holding up well, although on the Egyptian side there was a real coolness toward Israel, a kind of stiffness.

Q: Mubarak hadn't been that long on the scene as a leader. How did we view him at that time?

GREENLEE: Let me go back to the time that I was at the embassy in Tel Aviv. One of my responsibilities was to cover Gaza. I would go there every month or so and in fact was in Gaza, eating lunch with a Palestinian contact in the UN's beachfront restaurant, when news came of Sadat's assassination. In Gaza there was little sadness but a concern about what would come next. The Israelis were a good deal more shaken by the news. They saw Sadat as a peace maker. Palestinians believed he had sold them out. The question for all was whether Hosni Mubarak could fill Sadat's shoes-and whether he would last. I remember Wat Cluverius, on one peace process visit, speculating whether the "spirit of the Pharaoh" would descend on Mubarak. In retrospect clearly it did. Egypt is not a bottom-up democracy. There are elections but the outcome, at least up to now, has never been in doubt.

I remember that there was a kind of natural difference in view between the way the embassy in Egypt saw some issues and how the upper echelons of the State Department saw them. We in the office of Egyptian affairs were in the middle, trying to explain Washington to the embassy in Cairo and, of course, the embassy trying to explain things to us. The DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was Henry Precht. We talked now and then on the secure line. Once, for example, he had an idea about how to use some assistance funds that wasn't accepted in Washington. It was a kind of impasse. Finally I said to him it wasn't going to happen and I agreed with the Department's position. Henry responded, "Yes, I know, and I regret that." It was difficult being an advocate for the post, while at the same time having some times to push back.

These were the days before emails. We had a daily official-formal cable, that is, a cable that did not have to be cleared and had no formal status. It was used to exchange information and align positions between the post and the office. This was in use when I joined the office. It was a terrific coordination mechanism. I thought at first it would be a lot of work but it wasn't. When there was an issue or something to pass on, you could type it in and let it go with 15 or 20 other issue-paragraphs at the end of the day. Cairo was about seven hours ahead of us, so in the morning we would have the return cable, with comments or queries. It worked well.

While I was deputy director of Egyptian affairs, Nick Veliotes left as ambassador together with his deputy, Henry Precht. They were replaced by Frank Wisner and Jock Covey. During Wisner's tenure there was a major disturbance-street riots- in Cairo. I can't remember the cause-it may have been the government's attempt to raise the price of bread. Some in Washington thought the protest was regime threatening, because Muslim extremists were involved. But the post repeatedly assured us that Mubarak would control the situation. They were right. That was a good example of how the embassy perspective was better than what we were picking up in the international press and some less informed elements of the State Department.

Q: The price of bread can be politically sensitive....

GREENLEE: Right, and when you say bread you think, "Well, what difference does it make if the price of bread goes up a little bit?" But it made a lot of difference to the Egyptians. The price of wheat was so subsidized that bread was even used to feed cattle. Think of the ripple effect of even a slight price rise. Bread was life, literally, for lots of people. It was a linchpin of the economy.

I had one particularly good visit to Egypt when I was deputy director-actually a visit to Egypt and Israel. An embassy officer, Bob Beecroft, and I, went by car from Cairo to Elat, through the Sinai, and then, in another car, from Elat to Tel Aviv. We went through Sharm el Sheikh, where the 82nd Airborne had a battalion with the Multilateral Force and Observers, basically an international monitoring body for the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. At Sharm they had a recreational facility on the Gulf and for a dollar or two we were able to rent fins and snorkels and swim over the incredible reefs close to the shore. It was one of those things you can do in the foreign service that would be much harder to do in conjunction with work in the private sector. As a private tourist, it would cost plenty.

Q: Were you at all looking at the internal political situation in Egypt, particularly the Muslim brotherhood?

GREENLEE: Certainly that was being looked at. I mentioned the rioting that could have been exploited by extremists. The sense we had of it was that Mubarak could quell dissent, that he could keep the lid on Egypt. Of course, we in those days weren't able to have the kind of fast-forward in history that would show Egypt as the spawning ground for some of the radical Islamic terrorists like Zarqawi, the number two in Al Qaeda. He was jailed in Egypt after the Sadat assassination.

Q: Did the Achille Lauro happen during your watch?

GREENLEE: Yes, it did. In fact, I led a few shifts on the Achille Lauro task force that was convened in the operations center. The drama within the drama of the hostage taking was the killing of Leon Klinghoffer. He was in a wheel chair and was shot and thrown over the side. His body washed up in Syria. I remember that we got the call that this was Klinghoffer. At one point I talked to the family by phone. Nick Veliotes was a very colorful ambassador. The Achille Lauro ended up in Egypt, with the hostages freed in a deal that also let the hijackers escape. Veliotes called the hijackers a bunch of "bastards." That played well in the U.S. media, and accurately reflected how all of us felt.

The sequel to the Achille Lauro was no less interesting. The Egyptians arranged for them to escape to Tunisia on an EgyptAir flight. We had information that this was going to happen and U.S. interceptors were scrambled from an air base in Sigonella, Italy. They forced the Egyptian plane to land in Sigonella, but I don't know how much coordination there had been with the Italians. Very little, I suspect. So these Palestinian hijackers-ship hijackers-were on the ground in Sigonella. But the Italians, like the Egyptians, saw them as too hot to handle. They let them escape on a private plane that took them, as I recall, to Yugoslavia. It was great international theater, with denials all over the place. We were aggressive, it is true, but it was neither Egypt's nor Italy's finest hour.

Q: This was a horrible set of circumstances- the Egyptians trying to smuggle the perpetrators out. I've talked with people on the Italian side, but on the Egyptian side, our relations with the Egyptians must have taken a nosedive.

GREENLEE: Well, they took a hit. The Egyptian ambassador in Washington was a guy named El Reedy. He was a good ambassador, in that he tried to build the best possible relations between our countries. After the intercept but before the Egyptian government was aware of what had happened, El Reedy was summoned to the State Department. Mubarak had denied a rumor that the Egyptians knew where the Palestinians were. Before El Reedy went in to see our assistant secretary, Dick Murphy, I talked with him in the waiting area. The whereabouts of the hijackers was on everyone's mind and El Reedy knew that was why he was summoned. We were talking. I said, "Do you know where those Palestinians are?" He said, "Our president has said that we don't have them." They were lying to us. I don't know whether he already knew that or didn't know that. Maybe he didn't know. But we knew the Egyptians were lying to us.

Later El Reedy was confronted with the evidence in a TV interview. I've never seen a diplomat look so uncomfortable. He had to cover for his president. Sweat was pouring off his face. He fidgeted. I think he was an honest man in an untenable role.

Q: Was there an immediate effort by the Egyptians or our part to put things back together?

GREENLEE: This was never a meltdown in the relationship. It was the U.S. keeping its eye on the big issue. Egypt on the whole was a constructive peace process partner. We knew the Egyptians were in a difficult position. It was frankly harder to figure the Italians.

Another thing that happened during the time when I was deputy director for Egypt was a sting that the Egyptians did on Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi. Qadhafi wanted somebody murdered in Egypt, and the Egyptians found out about it. This guy-I think he was a Libyan in exile in Egypt-worked with the Egyptians to fake being murdered. They basically had the guy lie down on the floor, covered him with some red substance, and made it look like he'd been assassinated. The photo was publicized, and Qadhafi crowed. Then the Egyptians trundled the supposedly dead guy out in a press conference. George Shultz jotted in the margin of a memo we sent him that it was a "delicious" sting. That was the word, "delicious."

We understood Egypt to be a complicated country, a country with a high birth rate, relatively low economic growth and significant internal and Arab-world political challenges. We had, and continue to have, a huge AID program there. If you checked into the Nile Hilton in those days, you'd see these Americans in cowboy hats and dungarees, agricultural contractors. They and others who looked as if they had been scooped out of rural pockets of America occupied the top few floors of the hotel. It was a significant U.S. presence. There was a kind of relationship-a proportion-of U.S. assistance to Egypt vis-vis our economic aid to Israel. It was not a mathematical relationship, exactly, but it was almost that. If Israel got more, the Egyptians knew it was likely they would get more. In those days-I don't remember the figures exactly-Israel would get something like $800 million for their treasury, and then they'd get another $1.3 billion for military assistance. The Egyptians would get less, and the economic assistance would be run through our AID system. But the understanding was that if assistance to Israel went up, then the assistance to Egypt would go up too. In this sense, the Egyptians were pulling for the Israelis.

There were huge assistance programs in Egypt. Unlike Israel, Egypt didn't have the infrastructure to process what was coming in. We had to provide that, and it still wasn't sufficient. I remember there was about a $500 million pipeline of assistance awaiting disbursement. On the military side, the Egyptians, unlike the Israelis, needed help with training and maintenance. There was a very large military assistance group in Cairo. I think there were at least 100 U.S. military personnel to help with F-16s alone.

Q: In other words, the embassy was huge.

GREENLEE: It's very, very big. It may have been the biggest embassy we had.

Q: I think it has the reputation of being that. Was there any feeling that too much is too much?

GREENLEE: I didn't get that impression. There were reasons the embassy had to be large, political reasons stemming from Camp David and practical reasons as well. Egypt had to get a certain amount of aid, and that aid had to be channeled. You needed people to do that, but let's face it: There was an awful lot of overhead, a lot of inefficiency.

At that time the embassy was in an outmoded building. There was also an older annex-it may have been the original chancery. I was out there not long after an OIG inspection. Somebody told me this story, and I think it's a true story. It gives you insight into the kind of help the Egyptians needed to process the economic assistance they were getting. In this old building there was red carpeting. The inspectors looked at the carpet and noted that there were two unused vacuum cleaners. They asked the Egyptian cleaning staff how they cleaned the carpet. One of those guys apparently took some Scotch tape and wrapped it sticky-side out around his knuckles, and then started pressing down on the carpet five or six inches at a time. That was he way they were cleaning the thing. This sounds crazy, but, if you see how things are done in Egypt, it has a ring of truth.

Q: Working the Egyptian account, how did you see the Israelis?

GREENLEE: The Israelis-as I have noted-were always concerned that the peace with Egypt was a cold peace. They wanted the Egyptians to like them. They wanted Egyptians to visit them. They found the Egyptians to be personally warm and nice when they went over there, but the posture of the government and the posture of the country of Egypt was cool because Egypt was an Arab country and the biggest Arab country, the most important Arab country, and it considered itself to be the standard bearer for the countries that remained technically at war with Israel.

In fact, there was a scandal when I was in Israel as a political officer. I think it was in 1981. An Egyptian diplomatic officer seduced a first-tour British third secretary, a woman from Scotland, and this woman told this Egyptian about possible contributors to the MFO (Multilateral Force and Observers). The Israelis sniffed this out somehow and expelled the Egyptian. The British woman was summoned back to the UK (United Kingdom). There was a trial, and she was put in jail over this thing. There was always this whiff of espionage, stuff that became public when it was revealed but remained under tight wrap when it wasn't.

There were other interesting things. Another story that turned up in the press. There had been a lot of car thefts in Israel. Many of the cars were Mercedes, a lot of them Diesel limousines. The Israelis had no problem buying German products at that point. They would not tolerate a concert with music by Wagner, but Mercedes vehicles were all over the place. I understand in fact that Germany included Mercedes in reparation arrangements after the Second World War.

Well, a lot of cars were stolen in Israel by Israelis, who transferred them to Bedouin smugglers. The Bedouins drove them into the Sinai, wrapped them in plastic and buried them in the sand. When Israel handed the last third of the Sinai back to Egypt, the border moved and the stolen cars were then in Egypt. The Bedouins would then dig them up and shop them in Cairo.

Q: Did you see any possibility of Egypt, having made peace with Israel, repairing its relations with the rest of the Arab world?

GREENLEE: The Arab world could not ignore Egypt, and Egypt couldn't ignore the Arab world. Egypt was the biggest Arab state and the most important militarily, and in those days, at least, probably the most competent of the Arab states. It was clear that Egypt would not sever its relations with the Arab world, that it wanted to work with the Arab world. In this sense Israel was a stumbling block for Egypt, but Egypt needed peace with Israel to obtain the assistance from us to develop. That was the thing about Sadat. He realized that the Soviets could not give Egypt what it needed. Only we could do that. And our price was peace with Israel.

Q: Did you on the Egyptian side consult with the Syrian side at the State Department?

GREENLEE: Oh, yes. NEA was an interesting place. There were three key offices. IAI, Israel-Arab-Israel Affairs, ARN, Arab Republics North, which included Syria and Saudi Arabia, and EGY, Egyptian affairs. Of course India and Pakistan were crucial, strategically important countries. But 80 percent of the NEA bureau's energy was focused on the Arab-Israel issues. That is why ultimately the South Asia part of the Bureau was split off-to get the full-time attention it deserved.

Q: The Iran-Iraq war was going on then, too.

GREENLEE: Yes, it was.

Q: Was this one of those things where you just sat back and say, "A plague on both your houses?"

GREENLEE: The Israeli position was to let them bleed each other. On our side there was a slight tilt toward Iraq. The policy issue was whether we should come off the fence and really support the Iraqis. Or when and how we would do it. This was going on, but outside my lane. We were looking at this thing geo-politically, but I'm sure there was a certain amount of leftover anger -maybe not so leftover-at Iran for having seized our embassy and holding our people hostage.

Q: Were there any other major developments during this time?

GREENLEE: Probably, but my main memories are of what we have covered. Achille Lauro, the escape of the hijackers, the implementation of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The Taba issue, the quality of life initiative. Those were the main things I was involved in.

Q: You left the Egyptian affairs office when?

GREENLEE: I left in June of 1986, and I went to the National War College toward the end of that month.

Q: This was Fort McNair.

GREENLEE: Fort McNair, yes.

Q: How did you find it?

GREENLEE: I'd always wanted to go to the War College. I don't have a higher degree. I have a degree in English literature, a Bachelor's of Art, but I'm not one of these people who studied national security issues in college. I didn't have much background in political science, and I had been doing s lot of operational work and analysis as a foreign service professional. I wanted to have a better understanding of the big picture. I was not exactly burned out, but I'd been working under stress. The Middle East accounts can wear you down.

I was moving quickly in my career. I had two promotions in six years and had reached the senior threshold. I wanted to sit back and absorb some things, to "sniff the roses," as some would say, to get to know the family better, as well.

It was not too easy for me to get to the War College, because I had to submit three training bids. I bid two other places where I knew I didn't qualify. One of these was a slot at the Atlantic Council, which presumably would lead to a NATO assignment. The fine print said that the candidate for the position had to have European political-military experience. But then to my shock the personnel system wanted to panel me for the Atlantic Council. This would have put me in a small think tank. I pushed back and told them I didn't want the assignment. They said, "Why not?" I said, "Because I'm not qualified." They said, "That's OK, we're aware of that, but we think you can do it." I said, "No, no. I want the National War College, only there. They finally yielded, but it wasn't pleasant.

Q: What did you get out of the War College?

GREENLEE: It was the year I expected-lots of reading, some rigor, but not much pressure. There were no graded papers. In later years it became tougher and the curriculum ended in a masters degree. But not when I attended. There wasn't a degree attached to it. It was simply a year of going through different strategic topics, for example, the Soviet Union, India-Pakistan, how the congress works, economic policy. There were things I knew something about, but a lot I didn't.

There were elective seminars three afternoons a week. I studied basic economic theory, something I missed in college. I also took a class on political biography, actually just reading recently published books-by or about Henry Kissinger or Alexander Haig, for example. There was a lot of reading, like 300 pages a day. You couldn't read it all, but you would discuss what you got through. It was useful.

Another plus was the emphasis on health and physical exercise. I got into pretty good shape. I ran and lifted weights. I became good friends with some of the military guys who didn't understand State Department people.

These were full colonels and lieutenant colonels from all the services. There was one guy I used to go running with. He was an air force colonel, Mike McCarthy. He really pushed me. Then we'd go to the weight room, and he pushed me some more. He later made Lieutenant General. So I got in shape. I ran all the time, at least seven miles on Saturdays. I even got to the point one time where I "red lined." That is, I urinated blood. I had to get checked rather invasively after that. But the running was in other ways all to the good.

Q: You were there in '86...

GREENLEE: Yes, '86-'87. There were also opportunities to take field trips. Some of them were structured into the program, like walking the battlefield at Gettysburg. There were also voluntary opportunities. I went out to the Iron Mountain in Colorado Springs, for example, and was able to take a day to see my sisters in the Denver area. There was one foreign trip. You couldn't necessarily get what you wanted, but you could bid on what you wanted and then list "least regrets" as back-ups.

My first choice was China, and I didn't get it. It was a lottery. But I got my second choice, the Norway-UK trip. We went above the Arctic Circle, to Boda, and watched Norwegian F-16s do short landings, breaking with parachutes. In the UK we went to Oxford, as well as meeting defense and foreign affairs officials in London. It was a good trip.

Q: You finished in '87...

GREENLEE: I finished in 1987.

Q: Where did you go?

GREENLEE: I was at this point the foreign service equivalent of a full colonel, not yet at flag rank. But I wanted to be a deputy chief of mission at a fairly large post. There were several junior DCM positions, but I didn't want one of those. I wanted one slotted for an officer of more senior rank. I set my sights on deputy chief of mission in La Paz, because I knew that no one had the background that I had. I'd been in the Peace Corps there and had been a political officer there. I even knew some Quechua. But I was below the required rank, and there were officers at grade who wanted the job.

I remember thinking that I could get squeezed out by somebody who didn't know the area and probably didn't really want to go to Bolivia, anyway. I went to see Bob Gelbard, whom I had known in the Peace Corps and who was now a deputy assistant secretary in the American Republic Area (ARA) Bureau. I lobbied him. I said, "Look, Bob. There's nobody who could do that job the way I can do it. There's nobody with my background and experience. There's nobody who knows a native Bolivian language..." Bob thought a second and said, "Well, there is so-and so," mentioning a guy at grade who had also been in the Peace Corps with us and who was trained in Aymara. Bob let me twist a little bit, and then said, "But were sending him some place else." So the ARA door was open and I was put on the short list.

I had an interview over the phone with Ed Rowell, who was the ambassador. I think there were still several officers at grade who wanted the job. Ambassador Rowell called me in the late afternoon. I was in my kitchen, and our youngest daughter, Nicole, was fighting with one of her siblings, shrieking and screaming. She occasionally reminds me that I lifted her off the ground by her hair while I was on the phone, mouthing "shut up" to her. The interview went fine and I got the job. I thought Rowell selected me because I had all this Bolivia experience, good recommendations, and so forth. But he told me later that he chose me because I had been in the military. I thought, "Well, that Vietnam stuff wasn't a total waste after all."

Q: You were in Bolivia as DCM from when to when?

GREENLEE: I was DCM in Bolivia from the summer of 1987 to '89.

Q: What was the situation in Bolivia in 1987?

GREENLEE: Bolivia was in a comparatively rare period of stability. The president of Bolivia was Victor Paz Estenssoro, who had been the leader of the 1952 revolution. He was a very shrewd politician and a great statesman. He was able to pull rival parties and factions behind him on a general way forward. The objective was to achieve some degree of cooperation within the context of political competition so that the country could get out of its economic quagmire. When he came into office inflation was running over 20,000 percent. Paz was given rein to adopt significant economic reforms. He basically saw Chile as the economic-not the political-template.

The U.S. supported Paz's drastic corrective measures. With the economic direction of the country on a more rational course, our most acute concern was the over-production of coca and the growing traffic in cocaine. Our assistance in the areas of interdiction and alternative development began to increase. We pushed USAID to get involved in crop substitution in the coca-rich Chapare area of Cochabamba-which our AID director was reluctant to do. There was a significant police-training program, and DEA officers accompanied the Bolivian police on drug raids. At that time we had a dozen or so old Huey helicopters and a good maintenance and pilot training program. It was the beginning of what became later an even bigger push. We were limited, though, by the economic importance of the coca crop and a certain political reluctance on the part of the government. The reality was, and remains today, that the Bolivians regarded the coca-cocaine problem as affecting us more than them. They saw it as a consumer-driven issue, that is, as a U.S. responsibility. Coca crop eradication, even in the illegal cultivation areas, was resisted by the local growers, by "environmentalists," by some NGOs and by many mainstream Bolivians. This was the beginning of Evo Morales' rise to political power. He was a leader of the Chapare coca-growers and took the free-market position that the coca leaf itself was innocent, and the growers were innocent, and what others did with the leaf was someone else's problem. I recall that, in the late 1980s and early '90s, he likened it to the manufacture of arms. The problem wasn't arms but how they were used. It wasn't coca, but how it was used. As deputy chief of mission I was the embassy's anti-narcotics coordinator. I held daily meetings but was not involved in the actual planning of the interdiction or eradication operations.

I had been DCM only a few months when Ambassador Rowell took leave over the Christmas holidays. He came back in about mid-January and called me and his secretary into his office. He said, "I am being pulled out to be ambassador to Portugal." The designated ambassador, Dick Viets, had run into problems in the confirmation process and an ambassador was needed urgently for base negotiations. Ed Rowell had been DCM there and, from his youth in Brazil, spoke excellent Portuguese.

So Rowell told me he would be packing out in a few days, leaving me as chargï¿½. I thought it would be a huge challenge. I was a little bit-I shouldn't say apprehensive, really-but I realized I'd have to learn how to play this much bigger role for a fairly long period. I was chargï¿½ for about eight months.

Q: Who did you have to deal with in Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Well, the president was Paz Estenssoro, but I only called on him once or twice. I dealt mostly with the foreign minister, Guillermo Bedregal. He was the guy I warned about coup plotting in 1979 and who subsequently accused me of being the "station chief." That wasn't true, but it remains a part of Bolivian political folklore. Bedregal was a front-line politician with presidential aspirations. We got along all right, despite our past entanglement.

Q: You said your main problem was narcotics. When you start talking about narcotics, you're also talking about a virulent form of corruption.

GREENLEE: Yes. There was corruption from a lot of different angles in Bolivia, but what worried us especially was drug corruption. It poisoned the democratic process. It affected at least one president, Jaime Paz Zamora, who won a runoff election in the congress just as I was leaving Bolivia for my next assignment. Paz Zamora was said to have taken campaign contributions from a narco-trafficker and he had at least one cabinet member with narco-connections in his government. But that was after I left.

Q: Was there a crop that could be substituted for coca in an equivalent economic sense?

GREENLEE: Alternative crops were developed that were viable, and the program had some success. But it was always easier and more profitable for the campesinos to grow coca. And it was easier to bring coca to market. That remains the case. At the end of the day, cocaine is the area's only recession-proof commodity.

With crop substitution there are problems of marketing, transportation and pricing, as well cultivation-producing citrus, or hearts of palm or pepper to international standards. But that's today. In those days it was a gleam in the eye to try to develop a good alternative development plan. There wasn't enough expertise or funding, so a lot of it was simply pushing against the illegal coca crop. We would pay an indemnity to a grower who eliminated his illegal crop-and that same grower would move down the road and plant another crop. It was pernicious. These campesinos-many of them former miners-weren't agronomists. They didn't know or want to know how to grow crops that required much tending or nurturing. And they were organized into syndicates-unions-that were precise replicas, even to the names, of the labor organizations in the mines in Oruro and Potosi where they came from originally.

Q: Was the use of coca for non-drug purposes a fake issue?

GREENLEE: It was a false issue in the Chapare area. Traditionally, coca was used for chewing, that is, to improve stamina, and for ritual. That coca was and is grown in an area called the Yungas, in the high valleys north of La Paz. The traditional leaf, from the coca grown there, is milder than the Chapare leaf. The Yungas coca is what most people chew. The Chapare coca, on the other hand, was planted in the late '70s and '80's to serve the cocaine industry, and really only for that. It is not good to chew. And in fact Evo Morales himself has told me personally that he doesn't like to chew it. He likes the Yungas coca.

As the mining industry collapsed and after a severe drought blighted the area around Potosi and other upland areas, people migrated in droves to the tropical Chapare to grow coca. It was a way to survive and to earn a marginal living. The Chapare coca was easily shopped to traffickers who turned it into paste and then base. The product in those days was smuggled up to Colombia. But later, as Colombia cultivated its own coca, the Bolivian paste or base started moving east, to Brazil and Europe. Coca base is what is used to make crack cocaine. So the argument that coca is a traditional crop doesn't hold for the Chapare. Most experts say at least 90 percent or more of the Chapare coca is for the cocaine market.

We tried also to get at the problem by intercepting precursor products, the stuff used to turn the leaf into paste and base. But these were common household or industrial liquids or materials, such as kerosene, baking soda, cement and even toilet paper. The police would confiscate what looked to be excessive at check points. But great amounts would still get in. The economics of the thing were too powerful.

The Bolivian government, pushed by these coca growers, insisted on a kind of ecological restriction: no herbicides could be used to eliminate coca. Coca ruins the soil. It bleaches it out and makes it impossible for other crops to be grown for 10 years or so. It sucks out the nutrients. But this wasn't considered the problem. The problem was the kind of weed killers that could kill coca. These were prohibited for eradication but were used by the cocaleros to trim the areas around the coca plants. So the coca growers became the great ecologists, and the people trying to control the illicit growth of coca were vilified as the predators of the environment. There was a lot of double talk. An awful lot. It was continuous.

The explosion of cocaine use and the devastation of inner cities in the U.S. really came with crack cocaine. That's when Bolivia got into the business. In the early '70s, the chemists who made cocaine were in Chile. One of the things that Pinochet did was to arrest these people. He sent a bunch of them up to the U.S., where they were put in jail for a decade or so. That solved Chile's producer problem. The refining industry moved to Colombia. When I was in Bolivia as DCM, Bolivian "base" would be flown to Colombia through Peru or through Brazil. In those days the Colombians didn't grow their own coca. That came later. By the early '90s they were well on the way to fully integrating the industry. When coca began being produced in Colombia, it had a debilitating effect on Bolivia. It made crop substitution more possible and the buy-outs more possible. But that was in the mid and late '90s. During that time Chapare coca was reduced from about 35,000 hectares to about 5,000 hectares, where it remains, roughly, today. That reduction reflected economic factors, but also was a result of better U.S. strategy, and better implementation. But now, in 2007, the economics and local politics are more complicated.

Q: How did you see the indigenous sector? Were they gaining political strength?

GREENLEE: Indigenous political power was in the incubation stage. It grew significantly after I left as DCM. I had always thought-from my Peace Corps days-that it was only a matter of time before there would be a fundamental shift. The political parties were still able to co-opt the indigenous people, get their votes by promising them things. The traditional parties were still strong, and split the vote between them. But as they got used to power and power-sharing in government, they became more and more corrupt. The parties essentially agreed not to perform coups on one another; all needed a piece of the pie. There was a kind of structuring of corruption and that increasingly alienated indigenous support.

Q: What about the military?

GREENLEE: We were keeping an eye on the military. Today, Bolivia' has had a sustained run of about 25 years within democracy. In the late 80's it was recovering from the Garcia Meza dictatorship, which collapsed in 1981. That wound was still fresh. The military knew their game was up. The world had changed and they had failed utterly in government. Garcia Meza was later put in jail in Bolivia, where he remains. The military saw that there were consequences to coup-making. They preferred to watch from the balcony.

This was a time when the influence of the Soviet Union was diminishing fast. It hadn't collapsed yet, but it was on its way. It wasn't a factor that the military could exploit to justify intervening a democratically elected government.

Q: How do you think you did as chargï¿½ in Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Ed Rowell left in about February and Bob Gelbard came in October of 1988. In he interval between them I was the chargï¿½. I think I ran an effective embassy. It was a very collegial embassy, and one that I viewed perhaps too much as a kind of semi-autonomous body of the U.S. government. I looked at it that way because there was not much or consistent oversight from Washington, and we at post knew both our policy and the Bolivian situation quite well. When Washington did step in and push here or there, I felt often that they were wrongfooting what we were trying to do. But they were certainly right from their standpoint. And we at the embassy worked for them. I sometimes pushed back too hard. This got me in trouble now and then. Not serious trouble, but situations of unnecessary friction.

There were small things. One example was the question of whether we should give the police working in the Chapare area-a very violent narco-trafficking area with violent gangs-the firepower, the weapons, that could really shoot, rather than the old Mausers that they were using. A Washington view, reflecting a congressional concern, was that more modern weapons, even M-1 rifles, would put too much fire power in the hands of a force that wasn't very well trained and had been involved in human rights abuses.

To me the answer was very simple: We had to give them at least the fire-power that the narcos had, but Washington didn't see it that way. I would say, "We're trying to do a job. We should try to do something to really cut into the narco-trafficking, to turn this thing around." Washington's view-really mostly at the level of the office of Andean affairs- was, that we didn't understand the policy environment. This degenerated into bickering. I could see clearly what we needed to do in Bolivia, but I couldn't grasp Washington's priorities. I had played the game pretty well when I was doing the Israeli stuff. But I didn't take my ARA overseers seriously enough. I sometimes didn't show enough deference and respect. But ultimately I won-by enlisting the support of Attorney General Ed Meese when he visited- and we were able to give the police better weapons.

Also, I used to get upset with DEA. I didn't know about some things that DEA was doing. One time, for example, there were a couple of DEA guys riding horses on an operation near the Brazilian border. They got in trouble, surrounded by bad guys. So these guys called DEA in Washington on a satellite radio, and we heard about it from Washington! I was really, really furious. Again, I was maybe a little bit too jealous of my authority. My way of handling that was to call people on the carpet and say, "Let's get a few things straight." I was too sharp-elbowed at times.

This was my first crack at being DCM and then chargï¿½, but over time I became comfortable in the role. As I moved to Chile and then to Spain in DCM and chargï¿½ roles, I settled down a little, but I tended to be fairly aggressive.

Q: This can be an interesting thing for students of diplomacy-that as chargï¿½, technically you're in charge of the embassy. But both in the country and with Washington, you have less power than that role implies, right?

GREENLEE: Yes. A lot of people I knew who had been in chargï¿½ positions for lengthy periods were very uncomfortable in the role. The tendency of the host government was to look at you as a place-holder, and on the social circuit people would ask, "When's the real ambassador coming?" The embassy could have that view as well. The danger of being chargï¿½ is that you can slip into acting as if you're the president's representative, as if you have the authority of an ambassador. You don't. It's a delicate balance.

I think the role of deputy chief of mission is in a way the most interesting and complicated one in the foreign service. You're really managing up and managing down. You're dealing with the interests and demands of the ambassador and trying to do what he or she wants. At the same time you're mediating between the ambassador and the embassy staff, who may sometimes feel that they are not being recognized and taken into account. You're right in the middle, the buffer, the mediator, the colleague but also the enforcer. You really can't have friends as you might in a horizontal structure.

The ambassador looks to you for support. Assuming that he trusts you and relies on you, and you know you work for him, you also know that there are a people on the tiers below who may not understand what the ambassador is about. And the ambassador may not really care what they think. It really is a difficult role. When you're chargï¿½, you're the chief of mission, in a way like the ambassador and DCM together. And like the rest of the embassy you are waiting for the new person to come, and waiting to see how you will fit in with that new person.

Q: I've known some people who were chargï¿½. They'd move into the ambassador's office. Others very carefully would stay in their own office. How did you decide that?

GREENLEE: Bolivia's a fairly informal place. I played it differently in Bolivia than subsequently in Chile and in Spain. The difference was that in Bolivia, I was not holding the place for an ambassador who was on leave and coming back. Rather, I was between ambassadors. And, as later in Spain, it was a long haul, about eight months. I needed my own DCM. It wasn't a huge embassy, as it later became, and as it was when I returned years later as ambassador. In those days it was a medium-size embassy, tending to big.

I talked this over a bit with Ed Rowell before he left. I said, "What if I have to be out of the country? Who do you think I should have replace me as chargï¿½. What should I do about an acting DCM?" He had a very sensible idea. He said, "You could have two different chains: You could have one chain that would be your DCM chain, and someone like your administrative counselor could be in that. You could have another person, like the AID counselor, step in as chargï¿½." I thought that would be a good way to go.

I had an acting DCM, and rotated a couple of people in that slot. I saw this as team-building. I wanted them to feel that they were getting something out of the experience that I was having as chargï¿½. As chargï¿½, I was in a double-stretch position, serving two ranks above my foreign service rank. Why couldn't they stretch as well? Why couldn't we get this reflected in their evaluations? So that's what I did.

Q: Was there anything else you should cover in Bolivia during this time?

GREENLEE: Well, the ambassador coming in was a guy that I knew well, Bob Gelbard. I knew him from the Peace Corps, and at different junctures in the foreign service. In fact, when I was in Bolivia as DCM and chargï¿½, Bob was back in the front office of ARA. When Bob came in, he said he would be pleased if I would stay on as DCM. I forget how the conversation went. Either I started it or he started it, but I basically said, "You know, Bob, I think that I want to move on at the end of two years." The assignment was for three years, although others at the embassy were on two-year hitches, because of the high altitude of La Paz. I think I said, "It would be probably better if I moved on. I spent all this time as chargï¿½." He said that he understood that perfectly, and he would be pleased if I would stay, but he understood that.

This was fairly early on, maybe in November of 1988, a month after he arrived, when we had that conversation. He said, "OK, then you ought to write an official-informal cable to the director general. I wrote something like, "Now that an ambassador is in place, I would like to rotate on the summer cycle." Bob looked at it and said, "This doesn't read right. It looks like we're not getting along." I liked Bob and we worked well together. My draft left too much out and the tone was wrong. So I dressed it up, and my curtailment was approved.

Bob and I had different styles. He was very direct and at times abrasive. I would say, "Let's not break the crockery because these people will react the wrong way." He would say, "Let me be myself." I was thinking, "Well, let Reagan be Reagan." But Bob and I got along, and I respected him both as an ambassador and a friend. He was always supportive of me and I of him. He helped me connect with Tony Gillespie, who was ambassador to Chile.

Bob and Tony talked all the time. I didn't really know Tony. I had met him at a chiefs of mission conference in Buenos Aires, when I was chargï¿½. I was pleased that he selected me as his DCM. It turned out to be a very good and productive relationship.

Q: You were in Chile from when to when?

GREENLEE: I was in Chile from the end of July of 1989 until about June of 1992. It was a direct transfer. In those days it was very difficult to drive from La Paz to Arica, the northern most city in Chile. That leg was a dirt road with deep ruts. But from Arica there is a very good highway to Santiago. It's quite far, well over 1200 miles.

So we sent our car on a flatbed truck to Arica. Then we flew from La Paz-only about a 25 minute flight-to Arica, picked up the car, spent the night at a seaside hotel, and then drove south. It took about three days to reach Santiago. We arrived just before the second of two referendums near the end of the Pinochet period. This one was on a constitutional point needed to clear the way for a general democratic election. It was very organized and orderly and the "yes" votes carried overwhelmingly.

Q: It's a fascinating story, and I'd like to get your view of that. First, could you describe the situation in Chile before you arrived?

GREENLEE: The military government of Chile was losing legitimacy. It had never had legitimacy with the left, but it had a lot of support from the right. The economy had improved a lot and that was welcomed by the right and center right, especially. But the time of the military had run out. Democratization was reaching Chile. There was a sense that a more open system was needed to modernize the economy, to spur greater growth.

The military organized its retreat from government, and it did it through allowing public consultations and the two referendums that opened the way for elections. The referendum that I arrived for was one that really determined that there would be elections. It was very orderly. There was a large majority for elections, I think over 90 percent. Of that something like 56 percent supported what became the Concertacion, the center-left bloc that in December of that year elected Patricio Aylwin to be president.

The military in Chile and the military government tried to protect itself as it retreated from power through quasi-legal devices like amnesties, which much later were overturned. It was an interesting time because there was the sense that Chile was really on the cusp of very significant change. Then elections were held. Aylwin and his Concertacion slate prevailed over a right-wing slate headed by a former finance minister named Hernan Buche. The inauguration was several months later, on March 11, 1990, as I recall.

Q: Did you watch the pre-election referendum take place? What was our attitude prior to this crucial referendum? What did we think was going to happen?

GREENLEE: I had just arrived, and I visited some of the polling places with the political counselor, Ron Godard. There were a lot of international observers and the voting was very clean. I think there had been concern that the military would try to fix the vote, but that clearly didn't happen. Maybe it was because of Chile's strong institutional base.

Compared to other Latin American countries I have had experience with, Chile has always had a strong degree of institutional integrity. Even during the worst times of the Pinochet regime, for example, the national police, the carabineros, were respected as being honest. The court system was generally respected as well, although there were horrendous human rights abuses and repression of dissidents during the Pinochet dictatorship.

Q: What was the attitude of the embassy when you got there? The Pinochet regime was very controversial.

GREENLEE: The expectation was that change would happen, and U.S. policy was to strongly support the democratic transition. In the interval between the last referendum and the election there was a lot of political activity. Ron Godard accompanied me on calls at the foreign ministry and other parts of the Pinochet government. It was interesting to go into the Moneda, the imposing building that was the seat of power. It had been strafed by aircraft when Allende was overthrown and it was there that Allende had died-I believe by his own hand, although some dispute that.

After the election we began to work on the preparations for the visit of our delegation to the inauguration. In the last days of the Pinochet regime Godard and I were given a tour of the Moneda by a mid-grade officer. He flung open doors and let us walk about, pretty much where we wanted. He took us down to an underground auditorium, the Salon Prieto. I remember mentioning this to some Chilean, and the guy almost trembled and said, "That's where the military met when they decided to do the terrible things they did." It had an ominous feel to it.

It was interesting, the turnover. It went perfectly. I did not attend the ceremony. That was at the new parliamentary building in Valparaiso, on the coast. The ambassador was there. The U.S. delegation was headed by Vice President Dan Quayle. He capped his visit by buying an anatomically correct male doll at a market stall, a pornographic doll. The incident was reported in the Washington Post as a characteristic misstep.

Q: I remember that! A penis popped out or something.

GREENLEE: Yes, a priapic doll. I remember one of our boys, still a young teen, was so fascinated by this that he went to Valparaiso to buy one for himself. It may be still in our stuff somewhere. [laughter] Anyway, on TV I saw Pinochet pass the symbols of power to Aylwin and then sort of shrug, like, that's it and what next.

Q: A sash.

GREENLEE: There was a sash, and I think there was a medallion, but I am less sure of that. The event was almost anti-climactic. No rockets went off. But it was a moving moment, especially for the Chileans who had suffered repression.

Q: How did you find Chilean society particularly the movers and shakers, as compared to Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Chile basically had a pretty fixed political spectrum. It was roughly divided into thirds-one-third on the right; one-third in the middle; and one-third far left. The political allegiances tended to run in families. If your family was communist, you probably were a communist. There was little migration from one part of the political spectrum to another part. That was why coalition-building was important.

The Aylwin government, a mix of Christian Democrats and Socialists, principally, worked well. I think we were a bit surprised at how well it worked, and later that it was carried forward as a political bloc. Coming from Bolivia, I was impressed by the orderliness of the Chilean politicians. The Bolivians were more ragged, more visceral, less cohesive in their politics. The political culture in Bolivia was more intense-and frankly for me more interesting. In Chile, holding power was important for the direction of the country. In Bolivia, it was more about jobs-because government was where the jobs were. But Chile had a thriving private sector.

The Chileans were different in other ways. They were quite polished and well educated. They had institutions that worked, a court system that worked, a military that was serious, even though it had done terrible things to people. It was professional and not seen to be corrupt, and a police force that was extremely competent and not as tainted as the military by the Pinochet-era atrocities. Chileans are proud of themselves. Even the ones who had been disadvantaged and jailed saw Chile as special, as a nation.

There was a kind of ethnocentrism in Chile. People would say, "What do you think of Chile?" You would respond, "Chile's nice." I used to get this in Israel. "What do you think of us?" "Do you love us?" What was behind that, and what they seemed to mean, was "Don't you think we're different?" They would say, "We down here-Chile, Argentina-are different from other Latin Americans." The code was simple: "You Americans, you know the Mexicans, but we're not like them. We're different." I always had the impression that the Chileans didn't want to be like us-they wanted to be like the Europeans. They wanted to be seen as cultured, smooth, sophisticated.

Another thing, though, was that Chile was not a totally homogeneous society. There were different ethnic groups. There were Chileans with German names, for example, whose children would go to German schools, who would belong to a German country club and marry someone else of German descent. They might marry across their ancestral lines, certainly, but there seemed to be a lot of reinforcing of ethnicity. There were Lebanese who met at the Lebanese club; there was a club called the Prince of Wales Club; there was a French club. There were ethnic schools, ethnic clubs. This happens in other countries, of course, but in Chile it seemed to me to be more intensive.

There were a lot of Chileans of Basque descent. The foreign minister and the ambassador to the U.S. under Pinochet were both named Errazuriz, but I don't think they were closely related. Under Aylwin, the Finance Minister was Foxley. Another minister was named Ominami, of Japanese descent. There were a lot of Croatians in the mix, as well as people of German and French descent. President Aylwin had Welsh ancestry. Chileans take pride in their ethnicity diversity.

Q: Was there an Indian element there?

GREENLEE: There had been an Amerindian population in Chile, but they had been pushed away from the areas that became heavily settled. There were little enclaves in the south of Chile, but the Chileans would say that the experience of Chile had been like the manifest destiny experience of the U.S. The original indigenous tribes of Chile fought hard against the Spanish settlers. There was intermarriage, certainly, but it was not like Bolivia, where a very high percentage of the population was noticeably indigenous, with mixed Spanish-indigenous customs and particular ways of dressing. In Chile you didn't see that. Chileans dressed like middle class people, with the poor being more threadbare.

Q: Who went into the army, the officer corps?

GREENLEE: I think the army was a path to social ascension for a lot of people, but there were well-off types, too. As an institution it was well respected. The navy was perhaps more aristocratic, as was the air force. The national police maybe less so. The army, like the Bolivian army, had been formed by Germans. The uniforms were noticeably Prussian, and well tailored.

They would wear these cloaks that would go down almost to their ankles. When I first came to Chile, I was struck by these guys standing around the Moneda, looking from the rear sort of like Darth Vader, kind of outmoded and spooky. The carabinero guards at the Moneda wore high brown leather boots. It was like World War II German stuff. The tradition of the navy, on the other hand, was British. They were very good at maintaining their ships, but they didn't have many of them. They were a more aristocratic service than the army.

The air force was also professionally well regarded. They hosted an air show every year-FIDAE-and the U.S. air force took part. We brought top of the line aircraft to it. The Chileans had Mirages and old F-5s and at that time were in the market for U.S. F-16s, which eventually they were able to buy.

Several times when I was in Chile aircraft carriers from the U.S. would be moved from the Pacific to the Atlantic or vice versa. They were too big for the Panama Canal, so they would pass through the Strait of Magellan. They would stop at Chile. There would be opportunities for the Chileans to go aboard these carriers, and for some of us from the embassy to visit them as well.

I remember one time we at the airport near Santiago with some Chilean senior military officers waiting to be flown to a carrier at sea. We were to fly in what was called a COD, a small turbo-prop plane that was used to shuttle people from land to the carrier and back. It had to be catapulted off the carrier deck.

We were there waiting, and this little plane taxied up. As it pulled to a stop, its wings folded up. The Chileans seemed pretty excited. The pilot and the co-pilot got off, and the pilot looked small and thin. The pilot's helmet comes off. She was a woman, with long black hair, a Latin woman. She shook her hair. These Chilean admirals and generals were going nuts. They said, "Mira, es una mujer!" Well, it turns out she was an immigrant from Ecuador, a U.S. Navy lieutenant commander. She gave them a safety briefing in Spanish and said, "The carrier is 40 miles at sea. I'll fly you out and we'll land in kind of a controlled crash." These Chilean flag officers were amazed. It was a good example of how we were evolving, how dynamic our armed forcers were. It turned out there were four or five women on the ship, out of a crew of about 4,000. The captain of the ship told us, "Look, you can't really command a ship this size. What we have here is more like a town. You can only govern it." We watched the "cats and traps. " F-14s and F-18s were catapulted off the deck and were snagged on landing by an arresting wire. It was an impressive way to show the flag.

Another of the opportunities I had was to visit Antarctica. With another guy from the embassy I visited Palmer Station, courtesy of the National Science Foundation. We went on a C-130 to King George Island and then by a little ship to Palmer Station. King George Island is a piece of Antarctica where Chile has established a base, in effect a small colony. This is a manifestation of a Chilean "claim" of sovereignty over a slice of the continent. No other country recognizes it. It was interesting to see these little kids in ski jackets with dark sunglasses going off to school there. A baby was even born there the year we visited.

Q: I assume the Chilean military was making a great effort to stay in the barracks and out of civil control. Were they also pointed at Argentina at that time? How was the military?

GREENLEE: At that point, the thorniest border issue between Chile and Argentina had been resolved. There remained a relatively minor dispute in a glacial area in the Andes. The problem that had been settled with the Vatican's help was about which country should control three islands in the Beagle Channel off the tip of Argentina. In the late '70s there was almost a war over that. Look at the map.

Q: There's a map over there, but we're doing this on tape.

GREENLEE: Sorry. We're doing it on tape, but you can see... Well, you can't really see, but if you go through the Strait of Magellan toward the Argentine side, there are the islands. What the Chileans wanted was a land anchor in the Atlantic. But this had been resolved by the mid '80s, a sort of split solution, with Chile getting land but Argentina retaining maritime rights.

While I was in Chile the Soviet Bloc was collapsing, and Yugoslavia was coming apart. What had been the Yugoslav embassy became the Croatian embassy. The ambassador, though, was a Serb and a very nice guy. All of a sudden he was out.

The Soviet Union was also dissolving. The Soviet ambassador became the Russian ambassador. He gave a talk to the diplomatic community about the need to change and move on. Somebody said, "How could you have put up with communism for so long." The Russian was a very thoughtful guy. He said, "What you have to understand was that for us it was a kind of dream, a very beautiful dream. But it didn't work."

This guy ended up at the North-South Center in Miami as a visiting professor. He left Chile for California and took a bus across the U.S. with his family. The old rules, though, were still in place. The FBI apparently was mystified by what the guy was doing. Why was he taking a bus? What was he up to? We had a query about that. But all he wanted to do was get a feel for the country, on the bus.

Q: When you got there, and I don't want to say the trivial, but were grapes a... I've interviewed Tony Gillespie. He said he arrived in Chile happy in thinking that he was out of Columbia, and grapes were something you ate. All of a sudden he had a tremendous problem.

GREENLEE: The problem started before I arrived, but we had to deal with the whole time I was there. Chile was very much in the business of exporting fruit to the U.S.

Q: It's in an advantageous position: good climate, and its season is the exact reverse of ours.

GREENLEE: Right. But the match in trade terms wasn't quite in synch with the seasons. There were problems with "marketing orders," a protective mechanism for U.S. agriculture. Back in '30s, during the depression, banks wouldn't make agricultural loans unless they were sure there would be markets for the crops. So "marketing orders" were implemented to guarantee space in the market for a given crop. This form of protectionism remains in effect for certain crops-like grapes and peanuts.

Chile's growing season is the reverse of the U.S. because it is in the southern hemisphere and we are in the northern hemisphere. There is a period at the end of November until three or four weeks into December when there are end-of-season grapes in California but new grapes ready for sale from Chile. The U.S. grapes enjoyed high-tariff protection under the marketing order regime. Then, a few months later, there are fresh grapes in the U.S. and end-ofseason grapes from Chile in a similar overlap. There was a dispute around that. The Chileans would say, "We're free market people; you aren't." They had a point, at least concerning grapes. I don't know how this is being handled now, under our bilateral free trade agreement.

So there was a little bad blood around the grape thing anyway-but nothing like the aggravation caused by the cyanide incident. This stemmed from an anonymous phone call the embassy received. A guy said some grapes en route to the U.S. were contaminated with cyanide. The shipment was tested on arrival and cyanide apparently was detected. So all Chilean shipments were stopped and the producers took a horrible hit. The Chileans were outraged. The testing procedures came under fire. It was argued that there may have been a false positive, since cyanide occurs naturally in grapes. Or worse-many Chileans seemed to believe that it was all a U.S. plot to kill their industry. It got to be real nasty.

When I arrived in Chile, this was in the background of everything, and you'd hear about it again and again. Tony Gillespie was really under the gun. There was a powerful Chilean, a guy named Ricardo Claro, who owned the Santa Rita wine company. He attacked Tony in the media and insulted the U.S. and even our president. The anti-U.S. sentiment around the grape issue was vicious.

We never got to the bottom of who made the call to the embassy or whether it was a prank call or serious terrorist threat. But terrorism was a real concern, on many levels. In fact, absolutely the most dangerous incidents I experienced during my foreign service career happened while I was in Chile. There was an exploding baseball bat that killed a Canadian guy who was playing softball with some embassy guys. It also put out the eye of one of our security officers. In another incident an RPG was shot at vehicle carrying several of our Marine security guards. Luckily, it didn't explode on contact-sort of like what happened to me when I was on a tank with the 11th Cavalry in Vietnam. It was fired at too close a range.

Q: Speaking of terrorism, there was the residue of the Letelier assassination . How did that play out?

GREENLEE: The Letelier assassination-Letelier's car was blown up a bomb under it at Sheridan Circle-was a big issue. The Letelier family was in constant touch with the embassy and was closely connected to Senator Ted Kennedy's officer. Our interest was getting two Chilean former military officers, Manuel Contreras and Pedro Espinoza, put on trial for the deaths of Letelier and an American citizen, Ronnie Moffitt, who had been with him in the car. It was difficult because the military remained strong and protective of these guys. The case had to work its way through the courts. It was well after I left before verdicts against these two were rendered, I believe in 1993. They were found guilty and imprisoned. One of the Letelier sons and Letelier's widow were particularly active in driving the case in Chile. The young man, Juan Pablo Letelier, was elected to the Chilean senate shortly after I arrived in Chile.

Q: Were you picking up feelings about the role of the United States during the Allende overthrow and during the Pinochet regime? Was this a more American-left driven idea?

GREENLEE: I didn't have any sense of palpable Chilean interest in our alleged or possible role in Allende's overthrow when I was deputy chief of mission in Chile. But there remained a lot of speculation in the U.S. Maybe Chileans of the moderate-left and center-left were too busy governing and trying not to tear the scab off their precarious relationship with the military to probe too much about our rumored role. The democratic left needed us. The Chilean right was self-justifying and pretty arch with us.

Q: One gets a feeling that an awful lot of people here were saying we were much more involved than we were. I found, for example, the belief that the embassy would just look the other way and do nothing when an American boy was killed, allegedly in the interest of our policy interests, to be very far-fetched. That isn't the way we operate..

GREENLEE: I think that by the time I arrived in Chile the inquiries and concerns were dampened down from what they were.

Q: There can be a problem in keeping overly active do-gooders from the United States from coming down and trying to tell a new government, like the one in Chile, how to run things. We had that certainly in the former Soviet Union. Was that your experience?

GREENLEE: Not so much, although there were certainly strong opinions about what the new government should do on the human rights side. But in other respects, no. There had been plenty of outside advice and influence on how to shape the economy during the Pinochet period-Milton Friedman, for example, and his so-called "Chicago Boys." But by and large the Chileans are not ones to seek or take advice. There's not a Chilean who doesn't think he's at least as capable and well educated as an American. Certainly we were interested in cooperating with the new democratic government. We did, for example, put the Peace Corps back in. Occasionally there would be a congressional delegation with some sharp advice. But I didn't see a lot of, "We're going to tell the Chileans what to do," or the Chileans saying, "We want your advice on what to do."

Q: It's just that you have this group of Americans that feel they've got the word, and they run around to disadvantaged countries.

GREENLEE: I'd come from Bolivia where the Bolivians are used to being run over from the outside with advisors. The way the Bolivians handle that is they don't tend to say, "No, we don't want your advice." They tend to pick your pockets as you give them advice, and then they do what they want to do. In Chile, it was different. I learned that in the run-up to the election, shortly after I arrived. The right-wing candidate had been the Finance Minister for Pinochet. His name was Hernan Buche; he was of Swiss descent. He was a young, idiosyncratic guy, an energetic guy-known for riding his bicycle to work. He was preparing to go to the U.S. to meet people. I remember in a staff meeting that somebody said he wanted to do this or that, and it wasn't appropriate. The question was how to get the word to him. I said, "Why don't we just tell him." Silence. Tony Gillespie looked at me like, "He's a new guy. He still thinks he's in Bolivia." [laughter]

The problems we had on many issues was how to persuade the Chileans to do what in the long run we thought to be in their interest as well as ours. An example was their development of a new patent law. We wanted them to have a "world class" law. They wanted to protect their local pharmaceutical industry, which was actually heavily influenced by Argentine investors. Our interests were in play, but so were those of the Swiss, perhaps, proportionately, at least, more than ours. We'd approach the Chileans and they would say, "We're working on a good law." But every time we got a peek at what they were doing, we saw that it was pretty bad. We tried to work with the Swiss. I approached my Swiss counterpart. He wanted results, but didn't want to be out front. Or even on our flank. He said, "You Americans have the influence down here." That was fairly typical of what happened when heavy lifting was needed.

Q: How did you find the other embassies?

GREENLEE: I had a good and consistent relationship with my British counterpart. But most embassies didn't seem to be terribly active in Chile. They were interested in commercial issues, but not in the kind of rough and tumble that I had been used to.

Q: Speaking of embassies-put this as an aside here-the day before yesterday or yesterday, I was interviewing John Limbert. He was ambassador of Mauritania, and he went to the Russian embassy and said it was a magnificent, beautiful thing. Why in Mauritania? Well, apparently when Allende had been elected, the Soviets were going to put up a magnificent embassy in Santiago. It was a pre-fab, and it was being shipped, but all of a sudden the coup came. The Soviet ambassador in Mauritania said, "Hey! Why don't you send it to me?" So they took this embassy-it was already on the ship, so what the hell, let's get rid of it-and built it there.

GREENLEE: That's interesting.

Q: Pinochet. How was he treated, and what was he up to from our perspective after he left the presidency?

GREENLEE: Pinochet, when he retreated from government, continued to be the head of the army. He became a senator for life, with the immunities of a senator. That was not a place of political power, but it was a position that allowed him to have some insulation from legal scrutiny, at least for a while. That later changed, but when I was in Chile he seemed invulnerable to legal charges.

Pinochet was a very vital older man. Before he turned over the government, I think one time when I was chargï¿½, I had to so something out at the fair grounds, something related to a U.S. exhibition. Pinochet was walking through and I had to shake his hand and so forth. But I never really dealt with Pinochet. Later, when I was the political advisor to General Dennis Reimer, the army chief of staff, there was a conference of western hemisphere armies in Bariloche , Argentina.. I sat in on his meeting with Pinochet. This was in late 1995 or early 1996. Pinochet was in his mid or late seventies, I think but he still looked very fit and was very sharp. I remember that he remained fixated on communists-saw them as keeping their heads down around the world, but waiting their chance to come back.

Q: Was there any residue of nazism while you were there?

GREENLEE: There was a lot of mystery surrounding a place called Colonia Dignidad, a couple of hours south of Santiago. It was a closed community established by a messianic German after the Second World War. It was full of blue eyed, lederhosen-clad Germanic Chileans. Colonia Dignidad was a place where people were held and killed by the Pinochet regime after the coup. It was a strange enclave. But apart from Colonia Dignidad, I didn't have a sense of deep nazi influence. But there was, historically, a lot of Prussian-German influence. There had been waves of German immigration going back many years. There was very heavy German influence down the coast, near Puerto Montt, around places like Frutillar.

The Germans came for different reasons. There was a Lutheran group that arrived in the 1800s and also Catholics around the same time. Other Germans came after the Second World War, as they did to Argentina and Paraguay and other Latin American countries. Chile must have seemed a kind of cultural as well as political sanctuary in many respects.

Q: Were any nazi hunters going around there and checking license plates or doing something like that?

GREENLEE: I didn't see it. In Bolivia, there had been some of that, but I didn't have much of a sense of a really aggressive nazi hunting in Chile. There may have been some, but I didn't see it.

Q: Was there a wealthy right wing class, more or less dispossessed while you were there?

GREENLEE: Chile had become very business friendly. Nobody wanted to kill the economic growth that started with the opening of the Chilean system. Remember, this was the time when the first President Bush-H. W. Bush-launched the idea of a free trade area from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. The finance minister, Alejandro Foxley, in effect Chile's secretary of treasury, when he heard Bush's pronouncement, reacted by saying, "Where do I sign?" That was the position of a center-left government. There were some powerful business people who weren't necessarily political, but they certainly knew about politics and kept their eye on it. You know, people who would get around, go from Santiago to their villa in the seaside resort of Zapallar, by helicopter. There were some very rich Chileans, but I don't think they felt threatened by the tendency of the Aylwin government.

Q: How did your political section operate? What was the focus?

GREENLEE: We didn't have a large political section. Our emphasis was on knowing key political players in the concertacion and opposition. There was a right-wing opposition, which was respectful, not crazy. These were legitimate political people. There had been a long period under Pinochet when political parties were not able to operate, but there were a number of think tanks that served as crucibles for political thought, for parties. In fact, when it was election time, all of a sudden there were parties everywhere. The political section covered all that, just as the economic section followed Chile's economic and commercial progress.

Q: You would think the economic section would be having a ball with the grape issue.

GREENLEE: I am not sure I would call it a ball, but they had a lot to do, backstopping Tony Gillespie and our interests.

Q: How about the media there? How would you describe the media?

GREENLEE: The dominant newspaper was El Mercurio, owned by the Edwards family.

Q: Edwards was a Chilean.

GREENLEE: Yes. The Edwards family is a well known media family. El Mercurio was a respectful newspaper, but it tended to mix opinion with factual reporting. It was nationalistic in tone, with little digs at the U.S. and other countries. The media, the TV, seemed pretty free after democracy was restored, but it wasn't very interesting, at least not for me.

Q: Great on the Telenovelas.

GREENLEE: Soap opera. That's really more of a Venezuelan, Mexican, and Argentine industry.

Q: I watched one of these damn things back in Kyrgyzstan. People were watching the plight of a little peasant Mexican girl who goes to the big city.

GREENLEE: Now it's a big, big industry. Venezuela's really a main player.

Q: What about relations with Peru?

GREENLEE: As an embassy we weren't in the middle of any tensions between Peru and Chile. It was not like when I was in Peru in the mid '70s. Relations between the two countries seemed fairly relaxed and normal.

Q: Was there much sending of children up to college in the United States?

GREENLEE: There was some. I don't know how to quantify that, but there were a lot of super-educated Chileans. One thing that Harvard has done well with respect to Latin America is providing opportunities at the Kennedy School. I saw the positive impact of Kennedy School alumni in Bolivia and Paraguay, as well as Chile. Prominent local politicians or business people would boast, "Yes, I was at the Kennedy School," or, "I went to the University of Chicago," or, "I was at UCLA." I found that those educated in the U.S. had a different political and economic focus from those who attended La Louvain in Brussels or the Sorbonne or a German university.

Q: When did you leave Chile?

GREENLEE: I left Chile in June of 1992.

Q: How did your wife find it, being Bolivian? How did the Chileans treat her?

GREENLEE: My wife is not political and didn't try to engage with Chileans that way. She is an artist, a sculptor, and had many Chilean friends. She found any place we lived in Latin America, or any other place, comfortable. Her university and artistic contacts opened a lot of doors for me-every place I served. She liked Chile. I think she probably liked it more than I did. I always found Bolivia more interesting than Chile.

The thing about Chile-the Chileans wouldn't like to hear this-is that the culture in many ways is knocked off from Europe, or to a lesser degree from the U.S. There are shopping malls that imitate the U.S., circular billboards as in France, architecture derived from Europe. The men dress like Europeans. It would be hard at times to tell a Chilean from someone from the UK, pin stripes, blazers and a school tie. It's not like Bolivia, with its strong ethnic character.

Q: Not as much fun.

GREENLEE: Not for someone like me. If you want European culture, go to Spain, go to France, not to Chile. If you want unique South American culture, go to Bolivia or Peru.

Q: This raises the question was something you were ever contemplating internally or with your fellow foreign service officers in Latin America who served in Argentina. How come you've got Chile and Argentina, both essentially settled by Europeans? Yet Argentina seems to be an economic mess, and it's been an economic mess. The Chileans, even when they had their nasty coup, at least there was a coup that kept the country in better shape than when it took over.

GREENLEE: I think one reason that Chile has done comparatively well in the modern global economy is that Chile had copper wealth, but it didn't have the gold and silver that Bolivia had. It doesn't have the 12 feet of topsoil that the Argentines have. In Argentina you don't have to work as hard to make the land productive. In Chile you've got to be more efficient. That's Chile's advantage in the modern world. Instead of having viceroys and large estate holders, the Chileans were more middle class and in that sense more inclined toward democracy. That's what people say about Costa Rica as well. Costa Rica didn't have things that the Spaniards really wanted. So they are better off today.

One other thing in Chile. We had a presidential visit in December of 1991. It went well, but it required a lot of intensive work with the Chileans. One problem was that there wasn't enough hotel space for the George H.W. Bush party. I think they needed 640 rooms and there was a huge U.S. doctors' convention that had taken up most of the rooms. I had to work with the vice minister of interior on that. The Chileans wanted to make sure our president had the opportunity to spend the night. With a certain amount of friendly persuasion the Chilean government prevailed on the hotel operators to shift the conventioneers to another Chilean city. Then there were issues of protocol, of the guest list, and so forth. But in the end the visit went splendidly. It was work, though, a lot of work. I could see problems at the seams, but Tony Gillespie said he didn't see them. That was satisfying.

Q: In '92 you were off to where?

GREENLEE: In '92 I went to Spain as deputy chief of mission.

Q: And you were in Spain from when to when?

GREENLEE: I was in Spain from June or so of 1992 until about June of 1995.

Q: How did that job come about?

GREENLEE: At one point it looked like I might get on the list for an ambassadorship, but I didn't, and frankly I didn't lobby for or express any interest in an ambassadorship. I didn't know how to go about it.

I think today the Department asks you what you're interested in, but not in my time. Basically, you'd have to rely on word of mouth or an ambassador or senior person in the Department pushing you. I just laid back. One of the things that I looked at was deputy chief of mission in Madrid. It was on the bid list. I thought, "I've been a DCM twice and I'm tired of being DCM, but I don't want to go back to Washington and I would like to go to Spain." I loved Spain when I studied there and I thought my family would love it. So I bid high for Spain, but didn't think I would get it. It was a plum European assignment, and under the control of the European bureau, where I wasn't connected.

Then I got a call from Ed Casey. He was the DCM there. I knew Ed because he had been economic minister in Cairo when I was the deputy in the office of Egyptian affairs. He said, "Are you really interested in this." I said, "Am I competitive?" I was an OC (counselor level) at that point, I think-not an MC (minister counselor)-and it was a senior MC slot. Ed said, "The bureau is going to let us in Madrid control this. Yes, you're competitive, but there are 27 people on the list." I said, "I'm very interested."

The ambassador to Spain was Joseph Zappala, a political appointee. He had had been a fundraiser for George H. W. Bush. Zappala wanted to have a real competition and he looked at a lot of people. Or so I was told. With Ed's help, I was the one selected. Tony Gillespie also weighed in strongly. But then it got to be about April or so, and Tony had left several months before that. Curt Kamman was ambassador, a good guy. Well, I got a call from Zappala, who said, "Look, David, I want to tell you something. I'm going to be going back to the States, and will be replaced, so the selection process will have to be re-opened."

Q: This was right before the election.

GREENLEE: That was it. Zappala was going to go back and raise funds for Bush's reelection campaign. He had selected me to be his DCM although I had never met him. But he said, "Don't worry, I'll put in the good word with my replacement when he's announced." I frankly thought the assignment would fall through. The new person was Richard Capen, who had been the publisher of the Miami Herald. When he was announced, I got in touch with him and said, "I just want to tell you that you have no obligation to me. I'd like to be DCM in Madrid, but I'm not going to press. Look at the field and do what you want." And he did. He looked at the field, and he came back to me. That was that. I went to Dick Capen's swearing in, met him there, and then went to Madrid just after he got there.

Q: When was this?

GREENLEE: This was in early July of 1992.

Q: Were you looking at the election thinking, "I could have another ambassador in a few months?"

GREENLEE: The feeling then was that probably Bush would win. He had won the first Gulf War. This was before Clinton began to hit home on the economy, which was still in a downturn. Certainly the expectation of the new ambassador was that Bush would win. But, yes, I was very aware that there could be a reshuffle of ambassadors, and that's what happened.

Q: Back to the usual question: What was the status of Spain at the time and our relations with it?

GREENLEE: We had a good and developing relationship with Spain. It was the Felipe Gonzalez government, a socialist government but a very practical one. Spain wanted to develop as a modern European nation. It wanted to be a responsible and reliable player in NATO. There were or had been bilateral military bases that were not NATO-linked. One was in Zaragoza, one was in Torrejon near Madrid-air force bases-and a third, a naval base on an installation shared with the Spaniards, was at Rota, in the south.

The bases had become issues of contention between the U.S. and Spain well before I arrived. The U.S., I think, had wanted to keep the air force bases going, but we had already left Zaragoza and were in the process of pulling out of Torrejon. There was a nasty fallout from Zaragoza. Some of the facilities were damaged or left in disrepair, and the Spaniards were quite angry. Torrejon was handled better.

When I arrived in Spain there was still a pretty large military group. It had been big because of Torrejon, but remained fairly large to handle our withdrawal from there. There was still a PX and commissary, but they were quite small. We had access to the commissary. Within several months, it disappeared.

What was left, then, was the naval base at Rota. But that was not a source of friction. It was OK. There was not a problem with that. I think the Spaniards didn't want our military close to Madrid, but had less of a problem with Rota, far to the south. Also, the Spanish navy depended on our sharing the cost of that base.

Q: Did we find at that time Spain looking more toward the European Union and in a way becoming more European?

GREENLEE: Spain was clearly understanding that its best prospects for development lay with the European Union. By the time I got there, Spain was starting to reap impressive benefits from that. An awful lot of capital improvement had happened in the country-highways, rail-links, modernized airports.

There were two things I saw right off that were really eye-popping. One was the Olympics in Barcelona. I had the chance to go to a couple of events and to be involved as a U.S. diplomatic representative. The other was the Universal Fair-the World Fair-in Seville. These were e were huge, transforming undertakings. They heralded the new Spain.

When I was a student in Spain in 1963-'64, there was still a sense that Europe stopped at the Pyrenees- something Napoleon reputedly said because he couldn't consolidate his is control on the Spanish side. The Spain I experience as a student was catholic and a dictatorship. It was the Spain of Franco. But when I came back to Spain as the deputy chief of mission, after what was called the destape, Spain was modern and progressive and integrated into Europe. The U.S. was not a small factor, because we were in a sense Spain's hedge with Europe. The U.S. was a power to be cultivated.

Q: How did you find your ambassador? He didn't have much time there.

GREENLEE: He didn't. He was a very fine man. He knew very little about the foreign service, and he didn't know how our system functioned. He relied on me to help him understand our bureaucracy. He sort of floated over the embassy, but he had some strong ideas. He was a very religious man, a protestant. I don't know if he was "born-again," but he seemed in that mold. He had very particular ideas about projecting his faith as a part of American values. Religious faith was clearly a strong part of his life. For example, in the lunches and dinners he hosted, he would say a grace and have the Spaniards around the table hold hands with each other. This was something they weren't used to, and it seemed to make some uncomfortable. But I respected the man because he was projecting his view of how things ought to be. He relied on me to manage the internal issues of the embassy, and to keep us connected with Washington.

I think that there were some things here and there that we had to work on. He was a very ethical man, but wasn't used to the kind of scrutiny we have in government. But he listened when things were brought to his attention. He also wanted to help me in my career, but he didn't have a clue about how to do it. So I was on my own in that sense.

Q: What were the living arrangements like?

GREENLEE: We lived in what was called a palacete, a 19th century carriage house. It had four floors and an elevator and wonderful old furnishings. It had been owned in the '20s by the principal collector for William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon estate in California. He was an American architect named Byne and the residence was known as the Byne House. Byne encrusted and furnished this place with 16th Century and earlier pieces of marble, paintings and antiques.

He put cornices from the 11th century Moorish period on marble columns set into the walls. He put a medieval monastery roof over the dining room. There were two fireplaces, among the first in Europe, from the 17th century-one of them had inscribed in the stone mantle "1613," in fact. There was a third century Roman fountain in another place.

This was a wonderful old museum of a house. It had been bought by the U.S. government in the 1940's and used as an information office, a kind of propaganda platform, during the Second World War. Spain was neutral and there were representatives of both sides in Madrid. The house functioned for a while after that as a library and finally was taken over as a deputy chief of missions' residence sometime in the '50s. It was well located, just half a block off Serrano, Madrid's "toniest" street. It was across from Gucci's and close to lots of specialty shops, cafes and restaurants. The street it fronted was Ramon de la Cruz.

We lived in that house, and every ambassador, it was said, coveted it. But it was surrounded by tall apartment buildings, so it wasn't secure enough for an ambassador. Still it was large, about 11,000 square feet, and a cultural landmark, really, in downtown Madrid. Why didn't the U.S. government sell it? It would have been cheaper to get rid of it than to keep it up. If a pipe burst, there were no plans, and the repair people had to figure out how to punch in and fix the problem without creating other problems. But the U.S. government kept it because it was national patrimony of Spain and couldn't be demolished for an apartment building, and few Spaniards could have afforded to buy it and maintain it as it was. It wasn't worth selling, and for cultural reasons it was certainly worth keeping. It was a wonderful place.

I think Dick Capen expected to stay a long time as ambassador. But in November George H. W. Bush lost to Bill Clinton. Capen saw the handwriting on the wall and wisely, rather than waiting to be told, he announced in December that he would leave by early February. When he left, I became Chargï¿½ for about eight months.

During the Capen period there was one issue that became exclusively mine. It involved the transfer and destruction of some sophisticated weaponry that had been in the process of being developed some years before in another country. It was a tricky three-way negotiation, which in the end was successful and contributed to the strengthening of Spain as a strategic partner.

I found the management of Embassy Madrid to be very complicated compared to of the management of the embassies in La Paz and Santiago. Maybe it was characteristic of European embassies, but there were a lot of people who were quite senior and at the end of their careers. They weren't going to put up with things they would have tolerated earlier in their careers. If they had an opinion, they'd give it unvarnished. If they had a bone to pick with another counselor, they'd pick it. This created quite a lot of friction, and a lot of it came to my door.

You would think that at a desirable post with a lot of bidders, you'd get the best people. The truth is the embassy staff was pretty uneven. Some were excellent, others not very competitive. There were hard chargers and dead-enders. We had both in abundance.

It was an embassy that was turbulent in the personnel sense. It was the same across the spectrum of agencies. For example, there was a big military group that was getting smaller because the air force base at Torrejon was disappearing. These people's lives were being disrupted. There was a natural friction between the guy commanding the military group and the defense attachï¿½. Each thought he should be the defense secretary's representative, and the Defense Department wouldn't sort it out.

There was another problem between the defense attachï¿½ and the administrative counselor. The administrative counselor was effective but abrasive. He cut into what the defense attachï¿½ considered his prerogatives. The administrative counselor upset others in the embassy by unilaterally reorganizing the parking lot. This was within his responsibilities, in one sense, but he did it in a way almost calculated to raise temperatures. I liked this guy but ultimately he was bad for the embassy. After he left post, he tried to sue the defense attachï¿½ for comments in the defense channel that he thought affected his onward assignment.

Q: I have to say that when one really gets right down to it, one of the most critical things in, I suppose, most business, parking ranks right up at the top. When I was at the senior seminar, I went around and did a study of foreign consulates in the United States, and parking at the airport was by far the major problem.

GREENLEE: I agree. Parking is a really big deal. Staying on the administrative side, it ended up costing a lot of my time. It was something that occupied my time initially during the period when I was chargï¿½, but it projected through when the new ambassador, Richard Gardner, arrived. The administrative counselor had a more positive relationship with the ambassador's wife than with most of us in the embassy, and this contributed to the tension.

Q: I wonder if you could talk for a minute about Mrs. Gardner. I know when I was consul general in Naples, Richard Gardner was the ambassador up there in Rome. I didn't have much to do with him. People's eyes were shifty when they would talk about Mrs. Gardner. Without getting overly... Not trying to tell tales, but from your perspective, what were the problems?

GREENLEE: I'm married to a strong-willed woman myself. It's not that that its a problem, it's a question of relationships. Richard Gardner is a very smart man, a person who was qualified for his job.

Q: He has written a lot, a professor, also he was a senior State Department officer at one point. .

GREENLEE: He had been on in the international organizations area during the Kennedy administration and was later ambassador to Italy. He certainly had a background that qualified him in every respect for being an ambassador. His wife's a very smart lady and very much interested in the arts. She was on the board of the Guggenheim Museum and brought very good, very challenging artwork to the residence in Madrid. She wanted everything the embassy did publicly to be first-rate. I appreciated that. But not everyone in the embassy understood what she was trying to do. She became involved in things related to the internal workings of the embassy. The administrative consular worked well with her. Others kept their distance.

Another challenge was that Mrs. Gardner wanted to embassy wives to support her in a very particular way. My wife had her own circle of contacts, and she was content to let the other wives do that. So that was not a good relationship.

Q: It gives a feel for it. There you are. Let's talk about the ambassador. Let's talk about Richard Gardner and what he was doing, and then we can more on to the various elements and your time in Spain as far as the government and issues.

GREENLEE: Gardner, again, was very qualified. He's written a lot of op ed pieces. He was a law professor and had written a seminal book the creation of the international monetary system after World War II. In fact, that book was re-issued in Spanish while we were in Spain, with a new introduction he wrote. It was quite a prodigious undertaking. When he was named ambassador, I was talking to the head of the Americas Division at the Foreign Ministry, with a guy named Rodriguez Spiteri. On granting agreement, he said, "This is good-all the right Harvards and Yales." Gardner had a great CV.

Gardner's style was deliberative, not spontaneous. He was a bit professorial, a bit stand-offish. Professionally, he was effective, I think, but he didn't have much to do with the workings of the embassy. In that he was probably like a lot of non-career ambassadors. I don't mean that as a criticism. Some career ambassadors are too much the other way, and get bogged down by their embassies. But Gardner had little time for his staff. He left most of that to me, and I guess I bear some responsibility for not creating a happier environment.

This was a time of severe budget cuts, and these affected all of us worldwide. We had won the Cold War, and the U.S. public was looking for the peace dividend. Clinton came in with an unspoken mandate, and then an articulated mission, to downsize government.

The State Department budget was shredded. But how do you downsize a big bureaucracy? One target was the system of bi-national centers and libraries that had served our missions so well during the Cold War. Why have books when, increasingly, the content of books was being put on-line?

Nobody at post felt too good about this. Certainly, Richard Gardner didn't feel good about it, and he was very opposed to dismantling the libraries and cultural centers. This is one place where cuts were being made. Another place was the embassy itself. We were told to consolidate positions and be prepared not to do "more with less," but, realistically, "less with less." With the communications revolution that was gathering force, there was less need for informational reporting. So we looked at ways to cut back our political and economic sections. In fact our solution really my solution- was to combine those sections-a step that in later years was reversed.

Our consul general was Harry Jones. He was a published author. He had written a book called, I think, Shadows in a Weary Land, a novel about the Israeli-Arab conflict. I thought he would be an effective political-economic counselor. I put it to him and he was interested. Gardner agreed he had the intellectual background and heft for the job. So we pushed Harry for the new position of combined political-economic counselor. We also downgraded the consul general position, the slot he vacated. Mary Ryan, the assistant secretary for consular affairs, for one, was not amused. In retrospect I am not sure we did the right thing, but we were told to think creatively, and we did. At least I did.

Q: This was "reinventing government."

GREENLEE: That's right, but the real driver was the budget. We didn't have the money. We weren't going to be able to sustain the kind of embassy we'd had.

I remember this guy at the foreign ministry in a rather condescending way saying, basically, that our mistakes in the world are understandable, because we are still learning to live with our power. It was sort of like moneyed rich talking about the new rich. We had to learn how to fit into systems that had been established by history and by years of experience.

The Spaniards were comfortable and respectful of things quite alien to us. The monarchy, for instance. King Juan Carlos was a unifying symbol. Great attention was paid to ceremonial things. The king's father died when I was in Spain-he had been heir to the throne but Franco selected Juan Carlos over him when he cleared the way for the restoration of the monarchy. I went to the funeral at El Escorial. It was attended by Prince Charles and a lot of heirs to thrones of countries, like Greece or Romania that had become republics.

We would run into these people who were minor royalty, like counts, or in some cases dukes. We would see them socially. They would have an attitude toward themselves that was alien to me. It was fascinating in a way. My wife tells a story that reflected wonderfully on Richard Capen's wife, Joan Capen. My wife said one time they were at a lunch and a count at their table was talking about his social environment. Finally, he said, "You Americans know nothing about royalty and hierarchy." Joan Capen said, "We had a war and settled all that." [laughter]

Q: I hear people say that in France they'd get caught up in protocol with people with these titles. Were they Napoleonic or were they Bourbon types? Which took precedence? Some people get captivated by royalty and offshoots of royalty. Did this occur in Spain?

GREENLEE: The dukes and the counts and so forth were invited to functions, but were not regarded as important politically. There was a clear understanding that these people didn't count for anything. The exception, of course, was the king. He was crucial for Spain and its sense of itself as a unified nation.

The king was especially respected because he had intervened on behalf of democracy at a time when it came under threat-when a disgruntled Guardia civil officer and some followers laid siege to the parliament in 1981. It was a right-wing attempt. The king's position was crucial, and he pronounced for democracy. People remember that. He had real moral authority. His wife, Queen Sofia, was also greatly respected.

Q: Let's compare and contrast. You had had your time in Latin America. You talked some about how the Spaniards were not defensive in their relations with us. How did you find them as far as the bureaucracy is concerned? Was there a difference from your Latin America experience?

GREENLEE: Yes, in the sense that the Spaniards were very First World in the way they managed their bureaucracy. Their foreign ministry was very professional. I must say the Chilean system was good. The Bolivian system was not. The Spaniards were serious, very good. Having a relatively small bureaucracy, they could move fast when they needed to. If there was something delicate that needed immediate attention, you could get it done. They were very good at that, a little bit like Israelis.

Q: Moving to a different field, what about the business world? One of the problems that one sees in Germany and very much so in France today is that you can never fire people once they are embedded in a job. The brightest and best have been leaving France and heading to Ireland or England or the U.S. to get in business. Did you see this in Spain?

GREENLEE: Yes. As I recall, a business could hire someone without a contract for three years. At the end of that period the person had to be put on contract, with lots of benefits. So a lot of good people were let go just before that point. There was high unemployment. The benefits were very good for those who had jobs. I got to know a little bit more of this after I left, because our oldest son married a Spaniard. It's a very nice social welfare system if you can get into it, but it's something that over time, it seems to me, will have to become more flexible. It's sort of like France: When the truckers strike, the public turns out to support them-because they want to protect their benefits, too. But it's a drag on efficiency.

Q: You were saying Spain was benefiting by being part of the European Union. During the time you were there, they had this system which would make major companies be leery about moving in. How did you see the business world?

GREENLEE: There was an active U.S.-Spain chamber of commerce and there were a number of other business groups. We had a very good commercial counselor, Emilio Iodice, who was enthusiastic about opportunities for American business in Spain. I remember one time hearing him speak to an American group, business people living in Madrid. Emilio made his upbeat pitch and a guy stood up and said, "Emilio, I keep wondering if I came to the wrong room or maybe if we are living on different planets." So the views weren't uniform. But there was a lot of investment and the economy was getting stronger and stronger.

Spain had and continues to have the problem of Basque separatists, things blowing up. One time there was an attack on a van full of military people in Spain. Spanish military were killed. The getaway car was a little Fiat. The Basque terrorists abandoned this car about a block from the embassy, and blew it up. This car went up about four stories. You could see it from the embassy, pieces of this car in the air. There was a real problem with Basque terrorism. In fact, one of the contacts we had, the head of their political-military system, was assassinated, blown up in a central part of Madrid.

Thinking about people I have known in different countries, at least a half a dozen were assassinated-in Bolivia, Chile, Egypt. Being a politician in some of these places can be very risky.

Q: How about the parties? How did we see them?

GREENLEE: There were parties on the right and parties on the left, but two main parties. One was the partido popular, the PP, roughly equivalent to our Republican party. The other was the socialist party, the PSOE, on the center-left, which identifies more with our Democratic party. But the reality is that if you were to superimpose these parties on our political spectrum, you would find that Spain's right-wing party, the PP, was probably a little to the left of our Democratic party.

When I was in Spain, Felipe Gonzalez was the prime minister, but he was reaching the end of his political dominance. He had been prime minister, or president of government, for about ten years.

Q: He was the socialist party.

GREENLEE: Yes, he was a very sensible socialist. He would speak of the need to expand the pie before trying to divide it. The opposition was headed by Jose Maria Aznar, who was elected several months after I left Spain.

It was the end of the period of Gonzalez. I attended a meeting once with Gonzalez, with Ambassador Capen. I also met with Aznar, at an arranged social gathering, when he was campaigning for election. Aznar wanted to assure the U.S. that, if elected, he would be a good ally. He lit up a nice Partagas cigar.

Q: I take it we were comfortable with both parties, the basic parties.

GREENLEE: There was no problem.

Q: What about the Spanish unions? Was there anybody saying that they had too much clout, that they were a disadvantage to the country's good?

GREENLEE: Sure. There was a realization that, for example, the subsidies for the agricultural workers in the south, when they weren't employed in the off-season, were too costly. The wealthier parts of Spain paid for the inefficiencies of the poorer parts. That's the way the system worked, and has worked for years. And there were political considerations. The deal with the Basque people was different from the deal with the Catalans. And Andalusia was different from both. The Basques had their own police and could collect their own taxes. They had rights deriving from the old fueros. The Catalans had a different kind of autonomy. Spain is a mix of different nations, really. Anybody in political office, a prime minister, had to think about how to balance the equities.

Q: How did we view Catalonia? They have their own language....

GREENLEE: My first experience in Spain was in Catalonia. This was the summer before I began studying in Madrid, the summer of 1963. I found work at a day camp on the outskirts of Barcelona. It was the Franco period and Catalan, the language, was not permitted in public discourse. But everyone I met spoke it. It was the ethnic language, the language of the Catalan nation. Today, Catalan is the official language of Catalonia, on the signs and the menus. Spanish is for tourists, and the other Spaniards.

When I went back to Spain, passing through as a tourist nearly 20 years later, I was astonished at the changes. I couldn't recognize some of the city names. For example, Lï¿½rida had become Lleida. Barcelona was spelled differently.

There was a comment that a Spaniard married to a Catalan woman made to me once. During the Franco era, her mother was talking on the phone in Catalan with someone in Madrid. The operator came on the line and, interrupting, said, "Hable en Cristiano." That is, "Speak Spanish (Christian), not Catalan." I lived in Spain during that period as a student. But everything had changed by the time I came back.

After Franco, Spain went wild. This was the destape, literally, the "uncapping." All of sudden, there was nudity in films, whores and transvestites openly soliciting in the streets-a huge change in public acceptance of other forms of being, of personal expression. In fact, one of the interesting statistics was that Spanish women had become the most promiscuous in Europe. That was not the case when I was a student in the '60s.

Q: We had a consul general in Barcelona.

GREENLEE: Carol Lee Heilman was the consul general. I didn't see her that much. Once every several months I would see her. She came to Madrid at times. The things that I did in Barcelona were really cultural or symbolic. They had an effective regional leader named Jorge Pujol. When I was chargï¿½, Pujol invited the diplomatic corps to Barcelona for a kind of cultural visit, an exposure to Catalonian art and music. It was fantastic. We had dinner to chamber music under orange trees in the patio of the Generalitat, the governor's palace. A balmy, wonderful evening, with this world-class politician as host and raconteur. Pujol was a class act.

Q: How about the Basques?

GREENLEE: There were Basques who were culturally committed to being Basque and reviving and expanding their language. But they were also committed to being part of Spain. Then there were the separatists, and among them the small minority who were from ETA and were violent. I think less than 15 percent of the Basques wanted independence from Spain. With ETA, which worked also out of southern France, there were incidents, of course, and that was part of the political landscape.

I didn't get to the Basque country very much. I went to our small consulate a couple of times and attended a few events, such as a factory opening. I saw the site of the Guggenheim museum, in a depressed, industrial part of Bilbao, before construction started. There was a lot of excitement about the Frank Gehry design and the tourism it would bring.

Q: During the Franco period, we never really crossed Spain off the list, at least to the extent that the major countries in Europe did. And now Spain is very much part of Europe. Correct me if I'm wrong. Maybe that's not true. It's as if there are two magnets. One would be the European Union in Brussels and the other the United States. Were we on the shorter end?

GREENLEE: I think I mentioned this before. The Spaniards wanted to have a positive, constructive relationship with the U.S. and saw the relative weight of the U.S. in world affairs for what it was. After the fall of the Berlin wall, people were talking about the U.S. as the hyper power. Spaniards knew that. They saw that. They wanted to be players with us in many things, but they also were part of Europe, and the European Union. They were playing this dual track.

I'll give you an example of one of the issues I confronted as chargï¿½. There was the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, in 1991, almost a year before I arrived at the embassy. Spain played an important role as host.

Q: It was right after the Gulf War, I believe.

GREENLEE: Right. The Madrid conference jump-started a new peace-making effort. The process ultimately led to the Washington conference that Clinton hosted, the one that brought Rabin and Arafat together for their famous handshake. Well, the invitations went out for the Washington gathering, but Spain was not included. When the Spaniard realized they were not on the list, I got a frantic call. The message was, "How can it be that the British were invited and we were not. Don't you remember the Madrid conference? Where's our invitation?"

I got on the phone, and I talked to Beth Jones. She was the executive assistant for Warren Christopher. I said, "Beth, you've got to get Spain an invitation." She said, "I understand what you mean, but the White House is handling everything and it's really tight." We agreed that I should send a first-person cable, and she would put it in front of Christopher. I did the cable. I don't know if Christopher saw it, finally, but Spain got its invitation. It shouldn't have been that hard.

Q: This sounds like White House management.

GREENLEE: Exactly, but it also shows a rather cavalier sense of-and we get into this from time to time-of taking other countries' contributions for granted.

Q: Was there anything going on with immigration from Africa or relations with Morocco and Algeria at that time?

GREENLEE: There were the issues with the Polisario, a nomadic north African group with connections to Spain. The Spaniards were interested in seeing its dispute with Morocco resolved. I was not much involved in that but it was an item on our political agenda. There were also issues, human rights issues, with Equatorial Guinea, which had been a Spanish colony-and where large oil deposits were being discovered. The language of that little island country was Spanish, and we had an ambassador there. We later closed down that post-but re-opened it when the oil started to flow.

Morocco was the most important African country for Spain. Spain had two enclaves on the African coast surrounded by Morocco-Ceuta and Melilla. The Spaniards looked at them as a part of Spain. When the Spaniards would complain to us about the British in Gibraltar, what they didn't want to hear was, "What about your enclaves in North Africa?" Moroccan immigrants, legally and illegally, were also a factor. A lot of them passed through on their way to other parts of Europe.

Q: Was terrorism an issue?

GREENLEE: No, not then, in the sense of anti-U.S. terrorism. That came much later.

Q: What about Cuba?

GREENLEE: Cuba was and remains an area where the Spaniards disagreed with us on approach. They wanted to engage with Cuba, while we wanted the Castro regime isolated. That was part of our dialogue. The Spaniards thought our policy was counter-productive. They had a point. The Spaniards were sophisticated enough to know that our policy was driven by certain electoral and regional realities in the U.S. and that we had legislative as well as executive policy curbs on what we could do.

Cuba was always a very special place for the Spaniards. It was considered the "pearl" of their overseas holdings and also an island that had been stripped from them not by revolution, as in other parts of Latin America, but by war with the U.S.

Q: I'm not sure exactly how it played in 1998, the 100th anniversary. They have a different fix on it.

GREENLEE: They certainly do. I never got into conversations with Spaniards when I was DCM about the Spanish-American war, but when I was a student in Spain I remember a Spaniard, with some heat, saying, "I've read every book about what happened in 1898 ,and the U.S. invasion was totally unjustified." It wasn't good grist for social conversation. That page for us has been turned. Maybe not so much for them. We have a similar overhang with the Mexicans.

Q: I assume there was a Cuban ambassador there.

GREENLEE: They had relations with Cuba. I'm trying to think if I ever saw the Cuban ambassador. I can't remember if I came across him. The diplomatic corps is quite large in Spain and I can't remember what the Cuban ambassador looked like.

Q: I always think of the Spanish starting their dinners at 11:00 at night. The social life in general, how did you find that in Spain?

GREENLEE: The way the Spaniards schedule their lives is certainly quite different from rest of Europe. I like it. The Spaniards don't get up early. They will have a light breakfast and go to work from 9:00 to 12:30. Then they'll break for a heavy lunch, a break from about 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Then they'll work pretty hard until about 7:30. These were not the embassy hours, and we were out of synch sometimes when things needed attention.

From 7:30 pm until about 10:00 pm, a lot of Spaniards don't go home. They go to cafes and bars and eat tapas and drink copas. They're on the streets. After 10:00 pm they have a light supper and then maybe go out again. Movies, for example, start at 11:00 p.m. At 1 a.m., on weekdays, I suppose most Spaniards are in bed. Weekends are another story. Some are out almost all night.

The Economist had an article about how long Europeans sleep, and claimed the Spaniards averaged, factoring in siestas, about one hour less than everyone else. That might be something leftover from the old days. When Spaniards lived in dingy, cramped apartments, it was more congenial for them to meet and hang out in cafes. This was certainly true when I was a student. The life was in bars and cafes. Some people in those days got their mail at their favorite cafï¿½. It was like their office. They would sit over coffee or a drink for hours. This was central to their lives.

The ritual of meals is important to Spaniards. Coffee, cognac, smoking-cigarettes during meals, between courses. Men would light up cigars in restaurants. The waiters had cigar cutters. Maybe that has changed now, with concern about passive smoking. But in the early and mid '90s, Spain remained wreathed in smoke. Smoke in the air, dog crap on the sidewalks. That was the Spain I knew.

The city of Madrid is absolutely wonderful. It's going all the time. In summer, on the grassy strips beside the great avenues, there are temporary cafes called terrazas Some of them have music. At three in the morning, the streets are alive. There is more traffic on a Friday or Saturday at that hour than at 3 in the afternoon. It's wild.

Q: How were your days?

GREENLEE: On my workdays I would have a lunch that wasn't really leisurely. I could walk home for lunch or could have it in the cafeteria, or if I would go out if there were something official, a luncheon event. But at the embassy I was for the most part the inside person. I wasn't the ambassador. Even when I was chargï¿½, I was a locked inside more than I wanted.

I would put in a regular hard workday, but around 6:30 or 7 pm, I would go home. There was a lively social life, and we often hosted fairly elaborate official functions-receptions, lunches and dinners. My wife, Clara, was famously good at that-in Madrid and at our other posts.

We had lots of official visitors, more than at my other posts-writers, poets, artists, intellectuals, as well as people from Washington. My old English professor from Yale, Harold Bloom, gave a lecture. Joyce Carol Oates, William Kennedy, E.L. Doctorow, the poet Gary Snyder-interesting people-came to Madrid as part of our public diplomacy program. I remember that Alan Ginsburg was offered to us, but Gardner didn't want any part of him. Then of course there were congressmen and senators. The acting head of the CIA had breakfast at my residence with his Spanish counterpart. The Spaniards closed off our street-to the astonishment of our Polish butler. It was a very rich cultural-intellectual life, political and diplomatic environment.

Q: When you were there, were there any particular problems you had to deal with or incidents that maybe weren't mentioned before?

GREENLEE: I had mentioned before that the internal workings in the embassy were complicated. I worked with three different administrative counselors, two of whom were easy to work with. One was complicated but competent. As I mentioned before, he got things done, but at a great price in terms of internal friction. I spent a lot of time trying to calm people down. With a political ambassador, I realized I was pretty much on my own in trying to broker my next assignment. Gardner in fact tried to be helpful. The problem was more that I didn't really want to press for anything I saw on the horizon.

I looked at the DCM post in London, but the person in that job decided to stay on there. I was in contact with the ambassador, Admiral William Crowe, and also, indirectly, with Pamela Harriman in Paris. That was through Gardner, who wrote a nice letter on my behalf. Harriman liked my credentials, but noted that I really didn't speak French. Then I had a shot at DCM Mexico., but that fell through, really to my relief. It frankly didn't make sense to do a fourth stint as DCM. One ambassadorship was dangled, but it would have been an unaccompanied tour. I didn't want it.

Then I got a real rush from a guy who was the political advisor to the army chief of staff. I'd been an army officer. He put the arm on me. He said, "You've got to do this. You've got to come over and replace me as political advisor for the next army chief of staff. I thought, "Well, the Pentagon. It might be an interesting world," but I also thought it would be career Siberia. How do you make your way back to State from the Pentagon?

Q: Particularly since you really didn't have a firm foot in a regional bureau. You didn't really have a bureau.

GREENLEE: Right. Then there was another possibility, to be the #2, the deputy over at ONDCP.

Q: Good God! What does that mean?

GREENLEE: That's the Office of Drug Policy Control. The head of it actually has cabinet rank. The job was open, but the guy at the top was leaving. So nothing became of it, and I went with the Pentagon option.

Summing up Madrid, there is not much more to say except that if you can arrange a European tour in your foreign service career, you ought to take it. But one tour, for me, was enough. The work can be more interesting elsewhere.

Q. You were at the Pentagon job from when to when?

GREENLEE: From about mid-July of 1995 until about May of 1996. This normally was, I think, at least a one year job. But I was pulled out for something else, which I'll get to.

I had been in the army. I had served in Vietnam, was an officer there. I knew about the army, at least at the operational level. It wasn't a career for me, but I was in for three years and one month. I came out as a first lieutenant, one day away from when I would have made captain. With a full year of Vietnam under my belt and having served at five different army posts in the States, I knew something about the army. But I didn't know about what happened at the top, about the Pentagon. As a senior foreign service officer, I had high standing, in a protocol sense. I left the army as a junior officer, at the bottom end. I returned to it at an equivalent high rank. I was political advisor to the army chief of staff, to General Dennis J. Reimer. He was a superb man. He was not a gregarious type, but he was calmly professional. He dictated his own notes during trips, although he had a battery of mid-grade officers as note-takers as well. Reimer worked very hard and his staff worked hard. He cared deeply about the army.

I've seen that kind of concern occasionally in the foreign service, but not, frankly, very much. The military is much better at looking after their people. I think Tony Gillespie was cut from the same mold as Reimer. They were role models, from my viewpoint.

Q. What was your role as POLAD?

GREENLEE: It was not well defined. The chief of staff is different from what were then called the commanders-in-chief, the CINCs, at the unified commands. He didn't have an operational role. He administered the army, if that's the right word. He met with counterparts in Washington and abroad. He represented the army as a member of the joint chiefs of staff.

If he was traveling to a country where he would meet with a civilian official, say the prime minister, then I would go with him. If he had a meeting with a visiting chief of staff, an official meeting in his office, I would go to that. I was the policy guy in his office.

The Pentagon was an interesting place. I didn't really have an established role or from my standpoint enough to do. I nosed around, but never found an entirely satisfying niche. But I watched and learned things. I accompanied General Reimer on trips to Mexico, to Jordan, Israel and Egypt, to Argentina, and to Sweden, Russia and Ukraine-a lot of traveling, really. But I didn't have a very structured role. I had a nice parking spot. I was treated well. But I didn't have enough to do, and I was starting to get a little antsy.

Q: A question before you get on to that, you're the policy guy. How did you keep up with the policy? In other words, what were your connections to the State Department?

GREENLEE: I would go over to the Political-Military Bureau staff meeting once a week. I was nominally under a deputy assistant secretary in that bureau. If there was an issue involving some particular part of the world, I could get information from the relevant desk. I could always find policy statements or perspectives if I needed them. In other words, if there was an issue, say, with North Korea, and there was at one point, I would go to State and get briefed. I could feed information back into the army system, or directly to the chief of staff.

Sometimes I could bring my own experience to the table. I joined General Reimer, for example, in a meeting with Augusto Pinochet at the Conference of American Armies in Bariloche, Argentina. Pinochet was no longer running Chile, but he remained head of the Chilean army. I was able to provide some additional perspective on him before and after that meeting. I remember Pinochet saying to Reimer that the communists hadn't disappeared. They had gone underground and would come back, because that's the way they were. He then said he knew Reimer agreed with him but couldn't say it. That was the way Pinochet tried to manipulate the conversation. Of course, Reimer didn't bite. I actually wrote that meeting up. I wrote up other things. We were out in the former Soviet Union, out in Russia. We went to the Frunzi Academy. The Russians pushed vodka at us. It was liquid hospitality. They drank all the time, and it could be dangerous drinking. We had to jump on these continuously moving elevators, for example. You could jump into the void with too much vodka.

Q.: Right! They used to have those things in the IG Farm and Building in Frankfort.

GREENLEE: These Russians always had a little vodka in them. I remember coming back from lunch. We were in a van driven by a Russian army guy. There were about seven of us in the van. The driver unscrewed a bottle of vodka and passed it back. The guys with me-lieutenant colonels and whatever-didn't want to drink. One guy poured a shot into a paper cup, then emptied it quietly on the floor of the van. He wanted to be polite. The bottle, still almost full, went back to the driver, who took swigs as he drove. That was Russia for me.

Q: Did you get a feel about how the army was looking at the Balkans, the break up of Yugoslavia?

GREENLEE: Yes, sure, but I was never involved with anything that was happening in the Balkans. From '92 to '95 when I was in Madrid, I was doing a lot of political work associated with the Balkans, when were trying to see if the Europeans could handle the situation on their own. It turned out they couldn't. At the Pentagon, the Balkans were very much on the minds of the military officers, but it didn't have too much to do with what I was doing. I didn't travel there, although the chief of staff did.

The military in that period, and later when I was the special Haiti coordinator, was famously cautious about deploying troops. There was great concern about the political impact of casualties. The sense was that we could only fight a short war, at best a few days. After that a few casualties would shut us down politically. So there was great concern about being bogged down. 9/ll changed that to a large degree. But in '90s we were much more risk-averse.

Q: What was the attitude toward the Clinton administration?

GREENLEE: In terms of the attitude toward President Clinton, I never detected any concern or disrespect or anything like that. There was concern about the lack of military experience in the congress. The number of members of congress with military experience was declining. There were fewer and fewer people who understood military culture. This had implications for funding and support. There was a lot of worry about the budget.

But the army budget, even with the Clinton administration cuts, was still substantial. I think then it was about $65 billion. To put that in perspective, the GDP of Chile when I was there was about a third of that amount.

Q. What happened with you next?

After I had been POLAD at the Pentagon for a few months, I bumped into Bob Pelletreau in a corridor at State. He was in the front office of the near east bureau. He asked what I was doing and I told him. I said I would like to come back to NEA at some point, but didn't ask for a job. We just talked. Some weeks later, though, in April of 1996, I got a call from Dennis Ross's office. Ross was the Middle East peace process coordinator. He worked directly for Warren Christopher, the secretary of state. He wanted to see me right away.

I went to see him. He was joined by a deputy assistant secretary from NEA. The two of them, but mainly Dennis, said they needed someone to represent the U.S. in a monitoring group that was being established in an effort to reduce civilian casualties in the cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah. This was triggered by a tragic incident in which the Israelis shelled a Palestinian refugee camp, killing many innocent civilians.

Following an international outcry, the secretary of state and his French counterpart, I think it was Hubert Vï¿½drine, got together. The question was how to induce greater responsibility on the part of the fighters-so that civilians wouldn't so often be caught in the cross-fire. What emerged was something called the 1996 "understanding." It involved Israel, Lebanon, Syria, France, and the United States, but it was not between Syria and Israel or between Lebanon and Syria or Lebanon and Israel, but rather an understanding between each of those entities and the U.S. and France. The essence was that it should not be within the scope of the conflict, the daily fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, to endanger civilian lives. But how do you enforce such a thing? How do you give it substance?

Somebody came up with the idea of a monitoring group. The French later said it was their idea. Anyway, it was decided that a group consisting of parties to the understanding should monitor complaints that could be submitted by Lebanon or Israel. It was also decided that the monitoring group would be chaired by the U.S. and France on a rotating basis.

The Israelis insisted that the U.S. and French delegations had to set up close to the region and be ready to deploy quickly. Rome was considered, but Cyprus emerged as the preferred venue.

Ross asked whether I would agree to head the U.S. delegation for a year. It would be a TDY tour away from Washington and, because of the logistics of the thing, without family. The sweetener was that I would have ambassador rank. I talked it over with my wife. I saw it as an important career option, and my wife reluctantly agreed. So I said yes.

Then the question was how to deal with my commitment to the army. I felt very bad about this. I went to see Reimer. I said, "I didn't seek this job, but this is the kind of thing I have been trained to do." He said he understood, but I told him I didn't feel good about it. I went back to Ross and urged him to ask Christopher to speak with Reimer. They saw each other at an event a few days later, and Reimer told me Christopher had thanked him for letting me go. Then I felt okay. It was a clean break.

I went back to State and sat in on the negotiations to establish the guidelines for the group. The French were represented by Ross's counterpart, actually the equivalent of our NEA assistant secretary. The Israelis, French and Lebanese were represented by their ambassadors. We sat at a big table at the State Department for a few days.

The Syrians had a particular way that they want this thing to run, and it didn't have to do with diplomats. It had to do with the military. They said it should be a military committee, not a diplomatic committee. Heads nodded, but we and the French went our own way. For us it was diplomatic. For the Syrians and Lebanese it was military. For the Israelis, it was a bit of both.

So the monitoring group was established, at least in principle. It was decided that our delegation and the French delegation would work out of our respective embassies in Nicosia. We would meet to respond to complaints of violations at the UNIFIL base in Naqura, Lebanon, a few miles north of the Israeli border town of Rosh Ha-Niqra. It was decided that we should meet immediately upon receipt of a complaint and determine responsibility for any civilian casualties.

The task seemed impossible. We had to decide, not by consensus, but by "unanimity," a stronger term, on which side should bear the blame for civilian casualties or other damage. But the fighting would go on. There was no mandate to try to curb fighter-on-fighter violence. That could and would rage on. Why would an Israeli representative say, "Yes, we're responsible," or why would the Lebanese, on behalf of Hezbollah, say they did it? But these were our marching orders.

I thought a lot about this. I felt there was some way we could do something. I remember Ross saying at the last meeting in Washington that the Monitoring Group would only work if there was the will for it to work. "If the parties want to get to the bottom of an incident, they will. If not, they won't."

Q: They were trying to kill each other.

GREENLEE: That's right. But this was the idea. The first thing I had to do was get together a delegation, a team. Time was short. I immediately tapped Ted Feifer, who was married to an Israeli and wanted to go. I made him my deputy. Ted knew the terrain well, and I valued his experience.

Then I had to get a military guy to help with the negotiations and for military expertise. We wanted a retired brigadier or major general. After looking around a bit, I found retired Brigadier General James Wilson. He was a good guy, easy-going, and very competent. We had to have a technical component. We got a couple of area analysts and a couple of "bang and burn" guys-technical experts. So we had negotiators, technical experts and reporters. We drew on Embassy Tel Aviv for security personnel. I was given a generous budget to defray the cost of vehicles, local staff and transportation. We hired helicopters, for example, and at one point we chartered a plane to get to where we had to go within the short timeframe stipulated by the agreement that set up the monitoring group.

We had our own component in Embassy Cyprus. I was getting ambassador rank or going to get it. It was a potentially awkward situation in Cyprus. I had a big independent budget, was pending ambassador rank, while working at an embassy that had an ambassador. This was Ken Brill, a guy I knew from my days in NEA. We were establishing ourselves at his embassy with our own staff, but using his embassy's space and administrative resources. Fortunately, Ken understood how we could fit in, and we tried to be unobtrusive guests. So it worked well.

Q; Were the French duplicating what you had?

GREENLEE: No. This is where I really began to understand what we from the U.S. could do and really no one else could do. The French had an ambassador. They had a secretary. They had a military guy, a senior colonel. They had security people. They set up. But they didn't have what we had.

I had met my counterpart in Washington, but hadn't had a chance to talk with him. To get started in Cyprus, I invited him for coffee at my hotel, the Forum. He was quite formal at first, with a suit and tie. But we got quickly to a first-name basis. I invited him to our embassy to meet our people and see the equipment, the technical equipment, we brought with us. We showed them the cameras we had. We showed them our high-end laptops and other stuff. I think they were impressed.

Q: Some of this technology would be the tracing where shells came from and that sort of thing.

GREENLEE: Yes, we in theory we could do more than we had to do. We didn't want to rely on technology that we couldn't share. So we ended up being more low-tech than I had at first thought we would be. The monitoring group ultimately depended on political not technical resources.

As first chair-it would rotate after six months-I decided, I think on Ted's advice, that we should have an initial administrative meeting in Naqura. We needed to exchange information on how the parties could contact us in Cyprus, how they should file their complaints. We needed to test the logistics, how to get to Naqura. We needed to meet the UNIFIL commander and see whether the space would be adequate. The French went along with this. I think they weren't quite sure it was a good idea to meet in the absence of a complaint, but they agreed, finally, and so I convoke the meeting through our embassies in Tel Aviv, Beirut and Damascus.

The first issue was how to get to Naqura, in south Lebanon, when there was fighting going on. The French, as a matter of principle-and since they were basically Lebanon's perceived ally at the table-made it a point to enter from Beirut. They would get picked up by a UNIFIL helicopter and flown in. We entered always from Israel. Three or four of us would fly in by private helicopter. We had a charter arrangement with a private firm. Our pilots, though, were Israel Air Force reservists and could talk their way through the Israeli controlled airspace between the Israeli border and the UNIFIL base. The remainder of our team, including our security, would pass through the Israeli border and drive in armored vehicles a short distance to the base on a relatively safe road. The Lebanese and Syrian representatives drove in from the opposite direction.

Q: When did you have that first meeting?

GREENLEE: It was in June or early July, 1996. We gathered in Naqura. The UNIFIL commander was a Polish army general. He had the UN rank of under secretary general. He was a good host. He was very proud, deservedly so, of having set up a good room, with a large circular table, where we could meet. He let us do our work but afterward wanted a general brief on what we did. The French and we would do that together, but we did not get into detail. I imagine the UNIFIL commander's reports to New York were not much beyond what he could glean from our public communiquï¿½s. The UN was not involved in our work. It simply provided the venue.

Q: Was this deliberate, this keeping the UN out?

GREENLEE: Yes, it was deliberate. The Israelis didn't want them in.

Q: The Israelis got bitten in the Six Day War.

GREENLEE: They never trust the UN, although there are UN deployments all around them. These are to the north, on the ceasefire line with Syria, and in south Lebanon. But in the Sinai, after the experience of the Six Day War in 1967-when the UN pulled out after Nasser's saber rattling-the Israelis insisted on a special multi-national observer force, basically an independent international organization.

So, anyway, in Naqura the UN was not part of the meetings. Its role was strictly logistical. But the Polish general was always very curious about what we were doing. Our marching orders were to be discreet about meetings.

The first session in Naqura was stiff and formal. We didn't know each other and the political barriers were high and strong-and would remain so. The Lebanese and the Syrians were wary at being at the same table as the Israelis. It was a great big round table. The Chair-I was the first Chair-was at twelve o'clock on the table. The four delegations were deployed around the table, with the Lebanese and Syrians at the far end from the Chair.

At that first meeting we reached agreement on procedures. If there was a claim of violation of the understanding, who would be alerted? The Chair had to be alerted. For the first six months it would be the U.S. We provided fax and cell phone numbers, and we exchanged cell phone numbers-with the Israelis giving theirs only to us and the French. The idea was if there was an incident, the Israeli or the Lebanese side could claim a violation. The Chair would then notify the parties and convene a meeting as soon as feasible. All sides had to be available 24 hours a day, 24/7, and be ready to travel to Naqura.

There was a lot of curiosity on the outside about what we were doing. So we, the Americans, decided that there should be a communiquï¿½. Right away the Syrians, backed by the Lebanese, and even the French, said, "Why do we need a communiquï¿½?" We said, "Look, we've had a meeting. We're going to have to learn how to work together, and it would be useful to say that we met and agreed on at least our procedures by unanimity." So we agreed on some basic language and sent it to our capitals. The State Department spokesman issued it to the press-our first "success."

What we established was the principle that we should issue a public communiquï¿½ after each time we met. The communiquï¿½ would force us to find language we could agree on. This would guarantee a modicum of cohesion and focus. It might be that we couldn't achieve our mandate to get to the bottom of an incident, but we could agree on how to describe accurately the differing positions, and that in itself could have a calming impact. The people affected would know that there was an effort to come to terms, in a multilateral venue, with what had happened.

The instructions we were given were unworkable. Everyone knew that. You were never going to get the Israelis or the Lebanese to say, "Yes, our side was responsible for violating the understanding." But we could get agreement on things that bore directly on responsibility. This would let the Lebanese or Israelis draw the inference publicly that the communiquï¿½ in a given instance supported their claim.

After this first meeting we returned to our bases. Within two weeks or so, there was a claim of a violation. I can't remember whether it was the Lebanese or Israelis who called it, but I think it was the Lebanese. Anyway, this led to our first real meeting. We began to learn what our group was really about. We were trapped there in south Lebanon around the table, trying to figure out who was responsible. Either that time or a little later we actually had a field inspection. Our military representative, retired Brigadier General Jim Wilson, and his French counterpart traveled under Lebanese protection to a village that that been clipped by Israeli artillery fired at a Hezbollah position behind it.

Q: This was going out to the site...

GREENLEE: Right. It was quite dangerous for Jim and a couple of our guys who went with him. There was a lot of hostility. We didn't have field inspections after that. Exhibits, like fragments of side bombs, were brought to Naqura and we looked at them there. Most of the violations were called by the Lebanese, but the Israelis also made claims. There was a tendency on both sides to make tit-for-tat claims-basically competing claims over the same incident. One side would say it was provoked by the other side and that therefore the side that started the incident was responsible for what happened afterward, the impact on the civilian population.

Slowly, and this took a long time, we found ways to reach agreement on the contours of an incident. For example, there might have been an Israeli patrol moving through a particular area. There might be a "side bomb" attack by Hezbollah, killing a couple of Israeli soldiers. Then the Israelis would react. You could get agreement on that, the facts up to there. But if an Israeli shell aimed over a town did not have enough elevation to clear the town and, in fact, hit a house or injured Lebanese citizens of the town-that was potentially a violation of the understanding. But the Israelis would say Hezbollah bore responsibility for hiding behind the town, using it as cover. They would say, "We were attacked, and we were reacting to the attack, so we're not responsible for what happened to the town. The responsibility lies with the people who attacked us."

That argumentation led nowhere and threatened to make a mockery of what we were trying to do. But eventually we had a break-through. The Israelis would not concede responsibility for violating the understanding, but did at one point acknowledge responsibility for the "manner" in which they conducted their firing mission. They reached the point where they also would express "sorrow" for civilian injuries or deaths-but not responsibility for them. There was also some flexibility on the Lebanese side, although not quite as much. We learned over time to produce not just balanced communiquï¿½s but ones with a little bite here or there. But it was a slow, tough process.

There were three kinds of communications that came out of each of these meetings. One was a record of the negotiation that was available to all involved. That was done by the Chair. The language was English. It was a pretty raw account of the back-and-forth. It was not polished or even grammatical, particularly when the French had the Chair. It was for internal consumption only. It was not subject to review, really. It would run around five or six or seven pages close-spaced.

Then there were the reports that would be written individually by the parties, the private accounts of record. I sent a cable after each session, usually one I wrote myself, giving the flavor and dynamics of the discussions. Finally, there was the communiquï¿½ -the real product of the talks. This is what was available to the public, and what mattered most. The communiquï¿½ was what the negotiations were about.

Q: You referred to an incident that began with a side-bomb attack.

GREENLEE: They called them side bombs, but they were what today are called IED's, improvised explosive devices, on the side of the road. In many cases they were quite sophisticated. They were disguised as rocks or pieces of the landscape. You would have to kick them to see if they were real. At least that's how the Israelis made them-not improvised in that sense.

The negotiations were always protracted, always contentious and difficult. They lasted sometimes 48 hours without stop-there was no place to sleep except head down on the table. People would nod off. We would break to get something to eat, and then go back. We ran ourselves past the point of exhaustion.

Sometimes we had problems, not large ones, with the French side. They did not understand their role quite the way we understood ours. They acted at times as if they were surrogates for the Lebanese, the role they assumed we played for the Israelis. In one of the early negotiations we were about to close on pretty difficult language. We had a pretty good draft communiquï¿½. The Syrians were accepting it, the Lebanese were accepting it, the Israelis were accepting it, and we thought it was a wrap. But then the French guy said, "Wait a second. This doesn't really describe what happened from the Lebanese point of view well enough." We thought, "What's going on here?" If the Lebanese will accept it, the Syrians will accept it, who are the French to open up the Lebanese side?

It almost exploded the meeting. The Lebanese said, "Yeah! Yeah! That's right!" I think it cost another 12 hours of negotiating. I don't remember how I talked to the French about it afterward, but I told them, basically, "These guys agreed. Who are we to get involved?" It was always the problem with the French. Also, when they had the Chair, on at least one occasion they had trouble closing the meeting. We had to come in and help.

Q: A couple of questions on the dynamics on this. First, talk about the French. Did you have the feeling that they were getting close supervision from their government, or not?

GREENLEE: I think they had closer supervision than we did. I was given very free rein in these meetings. Dennis Ross was busy with the peace process, but we had quiet support all the way. I would call in after each meeting. I would talk to Martin Indyk, ambassador to Israel, and I would talk to NEA. I think I talked to Dennis directly after the first meeting. Basically, I talked to Aaron Miller, in Dennis Ross's shop, and to NEA, as well as to the embassy in Tel Aviv. I would call in on the helicopter coming back from Naqura, and describe what happened. What happened over time was that the fighting didn't stop, but the impact on the civilian population lessened.

I think both sides began to see our group as a success, and an unexpected success, in the sense that it was a forum where people on opposing sides of a nasty, protracted conflict could talk. But we could talk only about the specific elements of the conflict relating to our mandate. We couldn't and didn't stray out of that lane. The Syrians and Lebanese particularly were wary about that.

There was also, for me, a high amount of autonomy. I could visit Lebanon or Syria, as well as Israel, in my particular role as Chair of the Monitoring Group. I sometimes didn't clear my travel as much as I should have with NEA, although of course I always got country clearance from the embassies. I tended to be more operational in that respect than NEA wanted me to be. I had meetings at the highest level with the Lebanese, with the president, prime minister and army chief, and with the foreign minister in Syria. In Israel I would meet with Uri Lubrani, the defense ministry guru for Lebanon, and people in the foreign ministry.

Once we drove by convoy from Beirut, through the Bekaa Valley, to Damascus. It took about five hours. We always made sure that the Israelis knew we were on the road, or in the air when we flew in from Cyprus by helicopter, so they wouldn't attack us. Once we flew directly to Damascus on an old Syrianair DC 9 with broken seat backs. Our military representative, Jim Wilson, was held up at the airport because another guy with the same name had done something the Syrians didn't like in the 1970s. His name was in their computer and it took a long time for the foreign ministry to clear us in. The Syrian security was cumbersome, to say the least. I look at it more objectively after experiencing our own system after 9/11.

In Damascus we were always followed by the Syrian mukhabarat, the secret police. They were described to us as being from protocol. They actually were quite helpful. Once I bought a rug in the souk, the market. These guys I hadn't noticed picked up the bundle and said they would take it back to the hotel. I was with one or two others from the Monitoring Group. I asked if they would give us a ride back instead of a taxi. They said, sure. We got into an old Peugeot station wagon. In the rear were three or four AK 47's. It was kind of spooky.

During this second visit to Damascus there was a claim of a violation of the "understanding" and we had to get to Naqura quickly. For security reasons we always went through Tel Aviv. So instead of returning to Cyprus, which would have delayed us a lot, we drove, that is, we were driven, from Damascus to Jordan, and from there, to Israel. This involved cars from our embassies in Syria, Jordan and Israel, and took about five hours, with obligatory breaks for tea with security officials at the Syrian and Jordanian border crossings. It was a privileged trip, and a reminder for me about how geographically close everything was.

Being based in Cyprus was quite a strain for those of us coming out of Washington. It was difficult to get back, since I was always on call. My wife was in Bethesda with our youngest daughter, who was still in high school. The separation was difficult, and I tried to get back when I could. The flight was long, and the more so because we had to take the cheapest route. One time, after 18 or 19 hours, I arrived at Dulles Airport. I was met by my wife and one of my daughters. They had a message that I should call immediately the State Department. It turned out that there had been a claim of violation and I had to return immediately.

Q: Oh, God.

GREENLEE: At the Department they said, "Don't worry. We've arranged tickets and everything else." After not sleeping for 19 hours, I had four hours to pick up my ticket and go to National Airport for a flight to New York, and then wait a couple of hours for a direct flight, on TWA, to Tel Aviv. At the Department, I said, "OK. I haven't slept for 19 hours, I've got another 15 hours ahead of me on planes. I'll get to Tel Aviv, and I'll have to get on a helicopter to go and negotiate with 48 hours without sleep. How about business class?" NEA said "No." I thought, "This is nuts." I later heard that they felt sorry about the decision, but that was the budgetary environment we had.

Q: With Lebanon acting as the surrogate for the Hezbollah, how much connection did the government of Lebanon have with Hezbollah?

GREENLEE: Hezbollah was a government unto itself in South Lebanon. Hezbollah provided hospital services, health services, and social welfare services that the Lebanese government couldn't provide. I remember the Lebanese diplomatic representative, who was an ambassador and later became ambassador to the U.S., expressing his admiration for Hezbollah as a service provider. And this guy was a Christian, with a lot to lose if Hezbollah took over the government.

The main thing was that the Lebanese saw that the Lebanese army couldn't stand up to Israel and left it to Hezbollah to carry the fight against occupation. What the Israelis always wanted was for the Lebanese army to replace Hezbollah in south Lebanon. They wanted to deal with the government. They wanted to deal with the army. They didn't want to deal with Hezbollah, which had no formal standing or accountability. That was always a sub-text in the discussions.

The Lebanese army colonel, a guy named Tufali, was from south Lebanon and was a member of a clan that was prominent in the anti-Israeli resistance. He was not connected to Hezbollah, at least not directly, but to another group. He and the Syrians would meet with Hezbollah to formulate their complaints or responses to Israeli complaints. Tufali always purported to speak for Lebanon but in essence he was the Hezbollah advocate, as were the Syrians. It was all pretty complicated. The Israelis would work with the so-called Army of south Lebanon, which was a surrogate force. The army of south Lebanon, the SLA, wasn't recognized by Lebanon. They were a pretty nasty bunch. They would shell Hezbollah positions and other rival Lebanese groups and the Israelis at times would draw on their input in the Naqura talks.

There was one violation that was claimed against Israel that involved these guys. During the talks the Lebanese produced a tape in Arabic that they said proved the SLA was shelling a civilian area. According to the translation of the tape, which we had corroborated by U.S. translators, these SLA guys were threatening between shellings to "screw" the sisters of the Lebanese on the receiving end. The Lebanese negotiators were quite proud of the recording, their proof, so to speak. The Israelis had initially claimed nothing had happened, but had to back down when the tape was verified.

Q As I have watched this over the years, and the Israelis, of course, have spent a lot of their time hitting civilian targets because the people they are fighting disperse within the civilian population, and the Israelis... I never heard the Israeli army admit error. How did you find them?

GREENLEE: The Middle East is a hard place and the Israelis, Syrians and Lebanese are hard people. Very hard. I think that if you had to put them into an historical context that we could understand, it would be shaped by lex talionis, the law of the talon. If something happened to one side, you could count on a response from the other side. The retaliation would not be proportional all the time, but there was that sense about it, an eye for an eye. What was it Mohammed Ali said when he was still called Cassius Clay? "If you mess with my dog, you better keep your cat inside." It was like that. You could count on retaliation.

In the Naqura talks, the negotiators on both sides were very tough. They got to be pretty histrionic sometimes, but basically they understood the game, and understood it more viscerally than we did-and certainly more than the French did. The Israelis, I think, had a more modern ethical standard-although I am sure the Lebanese would dispute that. If the Monitoring Group achieved anything, it was to shine a light on what happened in a given circumstance and to remind the Israelis and Arab side alike of the need for a standard of conduct in warfare, a need for discipline in the use of explosives and arms.

Q.The Israelis responded tit for tat. Did that mean proportionate?

GREENLEE: If someone slaps you in the face, do you slap them back with the same amount of force? Is that proportionate? Or is it proportionate when you have to use just enough force to prevent being slapped again? That seemed to be the Israeli logic. The Israelis developed a significant and overwhelming military capability. During the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when I was still serving in Tel Aviv, that was evident. The Israelis destroyed about 90 Syrian jets, with the loss of only one plane, to ground fire, on their side. Their technological edge was overwhelming.

But when they started being bled by Hezbollah resistance fighters the balance began to shift. The Israelis don't want to take casualties. Any casualty is a national concern. Israel is a small, tight community, as much as a nation. Funerals of fallen soldiers are covered nationally. The impact of asymmetrical warfare began to weigh on the country. That is what we could see reflected in the Monitoring Group talks. It wasn't easy to occupy south Lebanon.

Q: What was the rationale for putting Syria into the Monitoring Group?

GREENLEE: Syria was very involved Lebanon. It was hard to distinguish where Lebanese sovereignty began and Syrian influence ended. When I visited Beirut we would travel to meetings in a twenty-vehicle motorcade with guys manning machine guns mounted on vehicle tops. We would go through various militia checkpoints, but also through Syrian army checkpoints. The Syrian army was there, with the Syrian flag. The Syrians were physically present in Lebanon. The Lebanese government couldn't kick them out, and many of the Lebanese saw them as a stabilizing force.

The Lebanese would complain about the Syrians, but they would have to deal with them. The Syrians had a view of Lebanon as part of Greater Syria, and the Lebanese had little choice in the matter. So it was natural to have Syrian representation in the Monitoring Group-and not least because Syria was the conduit for Hezbollah's weapons supply from Iran. Formally, the Lebanese, not the Syrians, had responsibility for bringing complaints under the terms of the Understanding. But the Syrians had a strong and at times preponderant role in the Naqura talks. That was a part of the dynamics of negotiations. When the Syrian general decided it was time to close on a point, or to stall, he could step in and dictate the Lebanese position. He was usually discreet about this, but not always. I remember one time when he cut the Lebanese off in a way that was chilling-but that allowed us to break an impasse.

Q.Did you feel the Syrians had control over Hezbollah?

GREENLEE: They had more influence over Hezbollah than the Lebanese, and they had control to the extent that they could stop the supply of weaponry. They would never admit that, but it was clear that they could exert a lot of influence if they wanted to. Basically, Hezbollah, acting in its own interests, also furthered Syrian and Iranian interests.

Q: Was there an Iranian hand in there that was discernible or not?

GREENLEE: Not by me and not in the talks, but it was presumed. I am not sure to what extent there might have been Iranian involvement in Hezbollah tactics or targeting. I had no sense of that.

Q: Did you ever sit down with your French colleague and shake your joint heads over the Middle Easterners?

GREENLEE: To some extent, sure. We had a good relationship with the French. We exchanged lunches and dinners. I think we were a lot looser and more optimistic about what we could accomplish. We would say, "Let's try this or let's try that." The French were more cautious and more interested in their image. They wanted credit for things. When we started to succeed, the French president, Chirac, claimed credit for the concept of the Monitoring Group-"une idï¿½e Franï¿½aise." We wanted recognition for our role, but not credit, and certainly not personal credit. I think the French were more image-conscious, at least within our group.

Q: You were doing this how long?

GREENLEE: I did it for a year and about a month.

Q: How did you find it when the French had the chair?

GREENLEE: We volunteered to help the French with the non-public raw reports of the talks, but they insisted on doing it alone. As a result the English was pretty screwed up, and after a while we stopped trying to edit it. If those reports ever seep out, they will seem amateurish. But that didn't matter. In the talks the French were competent, but once in a while there would be a stalemate, and they would act like, "Okay, this is over. The meeting is blowing up and nothing can be done." It would be left to us to say, "Wait a second, let's cool off and try another tack."

Once when I was Chair, we hit a serious impasse and the Lebanese and the Syrians said they wanted to leave the talks. I said, "No, we have to make this work." They insisted they would leave. So I talked to the Polish general. I asked him about the helicopter arrangement for the Lebanese and Syrians. He said, "The Irish pilots tell us that if they don't fly within the next 45 minutes, they'll have to rest, and they won't be able to fly for 12 hours." I went back to the meeting and stalled the talks for 45 minutes. The Lebanese guy finally said, "OK, now we're leaving." But he didn't get far. The pilots were on bed-rest. He went back to the table, and finally we worked things out. I don't think the French would have stalled to keep the Lebanese from leaving. They would have seen that as too manipulative.

Q: By the time you left, what did you feel your group had accomplished?

GREENLEE: Well, we beat the odds and put something together that worked. We had the advantage of low expectations. Few thought the Monitoring Group would survive the first couple of meetings. But we survived and our talks and communiquï¿½s had a settling effect on the conflict, or at least the fallout from the conflict. The fighting, of course, went on, and eventually, in about another three years, the Israelis pulled out of south Lebanon, and the Group dissolved. But the Group continued after I left and prospered on the narrow basis on which it was conceived.

Toward the end of my one-year stint, I began to focus on what I would do next and to work with NEA on who would replace me. A qualified person who was interested was Joe Sullivan. He had Middle East experience and was then the Special Haiti Coordinator. We ended up swapping jobs.

Q: Let's talk about Haiti. Let's start in 1492... [laughter] Okay, let's move up a little. What was the situation in Haiti in the summer of '97, when you started as special Haiti coordinator? Had Haiti ever crossed your radar before? What was the situation?

GREENLEE: No, it was not on my radar, I had not thought about Haiti in any way. I was enticed to the job by Joe Sullivan. When we were talking about the Monitoring Group, Joe mentioned the Haiti job, and suggested I would be a good fit for it. I said I didn't really have anything else going on. I thought it might be an interesting policy job. I said I'd like to be considered for it.

I had a brief interview with Strobe Talbot. Strobe, the deputy secretary of state, was in effect the Clinton Administration's action officer for Haiti. Haiti was that important in domestic political terms. The issues were so fraught with politics that there had been initially a "seventh floor" special coordinator, a person detached from the regional bureau and reporting directly to the top level of the State Department. That person was Jim Dobbins. Dobbins became a lightning rod for critics of our Haiti policy in the congress. He took the big hits, enabling WHA, which was called the American Republics Area bureau, or ARA, at the time, to stay clear of most of turbulence. He had the clout to go to the Hill and to lead the coordination of our actions with the White House and the different departments of government. Dobbins wasn't the first in that role, but his successor, Joe Sullivan, whom I replaced, operated a notch down, within the WHA (ARA) bureau.

That special coordinator job was needed to bring together the various parts of our government involved in assisting Haiti and to coordinate with other governments, as well.

Q: The troops were already in.

GREENLEE: The troops were in, and had been in since September of 1994. They were established at a camp at the edge of the airport in Port-au-Prince.

When I became special coordinator, Jean Bertrand Aristide was no longer president. He had been the democratically elected president, a demagogic leader whom we never had much faith in. After being deposed in a military coup, he hung out in the U.S. He was restored to office, for the remainder of his term, by the U.S. invasion, but he couldn't succeed himself. Rene Preval, a protï¿½gï¿½ of Aristide, was elected president. He was there when I became the special coordinator. Preval was a very weak president. (He is now president of Haiti again, and seemingly stronger. But in those days he was under Aristide's thumb. With Aristide once again in exile he has the latitude to be independent. But that wasn't the case in 1997.) As head of the Lavalas political movement, Aristide retained the real power. He controlled things from his residence in an area adjacent to Port-au-Prince called Tabarre.

The political situation was tricky in the U.S. for the Clinton administration, but it was no less complicated in Haiti. The opposition to Lavalas was shattered and under constant pressure. The Clinton administration-the Democrats-had scored a large political success with the invasion of Haiti and the restoration of democracy. But institutionalizing democracy was another matter, and by the time I became involved, the administration's boasting had turned sour, and the Republicans attacked relentlessly, often scurrilously. The special coordinator increasingly had to carry policy water for the administration and to defend aspects of our Haiti posture that did not have bipartisan support. And as the situation in Haiti deteriorated, the Republicans sharpened their political attacks.

Q: We're talking about a Republican- dominated senate and house of representatives.

GREENLEE: Right. The dialogue, if we could call it that, between the administration and the Republicans was very nasty.

Q: Again, a feel for the times. Looking back over periods, certainly in the post-war period, I don't think things have ever been as bad between Republicans and Democrats as at this particular time.

GREENLEE: That's right. What I didn't know coming into the job was that I would be meat for the grinder. I thought that if I went to the congress and requested more or continued funding for human rights or police training, I would get a respectful hearing. I might get turned down, but I didn't know I would be attacked.

I thought the congress, or the staffers in particular, would look at me as a State Department professional making a case in an objective way-not as a political representative of the Clinton administration trying to justify something that wasn't working. I was very wrong about that. There were things I didn't understand about how the congress works. When I interviewed for the job with Strobe, I said, "It's a real challenge but I don't know how doable Haiti is," meaning it was unclear to me whether Haiti could be pulled out of the problems it had. Strobe said, "I don't know what you mean by that," or something to that effect. He was probably thinking you really have to be committed to the effort and believe it's going to turn out right-otherwise you're not going to have the energy you need. I assured him that I could do everything that anybody could do to try to make it work. I said, "I'm an idealistic person. I'm a former Peace Corps volunteer. I want to see Haiti move forward. I just mean that the situation seems really complicated." We went forward from there.

Q: I want to get a wiring diagram. Strobe Talbot was the deputy secretary. Were you, as the Haiti coordinator, directly linked to him, or was there a level between?"

GREENLEE: The job evolved a bit. Up until my predecessor, Joe Sullivan, the special Haiti coordinator had been a seventh floor position, reporting directly to the top tier of the department. When my predecessor took the job, it went down to the sixth floor.

Q: Which is where the regional bureaus are.

GREENLEE: Correct. Where the assistant secretaries of state have their offices. And in the complex of offices around the assistant secretary of state, the special Haiti coordinator was treated as the equivalent of a deputy assistant secretary. That's the position I inherited. Key players were still around. Jim Dobbins, who had been the special Haiti coordinator, was over at the White House. He was the senior director for Latin America and special assistant to the president.

Q: I'm trying to get the background here. Dobbins has been controversial. As you saw at the time, what was the problem?

GREENLEE: Dobbins is a very smart guy who had clear ideas about what needed to be done-and a kind of take-no-prisoners approach to getting things done. The Republicans didn't like him. Before I came aboard and when he was special coordinator-this was a full year at least before I came into the job-Jim had testified before congress, and he was asked, I believe, about whether we had information about an assassination plot or something of the sort. Jim apparently dodged the question in such a way that some accused him of lying. That became a big issue and later blocked his chance to become ambassador to Argentina. It became quite a public and messy thing-above the fold on the front page of the New York Times, as I recall.

Jim was burned on that. Others dealing with Haiti were also bruised, but less so. Strobe had testified at some point on Haiti and had also been beaten up pretty badly. Others at the policy level had also had a rough time with congress. Anyway, I settled into the job and found I had access to Strobe and on a couple of occasions even to Sandy Berger.

Q: He was at that time...

GREENLEE: He was the national security advisor. Once, after I had been Haiti coordinator for a while, I was interviewing for a job at the NSC that finally went to someone else. I was alone with him in his office. He pointed to a picture behind his desk, a photograph at the airport in Port au Prince of Aristide behind a glass shield, giving a speech, after he had been returned to Haiti. There was a group of officials, including Berger, around him, and flags and so forth. Berger said, "This is the high point of my tenure here. This is it." That reinforced what I already knew-that the Haiti "success" had to stick.

Q: But a career minefield.

GREENLEE: Absolutely, that's what it turned out to be.

Q. Reporting arrangements?

GREENLEE: The assistant secretary was Jeff Davidow. Jeff was a savvy, smart politically astute and user-friendly guy. He's now the director of the Institute of the Americas, in La Jolla, California. Jeff was a former ambassador to Venezuela. After he left being assistant secretary, he went to Mexico as ambassador. Jeff knew his way around. He was my boss, but he gave me a free rein.

One time, when Preval was looking for a new prime minister, there was a Haitian at the Inter-American Development Bank who was rumored to be a good candidate for the job. This was early on, when I had just started as coordinator. At Jeff's suggestion, we went over to see him. We met this guy in his little cubicle. He was like a mid-level official. He told us what he would do if he took the job, how he wouldn't bend to any political pressure. He didn't seem to be in tune with the realities of the job, or the place, and ultimately he bowed out. In any case, after we were done talking, Jeff said to me, "Why don't you do a note to Strobe?" That again rammed home the importance of the Haiti account to the administration.

So I did a one-paragraph note saying we met this guy, he didn't inspire much confidence, but we met him. I gave the note to Jeff, and I think he made one little change in the first sentence. Then we passed it up to Strobe, and Strobe passed something back saying thanks, with a comment in the margin. Then something else came up, and there was need for another note. Jeff didn't want to be bothered by these things too much. Normally, if you wrote a memo or note to a seventh floor principal, there was a whole clearance process. It is an institutional thing. But Jeff suggested I just write an informal note and drop him a copy-no vetting, no clearance. This is what I did, and it became routine.

Once in a while we would do an information memorandum for the system which would be a page or page and a half and have all the appropriate clearances. It would go to the secretary and be distributed widely. All the principals would get it. Those notes tended to be homogenized. Any edge on a policy issue would be ground down. They had the virtue of being balanced, but also the drawback of not saying much.

Q: That's the problem of the bureaucracy.

GREENLEE: Yes, but the notes that I did for Strobe were different in that they were my impressions. After visiting Haiti or meeting with people on the Hill, I would drop him and Jeff a note. He would usually send me a note back-something he wanted to know more about, for example. He would ask more questions or write, "I faxed it over to Sandy, and he's also interested." This was different from what I was used to and I was careful not to abuse my access. I kept Jeff closely informed. Later, when Jeff left the job, I had the same arrangement with Pete Romero who succeeded Jeff, and Pete was comfortable with it. It did get to be a little bit more complicated with Pete. He wanted more influence over our policy, but the play was at a higher level.

Q: You did this from '97 to...

GREENLEE: I did it until late 1999, for a couple of years. During the last year I began to get more invested in the policy, and more of a player myself. I had been working closely with Jim Dobbins, at the NSC. At one point he became quite worried about the direction and increasing drift of our policy, and the way it was being implemented. He wanted someone involved, beyond the embassy, who could engage the Haitians at a credible policy level, as a White House representative. He said to me at one point, "I think I'll try to see whether Tony Lake would be interested in doing this." Tony was interested. Then Tony and I started working closely together.

Q: Tony Lake at that point was...

GREENLEE: He was the former national security advisor. Sandy Berger had been his deputy. In the second Clinton administration, Berger stepped up to be the security advisor, and Tony Lake went off into private sector and to academia.

Q: He was teaching in Georgetown...

GREENLEE: He was teaching-and is still teaching-at Georgetown. He was also involved in a business that did simulations and things like that. He was giving speeches. He was a very busy guy. Well, Tony was passionate about Haiti. He loved Haiti and wanted our policy to succeed. He once said to me, "You know, there are only two places I would have liked to have been ambassador." I said, "Yeah? Which ones?" He said, "Port-au-Prince. I really would have liked that." I said, "What's the other place?" He said, "The Court of St. James, of course." [laughter] Tony really liked Haiti.

I had a good relationship with Tony. There was a specific crisis in Haiti we were trying to deal with. It involved the Haitian congress. The terms of the members of congress were expiring, but new members couldn't be installed because there was a problem with the election. There was a challenge to the legitimacy of the outcome of certain seats. Neither side would give way. This was in late 1998. It became a huge constitutional issue.

At bottom the problem was that Preval, backed by Aristide, wanted the mandate of the congress to lapse. They didn't want a deal that would unblock the electoral problem, or a new election that likely would have given them the seats that were being contested. The congress in any configuration was inconvenient for them. It was better for them to govern without the congress.

But for us a government without a congress was no longer fully democratic. At the same time, extending the congress with its previous incumbents was problematic-and arguably not constitutional because their mandate had run out. What we were trying to do was achieve a negotiated solution, between the governing Lavalas leadership-under the sway of Aristide-and the opposition, which was crying foul not only to us, representing the Clinton administration, but directly to members of the U.S. congress. It was a mess. So Tony Lake and I practically shuttled between Washington and Port-au-Prince. One month, for example, we went back and forth four times.

My French isn't very good. I'm not a French speaker, but I took French in college and was taking early morning French at the Department. I tried to work as much as possible in French, but, if the other guys didn't speak English, we sometimes spoke Spanish. It turned out that some of these Haitian politicians had hung out in their youth in brothels filled with women from the Dominican Republic. They spoke fluid, pretty gritty Spanish. [laughter] So we used Spanish, English, French, and they spoke among themselves in Creole.

I was very much the junior person, but Tony relied on me, and I enjoyed the give-and-take. In some sense we were a problem for the embassy, because we would come parachuting in and do work that some would have said the embassy ought to do. But it's the kind of thing that happens in policy hotspots-in the Middle East, or Bosnia, at the time, for example.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

GREENLEE: At first it was Bill Swing. He was the quintessential Haiti ambassador. Then he moved on, and by the time Tony Lake got involved, the ambassador was Tim Carney.

Swing had had experience in different parts of Africa. He spoke Lingala, for example. He had been ambassador to South Africa when Mandela became president. He loved Haiti and was committed to everything about our policy. His reward was to become ambassador to Congo-which is what he wanted. Tim Carney was a top-line diplomat. He had been ambassador to Sudan and had had a distinguished career in places like Cambodia. But he had not been involved with Haiti when our troops went in. He inherited a mess. Unlike Bill and Tony, and even me, he was not so invested in our policy.

The people in Washington involved with Haiti-I mean those in the administration-were a tight group, and Bill Swing was very much a part of that group. The group included President Clinton, Strobe, Sandy Berger and Tony Lake, Janet Reno, the attorney general, and others, members of the congressional Black Caucus such as John Conyers and Charlie Rangel. I remember Conyers saying, "You know, no matter who comes in, when Bill Swing leaves, there will be a Swing 'deficit'"-meaning it was difficult imagining anyone filling his space.

Swing touched a lot of bases, in Haiti and in Washington. He knew Aristide well, and seemed to like him. He wanted to coax him into being another Mandela, a unifier. Tony Lake was on the same track. He knew Aristide well, knew him before the invasion. He respected Aristide's intelligence and leadership ability. Tony wanted to see Aristide develop into something bigger than a partisan power player.

Q: As you're saying this, from what I gather from other people, Aristide was actually a nasty son of a bitch. It sounds a little bit like Nyerere who wasn't a son of a bitch but somebody who captivated foreigners.

GREENLEE: Well, Aristide didn't captivate foreigners so much as he captivated masses of Haitians and a few people in Washington. Aristide was a defrocked Silesian priest. He was married to a woman of Haitian descent from Queens and had a couple of little children. He was a small, thin unassuming looking man, but he was charismatic. He knew how to ignite the crowds. His base was the impoverished majority of the population. His mantra was to lift the people from misery to poverty-one rung up. He wanted his party, the Lavalas, to control the country's infrastructure. He did not court foreign investment so much as foreign aid. He wanted handouts, which he thought the world owed Haiti because Haiti was poor.

Aristide was a very smart guy. When speaking English he chose his words very carefully, very precisely. He did not "misspeak," as our politicians and even diplomats all too often do. It is something I noticed as well in the Middle East. Words matter so much that people choose them carefully. They want to make sure they make their point precisely, that they convey exactly what they want to convey. Aristide was like that. He spoke English slowly, but very well. He spoke other languages. As a Silesian, he had studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and spoke Hebrew. I understand that as an exile in South Africa today he is translating biblical texts from Hebrew.

It's hard to know the secret of Aristide, politically, but I have experienced the same sort of thing in other countries where there's a populist leader with a passionate following and a passionate opposition. The passion of the followers doesn't translate very well outside the country. Aristide was extremely manipulative and jealous of his power base. He could have implemented, or have caused to implement, certain domestic policies that would have freed considerable international aid. The aid could have been used to build dams and roads and would have helped a lot of Haitians. But Aristide wouldn't give the green light to assistance that didn't play to his political advantage. That was one of the frustrations of our policy. And ganging up on Aristide from the outside, what some of the Republicans wanted to do, would have only made him more popular inside Haiti.

This is something that was difficult to understand in Washington. Part of my job was going to Haiti to interpret Washington to the embassy, and then returning to interpret the embassy, and Haiti, to Washington. This involved, as well, going over to the congress to explain the situation in Haiti. That's where I experienced the most friction. It was the height of "gotcha" politics.

No matter what you did, you'd get trapped. For example, I'd return from a trip to Haiti and then go to the Hill to brief Republican staffers. They would ask, "Did you go to Tabarre?" In other words, "Did you go see Aristide?" Sometimes I would see Aristide; sometimes I wouldn't. If I said, "Yeah, I met with Aristide," they'd say, "Don't you understand? By seeing Aristide, you're undercutting President Preval, because Aristide wants to run the country from Tabarre. So you should only see Preval." Okay, but if I met with Preval and not Aristide, they'd say, "Why bother with Preval, when the real power is in Tabarre" - or that would be the sense of it. They wanted to do politics. All I wanted to do was policy. It got to be really nasty. I said earlier that I had this feeling-maybe because I had forgotten my high school civics lessons-that we in the executive branch were preeminent not only as implementers of policy, but as shapers of policy. From my interactions with congressional staff-and from what I saw of some of the members-I didn't have high regard for what I heard on the Hill.

I didn't fully appreciate how much the congress could tie our hands, pull us back, and how easily the members-and their staffs-could insert themselves into the minutia of policy. I didn't go to the Hill with a chip on my shoulder, but when I started to get attacked personally, I didn't react with, "Oh, yes, sir. I understand." I would hit back. It happened at really high levels.

I remember once I went to the Hill with Strobe to call on Senator Mike DeWine. He was from Ohio, as was Strobe, and they had a good relationship. DeWine was a Republican, but he supported our policy generally. He had visited Haiti several times, and had a good relationship with Tim Carney, our ambassador. DeWine wanted to see our policy work. Anyway, at this meeting DeWine was saying that we had to do this and that to convince people on the Hill about what needed to be done. I reacted to what I thought was egg-sucking advice. I said, "If it's important to all of us as a national interest, why don't you guys on the Hill do more to back us up." I reacted as if he was attacking us, this friendly senator. I wasn't sure how Strobe would react. But he said, after a pause in the exchange, "I'm fascinated by this conversation." I realized then that I had more scope than I had thought. I didn't have to play it safe.

There were incidents inside the administration, as well. One time at the NSC there was a principals' meeting on Haiti chaired by Sandy Berger-with Madeline Albright, Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen and other cabinet members. John Podesta, Clinton's chief of staff, was there. Also, General Hugh Shelton, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The issue on the table was whether to pull out our military contingent. The Defense Department saw their presence at the Port au Prince airport as no longer necessary, and the troops were needed elsewhere. But politically they were useful where they were. They underscored U.S. commitment to the changes we were trying to bring about. Berger and Dobbins clearly wanted them there. I attended the meeting as a backbencher, a resource for Secretary Albright. I didn't think I would have a chance, and didn't want a chance, to weigh in. Cohen, the defense secretary, began the substantive part of the meeting by, in a stab at humor, holding his head with both hands and saying, "Let my people go." The talk went around the table. General Shelton at one point talked about the high cost of force protection, keeping his troops safe. And then someone, I think it was Madeline Albright, asked me about usefulness of the military presence. So I took Shelton on. I said I didn't see why a relatively small number of troops couldn't provide all the force protection needed. I was way out of my lane, as they say in the military. But a decision was made that the troops should remain in Port au Prince. And both Berger and Dobbins said to me afterward, "Nice work, you spoke up to a four star." I hadn't thought of it that way.

Q: Let's talk about congress and some of the elements. One, the Black Caucus with the Aristide admirers. I suppose there are people in Florida whose representatives just didn't want Haitians there. Maybe they did. What was that about?

GREENLEE: It was complicated. There was a fault line in the congress on the Haiti issue. There were people who absolutely were committed to Aristide and didn't see any problem with him. They saw him as representative of Haitian democracy. A lot of them were in the Black Caucus. If we needed help on something, we could always get it, with unanimity, from the Black Caucus.

Q: Was it a black issue?

GREENLEE: Yes, with the Black Caucus. But there was also considerable support from others on the Democratic side of the aisle. From Bill Delahunt of Massachusetts, for example. And, as I mentioned before, to a certain extent from Senator Mike DeWine, a Republican. But mostly there was a split along party, not racial, lines.

Q: So you didn't feel this had a strong racist element?

GREENLEE: No, it was mostly in the area of partisan "gotcha" politics. The administration-the first Clinton administration-had crowed a lot about the success of the Haiti invasion and for a year or two were on the political high road. But things went bad. The Haitians couldn't find consensus. Their democracy locked up. Instead of checks and balances there were only checks. The Republicans feasted on that-they saw it as a Clinton administration failure. They weren't entirely wrong, but they were mostly wrong. It was a Haitian failure. Our failure was in thinking we could guide the Haitians, put them on a glide path to good governance and economic development.

The Republicans went after the administration in the proportion that the administration had boasted about its early success. It was very nasty by the time I got involved. If I were briefing on the Hill, I would be assaulted by the Republican side-the staffers for Senator Jesse Helms or Congressman Ben Gilman-and defended with varying degrees of bite by staffers for Senator Chris Dodd and others. I remember briefing some of the Helms staff one time and Roger Noriega, a nemesis at the time, slammed his notebook shut and walked out. We had a terrible relationship then, but he later became my boss-when he was assistant secretary for western hemisphere affairs and I was ambassador to Bolivia-and we got along very well.

Then the time came when I was tapped to testify before the full House International Relations Committee, which today is called the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Then it was the HIRC. I don't know how many were on the HIRC, over 40 members of congress, probably, with about 25 showing up for a hearing. The Republican members had delighted in going after Strobe Talbot some months earlier. They wanted Talbot to testify, and he wasn't going to do it. They wanted the under secretary for political affairs, Tom Pickering to testify. He wasn't going to do it. They said, "OK, we'll settle for Jeff Davidow," the assistant secretary. But Jeff wasn't going to do it.

Q: Can members of the administration say, "Screw you"?

GREENLEE: They don't say it quite that way. [laughter] Well, this was a policy issue, not a personal one. They could deflect and say, "We'll give you this person but not that person." This was an extraordinary cascade downhill, with me at the bottom. It was unusual to have somebody of my equivalent rank, like deputy assistant secretary, testify before the full HIRC rather than a sub committee.

Q: You say the full HIRC.

GREENLEE: I had never testified before, but I wasn't too worried, because I kept remembering that when I worked on Gaza, I didn't know as much as I wanted to know, but I knew more than others at the embassy-so I was the expert. Well, compared to the congress, I was the Haiti expert. They could challenge me, but I could challenge back. There were certain things that I was quite sure that it was impossible to convince anybody about, but I could make the argument. In fact I like to argue.

The truth, though, is that, at least at first, I wasn't taking this responsibility very seriously. About two or three days before the testimony, Jim Dobbs said, "Let's see your opening statement." In fact, I didn't write the opening statement. The opening statement was written by a good guy in our Haiti working group, John Rath, a very good writer. I presided over a working group that was like a mini-office. It had about four or five people, and they were constantly turning out things, answering letters and so forth.

John had been doing this sort of thing for a while, and he laid everything out. I looked at what he had done and made a couple of changes, and sent it over to Dobbins. He looked at and said, "OK," but indicated I would be in for a rough ride. Jim had really gotten burned by his testimony, and assured me that no matter how badly they treated me, it wouldn't be as bad as the raking over he got.

I think that was true. I found that I enjoyed the testimony. I went before the Committee and read the statement, and there was a DEA guy who also made opening remarks. It was just the two of us and about 25 Committee members, some shuffling in and out. And a CSPAN camera trained on us.

Q: The DEA is...

GREENLEE: The Drug Enforcement Administration. This guy got some questions, but the big guns were trained on me. I got a battery of questions. It turned out well, though, from my standpoint. I had the rare experience of seeing myself on CSPAN afterward and listening to myself on the radio. They played some of the stuff over and over again.

There was only one sour note afterward. I think I did well on the testimony in the sense that I turned back the Republican probes and taunts. At one point I even said to Porter Goss, who later became CIA Director, that his focus was off base. I said, "Mr. Goss, I can answer your questions, but frankly if I were writing them, I would have written them a different way." I realized later that I was being smug, but didn't at the time. Goss seemed taken aback, but didn't dress me down. He seemed embarrassed, actually. Anyway, I answered his questions, which reflected uninformed staff work on his part. It reinforced what I had learned from working Gaza. I had maneuver room, although my own level of knowledge was far short of what I wanted it to be.

The most gratifying exchange was with Jim Leach, who then was a Congressman from Iowa. He asked me what the U.S. interest was in Haiti. I gave a stock answer, which he found inadequate. He said it didn't sound as if we had "tangible" interests. I insisted that we did, and talked about the boatloads of refugees that pitch up on Florida before the invasion. I said it was certainly a tangible U.S. interest to inculcate in some way a stable environment so that the Haitians could make their lives in Haiti. He said, "Now you've said something."

Q: Would you characterize some of the staff members? I get the stories on Helms' staff. I have heard there were some people who essentially hated the foreign service, hated the State Department, or smart brats who... Did you get any feel for this at all?

GREENLEE: More than a feel, I got a dose of it. There were staff people on both sides of the aisle who were passionately partisan, but you could talk to them-and there were ones who were passionately partisan who you couldn't really talk to. I mentioned Roger Noriega earlier, and he certainly fell into that category. He was Senator Jesse Helms' attack dog. Roger, I think, sensed that I didn't have a whole lot of respect for the congress. I certainly had reservations about much of the staff, and I wondered about the integrity of some of the members who seemed more interested in politics than in forging a policy that could work. Roger and I did not have good chemistry. I was tagged as a partisan defender of the Clinton administration. But I wasn't partisan, or political. At least I didn't see myself that way.

The partisan bickering actually had an impact on my career. After I had been special Haiti coordinator for a while, I was nominated to be ambassador to Paraguay. I was supposed to have a hearing at the end of September of 1999. A few weeks before, while I was still Haiti coordinator-the Helms staff cut off funding for a joint UN/OAS human rights monitoring group called MICIVI. Those were the initials in French. They put a hold on the funding for the OAS part of the group.

Q: OAS being the Organization of American States.

GREENLEE: Right. So I told the OAS people about the cutoff, but that they could continue to spend what was in the pipeline. I was very clear, however, that they could not spend new money, money they didn't yet have. But that in fact is what the OAS people did, and the Helms staff then went after me. They had a self-serving source in the OAS who I think was responsible for the mistake and tried to lay it off on the State Department, basically on me. So Noriega in the name of Helms put my hearing as ambassador to Paraguay on hold and requested an OIG investigation. It was to see if I had fostered a situation where money was spent that wasn't there, potentially a criminal charge. Well, I knew that I wasn't culpable, but also that an investigation would take time. There was some effort to get it done before the congress folded its tent in November. But it wasn't until about February that it was concluded, with the OIG report saying, in effect, we don't know why were asked to look into this. But I knew why. It was to derail my nomination.

So in the late winter of 2000 I was told that the Helms staff had lifted their hold and, since there was no chance of a hearing for months, would not object to a recess appointment. But I didn't want a recess appointment. I wanted the imprimatur of senate confirmation.

What was I going to do? I had left the Haiti coordinator job at that point. I was adrift. It was February. I wasn't going to get a hearing until May or June, so I thought, maybe I could learn some Guarani. That's the indigenous language of Paraguay, spoken by 90 percent of the population, in addition to Spanish. There was a Paraguayan lady at the Foreign Service Institute, a Spanish teacher, who knew Guarani. So, with the cache of being on deck to be ambassador to Paraguay, I was able to go over to FSI for a few months to get one-on-one instruction in Guarani.

I want to keep talking about my relationship with Roger Noriega, because I don't think he realized what he'd done to me, that he'd bollixed up my appointment that much. When I finally was confirmed, he congratulated me. He was very nice. Later, when I was in Paraguay, George W. Bush became president, and there was a big shuffle in the State Department. Noriega became the U.S. ambassador to the OAS. As ambassador to Paraguay, I briefed him a couple of times on Washington visits, and we were civil to one another. Then, after I became ambassador to Bolivia, Roger moved over to become assistant secretary for western hemisphere affairs, my direct boss. Bolivia became very turbulent-I'll get into that later-and Roger was very supportive of me, personally and politically. We agreed on where our policy should go. Just to show how a relationship develops, toward the end of my time in Bolivia, Roger proposed me for another ambassadorship-a very important one. I didn't get it-it went to a political donor. But it was a good example how an adversarial relationship can evolve into a constructive one. What's the adage? Where you sit is where you stand.

Q: I go back to people in these oral histories that go back to people who got caught up in the McCarthy period. That shows you how far back we go. That's ancient history now. One of the things that comes through is that if things are going badly and the congress is unhappy, they'll need somebody like you, pretty far down in the pecking order- they'll throw you at congress and not back you up. Did you feel that you had good solid backing not only in the career system but also from the political system, or did you feel that you were out there on your own?

GREENLEE: I never worried about that. I had good solid relationships with Jeff Davidow, the assistant secretary, and later Pete Romero, and good relationships with people like Tony Lake and Strobe Talbot. I felt that they backed me totally. What was strange for me was that I was not a political person, but, as Haiti coordinator, I was in a politically charged role. I think some looked at me as if I was a partisan Democrat. But I wasn't. I was a career civil servant. That's how I saw myself, right through my career.

In the department, though, my role was understood and I felt well supported. Paraguay was not a large ambassadorship, but it was what was available. I'd been offered a couple of other posts, which were the equivalent of Paraguay, but I didn't want them. But I liked the idea of Paraguay, and was willing to close my career there.

Q: We talked about the Washington thing. What were you seeing in Haiti, some of the personalities and all? For one thing, I've heard people say Aristide advocated putting burning tires around people's necks, "necklacing," mob killings and all of that.

GREENLEE: Haiti was a very chaotic and violent place. The police didn't have control of Haiti. Maybe certain areas and zones, but if you were driving a vehicle out of Port-Au-Prince and you ran over a child, you would either have to try to explain what happened to a potentially homicidal mob, or keep driving. There were incidents where people were killed by mobs in the wake of driving accidents.

I never felt threatened or unsafe in Haiti, but I was always inside an envelope, a secure envelope. You always had a feeling in Haiti that you were in a place where unexplainable things would happen. Like in Graham Greene's novel The Comedians, there might be a corpse floating in the swimming pool of your hotel. I remember talking to Caleb McCarry, a Republican staffer, one time. We had both read the novel, and he reminded me of the part of the book in which the protagonist asked how the man had died. The answer was, "He died of his environment." I thought, "That's right. That's Haiti. You can die because of your environment."

Haiti was a subject of much good writing. And also of much good art. What was interesting was that a great artist might make a painting that would sell for a great deal of money. Then journeymen artists of lesser talent would copy what he had done. And then he might knock off his own work, turning out quick reproductions of the original. This is what happened with Prosper Pierre Louis and the Saint Soleil "school." The high end product would be for the collectors. The other stuff might be unloaded in Jamaica to tourists from a cruise ship.

Once, while I was coordinator, a Swiss guy who had lived in Haiti about 40 years-he had been a missionary-came in to talk to us about his impressions, his experience, about Haitian culture, basically. He was trying to explain why the Haitians couldn't get together, why they couldn't do something for their greater collective benefit. What he said was that every Haitian is "connected to his own god." They're tremendously creative people, but except in small groups, they don't seem to bond. It's interesting, because there is a perception that when they come to the U.S., they fall back on our system for support. It's not so. Of all the immigrants, the Haitians are the least likely to go on welfare, and the least likely to commit crimes. They know that productive work is a luxury.

Q: You say you loved Haiti and other people love Haiti. But it sounds like a mud belt.

GREENLEE: It's easy to say we love Haiti because we don't live in Haiti. We don't live in the conditions of Haitians in Haiti. It's an enchanting place. But what can somebody like me, who has never even lived there, really understand about it?

The Haitians have a mystical sense of themselves. Maybe that helps them endure crushing poverty. I could see how dictators such as Papa Doc Duvalier were able to use superstition and voodoo to consolidate power. Political devastation has led to other kinds of devastation-deterioration of the land, over-fishing of the sea, garbage-strewn streets. If you fly over the border from Haiti into the Dominican Republic, or along the border, you see two different worlds. The Haitian landscape is blighted. It looks like Arizona. On the Dominican side are thick green trees, lushness. Haiti is eating itself up.

Several hundred of thousand people make charcoal for their living. They have to cut down trees to make charcoal. You can plant millions and millions of trees, but they never reach maturity because they are cut down to make charcoal. How do you solve that problem? You talk with development experts. They've studied this thing. One idea I heard was that Haiti should develop its cement industry and trade cement for wood from abroad. The wood could then be used for charcoal, allowing Haitian tress to grow unmolested. There are lots of ideas, creative ideas, about what to do about Haiti's many problems. But nothing seems to work. I think the word is anomie-when a country implodes, when it can't pull itself back up.

The question when I was doing Haiti was whether it was on its way to becoming a failed state or whether it could it become independently viable. I don't think it's a failed state, but there is a question, and still a question, about what will happen to it. How can a country that far behind get to the point where people will be content to stay rather than flee in flimsy boats with a fair chance of drowning.

Q: Did the Dominican Republic play any role there in your time?

GREENLEE: The attitude of the Dominicans, as I understood it, was that Haiti's extreme poverty and turbulence were a latent threat. Haiti was a difficult neighbor. The border was porous. Haitians could pass for Dominicans physically, but even Haitians who spoke Spanish well had trouble merging with the Dominican population. The Dominicans could be very tough on them. In recent history Haitians were massacred.

The two countries have been entwined throughout their histories. The island they share is not that large. After the slave revolt, the Haitians invaded what is now the Dominican Republic and occupied it for a number of years. Not so long ago-maybe 50 years ago- the per capita GDP of Haiti and the DR was about the same. Now there's a wide gap between them, because Haiti has been mired in the politics of self-destruction.

Q: Is there anything in Florida, Florida being such a political state, where the Cuban exiles play such a role. Were you feeling an influence of a Haitian exile group?

GREENLEE: Yes. There are influential Haitians in exile in Florida, and some who have prospered economically. Also in places like Texas. We tried to persuade some of them to invest in Haiti. They were interested, but they were more interested in business, so we didn't have much success. There are Haitians who are politically influential in certain districts in Florida, but they don't have anything like the clout of the Cubans. Haitians complain that they don't have the immigration rights of the Cubans. Some see the difference in how they are treated as racially based.

Q: Obviously, at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Cohen would say, "Let my people go." The military wants to get the military out. But how did the U.S. military on the ground feel? What was their attitude?

GREENLEE: It was different. There were a couple of commanders-I think they were reservists-who were very enthusiastic about being in Haiti. The "Let my people go" thing was at a high level in Washington and had to do with the big picture of where our troops were most needed. Bosnia was a challenge at that point. But our military on the ground in Haiti wanted to stay.

Q: It sounds like the troops would get along with the Haitians.

GREENLEE: They did, except the Haitians were so poor that there were incidents. A military guy would be driving through Port-au-Prince and stop at an intersection. He would have his hands on the steering wheel, and all of a sudden some little kid would come over and distract him, while some other kid would steal his camera from the seat.

I remember once talking with staffer on the House Appropriations Committee. He told me we had to get our troops out because they were in constant danger. I said, "We have foreign service people who go all over Haiti with no problem. You take precautions and assume normal risks." The response was, "Yeah, but if something happens to a foreign service officer, that's only a diplomat. If something happens to a U.S. troop, that's something else." [laughter]

Question: You went from Haiti coordinator to Paraguay, ambassador to Paraguay...

GREENLEE: I was special coordinator for Haiti for a little over two years, from July of 1997 until sometime in the second half of 1999. That year, in about April or so, it developed that our Ambassador to Paraguay, Maura Hardy, was going to break off her tour earlier than expected for a high-level job in the department and I was selected to replace her. But, as I noted earlier, I was held up by the Helms staff, and so I took advantage of the dead time to learn some Guarani at the Foreign Service Institute.

Guarani is an interesting language, spoken by European immigrants and indigenous Paraguayans alike. When the Spaniards conquered what is now Paraguay, they defeated the Guarani people, who were great warriors. The Spaniards came without women, so they took concubines from the native population. Not just one or two, but in Paraguay many more. The women would raise the children, and the children would speak Guarani. That was the language of the hearth.

Q: I take it the discrepancy of one conquistador for many women was because the males had been killed?

GREENLEE: I think that's part of it, but the other part of it was that the conquerors, the Spaniards, had power and rights but not women. Maybe not every conquistador would have many women, but at least some did, as many as 30 or 40 women, I have heard. So they weren't around to raise all their children. The women did that. Since the offspring of the Spaniards were in a position to have comparatively good jobs, jobs in the Spanish administration or the Church, it was important for them to know Spanish as well as Guarani. So a system of dual languages evolved. Spanish was the language of government, the courts and the church. Paraguay became a bi-lingual country, with an underlying dependence on Guarani. The Guarani people, as a people, disappeared, but their language persisted, and it is a sophisticated language. It has the equivalent of the subjunctive, and you can say anything in Guarani you can say in Spanish-unlike Quechua, which is much more mixed with Spanish. There are a lot of words in Quechua that are really Spanish words with Quechua endings.

Q: When you say the Guaranis disappeared. What happened?

GREENLEE: They were killed off or absorbed. There actually are a few people who call themselves Guaranis. I met some of them in a forest preserve, the Mbaracayu national park on the border with Brazil. They call themselves Guaranis, but I am not sure they are. But the Guarani language is spoken all over Paraguay. Almost all Paraguayans speak it. There was a period under Alfredo Stroessner, the dictator, when the language was looked down on, but it never disappeared, and in recent years it has flourished. Paraguayans abroad, when other Spanish speakers around, delight in lapsing into Guarani.

Q. Describe the country geographically.

GREENLEE: Paraguay is about the size of California. It doesn't have a direct outlet to the sea. You can get to the Atlantic by going down the Paraguay River, which feeds into the Plate River that flows past Buenos Aires and Montevideo. But it's a long way, over a thousand miles. Paraguay is cut almost in half by the Paraguay River, north to south, before that river turns toward the sea. On its northern border, running eastward, is the Paranï¿½, another large river. Paraguay is a low-lying country. The eastern part is well-watered and lush. The western part, on the western side of the Paraguay River, is dry, in places bone dry. That's the Chaco, which, however, does have green places. During the Chaco War, in the early 1930s, the Bolivians called it the "green hell." It also has thorn forests and dry, stick-like trees, and also trees that swell out, have kind of bellies to store water.

Q: Populated?

GREENLEE: Interestingly, the Chaco is populated by Mennonites in two key, contiguous areas. There are also a couple of Paraguayan army outposts. The main Mennonite town is called Filadelfia and the neighboring one is Loma Plata. The Mennonites have prospered in the Chaco-maybe even more so than Mennonite settlements in the more hospitable eastern part of the country. In fact the Mennonite populations in the Chaco are the wealthiest in Paraguay, with a per capita income, when I was in the country, of about $12,000 versus about $1,500 for the rest of the country. They found ways to suck water out of the ground.

Q: Are these German Mennonites? American Mennonites? Who are they?

GREENLEE: Some came originally from Germany, some from Russia and the Ukraine. But they came to Paraguay by way of Canada, I think in the early 20th century. They soured on Canada because the government wanted to bring them into the national educational system. Some went from Canada to Mexico, some to Bolivia, and a number to Paraguay.

There are different kinds of Mennonites, too. The Mennonites in the Filadelfia area, in the Chaco, are quite progressive. They drive cars. One guy I knew out there-his name was Orlando Penner-was very prominent politically and owned the Volkswagen dealership in Asuncion, the capital. He had a souped-up Golf model that he ran in an annual trans-Chaco race. Once I asked him about it. I said it sounded dangerous because there's only pavement in certain areas, and it would be hard to see in the dusty parts whether there were cattle or ox carts on the road. How could you be sure to avoid them? He said, "I have a fixed-wing airplane and a helicopter over head. They check the road and keep me informed by radio." That's a high-tech, progressive Mennonite.

But there are other Mennonites, in the eastern part, who are much more conservative. They have tractors that run on steel wheels, without tires, because tires are too modern. I am told this helps keep the kids from going into the towns and losing their way.

Paraguay has other ethnic populations. The Japanese are prominent in the eastern part. They are also pretty successful. In their towns there are baseball diamonds and open-air pavilions with tin roofs for sumo wrestling.

Paraguay was formed after independence from Spain by a Creole named Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia. He was like a secular monk, very cruel but personally honest. He decreed draconian measures and enforced the decrees absolutely. Example: If you were a European and came into Paraguay, he decreed at one point that you couldn't leave. And you couldn't marry another European. You had to marry a native Paraguayan. Measures like that. If you rebelled, you were executed, or spent the rest of your life in prison. He is revered today by many Paraguayans, in part because he didn't steal and left the country at his death with more in the treasury than when he assumed power. He lived humbly, but severely in every sense. He put an authoritarian stamp on the country, which has persisted.

Paraguay borders on Bolivia, but its geopolitical position is determined by Argentina, to the south, and Brazil, to the north. For years Paraguay has had what's called a pendulum foreign policy, swinging back and forth, favoring one of the big neighbors or the other. It would pitch toward Argentina, and then when it looked like there might be better deal with Brazil, it would go that way.

In recent years Paraguay has leaned more toward Brazil. There's a lot of Brazilian influence in Paraguay, and a lot of what are called Braziguayos, Brazilians who speak Portuguese but live in Paraguay-over 250,000 of Paraguay's population of about five and a half million. They are for all intents and purposes really Paraguayan. Many also speak Guarani.

Q: The great story in the early settlement of Latin America were the Jesuits. They were kicked out by Papal order. Did the Jesuits have a role in Paraguay?

GREENLEE: Yes, the Jesuits and the Franciscans and Augustinians, as well. That's another factor in the history of Paraguay. The Jesuits set up mission communities with the Guaranis and other native Paraguayans. They were ideal communities in the sense that everyone had work and was taken care of equally, under the tutelage of the church. There are ruins of these communities, which collapsed when the Jesuits were forced out.

Some Paraguayans view the Jesuit period with nostalgia. They see the missions as ideal societies. Others, though, say the Jesuits treated the natives as children, and wouldn't let them grow up and become independent enough to fend for themselves. Without Jesuit supervision, the communities collapsed. It happened quickly.

Paraguay remains a very Catholic country and a country that is respectful of authority. The Paraguayans are proud of their warrior heritage from the Guaranis. They will comment to you that the Guaranis contained the Incan expansion and that the Guarani language extended as far as the Caribbean. In fact, the word "Caribbean" derives from a word that means "very noble." The word "Carioca," describing the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro, means "noble's house" in Guarani.

The warrior tradition of course also comes from the Spaniards, but really more from the Guaranis. Two big wars have defined Paraguay. One was what was called the war of the Triple Alliance, from 1864-70. Paraguay at that time, although a small country, had the largest army in the region, larger than the armies of Argentina or Brazil. Brazil's army actually depended on slaves at that time, I have read.

In the mid-1800s Paraguay wanted to keep Brazil at bay. It had an interest in keeping Brazil from becoming too powerful in the region. When Brazil was encroaching on Uruguay, the Paraguayans decided-or their dictatorial government decided-that they should come to Uruguay's defense against Brazil. By marching through a part of Argentina, though, they turned the Argentines against them. The Paraguayans reached Uruguay to find that the Uruguayans had made a deal with Brazil-so all three countries, the so-called Triple Alliance, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay- swung against them. Paraguay fought down to its 12 year olds and lost most of its male population before surrendering. That was a formative part of what's now Paraguay's tradition of digging in and hanging on against the odds.

Then there were waves of immigration. Italians came and people from other parts. The population regenerated. There was a lot of men with multiple families. After a couple of generations, there arose a problem with Bolivia, a dispute over who owned part of the Chaco region. It was thought then that there were vast petroleum reserves there. There were skirmishes. The Bolivians attacked a Paraguayan fort, and the Paraguayans attacked back. The war was brutal, with many thousand killed on both sides. Paraguay had shorter supply lines and may have been better prepared. It ended up winning part of what had been Bolivian territory.

Q: This was the Chaco War.

GREENLEE: The Chaco War, from 1932-35, which turned out to have a real formative impact on Bolivia, on its politics and its sense of itself, and also on Paraguay. Paraguay was devastated by the war in many respects, but it won. It validated Paraguay's image of itself as a people, a people with a warrior tradition.

Paraguay for the last 50-plus years has been under the dominance of one party. We used to talk about the "PRI" in Mexico as being the classic one-party system in democratic terms. But the PRI's stranglehold on Mexico has been broken. The Colorado Party, though, remained strongly in charge of Paraguay when I was there. It was the instrument of the dictator Alfredo Stroessner. It continued in the Paraguayan version of democracy.

I talked a little bit earlier about Paraguay's pendulum policy, the shifting back and forth between Brazil and Argentina. Those countries are the reality-the geo-political reality-of Paraguay. Up until about 1994, when the Mercado del Sur (the customs union of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) was created, there were very substantial differences between the cost of importing products into Paraguay and the cost of importing those same products into Brazil or Argentina. Paraguay became the contraband hub for those countries. There is a place in Paraguay called Ciudad del Este. It used to be named Puerto Stroessner. It is at the tri-border with Brazil and Argentina. That place before the Mercosur was established moved more than $12 billion worth of goods a year, more at that time than any other place except Hong Kong and Miami. Contraband is still the main driver of the economy there, and key to Paraguay's broader economy.

Q: How did they get the goods in there?

GREENLEE: By plane, mainly.

Q: High value low volume type of thing. Electronics...

GREENLEE: Electronics.

Q: Luxury goods.

GREENLEE: Scotch whiskey is a really big deal. Cigarettes. I hadn't thought much until I was in Paraguay about how much the world depends on nicotine. There are certain cigarettes-including cigarettes with Brazilian brand names-that are produced illegally in Paraguay and packaged to look like the real thing. They might be Winston or Marlboro or a Brazilian brand. They are smuggled into Brazil with a fake Brazilian tax stamp on the packs.

There's a guy in Paraguay who once sought the right, as a matter of national law, to reproduce the Brazilian tax stamp legally-that's chutzpah, even in Paraguay. It's like trying to get a copyright on a dollar bill.

That's the mentality. It pervades the country. Maybe 60-70% of the economy is informal, and people are comfortable with that. Everybody is into it. Nobody would say, "I won't buy this software because it's illegal." Rather, "Why should I pay a premium to line the pockets of some rich corporation in some other country?" Nobody cares about that unless there is a personal connection. A singer, for example, might be outraged if his or her recording is pirated. But that's a personal thing.

Ciudad del Este is still the center of contraband, although not like before. There was so much demand that these huge department stores grew up. There's one place, called the Mona Lisa, famous throughout the region, that was about eight stories tall. You could buy a Steinway piano or Dom Pï¿½rignon champagne or Wilson golf clubs. Name it, if it was the best, they would probably have it. It was owned by a Lebanese guy who started by selling perfume on the street. Now he's branched out to Miami.

Another thing about Paraguay that sets it apart in the region: It's not anti-American, like Argentina or Bolivia. Paraguayans tend to like Americans. That may be in part because back in the 19th Century an arbitration panel headed by President Rutherford B. Hayes awarded Paraguay land that was disputed by Argentina. There is a geographical department or state of Paraguay, the one that covers the Chaco, called "Hayes." Another American hero for the Paraguayans is Huey Long.

Q: Former governor of Louisiana, known for corruption. Why Huey Long?

GREENLEE: Yeah, it sounds strange. Not long after I arrived in Paraguay as ambassador, after the presentation of credentials ceremony, I laid a wreath at the memorial for the Paraguayan fallen in the Chaco War. I had to give a little speech. It didn't have to be long. There were really two angles to it. One was that my wife, Clara, is Bolivian, and her father fought against the Paraguayans in the Chaco War. In fact he was, I think, at Bocaron, an important battle site in the heart of the Chaco. I had to clear with her this whole ceremonial thing. I wasn't sure she would want to go. But she had no problem with it.

Well, David Lindwall, a very good guy, was the political counselor. He gave me some talking points. One of them went something like, "In the great tradition of Rutherford B. Hayes and Huey Long...." I nearly gagged when I read that. I understood about Hayes, but why Huey Long? Well, it turns out that during the Chaco War, when American oil interests were mixed into the politics of the war and somehow the politics of Louisiana, Long, then a senator, said something in the congress supportive of the Paraguayan side. The Paraguayans never forgot that. There is a street in Asuncion called Senator Long. But I couldn't bring myself to utter his name. So I missed the chance to score a few easy points. [laughter]

Q: Could you talk a bit about the Stroessner period? Stroessner was almost synonymous with Paraguay during my foreign service career. When you thought of Paraguay, you thought of Stroessner.

GREENLEE: Stroessner was a very strong anti-communist dictator of Austrian descent who ruled the country with the Colorado Party for about 35 years. He had an iron grip on the country. If you read The Honorary Consul, the Graham Greene novel, you can get a sense of what could happen if you were on the opposite side of his regime. Stories about Stroessner are legion. The Paraguayans can be very tough and rebellious people, and the knife can cut both ways. There were Argentines working with Paraguayans to overthrow Stroessner. Stroessner's guys rounded up a few of them and threw them out of a DC-3.

Q: The DC-3 being an airplane.

GREENLEE: Right. Threw them out, killed them that way. It was like Rodriguez de Francia with airplanes. Stroessner was dictatorial, very tough, very anti-communist, and very unsavory. During the Cold War, or at least the early part of it, he didn't get the kind of back-pressure from the U.S. or other western democracies that he got toward the end of his regime.

Things started to change, I would guess, when Jimmy Carter became president, and human rights became a main feature of our policy. Pressure against Stroessner built up, and in 1989 he was overthrown by the army commander, General Andres Rodriguez. There followed a period of transition, a somewhat difficult period because Rodriguez was known to have been involved in drug trafficking, as well as other kinds of contraband. But the U.S. was pleased to see movement toward democracy. Stroessner went off to a gilded exile in Brazil, where he died, a very old man, in August 2006.

I came to Paraguay at an interesting time, the beginning of August 2000. About ten months before, there had been a traumatic event in Paraguay. The vice-president of Paraguay, Luis Maria Argaï¿½a, was assassinated. It was alleged that people close to the president, Raul Cubas, were behind the killing, and Cubas was forced into exile. There was a lot of turmoil. Our ambassador, Maura Harty, played a key role in helping the transition to a new government. Luis Angel Gonzalez Macchi, who was the head of the senate, was next in line and became president. Another key actor at the time was the army chief, Lino Oviedo, who some believed was behind Argaï¿½a's assassination. He, too, fled the country, but retained a strong political following. (After a time in exile and then in jail in Paraguay, he became a contender in the 2008 presidential election.)

Well, that was the background when I arrived. Gonzalez Macchi was President. The country was in a kind of political and economic paralysis and remained that way throughout my tenure.

I presented my credentials in a sober and impressive ceremony. There was an honor guard and some guy made a tape of the whole thing and sold it to me. He inserted fire-works and music in the lead-in that were entirely his invention. But I bought the tape and have it somewhere.

Gonzalez Macchi was famous for being a nice guy. People liked him personally. But he had no apparent interest in governing or rooting out corruption. He was part of the system and wasn't about to change it. He benefited from it, as did his family and his wife's family. His wife was actually, I think, his fifth wife. She was a former Miss Paraguay, very beautiful, and, some said, quite smart.

The continued fallout from the Argaï¿½a assassination and the ineffectiveness of the Gonzalez Macchi government framed the political landscape. It was actually quite difficult for me, as ambassador, because there were Paraguayans, influential Paraguayans, who insisted that the U.S. should not prop up such a corrupt government, that the government was not legitimate since it didn't enjoy broad popular support. But there was really no alternative for us. I often made the argument that a democratic constitutional government was ipso facto legitimate, but only those around Gonzalez Macchi, or benefiting from the status quo, really accepted that. So the public argument went that the U.S. was opting for stability rather than good governance. We were seen as part of the system. The owner of the Paraguay's largest newspaper, ABC Color, a guy named Zuccolillo, who favored the renegade Oviedo, plied the line that if the U.S. were an honest country, it would force Gonzalez Macchi out and new elections would produce a legitimate government.

Q: How was this attitude transmitted? What were you getting from the State Department and congress? Did you have instructions?

GREENLEE: Well, I read about Paraguay extensively before going there, and of course was familiar with the mission program plan, basically the policy and resource document for our bilateral relationship. I also met with lots of people, stake-holders in the government, NGO and private sectors. And I was studying Guarani, which helped me get ready in a cultural sense.

The problem I saw before arriving was that the informality and the corruption that comes from the informality of Paraguay's economic system was not checked by a strong legal system. But Paraguay has a strong cultural base. It's a nation state. Paraguayans can sit at the same table, master and servant alike. That was the environment I came into. It was interesting and challenging from a policy perspective.

But there wasn't too much that I could do with all of this, even at risk of being seen as interfering in their internal affairs. I found myself in the position of being a prop for a president who wasn't dealing with the problems of the country. I was supporting democracy, while Gonzalez Macchi was supporting himself and his family and friends.

Q: When you arrived there, was there any person or party that seemed to be a solution, or was it just a mess?

GREENLEE: It was just a mess. There was an alternative party, the Authentic Radical Liberal Party, but it had been out of power for about 50 years. It did manage to get a vice-president elected-Julio Cesar Franco- but at the time that was seen as a kind of historical fluke. He won a special election to fill the Argaï¿½a slot. It was a fair election. We had a role in validating the results-I paid a well publicized call on the electoral court just after the vote count was announced. There was some hope that we were seeing the beginning of the possibility of an alternation of political parties in government. But Paraguayan democracy was not yet that mature. The vice-president had no clout, no real role, and therefore no credibility. He was not seen as an alternative voice. He later ran for president, after I left, and got smeared.

What I found as ambassador was that a lot of people wanted to use me. The government wanted to use me and the political opposition wanted to use me. Occasionally I could do something that would startle the Paraguayans, that would promote our interests in the country and that wouldn't be seen necessarily as interference in Paraguayan affairs. The U.S. had tremendous symbolic weight. If a supreme court judge was under political pressure and was standing up in support of rule of law, I could call on him and that alone would be seen as U.S. backing, and the pressure against him might ease. Others in the diplomatic corps also sometimes weighed in like this-the papal nuncio on occasion, or the Spanish ambassador or sometimes the EU as a group, usually together with us.

There was a poor part of the country, 12 hours by bad road from Asuncion, called San Pedro. I went out there for a couple of days. I was the first ambassador to go there for years. I met with a left-wing bishop, Fernando Lugo. He later left the priesthood, ran for president and won in 2008. My calling on him was considered bold, controversial. I also gave a radio interview in my broken Guarani. It was news. When the media go wind of where I was-we did not announce my visit in advance-a few reporters came after me. It turned out to be great publicity.

When I returned to Asuncion, the newspaper ABC Color, which didn't like me at all, splashed a cartoon of me upstaging Gonzalez Macchi on its front page-because the president and few leading politicians never went out there. I credit David Lindwall, our political counselor, and the guy in the embassy who knew Paraguay best, for suggesting that trip.

Maybe I have painted government corruption and inefficiency with too broad a brush. There were some hardworking, honest and effective people. One was the foreign minister, Jose Moreno Rufinelli. He was a prominent lawyer who had been in politics and was well regarded in international circles. We worked well with him. I knew the former Paraguayan ambassador to the UK-a terrific guy-and the Paraguayan ambassadors to the U.S. I have known have been quite good.

But overall the Paraguayan government was pretty dysfunctional. The president, for example, "borrowed" $16 million from the central bank and had it invested in stock in the New York Stock Exchange. With the market going up at that time, the idea was to make a large profit and divert it back to him and his family through a bogus charity. Then the original $16 million would be returned to the central bank, with no one the wiser. But the market plummeted and he was caught short. Later, after he left office, and after I was long gone, he was convicted and sentenced to jail for that misadventure. I don't know whether he ever served time, though.

Probably 60 or 70% of what was called the auto parque, the cars circulating in Paraguay, were illegal. Some were bought in Iquitos, Chile, second-hand, off the boat from Japan, but then smuggled into Paraguay duty-free, like other contraband goods. But some cars were stolen, usually from Brazil or Argentina. Gonzalez Macchi, and his wife were caught up that kind of scandal. When Gonzalez Macchi became president, after the Argaï¿½a assassination, people around him decided that he needed an armored vehicle. So one was obtained at a relatively low price, a silver BMW. That kind of car costs new well over $200,000. This one, not quite new, reportedly cost about $80,000. I know something about BMWs like that because I ended up having one, which the U.S. Government purchased at full price, in Bolivia. It was a car with a lot of protection, but also a lot of pep, and with some sophisticated defensive systems.

Well, in the case of Gonzalez Macchi, an insurance investigator from Sao Paulo one day showed up in Asuncion with the proof that the car had been stolen from a private owner. Gonzalez Macchi claimed not to know where the car came from. Maybe he didn't, specifically. But he certainly knew the car was irregular. Somebody else tracked down a car his wife was driving. This was a Mercedes, which had been stolen from Buenos Aires. It was rumored to have blood stains under one of the seats.

The joke in Paraguay was that if you wanted a car that you could drive in Brazil, you would get a stolen car from Argentina. If you wanted one to drive in Argentina you would have one stolen from Brazil. It was even worse than that. People would say you could go to what was called a playa, a used car lot, and commission a car. A buyer might say, "You don't really have what I need. I'd like a Mercedes E class. I'd like it to be black with tan leather seats, and I'd like a 1998 model." The dealer would say, "We'll get one for you next week." Then it would come, hot off a street in Brazil or Argentina. That was the way things worked in Paraguay.

Q: Was there a class of merchants, like a mafia, that dominated the area? What was the embassy relationship with them?

GREENLEE: There was a merchant class, and there was a Paraguayan-American chamber of commerce, and there were legitimate businesses. But even the legitimate businesses often had an "informal" dimension. They would use pirated software, for example, or cut some other corner. There might be a police raid and a high-profile bust now and then. But that would be mostly symbolic, at our prompting and for our benefit. In reality, there was very little enforcement against intellectual property theft. In the international airport, for example, there were pirated CDs on sale. That would have been easy to control, but it wasn't a Paraguayan interest.

I had very good relations with representatives of U.S. and international business. I remember one guy I was talking to who worked with a bank. I can't remember which bank it was. He was a foreigner. He was not a Paraguayan. He was a Latin American guy. He was leaving after a few years, and he said, "It's time for me to go. I want to tell you about something. We needed to resolve an administrative issue with the Paraguayan government. They asked for a $90,000 bribe. You read about this stuff, you hear about it, but you never really think about it until it happens to you. It's very, very uncomfortable." He said his bank didn't pay, and the issue remained unresolved.

Q: Was there an intellectual group or a legitimate power center that the embassy could deal with where you could feel comfortable?

GREENLEE: I felt comfortable with certain individuals, but I was always wary of people I didn't know or weren't known to the embassy. Even with some people I knew I wasn't sure I understood as much as I should about where they were coming from. I may have suspected angles that weren't there. But I knew I could never get the whole story. You could never tell what was really happening. You could be dealing with somebody on a certain issue, but that person would be dealing on the same or related issues with other people you wouldn't know anything about. It got to be pretty complicated. This was a staple of conversation in the diplomatic community.

I'm painting too dark a picture, in a way, because Paraguayans are really the nicest people in the world, the most hospitable people I ever have been associated with. They love to have these asados, barbeques. They made a big fuss over everybody. It wasn't just the American ambassador. They are very egalitarian people, despite tremendous income gaps between the rich and the poor. A billionaire would have no problem sitting at the table with a peon. They would sip yerba mate, an herbal tea, from the same straw.

Q: What were American interests in Paraguay? Was there much at stake for us?

GREENLEE: There wasn't very much in the greater scheme of things. I think I've been fortunate in my career two ways: I have worked on issues where there was intense and keen interest in the senate and the congress and the executive branch-such as the Israeli-Arab dispute. But I have also worked on issues where I was left pretty much alone to implement U.S. policy. That was the case in Paraguay. At least that was pretty much the case before 9/11, when Washington focused attention on the tri-border area, the Ciudad del Este area.

Q: How did 9/11 impact on you and the embassy?

GREENLEE: Well, I saw it unfolding on TV. There was a country team meeting in my office. I got a call from my daughter, Nicole, who was visiting and staying at the residence. She said, "Turn on the TV. Something's just happened." It was a live feed, CNN. We watched the TV in my office, and saw the second plane hit. It was a jolting experience. It didn't seem real. Our reactions, I'm sure, weren't different from those of anyone in the U.S. We knew then that the world had changed.

In the aftermath there was a tremendous shift in priorities, a sharp focus on security-the security of the United States-as well as our embassies around the world. There was particular interest in radical Islamic activities and influence in the Ciudad del Este area. Remember that there had been the Jewish AMIA House and Israeli embassy bombings in Buenos Aires a few years before. Those had Iranian fingerprints and were linked to the tri-border area.

Then there was the anthrax scare in the U.S. Several people had become infected or had died after inhaling anthrax powder. There were traces of anthrax in a diplomatic pouch that had been sent to Peru. We thought we could be next. My deputy chief of mission, David Robinson, took the lead in this area. He set up a protocol for screening for anthrax. We had an isolation area by the embassy swimming pool. Then we started thinking about how what we were doing would be perceived in Paraguay. Would the Paraguayans worry that we would become a target for an anthrax attack and affect them as well? But that did not turn out to be a problem. As a rural country and a cattle country-a country with more cattle than population-Paraguay was infested with anthrax in its non-lethal form. It went along with the cattle. So the word "anthrax" held no terror for Paraguayans.

There were other security concerns. The chancery was right on the street, making us vulnerable to a truck or car bomb. When we got information about a possible attack-usually not very well sourced information-we had to react, and at times over-react. We put sandbags along the inside walls on one side of the chancery building. At times we had to ask the Paraguay interior minister to close the street, which he would do-greatly inconveniencing some Paraguayans. We spent a lot of time preparing for threats that never materialized.

Q: Was there a militant Islamic group that you could identify?

GREENLEE: In the tri-border area, there was fundraising-considerable fundraising-for Hezbollah, and also for Hamas, the Palestinian group. There was a real concern about Hezbollah, especially, after 9/11. Our main focus was on fundraising, but, but not completely, because there were what some believed to be training camps just over the border from Ciudad del Este, near Foz do Iguazu, in Brazil. These were videos of young men and boys in Islamic dress marching and acting militaristic. It was disturbing, but it fell well short being an imminent or serious physical threat. But we had to be alert to it.

There was a large Lebanese population in Ciudad del Este, and Syrians as well. One day I got a call from a guy I knew, a Lebanese, who owned a big business in Ciudad del Este. He said, "I was talking to the Syrian consul, and he wants to have a peace march. Could you join us in a peace march? We'll have a big peace march." I said, "I can't do that. But why don't you and others in the Islamic community denounce the 9/11 attacks on the United States? Why don't you come out and say, 'This isn't part of our religion, we want peace.'" He replied, "We can't do that. The people are scared. They're not going to do that. We could be killed." I said, "We really don't have anything to talk about," and that was that.

Q: Looking back, was there any residue of World War II and Nazis?

GREENLEE: There was, but not too much. I lot of time had passed. Josef Mengele, the inspiration for The Boys of Brazil, was dead. He had lived for years in Aregua, not far from Asuncion, under Stroessner's protection. There was a lot of German influence in Paraguay, but during my time it was mostly cultural. I didn't see any Nazi types, or ex-Nazis.

Q: Mengele was a death camp doctor...

GREENLEE: Yes, and I think there had been some other Nazi refugees. During the Second World War, there was a pretty large German population in Paraguay. Again, Stroessner himself was of Austrian descent. There is a town called San Bartolome on a small lake not far from Asuncion. This was a watering spot for the German community. During the Second World War there was a substantial focus of Nazi sentiment there. By the time I got to Paraguay, though, this was very much a thing of the past. It had no influence on anything that I was doing, and nobody talked much about that period.

Q: You mentioned the Spanish ambassador and the papal nuncio. Did the other ambassadors, essentially from the European Union, play much of a role there?

GREENLEE: Brazil wielded considerable clout, more than us in some areas. The Brazilian ambassador knew Paraguayan politics very well. Brazil was Paraguay's partner in the giant Itaipu dam and hydroelectric complex. It was a fifty-fifty operation, with the vast majority of the electricity flowing to Brazil. And as I noted earlier, there are a lot of Brazilians in Paraguay. They are a cultural and political reality. Argentina was also important for Paraguay, and the Argentine ambassador-who had been DCM in Bolivia when I was DCM there-had a certain amount of influence, and was effective. The Chilean ambassador, who had served in Bolivia, had some impact. He was a good guy, Emilio Ruiz-Tagle. He later returned to Bolivia as consul general, the senior Chilean position, when I was ambassador there.

I always tried to be discreet and careful, but the press knocked on our door, and wanted my comments, more than those of the other ambassadors. What I would say invariably made headlines. The other ambassadors might want a headline, but they couldn't get it. So, if there were a gathering of diplomatic corps, the press would elbow their way towards me. The other ambassadors would watch and hope I wouldn't say anything bombastic. Or maybe hope that I would.

Q: Did you have a problem or were there any repercussions when the Bush administration came in. In the early days there were all sorts of challenges, basically moving away from multilateralism to unilateralism.

GREENLEE: I didn't sense that there was any particular issue with the Bush administration. For me the transition was seamless. There was a period when I wasn't sure what our policy was- for example, whether we were still interested in carbon sequestration. But the reality is that our policy toward Latin American tends to be bi-partisan. The big issues, the political issues, didn't change. We were for democracy. After 9/11, security became our top priority.

There was a sharper focus on corruption, as well. It became a visa issue, much more so than previously. We probed in areas where we hadn't looked too hard before. For example, we denied visas to corrupt judges who previously had had them. We also revoked the visa of a Paraguayan congressman who promoted the interests of an Islamic extremist linked to a terrorist group. We warned him several times but he wouldn't listen. When we pulled his visa, he was shocked. Maybe we went too far with that guy, but there were grounds to do what we did, and it had an impact. He complained to the foreign ministry and the press, but people could see that we were serious about terrorism and our security.

Q: Did the economic problems of Argentina intrude?

GREENLEE: Not so much. Not directly. Again, Paraguay was more hooked to Brazil.

Q: Was Bolivia a factor or a big hunk of nothing between the two countries?

GREENLEE: Bolivia was not a factor for Paraguay in terms of its economic interests. Paraguay's geopolitical problem with Bolivia was resolved by the Chaco War. Relations were formal but not very active. I knew the Bolivian ambassador well, but he wasn't a player. The Bolivian embassy didn't have resources. It had no influence. I liked going to their cultural events, folk dances, things like that. It was a way of keeping in touch, and for my wife to keep in touch, with a country with which we were connected on many levels.

Q: What about drugs?

GREENLEE: Drugs were an issue and a problem. Paraguay is into contraband-it's a wild-west kind of country. There were parts of Paraguay that were of great interest to DEA. There's a place called Pedro Juan Caballero, on the border with Brazil, that was heavily involved in trafficking. It was an entrepï¿½t for drugs and arms from Bolivia en route to Brazil. Paraguay was not a producer of cocaine. It was prime producer of marijuana, however. The Paraguayans wanted our help with that, but marijuana wasn't of much interest to us. It was consumed locally and in Brazil. But eventually we got to the point that we would help them with their marijuana problem to leverage more cooperation on our interest in blocking the trafficking of cocaine and arms.

Q: Did we have Peace Corps in Paraguay?

GREENLEE: Yes, we had a large and productive Peace Corps program. There were about 150 volunteers, working in mostly rural areas. They were in everything from small business development to bee-keeping. The volunteers were good Guarani speakers-not just Spanish speakers, but Guarani speakers. I mentioned before that I had been trained in Quechua as a volunteer in Bolivia, but I never had to use Quechua in my work. The volunteers in Paraguay used their Guarani. I saw volunteers when I went out to the rural areas. They were very impressive, and very highly regarded by Paraguayans.

Q: What was the diplomatic social life like for you and your wife, with her being Bolivian?

GREENLEE: She was readily accepted by the Paraguayans. My wife is an artist-a sculptor-and she was very active in the artistic community. She had her group of artists and sculptors. She contributed tremendously to our diplomatic mission. She organized cultural events and worked well with our public diplomacy people. As with Bolivia later, she had a huge impact. She came up with ideas like bringing an Alaskan indigenous group to Paraguay, a group of dancers who also sang. They wanted to know if they would perform in an air-conditioned place! They wore seal-skin garments and heavy gloves. It was an astonishing success-and my wife's idea.

Q: Aside from the social life, how did you find your embassy as a working unit?

GREENLEE: It was great because it was a medium size embassy but medium-small, not medium-large-a small political section and a small economic section, a couple of people in each. Maybe we had three in political and two in economic, but very good people, imaginative...

Q: You didn't feel that this was a place where they sent the dogs...

GREENLEE: Not in terms of the embassy. I had great people. My deputy chief of mission, David Robinson, and office manager, Anne Kirlian, were first rate-both certainly as good as anyone anywhere in those positions. I was lucky enough to have them in Paraguay, and even more fortunate to be able to bring them both with me to Bolivia. There were a lot of other great people. I have mentioned David Lindwall. Richard Boly, as economic section chief, won an award as the most effective commercial officer in the foreign service for his work in Paraguay. He was succeeded by James Perez, another terrific officer. I knew Frank Ledahawsky, our administrative chief, from our time together in Madrid-another great officer. All have gone on to great careers. Robinson became ambassador to Guyana after his stint as DCM in Bolivia. It was a wonderful, wonderful embassy, small enough so that everybody knew each other well-but there was enough to do so that people weren't poaching on each other's territory.

Q: We haven't talked about how you got your appointment to Bolivia. It seems incredible that somebody who had been a Peace Corps volunteer, political officer, and DCM in Bolivia, and who had a Bolivian wife, could return to Bolivia as ambassador...

GREENLEE: I was mentally preparing to retire in the U.S. summer of 2003. That would have been a three-year tour in Paraguay. It would have capped my career. I was pretty close to ticking out anyway.

Q: "Ticking out" means...

GREENLEE: I would have been in grade for over 15 years in the senior brackets. I was going to be reaching a "time in class" limit, a "TIC," and was ready to go. I wasn't looking for any further ambassadorship, really, but I did note around March of 2002 that Bolivia was unexpectedly coming open. So I put my name in. I was told, though, that the post would be filled by an assistant secretary in another bureau, not WHA. So I figured that was that. Then a few weeks later I got a call. The acting assistant secretary in WHA, Lino Gutierrez, said, "I understand you're interested in Bolivia." I said, "Yes, of course, but what about that other guy?" He said he had decided to retire instead, and that WHA could submit a name. It wasn't a sure thing, but the deputy secretary's committee ultimately selected me and I got the nomination. This meant cutting short our tour in Paraguay. I was a little worried about that, because I didn't want to leave a vacancy. But it turned out my name went forward with that of my replacement, John Keene, and our nominations moved in tandem.

The processing took a while, as it always does, but in September or October I had a hearing with Senator Chris Dodd, and was confirmed in, I think, November of 2002. My predecessor, Ambassador Manuel Rocha, had left in August. Shortly before that, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who been president of Bolivia from 1993-97, was elected president with a slim plurality. He was under siege from the outset and was trying to govern with a very narrowly based coalition. The country was quite turbulent, with frequent strikes and road blockages. Evo Morales, the coca federation leader who later became president, had emerged as a strong political contender. He had finished second, just behind Sanchez de Lozada, in the 2002 elections. He was using his emerging political appeal as leverage against the government. His tactic was to close the road between Santa Cruz, in the eastern part of Bolivia, and Cochabamba-the road that trucks carrying soy and other products needed to use to reach the altiplano and port facilities in Chile and Peru. By cutting off that road at choke points in the Chapare, he was able to close the country down, at least in an economic sense. That was the picture as I was getting ready to transfer from Paraguay to Bolivia.

I wanted to get to Bolivia as quickly as I could, but I wasn't able to make the transition until January of 2003. I arrived in mid-January. I did not go back to Washington for the standard laying-on of hands. I had gone through that before, when I was headed to Paraguay. I am not one for ceremony, in any case, and didn't want another testimonial event, a Washington swearing-in ceremony. I didn't feel I needed to go through that again.

I asked permission to do a direct transfer from Paraguay to La Paz. I was told it was unusual but possible, and we made the arrangements. DCM David Robinson was given the authority to swear me in. That happened at a little gathering on the embassy patio in Asuncion, with our embassy staff, some Paraguayan officials and representatives from the Bolivian embassy. It was just right.

We got on a Lloyd Aï¿½reo Boliviano (LAB) flight from Asuncion to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and transferred there to another flight to La Paz. We were met by the acting DCM, who was the management counselor. We didn't have much baggage with us-but we did have our two boxer dogs and two Amazon blue-front parrots. Within four or five hours of leaving Asuncion we were in La Paz. We were met by the country team and there was a small press event. I said truthfully that returning to Bolivia was like coming home. That was how I felt, and how my wife felt. Two of our four children, our daughters Nicole and Gabrielle, certainly felt that way as well, as both have Bolivian as well as American citizenship.

Q: How long were you in Bolivia as ambassador?

GREENLEE: I stayed for three years and about eight months, leaving in the third week of September in 2006. Actually, Washington originally wanted to replace me and other ambassadors who had arrived at their posts at the beginning of 2003 in June or July of 2005. The idea was to rotate us on the U.S. summer cycle. I didn't complain. But when the guy who was slated to replace me opted instead for a very senior position in Washington, I told WHA that I would be willing to stay longer. It all came together, and I ended up continuing an additional year and three months.

Q: How were American relations with Bolivia?

GREENLEE: Relations had always been good, but very asymmetrical. The U.S. was the biggest bilateral assistance donor. Until Evo Morales was elected president at the end of 2005, the U.S. was always courted, paid deference to, because of that. But our presence was overwhelming. We were too big, the way we did things, was too big for the bilateral relationship. It was bad for Bolivia, and it was bad for us. The Bolivians were in the habit, the bad habit, of being supplicants, and we were in the position, the frankly arrogant position, of doling out assistance. The Bolivians wanted help without conditionality, while we needed to know that our aid wasn't being squandered, that it was going to something that had a developmental purpose or an anti-drug purpose. The Bolivians resented the emphasis on drugs. They saw the cocaine trade as a U.S. problem, but it was increasingly, even on the consumption side, a Bolivian problem in equal measure.

Getting back to the President-Sanchez de Lozada had a very weak government. He really didn't have a mandate to govern, having won only about a fifth of the vote. And he didn't have a solid coalition. He was ripe picking for the opposition, particularly for Evo Morales and his Movement toward Socialism, the "MAS," which had emerged as a strong political force. Evo Morales could close the country down with road blockades, and leverage political power by opposing our anti-drug efforts.

The Sanchez de Lozada government was tottering from the outset. Everyone referred to the president as Goni. He had grown up in the U.S., had gone to the University of Chicago. He had been the architect of Bolivia's recovery from hyper-inflation in the 1980's, instituting the kind of reforms that were proving successful in Chile. He was a "neo-liberal." His economic policies were based on free-market criteria and the so-called Washington consensus. When things seemed to be working, it was okay to be a neo-liberal. That was during his first term in the early and mid-'90s. But by the time I arrived, his policies had become discredited. With commodity prices in the tank, Bolivia wasn't creating jobs, wasn't advancing. "Neo-liberalism" was seen a dimension of U.S. "imperialism"-tantamount to economic exploitation, deepening inequality, unfairness.

Sanchez de Lozada's privatization of failed state industries, a logical step during his first presidency, was seen increasingly by Bolivians as a sellout-a theft of Bolivia's patrimony. Privatization, which Goni called "capitalization," had led to the discovery of vast reserves of natural gas. Bolivians couldn't understand how foreign companies could have a right to control what they knew was a significant economic asset, a national asset. To a lesser extent, many also wanted the state to recover the privatized railroads, electrical generation facilities, mining properties, the telephone company, and so forth. Sanchez de Lozada had been a popular president before. But when I arrived, just six months after his re-election, he was on the ropes.

During his first presidency Sanchez de Lozada had instituted reforms that gave more power to local governments. That initiative was called "participacion popular." It was an instrument of empowerment. It was a bold step toward democratic maturity. Unfortunately for Goni it also enabled his opponents to rally against him. It gave them resources that they could tap to move against the central government. That was a kind of Shakespearean irony.

After his first presidency Goni was succeeded by a former dictator, Hugo Banzer, who was suffering from cancer. Banzer did not follow through on Sanchez de Lozada's reforms and, maybe because he was sick, allowed social protests, road blocks and other disruptive actions, to get out of hand. Respect for rule of law, never high, diminished, and institutionalism took a big hit.

The vice president, Jorge Quiroga, who was well known in Washington, and also bilingual and familiar with the U.S., succeeded Banzer when Banzer's health began to decline steeply. The economy remained stagnant. Sanchez de Lozada, maybe because he wanted to consolidate the reforms he had instituted, maybe because he missed being in power, or both, ran again for the presidency. This was the second half of 2002. He eked out a razor thin victory over Morales, who surged passed two mainline candidates, Manfred Reyes Villa and former President Jaime Paz Zamora, into second place. The Morales factor was unexpected. It became clear that Morales had significant political strength beyond the Chapare area, beyond his cocalero base.

From the outset Sanchez de Lozada was strapped for resources. The IMF insisted that Bolivia had to reduce a huge financing gap in the government's budget. There was no way to do that without cutting subsidies or raising taxes. Goni was in a bind. In part he was in a bind because he had followed the IMF's recommendation to reform the country's pension system. This added considerably to the financing gap. Throughout his presidency, whenever I talked to him, he complained about that.

Anyway, while I was still in Paraguay-I think in November of 2002-Sanchez de Lozada went to Washington and asked for help. He had a number in mind-$150 million. He needed a cash injection, basically for pork barrel type projects, to keep people busy, off the streets, while the economy improved. Unfortunately, at least for a country like Bolivia, Washington doesn't work that way. Bolivia isn't Iraq. It's not Israel or the Palestinian Authority. It's near the end of the line for us in strategic terms. So, even after a direct plea to President Bush, Goni came back empty handed.

Meanwhile, in Bolivia, things got worse. There was a lot of political turmoil, and Sanchez de Lozada's government didn't seem to be delivering. By the end of the year Morales' cocaleros had closed off the main road through Chapare and were confronting the police. The U.S. kept the pressure on Goni to hang tough on the anti-drug front, while Morales pressed for legalization of the coca that was being produced in areas that were illegal under Bolivian law-coca that went to the production of cocaine. So Sanchez de Lozada was caught-between the U.S. and Morales, between political reality in Bolivia and the IMF, between his own political base, the MNR, and his coalition partners in the Leftist Revolutionary Movement, the MIR.

That was the situation when I arrived in Bolivia in mid-January of 2003. I presented my credentials within just a few days. Goni's advisors cautioned me against speaking with the press after the ceremony. They didn't want anything I might say to stir the pot further. I assured them I would be careful, but also that I intended to speak with the press. I didn't want to be known as someone who was surreptitious, evasive.

What was interesting in the credentials ceremony was talking to the president in Spanish. Goni's Spanish is heavily accented. Because he grew up in the U.S., and used English more than Spanish in his formative years, he speaks Spanish like a gringo. He opened by saying, "I'm told your Spanish is better than my Spanish." At least in terms of accent, I am sure that is the case. Afterward, when we met privately, we spoke in English.

After the formal part of the credentials ceremony, I met with Sanchez de Lozada and his foreign minister, Carlos Saavedra Bruno. Saavedra was an effective politician, and I think a capable foreign minister, but he was from the MIR party, and I don't know to what extent he had Goni's trust. Sanchez de Lozada said, "I want to tell you that my main objective as president is to be able to sell Bolivian natural gas to the United States. I may go down trying. But this is what the country needs, and this is what I want to do." That was the sound bite I took out of that first meeting and that I reported to Washington.

At that time the main sticking point with such a gas project was not so much the role of the transnational companies, but rather where the pipeline would go. With the relatively low price of gas at the time, the only feasible route was through Chile. Because Bolivia had lost its seacoast to Chile in the late nineteenth century, however, that wasn't politically feasible. The political pundits insisted that the pipeline had to go through Peru, and Peru, which needed Bolivia's gas to make its own gas project viable, dangled unrealistic incentives to steer Bolivia away from Chile-in the best case to make Bolivia a partner, but, more cynically, to insure that Bolivia would not emerge as a gas competitor. Peru was also after the Mexico and U.S. markets. The Peruvians dressed all this up as "solidarity" with Bolivia, a word Bolivians have a weakness for. Goni was never naï¿½ve about this, but Bolivians generally were-and are. They don't think geo-politically, although their neighbors certainly do.

When the subject of gas came up, I said, "I assume you are resolved to run the pipeline through Chile." I was writing my first reporting cable as ambassador to Bolivia in my head. But Goni said, "We haven't really decided." I sensed that he was being careful in front of his foreign minister-or maybe just me. It was good first meeting. I really hadn't dealt much with Sanchez de Lozada when I had been chargï¿½ and DCM years before, but I had a good feeling about him and what he was trying to do.

Q: How did the press deal with your arrival, or were you an important factor?

GREENLEE: The American ambassador in Bolivia is always an important factor. The U.S., in addition to our position as the major bilateral aid donor, carries great weight in the international lending organizations on which Bolivia normally depends. The Bolivian media are quite active, but not very professional. They roll the cameras, stick microphones in your face and try to bait you.

I came into the country with a headwind. There had been a disinformation campaign against me before I arrived. It was launched by the people who are now running the country, Evo Morales' people. As DCM I had been the anti-drug coordinator, and the MAS, or their surrogates in the press, accused me of having masterminded confrontations in which coca growers had been killed. There were articles about me being a guerilla warfare expert, because I had been in the army in Vietnam. It was said that I had been the CIA station chief in Bolivia in the 1970s, a story that was floated years before by a de facto government foreign minister. The acting chief of mission in Bolivia contacted me while I was still in Paraguay about these stories. He wanted to know how the embassy should respond. I said not to bother. But the stories persisted. Finally, I said it was okay to say the stories were fabrications, but not to go beyond that. I did not want to get into the habit of feeding media stories by denying them.

Even before I arrived in Bolivia, Evo Morales was saying that if were killed, everyone should look to me as the culprit. This kind of thing is still all over the internet. Ideological journalists, really quite creative people, wove shreds of information from my curriculum vitae-that, for example, I had been in Vietnam and present during various coups in Bolivia-and suggested that I was a trained killer and expert in toppling governments. There was even a story that, when I was DCM I had forced out my own ambassador-because Ed Rowell had left early to become ambassador to Portugal. It was all pretty bizarre, but that was life in this parallel universe. Anyone could write anything, and because it was written somewhere, someone else would cite it as fact. The press never checked anything, never followed a story to the end.

In Bolivia people tend to believe the most provocative, crazy rumors, so I had that to overcome. At the same time, I think there was a certain fascination with my Bolivia experience, and also that my wife was Bolivian. It helped as well that my wife is very photogenic, that she is a great artist and a great organizer. She raised a lot of money for Bolivian charities and, to the extent I was seen as trying to help Bolivia, people tended to see my wife's guiding hand. That was all to the good.

At first I didn't want to push my wife into the spotlight. But the spotlight gravitated towards her. She is a direct descendent of the first martyr of independence in Bolivia, Pedro Domingo Murillo. There are plazas and streets named after him. He was executed by the Spaniards and his head was displayed on a pike. He is reputed to have said, "I die but the torch I leave will never be extinguished." My wife comes out of that tradition. She would go around the country and say, "I'm a Bolivian just like you. I was a school teacher." She was great at forging these links. She helped my image, and the U.S. image.

Q: What was the situation vis-a-vis globalization and the World Bank? Was the Bank seen as responsible for the problems?

GREENLEE: There was a theme that ran through Bolivian political thinking-it was in editorial comment and on the tongues of TV analysts-that the neo-liberal model had damaged the country, that the Washington consensus had failed and that the IMF, driven by the U.S., was too harsh an overseer of the Bolivian economy. There was the sense that the people who were relatively well off got richer and that the poor people didn't get anything out of it. There was a belief that Bolivia's newest commodity, natural gas, was going the way of Bolivia's other riches-gold, silver, tin, guano, whatever-into the control of "oligarchs" and foreigners. It was as if the country was being stolen from underneath.

That was a significant part of the problem Sanchez de Lozada faced. He was seen as lining up with the exploiters-and, with his gringo accent, as not being fully Bolivian. People could see on maps and on the ground that gas pipelines ran through communities without providing gas to them. They believed that Bolivia's gas was being exploited for others, not Bolivians. Goni knew the problem well, but not how to deal with it. He suggested that the Catholic church or World Bank could preside over and administer a fund generated by the royalties from the gas. This would take gas out of the political realm. But the Bolivian public wasn't convinced. The seeds of what became the "gas war," in October 2003, were beginning to sprout.

Going back to the IMF and the international institutions, there was great skepticism in Bolivia that privatization and investment would help the country take off. The sad thing was that Bolivians looked back over the past 40 years, and different economic models, left and right, and could see that nothing had really changed. In real terms the country's economic growth had not exceeded its population growth. It was flat and stuck. And the indigenous people remained on the outside. Increasingly they migrated to Spain or Argentina or Brazil or the U.S. in search of a better life. They flowed into El Alto, the city looming over La Paz, from the rural areas. What they saw, what all Bolivians saw, was that the political system was rife with corruption.

There was the sense that nothing was working right and that these institutions backed by the U.S. were fundamentally at fault, that a formula for development had been imposed on the country that wasn't working. There had to be a change. The president of the country, who believed that a full implementation of the Washington consensus-including the reduction of corruption-could eventually lift the country up, was checked by a faltering world and regional economy. It's as if Bolivians were saying to themselves, "We tried this neo-liberal stuff for a while and now we have the same guy back as president and we're no better off."

Some said that the IMF was urging the president to cut the gasoline subsidy. I heard from a guy in the IMF, though, that there was no such suggestion-only that a way be found to shrink the financing gap, which was about 9%, by a few points. Sanchez de Lozada told me that he had considered different ways to close the gap, but slashing the gasoline subsidy was too regressive. It would mean that people at the bottom of the economic scale would have to pay more for their potatoes. It would hurt the poorest of the poor.

So he tried something else. What he tried was to impose a personal income tax on people with medium and higher income. This is what he was beginning to float publicly, in the form of draft legislation, when I presented my credentials. But it blew up in a uniquely Bolivian way. The national police had been promised a significant salary increase by the previous government. Instead, with Goni's suggested measures, they were facing what amounted to a salary cut. So a unit of the police went on strike. First, they barricaded themselves in their barracks. Then, when negotiations with the government faltered, they marched on Plaza Murillo, where the congress and presidential palace-the seat of government-were located. This was during the first half of February, I think February 10. Curiously, the police had a lot of sympathizers. Bolivians didn't seem alarmed that the police would go on strike. Didn't they have a right like anyone else? Also, they were against a government action to reduce their pay, just like everyone else. So the striking police sort of represented the middle class.

The police congregated in Plaza Murillo and took up positions around the plaza. Eventually they occupied the roof of the foreign ministry. Meanwhile, a bunch of school kids, organized by a radical Trotskyite union leader, also marched on the plaza. The students began throwing rocks at the presidential palace, which was guarded by a largely ceremonial army contingent. The guards fired off some tear gas, which landed amid the striking police. The police reacted by shooting and the guards shot back. In the melee, which raged throughout the day, a number of civilians, as well as police and soldiers, were killed or injured, and several buildings were torched. That was the end of Goni's attempt to raise revenue through a tax hike. Many saw the police action as justified. It was bizarre.

There was a lot of disinformation about what happened. I think the president thought that the police were trying to assassinate him, because a lot of shots were fired into his office. He might have been right, but it might have just been random fire at the building. In any case, he got away as the situation began to come unhinged, escaping out the back of the presidential palace.

In the aftermath, the next day, things calmed down. I think what happened scared everyone. We could all see how fragile the situation was. Our sense was that the police and military would not be able to work together for a long while. We were wrong about that. The two organizations had never gotten along, at least not since the 1952 revolution, when they were on opposite sides. But they at least re-established the relationship they had had fairly quickly.

What the police mutiny brought home to all of us was that Bolivia needed money from somewhere fast. So Washington came up with $10 million, and some others kicked in. The financing crisis eased, but the political crisis remained. Bolivia wasn't working, the government was faltering. Sanchez de Lozada, we believed, had the right answers for Bolivia, but the timing was bad. He had made needed changes in the way Bolivia worked, imposing the kinds of reforms that would seem unexceptional in a modern state. But what probably should have taken a couple of decades was compressed into just a few years, factoring in his first term as well. In political terms, it gave Bolivia indigestion.

Not long after I arrived in country I became involved in an incident that was never well understood publicly, but which I frankly didn't play the right way. We had received information, very well sourced-and in fact from more than one source-that some people close to Evo Morales had concluded that he could not be elected president and should be removed in favor of a more able pro-Cuban politician named Antonio Peredo. The sense of what we had was that both Morales and a close associate of his at the time, Filemon Escobar, would be taken out, that is, killed, to clear the way for Peredo. It was not clear whether Peredo was part of the plot. Now, if you get information like this, what do you do with it? The U.S. policy was that we had a "duty to warn" if we had credible information of a likely attempt on a human life.

This policy, if I can call it that, stemmed from an incident in Haiti that I was familiar with. It happened in 1995, before I became Haiti coordinator. The U.S. had obtained credible intelligence that a prominent politician named Mireille Durocher Bertin could be assassinated. The police were informed but apparently not the intended victim. The police did nothing and she was killed. Some in the U.S. congress savaged the Clinton administration over that. A "duty-to-warn" policy emerged from that.

We checked with Washington about whether the information we had obtained crossed the "duty to warn" threshold. We received an opinion-I believe a legal opinion-that it did. I confess that I was not unhappy with that opinion. In effect, I was being instructed to take an action that could sow a bit of discord in the ranks of a political group that took delight in opposing everything that we stood for. But what to do? We did not have and did not want direct contact with either Morales or Escobar, but wanted the information passed to them in some form. We decided that the best conduit would be the vice president, Carlos Mesa. As president of the congress, he could relay what we had to them.

Our first mistake was to provide the information in written form. The second mistake was to give it to Mesa. He was a journalist and historian by profession, not a person of discretion or confidence. He did his part in relaying the information. Escobar, he told us, reacted nervously, saying, "I knew it," and wanted protection. Morales, on the other hand, didn't believe it. He saw it as a U.S. trick, and denounced it publicly. Mesa, feeling uncomfortable, then talked to the press and released the one page non-paper we had given him. Of course, the press had a field day. I looked bumbling at best-and seemingly in character as the devious manipulator the leftist press had described me as being. If you look me up on the internet, that's what you will find.

Back to Goni. As the weeks wore on, the problems that were so evident in February seemed to be at least superficially resolved, and the president in fact seemed strengthened when another party joined his coalition. This was the New Republican Force ("Nueva Fuerza Republicana") of Manfred Reyes Villa. They were eager to get a piece of the government, and Sanchez de Lozada, I think, found he could work them better than he could with the MIR, his other coalition partner.

But underneath serious problems remained. The tension over excess coca production continued, and Evo Morales began to expand his reach, emerging more and more as a "socialist" leader and defender of Bolivia's natural resources. He took a ride on the gas issue. Around June or July we began to hear that a march against Goni's project to find a way to sell gas to the U.S. was being planned for September or October. Morales' involvement was not clear, or at least I don't remember to what extent he was a factor. In fact in October, he hung back and was not a main driver of what happened. But in those months leading up to September and October a lot of other things were happening. There were a lot of social grievances-salary issues, work issues, infrastructure issues. Lots of stuff, and all these things began to intersect with the gas issue.

There was another campesino leader, Felipe Quispe, more hardcore in many respects than Evo Morales. Quispe had done time for guerrilla activities, for blowing up some electrical towers, as I recall. He was not a cocalero. He was purely an altiplano guy. He controlled an area around Lake Titicaca, and during the Banzer presidency had tied the country up with some dramatic road closures and other actions. But Quispe had been pretty quiescent in the first half of 2003. He was extracting tractors from the government for the campesinos of his area, which the Spanish government was paying for. This was a deal he got for unblocking roads that he had blocked. It was a payoff, a political settlement of sorts.

But then he became the protagonist of a couple of incidents. The first one, in July, took place when some cattle were stolen in the Pucarani area, a couple of hours drive from La Paz, on the altiplano. The people of that area didn't trust the Bolivian justice system to handle the matter, so they asked Quispe to help. He sent his enforcers, who tracked down two or three suspects, tortured and killed them. When the incident was publicized, a La Paz or El Alto-based prosecutor tried to step in. Arrests were made, but Quispe organized protests and the vigilantes were ultimately sprung. That showed that the government was weak and that community justice could prevail over institutional justice-and that Quispe, who had seemed a bit in decline politically, could still make things happen.

The second incident was bound up with the gas protests, which were gathering force around La Paz and also in the Cochabamba area. Campesinos, in Quispe's area of influence, had blocked a road there that led to Sorata, a town in a tropical valley popular with tourists. Many Bolivians and several dozen foreigners, including Americans, were stranded in Sorata. It was a matter of concern among Bolivians as well as the diplomatic community. The government put together a convoy to get them out. But the campesinos, organized by Quispe, ambushed the police escorts to the convoy, ratcheting up tensions considerably. A couple of police or soldiers were killed, but also several campesinos.

These incidents, and other smaller protests-about 50 in all-created a setting for the big protest against Goni's attempt to export Bolivian natural gas to and through the Pacific coast. The political atmosphere was charged, more than any of us realized. The government didn't have authority, it didn't have legitimacy, and everything was chaotic.

Q: Go over again what the gas protest about? What was the issue?

GREENLEE: The issue was more complicated than the slogans of protest. Bolivia's constitution gave Bolivia ownership of its natural resources. But the private companies had "ownership" of the gas after the wellhead. The marchers rallied around the idea that Bolivia should own the gas above the ground as well as below the ground. More than that, the gas should be industrialized in Bolivia and bi- products of gas, as well as the gas itself, could be exported-but only after Bolivia's internal needs were taken care of. Later, during the election campaign of 2005, the idea of nationalization of the privatized hydrocarbons companies really crystallized. But in October 2003, the main neuralgic point was the possibility that Bolivia's gas would be exported through Chile, and also to a degree that it could end up in the U.S. There was a lot of hatred in one package, the dark side of nationalism. The reality, the geological reality, though, was and is that there is plenty of gas for everyone-enough to take care of Bolivia's needs for 300 or more years, even with exporting the lion's share to other countries.

Again, we didn't realize how serious this protest would be. We knew it would be big, but saw it more as a venting of emotions than a potential endgame. No decision had been made on gas. No gauntlet had been thrown. We thought this would just be another component in Bolivia's national debate. But that's not the way it played out.

I in fact accompanied several top-level Bolivian officials to Paris for a World Bank-sponsored "donors" meeting to generate additional economic support for the country just as the gas protest was gathering force. I went to buttress Bolivia's arguments for increased help. The meeting went well. I was going to spend a couple of days afterward on vacation-my wife and one of my daughters were there, as well- but my DCM called and told me that the situation had changed. There had been violent confrontations that day and people had been killed. So I headed back.

The worst incident involved a convoy of gasoline trucks that had passed without incident through a break in a crowd of protesters encircling the city of La Paz. The trucks were to bring gasoline from a gas storage point, at Senkata, near the airport. The pumps in the city, because of the protests, were running out. Food supplies were also threatened. On the way back, the trucks, filled with gasoline, were surrounded and pelted with rocks. Military escorts clashed with the protesters. There was undoubtedly a lack of discipline on the military side. People were killed, at least a dozen in that incident. And there were other incidents, before and afterward, and the death toll ran to about 56, I think, including a few military and police, someone involved in a traffic accident and one guy who immolated himself throwing a Molotov cocktail. But the turning point was the gasoline convoy incident. After that, La Paz's middle class, and many in the press and clergy, turned on Sanchez de Lozada. The violence was not understood in the context of popular insurrection, but rather as a government-induced "massacre."

So I left Paris immediately. I caught a night flight to Sao Paulo, but I didn't have a connection to Bolivia. My office manager, Anne Kirlian, spoke with the Brazilian ambassador, who intervened with a Brazilian carrier to get me as far as Santa Cruz. Because of the situation in La Paz, the flight could not go on from there. So the embassy arranged for me to be picked up by one of the C-130s that we ran for the anti-drug program. When I reached the air port in El Alto, a Bolivian air force helicopter flew me over the confrontation lines to a place near the embassy, where I was met by Bolivia's defense minister. He was clearly worried.

I talked to Sanchez de Lozada a number of times in the following days. At first he seemed confident he could weather the storm, but when the middle class abandoned him, and there were vigils in the churches aimed at forcing him out, it became clear he probably would have to go. It was ironic that this man of the center-right told me, more than once, that his model was Salvador Allende. "If I have to go out, it's going to be feet first," he would say, "like Allende."

The situation-Goni's situation-was deteriorating quickly because there were deaths-deaths that I am sure the opposition, the radical left, fervently desired. Dead people were "martyrs." Their funerals were exploited politically. The deaths catalyzed the middle class and the upper-middle and intellectual classes. In Bolivia, protest is bred in the bone. Protesters see themselves as "victims," and victims, whatever the grievance, are ipso facto seen as having a right to protest. The Catholic church, although divided internally, tilted toward the protesters, and hosted candle-light vigils and hunger strikes. The attitude increasingly was, "Goni has to go. We need peace in Bolivia. We need a new shakeout." A lot of good honest people were involved in these vigils, but others saw them as purely political instruments. There was a lot of loose talk about human rights, people's rights, and very little talk about constitutional government-or, except in the tightest circles and within Goni's shrinking government, about sedition.

Meanwhile, the miners were organizing for marches on the city, and there was the possibility of greater, more violent confrontation. There was probably some concern in the government about whether the army would obey orders if it came to a real showdown. In any event, the troops were not well disciplined. Their over-reaction to the initial wave of protests played to the opposition's hand.

Then there was the problem of the vice president, Carlos Mesa. He had never been part of Sanchez de Lozada's inner circle and may not have been consulted, or known much about, the president's actions to break or at least control the protests. As things got worse, Mesa distanced himself from the government and possibly-I don't know this for sure-began a dialogue with the opposition. Whether or not that was the case, he took the position that he could remain as vice president-that is, in the immediate line of succession-but remove himself from the government. It was a convenient political position, which could be portrayed as a moral position. It could also be read as a betrayal. For the protesting middle and intellectual classes, Mesa emerged as a safe alternative to Goni. He was one of them, after all.

While Goni was still hanging on, I went to see Mesa. It was a difficult meeting, because he had made up his mind to pull away from the president. I argued with him, but of course I was just an outsider looking in. I said, "The United States has worked hard to support democracy in Bolivia. What is happening in the street is not democracy. It's chaos. It's unfortunate that blood has been shed, but this is a constitutional government. If you want to get rid of the president, there is a constitutional way to do it. You could demand his impeachment." I got nowhere with this line of thinking. Finally, I said, "If you can't support your president, why don't you resign?" This was a philosophical point, not a political one. It certainly wasn't something I was saying on instruction from my government-although it was, I knew, the position of some people close to Goni. And it made sense to me. But, as I have said, I was an outsider. Bolivia was not my country. But it pained me to see a constitutional government being swept aside.

In retrospect I was mistaken in one thing, a fundamental thing. What was gathering force was not the usual pulsing of a coup-what I had experienced several times before in Bolivia. It was deeper and broader than that. It was a new phase for the country. It was a revolutionary current.

When Mesa and I finished talking, someone told us the press was outside. I said, "You called the press?" He said he had not, and asked whether I called them. It turned out that a TV crew had picked up some radio traffic of my movement to Mesa's house. So, together, we went out and talked to the cameras as if we had had a friendly, constructive conversation. It was nothing of the kind, but we acted our parts. I am sure he saw me as an interloper. I saw him as a guy who wanted to be president-and knew then that Sanchez de Lozada was probably not going to be able to hold on. But irrespective of what Mesa did, I realized later that Goni would not have been able to remain in office. The anger generated by the protests and the clashes was too much.

I could see the unraveling of Sanchez de Lozada's presidency, but we did what we could to stop it. I was in touch with Goni and his people, and constantly in touch with Washington. Goni's position really became untenable when Manfred Reyes Villa's NFR abandoned him. That left only the MIR, headed by former President Jaime Paz Zamora. I was also in touch with him. He impressed me in the last hours of Goni's presidency, because he could have pulled away. But to the end he tried to span the gaps and keep things together. He seemed more interested in the country than in his political future. In that he struck me as different from Mesa.

I don't know when the president made his decision to leave, but it was soon after he had assured me that he would tough it out. We heard a rumor that he was about to quit. I called him around noon of October 19, 2003. I said, "I'm hearing that you're going to leave." He said, "Yes, we're drawing up the conditions. We're writing a letter. The congress is going to convene and we will present the letter. It will say that that this is really a coup." I said, "Mr. President, you know we've supported you, and we want a solution that is constitutional. If you put in the letter that you're being forced out by a coup, we're not going to be able to support Bolivia. It will complicate our ability to help this country, to help what remains your country. He said, "I'll think about it."

He took that clause out of the letter. Months afterward, he told me he thought I was right-but he remained convinced that he had been the victim of a coup and that Mesa had played a pivotal part in it.

So Goni left. A Bolivian air force helicopter lifted him out, and the presidential plane flew him and his family to Santa Cruz, together with a couple of others of his inner circle. The police and military behaved very well. He was allowed to leave. He departed from Santa Cruz on a commercial flight that evening, just after the congress, in emergency session, had voted to accept his resignation. He later told me he had made a point of remaining in Bolivia until that final act was completed. He adhered to the forms of democracy. Many others did not.

At one point Goni reportedly considered setting up a government in Santa Cruz, but he didn't go that route. That could have ignited a civil war. He just went off into the night. The State Department operations center called me with a message from Secretary Powell. He wanted to know when the plane would arrive in Miami. For our part, we had been working with the authorities there to make sure Goni would be treated on arrival as the friend of our country that he was.

My immediate challenge was to shift gears and deal with Mesa, who was sworn as president the night that Goni left. We had to move on. So the next morning, Mesa's first day in office, I made a point of calling on him at the presidential palace. I was the first ambassador to do so. I wanted to make sure that everyone could see that the U.S. continued to support Bolivia and to support Bolivian democracy. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that our position, both in public and in private, had to be, "Let's go forward, let's make our relationship work."

Not long after this meeting there was an article in Pulso, a political newspaper. There was a very self-serving account, from Mesa's viewpoint, of that heated discussion we had had before Sanchez de Lozada's resignation. There had been only four of us in the room, two on each side. It grated on me that a version of what had happened came out the way it did, with Mesa painted as the great patriot standing up to the representative of the "empire." In an off-line meeting I told him as much. I said no one on my side had leaked anything to Pulso, and I was concerned that he, his executive assistant or someone close to him had done so. Mesa recoiled, and said, "Please, you are speaking to the president of Bolivia." I thought, well, okay. Ambassadors are around to be taken advantage of.

The purpose the meeting in which I complained about the "Pulso" article, though, was different. It was to talk about the legal case that was being mounted against Sanchez de Lozada for genocide. This was of interest to us because Sanchez de Lozada had ended up in the U.S. We saw the case as essentially political. I was concerned that Mesa had a role in promoting it for his own purposes. I wanted to talk about it. He assured me that he was not trying to press it. It was a matter for the judicial system, he said. But the reality is that nothing in Bolivia, and nothing involving the judiciary, is that simple. Mesa's main legal officer, the equivalent of our attorney general, was clearly pressing the case with the prosecutorial authorities in Sucre. Mesa's position may have been neutral, as he assured me. But another reading is that it was in his interest to see Sanchez de Lozada nailed as a criminal. That would justify his abandoning him and then succeeding him as president. I frankly don't know how to evaluate this. But I was appalled by how many of Goni's former colleagues, and people who owed a lot to him politically and no doubt personally, seemed content to see him hung out to dry.

I had several interesting discussions with Mesa during his presidency. I met more frequently with his minister of the presidency, Jose Antonio "Pepe" Galindo, whom I came to value as a friend. Pepe helped me gauge how difficult Mesa's day-to-day challenges were. They were difficult indeed. Pepe used to say that the Mesa government was playing chess on three levels. If Mesa seemed to deal away power to Evo Morales and his MAS associates, Pepe would say, it was because they assessed that only the MAS was by itself capable of bring them down. I think that was a good read on where things stood through Mesa's time in office.

A high-point for Mesa seemed to be when he orchestrated a referendum on how to handle Bolivia's natural gas and relations with Chile. It was a clever political ploy, designed to give Mesa a solid electoral mandate. The questions related to Bolivia's sovereign right to control hydrocarbon resources-at the wellhead as well as below ground-and Mesa's strategy to obtain a sovereign outlet to the sea in return for allowing Bolivian natural gas to be sold to Chile. There were five questions and all carried by a huge margin. This was in early July 2004. Mesa seemed to have solid support to go on. But then he tried to force an issue through the congress, and stumbled. One day he seemed strong, the next day, weak And he was weak. His popular support was illusory.

Mesa tried to be a populist president, not an institutional one. I actually don't think he had much of an institutional option. The institutions, such as they were, had been badly eroded before October 2003. During the Mesa presidency they eroded further. We saw that Mesa was adept at giving speeches, and kissing the Bolivian flag on a balcony of the presidential palace before handkerchief-waving crowds desperate for peace and a modicum of governance. But Mesa couldn't get things done. And in the end the people abandoned him. More importantly Evo Morales made sure he couldn't succeed.

We tried to help Mesa by leading an international fund-raising drive, and in fact raised a lot-about $80 million as I recall. Mesa at one point commented to me that, for all the negative comments Bolivians tended to make about the Bush administration, the U.S. had delivered. The Europeans talked a lot and gave nothing. But Mesa wasn't able to control the politics of the country. He wasn't a guy for the trenches. He didn't want to mix it up. And he made it clear that he would never use force to enforce the law. He used to tell me he didn't want to be president. Maybe he didn't, at least when it came to the hard stuff.

As Mesa weakened, he made a key concession to Morales-something Goni had toyed with but never did. He allowed Morales' coca growers to have some legal plots in the Chapare area. The coca there was not for legal use and growing it there was against Bolivia's own law. But he made that concession. We, the U.S., objected, but accommodated to it. I am not sure we should have, but we had little leverage. It was not the first time that our coca policy had to adapt to Bolivian reality. Nor would it be the last. The big issue was democracy. In my dialogue with Washington I always insisted on putting democracy ahead of coca.

Q: During this time was there drug traffickers' corruption money? Talk about the coca problem.

GREENLEE: When I was in Bolivia in the late '70's coca wasn't dominant in our policy, but by the late '80s, when I returned as DCM, there was a lot more coca and a lot more cocaine trafficking. As we brought assets to bear on the problem, our diplomacy took on a sharper edge. Bolivians saw us as being obsessed by coca, which they didn't regard as being a serious problem, and obsessed with cocaine trafficking, which they acknowledged should be addressed, but which they didn't think affected them too much. It was our problem. Cocaine trafficking made some Bolivians rich, and the money lubricated the economy. It reached the point where mainstream Bolivians said that the U.S. should compensate Bolivia to the extent that Bolivia stopped producing coca for cocaine. So we got into alternative development.

After I left Bolivia as DCM, in 1989, the dynamic changed a bit, because Colombia began to grow coca in large quantities. Before that, Peru and Bolivia supplied "paste" and "base," which Colombian chemists turned into cocaine and which Colombian traffickers sent on to the U.S. But when the Colombian traffickers began to grow their own coca, the market in Bolivia became depressed, and there was scope for a successful eradication program and crop substitution. So during the 1990s, with a lot of good work on both sides, thousands of hectares of Bolivian coca were pulled up, and Bolivia escaped from what was called the coca-cocaine circuit.

But coca remained a staple crop for many Bolivians, and the cocaine product Bolivians produced, which was low-grade base, began to flow to Brazil and Europe, primarily. Very little went to the U.S. But our interdiction presence remained, and our coca and cocaine interdiction policies continued to grate on Bolivians. Evo Morales effectively exploited Bolivian resentment of our large presence and our insistence on the coca issue, seemingly at the expense of other equities.

By the time I returned to Bolivia as Ambassador, our embassy in La Paz was one of the dozen or so largest in the world. It was too big, and our coca/cocaine policy was complicating other things, like our support for democracy. But as ambassador you play the hand you're dealt, not the one you want to play.

We were in the uncomfortable position of being the sharp end, the muscle, in the coca/cocaine issue-even though, at least when I was in Bolivia as ambassador, only about 1 percent of the cocaine on our streets was from Bolivia. We were dealing with what was most directly a Brazilian, Spanish and European problem, as well, of course, as a Bolivian problem. And in terms of consumption, we were finding that even Bolivia's per capita use of cocaine was equivalent to that of the U.S. But these arguments carried little weight with anyone in Bolivia. Coca and cocaine were seen as issues the U.S. was stuck with dealing with. For the others it was a public health concern, a cultural matter.

Q. That gives some context, but what happened to Mesa?

GREENLEE: Mesa found he couldn't govern. That has been the fate of most Bolivian presidents in recent history. He was beset by demonstrations and strikes. He could not, and would not, enforce order. He was especially vexed by the Bolivian congress. At one point Pepe Galindo asked me what the U.S. would do if Mesa dissolved the congress. I said he would be shutting down democracy, and we would react that way. Galindo assured me it was just an idea, but he later tried to ply it directly, by phone, with Washington. I was patched in from Washington on that conversation, and the response was the same. Mesa would deny it, but I am sure the idea had his blessing.

Mesa was stuck. He bent and finally broke. The same frustrations and demands that had brought people into the streets against Sanchez de Lozada were unleashed on Mesa. There was a problem with the provision of water services in the El Alto and a French company, Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, was in the crosshairs. There were other volatile issues. Mesa was backed into a corner. He submitted his resignation to the congress a couple of times, initially in an effort to revalidate his mandate. Finally, when he submitted it a third time, in June 2005, it was evident that he couldn't go on. He was finished. I think at that point he must have been genuinely relieved not to be president.

Then there was the question of who would succeed him. According to the constitution, it would be the president of the senate, Hormando Vaca Diez or, if not him, the president of the chamber of deputies, Mario Cossio. Vaca Diez clearly wanted the presidency, and lobbied for it. He would have been tougher than Mesa, but, being from Santa Cruz and the MIR party, which had lost popular support, would probably have had too narrow a base to govern. Cossio didn't want it and also didn't have the backing needed.

This played out over several days. There was a perception that the U.S. embassy actively supported Vaca Diez, but that wasn't the case. What we wanted was a constitutional succession and he was next in line. If he didn't get it, and Cossio stepped aside, then the presidency would go to the head of the supreme court, Eduardo Rodriguez Veltzï¿½, who would be required to hold new elections within six months. We wanted the constitutional process to work.

Vaca Diez wanted our explicit backing. We didn't weigh in. Curiously, a delegation of European chiefs of mission called on me, asking me to tell Vaca Diez to yield, so that Rodriguez could be president and call new elections. I said to them, "If I understand what you are saying, you want the U.S. to intervene in internal Bolivian affairs to make the person next in line to the presidency step aside. Is that right?" One of the Europeans said, "Yes, that's correct." I noted that for the record. The U.S. didn't intervene. But some of the same Europeans who were disposed to criticize us for being too involved in Bolivian internal affairs wanted us to do just that.

Well, Vaca Diez wanted the presidency and would have had it, except that the MAS and other organized groups surrounded Sucre, where the succession was to take place, and threatened to the point that Vaca Diez had to step aside, and then Cossio stepped aside, leaving the presidency to the person who least wanted it, the supreme court president, Eduardo Rodriguez.

Q. What was he like? Was he competent?

GREENLEE: Rodriguez was not a politician and had no lust for power. He was a decent, intelligent man, and in his six-month stint showed that he could govern honestly and well. His administration was competent and apolitical. His cabinet was professional. His foreign minister knew about the world and how diplomacy worked. It was a bright interval for a country that had been beset by so much turmoil. Since Rodriguez's main job was to bring the country to elections within six months, the protesters, I think, gave him a break they would not have given Vaca Diez. More pointedly, Evo Morales and the MAS, in a strong political position looking to elections, let him run the country.

Rodriguez was an honorable and good man in a difficult spot. And something happened during his presidency that has hurt him personally, politically and even economically that involved the United States. During his time in office we undertook to help Bolivia dispose of some surface-to-air missiles that had deteriorated to the point where they were unsafe. Their secure storage and monitoring had also become a challenge for the Bolivian military. After 9/11 there was a push worldwide to reduce the numbers of such missiles, called MANPADS (Man-portable air-defense systems), that were in danger of falling into the hands of terrorists. This was not just a U.S. initiative, but also welcomed by the OAS, among other international entities.

We had been in a dialogue with the Bolivian military for many months about their unstable MANPADS. That dialogue was not active at the start of the Rodriguez presidency. But one day, without Rodriguez's involvement or even knowledge, a senior Bolivian military officer suggested that we help take care of the missile problem. He asked in return that we provide Bolivia with several large Ford trucks, which were useful for transporting troops and equipment. We agreed. Later, he asked for a payment for the military-not for him-in recognition of Bolivia's cooperation on the broader anti-terrorism front. The compensation was to be instead of the trucks and used for needed equipment. This was worked out. I believe Rodriguez was briefed generally on this initiative, but probably not in detail. The embassy's contacts were with senior defense and military officials. What is clear is that Rodriguez did not know the timing of the missile transfer or perhaps even about the off-setting compensation. Perhaps he thought that he would have a chance to look the matter over in detail. I don't know. What I do know is that he was out of the country, in Brazil, when the transfer was effected. For us this was an operational matter, a technical matter, not a political event. We assumed that he was kept informed of what was happening by his senior defense and military officials. But apparently that was not the case. I can only conclude that his own military chain failed to brief him.

Meanwhile, someone in the military-I was told it was the former army commander, Cesar Lopez, leaked information about the transfer to Evo Morales and the MAS. They were quick to paint it as a treasonable act. The funds were available for the military, but no one wanted to touch them-and the military officer who suggested the arms transfer didn't want to step up to the plate. That left Rodriguez alone. Rodriguez later complained to me bitterly that he had been in the dark about the missile arrangements. I responded that it was not our responsibility to provide the links in his own chain of command. That was disingenuous of me. I knew his system didn't work. In retrospect I regret that I didn't personally brief him on the operational details that his senior defense staff was fully aware of.

After the elections, when Morales became president, he went after Rodriguez, and he also went after former presidents Mesa, Sanchez de Lozada, Quiroga and Paz Zamora. He filed charges against all of them for different things. He didn't want any competitors left standing. But all he could come up with on Rodriguez was the missiles. Politics is a dirty business, and diplomacy can also break a lot of crockery. When, as president, Morales asked me whether Rodriguez had known about the transfer, I told him that he did. Now I think he may have known in only the most general terms. Or perhaps he assumed the missiles would be destroyed in Bolivia.

Asked by the press about Rodriguez's role, I said publicly that he was among the most decent and honorable people I had dealt with in over 32 years of public service. I meant that. That was a one-day news story. I regretted that I couldn't say more.

When Morales was president, there was an initiative from his defense minister, Walker San Miguel, to resolve the tension by collecting the funds we had offered. I asked Morales if we could handle it that way, but before he could respond, his vice president, Alvaro Garcia Linera, shook his head negatively, and that was the end of it. But not for Rodriguez. Morales made him the fall guy. That's the way Morales operates. His pursuit of Rodriguez-to destroy him politically-is the only thing about the missile transfer-which was in Bolivia's interest as well as ours-that I have lost sleep over.

Apart from that one incident, which impacted on our relations with Bolivia, I recall the Rodriguez presidency as a gauntlet to elections. The presidential race was principally between Morales, former president Quiroga and a new contender, Samuel Doria Medina, who controlled the cement industry and had become a political factor. The supposition was that Morales had such high negatives that he might win a plurality, but that the other two, particularly Quiroga, would be important counter-weights. What we did not correctly assess was the extent to which the public wanted sweeping change and the degree to which Morales' negatives could turn to positives. If the public was worried about his history of blocking roads and confronting the government, there was a certain logic to their deciding to vote for him-to make him responsible for governance rather than blocking governance.

Morales ran a savvy campaign, reportedly with help from Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva's party in Brazil. The MAS's media ads were good. The production values were first rate. And of course Morales ran against the U.S., just as Quiroga tried to run against Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who was bankrolling Morales. The elections were on December 5. We expected a close outcome, but Morales won in an historic landslide. He won 54 percent of the votes. There was no need for a congressional runoff. It was a blow-out. We were surprised. The polling data, never good in Bolivia, didn't show a victory of this magnitude coming.

Q: The election polls are closing. What were you thinking and what were you hearing? Were you consulting with Washington?

GREENLEE: Yes, I was on the phone with Washington when the polls closed and the results started coming in. I was talking to Tom Shannon, the assistant secretary for western hemisphere affairs, and his principal deputy, Charles Shapiro.

Q And in the immediate aftermath. What did you do?

GREENLEE: Well, there was the recognition that the process that had begun with the forced expulsion of Sanchez de Lozada in October of 2003 had culminated with the election of Evo Morales, a cocalero leader, who had delighted in describing himself as our worst nightmare. He was not our worst nightmare-that would be in his dreams, not ours. His association with illegal coca was a big factor. But another problem, really Bolivia's problem, was that he wanted to implement economic policies, and the political policies that went with them, that were throwbacks to what hadn't worked in the '60s, '70s and early '80s. He was the anti-globalist in a globalized economy. He wanted central, authoritarian control when successful 21st century governments were pushing decision- making authority downward and outward. He wanted to nationalize efficient private industries when the trend worldwide was to privatize inefficient national industries. He talked about "solidarity" to attract needed investment-when investors, even sovereign-state investors, want a return on their capital.

There were different views about what attitude we should adopt. I strongly advocated dealing with Morales. I thought there was a way to talk with him about the coca problem, the main stumbling block, and that we had to support democracy in any case-and Morales had won a democratic election. So I got a green light to meet with him before the inauguration. We had not been in touch with him during the election period or before that because of his coca ties and other things we knew about him. But it was time to shift, and Washington agreed.

Q When you get right down to it, there's no alternative.

GREENLEE: Right. To me there was no alternative, but there was a lot of distaste in Washington. Here was a guy who had said nasty things about President Bush and the Untied States. And of course U.S. officials had said plenty of nasty things about him. But the real problems were his curious, fawning relationship with Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro and his history of promoting the growth of the stuff that was turned into cocaine. There was no getting around that.

Q: Was he by any chance put on a watch list or something like that?

GREENLEE: Sure.

Q: So he couldn't be given a visa...

GREENLEE: No. He couldn't get a visa without a waiver. He was seen as a guy like Yasser Arafat, in a sense. So was his vice president, Alvaro Garcia Linera, who had been jailed for guerrilla activities. There were visa issues with a lot of other people around Morales, as well.

I looked at this new reality as an interesting challenge. A few weeks after the election, but before his inauguration, we suggested to Morales' people that we meet, and he readily agreed. He came to my residence with the vice president, and we sat down at a table. I had my DCM and a political officer with me. The meeting was difficult, quite tense, actually, but on the whole positive. Before we started, I introduced him to my wife and Spanish daughter-in-law and our grand children, who were visiting. I think one of my daughters, Nicole, was also there when he came in. I told him that she as well as my wife were Bolivians. He just nodded. I think he was quite uncomfortable.

I told him that our relationship would depend on a couple of fundamental things. On tone, it was essential that he stop insulting my president and my country. On substance we had to find a way to address the cocaine problem. He of course had his own agenda, but where we came out was that we should turn the page, try to move forward. I thought it was a good start.

Then, later, there was the matter of the inauguration. Who should come from Washington? At first the idea was that only I should represent the United States. But I called Tom Shannon and suggested that he make the gesture and come. He said he had been thinking the same thing. And so that's what happened. The night before the inauguration, in late January, Tom and I met with Morales and Garcia Linera. It was another good meeting, much less tense than my initial round with Morales. We thought there might be a way to construct a good relationship. At the same time we realized that Morales was committed to Chavez and Castro and that there was very little space in which to get things done. Still, we tried and I, at least, was hopeful.

Morales knew the score on coca. He knew, as all Bolivians know, that the bulk of coca production in Bolivia goes to cocaine. But for him it was an economic problem that drove the political reality in which he had to operate. So he made the argument that the coca leaf was benign, even good for humanity, but cocaine was bad-a product consumed in the developed countries. So what was needed was a greater concentration in blocking the traffickers, on interdiction, and less focus on coca production-particularly coca cultivation in the Chapare, his political base. He argued that there could be "social" control of cultivation. Each family would be entitled to a limited coca plot and the syndicates, or unions, would restrict the size of other plots. It was simple economics. Control of supply would keep prices up.

This wasn't the coca policy that we wanted, but it was the one we were stuck with. Our DEA noted that there was good cooperation on interdiction. So both sides could say there was a way forward. But at bottom we all knew-and, again, all Bolivians know-that more coca means more cocaine. Bolivia under Morales is returning to that business, no matter how he and his cohorts try to dress it up.

On the political side, our relations quickly deteriorated. Morales couldn't stop attacking us. Partly, I am sure, it was his personal resentment, still occasionally stoked by intemperate remarks from Washington. The problem there was not the State Department. But off-hand comments, here and there, would give him something to work with. Once Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, for example, said something sneering about Morales on a visit to Paraguay. It played to Morales' hand, not ours.

Morales looked for anything he could use to demonstrate to his base that we were the enemy and he was "bending our arm." Once some guy from the U.S. came into Bolivia and allegedly, I have to be careful about my language, blew up a couple of buildings, or parts of buildings. There were deaths and injuries. Morales accused the U.S. of sending him to terrorize the country. The reality was that the guy had been arrested in Argentina for blowing up an ATM machine, and then obtained a Bolivian visa on the border with Bolivia, entered the country, and went on to get a license from the police to sell dynamite. I went over this with Morales, and he even thanked me, and thanked me publicly, for the "clarification." But within a week he was back with his accusations. "Why is the U.S. always sending us terrorists?" he would say. Morales lives in a parallel universe.

Morales had two big political initiatives. One was the "nationalization" of the hydrocarbons industry. On May 1 of 2006 he sent troops into several natural gas installations, making a show of implementing a flawed nationalization law. It was a law which had great popular support, but which virtually ensured that Bolivia would not attract the investment it needed to develop its gas reserves. The other initiative was a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. Morales asserted that he had achieved the government but not the power needed to lift Bolivia up. He said he was shackled by the "neo-liberal" laws that were enshrined in the old constitution. He needed a new one. But in pushing the assembly he created regional tensions. The eastern departments, where the gas was, wanted greater autonomy, not greater centralization. The constituent assembly got off to a noisy start that August and produced only dissension.

On the U.S. side, although Morales continued to attack us, we kept the door open to improved relations. We wanted Bolivia to have continued free access to our market, through the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Enforcement Act (ATPDEA), but that legislation was about to expire. After I left Bolivia, it was extended and then extended a second time. We also kept on the table the possibility of considerable assistance for infrastructure development available through the Millennium Challenge Account. But Morales continued to follow Chavez's lead. He gave the country over to Venezuelan influence. The world economy was booming. Bolivia was being left behind.

These were some of the reference points during my final nine months in Bolivia. I left post with the regret that I couldn't do more to shore up a bilateral relationship that had become too one-sided, but which in the end was the relationship that Bolivia most needed. It will take years for the social revolution that Morales is trying to direct to burn through. On the positive side, Morales has demonstrated that a Bolivian of any ethnicity can become president. On the negative side, he has harnessed South America's poorest country to a losing ideology and deepened divisions in the country that he could have bridged.

Q: One last question David. When you came back, in September of last year (2006), something that has always interested me is the lack of interest in pumping people who have been in a place like Bolivia. Did anyone sit down and talk to you about your experiences?

GREENLEE: Well, I was a pretty consistent and thorough reporter. The embassy was a very good reporting embassy. There were a lot of after-action analysis, "lessons learned" and so forth. I had good relations with the Department and with the assistant secretary, but no one, except you, has asked me this kind of question.

Q: Yeah. I mean, this of course is what we're doing, because there isn't an institutional thing built in which strikes me as sort of sad.

GREENLEE: Right, but there is a written record. I hope some day someone will pry it out.

Q: Okay, well David, I think we'll call it quits at this point.

GREENLEE: Thanks, Stu.

Q: And thank you very much.

End of interview