

the correct meaning of the original French/Arabic is accurately conveyed in the English summary.

4:45 P.M. I receive a call from the chargé advising me to be on call in the evening in the event that Mauritania breaks its ties with Israel, as this could cause larger local assemblies and the need for an official embassy response.

5:00 P.M. Mauritanian hip-hop legend Mohamed Lemine is waiting for me in the lobby to discuss the possibility of collaborating with our visiting jazz and hip-hop artist for a jam session in honor of Black History Month.

5:30 P.M. I call our English Language Fellow to check on our visitor's meeting with the nascent Mauritanian English Teacher's Association. I put the finishing touches on two proposals I have been working on, and send press coverage back to Washington of last week's embassy-hosted reception for five new Mauritanian recipients of Fulbright grants.

7:00 P.M. In Mauritania, there are few restaurants where one can have wine with dinner. We choose *L'Endroit* (The Place), which is rustic and calm, with a sand floor and a tent roof. The menu is on a large blackboard that is carried to your table. Here I join our visitor, the English Language Fellow, and several Peace Corps Volunteers for a conversation about our homes in the United States, Mauritanian politics, and the challenges of teaching English. It is important for me to keep a finger on the pulse on English-language activities and maintain contacts in the field. Plus, I enjoy their company.

9:00 P.M. I arrive home at the end of a long day and, as I have, countless times since my arrival, marvel at my luck to be serving my country in such interesting times. I nestle in bed with a book as the now-familiar sound of goats bleating nearby lulls me to sleep.

Heather Carlin Fabrikant joined the Foreign Service in 2008, after a career in refugee affairs that took her to West and Central Africa, the Middle East, and Central America. A native of Washington, D.C., she received a B.A. in world history from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.A. in international relations from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Nouakchott was her first Foreign Service post.

A Day in the Life of...
A CONSULAR OFFICER

CONSULATE GENERAL HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

By James P. Du Vernay

JANUARY 2009

5:15 A.M. As I step out into the cool, predawn Saigon morning, a stream of motorbikes and honking city buses is already trickling by. A motorbike taxi driver calls out to me, but I decline and begin my daily run before a torrent of vehicles clogs the streets in earnest. Down at Van Hoa City Park, next to the

former presidential palace, I carefully maneuver around the far more numerous tai chi and badminton enthusiasts.

7:45 A.M. During the five-minute walk from my downtown apartment to the consulate, my gaze meets that of the friendly vendor selling beverages from her sidewalk café. While she prepares a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice for me, I also buy two ears of steamed corn on the cob from another vendor selling from a basket mounted on his bicycle. The corn and juice together cost less than one dollar.

8:00 A.M. The workday begins calmly, as local and American staff steadily arrive. After five months here, I have grown accustomed to the challenging daily schedule of an entry-level consular officer at a post experiencing surging demand for both immigrant (IV) and nonimmigrant (NIV) visas, as well as American Citizen Services. We start by responding to e-mails and reopening complicated cases from the previous day. Officers prepare themselves for the sustained mental effort required for hours of careful interviewing. Meanwhile, out in the waiting areas, hundreds of applicants complete intake procedures and wait anxiously for their visa interviews.

8:30 A.M. All officers are “on the line,” and the consulate hums with the energy of more than a dozen simultaneous interviews. In the NIV section, we are in the middle of high season for student visas. Each day we meet wave after wave of hopeful young people striving to prove their student intent and qualifications. Consular officers must quickly discern which applicants are truly interested in pursuing education and which are simply looking for an easy way to enter the United States. Drawing on an understanding of the local context combined with knowledge of the complexities of immigration law, we have about three minutes to accurately adjudicate each case.

12:00 P.M. The NIV section completes its final interviews for the morning. We work through a full appointment schedule, and every officer has interviewed at least 50 applicants so far today; one officer interviewed 76. Although many applicants did not qualify for a visa, I met a few impressive and interesting ones, such as the student returning to Dartmouth on full scholarship and the scientist accepted to a Ph.D. program in the United States. More interviews await us in the afternoon, but for now, I relax over lunch at a local restaurant with the four local staff members I supervise. I am one of only two Westerners in the place. We enjoy the local specialties, including beef noodle soup, spring rolls, and fresh fruit shakes. Throughout the meal, my colleagues patiently indulge my desire to practice speaking Vietnamese.

1:00 P.M. Back at my desk, I review notes and add the last changes to a PowerPoint presentation. The NIV section chief has asked me and two other entry-level officers to talk about student visas at a large college fair this afternoon.

2:00 P.M. Reflecting the burgeoning interest in U.S. higher education, more than 400 students and parents crowd the standing-room-only reception hall for our presentation. After our prepared remarks, we respond to questions for 15 minutes before we have to leave. I feel like a celebrity as we determinedly move

toward the exit through the crowd of people requesting business cards and trying to ask more questions.

3:00 P.M. We return to the consulate and join other officers in processing the day's remaining immigrant visa cases. Working at a consulate that ranks as one of the busiest immigrant visa-processing posts in the world, we pull together as a team to manage the heavy workload. IV work differs considerably from NIV work; cases usually require a careful examination of complicated paperwork and investigative analysis of claimed relationships, especially at a high-fraud post. Some cases can take months or even years from start to finish.

6:00 P.M. I head over to the consul general's residence with a few colleagues for a reception. In support of a visit by members of Congress, the consulate is hosting a reception so members of the delegation can meet important contacts from the local government and business community. Assigned the role of greeter, I welcome guests, help them check in, and introduce them to the consul general. Later, my job is to mingle, speaking with guests about their work and ours, as well as generally ensure they enjoy the reception. During the evening, I meet several interesting contacts and have the opportunity to discuss politics with a congressman from Illinois.

9:00 P.M. I return to the consulate, and then head home. Once again, I feel thankful to post's housing board for assigning me to an apartment so close by. At home, I complete an assignment for my Vietnamese class the next morning. Like most days, this particular Thursday has proven long and full. Between the visa interviews, the college fair, and the reception, I spoke to hundreds of local people. Although tired, I look forward to another day on the visa trail. First, however, it is time for a much-needed good night's rest.

James Du Vernay joined the Foreign Service in 2007 as a management officer. Ho Chi Minh was his first post, followed by a tour as staff aide to the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan at Embassy Islamabad. He continues to enjoy the early morning fitness routine he developed in Ho Chi Minh City. He speaks French, Spanish, Italian, Vietnamese, and Urdu. James grew up in New Jersey and is single.

A Day in the Life of...

A COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE COORDINATOR

EMBASSY BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

By Candace Brasseur

JANUARY 2009

6:30 A.M. I can't sleep anymore; it's a Friday and today's workload is on my mind. The Community Liaison Office is coordinating a volunteer day trip to the *banco de alimentos*, a Buenos Aires food bank, scheduled for Monday in honor of