

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2023

PLUS
30 YEARS AGO
**Crisis in
Moscow**



Foreign Service Families
AT HOME

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The winning essay will be published in the May 2024 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*. Second- and third-place essays will be published in later editions. All winning essays will be edited for style.

REQUIREMENTS

- You are an AFSA member. We especially want to hear from those newer to one of the foreign affairs agencies (entry- and mid-level), but welcome submissions from any active-duty or retired current AFSA members.
- One entry maximum per person.
- Your entry is 800 to 1,000 words. It has not been submitted to or published in any print or online publications.
- You have not included any AI-generated content.
- Essays will be attributed. Please include full name, current and previous postings, and agency/position as part of a one- to two-sentence bio note.
- Authors are responsible for getting any necessary clearances before submission.

**Please send your submission to journal@afsa.org by December 15, 2023,
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We look forward to hearing from you!
—The Foreign Service Journal Team

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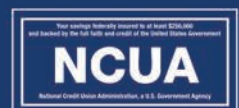


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On the Cover—Illustration by Davide Bonazzi.

The Broken Nominations Process

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

Much has been written about the unwieldy process the U.S. has for nominating, confirming, and attesting not only ambassadorial positions but Senior Foreign Service (SFS) promotions and tenure lists, as well.

And it is widely acknowledged that the dysfunction in the nomination and confirmation process has a big impact on morale for everyone in the Service, results in a loss of high-level talent, and, in leaving ambassadorships vacant for long periods, poses a risk to U.S. national security.

Peculiar among major industrialized democracies, the U.S. selects many appointees from outside the career Foreign Service. AFSA's Ambassador Tracker reveals that the percentage of political appointees averages 30 to 40 percent, with a low of 26 percent under President Jimmy Carter to a high of 44 percent under President Donald Trump. Under President Joe Biden, we are at 40 percent.

While that won't change anytime soon, it doesn't mean nothing can be done to improve the process.

First, AFSA is working to ensure that the parts of the process that the State Department controls move ahead expeditiously—namely, vetting nominees and

getting the full package to the Secretary and then to the White House. Currently, that can take up to two months.

We appreciate

the work that the Bureau of Global Talent Management's Presidential Appointments Staff (GTM/PAS) does on vetting, including coordinating with other foreign affairs agencies to process their nominees. Those nominated have a responsibility, too, to provide all required information in a timely manner.

Once tenure boards, SFS promotion panels, and the D Committee (for chief of mission positions) make their selections, there should be no delay.

Yet today, when these lists reach the White House, it can take another two to three months for the names to be officially nominated and sent to the Senate for confirmation.

Setting time limits at the department stage might make sense. AFSA has discussed with GTM/PAS ways in which we can work together to accelerate the process and is pleased they have established contacts with the White House. AFSA is also seeking contacts at the White House to push the lists along.

Of course, the biggest delays usually take place at the Senate. Sometimes individual senators hold up confirmations for reasons having nothing to do with the nominees. Some insist on doing their own vetting.

Sometimes entire promotion lists languish because of an alleged issue with just one or two names, even though in nearly every instance the issues were fully addressed by the department.

After confirmation, these lists are sent back to the White House for attestation, which can take another month or two.

In all, it is an extended grueling process for ambassadorial nominees, but those recommended for promotion and tenure suffer as well. The time between being notified of your promotion into or within the Senior Foreign Service and being nominated, confirmed, and attested has grown longer and longer. It is now not uncommon to wait nearly a year to actually get promoted. That happened to me.

Everyone agrees that the system is broken—and the continuing sharp partisan divide in our country makes it worse. But this much is clear: Those at the highest levels of the State Department need to involve themselves even more to get nominees and promotees across the finish line.

If we don't succeed in making needed changes, we will continue to lose talent. We hear stories about highly qualified career candidates for ambassador who do not even want to start the process, given how long it takes, including the very real potential of having to be renominated and start all over again because of partisan gridlock.

Most important, this puts our national security at risk. Countries feel slighted when there is no U.S. ambassador in their capitals—sometimes for years on end. AFSA will continue to advocate for a more efficient and fairer process at all points along the way.

If you have a story that illustrates these problems or have any comments, please contact me at yazdgerdi@afsa.org or member@afsa.org. We want to hear from you. ■



Tom Yazdgerdi is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

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FS Families ... at Home

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Welcome to the second half of our two-month focus on Foreign Service families. Last month, we looked at FS family issues related to work. This month, we put the spotlight on the kids and the home (abroad) front. FS kids, also known as third culture kids (TCKs), have a global childhood and get to—have to—transition from country to country as their parents serve in embassies, consulates, and USAID missions worldwide.

Former FSO Clayton Bond kicks off the Focus with his story of becoming an adoptive parent, including lessons learned, in “Our Foreign Service Adoption Journey.”

FSO Lia Miller explores “Cultural Identity Formation in Third Culture Kids,” offering ideas and resources to help families embrace their global lives while holding on to their American identities.

FS parent and AFSA Retiree VP John Naland lays out “Resources for Raising Foreign Service Kids.” FS college student Aidan Gorman tells us how he came to establish and run a pro-bono human rights research group staffed by students around the world.

Finally, a group of retiree TCKs who all attended grammar school together in Egypt tell us how they reconnected decades after that formative experience in “TCKs: Enduring Effects of Formative Years in Cairo.”

In the cover story, “Crisis at the

Russian White House, 1993,” veteran diplomat Louis Sell brings us a riveting personal account of the constitutional crisis and “October Coup” in Moscow 30 years ago this month.

In the Speaking Out, FSO and president of the employee organization Americans by Choice, Nikolina Kulidzan, writes on how she found her way to a satisfactory reaction when asked where she’s from in “Go Ahead, Ask About My Accent.”

This month’s Feature, “Doggedly” by Office Management Specialist Jean A. Monfort, is a (somewhat) fictional account of arranging pet travel that captures the sometimes-surreal nature of this daunting task. In FS Heritage, retired diplomat and frequent contributor Luciano Mangiafico tells the tale of “U.S. Consul Thayer’s Beethoven.”

The Local Lens from FS family member Susan Jorgensen is a striking image from Vilnius, illustrating solidarity with Ukraine.

In his President’s Views column, “The Broken Nominations Process,” Tom Yazdgerdi spells out problems with the nomination, confirmation, and attestation process, and he makes the case for all parties involved to do their part to improve it.

I sign off here with a pitch to Foreign Service AFSA members to participate in the FSJ’s Centennial Writing Competition. The topic: *Looking ahead to the next century, describe the ideal Foreign Service—as an institution and a profession.* Cash prizes for the top three essays. Submit your 800- to 1,000-word essay to journal@afsa.org by Dec. 15.

Be well, and be in touch. ■

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

Pull Up a Chair...

and get ready to
spend some quality
time with our
November issue.

- “In Their Own Write” highlights books by FS authors. This year, your colleagues wrote novels, academic tomes, children’s books, and more.

- “Of Related Interest” surveys recent books related to diplomacy.

- See the cover story for one veteran diplomat’s inside view of the October 1993 Moscow coup.

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The DETO Landscape: An Optimistic Caution

As Amelia Shaw noted in “Making Overseas Telework Better” (September 2023 *FSJ*), Executive Order 14100 (“Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors”), signed by the president in June, includes a small section on the domestic employee teleworking overseas (DETO) program.

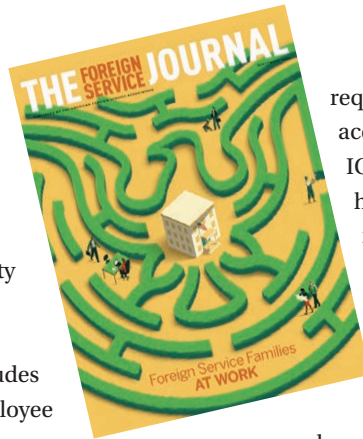
Specifically, the executive order directs the Secretaries of State and Defense to enter into a memorandum of understanding to pave the way for more military spouses to secure DETOs. It also provides that executive branch agencies develop common standards for DETOs, improve the DETO application system, and establish timeframes for application processing and approvals.

This is just the latest development in the DETO program in recent years. The Foreign Service Families Act of 2021 provided some clarity about who might qualify for a DETO and directed the Secretary of State to strengthen the program for Foreign Service family members.

And the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided that Civil Service employees who are approved for DETOs retain their locality pay (or at least receive overseas comparability pay, or OCP) while accompanying their FS spouses overseas.

These are generally commendable initiatives to improve the program for dual-service families. Gaps remain, however, and Foreign Service families should be mindful that some of the updates may make it more difficult to secure a coveted DETO position.

For instance, the NDAA’s pay parity provision makes it that much harder on agencies from a fiscal perspective to support DETOs, especially for jobs that



require classified access and where ICASS costs are high. Approving one DETO (even if just to show support for the program) might be

a drop in the bucket, but the numbers compound quickly, and proposed budget cuts will only make the issue of financing DETOs even more treacherous.

As for the executive order, its DETO-related provisions are vague and open-ended about how—or whether—to consider Foreign Service and other nonmilitary spouses in the standards and guidelines to be developed.

It does not specify a lead or even a coordinating agency for a major effort that supposedly will span the entire executive branch; it only provides that “common standards for DETO policies” shall be developed. (That responsibility could fall on any of the following: the Office of Personnel Management in light of its responsibility for governmentwide personnel policy; the State Department because of its role in determining and protecting the status of family members overseas under the agreements it negotiates with host countries; or the Defense Department, since the executive order focuses on a matter it ties to military personnel and readiness.)

Beyond that, it appears that each agency is to establish its own application system and approval timeframes, taking into account unspecified “factors unique to military families.” It also does not specify criteria for approving a DETO application: Is it implied that DETO approval is becoming an entitlement,

rather than an investment in workforce retention? If so, for whom, and under what circumstances?

We don’t know, but it is not hard to imagine a scenario in which nominally robust DETO policies end up lacking sufficient funding to carry out, potentially even disincentivizing agencies from hiring military or Foreign Service spouses in the first place.

The core problem with this vague directive—which carries the weight and authority of law in the executive branch—is that measuring agency compliance is nearly impossible. But there is also a practical matter that is reasonably concerning to Foreign Service families—namely, that the context of the ordered improvements to the DETO program is an exclusive concern with military families.

Certainly, military spouses merit just as much consideration and opportunity to participate in the DETO program as Foreign Service and other nonmilitary spouses, and there are certain factors unique to military families, especially enlisted families, that ought to be accounted for in this next round of DETO policy amendments and improvements.

The concern, however, lies in who gets a seat at the table in developing these executive-branch-wide policies, and whether new policies will be adopted with only military families in mind, or will families of nonmilitary public servants be considered and included.

Unfortunately, neither the text nor context of the order itself offers any incentive for the inclusion of Foreign Service and other nonmilitary families, and that presents a serious risk that those policies might inadvertently disadvantage them.

The State Department and other foreign affairs agencies should pay close attention as this process unfolds, and advocate strongly for consideration and

inclusion of their families in whatever policies and regulations come out of this executive order.

Adam Pearlman

*FS family member, attorney
Lexpat Global Services, LLC
Lisbon, Portugal*

The Reappointment Process

Sonnet Frisbie's "Boomerang Diplomats? Another Look at Reappointment" (Speaking Out in the July-August 2023 *FSJ*) raises very important issues that need to be addressed.

I am a Foreign Service officer (currently on leave without pay) whose spouse is going through the reappointment process. The lack of communication about basic procedures has been consistent and demoralizing.

My career development officer has not been able to identify a point of contact for the process (other than the collective email, to which messages go unanswered); and a query to DG Direct has produced no results.

I am unable to take any steps toward my next assignment with this complete lack of information.

I strongly support continued advocacy from AFSA on this matter.

Nina Murray

FSO

Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom

Dissent in Dublin

In a letter in the July-August 2023 *FSJ* ("Good Friday Agreement at 25"), Larry Butler tosses a barb at the "righteously wrong" Dublin dissenters who opposed issuing a visa for Gerry Adams in 1994. For Ambassador Butler, granting the visa was an important contribution to the

Good Friday agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland.

As the author of the July 1996 *FSJ* article, "Dissent in Dublin," which "celebrated" the dissenters and stirred Butler's dig, let me recall once again my admiration for the FSOs who remained

constant with U.S. policy toward Sinn Féin and dared take a lonely stand against a powerful ambassador and her most influential Irish American family.

The fact that, in retrospect, granting the visa may (or may not) have been an important factor

in the ultimate Belfast settlement ought not to diminish the courage of the Dublin embassy dissenters.

Richard Gilbert

USIA FSO, retired

Rhinebeck, New York

Keeping Our Pensions

Thank you for Tom Yazdgerdi's AFSA News column in the June 2023 *FSJ*, "Your Pension Should Be Your Pension, Period."

I am facing mandatory retirement in a couple of years, so this is a very timely topic for me. I have been contemplating the kind of job I could do to make the money needed to make up for the Social Security gap, since State's mandatory retirement age is 65, but Social Security's full retirement age (FRA) is 67.

Years ago I suggested to a State management official that State

should change its mandatory retirement age to automatically match Social Security's FRA. He cautioned that opening up the Foreign Service Act, which this would require, when you had a generally hostile Congress could lead to many negative consequences.

Working as a rehired annuitant (REA, formerly called WAE, while actually employed) is an attractive option, but the limit on hours because of a possible impact on the pension is inhibiting. So I thought: What about working for another federal agency that doesn't have that mandatory retirement age? I have very relevant skills and abilities, and I know a ton of acronyms!

I learned that if I take a direct-hire job at a federal agency, my *entire* pension is put on hold—that is, I don't get it at all during the time of that employment. *What?* That is nonsensical and a disincarnate for retired State Department federal employees to bring their years of experience to other agencies.

As Mr. Yazdgerdi pointed out, the Defense Department (DoD) does not have those limits on their pensions, which explains why so many of my State colleagues were retired military with great skills and experience ... and received their DoD pension on top of their State salary.

It's not just unfair. It's bad for business by freezing out a pool of skilled workers.

I appreciate and strongly support AFSA's efforts to remove the hour and salary caps in working after retirement. Otherwise, I will have to look for something that's outside government but more rewarding than being a Walmart greeter.

Curt Whittaker

FSO

Embassy Lima



The Case for Entry-Level Rotations

As a former head of training assignments in what was then the Bureau of Personnel (now Global Talent Management), I can only applaud the continuing effort to establish a State Department training complement. And prodded by Beatrice Camp's March 2023 *FSJ* article, "Learning the Ropes Through Rotations," I can also vouch for the benefits of rotational assignments for new officers.

I benefited enormously from a year's rotation in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) as a member of the U.S. Information Agency's very first junior officer program in 1954-1955, which qualified me to



open two new one-man field posts in Laos in 1955-1956.

Interestingly, my first assignments after I switched from USIA to State in 1957 taught me political and economic writing in

what was then called intelligence-research on Africa, which by chance was broadened when I accompanied the first chargé d'affaires to open our embassy in Conakry and took on all the administrative work as well as my assigned consular duties.

The experience greatly facilitated learning what other officers do, and I subsequently specialized in political affairs and eventually served as deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at other posts.

George Lambrakis
Senior FSO
Paris, France ■

Share your thoughts about this month's issue.

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Filling the Front Office in Niger

The new U.S. ambassador to Niger, Kathleen FitzGibbon, arrived in Niamey on Aug 19.

A career Foreign Service officer with extensive experience in West Africa, FitzGibbon was confirmed by the Senate on July 27—one day after the coup that ousted Niger’s President Mohamed Bazoum. Her nomination had been held up by Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) for a full year as part of an unrelated political battle.

The State Department said on Aug. 19 that there are no plans for FitzGibbon to present her credentials to coup leaders.

“Her arrival does not reflect any change in our policy position, but responds to the need for senior leadership of our mission at a challenging time,” the statement read. “Her diplomatic focus will be to advocate for a diplomatic solution that preserves constitutional order in Niger and for the immediate release of President Bazoum.”

When a military junta toppled Niger’s U.S.-backed leader on July 26, there was no American chief of mission in the country; the embassy had been run by a chargé d’affaires since December 2021.

The Biden administration did not nominate an ambassador to the post until 18 months into its tenure and still has not named a new envoy to Africa’s Sahel region. That position was created during the Trump administration and has been vacant for nearly two years, NBC reported.

In an effort to revitalize relations with the region, the White House released its strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa in August 2022—the first U.S. administration to release one. Secretary of State Antony Blinken then visited Niger on March 16 of this year, a “first” by a U.S. Secretary of State.

Contemporary Quote

ee The EU has ... draft legislation on artificial intelligence. In the U.S., basically we’re flailing. Part of that is [due to] lobbying from Silicon Valley, and part of it is because we are much more fiercely committed to free speech. And the U.S. Congress doesn’t seem to ‘get’ technology. I don’t think that we’re going to do anything as organized as the Europeans have. They’ve got a lot of experience already, and Americans are going to be watching [EU tech regulators] very, very closely.

—Carla Anne Robbins, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, in an Aug. 24 episode of “The World Next Week” podcast.

Niger was the sixth country in the Sahel—which reaches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea—to experience a coup since 2020. The region is also grappling with the rise of jihadist insurgencies.

Afghanistan, Two Years Later

On Aug. 15, the Taliban celebrated the second anniversary of their return to power in Afghanistan, congratulating the country on “this great victory” in a statement.

In an interview that day with the Associated Press, the group’s spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said restrictions on girls and women—including the ban on girls attending school beyond sixth grade and working for assistance organizations, including the United Nations—will remain in place. He also said that there is no fixed term for Taliban rule, which “will serve for as long as it can.”

Despite assurances of general amnesty from the Taliban, in the two years of their rule, hundreds of soldiers, police, and other officials from the former U.S.-backed government in Afghanistan have been subjected to extrajudicial executions, torture, disappearances, and arbitrary arrests, according to a United Nations investigation.

For Afghans who worked with the U.S. but remain trapped in Afghanistan, the slow pace of Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) processing is practically a death sentence. No One Left Behind, an advocacy organization for Afghan SIV recipients, reports that it has documented hundreds of SIV applicants who were killed by the Taliban while awaiting their visas.

In June, Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) introduced the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2023 (S.1786), and a companion bill was introduced in the House of Representatives.

This legislation would authorize an additional 20,000 SIVs for the Afghan program and extend it by five years, replacing the current system of year-to-year authorizations. It would also require a strategy for more efficient visa processing in an effort to reduce the backlog of applications.

In July, Sen. Shaheen added similar language to the State Department’s appropriation bill, adding 20,000 more visas and extending the program through 2029. But that bill remains in limbo.

Even those who didn’t work with the U.S. face immense hardship; aid agencies and human rights groups warn of the humanitarian crisis gripping the Afghan population.

(Continued on page 16)

Commemoration: 25th Anniversary of the East Africa Bombings

First, we will remember. Then we will talk about resilience,” said Molly Phee, assistant secretary of State for African affairs, offering the first words from the podium at a somber event at the State Department on Aug. 7.

Inside the National Museum of American Diplomacy, participants had filled in rows of seats marked “Dar es Salaam, Tanzania” on one side, and “Nairobi, Kenya” on the other. Between them was a narrow aisle, but since this day 25 years ago, the two groups have been bonded by their shared loss and trauma.

In near-simultaneous truck bomb explosions carried out by al-Qaida in Tanzania and Kenya on Aug. 7, 1998, the U.S. embassy communities in those countries were shattered. More than 250 people were killed (56 of them U.S. government employees, contractors, and family members; 12 of them were Americans), and more than 5,000 were wounded.

Next to speak was Ambassador (ret.) Prudence Bushnell, chief of mission in Nairobi at the time of the attack. She described the victims as “loved ones of many here ... who were trying to make a positive difference when they were cut down.”

She recounted how, in the months leading up to the bombing, she had repeatedly asked State Department leadership to relocate the embassy due to security concerns. She was told to stop.

“I would never have been able to face the people I face today, to have seen the pain, sorrow, and righteous anger of the families, survivors, victims, and citizens in Nairobi had I not known that I did my leadership best,” she said.

Bushnell praised her colleagues for their actions in the aftermath: “They dug themselves out of the rubble, they re-created their organizations, they assisted others, they helped one another to heal, and they created the August 7th Memorial Park,” she said, where the names of those who were lost are etched in stone.

“The mission purpose, because of those who died, is to be a symbol of hope, peace, and reconciliation,” she added.

Ambassador John Lange, the former chargé d'affaires in Dar es Salaam, then took the stage. He described watching, as if in slow motion, as the glass from a window behind him blew over his head and landed, in mylar film sheets, on the people sitting across from him.

Miraculously, none of them were seriously injured.

Lange praised survivors for the duties they took on, consoling families, setting up airport operations, and reestablishing the embassy. He also emphasized the importance of providing mental health care for those who may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

“I would hope that [the Bureau of Medical Services] would do a mental health survey of current and retired employees and dependents who went through traumatic situations in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere,” he said. “For the victims of the 1998 bombings, it’s never been done.”

Edith Bartley, chief advocate and spokesperson for survivors and families affected by the bombings, spoke next. She recalled her father and brother, both of whom were killed in Nairobi, and renewed calls for security at posts overseas.

“As long as there is instability in the world, the dangers remain,” she said. “Foreign Service officers and embassy personnel need to know their families will be taken care of and never forgotten if tragedy strikes. The most precious asset of our U.S. embassies and consulates are the human personnel.”

Finally, Secretary of State Antony Blinken offered remarks. Behind the numbers and statistics of the day, he said, “there was a father, a son, a brother, a mother, a daughter, a sister. Some of us in this life are somehow called upon to make a lifetime’s worth of difference in a period that is far shorter than what we consider a full life. Your loved ones did exactly that, and that’s an incredibly powerful, beautiful legacy to carry forward.”



Secretary Blinken delivers remarks at the commemoration ceremony at the National Museum of American Diplomacy on Aug. 7, with Edith Bartley, left, John Lange, and Prudence Bushnell.

He summarized security measures now in place for U.S. embassy facilities and discussed the challenge of balancing safety with the field work of diplomacy.

“We send people around the world so that they can engage, so that they can represent us. Making sure that they’re able to do that, while ensuring that they do so in safety and security, is the work we do every single day,” he said.

He also highlighted the department’s efforts to improve care for survivors and family members, such as staffing a corps of psychiatrists to provide crisis response, one-on-one counseling, and other direct services. The Care Coordination Team, he said, assists in case of physical health incidents and helps to secure workers’ compensation and benefits. The Office of Casualty Assistance serves as a single point of contact for bereaved families and those who have experienced critical incidents like a terrorist attack.

In closing, he said, “I can’t think of a better way to honor the scars, the sacrifices of that day than to carry forward the work that those we lost were engaged in—the work of diplomacy, the work of the United States, the work of connecting our country with other countries.”

After observing a moment of silence, the Secretary worked his way through the audience, speaking with family members and survivors, offering embraces to some, and allowing others to cry on his shoulder.

A brief panel discussion followed. Edith Bartley, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma, Under Secretary for Management John Bass, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, and event participants shared thoughts on how to care for embassy communities, and then many proceeded to Arlington National Cemetery for a memorial ceremony.

U.S. EMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM



At the Hope Out of Sorrow memorial in Dar es Salaam on Aug. 7, 2023, Ambassador Michael Battle (center, in suit) stands with former embassy employees who survived the bombing.

Memorial Event at U.S. Embassy Dar es Salaam

Nearly 100 people gathered on Aug. 7 at the Hope Out of Sorrow memorial at the Tanzania National Museum and House of Culture to remember the victims of the 1998 bombing.

Survivors, victims’ family members, members of the diplomatic community, and leaders from the Interfaith Peace Committee attended, alongside eight employees who worked for the embassy in 1998 and remain on staff today.

In his remarks, Ambassador Michael Battle commented that although the attacks that day were meant to divide the partnerships between nations, relations between the U.S. and Tanzania are stronger than ever. They are, he said, “a powerful repudiation of the violence and hate on display that day as I can imagine.”

U.S. Embassy Nairobi Remembers

The 25th anniversary of the embassy bombing was marked by two events in Nairobi.

Internally, the mission community gathered at the embassy to commemorate the sacrifices of those who lost their lives during the attack.

As part of the ceremony, staff laid flowers at the memorial that honors the 46 American and Kenyan employees who died in the bombing. Former ambassadors to Kenya including Prudence Bushnell, Johnnie Carson, and Robert Godec joined Ambassador Meg Whitman in offering reflections via video.

The Hope Out of Sorrow memorial was inaugurated in 2018 on the 20th anniversary of the attacks. Vice President Kamala Harris paid her respects and laid a wreath during her visit to Tanzania in March 2023.

Mohamed Ahmed, a Somali American who grew up in nearby Mombasa, Kenya, also spoke to commend the interfaith dialogue in Tanzania and its role in countering violent extremism (CVE). Ahmed was in the country as a participant of an embassy-organized U.S. speaker program on CVE. He noted that the cultural and religious diversity in the U.S. and Tanzania serves as common ground for the countries’ strong partnership.

Later that day, embassy employees gathered with Amb. Battle at a small memorial on the mission compound to place a wreath and share a moment of silence in remembrance of their fallen colleagues.

The second event was a commemoration at the August 7th Memorial Park, the former site of the U.S. embassy, where American and Kenyan officials, including members of parliament, victims support organizations and religious leaders, offered remarks and members of the public laid white roses and wreaths at the plaque bearing the names of the 218 victims.

Locally employed (LE) staff spoke of the significance of the park to survivors and what it represents to the city. In a testament to their dedication, 71 LE staff colleagues who served at the embassy during the attack 25 years ago continue to serve there today.



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(Continued from page 13)

World Vision said 15 million people in the country will face acute levels of food insecurity this year, with 2.8 million of those in the “emergency” category—one step away from famine. The World Health Organization also expressed concern about Afghans’ lack of access to basic health services.

ADST Launches Afghanistan Project

Two years after the evacuation of Kabul began, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) hosted a fireside chat with eight former Afghanistan USAID mission directors at DACOR Bacon House in Washington, D.C.

During the Aug. 16 discussion, participants shared powerful insights and reflections on their times in Afghanistan, comparing their experiences and lessons learned.

Panelists included Bambi Arellano, Jim Bever, Craig Buck, Tina Dooley-Jones, Earl Gast, Herbie Smith, and

Ken Yamashita, with Bill Hammink as moderator. The event was co-sponsored by the USAID Alumni Association.

In opening remarks, Hammink praised USAID Afghanistan mission leadership for “delivering enduring development results in a war zone” amid “ever-changing priorities” over the course of America’s longest-running war.

Bever described the experience of achieving one critical goal from his tenure: construction of a 300-mile highway between Kabul and Kandahar through terrain overrun by al-Qaida and Taliban operatives and replete with landmines. In 2003 his team completed the road two weeks ahead of schedule and under budget, significantly bolstering not only infrastructure but also health programs.

“Afghan women were dying in droves during childbirth,” he recounted. “Our standard was: can we get a woman who is bleeding to a place within four hours—generally the time it takes to bleed to death—[where she can] get the right treatment?” The new road, known as Highway 1, made this possible.



A panel of USAID mission directors participates in ADST’s fireside chat on Aug. 16.

The fireside chat marked the launch of ADST's new oral history project, an electronic collection of interviews with more than 30 diplomatic leaders, Oral Histories of U.S. Diplomacy in Afghanistan 2001-2021.

Supported by philanthropic grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the project aims to capture valuable first-hand accounts of the U.S. intervention in and withdrawal from Afghanistan.

New Munitions for Ukraine

Ukraine observed its national day—the second since the Kremlin's full-scale invasion 18 months earlier—with subdued celebrations on Aug. 24. In a video address marking the occasion, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked Ukrainians for their contributions to the nation's defense.

That defense effort provoked controversy earlier this summer, however, when the U.S. pledged to provide cluster munitions to the Ukrainian counteroffensive to help it overcome its disadvantage in manpower and artillery.

That decision was announced by the White House in early July as part of a new \$800 million package of military aid to Ukraine.

Cluster munitions include rockets, bombs, missiles, and artillery projectiles that break apart midair, scattering smaller bomblets over a large area. They are banned by most NATO members and more than 120 countries—though not the U.S., Russia, or Ukraine—for the harm unexploded ordnance poses to civilians even after a conflict is over.

According to *The New York Times*, since their first use during World War II, these munitions have killed an estimated



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56,500 to 86,500 civilians and killed and wounded dozens of U.S. service-members.

Representative Sara Jacobs (D-Calif.) denounced the decision, saying: “We’ve seen Russia’s horrific use of cluster munitions in Ukraine, and we shouldn’t cede the moral high ground by criticizing their actions and then sending cluster munitions ourselves. ... [They] prevent the successful economic rebuilding and recovery that’s needed to ensure a prosperous Ukraine and maintain anti-corruption gains.”

Senator Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) praised the announcement: “For Ukrainian forces to defeat Putin’s invasion, Ukraine needs at least equal access to the weapons Russia already uses against them, like cluster munitions. Providing this new capability is the right decision.”

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. will send a version of the munition that has a reduced “dud rate,”

meaning fewer of the smaller bomblets fail to explode, wrote the Associated Press.

At an Aug. 17 press conference, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel reiterated that “the U.S. will continue to support to Ukraine for as long as it takes so Ukraine can defend itself from Russian aggression and be in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table when the time comes.”

Wagner Group Leader Dies in Plane Crash

Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the mercenary Wagner Group, died on Aug. 23 when the private jet on which he was traveling crashed north of Moscow. All 10 people on board were killed, including two other senior Wagner figures, Prigozhin’s four bodyguards, and a crew of three.

The crash occurred exactly two months after Prigozhin and his paramilitary forces

staged an armed rebellion against the Russian defense establishment, taking control of the city of Rostov in late June. The event ended with an ambiguous arrangement in which Prigozhin received immunity from prosecution in return for leaving for Belarus.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called the uprising “treason” and said that those who organized it would “face unavoidable punishment.”

Based on preliminary intelligence reports, U.S. and European officials believe an explosion on board brought down the aircraft rather than a mechanical failure, *The New York Times* reported.

At the Aspen Security Forum on July 20, CIA Director William Burns, a former Deputy Secretary of State and former ambassador to Russia, had predicted that Putin would bide his time, NBC News reported. “I would be surprised if Prigozhin escapes further retribution for this,” he added.

50 Years Ago

Resolution of the Wives’ Dilemma

It is clear that there is a group [of women] that should be respected who oft-repeat, “But I didn’t join the Foreign Service. My husband did.”

Everyone who has had several posts in the Foreign Service knows that the quality of life at the posts depends on the women and the extent to which they organize themselves to keep it high. Doubtless we still have enough wives at each post who are willing and able to undertake the responsibility so that no one need participate who prefers another occupation.

What is important is that we somehow revive the system for having their enormous contribution recognized for what it really is: an essential ingredient in the smooth functioning of all our overseas missions.

—Carroll Russell Sherer, wife of career FSO Ambassador Albert Sherer Jr., in an excerpt from her proposal for a new system that allows wives to opt in or out of Foreign Service responsibilities at post under the “Sherer Plan,” from the October 1973 FSJ.



Shadow Diplomacy with Iran

On Aug. 22, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a press briefing that a deal is in the works with Iran to secure the release of five American citizens who have been detained in the country.

In exchange, \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenue stuck in South Korea would be unfrozen to use for humanitarian purposes, and the U.S. would release some Iranian nationals from American prisons, according to Reuters.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters on Aug. 15 that the deal would not lead to sanctions relief. “Nothing about our overall approach to Iran has changed. We continue to pursue a strategy of deterrence, of pressure and diplomacy,” he said.

The deal's very existence demonstrates that the two countries are engaged in shadow diplomacy—conducted through intermediaries including Oman and Qatar—to reach agreements on a range of issues while avoiding open deals that could be undermined by opponents on both sides, Bloomberg wrote.

The U.S. and Iran remain at odds over the Iranian nuclear program, Tehran's support for regional Shi'ite militias, its provision of drones and other weapons to Russia for the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, and the government's broad crackdown on women's rights.

The backchannel negotiations may offer an avenue to deescalate tensions in the Middle East over Iran's nuclear gains, keep oil prices low, and secure the release of U.S. hostages.

AI-Assisted Declassification

As hundreds of thousands of 25-year-old State Department cables reach the declassification stage, the onerous task of manually reviewing each one may soon be offset by artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

Through a small-scale AI pilot, the department is automating the review process in preparation for the large volume of electronic records that will need to be reviewed in the next few years. The pilot was developed in a collaboration across three offices, according to FedScoop.

Historically, manual page-by-page review, conducted year-round by a team of six, has been the only way to determine if information can be declassified for public release or is exempt from declassification to protect national security.

Podcast of the Month: *In the Room with Peter Bergen* (<https://peterbergen.com/podcast>)

Launched in May, this weekly podcast is hosted by the journalist who nabbed the first TV interview with Osama bin Laden in a cave in Afghanistan in 1997. CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen invites listeners to sit in on his conversations with important figures in geopolitics.

Self-described as the antidote to “conflicting narratives and sensationalism” in the news, Bergen's program delivers objective analysis on current events and narrative storytelling that makes each episode an easy listen.

Previous episodes have covered Havana syndrome, the fentanyl epidemic, and UFOs. A noteworthy two-part episode released in August on the anniversary of the Kabul airlift revisits the final days of the U.S. presence in the country, interviewing Ross Wilson, chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan during the evacuation, as well as Afghan national security adviser Matin Bek, and Breshna Musazai, a young survivor of a Taliban attack.



The appearance of a particular site or podcast is for information only and does not constitute an endorsement.

The rapidly increasing volume of documents, however, renders the manual review process unsustainable. Around 100,000 classified cables were created each year between 1995 and 2003. The number of classified emails doubles every two years after 2001, rising to more than 12 million emails in 2018.

The Bureau of Administration's Office of Global Information Services (A/GIS), the Office of Management Strategy and Solutions' Center for Analytics (M/SS CFA), and the Bureau of Information Resource Management's (IRM) Messaging Systems Office are now moving toward production-scale deployment of AI to augment the procedure.

With AI assistance, the workload stands to be reduced by more than 65 percent, according to the results of a three-month pilot program in which a model was trained using human deci-

sions made for more than 300,000 cables in previous years. The AI's document review matched previous human declassification decisions at a rate of more than 97 percent.

The AI tool will not replace jobs, because it requires human reviewers to participate in the decision-making process and conduct quality control.

Nevertheless, the project significantly reduces personnel hours and should save almost \$8 million in labor costs over the next 10 years of reviews, according to Matthew Graviss, chief data and AI officer at the State Department and director of the agency's Center for Analytics; Samuel Stehle, data scientist in the Center for Analytics; and Eric Stein, the deputy assistant Secretary for Global Information Services. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Julia Wohlers.

Go Ahead, Ask About My Accent

BY NIKOLINA KULIDZAN

all but skipped down the uneven Alexandria sidewalks. I had recently returned from an overseas assignment and was still cherishing every moment back in the neighborhood. I was almost to my car when my eyes locked on a bundle of silvery-brown fur. The tiny pup's eyes were mere slits, but his paws were comically large.

Without even glancing at the humans at the other end of the leash, I reached down to pet the pup. "What's he, like, eight weeks?" I asked.

At one point, it occurred to me that I should have sought permission, and I apologized to the humans. They were gracious and waved off the apology.

With two dogs under age 2 at home, both adopted at our last post, I was a recently minted dog person. I gave the new puppy parents some unsolicited advice, wished them good luck, and headed for my car.

And that's when it came. The question. "Where are you from?"



For 25 years, I had been answering that question patiently and politely, pushing aside the discomfort it caused

Don't tell a person with a French accent that you ate a baguette once, or an Australian that you envy their beach life.

me and the knowledge that more often than not, the inquiry would be either a conversational dead-end or an opening for the inquirer to share their opinions on my place of origin.

But that day, I smiled and said: "I'm from here."

Stumped but only briefly, the young woman rushed to clarify: "Oh, I thought I heard an accent."

"There are people with accents here, too," I said, still wearing a smile, hoping that would lessen the sting.

In the car, I recounted the event to my ever-supportive husband. He thought I had been uncharitable, and he phrased it less charitably than that. A friend we met for dinner agreed. And after some reflection, so did I, because as a matter of personal policy and in response to the social issues of our day, I believe we should be asking more questions, not fewer.

We should be starting conversations, not shutting them down. Making attempts to understand people who look, sound, behave, and think differently, not ignoring, shutting out, or shying away from them.

Even so, I felt entitled to my curt, smart-alecky response. I was being neighborly, only to get reminded I'm an outsider. I was born in a country that no longer exists, and by the age of 18, I had experienced war, refugee life, and immigration. For me, answering this seemingly innocuous question is a topic more suitable for the therapist's couch or a hefty memoir than a breezy sidewalk exchange. But my identity struggles aside, the question is problematic because it implies that I and the rest of my fellow accented Americans don't belong.

And that's hard to hear for those of us who have worked so darn hard to earn our place in this country—we've paid exorbitant international tuitions and worked backbreaking or soul-sucking jobs to get a green card. We have fought in wars or worked around the clock to evacuate American citizens from the epicenter of a pandemic, left our families and customs behind.



Nikolina Kulidzan is a public diplomacy–coned Foreign Service officer and a writer. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Sun magazine, a Best New Writing anthology, and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Award. She has served overseas in Singapore and Beijing, and in Washington, D.C., in the Operations Center and the Bureau of Global Public Affairs.

She is the current president of Americans by Choice employee organization (abc@state.gov). The views stated here are the author's own and not necessarily those of Americans by Choice or the U.S. government.

And yes, we have adopted puppies and allowed them to sleep in our beds, confirming our families' long-held suspicion that becoming an American involved losing your mind. We have done all this, and, in return, all we want is to be recognized as Americans.

That day, on the Old Town sidewalk, I didn't want to be an object lesson. I just wanted to be a neighbor.



That moment aside, I don't want to shut down conversations. I don't want to stymie the opportunity for myself or others to inform, educate, or connect. But I also don't want to feel like a foreigner every time I open my mouth.

So, as someone who has been answering questions about my accent for many years and discussed the issue at length with accented friends, but also as someone who feels a burning urge to inquire about the accents of others (whether to test my accent-placing prowess or learn more about the person), I have a few words of advice when it comes to engaging folks with accents.

- Earn the right to ask the question by first building trust and a sense of commonality. Don't make this the first question you ask. Learn something about the individual before pointing to what makes them different. "Do you have a dog?" would have made a great first question for the accented stranger who just spent five minutes swooning over your pooch.

- Have ideas for where to take the conversation after you get your answer. Have something better than "Oh, cool" to respond with. Or at least commit to checking your map app as soon as the person is out of sight. But don't use this as a chance to show off your vast knowledge of geopolitics or ethnic stereotypes.

Don't tell a person with a French accent that you ate a baguette once, an Australian that you envy their beach life, or a Serb American that her people started World War I.

- Find a way to ask the question without alienating the person. Instead of asking, "Where are you from?"—or, heaven forbid, "Where are you *really* from?"—consider saying: "Where is your accent from?" or "Where are you from *originally*?" That way you open a conversation while allowing for the possibility that the accented stranger is no less American than you.

- Be extra cautious in the professional setting. As U.S. diplomats, your accented colleagues represent the United States, and our credibility depends on being as American as anyone else. Help us by recognizing that our accent is just one of our many traits.

Asking personal questions is always risky. Some people might find it rude or intrusive. Others might think it a show of ignorance. And some are simply tired of answering the same question for the billionth time and might lash out the way I did.

I'd argue, however, that the risk is worth taking because the alternative is so dismal—that we remain confined to our comfort zones, fearful and suspicious of our differences, isolated in our unperturbed and misunderstood individuality.

So, go ahead, ask me about my accent and my heritage. But when you do, do it with a genuine desire to connect. You are asking a lot of me. Be willing to bring something of yourself to the conversation. If you do, I'll meet you there, in what could be either a minefield or a magic carpet of connecting with someone different than ourselves. ■



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CRISIS

AT THE RUSSIAN WHITE HOUSE

1993

On the 30th anniversary of what Russians call the “October Coup,” a veteran FSO offers an inside view of the fateful standoff between the president and the legislature in Moscow.

BY LOUIS D. SELL



During a 27-year Foreign Service career (1971-1998), Louis Sell served for many years in the former Soviet Union, Russia, and Yugoslavia. After leaving the Foreign Service, he served as Kosovo director of the International Crisis Group (2000) and as executive director of the American University in Kosovo Foundation (2003-2008), where he helped found the American University in Kosovo. He is the author of From Washington to Moscow: U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Collapse of the USSR (Duke University Press, 2016) and Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia (Duke University Press, 2002).

Sunday, Oct. 3, 1993, was the kind of unusually warm and sunny fall day that Muscovites cherish. Having essentially been on full-time duty as acting number two at the embassy since the crisis began in September, I decided to take my wife, Cathey, my 8-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, and one of her friends for a picnic on the outskirts of Moscow. That excursion turned out to be a big mistake, only mitigated by the fact that almost everyone else in Moscow, from Boris Yeltsin on down, was as surprised by what happened as I was.

“Got a cigarette?” the young Russian special forces sergeant drawled as he leaned his Kalashnikov casually across our open van widow. A dozen other soldiers walked warily behind two armored vehicles withdrawing slowly down the center of the unnaturally empty Moscow ring road. Weapons at the ready, their eyes searched the nearby buildings with the taut alertness of men who have recently been fired on and expect it could happen again. Trying not to look nervously at my wife and the two little girls in the back, I asked what was happening. “Who knows,” he replied. “Some kind’a ruckus. We’re getting out.”

Interior Ministry troops assemble near the Russian White House during the 1993 constitutional crisis.



COURTESY OF FLOUIS SELL

From there, I drove a few hundred yards through a milling crowd to the American embassy. Recognizing me, Marine guards arrayed unusually in helmets and flak jackets opened the gate

just wide enough for us to enter. Once inside the compound, while my wife and the children dashed for our residence, I hustled into the command post that the embassy had been maintaining near my office in the political section for the past two weeks—since Russian President Boris Yeltsin had dissolved the country’s hardline parliament. When the delegates refused to disband, Yeltsin surrounded them in the “White House” where only two years previously he, with parliamentary chief Ruslan Khasbulatov at his side, had led resistance to the August 1991 coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Yeltsin’s action was clearly outside the law, but for the past two years the parliament had been sabotaging his reform program with a vehemence that, in recent months, had blocked all normal functions of government. Since the White House was only 200 yards behind the U.S. embassy, we had found ourselves participants in the drama from its beginning. Despite the annoyance, inconvenience, and eventually danger of being at the epicenter of what turned out to be an armed conflict, embassy personnel and their families pulled together to meet the challenge.



In the command post, my deputy, Judy Mandel, an experienced Soviet hand who spoke fluent Russian, and the embassy security officer briefed me on what we knew and didn’t know—mainly the latter at that point. Mid-afternoon, a crowd of several thousand had unexpectedly come marching down the ring road and attacked police barricades from behind. Simultaneously, armed men, led by Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy, had swarmed out of the White House. After a brief firefight, most of the police had fled, but some had been killed and others had surrendered. While this was going on, embassy personnel had quietly brought inside the uniformed Soviet guards outside the main gate and let them out via a back entrance, thereby probably saving their lives.

Flushed with the enthusiasm of unexpected victory, the crowd was a motley collection of old-style communists, Russian nationalist extremists, swastika-toting Nazis, and leather-jacketed skinheads looking for a fight and not very particular against whom. About the only thing that united them was their hatred for Boris Yeltsin—and the United States.

At the point where it faces the White House, the embassy compound is protected by a brick wall about seven feet high. It was regularly climbed by drunks or thrill-seekers; on one occasion a confused but otherwise seemingly harmless Russian intruder was found taking a shower in the basement of the embassy townhouse belonging to the deputy chief of mission (DCM).

After milling about and making their views on America abundantly clear through shouts and gestures, the crowd moved away. On the open line to the State Department’s Operations Center, I briefed Strobe Talbott, ambassador-at-large and special adviser to Secretary of State Warren Christopher on the Newly Independent States. It took only a few words for Talbott to understand the gravity of the situation. He asked what we needed, and I urged him to remind the Russian authorities of their obligation to provide protection for the embassy.

My next task was to inform Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering who, like most of the rest of Moscow, was enjoying a quiet Sunday at his Spaso House residence. When he heard what was happening, Pickering said he would walk over immediately. There were still plenty of angry people milling about, and I advised him to at least wait until we could get a couple of security officers over to accompany him. But the ambassador brought the conversation to a quick close by saying, “I’ll be over in 15 minutes,” and hung up.

Having successfully sorted out the ambassador, my next call was to the USA section of the Russian Foreign Ministry. When I told the young duty officer what had happened, he put me through to the home of Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy

Mamedov. As I spoke, I could almost hear the deep intake of breath at the other end of the line. When I finished, Mamedov said simply, “I understand. I’ll get back to you.”

Mamedov never did call me back, but as the evening progressed, it was clear that the Russian authorities had much more on their mind than protection of the U.S. embassy. Unfolding in the streets of Moscow was an armed struggle for the future of Russia—one that Boris Yeltsin came within a whisker of losing. Had he done so, the consequences for Russia and the world would have been grave, indeed.



My own direct involvement in the crisis had begun on Sept. 21, when my regular contact in Yeltsin’s office, Foreign Policy Adviser Dmitry Ryurikov, asked me to come to the Kremlin. He told me that Yeltsin would be making an important speech to the nation that evening. I asked if Khasbulatov would like the speech, but Ryurikov simply smiled and advised me to keep an eye on “our neighbors” in the White House.

In the beginning, only loose lines of police surrounded the White House. They stood around talking, smoking, and looking in a bored way at the barricades the Supreme Soviet defenders had erected just across the street. Sometimes, however, riot-equipped police suddenly deployed in grimly massed ranks, as if awaiting an order to attack. Generally, the police commanders seemed to have little idea about what was going on. One told me that, as far as he could tell, no one had any idea how things

would turn out except for Yeltsin—and as for him, the policeman shrugged and spit on the ground ... not exactly a sign of high confidence.

During the first week or so, I strolled around what the parliamentary forces called “Freedom Square” for a firsthand impression of developments in what was a combination crisis and street theater. Sometimes I brought along my wife and daughter, which always elicited a smile from the babushkas in the crowd.

Gradually, things changed. Fewer people were milling about, and there was a much larger proportion of angry-looking young men, some dressed in black shirts, some in cast-off army uniforms, and others in civilian clothes. Many had been drinking, and all seemed to be spoiling for a fight. The older people still hanging about were not the genial Soviet-era pensioners who delighted in telling me how wonderful things had been under the benign rule of Josef Stalin but the crazies who screeched obscenities at Yeltsin, Clinton, and the nearby U.S. embassy at the slightest provocation. Most alarming was the evidence of weapons. Black-shirted Kalashnikov-toting young men stood guard at the entrances into the White House. Stacked inside were stockpiles of Molotov cocktails.

As the crisis heated up, Ambassador Pickering asked the defense attaché to draw a diagram showing which parts of the embassy could be hit by gunfire coming from the 18 stories of the nearby White House; the results were alarming. Most office areas and almost all the apartments where families lived were vulnerable. In response, personnel were instructed to keep



Russian police at the barricades in central Moscow in October 1993.

COURTESY OF LOUIS SELL



The House of the Government of the Russian Federation, known as the “White House,” burns. On Oct. 4, 1993, at the height of the crisis between the executive branch and the legislature, President Boris Yeltsin ordered an attack on the government center.

under cover, draw their curtains, and stay out of all rooms that faced in the direction of the White House.

Eventually, the tension turned to violence. Chanting and carrying placards saying, “Down with Yeltsin” and “Kill the Jews,” demonstrators seized Smolensk Square, in front of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and built a wall of flaming barricades. Muscovites gathered in the dusk, gazing in apprehensive silence at the angry wall of fire blocking Moscow’s main thoroughfare. As I listened to their comments, it was clear that the bulk of the bystanders had little sympathy either with the demonstrators or with the authorities.

“What will become of us?” one woman asked, crossing herself.

“This will end badly,” another man muttered gloomily. It was a view the Yeltsin administration would have done well to heed.



That Sunday, after our telephone conversation, Ambassador Pickering walked into the embassy looking as relaxed as if he had been out for a weekend stroll. After a quick briefing on the current situation and a phone call to Washington, Pickering summoned the senior members of the embassy staff who happened to be on hand that Sunday evening to the “bubble.” Calling for the Foreign Affairs Manual, he read systematically through the pages that describe what embassies should do in times of crises,



CHUCK NACKE/ALAMY

Anti-Yeltsin activists, who had barricaded themselves inside the White House, surrender after the Russian army’s action.

cases” reside, does not bear thinking about.

A larger and better-armed group headed in commandeered trucks for national television headquarters, located at the Ostankino Television Tower on the outskirts of the city. Fortunately, just before the mob showed up, a small detachment of special police loyal to the government arrived and took up defensive positions inside the building. For the next couple of hours, a firefight raged in the darkening square. Scores were killed, but the parliamentary forces never got beyond the entrance hall before they disappeared back into the darkness.

As these events were unfolding, courageous TV personnel set up an alternative site where government and public figures loyal to Yeltsin broadcast appeals to the people of Moscow to rally in support as they had done in 1991. Watching the parade of brave, intelligent, but clearly deeply shaken personalities was

assigning responsibilities to appropriate officers as he went along. It had an immediate positive effect on pulling the embassy team together and calming emotions.

All nonessential embassy personnel and family members on the embassy compound were told to assemble and remain in the embassy gym, which was partially below the ground and had no external windows. Embassy personnel living off compound were informed what was happening and told to remain at their apartments.

Meanwhile, after breaking out of the White House and milling around in front of the embassy for some time, the crowd split into two groups. One headed for the Russian Ministry of Defence about a mile away. They shouted for the army to join them and made a few half-hearted efforts to get inside before dribbling away. Later, a deputy minister who happened to be working in the building that afternoon told me that his first inkling of trouble came when security guards rushed into his office, handed him a Kalashnikov, and sent him with a couple of senior military officers to guard one of the entrances to the nearly deserted building. Calls for police protection apparently went unanswered for some time. What could have happened if the mob had gained control of this building, where two of Russia’s three “nuclear brief-



Demonstrators hold up a sign of President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow, October 1993.

was still unclear. Around this time, a lone figure appeared at the embassy's chained main gate. Iona Andronov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet's foreign affairs committee and its supposed "Foreign Minister," was asking to see me. I had gotten acquainted with Andronov in the mid-1980s when he was a Soviet journalist in the United States, distinguished by the seeming pleasure he brought to his vitriolic accounts of American life. Like many others, Andronov made a seamless transition from convinced communist to rabid Russian nationalist.

Andronov asked if I would contact Yeltsin's people and urge a pause for negotiation between the two sides. I replied that if the parliament was really interested in avoiding bloodshed, it should put its guns down, leave the White House, and continue their struggle through political means. After thinking it over for a minute, I added, however, that if Andronov would return to the embassy in one hour, I would see what could be done.

After checking with the ambassador, I called the Russian Foreign Ministry, which, in turn, put me in touch with the government's command post at Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's office. I described

the situation to Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaliy Churkin, a rising star of the Russian diplomatic service, who then had responsibility for Russia's relations with Yugoslavia and later was Russia's ambassador to the United Nations. After checking with Chernomyrdin, Churkin agreed to speak to Andronov on the phone.

After exchanging a preliminary round of insults, the two got down to business. Andronov proposed that Yeltsin rescind his Sept. 21 decree dissolving the Supreme Soviet and end the police siege of the White House. Provided they received guarantees of safe treatment, the deputies would leave the building. Churkin, for his part, demanded an immediate evacuation of the White House and would say nothing about the fate of its inhabitants except that those not guilty of crimes would be allowed to go free. Eventually, both more or less hung up on each other. Armed civil conflict in Moscow—the first since the Russian revolution—was now inevitable.

inspiring but also worrying. When the screen suddenly and without any explanation went blank and stayed that way for hours, it was a dark moment for everyone. If the crowd had managed to take control of Ostankino and Vice President Rutskoy had been the next to appear on television screens across Russia, it might have been the end for Yeltsin.

As surprised as everyone else by developments that day, Yeltsin arrived at the Kremlin via helicopter early in the evening. There he spent much time in an eventually successful effort to persuade reluctant senior military and police officials to move against the White House. He never spoke to the Russian people that evening, and senior officials hinted to me—and confirmed later in published accounts—that he was in no condition to do so.



By the early hours of the morning of Oct. 4, the streets of Moscow were quiet, but what would happen when day broke

NIKOLAI IGNATIEV/ALAMY

A few hours later, lying on the floor of my townhouse living room, I watched while a column of armored vehicles crashed through the barricades between the embassy and the White House. Defenders hurled flaming Molotov cocktails. In a few seconds “Freedom Square” was dotted with small pools of blazing gasoline. Crumpled beside them, often, were the bodies of the throwers.

Later in the morning, six tanks appeared on the opposite, front side of the White House. They fired a few shots, which ignited massive fires in the upper floors of the building. While this was occurring, special police filtered into the back side of the building and fought a floor-by-floor battle with its defenders. Late in the afternoon, Ruskoy and Khasbulatov emerged with their hands up, and together with several hundred supporters, they were driven away in buses. Throughout the conflict the embassy suffered only one casualty, a Marine Security Guard who was wounded while maintaining watch from one of the upper windows of the unfinished new embassy.

Since the White House was only 200 yards behind the U.S. embassy, we had found ourselves participants in the drama from its beginning.

Because of the continued sniping around the embassy, Ambassador Pickering decided that embassy personnel should not return to their apartments on the compound. People spent a second night in the gym. I slept for about an hour on the carpeted floor in the DCM’s office just across the hall from the ambassador’s office who, as far as I knew, did about the same thing.

I woke at about 5 a.m. on Oct. 5 to a brilliant sunlit morning. To my surprise, I saw that the fires seemed to have extinguished themselves. It was another unusually warm and sunny autumn day. While hardline supporters mourned over the bodies of the



Russian T-80 battle tanks made a show of strength outside the Russian White House in central Moscow on Oct. 3, 1993.

Unfolding in the streets of Moscow was an armed struggle for the future of Russia—one that Boris Yeltsin came within a whisker of losing.

dead, enterprising street vendors set up a brisk business selling photos to passersby taken against the backdrop of the blackened tower of the now grotesquely misnamed White House.



Two days after the attack on the White House, I accompanied Ambassador Pickering to a meeting with Yeltsin, whose face was puffy and eyes were swollen into slits. He moved briskly through his agenda, but his speech was slow and slurred. I had been observing Yeltsin closely for two years and never before seen

him this way in any private meeting. After half an hour, a bell rang and Yeltsin stood up abruptly, saying the meeting was over.

Yeltsin hung on as Russian president for seven more years but the impetus for democratic reform vanished. In my view, Yeltsin never recovered either personally or politically from the trauma of having to send tanks into the street to fire on Russians. Bouts of alcohol abuse and manic public behavior became more common. Two months after the October tragedy, Yeltsin rammed through a new constitution; it was much needed but seemed to sideline democratic change in favor of enhancing presidential power. Perhaps most tellingly, Boris Yeltsin, who had won elections convincingly every time he put his name before the Russian people, this time had to resort to chicanery in order to get the tally approved, as he did again in the 1996 Russian presidential election.

By 1999, when Yeltsin turned over the reins of power to Vladimir Putin, most Russians had come to associate his legacy and democratic reform more broadly with crime, corruption, poverty, and the collapse of Russian state authority at home and abroad. ■

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OUR FOREIGN SERVICE *Adoption* JOURNEY

Here is an insightful and heartwarming account of how one couple fulfilled their dream of becoming parents through adoption.

BY CLAYTON BOND

We began thinking about becoming adoptive parents many years before we took the plunge. In Washington, D.C., we had attended a “Maybe Baby” class designed for LGBT+ prospective parents that covered a range of topics. We learned about surrogacy and adoption, and settled on the latter.

We also learned that there are open and closed adoptions. Closed adoptions, where the identity of the birth parents is neither known nor sought, are more traditional, but we began to see that an open adoption would be our preference. With an open adoption, the birth parents and adoptive parents are known to each other, and communication between them and the adopted children is encouraged. This is increasingly considered to be the healthiest approach for all parties, and it made sense to us. Our comfort with the idea of an open adoption grew as a result of what we saw and learned from friends who had adopted in that manner.



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International Affairs Center, and continues to volunteer with AFSA and serve on nonprofit boards. His spouse, Ted Osius, is a former AFSA Governing Board member and U.S. ambassador to Vietnam (2014-2017). They and their two children live in Washington, D.C.

The emotional and personal baring-all that seemed to be a part of the process was not as onerous as the enormous amount of paperwork.

We didn't begin taking the formal steps until 2012, during the third and final year of Ted's assignment in Jakarta. Knowing of our interest in becoming parents, a friend and colleague told us about a little girl who was born with fixable special needs and had been abandoned. She had been looked after in a hospital by friendly nurses for several months but needed a permanent home. We went over to the hospital to visit her. We visited a few more times, brought her gifts, and had an independent doctor examine her to see if there were any other medical concerns we should be aware of, following the informative briefing the hospital's staff gave us about her special needs. Finding no other issues, Ted and I went about trying to figure out how to become the little girl's parents.

We already knew what her name would be. We had earlier decided that if we were to have a daughter, she would be Lucy, since each of us had a great aunt named Lucile. Because this little girl was Indonesian, we imagined spelling her name Lusi. We found, to our dismay, though, that we had several fatal strikes against us in trying to adopt Lusi: we were not Indonesian, we were not Muslim, and, of course, we were not a heterosexual couple. Happily, we later learned that another expatriate couple adopted the little girl, whom we believe now has the chance of the full and happy life we had hoped to be able to give her.

The Home Study

In the process of investigating whether we could adopt Lusi, we learned that there was a U.S.-licensed social worker based in Jakarta who could do a home study for us. Even though Lusi was not to be our child, we proceeded with the home study, which we understood we could update once we moved back to Washington, D.C., our next assignment.

The home study, usually the first formal step in the adoption process, was extremely difficult—the emotional and personal baring-all that seemed to be a part of the process was not as onerous as the enormous amount of paperwork.

The social worker required us to provide all kinds of documentation, including evidence of our financial situation, such as pay stubs, mortgage information, bank account statements, retirement accounts, and other investments. She required letters of recommendation from people who knew us and could attest to our suitability to become parents. We needed to provide addresses and police clearances from each of the places where we had lived since we were 18 years old, as well as FBI clearances. We also needed medical clearances, copies of our birth certificates, passports, and state driver's licenses, as well as our marriage certificate.

And then we chatted several times formally with the social worker, individually and together. We talked about whether and to what extent we would be interested in adopting a child with special needs, and whether we had preferences for the child's racial or ethnic background or gender. Our social worker had questions about our relationship, about our upbringings, and about how we expected to raise children, including disciplining them.

Since we had gone through the home study process once, it would be easier to update it, as needed, and to later complete a new home study, if nothing else, for the confidence gained from having gone through what at times felt like an ordeal. We knew that it could be done. So, when we moved to Washington, D.C., with one home study completed, we set about finding an adoption agency in the area to work with on updating it to reflect our new circumstances, which included a different home than the one described in our first home study, as well as new work positions for both of us.

We searched for adoption agencies in the D.C. area that were friendly to gay people, and found one in Maryland. They had certain fees to pay and new forms to complete.

Managing the Wait

The agency connected us with one of their social workers, with whom we worked on our home study update. She was insightful about our strengths and weaknesses and offered useful guidance about how to manage the wait for adoption placement. The adoption agency organized structured social evening sessions with other waiting prospective parents, most of whom had been waiting more than a year already. The agency told us that, in some years, there are plenty of babies they are able to place, but that this was a slow period.

Our social worker advised us to go about our lives as normal. She said that we may get a call about a baby, and at that time, we could run to a store, like Target, and get everything we needed. While we had designated a bedroom for our hoped-for-



COURTESY OF CLAYTON BOND

The Bond-Osius family, 2023.

child, we followed our social worker’s advice and did not turn it into a nursery. And we continued to travel, although we started to buy travel insurance, just in case we were to get the call and had to cut our trip short. We visited friends in Oregon and California; we went to Peru, to the United Kingdom. No calls came.

About a year after our return to D.C., we attended our adoption agency’s annual picnic. We saw all these happy families, which was great for them and difficult for us. Why wasn’t the process working for us? We ran into our social worker, who told us that before next year’s gathering, we would have a child. We wanted to believe her.

We had only planned to be back in D.C. for two years, and it was approaching a year and a half already. We understood that we needed six months after placement before we could finalize the adoption and get a passport for our child so they could travel with us to our hoped-for next overseas assignment.

One of the things we had been advised to do, to help move things along, was to make sure our network knew we were interested in an adoption placement, in the hope that someone might know someone or something that could help us become parents.

Why wasn’t the process working for us?

Then, while on a work trip to West Africa, I was chatting with colleagues who were also adoptive parents. They recommended someone who seemed to be successful in matching prospective adoptive parents with children. Ted and I decided to write the matchmaker.

The Dream

Shortly after I returned to the office from my trip, a colleague and friend told me, randomly, as I walked down the hallway near her office, “I had a dream about you.”

“You did? ... About something good, I hope?” I answered.

She said she dreamed that I was a father, with a baby. My colleague’s dream took me by surprise. I could not recall whether I had told her already about Ted’s and my hopes to become parents. In any case, Ted and I proceeded with our

Our social worker advised us to go about our lives as normal.

lives, including plans made six months before to travel to Rio de Janeiro for New Year's Eve, meeting friends there from Indonesia. We had long before booked our plane tickets and made our hotel reservations.

We arrived at Dulles International Airport that Saturday morning, full of anticipation. Then I noticed that the airline staff member checking us in appeared flustered. She anxiously searched through our passports, page by page. Uh-oh. We had no visa and realized, painfully, that we would not be able to obtain one on arrival in Rio.

We did some research online, and I called the airline's main reservation number. We decided to change our ticket to the afternoon flight to Panama, stay there until at least Monday, when we could try and obtain the Brazilian visa, and then proceed to Rio.

En route, we watched movies, had a good meal, and arrived in Panama at about 9 p.m. We planned to let our friends at the

U.S. embassy there know we were unexpectedly in town, and try to see if they would be available to get together. We planned to visit the Panama Canal. We would still have a vacation and enjoy ourselves, we resolved.

We started getting ready for bed and decided to quickly check Facebook and email before turning in. I saw a message from one of our friends to call the adoption matchmaker right away. We called, and the matchmaker calmly advised us that she was glad we had done so. A birth mother had just delivered earlier that day, decided to place the healthy baby boy for adoption, and had chosen us to raise the child. There were only 10 minutes until the hospital's phones would be cut off for the night; the birth mother's cell phone had run out of juice.

Did we want to proceed? Yes.



Ted and I hadn't planned to parent a second child, though we hadn't ruled it out. Our son was about 11 months old when we received word from the adoption agency that his birth mother was again pregnant, this time with a girl, and wanted us to raise that child, as well. The adoption agency told us that they thought the birth mother would give us some time to absorb the news and get back to her. ...We did. At last, we had found our Lucy, and our family was complete. ■

Things I Learned: Tips for Prospective Adoptive Parents

- Get your first home study done as soon as you begin to seriously consider adopting.
- Carefully think through how you will manage if a child is placed with you on no notice. How much leave could you take? Talk with HR and explore potential options.
- If you will need childcare outside the home, try to get on a waiting list as soon as you seriously consider becoming an adoptive parent. Waiting lists can be years long. But spots open up, unexpectedly, so keep checking in periodically with childcare centers.
- If you are based in the U.S., and the adoption placement occurs in another state, it can take about two weeks to get the requisite clearances to bring the child home.
- It is possible for an adoption placement in the U.S. to occur while you are posted overseas. Make sure to plan, though, to be in the U.S. for at least four weeks after the birth of the child. Four weeks is about the earliest that the Bureau of Medical Services can issue a medical clearance for a newborn.
- It is possible for adoption finalization to take place while you are overseas, via telephone or video.
- The adoption process can be lengthy, but you and your children will find each other.

—C.B.



CULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN

Third Culture KIDS

Helping their children form an American cultural and national identity is a particular challenge for Foreign Service parents. One FSO offers some practical pointers from her family's experience.

BY LIA MILLER



Lia Miller joined the Foreign Service in November 2003 and has served in Armenia, Bolivia, Tunisia, Nicaragua, Oman, and Washington, D.C. She is a 2023 graduate of the Naval War College and currently serves in a faculty position focused on State

Department–Defense Department foreign policy related to women, peace, and security. She is also an award-winning freelance writer.

Instilling a sense of cultural origin tied to a place and national identity in a family is challenging at the best of times. The constant presence of social media and globalized cultural phenomena that bombard us every second of every day promoting socially constructed notions of what and who are acceptable often bumps up against traditional cultural and national identity formation. Coupling that with raising children in the Foreign Service, a transient career where you don't spend more than on average two to three years in each place, makes the task of helping your children form a cultural and national identity that much harder.

National Spaghetti Day brings us back to the founding fathers because, according to the lore around this holiday, Thomas Jefferson popularized pasta in the 18th century.

As someone who grew up around my extended family in small-town America, where everyone knew everyone else, where we all attended the same schools and churches, and spoke the same language, I knew who I was and where I belonged even as a young child. Fast-forwarding to now—as a mother who is raising her children in the opposite environment—I often wonder how, separated from the networks and influences that I relied on as a child, my children will know who they are and where they are from. Will they know where they belong?



At a local library during a summer R&R visit to the United States, the author's children learn about reptiles and amphibians indigenous to the American Northeast.

The short answer is yes, they will. However, their sense of place and identity may be a little different and certainly broader than the narrow construct of “American” I grew up with. For example, my children know they are from America and that their families come from America, but America is an abstract concept for them. You see, my children have spent most of their lives overseas; and, so far, most of their formative memories have been made outside the United States. For them, “America” is a place they go to visit family and friends during the summers and holidays and sometimes both in a good year.

Their concept of “home” is wherever in the world we happen to be, and it has become more about people than a place. My children are more accurately described as “global citizens,” or third culture kids (TCKs), who are comfortable in diverse, multilingual, multiethnic environments, and who, despite their young ages, can be dropped in the middle of anywhere and will immediately dive in, adapt, and thrive.

However, for us the parents, whose roots and ties are still very America-centric, it is important that our children know this part of themselves, as well, and feel as comfortable in the United States as they do out in the world. So how do we do this with our children? For starters, we began reading books about American history and culture to our children when they were very young.

Holidays ... and Other Cultural Events

We celebrated traditional American holidays in a big way and even observed some of the more modern, obscure, and wacky unofficial holidays like National Spaghetti Day on Jan. 4, National Yo-Yo Day on June 6, National Waffle Day on Aug. 24, and National Donut Day on Nov. 5, among others. While not “real” holidays, they create a space for us to have fun with the kids in a different way and to also explore the origins of the holidays we celebrate.

For example, National Spaghetti Day brings us back to the founding fathers because, according to the lore around this holiday, Thomas Jefferson popularized pasta in the 18th century. We also learned that spaghetti was introduced to broader American society by Italian immigrants in the 18th and 19th centuries. Once spaghetti was adopted into American culture, it secured its place as the popular and beloved dish it is today. This one holiday alone created an opportunity for conversations with our children about the founding fathers, the origins of

Online Resources

Here are some interactive learning websites to consider by age.

Ages 4-6

- **PBS Kids** (pbskids.org)—Exposes children to educational stories and life lessons by a variety of authors and from our favorite children’s books including tales by Dr. Seuss, Curious George, and others that help expand children’s knowledge of new subjects.
- **Smithsonian Kids** (si.edu)—This site offers a variety of art, history, and cultural activities for kids/teens of all ages and starts as young as the 4-6 age range. This site offers everything at the museum network’s disposal from live video of the National Zoo to the Smithsonian Learning Lab and much more.

Ages 7-9

- **Climate Kids** (climatekids.nasa.gov)—This site sponsored by NASA covers a wide range of topics including weather, climate, atmosphere, water, energy, plants, animals, and more. The site talks about how we are all connected by the same ecosystem and how we must protect and preserve the climate and our world. There are numerous games, videos, and activities for children of all ages.
- **Cool Kid Facts** (coolkidfacts.com)—My children always love a good quote, joke, or pun; and this site offers those things in spades. This website also gives your children access to educational videos, downloadable worksheets, infographics, pictures, quizzes, and more.

- **Ben’s Guide to the U.S. Government** (bensguide.gpo.gov)—This interactive website takes users on various learning adventures and gives them an insider’s look at the “ins and outs” of the U.S. government. The most fun part of the experience is that Ben Franklin himself is your guide and companion.

Ages 10-13

- **NASA Kid’s Club** (nasa.gov/kidsclub)—This site focuses on outer space and space exploration. Kids can go on missions that will teach them firsthand what it is like to be in space.
- **NGAkids** (nga.gov)—The National Gallery of Arts offers older kids and tweens a unique and entertaining introduction to art and art history, much of it based on the American art medium. There is even an option for users to create works of art.

Ages 14-17

- **Theta Music Trainer** (trainer.thetamusic.com)—This site offers a series of online courses and games for ear training and music theory based on all musical forms and especially those that originate in the U.S. There are exercises for every level of proficiency designed to sharpen skills and move users to the next level of musicianship.
- **Exploratorium** (exploratorium.edu)—The Exploratorium based in San Francisco offers an online version of itself, a public learning laboratory that examines the world through science, art, and human perception.

—L.M.

diplomacy, immigration both historically and now, the evolution of American cuisine, and the contributions of immigrants to U.S. history and culture, and other topics.

During “themed” months of the year such as Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Month, and others, we established the tradition of incorporating into our bedtime routine stories and videos highlighting important individuals and events that are lesser known and not in most international or U.S. school curriculums. For example, during Black History Month this year, we talked about Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and what happened there that brought it all to an end.

Major cultural events can also lead to identity-building educational quests. Like the rest of the world, our family fell in love

with the Broadway show “Hamilton.” While the musical is a work of historical fiction, in our household it led to many conversations and long trips down internet research and fact-checking rabbit holes to learn “the truth” about the Constitution, the Continental Congress, America’s political party system, elections and the electoral college, dueling, the history and modern-day legacy of enslavement in the United States, the role of women in the nation’s founding, and many other topics.

It also led us to the amazing Hamilton Education “EduHam” program. Administered by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, the EduHam program’s goal as stated on its website is “to help students see the relevance of the Founding Era by using primary sources to create a performance piece. The program consists of classroom activities and digital resources

There are many interactive web-based resources that offer special perspective into different subcultures within America.

that can be incorporated into a regular curriculum on the Founding Era.” The program sparked our children’s curiosity about their home nation and “where we come from,” and through the lens of Hamilton, for the first time, my children see themselves as a part of America’s origin story.

In this lifestyle, where we spend most of our time overseas and have limited time back in the States, our family has tried to be strategic about how we use that time. For instance, in the last few years, we began dedicating a portion of our visits back to the United States to go to important historic and cultural landmarks and sites. Each winter and spring, we sit down with the kids and map out where and what they want to explore during the coming summer. Our travels have ranged from marathon visits to Smithsonian museums, a vacation by RV through some of the most beautiful national parks, and attending different types of music and cultural arts festivals. These “learning trips” are memorable for the kids because they participated in the visualization and planning of the trips, which in turn made them more invested in the experience.

There are also many interactive web-based resources available to children and teens that offer an insider’s view and special perspective into different subcultures within America (see sidebar, “Online Resources”). For example, one of my children wants to be a veterinarian, so we spend a good amount of time on the National Geographic (NatGeo) Kids website, watching videos, playing games, and completing other engaging activities. There is a NatGeo channel on one of the streaming services we subscribe to, which means that many of our weekly family movie nights have been dedicated to watching documentaries that explore American geography, topography, Indigenous cultures, music, art, food, animals, and wildlife, and so much more. Our NatGeo movie nights always lead to interesting conversations, and my children always have a ton of questions about what they’ve seen.



The author, with her father to her right and her children up front, takes a selfie in one of the main caves of Endless Caverns in the Shenandoah Valley. This stop was part of a summertime RV road trip in America.

LIA MILLER

Pen Pals and Online Play Dates

While I am not advocating spending exorbitant amounts of time online with your kids or allowing them to be online all the time, I found these resources extremely useful in helping my kids form a national and cultural identity.

However, the internet is no substitute for the real thing, which in this case is the experience of growing up immersed in one’s own culture or in a place where there are direct cultural and familial ties.

That said, as parents of TCKs, we work diligently and consciously to ensure our children maintain relationships with friends and family back in the States. We do this by encouraging our children to become pen pals with the children of friends from college, scheduling regular online play dates with friends and cousins back home, and initiating frequent conversations with grandparents, aunts and uncles, and former teammates and friends they have made when we were at home. These ties help the children feel connected to the United States and foster a sense of belonging and ownership. It also helps reduce the barriers to reentry whenever we go back home.

We hope that through these efforts—and it is an effort—our children will embrace their TCK status, and that they will thrive as global citizens. However, we are certain they will also know who they are, where they come from, and why that is important. The best part is, they will always be able to include the United States among the places they call home. ■

RESOURCES FOR *Raising* FOREIGN SERVICE KIDS

Get to know the nonprofit groups and State Department offices that offer a social safety net for Foreign Service youth.

BY JOHN K. NALAND

Growing up in a Foreign Service family presents both benefits and challenges. Benefits include an expanded worldview, heightened interpersonal and cultural sensitivity, increased tolerance, multilingualism, and the capacity to adjust more easily to changing circumstances. Challenges can include confused cultural identities, feelings of rootlessness, difficulties creating a sense of belonging, and, at times, exposure to physical hardship and danger.

Thankfully, Foreign Service youth and their parents do not have to face these challenges alone. Several nonprofit organizations and Department of State offices work hard to maintain a social safety net for our youth.

Unfortunately, many potential beneficiaries do not take advantage of these valuable resources. I hope this article will prompt more parents to utilize the programs and services that their colleagues put such great effort into making available.

American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)

AFSA's flagship publication, *The Foreign Service Journal*, has published dozens of articles over the years dealing with raising and educating Foreign Service kids. See a listing at www.afsa.org/educationarticles.



John K. Naland and his wife, Barbara Reiox, raised two children in the Foreign Service. He has been the president of the Foreign Service Youth Foundation since 2015 and is in his fourth term as AFSA vice president for retirees.

Most FSYP programs are geared toward middle school and high school students.

Since 1926, AFSA has offered college scholarships that last year supported more than 100 Foreign Service students with need-based and merit awards totaling over \$400,000. For more information, visit www.afsa.org/afsa-scholarships.

As the legal representative of the Foreign Service, AFSA's advocacy in recent years has included youth and family issues. For example, AFSA pushed for improvements in State Department support for children with special educational needs and secured passage of legislation granting in-state college tuition to Foreign Service dependents in their state of domicile, irrespective of how long it has been since they were last physically present in that state.

Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW)

For more than 60 years, the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide has advocated for the interests of Foreign Service family members. In 1960, AAFSW initiated and led creation of the Family Liaison Office (now the Global Community Liaison Office), which runs the Community Liaison Office program. AAFSW's efforts also gave birth to the Overseas Briefing Center (at the Foreign Service Institute) and the Foreign Service Youth Foundation.

This not-for-profit organization is open to all active and retired employees of all U.S. foreign affairs agencies, their spouses (including divorced and widowed), partners, and family members. It offers six scholarships for children of AAFSW members. In addition, the annual Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad honors employees and family members who help the most vulnerable communities worldwide.

AAFSW links families through several Facebook groups and via Livelines, an online group that connects almost 3,400 members to share tips. The popular AAFSW book *Realities of Foreign Service Life* touches on raising children overseas. AAFSW assists families with evacuations to the D.C. area. Its volunteers facilitate stateside family member gatherings, lead virtual webinars, and host cultural events at the Department of State. For more information, visit www.aafsw.org.

Bureau of Medical Services (MED)

The Department of State's Employee Consultation Service (ECS) in the Bureau of Medical Services offers free, confidential referrals to professional clinical social workers for State employees and their family members. These counselors can assist parents and children with family problems, blended family concerns, school adjustment problems, reentry concerns, and other emotional problems. ECS also coordinates several virtual support groups focused on parenting; see www.state.gov/counseling-resources-and-referral-services.

MED's Child and Family Program completes post-specific educational and mental health clearance recommendations for children with identified needs. In addition, the office adjudicates the Special Needs Education Allowance for those children who meet eligibility criteria for educationally required services and support. For more information, see www.state.gov/office-of-child-and-family-programs.

The bureau's Alcohol and Drug Awareness Program covers education, consultation, and treatment referrals for employees and family members dealing with alcohol or drug issues.

Foreign Service Institute Transition Center (FSI/TC)

For more than 45 years, the Foreign Service Institute's Transition Center (TC) has supported U.S. government employees and their family members as they transition—internationally and domestically.

The Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) is both a physical and virtual hub of information for bidders and their families from all agencies falling under chief-of-mission authority. For the younger community members, the OBC's resources include KidVids, which, gathered in partnership with the Foreign Service Youth Foundation, depict life at post from a child's point of view. OBC's Zine series focuses on different aspects of a nomadic lifestyle for middle and high school students.

The Transition Center's Training Team also provides youth-specific programming in the form of "Super Saturday" events, an opportunity for kids to explore both the emotional and logistical aspects of a move overseas, as well as "Young Diplomats Overseas Preparation," focused on safety and security for kids in grades 2 through 12.

Courses offered by TC's Center of Excellence in Foreign Affairs Resilience include "Encouraging Resilience in Your Foreign Affairs Child." For more information on how to access these resources or register for a course, visit www.state.gov/transition-center or email FSITCTraining@state.gov.

Foreign Service Youth Foundation (FSYF)

Since 1989, the Foreign Service Youth Foundation has helped young people embrace the adventure of an internationally mobile childhood by encouraging resilience, fostering camaraderie, and celebrating achievements. Open to dependent minors of U.S. citizen employees from all agencies serving under chief-of-mission authority, FSYF assists youth in adapting to changing environments as they transition between posts worldwide.

Global programs include webinars on third culture kids' issues (including reentry seminars for students returning to the U.S. and college admissions workshops), an online video and document library, publications, virtual youth meetups, annual contests (art, essay, community service, and video), and academic merit scholarships.

FSYF also organizes in-person events to connect its members in the D.C. metro area, including youth or family meetup events, volunteer work sessions, and a fall welcome-back picnic attended by more than 150 family members.

Most programs are geared toward middle school and high school students. Parents are encouraged to remain as members even after their children are grown to continue to give back and assist the next generation. For more information, visit www.fsyf.org or email fsyf@fsyf.org.

Global Family Liaison Office (GTM/GCLO)

Since 1978, the State Department's Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO) in the Bureau of Global Talent Management has worked to improve the quality of life of U.S. government direct-hire employees and their family members from all agencies under chief-of-mission authority serving overseas and returning to the United States by providing advocacy, programs, and services.

GCLO's Education and Youth Team provides guidance to assist families in making informed decisions about their children's education. They provide information on boarding schools, Washington, D.C., area schools, special needs education, home-schooling, virtual learning resources, and college preparedness. They assist the Foreign Service community with information on childcare, gifted and talented resources, education allowances, adult education, and summer camps. GCLO's Bouncing Back webpage contains information on transition and reentry planning for parents of Foreign Service youth.

The Unaccompanied Tours Team assists employees and their family members before, during, and after an unaccompanied tour. They provide guidance and information that can assist employees in the decision-making process for where their families will

AAFSW is a not-for-profit organization open to all active and retired employees of all U.S. foreign affairs agencies, their spouses, partners, and family members.

live during an unaccompanied tour. They manage the Children's Medals and Certificates of Recognition Program and provide age-appropriate workbooks to children who have a parent preparing for or currently serving on an unaccompanied tour. For more information, visit www.state.gov/gclo or email GCLO@state.gov.

Office of Employee Relations (GTM/ER)

The State Department Bureau of Global Talent Management's Office of Employee Relations contracts with WorkLife4You, a resource and referral service. WL4Y specialists are accessible 24/7 and provide guidance and referrals for a variety of services, including child/adult/pet care, financial/legal services, and health/wellness. WL4Y also provides Care Kits filled with practical products and guides. WL4Y is open to State Department direct hires and EFMs. For more information, contact WL4Y 24/7 at 1 (866) 552-4748 [TTY: 1 (800) 873-1322] or at www.worklife4you.com. Create an account by clicking on "Not registered yet? Start Now!" and entering registration code DOS. A State email address is not required to create an account.

USAID employees have access to a similar service called Staff Care. For details, go to www.usaid.gov/staff-care.

Office of Overseas Schools (A/OPR/OS)

The State Department's Office of Overseas Schools, part of the Bureau of Administration, promotes quality K-12 education at posts worldwide. The office assists U.S.-sponsored overseas schools in the operation and expansion of programs that embody best educational practices employed in the United States. Regional education officers are available to discuss all aspects of educating a child while posted abroad, including special needs and gifted education. The office maintains Fact Sheets and Special Needs Profiles on assisted schools, as well as resources on bidding, special needs, gifted, child protection, and teaching in overseas schools. For more information, go to www.state.gov/office-of-overseas-schools/. ■



HOW ONE FS KID CREATED A *Human Rights* ORGANIZATION

Building a pro-bono human rights research group gave university student volunteers from around the world valuable, real-life career experience—and made a difference, too.

BY AIDAN GORMAN

In 2021 I left Moscow, where my family was posted, to start university in the U.K. I knew I wanted to study international relations and eventually join the Foreign Service like my dad. I loved interning at embassies abroad, and studying international relations in a foreign country strengthened my determination to become a diplomat.

During my first summer at university, I chose to stay in the U.K. instead of going “home” and interned for the Global Peace Foundation, a peacebuilding organization. I was fortunate to attend a conference on freedom of religion or belief with 800 people from other NGOs, political organizations, and governments.

One of only a handful of young people there, I was inspired to encourage other college students to participate in this field.



Aidan Gorman is in his final year at the University of Portsmouth, U.K., where he studies international relations. He is a third culture kid, having lived overseas for most of his life in Almaty, Beijing, Amman, and Moscow. He has worked in the public, private, and third sector at places like U.S. Embassy Moscow, Portsmouth City Council, London Politica, and the Global Peace Foundation. Aidan currently runs GorStra Research Group, a pro-bono human rights research group centered on providing students with experience and providing small organizations with bespoke reports.

I began thinking about establishing a human rights research group led *entirely* by volunteer university students from around the world. I reached out to some students at my university and other universities to ask if they would help lay the groundwork for such an organization. The response was fantastic.

Here is the story of how we built the pro-bono human rights research organization GorStra Research Group, what it does, who it serves, and how the experience helped me prepare for a career after college.

Building a Human Rights NGO

The idea of starting an organization from scratch was daunting, but being a Foreign Service kid helped. I was used to meeting new people and operating in an online world, so I was able to find other students around the world, interview them, and ask for outside help from experts whom I’d met while living overseas. The startup costs were minimal—after paying for a domain name, I created my own website, asked a friend to create the logo, and used free communication software. There was a lot of interest from other students, so I interviewed several dozen and chose the first few based on their areas of interest as well as writing skills, allowing us to cover multiple regions.

GorStra currently has more than 50 university student volunteer analysts located in more than a dozen countries around

the world. Modeled after the State Department, we have regions and issues organized by “desk”—e.g., the Europe desk or gender inequalities desk. This division makes the website more easily navigable and gives our analysts the opportunity to specialize, which we hope will make us more attractive to future employers.

Volunteer analysts select their “desk” of choice and begin working with a team of other analysts interested in the same area. Despite the fact that we are located in different countries across the globe, desk analysts can easily bounce ideas off each other—reports are sometimes written conjointly, and everyone learns something from other volunteers! Each desk is led by a senior analyst and desk director—volunteers who have been with us from the earliest days of GorStra and have proven their leadership skills.

What GorStra Does

As a pro-bono human rights research group, we focus on human rights issues around the world. We offer both public-focused and client-directed research. Our public side develops concise reports focusing on specific human rights issues of interest to our analysts.

We analyze important, yet under-discussed issues using locally based sources, often in the language of the country on which we are reporting, along with open-source intelligence. We then publish these in-depth reports on our website and on social media. It is surprising how little information on global human rights makes it to the world stage and gains public attention—even the most experienced diplomats have gaps in knowledge, and we can help fill those gaps. Our main goal is to help push information forward, drawing public attention to critical human rights issues they might otherwise not know about.

On our client side, we provide free research services to NGOs, charities, and other organizations in the field. Small charities, for example, often need to put all their resources into fundraising, which makes hiring a researcher prohibitively expensive. We help by providing free, bespoke, in-depth research reports on a human rights topic of importance to their organization. Students are the perfect researchers: We already have to do so much in-depth analysis for school, so why not turn our academic writing skills into professional ones?

We have provided research assistance for organizations around the world, including Humanists U.K., the Global Peace Foundation, and Children of Heroes Ukraine. Different analysts work with each of these organizations, giving these students valuable experience in the professional sector as they prepare to enter the working world after school. Our volunteers can gain important, meaningful experience in just four to six hours a week.

From the Field: Advice for College Students

Foreign Service kids have grown up living around the world. But how do we decide what we want to do after we graduate? This is a challenge for FS kids and, in fact, for college students everywhere. And, once you decide what to do, how do you get your foot in the door? Our experience has taught us some lessons.

Look Around. Take a look at the work already being done at your local level—in your city, at your university, or even internationally. You’ll find many people doing great things, and you might find someone who is doing exactly what you want to do. Ask to speak to them, just to learn more about what they do. They might have advice for how to jumpstart your career during university. If you don’t find anyone doing what you want to do, you can do it yourself! Just start on a smaller level, and grow it from there.



From top left, by column: Samuel Jardine, James Sanchez, Alexis Cabello, Laraib Zehra, Kaitlyn Whitsitt, Leanne Curran, Aidan Gorman, Jennifer Young, Caleigh Plaatjes, Tamila Shvryda, and Sukhpal Garcha.

COURTESY OF AIDAN GORMAN

Our main goal is to help push information forward, drawing public attention to critical human rights issues they might otherwise not know about.

Use Your Contacts. Do not be afraid to reach out to people in the Foreign Service who worked with you or your parents. They can be a big help, whether it be through offering career advice or pointing you toward a job opening they've heard about. For example, one senior-level public diplomacy officer who served in Moscow at the same time as my family was able to give me useful advice as I started GorStra, and even offered some ideas

on where I can take it after I graduate. People you know are often happy to help—even if they remember you simply as the high school intern.

Stay Balanced. It's hard to balance your personal life, school life, and work life. Try to maintain a good balance so you don't burn yourself out. Schedule important tasks so you don't fall behind in school, at work, at the gym, or even at the grocery store. Experiment with what is too much, too little, and just right when you are managing everything you need and want to do.

I have one year until graduation—it takes just three years to complete a bachelor's degree in England. After graduation, I plan to continue leading GorStra while I apply for a position as a Foreign Service officer. I hope it grows to become an established, well-known organization in the coming years.

In the meantime, my team and I have gained valuable, real-world experience for future careers while helping make a difference in the world. There is always more to learn and do, no matter where you land after life as a Foreign Service kid. ■

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SCAN ME



THIRD CULTURE KIDS

The Enduring Effects

OF FORMATIVE YEARS IN CAIRO

Long after retirement, a group of TCKs who were grade-school classmates in Egypt reunited online. Here they tell their story.

BY MARY MARIKO MURO, JILL P. STRACHAN, AND JOHN R. WHITMAN

It all started with an article about Cairo's antique elevators by Vivian Lee in *The New York Times* on Sept. 20, 2021. One of our classmates from primary school at Cairo American College (CAC) more than 60 years ago had, amazingly, found email addresses for many of us. He sent around this amusing account of up-and-down "scenes of love and fear," suspecting it would evoke a special feeling among his peers who had shared the experience of Cairo together as preteens.

Then they began to respond from Oslo; Paris; Tokyo; Tucson, Arizona; Monte Rio, California; Washington, D.C.; St. Augustine, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; Cushing, Maine; Newfield, New York; and Port Ludlow, Washington. Their emails recounted anecdotes

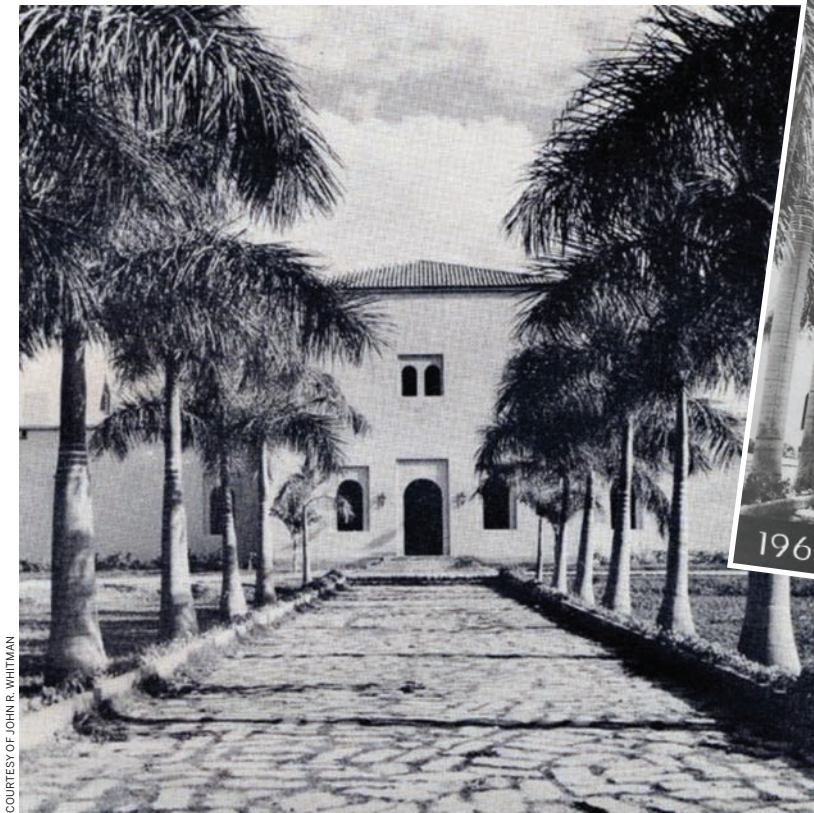
Mary Mariko Muro, Ph.D., the daughter of Osamu Muro, U.N. technical assistance expert in Cairo (1959-1961), writes and lectures in Yokohama, Japan. Jill P. Strachan, Ph.D., the daughter of D. Alan Strachan, whose last posting as an FSO was as director of the Colombo Plan in Sri Lanka (1966-1970), is happily writing nonfiction in Washington, D.C. John R. Whitman, Ph.D., the son of Roswell H. Whitman, whose last posting as an FSO was as minister for economic affairs in Japan (1961-1962), is teaching and writing in Chicago, Illinois. The authors would be delighted to hear from similar groups. Write to John at johnrwhitman@mac.com.

of elevator experiences in Egypt, which led, in turn, to encounters with lifts in Paris, followed by other stories. Sounded like an interesting group. What if we all met up on Zoom?

The invitation struck a chord. Perhaps it was the hunger to connect with others during the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with curiosity about what ever happened to that kid on the school bus from Zamalek or at the Maadi Sporting Club pool.

Seeing a former schoolmate you haven't set eyes on in 60 years is a kind of wake-up call. First, of course, you see how a child you thought you would always remember as a child has transformed into an adult approaching seniority, like yourself! And then the reawakening expands your consciousness, recalling the vivid, sometimes momentous times you spent together living the dream of climbing the pyramids, riding Arabian horses across the Sahara, partying in Bedouin tents, hearing the evocative call of the muezzin, gazing at the timeless image of feluccas gliding on the Nile, experiencing the warmth of Cairenes and the heat of their sun, and surviving those idiosyncratic elevators in your shared childhood. The bond of being a third culture kid (TCK) is real.

Every month now, going on two years, we all dial in for a couple of hours of revived camaraderie and talk about what these experiences meant to us and how we and our families have advanced since those ephemeral years in the land of the



The cover of the Cairo American College 1963 yearbook (inset) features the driveway lined by royal palms leading to the front entrance to the school, a former palace previously occupied by Princess Hanezada and her family, situated in Cairo's leafy suburb of Maadi.

COURTESY OF JOHN R. WHITMAN

COURTESY OF JOHN R. WHITMAN

pharaohs. One of us volunteers to present a “Cackle” (derived from the “Cairo American College Kick-off Lecture”), which is a short talk about one’s current personal or professional activities or a reflection on our time in Egypt or other, more current world events. After opening chatter, the Cackle lasts about 20 minutes, followed by Q&A or general discussion. The sessions begin at 8:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time to accommodate those living in time zones extending from Japan to Europe. Sessions are recorded for the benefit of those who miss an event.

Every Cackle has enriched us. Some have led to follow-up email transactions and a deeper dive informed by further research. So far, we have shared taking pilgrimages in Spain and Italy, observing elections in Bosnia, living life as an astrologer with an internet following, and being an American journalist in Berlin, Bonn, Hong Kong, Moscow, New York, Rome, and Warsaw during or after the Cold War.

We have enjoyed Cackles recounting the flight of Norwegian royals to London to escape the Nazis, on learning to become an Egyptologist, the importance of learning a second language, the psychosocial characteristics of TCKs navigating the conflicts between the culture of their foreign experiences and that of their home countries, the identity challenges of being an adopted TCK, the demise of academic standards in leading universities, and the rigor required to learn from the literature of the Ottoman Empire. And we have discussed lifelong lessons from experiencing childhood trauma, enduring the devastation of drugs and rootlessness, and more.

Connecting as Grown TCKs

This contrived reassembly of once-carefree boys and girls has become an important part of our lives. Some of us are compelled to attend the meetings regularly, and even those too busy to join want to stay tuned. We wondered why, and we put the question to our colleagues. Here are some of their responses.

I was born in Scotland to Polish parents, moved to the United States as an infant, and rarely stopped moving since. Soon after my father became an American citizen, he joined the U.S. Information Service (USIS), serving as a press attaché in Cairo, Seoul, and Paris where I attended American schools—all of which made my subsequent life as a foreign correspondent feel very natural. The initiative by some of my Cairo schoolmates to reconnect so many years later brought back a flood of memories, not just of Egypt but of other postings: riding horseback by the pyramids, getting my first exposure to tear gas while observing South Korean students protesting against the regime of military strongman Park Chung Hee, and celebrating the end of my senior year at the American School of Paris prom at the Eiffel Tower. My father, who often handled the programs of prominent American visitors, introduced me to the likes of Louis Armstrong and Robert Kennedy.

All those experiences felt almost normal until I returned to the United States on our home leaves or, later, to attend college. I quickly realized that I could not casually sprinkle in such stories without looking like I was showing off to my new acquaintances,

most of whom had grown up in more conventional circumstances. But none of those problems exist when you are in the company of others who have similar backgrounds. That's why our virtual Cairo reunions are always so enjoyable.

—Andrew Nagorski, St. Augustine, Florida

For my part, although our circle's presentations are often well prepared and quite scholarly, attending our group is akin to going to a family reunion, where we can tune into each other's feelings and hearts, and where we can share events and experiences in a way we may not do otherwise. Not only do we share our common past but also all that may be of significance that has happened since, always with loving respect.

—Alain Cardon, Paris

Little did I know that reconnecting through Facebook with my childhood Norwegian friend from 6th, 7th, and 8th grade in Cairo would then lead me to this whole new circle of friends from those magical days at CAC! It has awakened memories and motivated me to read through the saved letters my mother wrote of life in the Foreign Service. The term "TCK" was new to me, and this really explained some disconnect with friends in the U.S.

Sharing our experiences and commonalities has been cathartic and humorous. The Cackles are fascinating and produce amazing discussions from personal struggles and perseverance to broad topics where the expertise in the group shines as they mimic an international think tank. This summer I visited Kirsten in Norway after 54 years apart, and we instantly bonded

again. I've also made strong connections with other classmates whom I barely remember from the 1960s, but now we are talking about visiting each other in Japan and across the U.S.

—Marla Kean Hensley, Tucson, Arizona

I take great comfort from the reaffirmation of meeting those who shared the same classroom during budding adolescence at a school housed in a former palace near the edge of the desert. The Cackle sessions became one place where we didn't have to keep quiet about our unique childhood and, instead, could be accepted for what we really are. For me, personally, the sessions became a way not only to reach my childhood classmates, but also to be with other adult third culture kids [ATCKs] and speak the language that comes more naturally to me. It was also very encouraging to see firsthand what fine human beings my former classmates had become.

—Mary Muro, Tokyo

I have to add the memory of learning French while overcoming the distraction of camels snorting outside my classroom at CAC. My heritage and my U.S. Foreign Service childhood gave me many remarkable opportunities, but until later in life, I downplayed them to fit in with my U.S. peers and colleagues. By way of our Cackle discussions, I realized the power of the TCK model and am experiencing a coming out (the second in my case) that has opened a flood of memories and resurrected former connections dating back almost 60 years. Imagine my surprise and joy.

—Jill P. Strachan, Washington, D.C.



Ten of the 15 original members of the group, including the three authors, in a Zoom meeting in April 2023. From top left to bottom right: Mary (Marika) Muro, John R. Whitman, Alain Cardon, Jeff Peters, Nanako Nakamura, Susan Shaffer, Andrew Nagorski, Jill Strachan, Kirsten Rytter, and Marla Kean Hensley. Missing are Patrick Cardon, Richard Driscoll, Cornell Fleischer (deceased, April 21, 2023), Seibun Tanetani, and Andrea McCoy Van Dyke.

COURTESY OF JOHN R. WHITMAN



A farewell party for Susie and Johnny Shaffer (seated on couch) arranged by the Anschuetzes' daughters, Susan (holding dog) and Nancy (seated next to Susie). Inset: Kirsten Rytter dancing The Twist with Richard Driscoll, after release of the Chubby Checker hit song, 1959 or 1960. Party games included musical chairs and spin-the-bottle.



One difficult aspect of being a preteen and teen TCK is the cycle of Foreign Service posts. During eight years in France, where Dad was heading up Marshall Plan public relations before joining Voice of America, we lived a dulcet life in a village along the Seine with home leave every two years. Then came Cairo. Upon arrival, I was transfixed; clearly, Egypt would be a keeper for the rest of my life. At CAC, there were more than 200 students in kindergarten through high school from some 16 countries. Unlike in the U.S., French and Arabic were no longer foreign languages. Students were welcoming, friendships were blossoming. But sadly, with postings often just two years, goodbyes were common. We were just getting close, then off my friend went. I got good at hiding the pain by not showing up. Decades later, “Cairo elevators” arrived, distilling years of separation into an elixir of reacquaintance filled with memories still sweet.

—Richard G. Driscoll, *Newfield, New York*

When my family lived abroad, we always spoke of Norway as “home.” Now connecting with old friends in the Cackle network is like coming home. A place to share childhood experiences, discovering that the American kids also sometimes felt that their childhood experiences were sort of out of place. The group’s success is due to the interesting topics that are brought up in the introductory part by the network members. Having an effective moderator helps.

—Kirsten Rytter, *Oslo*

Spun out like yo-yos with very long strings, each of us were launched into the life journey and discovered ourselves enmeshed in a version of a cat’s cradle for a season near Cairo, Egypt. Once again, then, we were projected off to the far reaches of the planet to expand the potential entanglement of that cradle. Over the past couple of years, the return cycle back along varied paths, we discovered ourselves bouncing within each other’s spheres in closer proximity. The kaleidoscope of world adventure brought to the table each month has rekindled aspects of our childhood and onward travails that have been a delight to share.

—Jeff Peters, *Port Ludlow, Washington*

The gift of living my formative years in the Foreign Service, for which I am eternally grateful, has shaped the meaning of my entire life so far. Who could possibly understand the value of this good fortune? Mining this meaning with those who would most understand is certainly a benefit of reconnecting on a regular basis. Not having this group would be like reading a book and not being able to talk about it with other readers. Even more apt, we are learning directly from the other protagonists in the actual story. Every Cackle provides further insight. In this way, the Foreign Service continues to offer felicity and fulfillment in life, long after our last post.

—John R. Whitman, *Chicago, Illinois*



This group emerged spontaneously decades after shared experiences among the children of several nationalities. Does looking back together help affirm our experiences and our way of life as a TCK? Does the account here offer a possible “teachable moment” for both parents and policymakers? What can parents do to better understand the issues of adjustment from the point of view of the children who accompany them overseas?

What does it mean for the aims of the Foreign Service (or any international organization) that the formative experiences of such children can have a lifelong influence on their values, attitudes, and perhaps career choices and voting preferences?

What could such a group offer to current Foreign Service families as suggestions for making the best of a foreign experience for their children? Is there possible value in the reflections of a

Seeing a former schoolmate you haven't set eyes on in 60 years is a kind of wake-up call.

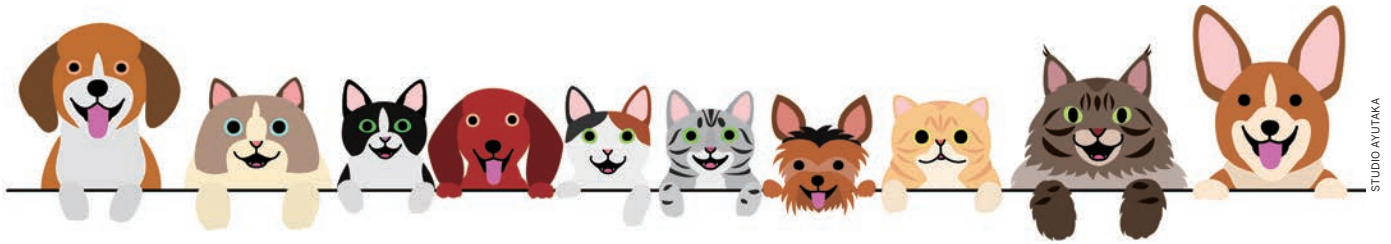
group long after their retirement years that should be of interest to policymakers and researchers concerned with the image these children leave behind in their host countries?

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our story with the Foreign Service family. Not all of us were affiliated with the U.S. Foreign Service; our common connection is with Cairo American College. And in a larger sense, our fellowship comes from living that extraordinary experience now commonly referred to as “third culture kids.” ■



COURTESY OF JOHN R. WHITMAN

Ruth Whitman, John R. Whitman's sister, and their father, Roswell H. Whitman. Children rode Arabian horses from the AA Stables adjacent to the pyramids to the tent for social events virtually every weekend.



DOGGEDLY

Pet transport while in the Foreign Service is a daunting task. This semifictional account does not stray far from its absurdly exasperating reality.

BY JEAN A. MONFORT

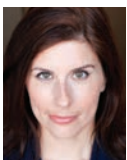
It is possible—within the tangled threads of the airline tapestry—to transport a dog as checked baggage when on government orders. As a customer service professional, I whistled past the graveyards on Facebook with their horror stories and strode confidently into the airline abyss, guidelines printed and in hand. I would be different.



It's been a month of seeking confirmation, and my confidence is wavering. From one airline representative to the next, the advice is never the same. If it isn't a rule not listed on the list of rules, it's a glitch with the tickets—a ticket number connected to an empty reservation, making confirmation impossible. A creaking in someone's arthritic knuckles suggesting that I couldn't do what I was doing.

When a rep found out my dog's astrological sign (Scorpio), I had to agree to do a tarot reading on a day with only three visible clouds in the sky. Visible to whom?

When I said she was a street dog, a Westminster judge materialized at my door to shake his monocle at me and demand I be more precise in identifying her. Pug-nose dogs are not allowed on planes, you see.



Jean Monfort is an office management specialist in the U.S. Foreign Service. Her previous posts include Conakry, Guinea, and the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels. She currently works in the Regional Security Office in Hanoi, where she is joined by her husband,

Liam, and one ungrateful dog, Kairi.

This piece has been condensed from a longer tale. All names have been changed because technically the author's journey isn't finished.

A friendly rep got my dog confirmed, only to reroute me to the cargo line where I was called an idiot and routed back to customer service, where I was told that nothing could be done, and why wouldn't you give up on that big rock, Sisyphus?

One surly rep told me to pay out of pocket to have a private company ship the dog if I was getting tired of calling (which I was). I researched this suggestion. I emailed for quotes, and replies came back at the speed of mousetraps. One promises to put my dog in a TARDIS and wind back the aging process so that I can train her properly as a puppy. Another oozes judgment *and* promises. Truly, if I loved my dog, I'd pay half a car to transport her around the world, right? If I really loved her. I balk.

I ... like my dog. I delete the shipping quotes, but they keep coming in all the same.



At two months, I am a step ahead of every question. I'm on government orders. I split the flight. The solstice isn't for two months. I took the oath of binding and sacrificed my tokens on an altar made of discarded model airplanes, as instructed on the airline website's sister service, *Invisible Caveats*.

Gamma said LMN required that I check the dog out and then in again, which I couldn't do with my short layover. I snagged tickets on an earlier flight and gave myself six hours to check the dog out and in again. Perfect—until I was told there was a three-hour layover limit on checked animals in general. Then LMN said that Gamma was mistaken and that I wouldn't have to check the dog out at all. Scrambling, I paid to switch my tickets back. Switching reset all my reservations. Gamma and LMN couldn't decide who was actually in control of the flight until the two pilots dueled the morning of the flight, as was airline custom.

Then there was the double layover rule, where a pet couldn't have two connections in a single trip, posted on nary a website

(I assume the parchment was unrolled and Terry Gilliam hovered gleefully over the fine print to locate this new pitfall). To overcome it, I overnights in our connection city to break up the connections. I told myself it would be nothing to move half a dozen suitcases and a large dog crate. My reward would be a complimentary make-my-own-dang-waffle.

All the while, the nefarious private carrier emails kept trickling in. Aren't you tired? Aren't you stressed? Aren't you getting just a little bit desperate? I delete the emails. Desperate, yes. That desperate? Well ...



The government makes it clear this mess is mine to deal with. In the beginning, I found their fear to be amusing. We will fight wars. We will build air-conditioned spaces in the desert. We will get potable water in nonpotable places. We will untangle your visa application. But a dog? No!

Now I begin to see their wisdom. Uncle Sam is cradled in Liberty's arms, softly chanting to himself: "Codeshare splits ... no double layovers ... hold please ... hold please ... hold please ..." Cue horrible guitar music.



For three months, I've been working on putting my dog on an airplane. Three months in, and they're wearing me down one call at a time. I now fight laughter when the rep asks if the combined weight of the dog and crate is less than a wet swan in summer. It's not a healthy laugh either—it's a cackling sound. I get rebuked for the sound on my 15th call when Gamma flip-flops again. They're doing the best they can, and I really should try to be patient. I do not throw my phone off the balcony that day.

Susanna, a cheerful representative who reminds me of myself before I hated everything, gets my dog confirmed for every step



I now fight laughter when the rep asks if the combined weight of the dog and crate is less than a wet swan in summer.

of the trip. During that phone call, I get an email from a do.not reply address. It's got a GIF of Wile E. Coyote getting crushed by an Acme safe. In different fonts, like a ransom note, it says my dog isn't going anywhere, ever. Signed: GAMMA.

Did Susanna know about this serial killer email? Is Susanna in on it? Of course she is ... she knew she wasn't helping me from the beginning! It was a ruse. That chipper voice, that ease of completing simple tasks! I want to call her back immediately and demand to know why she delights in my pain.

Instead, I get Heath.
"Hold please."



Four months in, I am weathered wood and indestructible, yet also just about ready to shatter into a thousand glass pieces if someone asks me the wrong question at the wrong moment. There is a small, worried voice within me asking if I want to maybe, possibly, perhaps drink 64 ounces of water or look outside at a tree or listen to some Aesop Rock. I do not. I just stare at the screen. They will not get me. I will get this dog into the airplanes. I'm going to go on leave and relax. I'm going to relax. I'm. Going. To. Relax.



Janice repeats herself, no matter the question I ask. She doesn't like that I'm sarcastic. She doesn't care how much I've done. She blesses me at the end of our call, which I take with grace because I'm damn graceful. I'm a professional. And Janice says it's done—each leg confirmed and clean in the computer's system.

I lean back on the couch, unsure. I don't feel like it's true. I feel like a dog that's caught its own tail. I tell my husband that it's settled. He's incredulous as well, having listened to me hum "hold please" guitar music and twitch in my sleep.

We sit in silence and hope.



I now must admit to my mistake. I am not perfect. I am tired. It's been weeks into months. I did not call the night before to confirm. I just ... *couldn't*. My brain stopped, full of fuzz. I played video games and drank a tequila and thought these words aloud: "Things are settled. We'll be fine ..."



"Ma'am, I'm not seeing a dog on your reservation. Did you call us ahead of time?" The agent, Marie, is unimpressed as I fail to respond, stammering, stunned. I step out of the line to make another call. After all this, it comes down to me on hold with the airline and the agent on the phone with another part of the airport.

Marie, who sees that I'm pushing rudeness into an ulcer I'll deal with later, does something that I'll appreciate when calm. She works hard. She makes more calls, and she translates my problems into lingo. The three hours prep I gave myself disappear. Soon I won't be able to make my flight at a flat sprint.

"It'll be 400 euros for the dog." Movement? Money? I have some money! I throw down my card.

"Also I see that you have extra bags. You only get one each." I throw down the other card and my carry-on bag. A tag prints out. Marie trots to the crate and slips the tag through the crate door—Brussels to Washington, D.C.

"This needs to go to DH—" Before she's finished, my husband has already taken the relay baton. He is off at a record-breaking sprint, luggage dolly leaving skid marks on the gray floors. I love him.

Then we run. I know the airport. I ask people for kindness, and people oblige. I move to the fronts of lines. I jump escalator stairs. I cut through duty-free like a pickpocket. I hear people exclaim as I dodge and weave. My legs complain (I had given them no warning). Someone cheers us on. Someone scolds.

Neither husband nor I are allowed to board. We're sweating from the sudden exertion. Ushered to one side, we look longingly at our plane. The long last minutes of the boarding time float by. I'm lightheaded. The gate agents here are typing our data into several different computers, pointing at things.

"Excuse me. You have a dog? How much does it weigh?"



In Schiphol, I watch my dog getting loaded onto the flight to the States. She's turning around in her crate, which is on an elevator. She must be miserable, but the luggage handler

is talking to her. Even from a distance I can see him gesturing to her and to himself. He's talking to the dog, telling her of his woes and the pros and cons of being a luggage handler at a busy airport. It's actually a little charming. I get it. She has such a sympathetic face. It's part of the reason that I'm watching from the airport window and feeling only relief.

I don't think my clothes or computer will meet me in the States, but she will. I don't imagine she'll be grateful. In fact, I know she won't. She'll ignore me and go find a piece of furniture she can call her own, back to me for the trouble I've put her through. Fair enough. Tickets in hand, we board.



There is more. About how we got rerouted to Los Angeles because Las Vegas was two degrees too hot, and then we drove across the desert ... how there was a long debate at 4 a.m. about the hinges of an Airbus A330 versus a Boeing 717 ... how at the very last minute we had to scramble to find a heretofore- unmentioned physical letter of approval from a partner airline ...

The rules are not quite knowable, not even by those who wrote them.

how we missed our flight to Seattle because the agent spent an hour looking for the *correct* kind of "up" arrow sticker ...

I'll spare you the details because perhaps you know my story; you knew it before I had even finished. Perhaps you are a veteran of these things and chide my dramatics. Perhaps you are wise and saw the calmer paths that I stubbornly chose to ignore. Perhaps I have frightened you. Good.

The rules are not quite knowable, not even by those who wrote them. Buy your tarot decks early, friends. Call early, and then burn your incense. Dig up the new regulations, and make sure your cypher is accurate. Be tenacious and as unrelenting as a glacier, and, for the love of all things holy, call the night before. ■



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AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION

U.S. Consul Thayer's Beethoven

The best biography of the great Ludwig van Beethoven was written by a U.S. diplomat in the late 19th century. Here is the story.

BY LUCIANO MANGIAFICO

Luciano Mangiafico, an FSO from 1970 to 1991, is the author of two books, Contemporary American Immigrants (Praeger, 1988) and Italy's Most Wanted (Potomac Books, 2007). He has also contributed articles to The Foreign Service Journal and the literary journal Open Letters Monthly, among other periodicals.

In the early years of the 19th century in music-crazy Europe, Ludwig van Beethoven—as a composer, conductor, and pianist—was the epitome of the mad, romantic genius. His wild looks, love of nature, unorthodox and quirky behavior, mercurial temperament, and self-awareness that he was a groundbreaking composer, made him widely recognized throughout the world, and when he died in 1827, everyone knew that a supreme musical wizard was gone.

You would think that such an interesting personality would have drawn biographers to him to begin writing about his life, and, of course, several were: Anton Schindler, a violinist and Beethoven's factotum; Ferdinand Ries, a composer and Beethoven's secretary; and Franz Wegeler, a German physician and Beethoven's friend. The biographies they wrote, however, while interesting, were not entirely accurate and were often contradictory in many details.

It was not until 1907-1908 that a five-volume accurate and complete Beethoven biography was published in Germany. It was the work of Alexander Wheelock Thayer, the longtime U.S. consul in Trieste. Thayer completed and published the first three volumes himself, while his translator and a fellow musicologist finished the last two after Thayer's death.

Despite the passage of time, Thayer's is still the best and most complete personal (as opposed to musical) biography of the great composer.



Alexander Wheelock Thayer was born in South Natick, Massachusetts, in 1817. After graduating from Phillips Academy in Andover, he attended Harvard College but did not graduate until 1843, when he was 26 years old. He stayed on, and two years later obtained a law degree from Harvard Law School. While

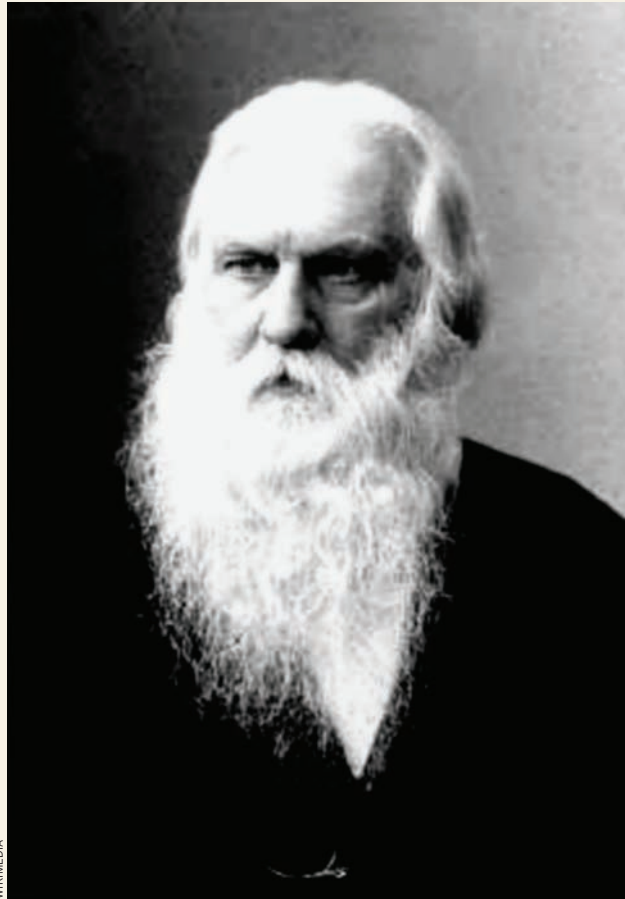
attending Harvard he had worked in the library, where his interest in music was heightened, and he began collecting research material on Beethoven.

Classical music in Boston, and Beethoven symphonies in general, were then the rage, and the Boston Academy of Music, established in 1833, performed Beethoven frequently beginning in 1841, so much so that musicologist Joseph Horowitz devoted a section to “Boston and the Cult of Beethoven” in his book *Classical Music in America* (2005).

In 1849 Thayer went to Germany for two and half years, traveling about, learning German, and doing research on Beethoven’s life because he intended to translate Schindler’s biography into English. To support himself, he wrote articles on music and culture for the *Boston Courier*. In 1852 he returned home and continued to write for publications, but in 1854 returned to Europe once more to pursue his Beethoven research. A little later, he decided that he would write a new Beethoven biography, in English, and have it translated and published in Germany. He also continued to write musical criticism and history, publishing articles on Beethoven, Antonio Salieri (Mozart’s alleged enemy), and others.

Thayer began his diplomatic career in 1862 at age 45, with the help of Senator Charles Sumner (R-Mass.), a fellow Harvard alumnus. Thayer first obtained a position as secretary of legation in Vienna; and then, on Nov. 1, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln nominated him U.S. consul in Trieste. At that time, Trieste was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a major cosmopolitan port for Austria. Thayer assumed the post on Jan. 1, 1865, and kept it for 17 years until he resigned on Oct. 1, 1882. In 1866 President Andrew Johnson submitted Thayer’s name for appointment as consul in Vienna, which would have made it much easier for Thayer to continue his research on Beethoven, but the U.S. Senate failed to confirm him.

By the time Thayer joined the diplomatic service, according to the Act of Congress of March 1, 1855 (10 U.S. Statutes 619), con-



Alexander Wheelock Thayer.

sular officers, whose main duties were those now performed by commercial attachés, had become salaried government employees. This relieved Thayer of financial worries; and, while his subordinates and clerks carried on most of the consular duties, he was able to continue his research and write his Beethoven biography.

It was not unusual for presidents to appoint literary figures to diplomatic and consular posts, providing security of income and allowing them to pursue, concurrent to their duties, their avocations. Thus, we had Washington Irving and James Russell Lowell as ministers to Spain; Edward Everett, George Bancroft, and John Lothrop Motley as ministers to Great Britain; Lew Wallace as minister to Turkey; Nathaniel Hawthorne as consul in Liver-

pool; and William Dean Howells as consul in Venice.

Other countries also had consuls with a literary bent in Trieste. Stendhal had been French consul there for a few months in 1830-1831, and in 1867-1872 the British man there was Charles Lever (1806-1872), a prolific novelist who once rivaled Dickens in popularity. Lever was succeeded as British consul by none other than Sir Richard Burton, the explorer and author, who was there from 1872 until his death in 1890.



While not neglecting his duties, during his earlier life in Germany and his occasional trips from Trieste, Thayer had interviewed virtually everyone still alive who had known Beethoven, read all available biographies, studied Beethoven’s surviving conversation books and any pertinent documents, and kept copious notes. He began to write his magnum opus in English, entrusting the translation to German educator and musicologist Hermann Deiters (1833-1907). The first volume of *Life of Beethoven* was published, in German, in Berlin in 1866; the second came out in 1872, and the third in 1879. Thayer was still working on the remaining volumes when he died in 1897. The fourth volume was being finished by Deiters when he died in 1907, and both this

Classical music in Boston, and Beethoven symphonies in general, were then the rage.

volume and the fifth were completed from Thayer's notes by composer and musicologist Hugo Riemann (1849-1919) and published in 1907-1908.

While Thayer's guiding principle was "an ounce of historical accuracy is worth a pound of rhetorical flourish," his prose is anything but dry. He also succeeded in his biographic endeavor because, as he told his translator, Deiters, "I have resisted the temptation to discuss the character of Beethoven's works and to make such a discussion the foundation." He avoided discussions of the philosophy, meaning, structure, and evaluation of Beethoven's opus, and concentrated on his personality and life events, except for, in the Victorian era, prying into his sentimental life. Thayer showed both sides of Beethoven's character: the musical genius and generous man, his aesthetic, groundbreaking vision and his sweetness, as well as his uncouth, abrupt manners, his occasional dishonesty, and his litigious, controlling misanthropy. He was, indeed, angel and devil at the same time.

The first English edition of the work, assembled from Thayer's original manuscript, his notes, and the published German translation, was published in 1921. Its author was American musicologist and music critic Henry E. Krehbiel (1854-1923), who commented: Thayer's "industry, zeal, keen power of analysis, candor, and fair-mindedness won the confidence of all with whom he came into contact except the literary charlatans whose romances he was bent on destroying in the interest of the verities of history."

More than 100 years later, Thayer's is still the definitive biography of Beethoven. The eminent literary critic Van Wyck Brooks wrote: "The work was a characteristic product of the Yankee mind [when] hero-worship flourished in Boston. ... Thayer conceived his passion for Beethoven while still at Harvard. All the existing accounts of the composer were a tissue of romantic tales



A portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven by Joseph Willibrord Mähler that was once owned by Alexander Thayer and now belongs to the New York Public Library.

and errors, and Thayer resolved at once to write the great biography. ... Thayer's life of Beethoven had long been a German classic when it first appeared in America in 1920. ... [W]ith his calm and logical mind, scrupulous, magnanimous, and spacious ... [he] had set out to describe for posterity the great man as he was ... with all his warts; and his patient realism and all but inexhaustible industry had created an irreplaceable and masterly portrait."

The latest reprint of *Thayer's Life of Beethoven* (1967), updated with the latest research and newly discovered material, was that of musicologist and conductor Elliot Forbes (1917-2006).



In addition to being the site where the biography was written, Trieste shares two other links with Beethoven. The composer's famous piano sonata, *Moonlight*, Opus 27, Number 2 (1801-1802),

was dedicated to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi (1784-1856), a young lady with whom the 30-year-old Beethoven had fallen in love. Guicciardi had just moved to Vienna from Trieste and was taking piano lessons from the composer.

The other link is the greatest collection of Beethoveniana. Not located in Bonn, where he was born, or in Vienna, where he became famous, the museum is in Muggia, a small town across the Gulf of Trieste. Its contents were assembled during the last 40 years by the Carrino family, who converted their villa into a Beethoven museum.

In Trieste, Thayer, who never married, lived in an apartment cared for by a housekeeper on the seafront promenade and, as a Carthusian monk, dedicated most of the last 40 years of his life to his project. Even after retiring from the consulate in 1882, he stayed put in Trieste, continuing his routine as much as his health allowed him.

Despite his long residence in Trieste, where the majority of the inhabitants spoke Italian, he never learned the nuances of that language, one time being embarrassed at a dinner by not recalling momentarily the Italian word for “spoon.” His research and his prior life in Germany had made Thayer’s personality more attuned to German culture and speech, and he was often taken for German, rather than American. Apart from people in the musical world, his friends in Trieste included Sir Richard Burton, who, like Thayer, died in that city.

Alexander Thayer’s death in Trieste in July 1897 was big news, particularly in Germany. His library and Beethoven memorabilia were sold by his inheritors at auction both in New York and in London in 1898 and 1899. Thayer also left \$30,000 to Harvard, his alma mater, to be used for scholarships.

He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery of Trieste, and, over time, his tomb was either forgotten or believed lost. Then in 1964, John P. Sabec, an employee of the American Consulate General in Trieste, with the assistance of local historian Oscar De Incontrera (1903-1970), found it. Sabec then began to clear out the vegetation grown on the tomb and involved Vice Consul Samuel E. Fry (b. 1934) and Consul Samuel G. Wise (b. 1928; later ambassador).

Money was raised, and back and future rent on the cemetery plot paid. The marble tombstone had previously given only his name and the dates and places of birth and death; Vice Consul Fry then paid a sculptor to add: “Biographer of Ludwig van Beethoven—American Consul in Trieste 1865-1882.” Nearby are also buried Stanislaus Joyce, James Joyce’s brother, and Achille La Guardia—father of Fiorello La Guardia, a former U.S. diplomat, congressman, and mayor of New York. ■

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AFSA Hosts MED Town Halls on Mental Health Care

On July 12, AFSA hosted two virtual town halls with Dr. Thomas Kerrihard, deputy chief medical officer for mental health programs in the State Department's Bureau of Medical Services (MED), to discuss mental health services in the Foreign Service.

In opening remarks, Tom Yazdgerdi, then AFSA's State vice president, noted that awareness of mental health issues has increased in the last decade.

"We've come a long way in making our medical programs responsive and supportive," he said. "We want to thank the MED team for those efforts."

To unearth members' principal concerns regarding

mental health services in the Foreign Service, AFSA conducted a survey in January 2023 in collaboration with MED. The responses showed that Foreign Service employees were most concerned about access to overseas mental health providers, the effect of seeking care on security clearances and privacy, MED staffing overseas, and mental health support for family members.

MED did a more detailed survey in May, which revealed that many FS members knew little about MED's services.

To promote and safeguard the health and well-being of the American diplomatic community, Dr. Kerrihard said, MED has

about 63 physicians, known as regional medical officers, in health units around the world who conduct general medical work. MED also employs 23 psychiatrists and more than 100 physician assistants, nurses, and nurse practitioners who staff the department's health units overseas. There are more than 200 such units, serving about 270 posts, worldwide.

Dr. Kerrihard pointed to a growing need in the Foreign Service for mental health care, citing regular transitioning to new positions and places, as well as frequent exposure to war, terrorism, and conflict.

"[Many] embassies are understaffed, so people are overworking while adjust-

ing to new supervisors," he added. "Our children may have a hard time at new schools, finding new friends,

Continued on page 66

CALENDAR

Please check www.afsa.org for the most up-to-date information.

October 5
3-5 p.m.
AFSA Awards Ceremony

October 9
Columbus Day / Indigenous Peoples' Day
AFSA offices closed

October 11
11 a.m.
AFSA Meets with Job Search/Transition Program Class

October 18
12-2 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

October 26
1 p.m.
View from Washington: Virtual Event

November 10
Veterans Day
AFSA offices closed

November 13-December 11
Federal Health Benefits Open Season

November 15
12-2 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

November 16
Time TBD
Webinar: 2024 FEHB Insurance & Benefits

November 23-24
Thanksgiving Holiday
AFSA offices closed

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Mark Evans

Christian A. Herter Award for a Senior Foreign Service Officer

Alexander Douglas

William R. Rivkin Award for a Mid-Level Officer

Look for profiles of all the recipients, and an interview with the Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy awardee in the December edition of The Foreign Service Journal.

EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE

Erin Cederlind

M. Juanita Guess Award for a Community Liaison Officer

Katie Leis

Nelson B. Delavan Award for an Office Management Specialist

David Burnstein

Mark Palmer Award for Advancement of Democracy

Marina Grayson

Mark Palmer Award for Advancement of Democracy

Honorable Mention: David Baugh

Avis Bohlen Award for an Eligible Family Member

Felix Peng and Paige Puntso

Post Representative of the Year Award

Ken Kero-Mentz

AFSA Achievement and Contributions to the Association Award



Building A Culture of Belonging

Building a culture of belonging is everyone's responsibility and our institution's opportunity. This call to actively build belonging is not only embedded in our nation's history, but also intrinsically tied to our ability to successfully modernize the U.S. Foreign Service.

I recently reflected on our country's history of civil rights and labor rights movements, and am reminded of those vanguard activists, heroes, and collaborators who walked the streets of Washington, D.C.

Sixty years ago, on Aug. 28, 1963, America experienced the largest rally of the civil rights movement, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Most of us call it the "March on Washington" and forget "Jobs and Freedom," but those latter few words remind us that people from all walks of life came together in one intertwined struggle for both civil and labor rights.

In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress." This movement fundamentally spoke to each of us about belonging in the workplace, in our schools, and in our nation, creating the momentum that advanced the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

AFSA's work every day builds on the efforts of those

pioneers. As AFSA State VP, I am committed to pursuing and strengthening the culture of belonging.

Belonging is about more than just inclusion; it is offering tools, resources, and opportunities to help each member thrive. AFSA is a core part of this journey as we recognize and celebrate each other's achievements through awards.

Building a culture of appreciation and recognition is also the White House's commitment via the June 21 Executive Order 14035: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workplace, where inclusion is defined as "the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds."

I often hear employees say this or that post or office is a "one award per assignment" place, or some managers say that certain work is not significant enough for an award. We have an opportunity to create the counter-culture to such talk.

If colleagues have done meaningful work and are being overlooked for awards of any category, know that there are many ways we will celebrate your achievements, formally and informally, including within AFSA. Speak up to allies and mentors and nominate those around you. Check out AFSA's awards categories

Belonging is about more than just inclusion; it is offering tools, resources, and opportunities to help each member thrive.

and deadlines at www.afsa.org/awards-and-honors.

Belonging is also about being a proactive bystander who intervenes when there is bullying or harassment in the workplace. AFSA continues to advocate to the highest levels of State Department leadership for the creation and staffing of the department's anti-harassment and anti-bullying office.

This office could address the myriad situations many Foreign Service members find themselves in that might not amount to an equal employment opportunity (EEO) violation but still have a deleterious effect on the well-being of the individuals targeted, as well as on the overall work of belonging in our institution.

Some bureaus and DEIA councils have initiated bystander awareness training and discussion. AFSA supports having dedicated resources to help those being targeted by bullies or harassers and to build a culture of accountability to address systemic issues enabling those responsible to continue such behaviors.

A culture of belonging asks who is *not* at the decision-making table and seeks to give them a seat. This is not "tokenism." As the

Office of Diversity and Inclusion released the second annual DEIA baseline report and four barrier analyses of our workforce, we noted the gaps and intend to deepen conversations on hiring, retention, and promotions across the Foreign Service.

This data-driven approach is just step one. The next steps involve changing perceptions and building trust with stakeholders across our institution to demonstrate that we are not putting "merit-based" hiring to the wayside in favor of something "less fair," particularly for mid- and senior-level assignments.

We have, indeed, come a long way since the 1963 March on Washington, but we still have a long way to go to ensure our foreign policy decision-making table represents the plurality of thoughts, views, and approaches of the U.S. population.

This plurality is our strength. Every time AFSA is afforded a seat at the table with State Department leadership and with powerbrokers across Washington, you have my commitment that I will ask: Who else should be at this table? What ideas could they bring? And what more can I do to help others belong? ■



A Case for Unions

I am a union guy, and I come from a union family. My grandfather was a United Auto Workers member; my grandmother was in the Communication Workers of America; my brother and mother-in-law were members of the California Teachers Association (CTA); and my spouse, a former member of the CTA and the Service Employees International Union, is now an AFSA member. Unions are important to me.

Unions and employee associations have changed the American workforce. Through the power of advocacy and collective bargaining, they are responsible for many of our labor protections and regulations, safety standards, pensions systems, rights, and a factor in mitigating income inequality.

Union membership peaked in the U.S. in the 1960s with 35 percent of the total workforce, more than 21 mil-

lion people. Since then, with increases in globalization, anti-union federal legislation/regulation, and the increase in right-to-work states, private sector membership declined, but public sector membership has soared to 33 percent of public sector workers in 2022.

Today, sadly, only about 10 percent of the total (private and public) workforce, or 14.3 million people, belong to a union.

Since 1924, AFSA has been the advocate and partner for members of the U.S. Foreign Service. As a public sector union, there are limits to what AFSA can do, outlined in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (chapters 10 and 11).

But make no mistake: AFSA is a powerful advocate. This year, AFSA successfully lobbied to update the pet travel policy, helping obtain an increase in types of and reimbursement amounts for transfer allowances for

FS employees returning from overseas for domestic tours. AFSA's ongoing efforts include advocacy for:

- **Pay parity for new Foreign Service hires**, no matter where they are hired, during the orientation period prior to leaving for a first post.
- **Internet to be treated as a utility**, just like electricity, at government-owned and -leased buildings.
- **Anti-nepotism review parity for tandems and eligible family members (EFMs)** in Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) language.

Here at USAID, more than 80 percent of USAID FSOs are AFSA members—that's more than 1,500 FSOs. In addition to the Foreign Service Act, the AFSA-USAID 2022 Framework Agreement guides our interactions, negotiations,

advocacy, and grievance support with the agency.

At USAID, AFSA is actively engaged in lobbying for additional resources to fund overseas and domestic FSO positions; participating as a key member of the For-

eign Service Strengthening Initiative; working closely with the Employee Labor Relations team on chapter rewrites in the Automated Directives System (ADS); engaging with the Human Capital and Talent Management office on promotion/assignment reform and workforce planning; and advising and representing FSOs to the grievance board.

For me, joining AFSA was never a question. Over the years, my support for union membership has only grown. Whether I'm talking to the local barista trying to organize, the teamster driving a long-haul truck striking to improve work conditions and pay equity, or the FSO juggling work and private life priorities, I stand with you.

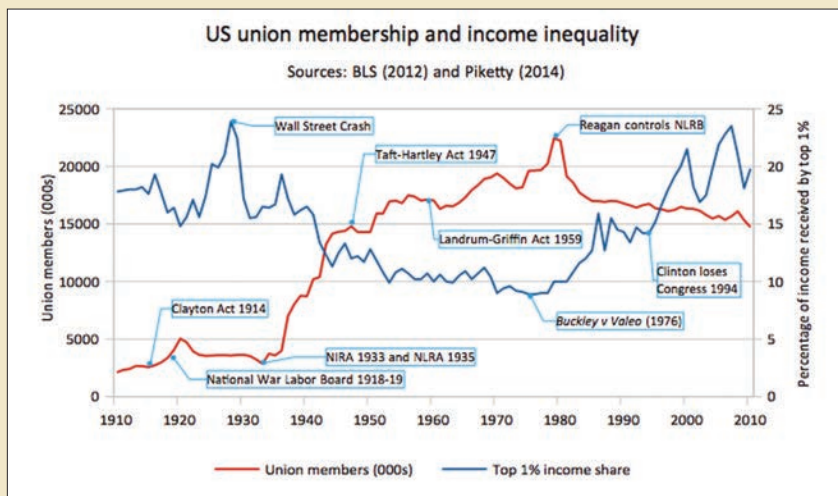
My questions to you: How do we get USAID officers more involved? How do we go from 80 percent to 90 or 95 percent membership?

Want to know more? Go to <https://afsa.org/usaid>, drop me a note at chester@afsa.org, or visit me in the Ronald Reagan Building, Room 3.09-D.

Not a member, or know someone who isn't? Contact member@afsa.org for an application. ■



OECD DATA, TRADE UNION DATASET



Data based on research by E. McGaughey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Thomas Piketty.



Small but Mighty, Not More with Less

When describing the Foreign Agricultural Service, I often use the phrase “small but mighty.” Our team of less than 150 Foreign Service officers helped facilitate a record \$196 billion in U.S. agricultural exports in 2022.

Over the years, we’ve had to do more with less; compared to three decades ago, we have 25 percent fewer FSOs facilitating four times the value of U.S. ag exports, requiring an outsize effort that takes a toll.

U.S. industry groups have always counted on us to influence host government policies and provide detailed market intelligence, while also implementing wide-ranging local programming.

More recently, our scope has expanded to include ethanol, food security, and agricultural innovation to help foreign farmers adapt to climate change and develop markets for sustainable U.S. products—without new staffing or funding. Our efforts now range from school feeding programs in least developed countries to savvy marketing campaigns in the most advanced social media markets.

As FAS prepares to identify significant budget cuts for an unknown duration, it will face tough decisions on how to prioritize its waning resources. Having less means we must be more intentional about what we fund and why.

As those who have worked

in or with FAS know, it is not that agricultural trade has gotten less political, less complex, or “easier.” Quite the opposite—gaining market access can take more than a decade of creativity and persistence, and maintaining exports is often a result of persistence in the underappreciated game of whack-a-mole with emerging trade barriers.

To take advantage of emerging opportunities for U.S. agriculture abroad without sacrificing past gains will be extremely difficult with a static number of FSOs. FAS is already stretched very thin, with many FSOs covering several countries in a region. One FSO currently covers 25 markets in the Caribbean basin, including Cuba, and only 11 FSOs cover the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

In this limited budget environment, I am pushing for no reduction in overseas budgets for travel and post-organized activities. Regional coverage only works if FSOs can meet in-person with their local staff, host government officials, farmers, and traders in their countries of responsibility.

In addition, it would be a huge loss if overseas offices didn’t have sufficient funding to organize in-country activities to market U.S. ag products and address policy issues. These activities are at the heart of what FAS does

and directly benefit the U.S. stakeholders we exist to support.

I recognize that this approach—while in FAS’ best interest—could force tough reductions for some more recent programs. However, this is a great opportunity to refocus our reduced funding on the essential services the agency provides to stakeholders and make sure that our budget, too, is “small but mighty.”

In addition, the agency should prioritize areas of work/life balance that do not require additional financial outlays. For example, it could significantly reduce the administrative burden facing overseas FSOs by filling vacant headquarters positions with personnel who could provide budgetary and other support.

This would align with President Joe Biden’s directive to chiefs of mission: “Unless a clear benefit to the U.S. government justifies otherwise, all functions that can be performed effectively and efficiently by personnel domestically or at regional offices overseas should be performed in those locations.” Overseas personnel could then focus their time on mission-critical efforts that must occur overseas.

In the current job market, not addressing these issues could exacerbate attrition and jeopardize the future of our Foreign Service. It is

notable that 9 percent of our FSOs began their first overseas tour after September 2022. While these new FSOs bring much talent to the table, it is alarming that we also lost 10 percent of FSOs (collectively representing more than 400 years of government service) over the same period.

Significantly, half of the losses were the result of voluntary—not mandatory—retirement. While some increased attrition may be generational, we know burn-out from years of doing much more with less and the lack of designated HQ positions for FSOs play a role.

However, FAS has a unique opportunity to address these issues. Redirecting budgets toward our core functions and the employees who carry them out would also offer a better work/life balance for employees who have grown weary from years of doing more with less.

Such a refocus would help the Foreign Service continue to be a competitive career for the talented, and increasingly diverse, workforce we have recruited and trained. It would also demonstrate that leadership truly values those who deliver wins for our stakeholders, often in very challenging circumstances.

While budgetary constraints may force us to remain small, these changes would help us deliver even mightier results. ■



A Season of Newness

For many of us, this time of year brings a new beginning—perhaps a new assignment, a new country, a new school, or maybe a new boss or new colleagues.

There is a lot of “new” these days in the Foreign Commercial Service. We have new leadership, as the deputy director general (DDG) baton has recently been passed. Our new DDG has one of the toughest jobs in all of government: trying to fill the big shoes and steadfast leadership of his predecessor.

This season also brings us a new career development and assignments officer; we’re lucky to have him in this important role. I know he is working hard with leadership to ensure that all of us are made aware of our assignments before the winter holidays—that’s a gift we’re all eager to unwrap!

As you know, we also have a new AFSA VP—I’m truly humbled and honored by the opportunity to serve in this role. My gosh, do we have a lot of work to do. “We” is the key word here—I’m going to need a lot of help from all of you to be effective in this role. Thankfully, Jay Carreiro is still serving, from Germany, as our part-time representative.

To complement all the new, FCS is fortunate to have exceptional and stable leadership. With Arun Venkataraman at the helm, and

guided by Ike Umennah’s ever-wise counsel, we have a front office team focused on advancing the administration’s agenda *and* improving the day-to-day operations of FCS.

After decades of underinvestment in staffing, technology, and process improvement, day-to-day operations present the greatest challenge currently facing the Foreign Commercial Service. Despite recent recruitment efforts—like a renewed and welcomed focus on improving diversity in FCS—it seems like we’re losing officers faster than we’re able to onboard them. Our colleagues in the field are feeling the effects of so many vacancies.

Nearly one third of FCS Senior Foreign Service positions overseas are currently vacant—all in geostrategic locations. At the same time, FCS has loaned out three of our most senior leaders to other agencies.

But demands from clients, HQ, or the Secretary of Commerce do not stop when we have vacancies. Work piles up, days get longer, weekends and leave get shorter, and burnout becomes inevitable.

Speaking from personal experience and observation, overworked and overstressed officers do not help our mission or our nation. On the contrary, fatigue and stress from overworking lead

AFSA and FCS management agree that to have an effective Service, we must take care of our people.

to conflict, burnout, poor decision-making, and physical and emotional health issues.

To be clear, managers and organizational cultures that restrict leave, demand weekend work, or disallow overtime for untenured officers are contributing to the current mental wellness crisis in the Foreign Service.

How would the Fighting Irish ever hope to compete for a national championship if they only played with eight fatigued players on the field? (Lifelong Notre Dame fan here.) How can FCS hope to compete without a full team on the field and when our bench is empty?

Thankfully, the vast majority of our colleagues love their work. We get to support American companies overseas, strive to bring peace and prosperity to the world through commerce, and solve real-world challenges with U.S.-made technology! Our jobs are fantastic—when we get to *do* our jobs.

But what percentage of time do we actually spend working toward our mission? My guess is less than 60 percent, and I hope to collect data from colleagues

to test my hypothesis. I’ll be sending out tools to help estimate a work breakdown structure that will help us track our time. More to come.

We’re fortunate to have a strong FCS leadership team. While areas of divergence may appear in time, AFSA and FCS management agree that to have an effective Service, we must take care of our people. New leadership in key positions can help our collective cause. There is energy and a hopeful spirit that comes from new beginnings.

For all of us in new roles, or with new relationships to cultivate this season, I would like to invite you to embrace the concept of “shoshin,” a Japanese term for the beginner’s mind.

Having a beginner’s mind means you approach the world every day with fresh eyes. It means you look at every situation you’re placed in as if it’s the first time you are seeing it.

This skill takes practice, but in doing so, we can break the cycle of spite and retaliation, and be the change we wish to see in our Foreign Service. ■



Safeguard Your Finances

So far this year, two dozen Foreign Service retirees have had one of their monthly pension payments maliciously diverted to another bank. While that is a tiny fraction of the nearly 16,000 Foreign Service annuitants, and the Department of State reimbursed the stolen funds, it is still obviously a major cause for concern.

These thefts are currently under investigation by federal authorities, but it appears that they originated with the hacking of the retiree's personal email account—not via any vulnerability within the Department of State or in the government's Annuitant

Employee Express platform that holds the annuitant's direct deposit information.

This is an uncomfortably close-to-home example of the threat posed to our personal finances by the ever-proliferating number and ingenuity of financial scams.

To ensure the integrity of your financial dealings, educate yourself and family members about scams and cyberthreats.

Many financial institutions, retail companies, and government agencies publish guidance on how to avoid becoming a victim. For example, on the State Department Federal Credit Union (SDFCU)

website, click on Services and then Learning Hub, and then select the category Security in the filter menu. On the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) site, click on Advice and Guidance.

Top tips are to use caution when opening emails, clicking on internet links, and answering telephone calls. Instead of clicking on links in emails or texts that purport to be from a company with which you do business, conduct your own internet search for that company's website address, and then contact them at the telephone number or email address listed there.

Regarding telephone calls, scammers can change the phone number displayed on your caller ID, so if you have any doubt that the caller is

who they claim to be, hang up and contact the company directly at a telephone number or email address listed on the company's website.

Common signs of scams in emails, texts, and phone calls are the person saying that there is a problem with one of your accounts or that you have won a prize, then pressuring you to act immediately by paying in an unusual way.

To avoid being scammed, do not give your personal or financial information in response to a request that you did not expect, resist pressure to act immediately, and stop before you act to talk with someone you trust, like a family member or neighbor, who may help you identify it as a scam before it is too late. ■

2024 AFSA Directory of Retired Members Update Your Information!

AFSA's annual retiree directory (in print and online) offers one of the best ways to stay in touch with your Foreign Service colleagues after they leave the Service.

Help us ensure that the 2024 directory is complete and up to date by sharing any new contact information with us—including physical address, telephone, and email address.

If you have moved or changed any of your contact information in the last year, please email us at member@afsa.org. If you have not, there is no need to act.

The deadline for all

changes for the 2024 Retiree Directory is Nov. 3, 2023.

Please note that if you have previously requested your name *not* be included in the directory, we have that information recorded and will ensure that it is not.

Let us know if you prefer *not* to receive a copy in print and access it online instead. If you have previously told us that you do not wish to receive a print copy, we have that information recorded, as well.

For new requests, please email AFSA at member@afsa.org. ■

Another Clean Audit for AFSA

The American Foreign Service Association has yet again received the highest possible commendation in its annual audit: a clean, unmodified opinion. This marks 14 consecutive years in which the association has been awarded this audit result. It is important to note that AFSA voluntarily undergoes an audit each year; there is no requirement to do so in the bylaws.

The accounting firm Gross Mendelsohn found no deficiencies in AFSA's 2022 financial reporting and financial operations. The AFSA Governing Board received the official report at its August board meeting.

Said AFSA Executive Director Ásgeir Sigfússon: "We are proud of this achievement. AFSA members should expect spotless internal governance and adherence to the highest accounting standards from their association. We are very pleased to be able to provide the reassurance that our members' dues are being responsibly cared for.

"It is especially meaningful this year, as we have a new auditing partner in Gross Mendelsohn. An initial audit such as this is especially thorough, so passing this test is really meaningful." ■

FSJ Wins Awards



The March 2022 issue.

The *Foreign Service Journal* won a Gold “Tabbie” Award in the category of “best special section” for “excellent interviewing and research” in the March 2022 edition on the Afghanistan evacuation. Trade Association Business Publications International (TABPI) presented the award.

The TABPI announcement described the March *FSJ* as “a thorough and thoughtful examination” of the evacuation from Afghanistan, citing “powerful photos and storytelling.”

The judges also congratulated the *Journal* on “producing the first map of its kind,” which was created in collaboration with cartographer Chad Blevins and details the evacuation flight paths taken out of Kabul after the city fell to the Taliban.

The March issue included moving reflections from 29 FS members on the front lines of the evacuation effort, as well as an interview with an Afghan ally who worked for the U.S. as an interpreter and described his harrowing exit from the country.

TABPI gave an honorable mention in the category of “best single issue” to the October 2022 *FSJ* on Ukraine, which featured articles by former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bill

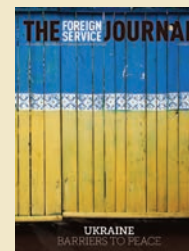


FSJ team members (from left) Kathryn Owens, Julia Wohlers, and Hannah Harari accepted two awards at the EXCEL Awards Gala on June 27 in Washington, D.C.

Taylor; Rose Gottemoeller, who previously served as under secretary for arms control and international security at the State Department and deputy secretary general of NATO; and retired FSO Ken Moskowitz, among others. The Moskowitz article continues to draw readers, garnering thousands of clicks every month.

In June, the *FSJ* was recognized with two EXCEL Awards. The March 2022 edition on the Afghanistan evacuation earned a silver in the category of “single topic issue,” while the June 2022 issue on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility received a bronze in the category of “diversity and inclusion initiatives issue.”

The EXCEL Awards are hosted by Association Media & Publishing and recognize excellence and leadership in media for associations. ■



The October 2022 issue.



The June 2022 issue.

AFSA Welcomes New Recruits

At a series of events over the summer, AFSA was pleased to welcome new members of the Foreign Service and introduce them to the association’s work on their behalf.

USAID’s Career Candidate Corps, class 36, which met with AFSA on July 12, was made up of 21 participants across eight backstops, with the largest subgroup consisting of five crisis, stabilization, and governance officers.

These new USAID FSOs speak Arabic, Chamorro, Chichewa, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Korean, Lingala, Pashto, Portuguese, Pulaar, Punjabi, Spanish, Sotho, Swahili, Urdu, and Wolof.

They have worked or studied in 57 different countries. Four already have experience working for USAID, while 15 have worked for the U.S. government in other capacities.

The State Department’s joint Foreign Service Orientation 169-215 class of 230 members visited AFSA headquarters for lunch events in three groups on July 31 and Aug. 9.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi welcomed the new hires, outlined AFSA’s recent victories and current priorities, and took questions from the group.

The class consisted of 116 generalists (26 consular, 23

economic, 22 management, 22 political, and 23 public diplomacy) and 114 specialists (with the largest subgroups made up of 48 Diplomatic Security special agents, 19 office management specialists, and 13 information management specialists).

The group contained 32 Rangel Fellows, three Pickering Fellows, one Presidential Management Fellow, and seven former Consular Fellows.

Forty-five are former State Department employees, contractors, or eligible family members, while 70 served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

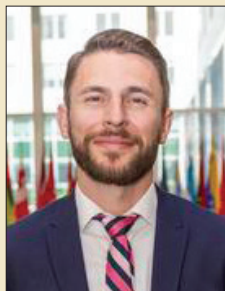
Languages spoken include the six official languages of the U.N., as well as Afrikaans, Bahasa Indonesia, Bangla, Belarusian, Cantonese, Czech, Ewe, German, Haitian Creole, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Pulaar, Punjabi, Portuguese, Romanian, Samoan, Swahili, Tajiki, Persian, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, and Yoruba.

Among the class members are commercial pilots, a certified barbecue judge, and a competitive baton twirler. One individual starred in a Thai television series and Bollywood movie, one survived a hurricane on a boat, and another holds a U.S. record in ice swimming. ■

FSJ Editorial Board Welcomes New Members, Chair



Vivian Walker



David Bargeño



Lynette Behnke



Steven Hendrix



Dan Spokojny

The Foreign Service Journal is pleased to welcome to its editorial board a new chair as well as four new members for the 2023-2025 term: active-duty State FSOs David Bargeño and Lynette Behnke, active-duty USAID FSO Steven Hendrix, and former State FSO Dan Spokojny.

Vivian Walker, board member since 2019, State Department FSO, and executive director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, was appointed chair of the *FSJ* Editorial Board in July after the departure of newly retired FSO Alexis Ludwig, who had held the position since 2018.

David Bargeño joined the Foreign Service in 2012 and currently serves as the “climate guy” (and deputy counselor for environment, science, technology, and health affairs) at U.S. Mission Brazil.

His previous overseas assignments include Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Africa, and Brazil (São Paulo). In Washington, D.C., he worked in the Office of the U.S. Spe-

cial Presidential Envoy for Climate and the Secretary of State’s Office of Global Food Security.

Bargeño earned a bachelor’s degree from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and a master’s degree from Yale University. An avid runner, he lives in Brasilia with his husband, son, and two Rhodesian Ridgeback hounds.

Lynette Behnke, a Foreign Service officer since 2006, was elected to the AFSA Governing Board in 2023 and serves as that body’s liaison to the Editorial Board. Her full biography appeared in the September 2023 *FSJ*.

Steven E. Hendrix is the USAID senior coordinator for the Department of State’s Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance and managing director for planning, performance, and systems.

Previously, he served as senior adviser for USAID’s programs in South America and was also deputy mission director for USAID/Ghana. He served in Bolivia, Nigeria, Paraguay, Iraq, Nicaragua,

Guatemala, and in USAID’s Bureaus of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Science and Technology.

Before joining USAID, he was with the University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Center and the UW Law School Institute for Legal Studies.

Hendrix holds a B.A. in economics and Spanish from Carroll College, a J.D. and an M.A. in Ibero-American studies from the University of Wisconsin, an LL.D. from Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in Bolivia, and an S.J.D. from Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala.

Since 1999, he has been a Fellow with DePaul University Law School’s International Human Rights Institute. He has published more than 100 professional articles and two books.

Dan Spokojny is the founder and chief executive officer of fp21, a foreign policy think tank at the nexus of government, academia, and tech. It partners with the State Department and other organizations to improve the quality of the policymaking process.

A former Foreign Service officer, Spokojny served abroad in Lithuania, Belarus, and Pakistan, and in Washington, D.C., on the Pakistan desk, in the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. He served on the AFSA Governing Board from 2014 to 2015.

Prior to joining the State Department, Spokojny worked as a legislative aide in Congress focused primarily on foreign policy issues. He is also pursuing a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley. His research focuses on the nature of expertise in foreign policy.



A fond farewell and deep thanks to Bronwyn Llewellyn, Maryum Saifee, and Joe Tordella, who have left the Editorial Board. We thank them for their thoughtful guidance and contributions to the editorial direction of the *Journal*. ■

Believe in Their Future: Support FS Youth

BY ARILÉA FERNANDEZ

Ariléa Fernandez is executive director of the Foreign Service Youth Foundation. An FS family member and mother of four, she has lived and worked in Bogotá, Colombia.

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation has provided innovative programming and support services to our community for more than 30 years. It is primarily a volunteer organization that relies on the energy, enthusiasm, experience, and ideas of Foreign Service parents to provide direction and people power.

We need an influx of dedicated new members for our executive and advisory boards. Our most immediate need is for a grant writer, a social media content writer, and a fundraising team member. As a volunteer, you will find many meaningful ways to contribute as FSYF continues to engage, develop, and inspire youth globally.

FSYF is also delighted to work with individuals who cannot make a one- or two-year commitment but are willing to help with any of our ongoing projects.

Our core objective is to support Foreign Service youth globally. This requires recognizing the unique obstacles and opportunities our kids face, creating new programs that are in sync with the expectations of today's kids, and rolling up our sleeves to get the work done.

Whether you're an eligible family member (EFM), senior government employee, or mid-career officer looking for a volunteer opportunity, there is a place for you at the Foreign Service Youth Foundation. We also encourage college-age, post-graduate FS kids, and third culture kids to join us.

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation was established in 1989 by what was then the State Department Family Liaison Office (now the Global Community Liaison Office, or GCLO) and the

Overseas Briefing Center (OBC). FSYF was born of a need for an outside entity solely focused on Foreign Service youth as they transition from post to post, with special attention to supporting youth as they return to the United States.

We host local, in-person events for young people, like holiday parties, climbing activities, splash-pad play dates, trainings, welcome home seminars and picnics, and youth leadership opportunities, such as the Youth Leadership Advisory Board and the youth newsletter.

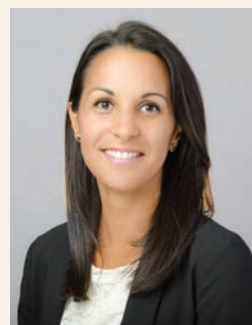
We also host virtual events and hold contests with cash prizes. Our website has a digital library full of recorded virtual events on topics such as mental health, successful transitions, security in overseas schools, how to support a good goodbye, and many more. These sessions are for families in transition and can be accessed at any time.

The Welcome Home and KidVid videos, created by youth about their host country and the Washington, D.C.–Maryland–Virginia area, are stored on an interactive map.

We partner with GCLO, OBC, overseas schools, and Active and Connected Family Therapy to link families to resources. Strong human connections can ease the hardship of transition, so our local and virtual events are intended to foster meaningful relationships. Yet there is still so much work to be done!

If you are interested in pitching in or learning more, please email me at fsyf@fsyf.org.

Help us make sure our kids have the support and the programming that demonstrate our faith in them. ■



Ariléa Fernandez

AFSA Celebrates Foreign Service Youth

AFSA joined the Foreign Service Youth Foundation (FSYF), the Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO), and Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) in honoring excellence in Foreign Service youth at the 2023 Youth Awards Ceremony. The event took place on July 19 in the State Department's George C. Marshall Center.

The FS community came together to celebrate the achievements of the children of U.S. foreign affairs agency employees. The ceremony drew more than 100 guests, and dozens more tuned in to watch the livestream.

FSYF President John Naland presented the foundation's merit scholarships and essay and art awards to the six recipients (out of 26) who were able to be in Washington, D.C., for the event.

Next, AAFSW Scholarship Chair Adah Ellenport conferred six scholarship awards for academic merit, volunteerism, and essay writing.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi then presented the association's 2023 merit scholarship awards to the eight recipients (out of 38) who attended the ceremony.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken's letter of congratulations to the awardees was read aloud, and Foreign Service Director General Marcia Bernicat delivered the keynote address. The event was followed by a reception.

Each year AFSA awards merit scholarships to graduating high school seniors ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,500.

This year the AFSA scholarship program awarded



Recipients of AFSA's 2023 Merit Award scholarships pose with Director General Marcia Bernicat (center). Students from left: Daniel Petry, Kiara Fenn, Donna Cazeau, Martin Neisuler, Alexander Liesegang, Ethan Mandojana, Daniel Murray, Olivia Tilley.



2023 FSYF award winners were recognized by Director General Marcia Bernicat and Foreign Service Youth Foundation President John Naland.

\$254,000 in need-based Financial Aid scholarships, divided among 78 students, and distributed \$141,500 in 48 Merit Awards going to 38 students, some of whom received awards in more than one category.

For more information on AFSA's Scholarship Program, please visit www.afsa.org/scholar. Details of the 2023 Merit Scholarship recipients appeared in the September issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meeting, August 16, 2023

The board met in person at AFSA headquarters, with some members joining virtually via a hybrid system.

Chair of the Board: The Governing Board unanimously approved AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi as chair of the board. According to AFSA bylaws, the president of the association does not become chair until such a motion is approved.

Awards: The board adopted the Awards and Plaques Committee's recommendations for an additional recipient of AFSA's annual dissent awards. The full list of award recipients appears on page 56.

Committee Assignments: The board voted to approve the following AFSA committee assignments, in addition to those approved at the July meeting:

Centennial Committee (ad hoc): Lisa Ahramjian, Randy Chester, Steve Herman.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee (ad hoc): Joshua Burke, Sue Saarnio, Logan Wheeler.

Minutes Approval Committee: Sue Saarnio (chair), Lynette Behnke, David Josar, John O'Keefe. ■

AFSA Selects High School Essay Contest Winner

Justin Ahn, a junior at Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Mass., is the winner of this year's AFSA national high school essay contest.

Ahn won with his essay, "Mending Bridges: U.S.–Vietnam Reconciliation from 1995 to Today," in which he focuses on successful reconciliation efforts by the Foreign Service in transforming the U.S.–Vietnam relationship from postwar tension to a close economic and strategic partnership.

As the winner of the contest, Ahn will be awarded \$2,500. He will receive a full-tuition scholarship for an educational voyage with Semester at Sea during college and was invited to Washington, D.C., to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Aug. 15.

Joining the award recipient were AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, AFSA Education Outreach Coordinator Erin Oliver, U.S. Institute of Peace Vice President of Civic Engagement and Scholarship Michael Yaffe, and U.S. Institute of Peace Senior Outreach Officer Megan Chabalowski.

This year's runner-up is



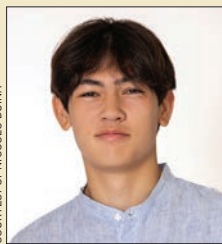
RON PRZYSLICHA

Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulates AFSA's high school essay contest winner Justin Ahn at the State Department on Aug. 15.

Niccolo Duina, a junior at Pulaski Academy in Little Rock, Ark. He wrote an essay titled "Reviving Democracy in the Philippines."

Duina was awarded \$1,250 and a full-tuition scholarship to attend the International Diplomacy program of the National Student Leadership Conference this past summer.

Every year, AFSA welcomes



COURTESY OF NICCOLO DUINA

AFSA national high school essay contest runner-up Niccolo Duina.

essay submissions from students in grades nine through 12 that address diplomacy, peacebuilding, and the U.S. Foreign Service.

This was the contest's 25th year. Students were prompted to write about a country or region in which the Foreign Service has been involved since 1924 and to describe how American diplomats were

successful or unsuccessful in advancing U.S. foreign policy goals, including promoting peace.

This year, AFSA received 416 essay submissions from 44 states and numerous locations abroad. The winners were selected in three randomized, blind rounds of judging.

The judges also named eight honorable mentions: Santiago Castro-Luna of Chevy Chase, Md.; Dante Chittenden of Grimes, Iowa; Merle Hezel of Denver, Colo.; Adarsh Khullar of Villa Hills, Ky.; Nicholas Nall of Little Rock, Ark.; Ashwin Telang of West Windsor, N.J.; Himani Yarlagadda of Northville, Mich.; and Sophia Zhang of San Jose, Calif.

AFSA is thrilled to have received so many essay submissions this year and appreciates the support of our valued educational partners: the United States Institute of Peace, the National Student Leadership Conference, and Semester at Sea.

To learn more about AFSA's essay contest and other educational initiatives, visit afsa.org/students. ■

MED Town Halls
Continued from page 56

having to say goodbye to their old friends. All of this makes our lifestyle stressful."

While these challenges are not new, the COVID-19

pandemic led to a spike in demand for mental health services, Dr. Kerrihard said.

One misconception he sees often is that people think they need to have a psychiatric diagnosis or a mental health condition to

see the regional psychiatrist.

"That's not true," Kerrihard said. "I have many people who just come in [once] to vent or talk about a difficult situation at work or with their family. Other people will see us for years."

In Washington, D.C., MED's Employee Consultation Services (ECS) provide free, confidential support to Foreign Service members, Civil Service employees, and

Continued on page 67

MED Town Halls
Continued from page 66

family members. Those services include the employee assistance program (known as “staff care” at USAID), the deployment stress management program, and the alcohol and drug assistance program.

ECS also provides crisis response, virtual support groups spanning eldercare, divorce, and mindfulness, and presentations on stress management, working with difficult supervisors, workplace conflict, and coping with transitions.

Overseas, there are 21 regional medical officer psychiatrists (RMOPs) stationed internationally to provide short-term counseling and therapy.

MED psychiatrists provide comprehensive mental health evaluations, treatment plan recommendations, and medication management. The section also offers voluntary medevacs for those seeking more intensive treatment not available at overseas posts.

RMOPs travel frequently to reach out to embassy communities, and they work to vet local healthcare providers at post. They consult with mission leadership on morale issues, assess mental health support at international schools, assist with child learning (including helping FS members access the special needs education allowance, or SNEA), address allegations of child abuse

or domestic violence, and respond to regional crises.


The Mental Health Services office is currently preparing a list of mental health resources with worldwide availability, which vary in cost and may not be covered by health insurance, as well as a list of the 21 different therapy services covered by Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) insurance.

Moving forward, Dr. Kerrihard said MED is requesting increases in staffing and will work to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health care through advocacy, offer more in-person therapy options overseas through a pilot project with licensed clinical social workers, increase services for children and adolescents, and collect data to measure the effect of MED services on quality of life overseas.

“Seeking mental health care is normal, healthy, and needs to be encouraged at all levels of our institution,” he said in closing. “I think [MED] has an excellent program, but I hope during my time here as director of the mental health program to improve our services.”

A recording of the town hall can be found at <https://afsa.org/videos>. ■


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Understanding Southeast Asia

Imperfect Partners: The United States and Southeast Asia

Scot Marciel, Rowman & Littlefield, 2023, \$39.95/paperback, e-book available, 560 pages.

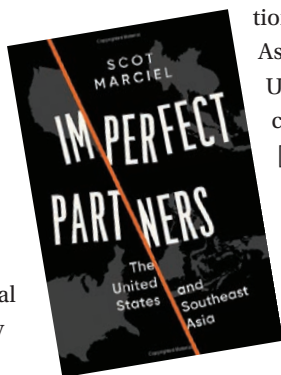
REVIEWED BY TED OSIUS

With *Imperfect Partners*, Ambassador Scot Marciel, now the Oksenberg-Rohlen Fellow at Stanford's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, has written a superb primer for people interested in the region who want to understand its dynamism and complexity.

A retired senior career diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Myanmar (2016-2020) and Indonesia (2010-2013) and in senior State Department positions, Marciel provides an insider's view of events while remaining scrupulous about history and even-handed in his analysis. Rather than writing a memoir, Marciel chose to weave his insights into the story of recent diplomatic engagement in the region in which he spent most of his 37 years as a Foreign Service officer.

During one of the highest points of U.S. engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—President Barack Obama's 2016 Sunnylands summit—Marciel served as principal deputy assistant secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, responsible for relations with Southeast Asia, so he really had a front-row seat.

In his account, Marciel makes clear



when he is expressing his own views as opposed to describing historical facts. Admirably, he is also willing to admit when, amid the diplomatic fray, he made calls that in retrospect he wished he hadn't.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I should note that our careers intersected often, including when I served for two years as Ambassador Marciel's deputy in Jakarta. I appreciated his pragmatic, results-oriented approach to diplomacy and saw him play a key role in many of the events he describes.

The Importance of Southeast Asia

ASEAN continues to enjoy some of the world's highest growth rates, and collectively the block has accounted for 9 percent of global GDP growth over the past decade. With a population of nearly 700 million, ASEAN has an economy that is the world's fifth-largest with a GDP of \$3.3 trillion and will soon become the world's fourth-largest. U.S. direct investment in the region exceeds that of U.S. investment in China, India, Japan, and South Korea combined.

Certainly the region is strategically important, but Marciel wisely cautions against looking at Southeast Asia only through the prism of U.S.-China tensions. He argues convincingly that "U.S. weakness [in the region] is much more in the economic and—to some extent—diplomatic fronts than in the security sector." China's trade with Southeast Asia skyrocketed from \$7.5 billion in 1990 to \$642 billion in 2018, pushing

it past the United States and Japan to become Southeast Asia's top trading partner. In 2020 the China-ASEAN trade relationship became the largest bilateral

trade relationship in the world, reaching \$685 billion.

Not surprisingly, Marciel's narrative is richest not when he is in the middle of policy battles in Washington, but when he recounts events from an on-the-ground perspective. He begins his storytelling in the Philippines, where as a young diplomat he met his future wife, Mae. He stumbled upon the 1986 revolution that toppled President Ferdinand Marcos while courting Mae and recounts a conversation that he overheard, just after Marcos fled for the United States and his Presidential Security Guard tried to follow him on a U.S. naval ship.

When guard elements seized the U.S. ship, Marciel writes, Ambassador Steven Bosworth told the guard commander via radio: "This is what you are going to do. You are going to put down your weapons and return control of the boat to the U.S. Navy. They will ensure you get out safely. Do you understand?" It worked. Sometimes it takes courage and real leadership to be an effective diplomat.

Ground-Level Insights

The storytelling grows in depth and insight as Marciel becomes a significant player in events, as when he served as the first U.S. diplomat to return to Hanoi after the war in Vietnam. I am often asked how it can be that Vietnamese are so forgiving after we devastated their country.

On that, Marciel provides a telling anecdote, recounting a conversation in 1994 with a driver who had lost most of his family to American bombs. "I'm not mad at America. It was war," the driver said. On another occasion, a government official told Marciel: "We've been fighting the Chinese for 2,000 years. The war with you was just a hiccup."

I know from watching him up close that Marciel was terrific at commercial

diplomacy, winning the prestigious Charles E. Cobb Jr. Award for Initiative and Success in Trade Development. He invited Lion Air CEO Rusdi Kirana to the ambassador's residence to persuade him to purchase Boeing aircraft rather than Airbus for the budget airline. Marciel instructed staff to dispense with security protocols and wave in the CEO, determined to show him respect.

The effort succeeded, resulting in an aircraft sale worth billions of dollars supporting tens of thousands of U.S. jobs. Marciel also recognized the limits on what could be accomplished in Indonesia: "Having been colonized by a private Dutch company that was mostly interested in their natural resources, it is not surprising that Indonesians have a strong nationalist streak vis-a-vis foreign investment."

In describing Suharto's fall and the aftermath, Marciel provides a window into Indonesian culture where "forgiveness trumped accountability." Among his recommendations for strengthening ties with the world's third-largest democracy—and largest Muslim-majority nation on the planet—Marciel urges the U.S. to support Indonesia's diplomatic efforts in the region.

This is particularly relevant when we consider that Indonesia and Myanmar have both experienced long periods of military rule. Indonesia found a way to send the soldiers back to their barracks while providing a face-saving way for the generals to maintain income sources and status in society, preconditions for their withdrawal from politics.

Marciel was a three-time ambassador when he had to manage the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, perhaps the thorniest challenge of his career. As ambassador, he came to know Aung San Suu Kyi, the democracy icon whose reputation was tarnished when, upon becoming a politi-

[Marciel] makes a crucial argument that will have many detractors: engage even when we don't like what a country is doing.

cal leader, she (surprise!) behaved like a politician. Marciel also shares insights about Hillary Clinton who, as Secretary of State, supported the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, but later rejected it as a presidential candidate.

Always Engage

Some of Marciel's recommendations are cautious and incremental. However, he makes a crucial argument that will have many detractors: engage even when we don't like what a country is doing.

While he champions the United States' longtime, consistent support for democracy and human rights, he writes that, even when things go badly, Washington's response should not be to sharply curtail or even eliminate senior-level discussions or impose sanctions but rather to keep high-level channels of communication open.

Using the example of the Rohingya crisis, Marciel considers whether an

intensive, high-level diplomatic campaign might have shaped the government and military's behavior differently. A nuanced approach rather than disengagement, he argues, might have made a difference on the ground. He notes: "If we waited for Myanmar to fix all its problems before we did anything, we would lose any ability to influence developments."

Indeed, if I learned anything in three decades as a diplomat, it is that engagement creates the possibility of influencing change. By contrast, pulling back from engagement—even when the government in question is behaving in a heinous fashion—means we lose the ability to have an impact.

A Foreign Service officer for nearly 30 years, Ted Osius served from 2014 to 2017 as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. He is now president and CEO of the US-ASEAN Business Council, which helps U.S. companies succeed in Southeast Asia.

A Tribute to Diplomacy

Our Man in Tokyo: An American Ambassador and the Countdown to Pearl Harbor

Steve Kemper, Mariner Books, 2022, \$29.99/hardcover, e-book available, 448 pages.

REVIEWED BY JOHN LIMBERT

Read this book. If you cannot find a copy, I will lend you mine.

Kemper has written both a fascinating account of diplomatic history and a case study of how Ambassador Joseph

C. Grew (1880-1965), one of America's most experienced and skilled diplomats, dealt with "mission impossible," a situation that over his nine-year mission in Japan (1932-1941) went gradually out of control and ended in all-out war.

First appointed by President Herbert Hoover in 1932, Grew remained in Tokyo under Roosevelt, whom he had known at Groton and Harvard. After Pearl Harbor, he and his embassy staff were interned until an exchange of diplomats in June 1942. He remained in Washington, D.C., until his retirement in 1945.

The book has numerous strong points. First, it is a good story, very well told. We know the tragic ending, but we still cheer on the efforts of well-meaning people, American and Japanese, to stop the inevitable tragedy.

It is also a tribute to the profession of diplomacy. Grew is a complete professional. He never gives up. Never. He searches for the sliver of common ground

Kemper's book is a superb read for anyone who believes in the profession of diplomacy.

and the narrow opening that might allow the U.S. and Japan to settle their differences short of war.

He remains calm in the face of the growing barrage of anti-Western verbiage from Japan and willful ignorance on the American side, where his advice is ignored, he is left uninformed, and he is often personally snubbed.

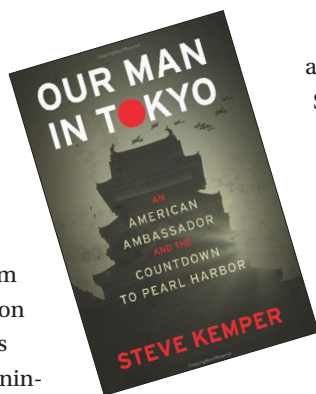
He listens to his Japanese interlocutors with empathy and understanding. He finds much to admire in Japan and the Japanese and watches the country's descent into military dictatorship—to the despair of his Japanese friends—with a feeling of helplessness.

Vivid Characters

The book is full of vivid characters. There is the ever-hesitating and indecisive Japanese politician Prince Konoye; the voluble, self-aggrandizing, and erratic Foreign Minister Matsuoka; the honorable Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura; the American Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and his unsympathetic Far East

adviser, Stanley Hornbeck; and there is Grew's embassy deputy after 1937, Eugene Dooman—an officer of Iranian Assyrian parentage who had grown up in Japan with missionary parents and spoke fluent Japanese.

As with most humans, even the good guys have their dark sides, which Kemper's book does not mention. Grew was the product of an "old boy" network



and entered the U.S. Foreign Service in 1906 because President Theodore Roosevelt was impressed that a young Grew had shot a tiger in India.

Grew was head of the Foreign Service Personnel Board after the Rogers Act created a merit-based Foreign Service in 1924.

On the dark side, while he welcomed the new system, he used the oral examination process to exclude Black applicants after admission of the first (Clifton Reginald Wharton Sr.) in 1924.

As for the talented Dooman, who as a country expert had faced accusations that he was "too sympathetic" to the Japanese, in retirement he strongly supported McCarthyism and the witchhunts of Senator William Jenner (R-Ind.).

In the first years of his mission in Tokyo, Grew benefited from friendly U.S.-Japanese relations, but after Japan began its war against China in 1937, he witnessed Japan's rapid descent into an authoritarian state dominated by an aggressive military. Grew arrived

in Japan before Hitler took power, but he later saw how many Japanese were mesmerized by the apparent successes of European fascism.

Kemper shows us a small and personalized U.S. Foreign Service, which was seriously underfunded. Salaries for everyone were low, and Grew entertained generously—making good friends among Japanese—with his own money. In 1936, facing an unresponsive department bureaucracy, he had to ask President Franklin Roosevelt personally to approve an overdue pay raise for the embassy's Japanese employees.

Growing Frustrations

As relations deteriorated in the months before Pearl Harbor, Grew faced growing frustration. Japanese officials met his requests with "promises to investigate," but only if the U.S. first validated Tokyo's aggression in China and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. On the American side, Grew often found that his messages—about last-minute efforts to avoid war—were ignored or unanswered.

What he did not know—and what Washington would not tell him—was that, thanks to a system called MAGIC, the U.S. was reading Japan's diplomatic cables. In these messages it was clear that Japanese Ambassador Nomura was softening messages from both sides and misleading Japanese officials about American positions.

Grew, who greatly respected Nomura, had no idea that Washington was reading these messages, which were much more hostile than what well-meaning Japanese were telling him. As a result, Grew and others pursued openings where there were no openings to pursue.

A couple of excerpts illustrate Grew's commitment to diplomacy:

• “[Grew] had faith that rational, well-intentioned people would choose compromise over conflict. He believed in nurturing personal relationships to build trust. ... He needed to believe these things, because they were the fundamentals of diplomacy. Without them diplomacy failed.” (page 19)

• “[Secretary of State] Hull’s ‘high-minded, far-seeing statesmanlike pronouncements’ against Japan’s aggression [against China in 1937] were praiseworthy and necessary for the record, but would have absolutely no effect on Japan’s actions. ‘In other words,’ [Grew] wrote, ‘the righteous indignation theme can now do no further good and should be soft-pedaled.’” (page 133)

Kemper’s book is a superb read for anyone who believes in the profession of diplomacy. It is unfortunate that the book leaves out Grew’s career between his entry into the Foreign Service in 1906 and his appointment to Japan in 1932.

He held sensitive posts in those years, especially U.S. ambassador to Turkey (1927-1932). That and other postings must have shaped his approach to the difficult Japan assignment, but we are left guessing about what might have gone before.

John Limbert is a retired Foreign Service officer and academic. During a 34-year diplomatic career, he served mostly in the Middle East and Islamic Africa, including two tours in Iraq. He was among the last American diplomats to serve in Iran, was ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and president of the American Foreign Service Association. ■



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(signed) Kathryn Owens, Managing Editor

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It Took Me 30 Years, but I Finally Put Down Roots

BY LOUISA ROGERS

As I write this, I'm lounging on the glider in my 96-year-old aunt's home in the rural South Carolina town where my father grew up. Because my family always visited here on home leave, this house is the closest thing to roots in my life. Memories of dogwoods, Carolina peaches, and swims in the neighbor's pool soak my imagination.

While I love the *idea* of roots, in most Foreign Service families, some degree of change and upheaval is the norm. I had a tumultuous adolescence, attending three high schools—all away from home.

First, in 1965, was the Karachi American School, where I boarded with a U.S. military family; my father had been assigned to the new Pakistani capital, Islamabad, and there, barely any roads or infrastructure existed, let alone an English-language high school.

A year later, I was one of about 15 students who lived at the "Hostel," a boarding unit attached to the Lahore American School. I spent only one year there because my parents were concerned about my adjustment. So, for my two final years of high school, they sent me to St.



Louisa Rogers is a writer who divides her life between Eureka, California, and Guanajuato, Mexico. The daughter of Jordan Thomas

Rogers, who served as an FSO from 1947 to 1975, she grew up in Hungary, Argentina, Ecuador, Maryland, and Pakistan. Her Reflection, "The Lure of the 'Painful Childhood,'" appeared in the September 2022 FSJ.

Maybe we're like other migrating creatures who create a nest wherever they go.

Mary's, an all-girls' Episcopal boarding school in Raleigh, North Carolina, where my grandmother had gone.

My first year at St. Mary's was tough. I made heavy use of the sky-blue self-sticking aerograms popular back then. But by my second year, I had made lifelong friends and felt a sense of belonging.

You'd think, with all that turbulence, in adulthood I'd settle down. Far from it! After graduating from college in New Orleans, I wanted somewhere new. Vancouver, British Columbia, appealed to me for its mountains and multicultural population, and—best of all—Canada was a new country. A few months after moving there, I became certified to teach English as a second language and met my future husband, British-born Barry.

Four years later, everything changed abruptly. My mother died of pancreatic cancer at 53, only five weeks after diagnosis, and not long after, my 16-year-old brother was killed in a head-on collision. To be closer to the remnants of my family, I moved to Boston. Barry joined me, and we got married. He applied for a green card but couldn't find a job. Plus, the winters were grim.

What to do, where to go? I remember exhausting discussions with friends offering advice. Austin! Eugene! Boulder! The wealth of options was intimidating, and I felt overwhelmed and drained. Too much freedom is no freedom.

Undecided, Barry and I moved from city to city in the U.S., landing in Palo Alto for 12 years, until in 2001, the year I turned 50, we bought a camper van. We traveled up the California coast looking for a new home base. In Eureka, the "Victorian seaport," we found a loft-like apartment a block from the bay. "Let's try it out and see," I said to Barry. Ha! We're still there.

Two years later, we sold our Palo Alto home and bought an old adobe house in the town of Guanajuato, a UNESCO World Heritage city in central Mexico, where we now split our time.

Looking back, in some ways our earlier married life seems confused, as we zigzagged north to south, west to east, and back again, moving restlessly between four U.S. states and one Canadian province, an echo from all my adolescent moves. Yet just like my younger self, wherever we lived, we always adapted and made friends.

Now we've found our rhythm, and we're rooted enough. Maybe we're like other migrating creatures who create a nest wherever they go. We're more wanderers and explorers than settlers. Changes may come, of course. I'm 71, Barry's 80. Who knows in 10 years if our lifestyle will still be sustainable.

For now, when someone asks where they'll find us, I smile. "It's not hard. We're usually somewhere in the Americas." ■

LOCAL LENS



Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, people around the world have joined in solidarity with the war-torn country. Everywhere, Ukrainian flags have appeared—hanging from windows, painted on signs, and printed on T-shirts. The display of the two colors—sky blue and sunny yellow—has come to represent support for Ukraine.

In June 2023, I visited my husband, Mark, who was working in Vilnius, preparing for the upcoming NATO summit. While on a city bus tour, I spotted two shirts, one blue and one yellow, hanging from a window, their long sleeves tied together. These two shirts, waving in the wind, capture a moment in history and relay the message: “United with Ukraine.” ■

Susan Jorgensen is the spouse of a recently retired Foreign Service officer, now working in the reemployed annuitant (REA) program on temporary duty (TDY) assignments. The Jorgensens have been posted to the then Soviet Union, Malaysia, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Senegal, Moldova, and Belarus. They now reside in Minnesota, where Susan works remotely as an independent contractor with the State Department. They have a grown daughter, Janelle. Susan says she was born with a camera in hand. She took this photo using an iPhone 14.

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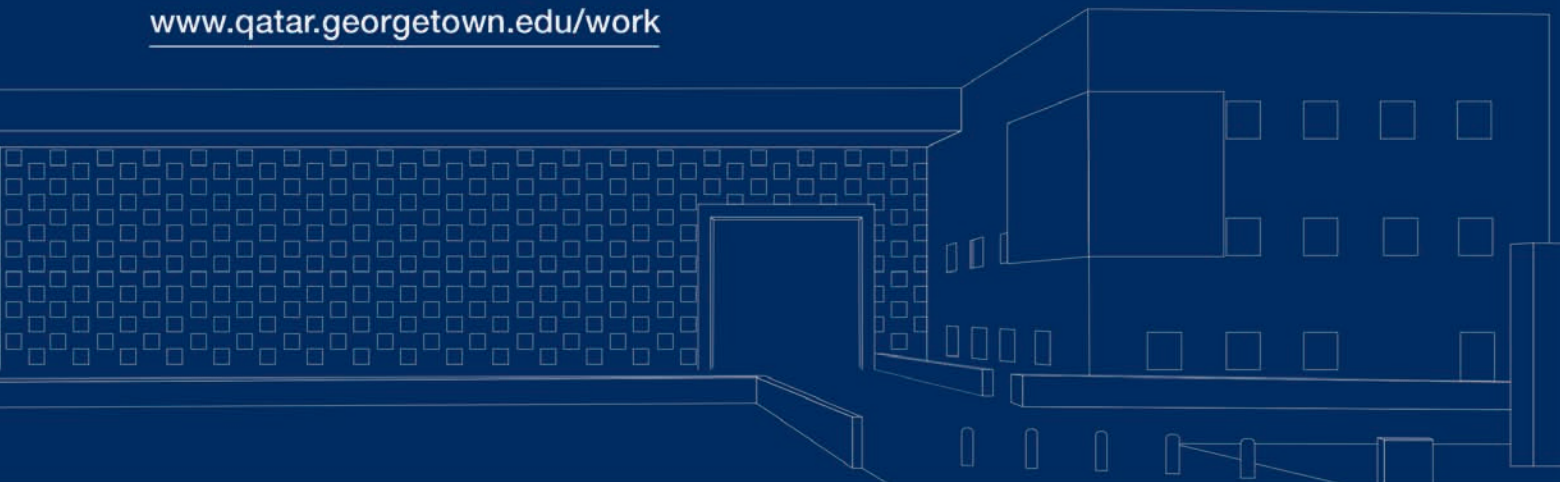
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