

DAVID RYBAK

Interviewed by: Frank Pavich

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Q: Give us some background about your birthplace, education, a little bit about your family - your wife, what your beginnings were.

Early years and education

RYBAK: I was born in Syracuse, New York on July 14, 1940. I attended local schools and graduated from LeMoyne College with a bachelors degree in political science and history. The emphasis on subjects was international government and constitutional law, economic history of the United States, Russian history, modern Europe, diplomatic history of the U.S., and French and Russian languages.

I did not travel much outside of New York State for the first 20 years of my life except for occasional trips to Canada with the family. In early childhood, if there was any influence for the Foreign Service when I was a child, I recall crawling up on my father's lap after supper with my geography books and reading to him about exotic lands and places. I think this had a real influence on my career later in terms of wanting to travel overseas and work abroad.

In my Junior year of college I became interested in the principles and the concepts of the Peace Corps and often spoke to my fellows students about joining the Peace Corps. An event occurred in my senior year of college that actually made me look at the Peace Corps much more seriously. That was the death of my father. I was finishing up my degree and taking final exams when my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. At that point, I was very unsettled about what I was going to do after receiving my college degree. I stayed at home taking care of my Dad with my Mother.

I actually applied to the Peace Corps a few months before my Dad died and three days before my father passed away, I received a phone call from Washington in which they indicated that I had been accepted for a program in the tiny country of El Salvador. My father was still well enough to understand when I told him I had been accepted into the Peace Corps. He was delighted to know that I would be doing something for the next two years.

Joined the Peace Corps in El Salvador - 1963

Q: How did you discover US AID? But before we get to that...what did you do in the Peace Corps?

RYBAK: The Peace Corps was one of the most marvelous experiences. I worked in the area of rural development. I didn't know what was in store for me but it actually changed my whole life.

Q: What year was this?

RYBAK: 1963. When I joined the Peace Corps, we were sent to Puerto Rico for two weeks. This was the old Peace Corps training. They put you through physical training at one of their camps in Puerto Rico. Mine happened to be Camp Bradley in the Arecibo rainforest. They posed a variety of challenges to the volunteers. You either accepted those challenges or you didn't. Some people actually refused to do them. Notes were taken carefully during that two week training period of which volunteers would be de-selected from the program. It was a very intensive exercise and included everything from Spanish language training with Berlitz teachers to repelling off Dos Bocas Dam.

After Puerto Rico, we went on to Los Cruces, New Mexico, where we studied for three months at the University of Los Cruces about various aspects of rural community development including intensive Spanish language training. It also included field trips to Mexico in order to practice our Spanish. By the same token, we had the selection team scrutinizing us closely and telling us that they would be back after a period of time to make their final selections for the country. After this second deselection, we would then learn which volunteers would travel to El Salvador for two years to help the poor and needy.

Q: What did you learn about development and what did you learn about yourself?

RYBAK: Actually, much of the training was very sophisticated. We would not know how sophisticated at the time because we didn't know what we were going to encounter in the country we were preparing to go to...in this case, El Salvador.

They were showing us how to slaughter animals for example. The sophisticated methods that we use here in the United States were not very applicable when you learned how they do it in a Third World country. They hack the pig over the back of the neck and then string it up or cut its throat. They use their own means of doing this and the thing is that we did not practice what we learned in that training. We were also shown sophisticated water purification and sewage facilities around Las Cruces that were the farthest thing from what we were to encounter living in rural Salvadoran towns and villages.

Q:What was the basic mission of your Peace Corps group?

RYBAK: We were a mixed group of volunteers. The basic mission was rural community development, health, education and home economics training. At that time (1963), the Peace Corps was recruiting volunteers to do anything to improve the lot of poor people in Third World countries. As the Peace Corps grew and matured, volunteers with specific skills were recruited like doctors, engineers, sanitation experts, etc.

Q: What was the actual experience like? Tell us something about what happened when you first got there and how you first got into your job and how it affected you? Some of the things you feel you were able to do.

RYBAK: We arrived at the capital for orientation in San Salvador. After a one week orientation, we were assigned to various villages. I was assigned to a larger town and for two months was part of a U.S. Alliance for Progress (Alianza Para Progreso) Mobile Health Unit composed of a doctor and two nurses. We would travel each day to a different village. My role was to seek out the local village leaders and learn who the important people were that one could work with in each village on the circuit. Those people who showed leadership capabilities might be the local barber but not the mayor. It could be the village grocer, a successful farmer, or a housewife. And that was basically what I did for two months until I was finally assigned to one village. During this mobile assignment, I somehow picked up a skin disease in my groin that took several weeks to diagnose since the Peace Corps doctor had to have the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia do the final analysis. Then a specially formulated cream was prescribed and sent to San Salvador, where I picked it up. This was my first encounter with disease overseas.

Q: What did you learn from that experience?

RYBAK: What I learned from that experience was that people whom you thought were village leaders weren't necessarily the people who were the local leaders. It was the people who were perhaps in a profession, like a barber or a seamstress or someone else - a teacher - they showed more leadership, drive, and ambition than some of the local elected leaders who one might think were good, strong, reliable leaders. That was an important experience that came from visiting each of several villages over the two month period before being assigned to one of the villages on the circuit.

Q: And you were in El Salvador in a village for two years?

RYBAK: For two years I lived in a tiny village called San Ildefonso in the department of San Vicente. It is located in the central part of El Salvador and at that time was one of the more remote assignments given to a volunteer. The village of San Ildefonso where I was assigned had no running water, no latrines, an old school, and a dilapidated clinic. There was no electricity but a few richer people had generators. Most of the menfolk were campesino farmers who worked rented plots of land using oxen to prepare the land and harvest their crops. San Ildefonso is located off the Pan-American Highway within sight of Chinchontepec or San Vicente Volcano. The village was the site of a Spanish hacienda before it became a village and most likely the Spanish cultivated indigo; this plant is still the most famous of its kind in Central America.

Q: What were a few of the projects that you got involved in?

RYBAK: It was interesting that I was assigned to one of the villages included on the weekly visits of the Mobile Health Unit to which I was working for the first two months after my arrival in El Salvador. I was acquainted with San Ildefonso from the weekly visits I made on that circuit. Peace Corps supervisors were going to put me in a tiny village called Villa Dolores on the other side of a river which would have isolated me in the rainy season since I would have had no way of getting out of that village. So they put me on the nearer side of the river which at least had access to some transportation, one bus that left early in the morning and returned late in the evening depending on the time of year and condition of the road.

One of the first projects was a latrine - actually two latrines. One was at the clinic where I was going to be assigned to work. People were coming in for their consultations with the nurse and once a week with the doctor and had no means of disposing of their waste. The other was at my house since otherwise I would have no means of disposing of my own personal waste. Primitive conditions of waste removal existed in the village - people defecated and urinated in fields and yards behind their houses. Pigs then did the removal of feces by eating it - the people eventually would eat the pigs!

Q: Was there anyone supervising you?

RYBAK: No. I was the only Volunteer assigned to the village. There was no supervision other than to work with the nurse at the clinic. From time to time, Peace Corps supervisors would visit my village but because I was in such a remote area of the country, the visits were far and few between. Of all the Volunteers in my group, I was living in one of the most isolated areas of El Salvador.

Q: After you had been there for about a year, how did you feel about the Peace Corps, what you were doing, and yourself?

RYBAK: After a year I felt great. After the first month or so I didn't feel very well because I had not really settled in. I was living behind some packing cases in the clinic. Life was harsh and I was feeling sorry for myself because I tended to think of the good life back in the United States - the good food and all the other things associated with the good life. I realized you have to put that behind you and bear with the situation you are confronted with and make the best of it. And everything turned out better once I moved into my own home.

Q: How about the language?

RYBAK: The language wasn't too bad because the people did not speak sophisticated Spanish. This was a small, remote village. People tended to use local expressions which I learned and used. When I would go to the capital, I sounded somewhat like a country hick since I wasn't speaking high level Spanish like educated people. I was in a small village and adapted my Spanish to the people who I was living with in the community.

Q: How about your other Peace Corps comrades? How did they do?

RYBAK: Most of them did fine. A few of them were eliminated; actually they eliminated themselves by quitting. But most of us stayed. I did eventually have a female volunteer who was not happy where she had originally been assigned. She wasn't able to do much where she was and decided to come to San Ildefonso, take a look around, and see whether she liked it or not. As it turned out, she said she loved it. I never understood why she decided to move to my village but her Spanish language was rather poor and maybe she felt I could help her with some of her programs and projects. San Ildefonso was in a rocky location and the village was nicknamed "la olla" because it was in a depression like the bottom of a pot.

Years ago, San Ildefonso was a hacienda and it was located where the village now stands because it had the only source of water. The village grew around the source of water. But Norma liked it and she was a health expert. Once we adjusted to each other, we accomplished a lot together.

One of the great projects was a Mother's Care Project. Norma's Spanish was not very good. Mine was better than hers, but she had the health knowledge. We designed a program to educate mothers and their children in using hygienic techniques. They used to tell me that I was very rich even though I lived in a house similar to the rest of the villagers. The reason the villagers thought I was very rich was because I kept my house clean. I told them all of them could be rich, too. All you had to do was keep your house clean by sweeping it every day. This is something we take for granted in the U.S., but the village people looked at it in a different way.

Q: Do you feel that your presence and your colleagues presence there had an impact on the village in the way that it did things?

RYBAK: Not right away. They realized that we were different. That we were North Americans from the U.S. and we lived differently than they did. As I mentioned before, one of the first projects was a latrine at the clinic and a latrine at my home. I did not go out in the back and defecate like they did in the bush. I tended to keep my house very clean. I found that example went a long way in demonstrating to the people why we did things the way we did them. The villagers' impressions of the U.S. was that everyone was rich. I don't think they realized that we had poverty in the U.S., too. However, one could never equate poverty in the U.S. with poverty in the rural areas of El Salvador at that time (1963-1966) or perhaps even now.

They seemed to like us. I think they used much of what we taught in the mother's class. With that program, in order for a mother to participate, she had to attend weekly sessions that we presented on health and hygiene in the home. The mothers were also responsible for getting the wood, preparing the milk that we brought in from CARITAS, a Catholic voluntary agency, and actually had the mothers prepare and distribute the milk to the youngsters who were of pre-school age. Norma and I also planned and implemented an athletic program working with the teachers of the school. We taught baseball, volleyball, and other games to the school-aged children.

Q: At the conclusion of your Peace Corps tour did your group get together and evaluate the program and come up with lessons learned?

RYBAK: We did. We did that in San Salvador. In fact we took two or three days for the evaluation. We also discussed where people were assigned, how happy they were with their assignments, what they were able to accomplish, what their feelings were after the two years, and whether or not the Peace Corps was what they expected it to be. We did have the evaluation. And this was attended by officials from Washington who also wanted to know about our two year experiences.

Q: Was there anything about development in particular that changed during the two years down in the village?

RYBAK: One of the things was US AID had a rural health program under President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which was very active in El Salvador. We were working very closely with AID people even though they would only occasionally come to the village where I was assigned. They provided us with nothing in terms of products or goods or anything else to make it easier. We had to find those things on our own or be innovative and devise ways to use local resources on hand in El Salvador.

The AID people visited us to monitor their programs and they used Peace Corps Volunteers to help them monitor their programs and projects. None of them wanted to stay overnight in the village. They wanted to go back to their lavish homes in San Salvador where they had servants and could buy food and goods from the commissary. They would invite some of the Peace Corps people to come to their homes in San Salvador and cook hamburgers for us when we came into town. We literally became the eyes and ears for US AID in the field. And we would report back to them and let them know how their programs were doing in the field.

I can give you a very good example. I was responsible for getting a doctor fired. The doctor was drunk the night before he was to see the sick in the village and he had sex with a young girl. He was unable to show up the next morning for his consultations with the people, many of whom had traveled long distances from surrounding areas to see the doctor. I telephoned San Salvador and reported to the AID person in San Salvador about the doctor's behavior. That doctor disappeared the next week and a new doctor was assigned to the mobile circuit.

Q: This was a local doctor?

RYBAK: This was a Salvadorian doctor, yes, who was part of the mobile health team that traveled on a circuit and visited San Ildefonso once a week.

Q: When did you come back to the US from your Peace Corps training?

RYBAK: I came back to the US in June 1966. I actually extended my tour in the Peace Corps because I had an illness. I had contracted infectious hepatitis. I also had a scare with potential cancer. Fortunately for me it turned out to be negative but did require extensive time at Johns Hopkins Hospital. I therefore extended my tour in the Peace Corps and actually went back to the village after Washington asked the people if they wanted me back. They said, "Definitely." So I extended for three months to make up for my absence in the U.S.

Q: What was the process that got you into USAID?

Joined USAID in Vietnam - 1966

RYBAK: When I came back from El Salvador, like many Peace Corps Volunteers, I did not have a job. I decided because of the positive experience I had in El Salvador I wanted to work in Latin America and I would seek employment with Catholic Relief Services, CARE or some other private voluntary organization active in Latin America. At the time they weren't recruiting for Latin America. I applied to several volunteer organizations and each time I was told they didn't have any jobs available.

I happened to look in the local Syracuse newspaper and saw an AID advertisement recruiting people for Vietnam and I responded to that advertisement. I was invited to Washington and interviewed by a battery of people. I was accepted for AID's program in South Vietnam.

Q: What were they looking for in the interview?

RYBAK: AID was looking for people who had development experience or had educational background in International Relations or Community Development. I feel the two years in the Peace Corps qualified me for the job in Vietnam.

Q: How did AID prepare you for your job in Vietnam?

RYBAK: We had a three month preparatory training which included everything from living in the country to security measures. It didn't seem that we concentrated a lot on development. They were more concerned about security issues which were necessary because of the war in Vietnam. Whatever we received in development training was basically lectures from people who had experiences with development in Third World countries.

Q: Were you exposed to any new development theory at this time?

RYBAK: At that time because Vietnam was building up its programs and AID was building its mission in Vietnam, AID was anxious to get anybody that had any experience in working overseas particularly in international development. That is why the Peace Corps volunteers were picked up quickly by AID. Ex-Volunteers had toughed it out in Third World countries and most Volunteers were interested in working and traveling abroad. Also, ex-Peace Corps Volunteers were more likely to adjust quickly to the conditions in South Vietnam even with an on-going war.

Q: When did you actually arrive in Vietnam?

RYBAK: I arrived in Vietnam in June 1966.

Q: What were your major duties in Vietnam?

RYBAK: Before I left Washington I knew I was going to be working somewhere in the refugee program. Thousands of displaced persons had been created as a result of the bombing in the countryside villages and wartime conditions. I ended up being assigned to refugee headquarters in Saigon. I was working with the Vietnamese people who were displaced and migrated into the city but were living on the streets of Saigon.

Q: How was the program structured? Did you have a particular series of tasks that you had to perform?

RYBAK: It wasn't very structured at all. It was more or less finding out what needed to be done, talking to your supervisors about doing something about it. Getting out and looking at the situation, coming back with recommendations and then trying to get some real help to those people. The war did not make it easy to do too much advance planning since one never knew when the next wave of migrations to the urban areas would occur.

Q: Were there sufficient resources for the work that had to be done?

RYBAK: That was one of the things that we never hungered for in Vietnam. There were so many resources available to get community development projects going in Saigon. There was one particular area-District 8-that was a haven for refugee resettlement. AID was instrumental in getting a huge development project going to house the refugees...much better housing than they had on the streets of Saigon and Cholon.

Q: Were you exclusively working on refugees? Did you have any other assignment?

RYBAK: Basically it was with the refugee population displaced by the war. But you couldn't exclude the rest of the poor either. And that was just the first year or so because I did make some changes while I was there in terms of getting an assignment where I could focus on the poor. And I found that it wasn't through the refugee program. I transferred from the AID Refugee Program to the Office of Public Administration which at that time (1963-1966) had a huge number of AID supported programs and projects. I was assigned to the Municipal Government area and thereby started working with Vietnamese urban officers on projects to assist the poorer segments of Saigon society. These projects involved the local district officials and families living in those districts. We were building a true self-help development program.

Q: What do you feel your major successes were in working with the refugees?

RYBAK: I think the major success in working with the refugees was giving them hope there was a better life than what they had at the time. We were there to help. We were there to make their conditions better and it was demonstrated to them with new development projects being developed such as potable drinking water, housing development, and improved sanitation.

Q: What were the major problems in implementation?

RYBAK: Major problems in implementation included (1) getting people to participate in the program because sometimes they would not show up for the projects and (2) bureaucracy from headquarters by setting other priorities and giving them precedence over what you were working on. However, things pretty much came together and we had some very viable projects.

Q: And after refugees, what was your...?

RYBAK: As I mentioned, I switched out of refugees and into a program where they could focus on these displaced people because refugees was not a term that the Vietnamese government officials recognized. These were truly displaced people; the Government refused to recognize them as refugees. As a result, many of these people were not getting the attention they should have received simply because of an interpretation by the Vietnamese government that these people wandering from villages outside Saigon and fleeing to the city for protection were not considered refugees. In addition to migrants from the south moving to Saigon, the metropolitan area absorbed large numbers of refugees from the north. At least 100,000 North Vietnamese became part of the exodus to Saigon. The real term for these migrant Vietnamese was "war victims" since they fled their towns and villages because of terrorism or the dangers of war.

I went into public administration and I worked with a gentleman who was working in municipal development in Saigon. I assisted him in developing activities and projects we could feasibly support through the public administration office rather than the refugee office of AID.

Q: How long did you continue in that line?

RYBAK: I continued in that particular job for about three years. One of the noteworthy things that I remember is going into some of the urban poor areas, if you will, the ghetto areas, and listening to the people. I think that was one of the more important things that we had to do was find out the problems. The way to find out what those problems were was to go to the phuong chief. Phuongs comprise districts and there were five to six divisions within each district. We went to the local officials, to the people themselves. We looked to see where the water levels during the flooding had made marks on the walls of the dwellings. What did they want? They wanted closer sources of drinking water. They wanted better sewage. Their walkways would flood and the water would come in their houses during the rainy season. Therefore, they wanted better drainage. These were the things upon which we focused and we developed a neat little program which was truly self-help like we learned to do in the Peace Corps. The important thing was to get something started and not just talk about it. Talk must be translated into action.

Q: What were some of the political imperatives that affected your work and program?

RYBAK: In that particular program?

Q: Well, in any of your experience up to now in Vietnam.

RYBAK: The fact was if you arranged for the cement or whatever else might be needed to do the project some of it was bound to disappear. And it would disappear into the hands of the officials. You accepted it on the basis there was still enough product left to do the project. You knew they were going to skim off a few bags of cement or some rebar or whatever. Taking that into account, there was always enough product for the project. In other words, a few bags of cement or a couple rebar missing would not prevent the projects from going forward.

Q: Did you have any other activities going in Vietnam?

RYBAK: Because I stayed in municipal administration three years, I then moved on to a job at CORDS (Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support organization). I was working in the social welfare section and particularly in child adoption. I also worked with private voluntary organizations in Vietnam. What we were trying to do was coordinate their programs and focus their assistance so that it wasn't so much a scattered shotgun approach. Actual direction and control of CORDS was directed by Robert Komer, a rather flamboyant bureaucrat who made public statements in South Vietnam by his outlandish uniforms.

Q: Anything else interesting about your experience in Vietnam that you'd like to talk about?

RYBAK: Vietnam was really a special situation because you had so many resources, you had so many people, you had so much cement-so much of everything that you could literally try and do anything you wouldn't have the opportunity to do in other countries. It was a testing ground almost, because there was so much money and physical resources available. You could literally do almost anything you wanted to do that was a decent idea. Quite a different approach than the philosophy behind the Peace Corps in which little was provided but much accomplished by using innovation and ingenuity.

Q: What about the AID bureaucracy? How did it function?

RYBAK: The AID bureaucracy in Vietnam was like the bureaucracy in Washington. The structure was set up very similar. You had your supervisors and you had to report through them and to them. Sometimes they listened to you, sometimes they didn't. But it was just like any other bureaucracy, you lived with it. And you found and learned ways to get around the bureaucracy. But you had to have the experience in dealing with some of these people to do that.

Q: How about your colleagues?

RYBAK: It is very interesting that you bring that up. I remember I was ready to make a break with the agency and I felt you had to have guts to stay with AID. It also took guts to quit. My fellow officers who had reported about the same time as I had in June 1966, became very frustrated with the bureaucracy especially when the promotions were not coming through. I said they had guts to quit. But on the other hand, many of us who stayed I felt had a lot of guts, too. Because it took just as much guts to live with the bureaucracy, to try to do as much as you could while you were there and to carry out your assignments.

The deciding factor for me was a promotion. I knew I was in for a promotion. If I got it, I was going to stay. If I didn't, I was going to make a break with AID. I got the promotion and so I stayed.

Q: So you got your promotion and your tour in Vietnam ended and you moved on. What was the next place?

RYBAK: While I was still in Vietnam it wasn't clear what I was moving on to. I remember talking to the director of the refugee program and telling him about my concerns of not having a job when I got back to Washington. He had a lot of experience with Washington and bureaucracies and told me, "David, you can go back there and find a job doing dishes and be a grand success at it." And that gave me a lot of confidence. I never forgot that. At the time, his words gave me a tremendous boost.

Returned to USAID/Washington to the Foreign Disaster Relief Office - 1972

When I went back to Washington, I was assigned as a special assistant to the head of the Foreign Disaster Relief Office (FDRC) Coordinator headed up by Russell Tim McClure. That was a neat job. I had that job for about two years. I reported directly to the foreign disaster coordinator. I did a lot of things directly for him...and many significant things. I was his assistant and reported directly to him and no one else. He was former Mission Director to Afghanistan when AID had a program in that country. He was tough to work for but I learned a lot from him about management styles.

One of the nice things was my independent responsibility to bring together all the PVO's who would respond to a foreign or man-made disaster. At that time, many PVO's would respond but didn't know how to respond by providing the necessary equipment, food or services. As a result, there was a lot of duplication of effort. We worked out a program to provide as much information as we had on the requirements from a foreign disaster and then asked the volunteer organizations to focus on those requirements letting all participants know what the other was doing.

My job was to coordinate and to bring them together so that we could have more focus by the voluntary agencies. We used to have conferences in New York and in Washington to bring the voluntary agencies' representatives together to explain what we were doing and why we were doing it.

A disaster would break out and, of course, operations would go into immediate effect in FDRC. The idea was to ensure that all the voluntary organizations had the same knowledge base about a foreign disaster. We wanted to make sure they were working off the same knowledge, so they could respond more appropriately. When they responded, we asked the voluntary agencies to coordinate with us so that we knew who was giving what kinds of assistance. If someone was giving a particular type of food that had been donated, we would tell them they don't need that but need other specific items. We would point this out to each of the agencies, so there was less duplication of effort among themselves and with AID.

Q: So you were working with PVOs and doing coordinating work. Do you feel that what you were doing was having much effect on improving your capacity?

RYBAK: Absolutely. The fact was I was bringing the agencies-the voluntary agencies together in their assistance efforts whereas in the past they had only been getting together among themselves apart from AID. Bringing Washington into the picture and giving them the knowledge that we were getting back from the field, I think assisted them greatly in having better focus to their programs in responding to foreign disasters.

We worked with the people in New York City at headquarters for voluntary agencies. We conducted a conference once a year to bring the voluntary agencies together in Elkridge, Maryland. The whole idea was to discuss where we were, where we were going, some of the new things that we were doing in terms of sharing information so that everybody worked from the same game plan.

Q: What year was this?

RYBAK: It was 1972 thru 1974.

Q: What was going on in AID during that time in Washington?

RYBAK: As usual a lot was going on. I'm not sure I could articulate appropriately about what else was happening around me since we were mainly concerned with rapid and appropriate response each time the U.S. was asked to assist a country experiencing a natural or man-made disaster.

Q: Any policy changes or shifts?

RYBAK: There were always policy changes in AID. Policy change was matter of fact. Every day, every month, somebody was changing something.

Q: How did that effect your work?

RYBAK: Sometimes not directly. It was only if something affected us that came down from the Administrator or from the person that headed up the voluntary agencies. The director of foreign disaster was accountable directly to the Administrator. Normally, we were allowed to function as an independent unit. We had a Disaster Operations Center and we would request other offices, including desk officers to participate in around the clock shifts.

Planning a career change

Q: At the time, what were your thoughts about your career? Did you have an idea of where you were heading and what you wanted to do within AID?

RYBAK: Not at first. When I went to South Vietnam, I went because it was a job. As I progressed in AID, I decided I was going to stay with this agency but preferably do things that I would enjoy doing. If there was a job, I didn't care to do, I learned there are ways to find the job you are looking for. The important thing is to know what that next job is and what you want to do. Then with patience you start making contacts and networking. It might take as long as 18 months before there may be an opening in the area where you want to be.

So many people in AID I talked to told me they had been years in the same job and they were bored and hated their job. I would ask them why didn't they change jobs? They didn't feel t his worked. I would then say, "Do you know where you want to be?" The answer was "No." I told them, maybe they should sit down and think about where they want to be. And if it's not within AID then maybe AID isn't for them. I believe there are people within AID who lack the motivation and self-confidence to move into another position that might be more exciting and challenging.

Fortunately in my case, I knew-particularly after Vietnam and after the disaster assignment, the track that I wanted to follow in AID.

Q: Describe it.

RYBAK: It is a little difficult to describe because every few years or so I would tend to feel I had learned the job and I was then restless to do something else more challenging and would hopefully lead to promotion. Let me give you an example. After two years in disaster assistance, I realized I didn't want to make it my career. So I began looking around and I realized with bureaucracy you have to be patient because it can take anywhere from a year to 18 months before you can make the change. But it doesn't prevent you from making contacts in the area where you want to be. An example would be switching out of disaster assistance and becoming a population officer. Many of our AID colleagues remember Ray Ravenholt who was heading up the population program. Many people thought this man was a fanatic. On the other hand, if you didn't have a person like Ravenholt driving the AID population program the way he did, I don't think we would have made the strides in population planning that we did in many countries.

I was in Washington for three months spending a few weeks in various population offices and learning all the private contracts with AID. I also learned who the people were that were back-stopping those contracts - the services provided - with the objective that I would go to Costa Rica on assignment as a population officer and have total familiarity with the resources in Washington.

In the past, AID sent people for master's degrees in demographics and other types of specialized population training. AID learned this did not work when these people were assigned to the field. They were too sophisticated by learning too many theoretical concepts at the university. They were overpowering to their local counterparts in the countries where they were working. As a result some of these people didn't work out very well. So Washington decided they would try an "on the job" approach and have a population officer go abroad with total knowledge of the services available in Washington.

Q: In your opinion, did this on the job training work?

RYBAK: In the colleges and universities?

Q: No. For you?

RYBAK: It did because I was totally aware of everything that AID/Washington's Population Office was doing, how they were doing it and who the principals were in the event that I needed to call on them. I frequently requested assistance from Washington to implement the Costa Rican population and health program.

Q: Did AID prepare you with any kind of training?

RYBAK: No formal training. The idea was they had some failures in the past in that respect and therefore few people were going to get master's degrees in demographics or other population studies.

Q: So now it sounds like you are getting ready to make another move. What year are we in now?

RYBAK: I was in Costa Rica from 1974-1976.

Q: So you went from AID Washington to Costa Rica?

RYBAK: In 1974. Yes.

Q: So what was your title and job in Costa Rica?

RYBAK: I was taking the place of another population officer. Unfortunately there was a mandate from Washington I was to be there "yesterday." My wife had just had our first child here in Washington and we were literally pushed to get on a plane and get down to Costa Rica since the position down there was vacant. My predecessor had left the job a month before and they needed somebody very quickly - like yesterday - to resume the work in the population office. This was good for AID but bad for us personally because my wife had not been checked out thoroughly here in the United States after having had our first child and we had a very unfortunate incident which I will not go into any detail.

Q: So you returned?

Returned to the USAID Disaster Relief Office - 1976

RYBAK: I came back to Washington without a job again, but feeling because I came back for family reasons I would not be considered for another position in AID/Washington or anywhere else. This was far from the truth.

When I came back and actually looked around after telling people about my situation, I was offered ten different jobs. I ended up going back to something with which I felt comfortable - foreign disaster assistance. The interesting thing is when I was interviewed for that job, a lot of people had changed in that office and the deputy director was Christian Holmes. During the course of the interview he asked me if I could write. I told him one learns to write all your life and I felt I was a developing writer. He liked the answer and I got the job.

My first assignment was to organize the reports to the Administrator on foreign disasters. I didn't have to wait too long because at that time we had a tremendous mud slide in Friuli, Italy. Chris Holmes wanted a report for the Administrator twice a day. I was asked to develop the report and it was something that was implemented after I left that office.

Q: This was a situation report?

RYBAK: This was a situation report which gave you the numbers of dead and injured. It also included the number of homes destroyed, infrastructure disrupted, etc. We would change the information as it became available. And again, going back to my previous assignment in foreign disaster assistance, this was particularly useful to the voluntary agencies because we made sure that the daily reports were faxed to them. Everybody was reading off the same "poop" sheet, so to speak. People would know exactly who was doing what. We would record the voluntary agency effort, how much they were giving, what they were giving in terms of money, food, equipment or any other types of services. Incidentally, I was assigned to the Planning Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

Q: And again, this was in...?

RYBAK: That was 1976-1978 when I went back to that office after coming out of Costa Rica.

Q: Anything special happening in AID at that time?

RYBAK: Change of administrators which always represents a major change in the agency in terms of how things are done, new policies. Different emphasis on programs. And it probably affected people more in the field than it did in Washington. Policies are made in Washington but the real implementation is out in the field. And if it is not conveyed properly to the field, people are in the dark in terms of how they should be doing things if Washington already has decided how they would like to have it implemented.

Q: In your experience were they effective in communicating these changes?

RYBAK: Yes and no. In certain areas I think they have probably been very effective. In other areas, not so good.

Q: Do any examples come to mind?

RYBAK: Not right now.

Q: So you continued with the foreign disaster assistance...

Assigned to the USAID/Philippines Desk - 1978

RYBAK: Until 1978. Again, if you look at my career, it usually goes in two to three year periods. We just talked about 1976-1978. We are now talking 1978-1981. I had heard they were looking for an assistant desk officer on the Indonesia desk. I didn't know who the desk officer was but I found out and arranged to have an interview with that person.

Interviews are very interesting because you can find out so much information. I actually was interested in an assistant desk officer position in the Philippines. Inadvertently the Indonesian desk officer told me there was an opening on the Philippine desk. So I went back to my office in foreign disaster assistance and looked up who the desk officer was for the Philippines. I contacted this person and, lo and behold, his assistant was going to be leaving within a month.

Q: Why were you interested in the Philippines?

RYBAK: I was interested in the Philippines because of my six year tour in Vietnam and also the fact that I had met my wife, who is Filipino, in Vietnam. It would give us the opportunity to go back to the islands on TDY (temporary duty) assignments.

Q: There was a possibility of going to the Philippines?

RYBAK: There was definitely a possibility of going to the Philippines on TDY assignments. I brought the family with me on the TDY to the Philippines.

Q: What was the nature of the TDY assignment?

RYBAK: TDY assignments were necessary to follow up on the projects that I was responsible for back-stopping in Washington.

Q: So you became the desk officer?

RYBAK: I was the assistant desk officer on the Philippine desk. Peter Cody was the mission Director at that time.

Q: So your job was to go on TDY's to the Philippines...

RYBAK: TDYs were difficult to get. The thing is that money was always a problem in AID/Washington getting people out to the missions. And I would sometimes observe that the wrong people got to go. The job was to be an advocate in AID/Washington for the projects the Mission in the Philippines was implementing. Additionally, the job entailed completion of program documents like the Congressional Presentation done each year, participate in project reviews, prepare papers on issues for symposia with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.

Q: Why is that?

RYBAK: Simply because people who were back-stopping the programs following the day to day progress or lack thereof, of programs were the ones that were at the bottom of the totem pole money wise. The higher-ups...the people in the hierarchy that were above you were the ones that normally got to go. I only made one trip to the Philippines. And I think it would have been beneficial if we could have made trips at least once every six months. I made one during the time I was there. It was a good trip because I was able to meet the people out there I was back-stopping by telephone. And I got to meet them personally.

Q: What were the conditions in the Philippines in those days?

RYBAK: The Philippines was a very large program. It was under President Marcos and his regime. It was a multi-million dollar program AID was supporting over a hundred million dollar program. Projects included every aspect of development. The Philippines was also like a proving ground because so much money was going into that country. And hopefully we profited both ways. From those projects that failed and those that succeeded.

Q: Looking back at that experience and looking at the situation in the Philippines today, do you think that things that you were doing then had an impact?

RYBAK: I think many of the projects that AID was supporting had an impact. Particularly in the agriculture and health fields. And I think the reason is we had AID officers actually assigned outside the capital in areas in the Philippines where they lived day to day and were closer to the problems than people who resided and worked in Manila. It makes a big difference whether you have people in the field or people who are able to cover a particular area and be responsible for that area and work with the people to develop the area than having people just occasionally going once in a while from the capital out on a field trip.

I know this goes back to my Peace Corps experience and at this point I'd like to make a distinction if you would between economists in the agency and the Peace Corps ex-Volunteers working at AID. We had over 500 ex-Peace Corps volunteers who joined AID. They also hired a lot of economists out of college. And you get into this thing about theory vs practicality. Pragmatic vs theory of economics. When you are talking about rural areas, theory is fine in its place. But people in the village don't understand theory. They understand the pragmatic aspects of getting drinking water or wells or better drainage or better housing. Things that touch them personally. Perhaps this debate will go on forever and never be resolved. Who accomplishes more in Third World countries - economists with their unproven theories or trained and experienced urban and rural development specialists who get down to the grassroots level of society.

And I had discussions with people in the agency who were of the opinion the economists are the ones who really make things happen. I took the contrary position that, I believe many of the ex-Peace Corps Volunteers became real implementers of AID projects. They wanted to get something done. I observed economic theoretical programs imposed on countries like Senegal and The Gambia that are still being judged whether or not they really helped those countries in the long run.

Q: Those are two ends of the continuum.

RYBAK: They are two ends of the continuum and I guess the debate is still going on. I was termed a "do-gooder," whereas the economists with their high falutin theories, even though much of that theory when it was put in practice, did not work out as well as expected.

Q: So what lesson did you learn from that?

RYBAK: Perhaps you need a combination of both. That you have to mellow and adjust the applied economics to the country and the situation existing in that country. That what a Ph.D. graduate feels should be done isn't exactly the same way they look at it in Sudan, Mali, Senegal, or somewhere else. We must take the country's situation into consideration when planning and implementing projects and programs.

Q: Do you think this contest between the theorists and the do-ers is still prevalent within the agency?

RYBAK: I don't think it's as prevalent as it used to be. When I worked in the Africa Bureau, I had closer contact with the economists. It was sometimes appalling to see what they were trying to impose as economic conditionality on some of the countries. In this case it was Senegal and The Gambia. It was very stringent but it was almost like transporting what we do here in the United States and saying these countries must do it the same way. I disagreed with that approach. I think it has to be adapted and adjusted to those countries, to the culture, and to the conditions that exist in those country.

Q: Along these lines, do you have a personal theory of development?

RYBAK: My personal theory of development is the grassroots concept works. But not everyone wants to work at the grassroots level. AID has been in and out of this. We have had people assigned beyond the capitals of Third World countries, but in most cases our AID people are assigned in the capitals. They live in the big city and work out of the AID building in the capital and they go to the field on their observation trips. I really believe if you are going to get some development going beyond the capital in the countryside, the advisors have to be out in those areas. One must live and work with the people in order to build rapport and confidence, something that does not happen overnight.

Q: What kind of programs did you work on in the Philippines?

RYBAK: In the Philippines I didn't have the agricultural portfolio. I did have the health, education, family planning, rural development, and other social programs. I handled that part of the overall portfolio. It was just too large a program to have one assistant. Therefore, two assistants worked with the desk officer for the Philippines.

Q: So this was in 1978 until...

Transfer to Desk Officer for the South Pacific - 1981

RYBAK: Until 1981. And it was then on to another challenging assignment. After the Philippines, I became desk officer for the South Pacific, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the residual AID program in South Korea.

Q: What countries did that include?

RYBAK: All the newly independent countries of the South Pacific in Polynesia and Melanesia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu (New Hebrides), many of the island groups, but not the Cook Islands.

Q: You can fill them in later.

RYBAK: Okay. But all these little island republics were becoming newly independent. My assignment as desk officer was South Pacific, the residual South Korean program, and ASEAN. Backstopping Bill Paupe in Korea; Don Melville in the Philippines; and Bob Craig in Fiji. I was backstopping three people at the same time in different parts of Asia and the Pacific.

Q: How big a program money wise was it?

RYBAK: The South Pacific program was not that large. The ASEAN program was larger. It was something being promoted in Asia. AID wanted at least one project in each one of the ASEAN member countries. We felt it was important enough to have a person in Manila to coordinate the assistance going into each country. The member countries of ASEAN were The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

Q: What was the overall objective?

RYBAK: ASEAN is an international organization formed by the above-mentioned countries for the purpose of accelerating economic, social, and cultural progress and ensuring the stability of the Southeast Asian region. It was established in 1967. The objective was, at least at the time I was involved, was to have one project in each of the member countries. To show those countries as a coordinated group they had U.S. support and we would provide funding for projects.

Q: How successful was it?

RYBAK: I think it was very successful because we helped to strengthen ASEAN. It is still an on-going Asian membership and Myanmar (formerly Burma) became a member. They do a lot on their own without outside assistance. I think we were planting the seeds by promoting and funding projects. We were instrumental in getting the organization moving actively, getting the people from each member country to talk to each other, showing we were serious about getting projects going in each country.

Q: Do you think it had a developmental effect?

RYBAK: Oh, very definitely. I think a lot of what you see now in progress—quote progress—in those countries...the reason I say, quote progress is because we saw Indonesia take off beyond anyone's dreams. We saw Thailand take off. Philippines is bustling. Korea was not a member of ASEAN. They had a situation where AID had a program for 33 years. I was part of the AID group that helped to phase our program out of South Korea. In the other ASEAN countries, I think, very definitely there was a developmental effect. We helped pull ASEAN together and realized if they (the member countries) were going to succeed in this area of industrialization, increased employment, and trade, they would have to pull together. I'm not saying that ASEAN did it on its own but we were certainly instrumental in helping those countries do it.

Q: And you say ASEAN continues today?

RYBAK: Absolutely and the Republic of Myanmar (formerly Burma) has also become a member. Vietnam was supposed to become a member also, but I am not sure it has occurred.

Q: So by now I suspect that you are feeling that you want to move again...two years.

RYBAK: How did you guess? Absolutely. Every two or three years. Now we are in the period of June 1981-June 1985. I was sitting contentedly on the South Pacific/ASEAN desk. I was hopeful an overseas assignment would come either to the Philippines or another country in Asia. That assignment was not forthcoming.

Returned overseas to USAID/Jamaica as the Private Sector Officer - 1985

One day I was approached on the telephone by someone named Glenn Patterson. He introduced himself as the AID Mission Director to Jamaica and asked if I would be interested in talking to him about a position in Jamaica as a private sector officer. I have always known better than to spite myself even though I had ambitions of going to Asia on assignment. I told Mr. Patterson I would be happy to talk to him about an assignment to Jamaica. And we did. He explained the situation in Jamaica. With President Reagan committing the U.S. to the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and to Prime Minister Seaga of Jamaica in particular, Mr. Patterson was developing a private sector initiative early in the game.

He told me he was proposing I come down to AID/Jamaica as his private sector officer. At that time, Patterson had the foresight to realize that AID's emphasis was going to be increasingly on the private sector. And the Caribbean Basin Initiative, which he knew was coming down the pike and Prime Minister Seaga of Jamaica was to be instrumental in playing a major role. Seaga actually came to the U.S. and talked to Reagan about the regional private sector initiative about to occur in the Caribbean.

Patterson had the foresight to see what was happening and decided he would get the USAID/Jamaica Mission involved in the private sector. Therefore, he asked me to consider going to Jamaica as the private sector officer in the USAID mission. I agreed to go take this assignment with little or no training in private sector development. But I realized in AID as in so many things I had done in the past, where I didn't necessarily have the specific training, one can take the job and learn as much as possible about the job so you can function well in the job. I always took an assignment with AID with the objective I would become an expert and do the best job possible in each position held. That is one of the reasons I feel that I had such a wonderful, diverse career with AID.

Many people hesitate to take jobs because they don't have the background. They don't realize they have experiences which can qualify one for positions. Experiences can't take the place of a master's degree or a Ph.D. If one knows the ropes of how to operate within the parameters of the agency, then one should be more than willing to take on an assignment and accept it as a challenge. One can learn as much about that position as one can and function well.

In Jamaica, we were providing funding to more than one hundred private sector consultants (these were American and Jamaican consultants) to implement private sector activities in the country. For example, Jamaica was trying to market its products in the U.S. and elsewhere. Those products must literally jump off the shelf so the consumer will want to try it. However, the labeling on Jamaican products at that time was not very sophisticated and the outside packaging was poorly done.

So I arranged to contract with a very sophisticated advertising firm in New York City; I brought an expert to work with the Jamaicans to improve their product labeling. This man was a labeling expert. Because Jamaica had some very decent products, the labeling expert felt with better labeling, the Jamaicans would be able to export those products to the United States and elsewhere. They also would have better opportunities to sell their products with better labeling. AID funding was also used to support the Kingston Export Free Zone, Small Business Association, Jamaican Investment Group, and a host of other individuals and groups working in the private sector.

I would recommend this project I was responsible for conducting in Jamaica be done in every AID country where we are trying to develop the private sector. It was called the Technical Consultations and Training Grant. In Washington, they termed the project a boondoggle. But without such a grant funding to , we would never have made the strides we were enabled to do with the private sector in Jamaica. This grant project was started with a few million dollars. It gave us immediate access to funding to contract for consultants and services directly from Jamaica without having to go through approval in Washington. It gave us a great deal of flexibility to accomplish activities and promote private sector projects without Washington putting in their two cents, which often was the reason for the demise of some very good overseas projects.

Q: Who were your customers?

RYBAK: Customers were basically Jamaicans. It was all part of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. It was where you saw a need the Jamaicans couldn't fulfill themselves that we would bring an expert in to their system - basically business people to assist the Jamaican private sector.

Q: Big ones, small ones?

RYBAK: Large and small. But the whole idea of the grant was to give us flexibility in approving these \$20,000-\$2 million projects immediately. We did not have to go through the Washington bureaucracy for approval on evaluation of the effectiveness of the projects. But as it became known that we had this special grant, Washington started calling it a boondoggle. And we had to prove to Washington it was being used for worthwhile activities within the mandates AID had set for us to develop a country's private sector.

Q: You are now in Jamaica?

RYBAK: This was in Jamaica, yes.

Q: You were physically located in Jamaica.

RYBAK: I was physically located in Jamaica with my family. When this project was initiated before I got there, not one single project had been implemented. The project was taken away from another officer and given to me by the Mission Director. Within one month, and this is not to brag about my capabilities or anything, but within one month we had at least ten of the fifteen projects already underway.

Q: How did you do that?

RYBAK: By contacting the people who were to be involved in the projects. There was already a list of some projects Jamaicans wanted to do which had not been accomplished yet. It required a lot of initiative to get out to see these people, to talk with them and find out what they needed. Since I had direct access to the Mission Director, I would discuss the project with him, whether or not we could do them. They had been sort of pre-approved by AID prior to making the contact but needed an implementor. AID needed somebody to get the job done.

When the person from whom I took his job came back from a trip to London one month later, he was flabbergasted I was able to get as much started as we did. And I am talking about all sorts of initiatives with a small business association, business groups that we worked with and through to promote projects in the private sector. Some of them were almost "Mom and Pop" type projects. People who had projects in their backyards. Maybe they needed a little extra money to boost their production, to buy some resources, tools perhaps to make their project grow. They usually had five or six people working for them. These were fantastic opportunities for private entrepreneurs and it was great fun to have a job where I touched the lives of so many people to make their lives better.

We did some work with the Kingston Export Free zone. I would like to visit Jamaica to see if some of those businesses are still functioning. We also were trying to attract U.S. businesses to Jamaica. The Jamaica Exporters Association was another group that we worked with.

Q: Mr. Patterson was the director then?

RYBAK: Yes.

Q: And how did he feel about this approach?

RYBAK: It was due to the initiative of Mr. Patterson and the foresight to get this project initiated that made it easy for me to actually implement and build on it. By the time I left Jamaica four years later, the project had grown to a \$20 million dollar program and was being replicated in other AID countries. I earned a promotion during the years I implemented this series of projects which brought me up to the FS-1 level.

The focus changed a little bit with the change of directors. After Patterson came Lou Reed. Reed came from the private sector and the independence I felt we had with Mr. Patterson was not there when Mr. Reed arrived. He took a much more direct role himself rather than let the officers, myself and others implement the projects.

Q: What would you say the major accomplishment of this activity was?

RYBAK: It was to put funding where our mouth was. It was basically to tell the Jamaicans we would check to see if we could do something and we did. If we found we could do it we did. If we were unable to utilize the money because of stringencies in the AID regulations, we would tell them we could not do it. But we would try to find other ways of getting around it, particularly if the Jamaicans came up with good concepts for projects. My counterpart on the Jamaican Government side was a wonderful person by the name of Corinne McLarty, Prime Minister Seaga's choice to head up his private sector and investment initiation.

Q: At this point you are about 20 years into your development experience...

RYBAK: That's correct.

Q: ...if you go back with the Peace Corps as the beginning. What are some of the changes that have occurred to you and to development over this period? Anything that comes to you at this point?

RYBAK: We touched on it during our discussion. Development became more sophisticated as I went along in my career. Maybe too sophisticated. We were going over and beyond in not staying and building more at the grassroots level with the people who really needed the assistance - the urban and rural poor. We generalized and what was good for one country was good for any country. Each country is different. I think we tended to forget that very important concept as we proceeded down the development road.

I believe we have to work with development uniquely in each country. We can use many of the ideas and concepts that succeeded in other countries and apply them to a country but not exactly in the same way. I am afraid that sometimes AID made the mistake of trying to apply a program in exactly the same way because it was successful in one country it would work exactly the same way in another country. Nothing works exactly the same in another country. Each country is different.

Q: Not to put words in your mouth but it sounds as though you are talking about a kind of "cookie cutter" approach.

RYBAK: Right.

Q: Was that reflected in the attitude of the director?

RYBAK: I think it was at that time, yes.

Q: You're saying that it was working or it wasn't working...?

RYBAK: I am ambivalent. I would say maybe some of it worked but certainly if it didn't we should have dumped it quickly...rather than let it linger on the way we did.

Q: There were some good ideas that may have applicability?

RYBAK: Absolutely. Even if there were some things that were bad there was still some good to come out of it. It may take a little longer with AID though. We can always profit from our mistakes. It just seemed to take longer for AID to understand that concept.

Q: So in 1985 what was going on?

Back in USAID/Washington in the Africa Bureau - 1985

RYBAK: Okay. What was going on? There was more emphasis on Africa. When I came back from Jamaica-well, even before I left Jamaica-I knew I was going to be assigned as program officer back-stopping Senegal, The Gambia, and I would have another assistant desk officer working for me who would backstop AID's program in Mali.

This was very interesting in terms of personalities because years ago on the Philippine desk, I had just missed the famous-maybe infamous-Sarah Jane Littlefield. She had worked in the Asia Bureau before she was assigned as a Deputy Director in Indonesia. I had never met Sarah Jane Littlefield. When I left Jamaica and was going back to a Washington assignment, I realized I was going to be back-stopping Sarah Jane Littlefield, who was the Mission Director in Senegal at the time. And she was one of the most marvelous Mission Directors I can ever recall meeting.

Q: What was it about her that made her distinguished?

RYBAK: The thing that distinguished her was her realistic approaches to development. Building on her own experience-and she had a wonderful past experience and incidently was one of the women who rose up through the ranks step-by-step before the women's liberation movement really started. She did it before the women's liberation movement got started. I mean, you would have to take your hat off to her just for that reason alone, she rose through the ranks and she did it at AID prior to any of this movement.

Q: What was her theory of development?

RYBAK: I believe Sarah Jane's theory of development was basically to build on the projects, programs, activities which in her experience had worked in other countries. And to adapt and adjust those successes to the country where she was working. It seems to me she was forever citing projects she was responsible for in other countries. She was willing to adapt to the country - in this case, Senegal.

That was a big program at the time, the Senegal and The Gambia programs. I also got a four week TDY to Senegal and The Gambia. Sarah Jane was a real human being. I mean, there was a lot of hoopla built up about Sarah Jane - oh, my God! - because everyone in the agency knew her. I found her to be a delightful person. It was wonderful to back-stop her. It created a little bit of a problem for me personally which I will mention because I think it is important for other people who may have had a similar experience or may encounter this problem during their careers.

Sarah Jane considered me part of the AID mission-even though I was based in Washington. I knew her program so well. I was her defender as the desk officer. I had to defend her programs and activities. She and I were on the phone I would say at least four or five times a week talking about particular projects, the missions' position on those projects and the advocacy role they wanted me to demonstrate in the meetings with the Africa Bureau administrator and others. I think I played the role very well and she knew it. She told me, "Dave is an honorary member of my mission. I am making Dave an honorary member of my mission even though he is in Washington." I felt good someone appreciated my work so much.

Dennis Chandler was the director of the Sahel-West Africa program, Phyllis Dichter succeeded Chandler. In my annual evaluation, I was not in her estimation (Dichter) performing the role of a desk officer appropriately. I was doing too effective a job of backstopping Senegal. Too much on the mission side, and not Washington's. However, I was getting all sorts of plaudits from the U.S. ambassador in Senegal and the Mission Director about the job I was doing. The Senegal Mission was engaged in some major policy reform in Senegal at the time and the U.S. ambassador played a major role in the reforms. He took more interest in the AID program than most U.S. ambassadors, because he liked AID.

Q: So you were caught between a rock and a hard place.

RYBAK: I was caught between a rock and a hard place on that one. Again, if you look at the record I was the program officer from September, 1985 through November, 1987. And it was time again for a change.

Special assignment with the National Year of the Americas - 1987

And this change isn't on my official resume. But I made a note of it here I was being beckoned by the Deputy Administrator of AID and his assistant to take a job which was a very special position. It was the National Year of the Americas-1987. Ronald Reagan was President. He was bestowing on Holly Coors of the Coors Brewery Company an ambassadorship-a goodwill ambassadorship-for the National Year of the Americas. The Pan-American Games were to take place in Indianapolis. It was going to last for about seven months until the end of the year. President Reagan signed a special decree officially establishing 1987 as the National Year of the Americas to strengthen ties between the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

It was to celebrate the western hemisphere nations. That is, to celebrate the regional commonalities and cultural differences between the countries of Latin America, Canada and the United States. It was a year of special events in which the major event was the Pan-American Games in Indianapolis. The special program assistant to Ambassador Coors was to ensure she was successful in her role as ambassador and to implement projects in a very short time. That is a short time-frame by AID standards-six months.

The reason they needed an AID person on the ambassador's staff was to plan and program half a million dollars in assistance provided by the Bureau for Latin America. And we planned projects that could be implemented within a few months.

One of the projects we planned was to bring two children from each of the Latin American countries to the US to participate in a special one week program conducted by the Department of Agriculture for 4-H youngsters in the United States. The Latin American equivalent was 4-C and these youngsters came to Washington for this segment of the two to three week program. After they completed the one week training in Washington, we sent them to Indianapolis to watch a day or two of the Pan-American games. We also had the youngsters attend the annual State Fair to observe how 4-H-ers in this country exhibit their animals, crafts, vegetables and participate in judging events.

We had to be very careful how we budgeted the money. I had to appear on the Hill in the chambers of the House and Senate representatives responsible for the foreign assistance program. They were very dubious about the entire National Year of the Americas and the fact President Reagan had appointed a Republican to the position. They felt this was partisan politics. Therefore, they were viewing this program with a very skeptical eye and it was the Democrats who were critical since at that time they controlled both chambers of the Congress.

I went before the Senator responsible for the foreign assistance program and had to justify why we were doing this program, why I had been assigned to the program and why half a million dollars had been assigned for the project. We were successful in getting the Congressmen to approve most of the projects but they did turn down a few as well.

Q: What did you learn from this experience that was different than what you had done in the past?

RYBAK: In the past, I never had the opportunity to testify on the Hill and defend one of AID's programs. I learned it requires compromise and accommodation on the part of both parties; in this case, Congress and AID.

Q: Can you give some examples of this? Does anything come to mind?

RYBAK: Yes. We had presented to the Congress a portfolio of four or five projects we felt were development projects. The Congressmen eliminated two of the projects and were planning to reject the third project, which was the 4-H program. Because Holly Coors was very well connected in government and political circles, she contacted the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, the very top position. As a result, it helped us to get Congress' approval to implement this project within six months. We convinced the people on the Hill it was a worthwhile project and would make a big impact in this country and the children visiting from Latin American countries.

Q: So now you were dealing with the political level of the AID program?

RYBAK: That is correct. It was the political level for a very special program that was only going to last seven months. Because of my position with Ambassador Coors, it involved politics at high levels of Aid, the Congress, the White House, and other departments of the U.S. Government.

Q: And how did that program actually come out?

RYBAK: Actually I think the program came out very well. The USAID Deputy Administrator called me into his office and explained I could literally have any job within reason in AID. And it was sort of, if you will, a gold coin in my pocket I could use at the time when I completed my job with Ambassador Coors.

I needed a break after working with Ambassador Coors and I needed time to think about what I wanted to do next in my wonderful career. Someone pointed me in the direction of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). I interviewed with the deputy director and she was delighted I would take the program officer position and have responsibility for organizing conferences in the United States; to be exact, four conferences a year for small minority and women-owned businesses.

One must understand AID was prominently involved in promoting business and investment abroad, an area that AID traditionally wasn't out front before. All of a sudden, AID was very involved in private sector interests. I believe it was during the Bush years when there was a major effort to increase support abroad to enhance the private sectors of Third World nations.

I accepted the job in OSDBU and proceeded to take on full responsibility for planning, organizing and implementing conferences in major U.S. cities. For the length of time I was with OSDBU, about four years, I conducted 15 conferences in major cities throughout the United States. San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Houston, Phoenix, Denver, Chicago, New York, Miami and Atlanta. I liked the job because it allowed me to get away from Washington, to major cities of our nation and learn each city well. Most of these cities were new to me. I learned what resources were available in each city to coordinate with local Chambers of Commerce, small business associations, minority business groups, and others interested in promoting small business and minority business contracting.

Q: How do you plan one of these conferences?

RYBAK: There is a lot of work that goes into a conference and unless you did one you wouldn't really understand how well it has to be planned in order to make it successful. In the office where I worked I didn't have anybody to assist me. I was basically doing most of the work myself. And as a result it wasn't bad because nobody else could screw it up except me. I had the format down so well, where everything went according to a very precise schedule. A pre-site visit six months before the conference was made to each of the sites where we intended to conduct conferences for that year.

I would go to the city for two or three days, sometimes as long as a week. I made contacts with the small business administration people, departments of commerce, minority business groups, ethnic groups working in business in those cities and keeping them as my personal contacts in getting the word disseminated throughout the city, informing them we would return in six months to conduct the one day conference.

Q: Were they receptive?

RYBAK: In most cases people were very receptive to the idea AID was giving people the opportunity to learn about our international agency and potential opportunities that might exist for doing contracting or subcontracting with AID and with larger firms.

The small/minority business concern was would they all get contracts? The answer was "No, of course we are not going to contract with everybody." We are going to contract or subcontract in those areas where AID normally needs special skills and knowledge. Once they understood what AID does, they were very receptive to the idea of AID conducting a conference in their city.

Q: What did they contribute to the conference?

RYBAK: What they contributed was the special speakers. We had to work out a roster of speakers and we always invited the mayor or someone in his office who might be responsible for small, minority business to participate in the conferences. In many cases, the mayors themselves came. We would ask presidents of business associations or Chambers of Commerce. We would schedule a spot on the program for fifteen minutes where they would talk about their organization and how they felt their organization could work with AID abroad or in Washington.

Q: How did the outcome of these conferences relate to the work that AID was doing in the developing countries?

RYBAK: Actually it related directly in terms of many of the 8(a) minority contracts that were awarded to eligible businesses.

Q: 8(a)?

RYBAK: 8(a) is minority business contracting, a special legislative mandate by the Congress. I'm not sure it is still functioning now, but it was a very active program at the time I was working in that office.

Q: How effective were the conferences in developing an interest in 8(a)?

RYBAK: I do not believe we ever had an unsuccessful conference. I was always able to predict how many people would show up at each conference. I could make good predictions because of the close work I did in following up after the pre-sites with the host city officials and the people in Washington for the major organizations like the Small Business Administration, Minority Business Development Agency, Commerce Department, the Import/Export banks, and other organizations.

Q: Aside from being offered any job you wanted to have, did you get any other kind of recognition from AID for this program?

RYBAK: You mean for the small business job. No, not really. I never cashed in the gold chip I had in my pocket from the previous assignment. If you mean did I get a promotion for my work in small business, the answer is no. We did have a proactive and dynamic director.

Q: Who was that?

RYBAK: His name was John Wilkinson who was the special assistant to the Aid Deputy Administrator. Since he was a minority person himself, he really believed in the program. I'd like to mention at this point though before he came to the office (I joined the staff in December 1987.), I was almost a year there without the benefit of a director. I was working with the deputy director and with ten or eleven other black African-American women. It was a unique experience because I was the only white person in the office. I learned a lot from my work experience in OSDBU.

Q: How did it effect you? What did you have to change?

RYBAK: It didn't effect my work directly but I had to be careful what I said and how I behaved in the office. Making sure I didn't offend anyone. The office staff was very sensitive to the issues of ethnicity and especially race.

Q: How about gender?

RYBAK: Gender was also something where I had to be very careful. What you said and how you said it. I became very sensitized to the staff around me since I was the only white person on the staff until the director finally arrived.

Q: So this is basically four years of work in private sector development.

RYBAK: It was basically in small business development. And I liked it very much. I liked it because it was tangible. I could see the results. When I did a conference and I managed to get 150-200 participants, I knew I would hear from many of the participants. They would come to Washington. They would ask for an appointment to follow up to get on a roster. A roster that would give them potential opportunities for contracting or subcontracting.

Q: Did any of the lessons that you learned as a Peace Corps volunteer doing rural development, did any of those lessons apply in this situation or were they helpful at all?

RYBAK: It was a people-oriented situation where you have to get along with people. Not only the people I was working with in the office but particularly the cooperation of people I was contacting in the cities. They were of all racial backgrounds. I was talking to Asians, African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, etc. I was attending meetings in ghetto areas. I was traveling throughout the cities and it required good people skills I felt I learned in the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps experience and a wonderful family upbringing helped me greatly.

Q: How about on the management side? What skills did you use?

RYBAK: Management skills...you had to be a good planner, a good organizer. And meet tight deadlines. Very tight deadlines. Things had to be done on schedule. If I did not adhere to the schedule, I would get off-track quickly. I knew I was working toward a goal - a conference on a particular date that had been locked in six months before.

Q: Did you receive any particular training in funding and management from US-AID?

RYBAK: None whatsoever for the small/minority business job. In terms of planning and implementing the conferences, no. The job needed to be done by someone who would make it work, a doer, someone who could get the job done. I had participated years before in AID's mid-level management training program in Jamaica and I also participated in the Development Studies Program(DSP) in Washington.

Q: Anything further to say about this experience?

RYBAK: It was a very unusual assignment. It was, if you will, out of the mainstream of a traditional program officer. I had an opportunity to participate not only in the conferences themselves by organizing and implementing them, but I also made hundreds of contacts in and around the Washington area. Seeking out private organizations interested in AID's type of work and informing about potential opportunities.

Q: What came up next?

RYBAK: What happened was a change of directorship at the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). And a change in the budget. In the early years when I joined OSDBU, we had the budget to fund four conferences a year. As we went along, the budget was cut and we went from four conferences to three. When I left OSDBU, we were down to two. Right now, I don't think the OSDBU is doing any conferences. If they are being done, they are not at this time being done at that office. They are being done somewhere else in the agency. But, I did learn after my retirement that the conferences were being done again at OSDBU.

Concerning me, a new office was being established under the AID Administrator. He was from Ohio, I believe. This office had not been launched yet. It was the Center for Trade and Investment Services (CTIS), almost a perfect transition for someone like myself who had been working with small and minority business development to move into an area much broader, which was business development and investment in general.

Assisted in creating the Center for Trade and Investment - 1992

Based on an AID report recommending a Center for Trade and Investment Services to coordinate and to educate the private sector in opportunities abroad, I was brought in to help establish the office. AID cooperated with the Department of Commerce, the Import-Export Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and a host of other organizations. CTIS staffers would help private sector business firms interested in doing business abroad. I moved to that office.

Q: Who were you working for?

RYBAK: At that time the director of the program was Michael Hacker and it was in the Bureau for Global Affairs.

Q: What was your position?

RYBAK: My position was senior business advisor. I was given a specific portfolio of countries-more like regions if you would-I was given Russia and the New Independent States and was also responsible for Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa. But because of my background and the fact I was interested in Russia, the Ukraine, and the New Independent States they had me focus specifically on those areas and Eastern Europe.

Q: How big a program was it money-wise?

RYBAK: Money-wise it was not a large budget. As I recall, we had a few million dollars in the budget which was supplemented as we went along. It was under five million dollars overall.

Q: What kind of activities did you fund?

RYBAK: We didn't fund activities. We provided information. It was an information center for the business community. We had facilities set up within the center where we could meet businesspeople and talk to them about AID, the Agency's goals, foreign assistance, and potential opportunities that might exist for them-either with the Agency or with another department of the United States Government.

Q: Was that a very busy activity?

RYBAK: We started out slowly. We launched the Center with the AID Administrator cutting the ribbon. It grew quickly. One of the neat things about the office was a specialized computer system. Every serious investor or business person, i.e. a person who was interested in an import-export business, a person interested in investment in a country, a person who wanted to develop a business in partnership with a local business person in a particular country, etc. was entered into the computer database for future reference.

Q:...market for services at the center? How did you get people interested and knowledgeable about what you could provide?

RYBAK: The first thing was to get people knowledgeable within the Agency to what the Center for Trade and Investment Services was. A lot of people within the Agency didn't necessarily have a business orientation and were accustomed to developing traditional projects with AID funding. They weren't oriented toward promotion of private business and investment.

We went to various AID offices to brief them on the Center. We did this with each AID Bureau. After we briefed the Agency Bureaus about the Center, we went outside AID to the Department of Commerce, the Import/Export Bank, the World Bank, the Small Business Administration, etc. We made contact with those people because we were also utilizing their information systems, as well as the information we were accumulating within AID. We used the information from the World Bank, the Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration, and a host of other organizations including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

We sought out those people and made contacts staying in touch with them to continue the dialogue between the Center for Trade and Investment Services and each of the groups in the Washington area.

Q: What was the follow-up? Once they came and got the information, what happened after that?

RYBAK: In many cases it was the difficult part of the program. Often times we never knew whether a partnership actually reached fruition. We knew people were traveling abroad with the information we gave them but at that time we didn't have their feedback to inform us whether or not they had made an investment, whether or not they had established a business overseas, or other transactions they might have made overseas. I believe this information may now be in the system.

Q: How long were you working in this center?

RYBAK: I worked in the center from September, 1992 to February, 1995. One of the things I wanted to mention about the program was the computer system. We had a system whereby we could record every serious investor. We had their names, the name of the business firm, the location in the United States, the business interest of the firm since oftentimes we needed to follow up on what the business wanted to do and someone else on the staff might have to handle the case. If we wanted to know who talked to that person recently, we could access the system and would know what the current situation was.

Q: Was this program ever evaluated?

RYBAK: It was evaluated after my departure from the office. And I am certain it was a positive evaluation since the Center continues to function within AID's Global Affairs Bureau.

Q: You were there for approximately three years?

RYBAK: Three years.

Q: In those three years did you see much change in the program?

RYBAK: I saw the program evolve from an idea to a viable program as we went along. We became a finely-tuned information center, so much so that it is part of the AID information program in the Reagan Building.

Q: How do you feel about this particular assignment? Was it satisfying to you?

Named to the USAID/Office of Information Resources Management (IRM) - 1995

RYBAK: It was very satisfying. And your next question should be, "Why did I move?" Because I had been in CTIS three years, I had pretty much done what I had accepted the job to do. I was getting restless. Therefore, I decided I wanted to finish my career in a different area. At that time, AID's IRM office was looking for someone-an ombudsman, one of two-in the Office of Information Resources Management. I interviewed with the director and the deputy director at lunch and was overwhelmingly accepted for the job.

This was a very interesting assignment because the Office of Information Resource Management is responsible for all of the computer operations in AID. At that time, under the leadership of Larry Byrne, there was an intensive effort to implement new computer management systems. A multi-million dollar program that would effect the entire AID operation in Washington and its Missions overseas.

Q: What specifically were your duties?

RYBAK: As an ombudsman I was a trouble-shooter. My job was to answer any inquiries from the field or within Washington and to deal with any computer problems people were having. I was not a computer technician. But I would get the technicians to focus on problems and help AID employees solve those problems.

Q: So you were in between the computer technicians and the users?

RYBAK: I was the go-between to tactfully calm the persons when their computer suddenly crashed. Usually they were very angry and I would ameliorate the situation by informing them we would get help for them and they would correct the situation. We were truly providing customer service to our AID colleagues in Washington and our AID Missions overseas.

A lot of what we did was facilitating AID employee problems with computer hardware and software. We also planned and implemented events designed to improve IRM staff teamwork and Total Quality Management (TQM). Total Quality Management is an interesting concept and the private sector has been doing it for a number of years. Total Quality Management did not get approved at the higher levels of AID. I am referring to the Larry Byrne level. He felt AID was not ready for TQM, yet AID was working on a mega-million dollar computer system which was to be part of the New Management Systems in the Clinton administration and was termed by one individual in the agency as a financial boondoggle. This makes the Defense Department's \$500.00 toilet seats scandal a few years ago look tame by comparison.

The computerized system was also termed the "black hole" because we were sinking almost a hundred million dollars into a system that wasn't working. And it wasn't working because it hadn't been properly tested.

The whole idea was that an officer in the field working on a project would have the very same information an officer in Washington monitoring the project would have. One has to understand when you mention the fact it was just a little under a hundred million dollars to develop this system. There were big AID contracts going to high tech firms in the Washington area and elsewhere. These firms supposedly knew what they were doing. On the other hand, there was a lot of pressure by Larry Byrne to implement "his" program as quickly as possible. Many of us felt Byrne had a Napoleonic complex, this short guy who walked into the Agency as a political appointee and acted like he owned the AID establishment. He was lucky to leave AID before being prosecuted for creating a "white elephant" at AID.

Q: What year was this?

RYBAK: The year was 1995 and if my memory serves me correctly, Byrne frequently referred to "his" project as a train leaving the station on September 1, 1995. The train was the New Management Systems. Larry Byrne stated everyone will be on his train. As Ombudsman and knowing just how bad the situation was, even though a lot of people were saying everything was on track and was going fine, one couldn't help but feel this train was pulling out of the station on September first but unfortunately there were no tracks! I would share my opinions with my colleague, the other Ombudsman. I would tell him I was not on the locomotive or in one of the cars. I was on the last steps of the caboose ready to jump off. The engineer was Larry Byrne.

Q: What were some of the problems, particularly in the field, that people were having with the New Management System?

RYBAK: It wasn't something happening at the same time. It was pieces of the system Washington felt were ready for implementation in the field. Because of inadequate testing in Washington before taking it to the field, they were asking the field to implement what hadn't been tested. As a result, it failed or did not work.

This was a real "black eye" on the face of AID because so much money was spent to develop a very sophisticated system supposedly under Vice President Gore's New Performance Initiative to make AID one of the model agencies in Washington to implement such a program.

Q: Has the New Management Systems been implemented yet?

RYBAK: To my knowledge it has not been implemented but I believe it is in the correctional stages so this beast is not a waste. I believe the techies are trying to correct the systems to make them operational.

Q: And how do you feel about AID in terms of being a model agency?

RYBAK: With all the downsizing that has happened with personnel and budget cutting, I do not believe AID has yet become a model for other agencies to follow. I do not believe AID has been reinvented. We haven't reinvented anything. It is the same old stuff in a different package, some of which has been very costly and isn't working like it should.

Q: Why?

RYBAK: Mainly because I believe the people who are the decision makers didn't know what they were doing. They were imbued with some concepts they felt strongly about and without being tested, charged ahead to get them started in AID. Unfortunately, the people responsible for these "white elephants" left the Agency. I understand Larry Byrne now heads up his own consulting firm. His wife, Leslie Byrne, was recently elected Virginia State Senator.

Q: Going back to your work with investment. Did you find the work satisfying?

RYBAK: Satisfying because I was helping people. I was assisting people. Helping them to get their software and in many cases their hardware operating. But one of the more rewarding parts of the assignment and you have to understand I went to IRM in February of 1995. I trained supervisors and 80 staff employees on the new employee performance evaluation system. I retired from the agency in January 1996. I attended the State Department's Career Transition Center (CTC) program in September of 1995.

Another new part of the re-invention was a new evaluation system. Employees had to be educated on how the system worked because it was totally different from anything we had before either the Civil Service or Foreign Service evaluation process.

Q: In what ways?

RYBAK: You mean in terms of differences?

Q: Yes.

RYBAK: The old system did not pinpoint enough areas where employees were being graded on leadership, monitoring capabilities, and accountability. The Foreign Service evaluation was very general. It did not really give much detail and it was rather long. The purpose of the new system was to simplify the form by marking boxes rather than writing long paragraphs about a person.

Q: Was it more effective than the other?

RYBAK: I can't say it is more effective. I personally chose not to have the evaluation under the new system because I knew I was leaving shortly. I can't say how effective it has become, but I believe our training was effective in letting people know what they were up against. Because the decision was made, I feel AID probably is implementing the new evaluation system.

Q: In all the years and your experience with AID you have been evaluated many, many times. And the evaluation system probably changed once or twice. What do you think about the whole employee evaluation system? Did it work properly? Did it give AID the full benefit of knowing what its employees could do and can't do?

RYBAK: The only way you are going to have a real objective evaluation is with the participation of both the employee and the supervisor. By that I mean an employee should be keeping a running record of what he or she has been doing. Regular normal work is fine, the routine. But I am talking about special assignments and projects assigned and any overtime or weekend work that one was required to do. If one doesn't keep a record of work accomplished and let the supervisor know about it, this needs to be acknowledged. Oftentimes, significant accomplishments do not get included in the record.

I believe in many cases the employee shortchanges himself/herself by not keeping an on-going record of what they are doing, of what activities they are assigned to do.

Q: Is there an obligation on the supervisor's side to keep a record also?

RYBAK: Not necessarily if the supervisor isn't the one giving the assignment. If it comes from two or three other sources sometimes the supervisor would not know about it. That is why the employee needs to keep a record. He can tell the supervisor what he has done. The supervisor's obligation would be to check with those other people who had given the assignment.

Q: Do you think the personnel system does a good job in moving people along properly in their career and giving training and placing them in the organization?

RYBAK: No. I have never felt the personnel system has taken the employee's wishes or desires truly to heart. In many cases, and I am going back several years, when I called on the personnel office, I wouldn't call on them often but I had the impression I was bothering them. "What are you doing here?" And not very helpful. That may have changed. I hope it has changed because personnel people should be people oriented. They should be concerned about your concerns, your problems, your skills and matching those experiences and skills with appropriate jobs available. I never experienced much matching of skills in my career. I went out to find the jobs myself without much assistance from personnel staff. I do not know what other employees did to plan their assignments.

Q: Did you find the personnel people within the agency professional and qualified to do the type of work you just mentioned? That is a leading question.

RYBAK: Qualified, if they were personnel people. But my impression is many of these people were originally in clerical and/or secretarial fields and were promoted into the personnel system without background or qualifications to be personnel officers. As a result, they did the best they could under the circumstances. If AID provided appropriate training and orientation for all essential personnel officers, I believe the system would be much better. We have many ex-secretaries and clerks in the personnel system functioning as personnel officers.

Q: We digressed a little bit but I think it was appropriate. Can we go back now to the ombudsman position and sum up on that?

RYBAK: Sure. I enjoyed the assignment and they wanted me to extend for another year. AID would not allow it to happen because of my time in class (TIC). IRM supervisors were rather disappointed when I mentioned to them I was retiring. I did not want to retire but I was forced to retire. My TIC date was scheduled for the summer.

Q: TIC?

RYBAK: Time in class. I technically had to leave the agency regardless of whether or not IRM wanted me to stay. That was when I made my plans to attend the Career Transition Center Program. In my case, it was a very interesting year because I left AID's Information Resources Management Office in September. I attended the one month training. The second month I practiced what they taught us at the Transition Center Program. I went back to work and was caught in the shutdown of AID as a result of not having a Continuing Resolution by the Congress

Q: A RIF (reduction in force)?

RYBAK: Not a RIF. It was the federal government shutdown. It not only happened once, it happened twice. I had every intention of returning to IRM (Information Resource Management) to finish one month of work. I never made it. I only had one week left after the two shutdowns. I went back for one week and it was time to process out. The shutdown of government was still in effect.

Q: So that was the end of your career.

RYBAK: That was the end of my career. It was a strange way to end my career. But that is the way it happened.

Retirement and career transition

Q: Would you like to talk a few minutes about the career transition process?

RYBAK: Yes. In my opinion, the Career Transition Program is probably one of the best programs offered by any government agency for retirees. The course gave the proper orientation and procedures for someone who had to retire. Not only the business about doing a resume properly and making sure it was done the right way but all of the good pointers and suggestions made were very helpful, things that one has to be especially aware of after retirement, such as keeping yourself in good health. If you don't have your health, there's not very much you can do. No matter if you retire with a hundred thousand dollar annuity, which most of us don't do, the fact is without your health there is not really much you can do. You must be healthy both in body and mind.

I believe The Career Transition Center did an excellent job in orienting the retirees. I believe the program is terrific. I would recommend anyone faced with retirement to enroll in the program if they can.

Q: How was your transition?

RYBAK: My transition... I tried all the techniques taught us. I was turned down for some jobs. I was only pursuing jobs I was interested in. I did take to heart what they said about looking back to your childhood or somewhere in your life on things you might want to do. Because I was especially attracted to airports, I took a part time job at Dulles International Airport.

If my body and mind are sending me the right signals, I might be making a change. However, I am a year and a half into the job and my two years is almost up! Time for a change!

Q: Okay. Let's sum up a little bit. Any regrets that you might have in going back to the beginning to your experiences in the field or in Washington or on the Hill or in the private sector? What comes to mind?

RYBAK: I had a very diverse career with the agency. I've done so many different things with AID and have learned every step of the way through experience and training. My one regret is I did not have the opportunity-or felt that the opportunity wasn't offered to me-of getting into the upper echelons of management with AID.

Q: Why is that?

RYBAK: There was a period of time in the agency when we were top heavy with senior Foreign Service officers and senior executive personnel. As a result, there was no upward mobility within that upper echelon. As an FSR-1, logically the next step would be Senior Foreign Service. I have seen people become senior Foreign Service officers and have questioned, "Why?" But not having all the facts available I really can't say.

The fact is at one time we had constipation of the system. And it is my term-constipation of the system. It was constipated at the top and as a result of being constipated at the top, it was constipated at the levels below (FSRs) - 1s, 2s, 3s - it affected everyone. This happened because the system allowed people who should have moved on or been moved on, to stay in their positions or were extended beyond the time of their TIC dates. It was only when they began enforcing TIC dates a few years ago, all of this constipation loosened up.

Q: So you think now that the situation is better?

RYBAK: I think there might be more opportunities for people to get promoted from FSR-1 to the senior level than before when I was looking to move upward.

Q: Any other regrets?

RYBAK: I want to mention a little more about the Senior Foreign Service. I had done many things as a mid-level management officer and had been trained as a mid-level manager. I felt AID was interested enough for me to be trained and I could aspire to move into the upper echelons. Many of us became locked into the system, so we were content to get in grade step increases to retire at the highest grade possible.

Q: Locked into middle management?

RYBAK: Locked into middle management without ever having the opportunity to move upward. Many of us did not have the opportunity to actually try management at a higher level. We were never given that opportunity so there was no way of knowing whether one would succeed or not. We knew mid-management needed improvement. All it takes is a few good managers to make a real difference. I have seen more of the bad side of management than I have the good side in AID.

Q: What of this re-engineering? Is that changing the situation?

RYBAK: Call it re-engineering, call it re-inventing, I really don't think they are re-inventing anything. What are we re-inventing? Are we re-inventing AID? What does that really mean? I don't believe I ever understood what that term meant.

Q: Well, it is supposed to mean that more power is given to the people at the operational level.

RYBAK: That's nice to say. Those are words. But in practice is that really the way it will operate? Will employees really be given a chance to participate and to make decisions? Or will the supervisors just take good recommendations and make themselves look good. Who gets the credit for that, the manager or the people that are feeding into the system?

Q: Well, re-engineering is supposed to eliminate extraneous management.

RYBAK: You use the word "supposed." We hope the system will work better. Having seen so many different changes in AID in the past, I have to be a little bit dubious about these terms now being used.

There is another regret I would like to mention. This was a big disappointment for me. When I worked in the Center for Trade and Investment Services I built up a lot of information about Russia, the Ukraine and the other Independent States. I expressed an interest at one time when the new Mission Director was assigned to the Ukraine of working with the program there. The first Mission Director was Terry McMahon. I told him I would be interested because of my Ukrainian background and because I felt I could do a good job for him. Terry kept me in mind.

About six or eight months after he went to Ukraine, he sent a cable to Washington inviting me to go there on a month and a half TDY. I was to check with the appropriate desk officer for the Ukraine program and to get the preliminaries going. On the other hand, I also had to let the people in the office where I was working know of this opportunity that came my way. They were totally negative and against my going to the Ukraine.

Even though others on the staff had opportunities to go to Eastern Europe and other places related to the job that we were doing at CTIS, I never went abroad during the time I worked for them. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to take the place of two people, a tandem couple who were coming to the U.S. on home leave. I was to manage their projects until they returned to Ukraine.

I wanted to do this special job. I was betrayed. I was betrayed by the Deputy Administrator of the Bureau for Global Affairs.

Q: Why didn't you use your "chip" from your friend?

RYBAK: The coin I'm afraid, had tarnished. When I had expressed to that individual and my immediate supervisor my desire to go TDY to Ukraine, they were very negative and told me I was urgently needed within the office. How come other staff persons were able to make trips? It broke my heart because being Ukrainian, and the fact that my cousin was the first ambassador to Ukraine, I know I could have done a lot in the Ukraine - particularly the AID Mission - not only the projects but recommendations I could have made to the ambassador.

Q: Why do you think that they didn't want you to go?

RYBAK: Partly it was my supervisor. She had a direct hand in it. And the very interesting thing is the betrayal came when I went above her to a person who was a long time friend and also a colleague I had worked with for many years. He originally said I could go to Ukraine. When my supervisor talked to him, he reneged and followed her rather than my desire. He turned my TDY down. In other words, he approved it and then turned it down. As a result, it destroyed our friendship. We had been friends for a very long time and we still talk to each other, but it is not like it was before. It was regrettable because I really wanted to do the Ukraine assignment.

Concluding observations

Q: Okay, now given your experience and given what you know about AID today and where it is trying to go, do you have any kind of recommendations that you would make?

RYBAK: Yes. One of the big recommendations would be the fact that we are losing a lot of talent...and have lost a lot of talent in the last five years as people were forced into retirement.

Some of these people, and I include myself, were at the productive peak of our careers. We knew the Agency; we knew how to deal with the system. We knew how to handle procedures and regulations and we also knew ways to expedite and get around those rules and regulations but not break them. We knew how to stay within the rules and regulations but still get the job done. Much of this is based on accumulative experiences for 25, 30, 35 years of development work not only in AID but in the Peace Corps and other international organizations.

It is a crying shame for AID to be unaware of the talented people AID removed by retirement and other means without having a program similar to what they have at the State Department. The State Department has a program to hire retirees for vacancies within State. I'm not talking about anything that would be permanent employment. I'm not talking about a program whereby people come back and they start another career with AID. I am talking about needs of the Agency. Places where people with good skills and experience could be utilized if the agency so desired.

We pay private contractors to do much of this work. AID retirees could do many jobs in Washington currently given to contractors to perform. Retirees could also do special work that might be required at the AID overseas Missions. It would make a lot more sense to let AID retirees do it. You don't have to hire them at contractor salaries. I am certain retirees would be willing to do many jobs because they are interested in international development.

Q: Some would volunteer.

RYBAK: I am sure retirees would volunteer.

Q: What are two things that they could do?

RYBAK: Two things the retirees could do or AID could do?

Q: Retirees could do.

RYBAK: Three things the retirees could do. You mean specifics like activities or projects?

Q: Could they do training or...?

RYBAK: Oh, absolutely. You could use retired AID people to do a variety of things - jobs that need to be done. You could use them for in-house training. Many retirees have had training experience. What I guess I am trying to say is because retirees have had the experience - and I have had a very varied experience - I am sure other people have had as much varied experiences or more than I have. Retirees possess all kinds of talented capabilities. In order to use those capabilities, AID should not lose touch with their retirees.

Q: Are the retirees organized in any way?

RYBAK: There are some retired Foreign Service associations around but I believe most of them are composed of State people. I am not sure AID is very active in them. There are many retired AID people and it would probably be good if something could be developed like an AID retirement association. AID might want to focus on the concept together with AID retirees to discuss the possibility of such an association.

Q: Do you think there are enough retired AID people to support this?

RYBAK: I believe there are certainly enough AID retirees in the Washington area. It might be a little difficult to bring people from outside the Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC area. But even then I would venture to say there are retirees living in Pennsylvania or other places who would be willing to become members although they might not be able to be as active as people in this area.

Q: Do you think that AFSA could play a role in it?

RYBAK: AFSA could be brought into it. Many of us are AFSA members. They should be able to assist in organizing the association. If not, just to bounce the idea off them and maybe see how they feel about it.

Q: Any other recommendations?

RYBAK: You know, after all of this interviewing I have to conclude I have had a wonderful, interesting and diverse career with AID. Much of my career has been through my own initiative and drive and also knowing where I wanted to be, then making contacts with the people who might be able to help me get the job I wanted. Oftentimes, people get disappointed. They get depressed because they can't make it happen right away. Nothing happens right away, especially in AID. And it may take a year. It may take 18 months. As long as you know where you are and where you want to be working. That's half the battle.

Q: Is there a lesson to be learned there for younger officers?

RYBAK: Yes. The lesson would be to maintain your individuality. Know who you are. Know where you are in AID in relation to others around you. Where do you want to be? Take the necessary initiative to achieve your goals and objectives - your career.

End of interview