

**United States Foreign Assistance
Oral History Program**

Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection

An Interview with
Ambassador Julia Chang Bloch

1993

**Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Arlington, Virginia**

This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AEP-0085-A-00-5026-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

ASSOCIATION FOR DIPLOMATIC STUDIES AND TRAINING ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, was established in 1986 to enhance the training of foreign affairs personnel and to instill in the public a greater appreciation for our diplomatic history.

The Association's Foreign Affairs Oral History Program was established in 1988 and is housed in the Lauinger Library of Georgetown University and at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, VA. The collection is comprised of oral histories taken from a number of projects, with the unifying factor that all concern the conduct of American foreign affairs and experiences of those employed in the field of diplomacy and consular affairs and their families.

The oral history collection includes interviews done under the auspices of the Foreign Service History Center of George Washington University, which was amalgamated into the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, the Foreign Service Family Project, the Women Ambassadors' Project, the United States Information Agency Alumni Association Project, the Foreign Assistance (AID) Oral History Project, the Senior Officers' Project, the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project and others.

The aim of the US Foreign Assistance Oral History Program, in particular, is to develop a collection of oral histories of those who have served USAID and predecessor agencies and those who have served in foreign assistance programs of associated organizations such as private firms, private voluntary organizations, and other US government agencies. The Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) of the USAID has made a grant to help finance the preparation of 120 oral histories.

For the most part these interviews are carried out by retired USAID personnel on a volunteer basis, directed by the Oral History Program. The interviews are unclassified, and unless so marked are available for use by researchers. Most of these interviews have been transcribed and then returned to the person interviewed for editing. The transcript is an edited version, and is not a word for word rendition of the cassette tape. The editing usually consists of correcting of names and dates that have been missed during an interview. The individual interviewed may also choose to expand upon topics that may not have been developed in the time allotted for the interview.

[Footnote citation example: Ambassador John X. Jones, oral history interview, Georgetown University Library, 25 December 1988, p. 13. Bibliographic citation: Jones, John X. Oral history interview, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection. Georgetown University Library, 25 December 1988.]

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KEY WORDS

AMBASSADOR JULIA CHANG BLOCH

Afghanistan
Africa wide 1984 drought and famine
Cambodia
democracy support program
Food for Peace program
Gaza
Malaysia
Nepal
Pakistan
Peace Corps
Peter McPherson (AID Administrator)
President Kennedy
private volunteer organizations
revolution
Senator Percy
The U.S.-Japan Relations Program
USIA

**United States Foreign Assistance Oral History Program
Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection
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an interview with
Ambassador Julia Chang Bloch

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: November 18, 1993*

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Bloch.]

Q: Today is November 18, 1993 this is an interview with Ambassador Julia Chang-Bloch. Madame Ambassador, could you give me a bit about of your background, where you've come from, family and all of that.

Early years and education

BLOCH: Sure, I was born in China.

Q: Where in China?

BLOCH: In Chifu, Shangdong Province. My family and I immigrated to the United States in 1951. We settled actually in San Francisco, where I grew up.

Q: You must have had problems, 1951 was not a good Chinese-American relations year. How did you get out?

BLOCH: My mother was very clever. It was difficult to get out, as you say, but Shanghai had not been totally closed and she just waited for a time when authorities no longer required 2 guarantors to let you out, to give you an exit permit. And she also paid the rent, the school fees and anything that she could pay for a year. And she persuaded the authorities that she was going to see my father who was ill in Hong Kong. So we got out.

Q: You're very fortunate.

BLOCH: With all 3 of the children. Normally they would never allow that.

Q: As I say, this was the height of the Korean war. Your father was in Hong Kong.

BLOCH: He left right after 1949, right in 1949.

Q: *Then did you go to Hong Kong?*

BLOCH: Yes, we stopped in Hong Kong. And it was not easy to get a visa to come to the United States as you well know. But my father had classmates from Harvard. He was the first graduate of Harvard Law School, Chinese to graduate from Harvard Law School. At that time then Senator Saltonstall was his classmate. And Senator Saltonstall had a special bill for him and his family to come to the United States.

Q: *Where did you go?*

BLOCH: We went to San Francisco.

Q: *Where did you go for College?*

BLOCH: I went to Berkeley. It was the only College I could afford. My father is a Harvard man and he very much wanted his son, preferably, at least one of his children to go to Harvard. But in those days I certainly could not afford to go to Radcliffe and I wasn't a citizen at that time so it would have been very difficult to get a scholarship. So I went to Berkeley and I'm very happy that I couldn't afford to go anywhere else. Berkeley gave me an excellent education.

Q: *What was your field?*

BLOCH: Communication and Public Policy.

Q: *Obviously, looking, as we go into your history, you were very much interested in Public Policy. What directed you towards that at that time?*

BLOCH: Personal interest, I've always been so inclined. I think my father, his example. He had worked as the first Chinese to head China's Custom Service. He contributed a great deal to the modernization of China. He could have made a lot of money but that didn't drive him. And money has never driven me either. So to me, the idea of contributing to society was always a driving force.

Q: *When did you finish Berkeley.*

BLOCH: '64.

Q: *Did you become an American citizen by this time?*

BLOCH: I became an American citizen when I was in College.

Q: *'64. Then you immediately put your public policy to work.*

BLOCH: Well I think a lot of that had to do with the times as well. And with my personal, I think, thinking at the time. I very much wanted to find out whether I was really Chinese or whether I was American. And so I thought going to Asia at that time in my life, I would be able to answer those questions. And, of course, we are now getting to the anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy. That also had an impact on me. In those years he was certainly somebody that college students looked up to. His ringing questioning of "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," stuck with me. And so I think the personal and the public policy interest sort of came together.

Q: Berkeley within a few years turned into one of the most radical campuses, but at that time the thrust was more towards public service, you might say?

BLOCH: No, I wouldn't say Berkeley gave me this dose of public policy, public service interest. I think it was much more ingrained, in terms of my family philosophy and my personal interest. Some people are just interested.

With the Peace Corps in Malaysia and Washington - 1964

Q: So you went into the Peace Corps? And you were in there from '64 to '66, the overseas part. What was the type of training you got? In the first place, was it difficult to get into the Peace Corps in those days and what was the training.

BLOCH: It didn't strike me as being difficult because I was cheeky enough to say I wanted Asia. And at that time I spoke Spanish as well and I was afraid that they were going to send me to Latin America. And I specifically said that I did not want to go to Latin America. I wanted to go to Asia. And they gave me an Asian assignment, just like that.

Q: How was the training?

BLOCH: The training was, in those days, they put a lot of emphasis on physical training. They were afraid that middle-class American college graduates being sent out into the Third World may not survive the rigors of deprivation, shall we say. And I really found that the overemphasis on physical training, psychological examination on what did you call that? The kind of training where, I've even forgotten the term for it.

Q: Sort of like t-groups?

BLOCH: There's a term for it, maybe I'll remember. But a lot of emphasis was on psychological training. Do you know what I mean?

Q: I know exactly what you mean.

BLOCH: The kind of stuff that was in vogue in those days. I thought those were really not very useful. Because when I arrived at my site, you know, I had a perfectly fine house, better

probably than what I could have gotten in America. In the sense of a young college graduate going right into the work force. I had an all electric kitchen, I had electricity obviously, I had fans. It was nothing luxurious but it was perfectly fine. I had enough to eat. I had access to all kinds of food and I was not assigned to a capital city.

Q: *Where were you working in Malaysia?*

BLOCH: In Sabah, Malaysia. In North Borneo. And I was assigned to a rural town, in the middle of a jungle. The confrontation with Indonesia was raging at the time.

Q: *Was it a problem of being of Chinese background?*

BLOCH: Not at all. It was in fact an asset. I think there's too much of this stereotypic thinking, it's a myth. People think that the Asians only respect elderly white men, right?

Q: *I was thinking more in terms of Malaysia vs Singapore and the Chinese.*

BLOCH: I see what you're saying, the ethnic issue. No, because when it was appropriate, I made sure they saw me as an American. When it was otherwise appropriate, I made sure they saw me as an Asian. What I mean is this. I was treated like an American, a foreigner, when it came to public meetings or official meetings where women were normally relegated to one side and men to another side, do you know what I mean? When it came to my human relations, I did a lot of activities with my students.

Q: *You were teaching English?*

BLOCH: Yes, and my students' families all took me in. Because they felt very comfortable with me because I could speak Chinese. They felt I could eat their food. And so I had tremendous entree, both ends.

Q: *When you left this part of the Peace Corps, how effective did you think you were and how effective did you think the program was? What was your impression?*

BLOCH: It was the best job I ever had. And I would say that I certainly gained, I've always said this, a lot more than I gave. Because, at that time I was a 21, 22, 23 year-old young woman; what can you contribute? I taught, I did a job, I taught English, But at the same time I used my teaching as a venue, a vehicle to reach out to the community at large. Impact? All Peace Corps impact stories are anecdotal. But I went back in the middle of the 1980's and students of mine just came out of the woodwork. You know, one student of mine came out to meet me at the airport, at the end we had bus loads to see me off. And we had banquets and we had all kinds of parties. And the things they said to me was really very moving. Most of them were married, the wife and the husband they were both working. They may have come from families of 7 or 8 children, they had normally 2 or 3. They told me that: "The best times of our lives, we think we spent with you." It was a question of opening of minds. I used to

take them, I took some of them to their first trip outside of the country. Took them on their first airplane ride, took them on their first boat ride, and it was the whole idea of motivation, self-worth and the ability to help yourself. These are very American attributes and ideas. Obviously there was fertile ground there and to go back and see the effect is very rewarding.

Q: You came back and you were with the Peace Corps for about 3 years, '67 to '70, what were you doing then?

BLOCH: I started first as a training officer. I did cross-cultural training and then I moved to evaluation. At that time our tilt then, evaluation was always done by a cadre of excellent newspaper reporters and writers. At that time, the then-new Director of Evaluation wanted more of what he called "reality." And so he brought in former staff members and former volunteers. I was one of the few that was a former volunteer as well as a former staffer so I fit the bill even though I'm not the best writer.

Q: Obviously, you were in the bowels of the organization. How did you find it when the next Administration came in '69. Was there a change?

BLOCH: Jack Brown was the head of the Peace Corps when I was there as a staff member, I think there was beginning to be a move away from the euphoria. As I said, more towards reality. You know, what can BA generalists, 21 to 23 year olds, what can they really contribute. And also when I was there as a staffer, still there was this notion of expansion, numbers. The larger the better. So there were certain conflicts, you can't get larger, better. And also getting to the substance of contributions. So it was a time of transition.

Q: So it was not what you might call a political or philosophical thing, it was more really the practicalities of the matter?

BLOCH: I don't think the ideological sort of tensions really started until later. Certainly I didn't feel it, maybe I was too far down in the bowels, I certainly never felt it.

Joined Senator Percy's staff - 1971

Q: To move on, you were Senate Staff then you went there from '71 to '76. What were you doing there?

BLOCH: I went to work for Senator Percy as a professional staff member at first on the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs.

Q: Did you work with Evert Beardman?

BLOCH: I don't remember him. I know the name but I never worked with him.

Q: He was with the Foreign Relations Committee at that time?

BLOCH: Yes. You see it was very difficult in those days for a woman to get a job on the Hill. I went to my California Senators. I wanted to work for the Senate. After I checked out the House, I decided I really preferred the Senate. I like larger issues and Senators seemed to me to have a more professional staff. Very difficult. They all turned me down because they all wanted to hire me either as a receptionist or as a congressional case worker. And hey, I didn't go to Harvard, or work in the Peace Corps as a professional to become a receptionist. I have to say that in those days, it's probably much better now but it's still there. In fact I still remember Senator Cranston's AA asking me if I typed. And I said, "Why?" He said that all the women on the staff typed. But anyway, Senator Percy, I have to say, didn't look at me as a woman candidate. He just looked at me as a candidate for a job. And hired me.

Q: *What area were you working with?*

BLOCH: I covered numerous legislative areas. You know when you work for a Senator you can't just cover just one issue. The Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs obviously covered all the social issues. But I did agriculture, food, that's also obvious, women, the elderly, health care, you name it. And because my interest was always international affairs, he started giving me more international things as the years went on.

Q: *Looking at this, I can't think of a better preparation for getting involved, particularly with the AID issue and all of that.*

BLOCH: Yes that's true. I've always been interested in the Third World, in development.

Q: *Moving back into the international side, you went in AID in 1977 to 80. I have you first with African Affairs.*

Joined USIA in African Area office - 1977

BLOCH: No I was with USIA first. When they terminated the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, there were a number of editorials in the Washington papers. So I received several solicitations to join various agencies. USIA's offer was the best, because the Director at that time was really interested in getting somebody like me.

Q: *Who was the Director?*

BLOCH: John Reinhardt.

Q: *What were you doing then?*

BLOCH: He recruited me to be the Deputy in the Africa Area office. I said to him that I know nothing about Africa, I don't speak French, I don't speak any African dialects or languages, I never stepped foot in Africa. How is that you're not putting me in Asia or Latin American even? At least I speak the language in Latin America. And interestingly enough, he

never told me absolutely. I think he even thrust me down the throat of the Area Director. He did it very nicely. But essentially, I think he really cared about Africa, he wanted completely fresh blood. Somebody new with a completely fresh approach. So I went to Africa.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

BLOCH: I was really the manager. You know the Deputy always does what the Director doesn't want to do. And I became his alter ego. He became one of my mentors, Jack Hedges.

Q: What was your impression of USIA operation in Africa?

BLOCH: In Africa, when I arrived my first responsibility was to fill the vacancies. We had 40-some odd public affairs operations in Africa. We may have had, I can't remember the exact number. What I remember was huge gaps in vacancies. Because it was always the last choice. You know if you can't go to Europe, then you go to Asia, if you're retiring from Asia maybe you'll take Kenya. So it was problematic. In a way, the Area offices reflected their regions. And Africa was a mess, it was a mess. So John Reinhardt was right. Jack Hedges was terrific. He had a reputation in USIA as being a firefighter. He was brought in to clean house.

Q: How did it come out? How long were you with USIA?

BLOCH: 3 years. I've forgotten my dates.

Q: '76 to maybe '79?

BLOCH: I would say it was '77 to '79, 3 years. We can check that. I thought we were quite successful. Because I went after younger recruits, JOT's. I went around recruiting, giving speeches. I'd say. "Okay, you come to the Africa Bureau, we'll give you a stretch assignment, you prove yourself, and you'll obviously improve your careers." We had to compete.

Q: This is it. I would think that looking at it careerwise, there's a real solid career for a Foreign Service Officer in the Department of State. You become an Africanist and skip responsibility rather quickly. But the USIA thing has been so concentrated in the European, Asian areas that I would think there would be...

BLOCH: That's right. And we fought our battles, and I did evaluation reports that showed that those who left Asia or retired from Asia to get a PAO-ship in Kenya, usually they only wanted Kenya, that they didn't do a very good job. Because they did not have the kind of respect that is needed to work in Africa. You know what I mean? They didn't respect African culture, they didn't respect Africans. I mean, I was scared to death when I first went on a trip to Africa. I went to 11 countries. I'm used to Asia, you know, 30 years and you're still not a friend. But I don't know anything about Africa. The Africans once they sense the basic respect that you have for them, they didn't expect you to know anything about them. So I thought it was a wonderful experience.

Attended Harvard's Institute of Politics - 1979

Q: *You left there about 1979 so you went to AID for awhile?*

BLOCH: No I went to AID for a long time. I went from USIA to the Institute for Politics. They had wanted me to go as a Fellow earlier, but I wasn't ready. After 3 years I felt I had done my job. There was even a possibility of a promotion because Jack Hedges was pulled suddenly to go to Paris. Again, to clean house. But I felt that the job rightly belonged to a career USIA officer who had sort of been in the wings for the job, Art Lewis, Ambassador Art Lewis. I didn't feel it was fair because of the timing, for me to step into the breach. You know what I mean? I felt that he deserved it and that it belonged to him. At the same time, I wanted to go to the Institute. It's a wonderful Fellowship.

Q: *This is in where?*

BLOCH: In Harvard, Institute of Politics. It's a very prestigious Fellowship and I thought maybe it was time for me to leave government. And Art held the Deputy's job for me. The Fellowship was a semester. I had said when I left, I left. I was SES, I was on the charter club of the Senior Executive Service, so I said I don't need a set-up here. He held the job for me and I decided not to go back and I went to AID instead.

Transfer to USAID and then Food for Peace Program - 1979

Q: *What were you doing with AID?*

BLOCH: I first was brought on as the Assistant Administrator for Food for Peace and Voluntary Assistance. And I picked up another mentor who was Peter McPherson (AID Administrator), who is now President of Michigan State University. Peter brought me in, first he thought to head Food for Peace. He brought me in as a Special Assistant. Because you have to go through confirmation. And it was a very tough for him to get me confirmed.

Q: *Why?*

BLOCH: Because I'd been a government person all my life.

Q: *You're not talking about the Senate, you're talking about the political process.*

BLOCH: Yes. I mean to get me through the White House. I don't have any political chits. You know you're hatched. But he got me through. So I was there from April to July as a Special Assistant. And my portfolio kept growing. So in the end I became an Assistant Administrator and I was nominated and confirmed as such.

Q: *What were your impressions when you arrived as to how the Food for Peace program and the other programs dealing with nutrition were going at AID?*

BLOCH: The Food for Peace program was one of the more complex of any that I ever dealt with. Because it involved a committee comprised of 7 agencies including AID to make every decision. It was called the DCC, Developing Coordinating Committee, I think. You can imagine what happens when there are that many agencies involved. The decision making process was very slow, very complex and difficult. AID was not of Cabinet status and yet we implemented the program.

Q: *Agriculture, Treasury and all that.*

BLOCH: OMB. I would say it was difficult, difficult, difficult. But it was extremely rewarding. Because I was there when the Africa famine stuck in 1984.

Q: *We're talking about the Sahel*

BLOCH: Not the Sahel, this was Africa wide, 1984 drought and famine. So again we made it work.

Q: *How did you find as far as AID implementing these thing on the ground in Africa. Did you find that you were dealing with a responsive instrument or was it a problem? In other words, how did you find the AID apparatus on the ground? Particularly, let's say Africa, getting food out there, how well was it organized?*

BLOCH: You know AID did not itself get the food out. There was no capacity for that. We had to do this through private volunteer organizations. And that was another part of my job. To build a relationship, to oversee the relationship between AID and the POV's. The logistics and the administrative management framework were very weak. Again it reflected the reach, the infrastructure was very weak. It was a humongous job. And to this day there was not one hint of scandal. And I use to, you know, lay awake at night worrying that something bad might happen. Because the administrative and management structure was so weak.

Q: *How did you find the voluntary agencies? Were there some that were stronger than others?*

BLOCH: Absolutely.

Q: *Which ones struck you as being particularly well organized as far as being able to deliver the goods, you might say.*

BLOCH: Well they were only really to speak of, only 2 POV's that were involved in food aid. You know food is a very difficult commodity. It's not like cash. If it arrives too late it rots. If you don't have the transportation system in place, you know, food doesn't get delivered. If you don't have good accountability system, a lot of food gets stolen. It's a different thing. Only 2 POV's, CARE and Catholic Relief, were involved in food aid. And we needed many more.

And we got Lutheran World Relief, we got Save the Children, to get involved. We had to go out and find additional capacity. Only the large POV's could really handle the management side.

Q: Then you moved over to, the Reagan administration came, did your job change or not?

New USAID assignment with the Asia Bureau

BLOCH: I had 2 jobs. It wasn't the change in administration. Reagan had been there for 8 years and I worked at AID throughout the Reagan administration. I moved to Food for Peace and Voluntary Assistance to Asia. I was ready again to leave because I felt that I needed a second career. And I felt that if I waited any longer, nobody would want me before I completed a new career. So I was about ready to make a move when Peter McPherson one day called me and offered me Asia. At first I almost said, I'm one foot out the door and obviously that's the reason he called me. I guess I just couldn't turn down Asia. I had avoided it all my life because I did not want to get into a stereotypic situation where an Asian gets assigned to Asia. The first offer that USIA made me was to be the Voice of America China Director. And I turned it down flat. But at that point I figured, I had proved myself. And it was not just Asia. It was Asia and the Near East so my geographic responsibility spanned from Northern Ireland to the South Pacific.

Q: Where were your main areas of concern during this period?

BLOCH: On the Asia-Near East assignment. First and foremost, I shouldn't say first and foremost, it wasn't that clear. One, the Gaza, the West Bank. We had a special program there, it was poorly organized. I went there twice to try to straighten it out, to figure what could be done. Then we had some special problems in a special program in Cambodia. Again, how does an AID agency deal with that kind of a special program. We had Afghanistan, with aid to the Afghan refugees. They were in Pakistan, they were not in Afghanistan, another special program. Now how do you handle that, how do you manage that, within the AID mandate? Those 3 were really tough ones.

Q: How about dealing with the Gaza with the Israelis?

BLOCH: Oh yes, that was part of the problem. We had to maintain a very careful balance.

Q: One almost has the feeling, particularly during that period, would begrudge anything that went anywhere but to Israel and they really didn't want much attention...

BLOCH: We had to be very balanced and we had to make sure that our intermediaries were balanced to a fault. And that's why, as I said, it was very difficult. It required a very good strategic plan. A very good clear concept of what we were there for. As long as we were working for the welfare of the people without any political tinge, then we were alright. But it was very difficult.

Q: *Did you find the Embassy in Tel Aviv for example, leaning on you?*

BLOCH: No, in that respect, I think, no. I think the Embassy was very supportive. Again there had to be a lot of back and forth. And we worked on our plan together. And we had to work not only with the Embassy in Tel Aviv but the Consulate General in Jerusalem. I think the program really came under the Consul General.

Q: *What about in Pakistan? Here you had these several million refugees plus the fact that the Pakistani government was not very clean as far as corruption?*

BLOCH: Well you have very clear cut account. And we had to have good intermediaries. These are the kind of questions we had to look at. And I think, again, so far anyway, no scandal. It was difficult.

Q: *To move, how did you get your appointment to Nepal?*

Joined the U.S.-Japan Relations Program at Harvard

BLOCH: Well I was again out of government, how many times has it been that I've tried to get out of government. I went back to Harvard and I was at the Center for International Affairs - the U.S.-Japan Relations Program. One of the major things I did at AID, which I did mention, was to establish a dialogue with the Japanese on aid. They were becoming the largest aid donor, supplanting us. And I thought the cooperation was to the good for both of us. I think I worked out a very good mechanism that still carries on today but without unfortunately the full support of top management. And so I got very interested in Japan. I had done Asian studies but in my day it was Chinese studies and I felt that anybody who was interested in Asia cannot know Japan in this day and age. So I went to the US-Japan Relations Program, it was a perfect fit. I had become somewhat an expert on US-Japan aid.

Appointment as U.S. ambassador to Nepal - 1989

And then one day, you know, I have a lot of friends in Washington, and I got an interview with Secretary Baker. And I wanted to stay in Washington. I thought I'd get an Assistant Secretary job, something like that, because my husband is in Washington. Well, he said, he went over the Assistant Secretaries jobs and either they were all taken or not suitable. The ones that I was suited for were no longer available. And he said, what about overseas. And I knew what he was after. Because there had never been an Asian-American Ambassador. I had been offered an Ambassadorship once before under Secretary Shultz, that was another saga, but at the time my husband said no. Then I got a call from the White House personnel office, after that maybe. And they asked me whether I'd be interested in Nepal. And frankly I said, is there any other choice? Because I felt Nepal might be boring. I was not interested in an Ambassadorial assignment even a historic one if I was going to be professionally bored. I'd always had meaningful jobs. I'm not interested in the status or what do you call it? The visibility. Two other countries were named but after a long deliberation with my husband, we

decided on Nepal. And thank goodness. Of course it wasn't very boring because they had a revolution soon after I arrived.

Q: You were there from '89 to '92. What was the situation in Nepal when you arrived?

BLOCH: When I arrived it was an absolute monarchy, lovely country, beautiful scenery, and as far as Embassy work was concerned, it was a very sleepy little outpost. Nobody worked terribly hard with the exception of maybe one officer. Even had things not changed. I worked differently and even then my focus was on aid. Because that was the focus of our relationship. And there I had to make sure I didn't overstep my bounds as Ambassador and get into the responsibilities of the AID Director. At the same time, it was okay because I was learning my job as an Ambassador, but that was very easy. Because I think that I've been in training all my life.

Q: I was just going to say, once you're in the business, and you've been in it so long, and worked with so many Embassies.

BLOCH: The thing was in Nepal we had a Peace Corps, we had a USIA, I knew less about the State Department than the other agencies. We had a large AID program, comparatively speaking. The only other agencies I didn't know was Defense and CIA. And so I immediately set about to run a Mission and not the State Department. Not an Embassy. And that hadn't been done so that was interesting. That the whole Mission could work together for a national objective.

Q: What was our objective? What were American interests in Nepal?

BLOCH: Our American interest in Nepal when I first arrived was to support Nepal's sovereignty and to support Nepal's economic development. Those two.

Q: What sort of aid were we doing there?

BLOCH: It was minuscule. When I arrived I think it was about 12 or 15 million. But Nepal is a small country. That was a large sum for a country with the absorbed capacity of Nepal. We had at one time been the largest donor but as the years went by, certainly the Japanese, the Germans, even some of the Scandinavian countries supplanted us. But nevertheless we had influence because we were one of the few countries with a Mission on the ground.

Q: At the beginning with an absolute monarchy, how did you deal with the Monarch?

BLOCH: The Monarchy. In Nepal at that time, you could deal with maybe 6 people in Kathmandu. Because they made the decisions, so it was a very small community. You deal with it with respect. You try, of course, to have some dialogue, to have some relationship and it wasn't always easy. Because Monarchies are very closed, by large. Lots of ceremony. For example, the custom was that when an Ambassador arrived, you waited 6 months for your first

appointment with the King. I arrived in late September, I had to come back on some personal business in November. I went to the King's private secretary and I said, "Look, I'm going home, does the King want to give me any messages to take back." This is a good time for me to certainly make a case. And, lo and behold, I got an appointment. Kathmandu was aflutter, the diplomatic community was aflutter. How did this happen? And my interview was, if you got 15 or 20 minutes you were lucky, I was told this by my staff. I was really prepped by everybody, even the Palace's secretary had said no more than 20 minutes or whatever and when he tells you to go, you get up and go. Well, our meeting lasted for almost an hour and the Private Secretary was beside himself.

Q: There was a revolution there when you were there. When did this happen?

BLOCH: It happened in February.

Q: How did this impact you and the Embassy?

BLOCH: We were working around the clock. We called our Emergency Action Committee together. From all that was coming out of Washington, my first priority was that all Americans in Nepal were safe. That is no easy matter because Nepal is a tourist destination. But our EAC committee worked very well. My Deputy at that time, Al Thibault, was really terrific. We became the information center for all the western Embassies because most of my colleagues were out at Kathmandu. Not so much in February; everything came to a head in April.

Q: How did this develop? How did this revolution come about? Was it foreseen?

BLOCH: It was certainly not foreseen in terms of the results not even by the protagonists. The Congress Party had been in opposition for a long time, they were either in exile or banned. Many of them were in prison. But the beginning of February they started marches and demonstrations. Most of the leaders were under house arrest. And things started sort of placidly. Nepalese are not violent people. The demonstrations gathered steam. Partly aggravated at that time by Indo-Nepal dispute. Where India cut off all but 2 access points or transit points. So goods were scarce, the middle class was getting somewhat disgruntled because of that. I think part of the problem was the way the government handled the protest cause they were making no concessions. And by the time they began to realize and talk to the opposition, to take the opposition more seriously, it was getting too late. And that's what happened. About 50 people were killed. And for Nepal that was a horrendous act, to have people killed. The momentum just built. I remember Solarz came in December, Congressman Solarz. And we had a breakfast with the Congress Party leaders. Certainly at that time none of us, including the Congress leaders, predicted that they would in fact, not just succeed but actually win. Because what the Congress Party, even as the momentum gathered, had sought was essentially participation in the upcoming election. They wanted to participate as a party in the coming election. They were not after taking over the government. Partly I think also what was happening around the world.

Q: *We're talking about the fall of the Soviet Union?*

BLOCH: Exactly. Word was getting into Nepal, even the Uhmaru Kingdom of Nepal, and people wanted more say, because it was a very closed society. And the professionals began to get involved. Professionals in the medical field, professionals at the universities, professionals even in the civil service started demonstrating. And as more people were killed, more of the professionals came out.

Q: *Was the Embassy taking sides?*

BLOCH: We maintained a very clear dialogue with both sides. We were one of the few places where there was clear information because we talked to both sides. And we made sure that our message was: Minimize violence and open dialogue. We were perceived by the revolutionaries as having helped their movement. Congress sent a letter again espousing support for democracy.

Q: *Our Congress.*

BLOCH: Our Congress. But at the same time we never lost access to the government. So again it was a question of balance.

Q: *How did it play out as far as the American Embassy was concerned?*

BLOCH: Tremendously. Because when the dust settled, the government really sent us all kinds of appreciation letters. And with the new government we had complete access, even with the communists.

Q: *Did this help at all, I mean, United Nations votes are always a big problem, were you able to, how was Nepal united?*

BLOCH: Nepal, of all South Asian countries, I think they supported us more than any others. But that's only one gauge. I think we were able to help them consolidate their democracy. Democracy is very fragile, it's still very new. Still a lot of work remains in the consolidation process. But I think we built probably a model democracy support program. I wrote a paper by the way and USIA commended us for doing that.

Q: *Were they coming to you for advice.*

BLOCH: Absolutely.

Q: *I just came back, I spent the last month, 3 weeks, in Kyrgyzstan where I was one of the many people helping them, my role as a consultant on how to set-up a consular service. Many of these countries that are sort of coming out of a different era have found that we act as a sort of honest*

BLOCH: Honest broker.

Q: *A national Peace Corps.*

BLOCH: More than a Peace Corps.

Q: *We only give advice.*

BLOCH: We developed and established a program for what we considered the transition phase and the move into the consolidation phase. We were there immediately because we started work, we had people on the ground helping with the constitutional reform process in May. The revolution succeeded in April, they came to us because we had complete access. They asked us for help. We helped with the constitutional reform phase, we then worked up a program to support the development of the parliament. And we looked at the judiciary because that's another anchor of democracy. We stepped up our exchanges. I got AID to fund USIA's International Visitors. Because we had to get the leadership out, to see the world and broaden their horizons. Because they had no experience, no experience in government.

Q: *As the Mission goes, I take it that because we had a Mission in Kathmandu that we played a much greater role than many others?*

BLOCH: Absolutely. Because I ran an integrated Mission. It was not easy to get AID to support USIA activities. I had to make them see that it was not an AID activity or a USIA activity. It was a democracy support program for Nepal. It was a US democracy support program for Nepal. And we had a task force which I chaired, I think only the Ambassador can chair. Because you've got to make all your components work together.

Q: *Were you getting good support from Washington on this nation building?*

BLOCH: Fairly good, except, of course, Nepal was never a priority. We could never be considered in the same plateau as any other democracies. You know, money was no problem for Russia or the Soviet Republics or for Eastern Europe. I will never forget that the sort of quasi-governmental institutions that we set up to support democracy, what was it called now, the Democratic, it was a net, do you know what I mean?

Q: *I know, there was one [National Endowment for Democracy - the International Republican Institute (R) and the National Democratic Institute (D)].*

BLOCH: The Democratic side and the Republican one, right? The Democratic side wouldn't even give us the time of day. So a lot of it we did from the field. And we got AID, we persuaded AID to give us more priority on a regional basis. And we squeezed out monies when we needed it.

Q: It sounds like you're the right person on the spot. You had credentials in USIA and AID. So you kind of knew not only where the body was buried but where the money was buried?

BLOCH: Exactly, no question.

Q: When you left Nepal, how did you feel about your Mission there?

BLOCH: Great. I thought I left on a high.

Q: Well, thank you very much.