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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF DAME JUDITH MACGREGOR DCMG LVO DL

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING

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It is Monday 25 November 2019 and this is the first interview with Dame Judith Macgregor for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording. Judith, what led you to choose the Foreign Office as a career?

JM: It wasn't by design. When I finished at university after reading History, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I took a British Council scholarship to Romania, which was done in a fit of complete ignorance about where Romania was or what it was. A good girl friend, Camilla, was taking up a music scholarship to Hungary to study the works of Kodaly and she suggested I should go slightly further up the Danube and we would meet up from time to time. Our ignorance of the fact that we were going to Communist Europe, where practically nobody crossed borders, was ridiculous.

Romania was a formative experience - being a student again in an enormous hostel in Bucharest. I planned to research a particular group of Romanian revolutionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century. I never did get to study them because I was never given permission by the Foreign Ministry to use the libraries in the country. So I learned Romanian and lived in a room probably no bigger than this, with seven Bulgarian girls, who were fantastic but very different companions. I learned very quickly to speak Romanian because it was very necessary. I was desperately homesick and unsure of myself and often in touch with the British Council, where a wonderful woman called Claire Newton was a great supporter. I also got to know the people in the Embassy in Bucharest and I thought what they were doing was very interesting. Being in such a foreign society, not a friendly society towards a female student from the capitalist West - though people were personally often very nice - was really educational and all my prejudices about diplomats doing nothing, spending their time at cocktail parties - goodness knows where I had picked this up - fell away. Michael Shea, who was the Head of Chancery and who went on to become the Queen's Press Secretary and a great author, was wonderful. He sat me down and said, 'Now, let's go through all those preconceptions. I really think you should apply for the Foreign Service; you learned Romanian very quickly; you seem to get on well with people. I

think you've picked up a lot of information about the country; I think you would be well suited.'

When I returned from Romania, I felt I had nothing to lose. A good friend of my brother, Stephen Gomersall, had just joined the Foreign Service; I spoke to him and I remember him saying, 'More power to your elbow, but good luck, because it's not an organisation with much going for women, as far as I can see at the moment.' So I set to and took the exams, always with the feeling that this was not very real and that I was not going to get through. Indeed I think I had more or less set my sights on going into the Home Civil Service, which seemed an easier prospect in terms of accessibility for women and of greater general interest. In parenthesis, I also decided I might try Barclays International; I literally rang them and they said, 'Come along.' I went for an interview and I was made an offer within two days. The Foreign Office process meanwhile churned on: it took ten months, but I held my nerve and I said to Barclays, 'I'll come back to you when I've finished the Foreign Office competition.' They said, 'Fine,' but I never needed to go back. The Final Selection Board was a turning point for me. I think I was beginning to lose interest in the whole idea, when at the Final Selection Board the Chair said, 'Now, Miss Brown, could you just tell us what your marriage plans are?' I stopped for a second and I thought, 'Why are they asking me about my marriage plans.' So I said, remarkably coolly, 'Is this a question that you ask all candidates, including male candidates?' To my amusement, the Chair said, 'Right, we'll perhaps go on to the next question.' And everyone looked at their papers. It was just a wonderful moment and I thought, 'Well, OK, I'm going to get into this organisation. How dare you treat me differently from other people!' The interview proceeded on its way and then, to my astonishment, I heard I'd been successful. At that point, I thought, in the spirit of Judith to save the world, 'OK, I'll try this, but I don't think it's going to be my style of thing.'

CM: Judith, before we get to your first job, can we just reel back a little bit further even than Romania. Could you tell us about where you went to school and university?

JM: My secondary school was a girls' grammar school, St Saviour's and St Olave's, which was in Southwark. I lived in the far wastes of Lewisham and Catford in SE London and thus had an hour's journey every day from the age of twelve. But my mother, who had grown up in the City of London, was convinced that this was an extremely good school and that I should go to it. My school was at the corner of the Old Kent Road and the New Kent

Road. It achieved fame latterly because Tony Blair announced the election in 2001 from it as an example of a failing school. I had happy time at the school, but it wasn't very supportive of its pupils. Our sixth form was only six girls, all the rest had left at sixteen. I wasn't able to study for Oxbridge there, so I left and went and studied in the public library, with my brother Roger as my tutor. Roger had already gone to Cambridge – he's five years older than me and he had studied history. That was the reason why I studied history; because my passion at school had been languages. I liked French and Latin and I was going to apply, indeed applied, to other universities to read French, and got various places at other universities. But I wanted to go Oxford because it was challenging and different and my brother had gone to Cambridge. So Roger and his girlfriend, Mary Francis, who went on to be a very eminent civil servant tutored me. I was successful in the exam and went up for interview at LMH. I found it quite difficult. It was a real culture change for me, coming from this inner London girls' school where people were basically leaving at 15. This is overlaid now by the fact that I had such a happy time at LMH, but I can recall a terrible interview where I got very muddled in what I was saying and the tutor, Anne Whiteman, a wonderful historian of the eighteenth century, looked at me speculatively and said, 'Do you think that's quite right?' and I put my papers on one side and said, 'No. I've got very muddled. What I want to say is ...' I went into a strong head of argument and she told me afterwards that she had written GVG – good vigorous girl – across my papers. So I did secure a place. But I remember leaving LMH after that interview saying, 'I'm never going to come back.' A year later however up I came.

CM: I think the idea of your entering Oxford with your brother tutoring you is very remarkable. Now, we are going to start on your career. You joined the Foreign Office in 1976 and presumably you had the usual experience of a little bit of training when you arrived?

JM: I think we had about two or three days' training. There were about fifteen in our intake and I was the only woman. It wasn't that there was a woman in waiting. Some others like Adam Thomson had gone off to New York to do an internship and deferred their entry, but there were no women amongst these. I can remember my very first feeling of encountering a strong and very different culture when the person who was running the training course introduced himself as Paddy de Courcy-Ireland. I was struck by what seemed such an

extraordinary name. That impressed me. Secondly, was the injunction to us that we should only call people by their first names and we should not knock at doors and should throughout operate according to the code of the 'Office'. I absolutely could not bring myself to call Mr de Courcy-Ireland just 'Paddy'. So I remember in that first week always positioning myself so that I was in his line of sight, so I could avoid having to use his name at all! I thought I'll never get the knack of this, but of course one did, remarkably quickly. But things like the Latin tags, the use of first names and particular words not used much in ordinary life were probably what impressed me most.

CM: Did it strike you as, if not macho, masculine?

JM: It was not laddish, at all, actually, and it was not hostile. I think throughout my career I encountered for the very great part, courtesy and respect on a personal basis. But it was a very masculine culture, there was no doubt about it. There weren't many ladies' loos; you had to walk a long way from your office to find the ladies' loo and essentially the thing was geared to a 'chaps know-how' culture. My brother had gone into the Civil Service, but didn't know much about the Foreign Office and at that time I think Stephen Gomersall had already gone for language training, so I didn't have anybody that I could ask questions to, or to whom I could say, 'Is it always like this?' or 'Should I do this or should I do that?' There was no personal tutor system. You went in and obviously your line managers were there, inside the department, but there wasn't really, in those days, any one person looking out for you, to wonder whether you might be finding some sort of cultural issues at the beginning, so everything was slightly magnified in its strangeness. I remember the very first task I was asked to do was to write a brief for a visit or a meeting. I couldn't work out what the word 'brief' could mean in this context. I knew briefs were male underpants! I hadn't had that experience of being at a meeting and seeing someone use a piece of paper prepared earlier on a particular subject as guidance for what they were going to say. We just went into it: you just tried to do what you were asked to without any real explanation or seeing the process in action.

CM: After your few days of training you were sent to be a desk officer in the famous EESD, East European and Soviet Department, and there was nobody there who said, 'This is a brief, this is a memo...?'

JM: Well no. You were just told to do it and once the person who told you to do it went out of the room, you asked the other colleagues in the room – called The Third Room - what was it that you needed to do. My area of responsibility was UK policy towards Yugoslavia and Albania. Rather an uneven portfolio because Yugoslavia was an important country for British foreign policy in the troubled region of the Balkans, particularly as a counterweight to Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Albania, by contrast, was absolutely isolated. It was run by Enver Hoxha with a form of Communism that relied on Chinese support and had virtually no contact with the West. But many senior FCO staff had strong memories of what had happened in Albania after the war, and our attempts to overthrow Communism in that part of the world. So there was a far greater interest in the affairs and fortunes of Albania than I had expected. One of the first things I was asked to do was to prepare a Strategy Paper on Albania. What was going to happen to the country going forward and could HMG derive more benefit from a more productive relationship with Albania? The answer on all scores was pretty negative really, because there were no openings and there was not really the political will on either side to change matters. But I was taken aback by the level of interest in and scrutiny of my paper - and felt more engaged in consequence with FCO work that I otherwise still found rather opaque.

One highlight in that first year was an unexpected meeting with Mrs Thatcher, then Leader of the Opposition, on Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia at that time was run under a system of workers' self-management, a form of communism, but less dictatorial than the Soviet model. It was in fact immensely complicated and not much known in Britain. Rather unexpectedly - in 1975 or '76 - Mrs Thatcher, as Leader of the Opposition, decided that she would visit Yugoslavia, because she felt it was important to show support for countries standing up to the Soviet Union. She sent a note across to the FCO saying that she wished to be briefed, but only by the person who knew about the country: ie the Desk Officer, not by more senior staff. This was pretty unusual. So slightly quaking in my boots, I read up furiously about every aspect of Yugoslavia and made my way over to the House of Commons, where I had never been before, and was shown into her office. She proved an incredibly engaging and friendly person and, for me, an extraordinary change, because she was so interested in the detail of the country including in workers' self-management. We sat for about an hour while I explained it to her and its antecedents, its difficulties and its limitations. Our meeting was scheduled for forty-five minutes; it went on for two hours and a half. She was full of

questions and interest in the country and really wanted to know about the personalities and every part of the country. I was absolutely astounded by her interest and her energy. As I went to leave, she said, 'Have you ever been to the House of Commons before?' I said, 'No, it's my first time.' 'I'll take you round,' she said. Off we went; we walked up and down all the corridors and she kept opening doors on meetings that were going on and saying, 'Excuse me, I'm just showing Miss Brown from the Foreign Office around.' I came out feeling as if I had been turned upside down and reported back on her remarkable interest. It was the beginning for her of a succession of visits, as during my time in Belgrade she came twice, first as Prime Minister for an official visit and secondly for the funeral of President Tito.

CM: Everything one reads in the Charles Moore biography suggests that she was a vacuum cleaner of facts, that she could absorb so much, that she really liked material like that.

JM: She absolutely had an ability to absorb it all and to use it immediately. When she came to Yugoslavia later, other issues had arisen by that time and Yugoslavia had abandoned workers' self-management, so it was not on the agenda, but she retained, as far as I can see, a good understanding of Yugoslav politics and a life-long interest in the Balkans.

Belgrade, 1978-81

CM: With a consistency which is not often found in Foreign Office postings, after your two years as Desk Officer dealing with Yugoslavia and Albania, you went as First Secretary to Belgrade in 1978. Is that right?

JM: No, that's not quite accurate. I went as Third Secretary.

CM: I've got here from Who's Who that you entered the FCO in 1976, were desk officer 1976-77 and went to Yugoslavia in 1978. Did you get promoted to First Secretary by the time you left Belgrade?

JM: Yes, and just to be pernickety, I went there in '77.

CM: No, no, we want to get it right. OK, you went as a Third Secretary and then, as usual as you grow older in the Foreign Office, you advanced up the grades to Second and then First

Secretary.

JM: Yes, but it's perhaps worth saying that I didn't go on my first posting in a cloud of glory. I was told by the Personnel Department in London that if I didn't buck up and work better, I was actually on the way out. So Yugoslavia for me was a chance to show that I could do the job properly. I remember being incredibly upset by all that, but in retrospect I can see that I was just still finding it difficult to settle to the work. There were highlights with Mrs Thatcher and some other interesting things that happened, but generally speaking I didn't feel very happy. The opportunity came up unexpectedly. I had said that I wanted to learn a hard language, that I wanted to learn something like Hebrew – I had my sights set on the Middle East, thinking this wasn't a usual place for women. I was told promptly that a) my MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test) score wasn't brilliant and b) it was most unusual for women to be posted to these places and I certainly couldn't be posted to an Arab country and, anyway, I wasn't doing well enough to be posted anywhere. Period. At that juncture I felt that I would still very much like to go abroad, which was normal - one went abroad at the end of the first year. So at the end of my first year, they said, no, you're going to have to stay on in London for longer, because you're not doing well enough. Then suddenly up came a post in Belgrade and because, I suppose, they didn't have anybody else, they offered it to me and I accepted it very willingly and went off to learn Serbo-Croat.

In fact and despite my MLAT score, I enjoyed learning Serbo-Croat – I learned it at SSEES, (School of Slavonic and East European Studies) in London, with two tutors, one Croatian and one Serbian. Because it was all happening at short notice, I had about four months in London and then I lived with a family for one month in Jastrebarsko in Croatia, a village which sadly was badly bombed later in the war there. Serbian and Croatian as languages have diverged quite a bit in recent times, but at that time Srpsko-Hrvatski was one language and you could learn the language in Croatia and be perfectly fitted to work in Serbia. You wouldn't have an accent; you wouldn't have a vocabulary that would make life difficult for you in the capital, Belgrade. I learned with a family who were delightful and at a time when Yugoslavia was not so obsessively riven by divisions between the nationalities. Everyone was extremely aware of history. They had, after all, fought each other and there had been great problems during the Second World War, but Tito had managed to iron it into a fairly coherent whole. The younger people in particular were intermarrying

with greater numbers of people from all different parts of Yugoslavia and looking to a country that was one, not looking to divide back into smaller pieces. It was on the whole a very positive period.

One of the best things that happened to me personally in Yugoslavia was meeting Andrew Wood, who was at that stage Head of Chancery and my line manager. I said, 'I'm here a bit on sufferance.' He said, 'Oh, don't worry. I wasn't allowed abroad after my first year. I was so bad that I had to stay in London and, unlike you, I had to stay back for a whole year until they decided that I was safe to send abroad.' I was so surprised that this amazingly charismatic and able man had had a bad experience too, I don't think I looked back after that. Indeed I can date the moment when I felt 'This is going to work for me,' from that conversation with Andrew. He was an excellent tutor. He paid attention to me as a person and as a diplomat and I learned my tradecraft from him. You do need somebody to have faith in you and booster your confidence and encourage you to be ambitious and Andrew did all three.

It was a fascinating and interesting time to be working in Yugoslavia because things were already on the move in Eastern Europe, in the sense of gradual detente with the Helsinki Final Act, and cautious growth in relationships with the countries of East Europe which had been literally on ice for such a long period. Yugoslavia itself was shifting. It was partly time moving on: the political leaders: Kardelj and other former communist partisans who had imposed workers' self-management, had died and Yugoslavia was going through increasing economic and social problems with growing policy differences between the constituent parts. Tito was already in his 80s, and there was a restiveness afoot. Our interest was hugely focused on helping Yugoslavia to remain united, independent and non-aligned.

As Political and Information Officer, I had quite a large staff of 15 Yugoslav people and a wide remit. Our work covered the whole of Yugoslavia, which meant I was constantly on the move. I was always driving off in my own car, a Ford Fiesta, to travel to the different republics in often quite remote and culturally very different parts of Yugoslavia, to monitor what was happening in these areas and where possible to promote British trade and British industry. I would take with me a stack of agricultural machinery bulletins and pamphlets on British design or fairs and exhibitions - about which I had no specialist knowledge but plenty of enthusiasm and I would hand these out to various attachés and people in different ministries. I could do pretty much what I judged to be important or

relevant: the remit was to understand the country well and see opportunities for British trade and influence. Back in Belgrade my work was to build up a network of contacts with the missions of the principal non-aligned countries and their diplomats and with the Yugoslav Government federally to understand developments in the Non-Aligned Movement, which of course became eventually the G77, which was not always a friend of NATO or the burgeoning European Community. I found the freedom to use my language and growing diplomatic skills energising and very satisfying.

The bilateral agenda was also very active while I was there. Soon after I arrived, Prince Charles visited - a first experience of what was to become something that I did several times in my career, which was to accompany royal figures on visits generating huge press interest. I later handled the first official visit of Princess Diana overseas. Charles arrived with some twenty UK press in attendance; this was 1978, quite early on. He was unmarried and a figure of international interest. Desperate for incident, the British press spent quite a lot of time positioning nubile young Serbian ladies in his path and saying, 'Go on, Charles, give her a kiss.' The press pack was unruly and demanding and didn't like being kept out of political meetings. The Palace did bring a press advisor with them, John Dauth, who went on to become Australian High Commissioner in London. John was very cool and calm but at times the press activity ran riot - unusual at that time, but a presage of what was to come.

Charles asked for, and was granted an audience with President Tito. President Tito was wont to smoke huge, fat cigars and offered one to Charles, who politely took it and put it on one side. It was a remarkable meeting: Tito, man of legend, man of iron, Josef Broz Tito, and Charles, the young leader in waiting, wanting to learn about international relations at first hand from eminent and experienced leaders. Tito was gracious, funny and canny, giving Charles tips on leadership and a meeting scheduled for fifteen or twenty minutes went on for an hour and a half. Nothing of great policy substance came out of it, but it really did underline that Tito, the Communist leader, who had developed into a world statesman, had a fondness for, respect and interest in the UK. And indeed this was quite genuine - with little trouble in keeping the conversation going, through translators, of course. That visit was quite a big event for me, taking the main responsibility, for the programme, reporting and press handling - having to think very fast on my feet, in quite an impromptu way: changing the schedule at no notice if I came upon a Press bear trap in preparation! It was also a wonderful chance to get to know the beautiful Adriatic coast long before it became so touristic or war ravaged.

Prince Charles came out to Yugoslavia in July 1978 and President Tito was very active during that period before he succumbed to the illness that put him into a coma for a year during 1979 and he died in May 1980. Essentially, during the last period of his life, he pushed very hard to increase the power and cohesion of the Non-Aligned Movement. I think he saw it as his legacy amidst concerns that it had become rather fossilised after the departure of many of its founding members. I recall endless conferences in Belgrade with and within the NAM. I think from the point of view of HMG, we observed this with interest, but with some concerns in this world of emerging detente as to what would be the role of the NAM in the future. Was it going to be a force that was going to be helpful to the West in terms of the security issues of the day or would there be increasing antagonism over developmental issues? Tito's vision was also to keep it genuinely unaligned from either the West or the East.

Then there was the death of President Tito. This was one of those passings like that of Nelson Mandela's later, where there was huge concern about the political impact on the host country and the world in general. When President Tito first became ill at the beginning of '79, the world's press literally turned up in huge numbers filling the main hotels and occupying rooms in nearby Budapest. It was an extraordinary presence propelled also by increasing strains and stresses inside Poland and other countries of the Soviet bloc. As Tito continued to live - out of sight and probably in a coma - the tension and the speculation mounted and lasted for over a year. During that time the political struggles in Poland became more active and more press worthy, so reporters and media teams would be lodged in Yugoslavia and then decamp to Poland to handle something that was happening in Gdansk or Gdynia and then come back. My job was to support and liaise with the large number of the British press who were camped out; with very little to do. I had to handle this restive pack, which was quite tricky, while keeping myself - because we were all primed for the death of Tito - absolutely abreast of what was happening. All leave in the Embassy was cancelled; we all had to stay in Belgrade in case the moment happened. A plan was drawn up: the Prime Minister was coming and representatives of the Queen and various politicians. It went on and on and on. I was very friendly with some journalists from the BBC and we decided in early May 1980 that we would just go down to Dubrovnik for the weekend. Of course, that was the weekend President Tito died. I remember ringing Belgrade and being told in fairly sharp terms by my Head of Chancery to get back immediately. It was five pm in the afternoon and a crisis meeting was scheduled at 8 am the next day. We had no

mobile phones. We just had to be there. So we jumped in our little car for the 8 hour drive. I remember my friend Michael Dobbs, who was working for the BBC, filing copy and saying that everything in Yugoslavia was very calm - and we all just hoped it was. A Yugoslav diplomat was with us: Sonia Biserko, who at the time was working in the UN Department of the Foreign Ministry. She was anxious to get back to the capital as she knew she had a role to play. So all of us were in the car, driving through Yugoslavia, through the night, on these roads that were not wonderful. It was quite dramatic, and I remember we all sang to keep awake.

We came back and the world's leaders did descend on Belgrade. Mrs Thatcher came, her second visit as Prime Minister. She retained a strong interest in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav unity and independence - believing it was important to demonstrate this both to the Yugoslavs and their neighbours. And she also valued the Yugoslavia perspective on Russia. Tito had been a very loyal member of the Communist Party and had spent much time in Moscow at an earlier stage. His differences were within the family. So there was quite often a very informed view about Russia and I think that she found that interesting. Also we were developing our trade quite extensively and her support was welcomed. So her presence and that of the Royal Family was very natural.

CM: You had to look after both Mrs Thatcher and the Duke of Edinburgh at the funeral?

JM: Yes, I did. They had quite different but full programmes so we were racing around trying to arrange for many different bi-laterals and meetings in the margin of the Funeral programme. One of my best memories was around access to the VIPs - a testimony to the difference in the way these things are handled nowadays when security would be so massively tight but in Belgrade in 1979 things were a little less regimented. All the many VIPs were put in one big International hotel and conference centre. This was a familiar venue for diplomats and journalists. We knew the staff there and access was not particularly difficult. Obviously, I had my diplomatic badge; my friend, Michael Dobbs, had his press pass. On the first day after all the arrivals, Michael related to me that he had had a very enjoyable afternoon by simply standing outside the main lifts. Whenever the lift opened and he saw somebody important in there, some world leader, he got in and said, 'Hello, I'm Michael Dobbs from the BBC, may I ask you a few questions?' He did this with everybody and even had an interview with Brezhnev, because Michael spoke Russian. He asked him

what he expected to happen through the funeral, and about the future of Yugoslavia and he filed this amazing copy just from getting in and out of the lift. It was a testimony to a very different world and at a time when concerns about the future minus the great Yugoslav leader were of course in the spotlight. It was the end of an era.

CM: Did you notice the very aggressive Serbian nationalism that became such a dominant part of the break-up of Yugoslavia?

JM: Serbian nationalism had never really gone away although it was generally subdued during my time in Belgrade. Milosevic had, like many Balkan politicians, a long past and he and Tito had clashed at various times in the past over the question of how much power and influence should be enjoyed by the different national groupings in Yugoslavia. After the war Tito had been concerned to keep Croatian nationalism in check. After a decade or so the Croats had rebelled against this heavy hand and Tito took steps to remedy this. Serbian discontent had then in turn flared up, which Tito had also sought to contain. The structure in the late 70s was designed to keep both the bigger groups in balance but also safeguard the minorities such as the Islamic groups, the Kosovo Albanians and the ethnic Hungarians. So Tito was constantly manoeuvring to keep these different nationalities feeling that their power, their importance, their economic weight was fully represented in this patchwork quilt that he had created. At times, it was very fraught. Milosevic had had his knuckles rapped and sent into exile, alongside other more right-wing Croats and the thing had bumbled along after that reasonably smoothly. But Milosevic and his followers had never gone away. I never met him myself, but I knew very well people with links to him. In retrospect, I don't think we properly accounted for the residual strength of his support amongst the Serbs or for his counterparts in Croatia. We all knew that there they were, but they seemed like yesterday's men.

I think we were also not disposed to perhaps give enough weight to the rumblings of discontent among the Albanian minority. I reflected on this afterwards, because I went down to Kosovo quite often and reported back that there was discontent with the status quo, but I didn't necessarily perceive that it was anywhere near boiling point. 'Boiling' makes it sound very strong, but it certainly overflowed, gradually building up. I think that's partly because I didn't speak Albanian, so I was always doing it through the prism of their English which limited my reach. And I think because in our minds and hearts we wanted Yugoslavia to

remain united so very much and therefore, we perhaps looked for the positives, rather than necessarily understanding the strength of the negatives. I think that is something that comes out throughout British foreign policy, going forwards to the Arab Spring, when there was a sense that we hadn't been fully in touch with the 'Arab Street'. I also felt in retrospect, that while we were aware of some of the human rights concerns raised under the Tito regime, and indeed made representations on many of these - we were also concerned to maintain the stability of the country. It is a difficult balance and hindsight is of course a wonderful thing. But I think in our current diplomacy we are much more alive to the need to get the widest range of views on what is happening.

East European and Soviet Department, FCO, 1981-83

CM: You were becoming very much an expert on Eastern Europe; you went back into EESD, but this time you were Desk Officer for Poland and Hungary, so that was rather different, as those two were very firmly behind the Iron Curtain.

JM: That's right. Yugoslavia gave me my break, really, because I had been promoted there to First Secretary. I'd got into my stride.

CM: And when you came back, they weren't threatening to throw you out?

JM: Absolutely not, on the contrary. I think it had been evident through my work on the Tito death and change in Eastern Europe more widely that I was well briefed in these areas and through my media work, was in touch with developments in Poland. We didn't bid for jobs in those days, don't forget, so they were doled out. I was told it was going to be Poland and I was delighted because many of my friends from Belgrade were already engaged in events there.

CM: This was 1981 to '83 when you were doing this job. Now just remind us of the start of Solidarity. Lech Walesa climbed over the gate in Gdansk in 1980. So when we get to 1981, are we talking about the imposition of martial law?

JM: Not quite. It was a period of change before the Russian-backed clamp down. My work also covered Hungary, where under Kadar there had been attempts at an accommodation with

dissident forces, or at least, to try to find a middle way, a less authoritarian structure, with some openings for private sector opportunity, recognising that the model needed to adapt to popular feeling in Hungary. The Polish scene had been characterised by dissent through union activity by Solidarity and before that by the impact of Charter 77 in Prague, which itself had been inspired by the Helsinki Final Act of '75. Solidarity was capturing the headlines. But the government at the time in Poland was seeking to contain it: not do a deal with Solidarity, but equally not to come to blows with it - and absolutely avoid direct Russian action if they could. But the Russians were of course worried - not just for Poland but for the wider impact of all this. We were trying to work with the Polish government to help them find an accommodation with Solidarity. There was quite a lot of activity. Political and economic discussions on e.g rescheduling Polish debt against certain conditions.

One of the things on my desk was the question of the return to Poland of General Sikorski's ashes. It was an issue that became immensely symbolic. Solidarity broadly did not want the ashes to come back, because Sikorski was a national hero of an independent Poland being appropriated by the regime who would use the return for propaganda purposes. The government was keen to show it was a government of national unity and saw the return as an issue of national importance. We were formulating our response to this request for their return as the ashes were with us, in a military cemetery in Newark. My task was to write long submissions about the pros and cons of what we should do: trying to steer a course between the government and opposition and respect the wishes of the family. An issue of course of considerable sensitivity in view of the suspicion which lingered over whether Sikorski's death had been accidental or not. I think it was one of those issues that was put paid to by the imposition of martial law when it was obvious that the ashes weren't going to go back. But for me it was absolutely fascinating. I felt I had a lot of experience from understanding all the tensions in Yugoslavia to be handling this quite well. I went to Poland before the imposition of martial law and through my journalistic connections from Yugoslavia, I had plenty of good links into Solidarity, which were very valuable for understanding and foreseeing developments.

It is hard now to think back to a time when the Solidarity players were unknown. I remember a very memorable meeting with a prominent Solidarity leader, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, in London in 1981. My Head of Department, Nigel Broomfield was asked at short notice to give Onyszkiewicz lunch and invited me along. All was well until the man himself turned up open necked and in jeans - Nigel having booked us a table at the RAC Club in Pall Mall -

where the dress code was strict ... Nigel and I conferred rapidly. He had a spare tie and I had a pink denim jacket which I offered up. Onyszkiewicz looked a little startled when we asked if he would put these on but he had a great sense of courtesy and humour and agreed without batting an eyelid. Mercifully they fitted well enough and we sailed into the RAC Club - not without a few stares! It was the beginning of a great relationship; Janusz went on to become a senior Polish and European politician but always remembered strongly that this had been a very positive and favourable – apart from the pink denim jacket – first meeting with the British. Apart from such meetings, my work was taken up with the deteriorating political and economic situation in Poland and what we would do in the event of a Russian clampdown. We had a number of plans of what should be the British, European, NATO reaction to this and time went on with no change. Then, as with the death of President Tito, just when you weren't expecting it, one Saturday it happened.

CM: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the news of martial law?

JM: Yes, I was out with John shopping in London. We returned to our flat and got a call from the Foreign Office and arranged to go into work on the next day, Sunday. Interestingly enough, I think now people would rush straight into the Office. They would already have their rapid-reaction packs and would be thinking about British subjects in the country, and press statements etc. all to be actioned immediately. Things moved a little bit more slowly then.

I can also remember that we went in not quite knowing what we were going to do. We had a plan, but our plan was for a Soviet invasion, not for the imposition of martial law by the Poles themselves, so we were obviously needing to rethink our response. During the day we had a series of meetings with Julian Bullard who was the Director General for that area – he was called a DUS, Deputy Under-Secretary then. And we were in touch with close allies: especially the US, France and Germany. By the end of the afternoon, on that Sunday, we had begun to hammer out our three conditions that the Poles should meet. We had decided that we would not reschedule debt any further; we were going to bring in some limited sanctions on trade and we demanded that they should release the people who had been taken into detention and that they should restore the rights of the union that had been suspended and various other things. Draft statements on these conditions were agreed other NATO and EU countries. My main takeaway was how determined we were in the department that there

should be some form of punitive - if conditional - Western response - and then a discussion late in the day on what we would do if the Polish Government did not accede fully to these demands or if our united position with other allies broke down. In other words what would be our Plan B? And was our statement flexible enough? I think we looked again at the wording of our text and thought it would do. Years later when other crises arose and sanctions were imposed - not always successfully, I thought back to the wisdom of that discussion.

CM: You said you led the crisis reaction team. Did you form a special unit over a certain period?

JM: When I say 'led', I was the main co-ordinator; more senior officers were leading: Julian Bullard, the Deputy Under Secretary, was at the heart of it alongside his Economic DG counterpart because of the financial issues involved in rescheduling Polish debt and trade restrictions. The FCO Planning Staff was closely involved as technical owners of the Crisis Plan: seeking to ensure strategic policy co-ordination. But because it was martial law and not a Soviet invasion that happened, it came down to being more of the Desk Officer's especially once it became clear that Russian troops were staying in their barracks. That was the big thing, was it going to blow up into something so much bigger with considerably wider implications, or was it going to remain a military action but one with relatively little direct violence or coercion. It was quite ambiguous in a way. It wasn't clear that the mass of the Polish people thought that Jaruzelski had been wrong - following after a period of growing unrest and economic disruption. Equally, the repression also boosted residual support for Solidarity. An uneasy status quo set in and our work to ensure the delivery of our three conditions, intensified. This was of intense interest to Ministers and I recall that we were frantically busy preparing briefing for Ministers to use internationally but also constantly in Parliament.

Particularly active on the domestic front was the grass roots movement: Aid for Poland. Partly as a result of our sanctions and the dislocation of trade, and partly for long standing local reasons, the situation in Poland was becoming very difficult - compounded by a cold winter. This received a great deal of media and thence parliamentary attention. It was not something that we had wholly anticipated and seen from an ODA/DFID (Overseas Development Agency/Department for International Development) perspective, the situation

in Poland was not comparable with poverty in the developing world. But there was increasing Third Sector interest. Lady Ryder, Sue Ryder, was very much at the heart of it all; she had a particular attachment to Poland and wanted the government to organise food transports and humanitarian aid, plus allowing free post to Poland in order that people could send money, remittances, more easily. The government wasn't really prepared or supportive of this at the beginning and my task was to try to set out a position that was supportive of private actions but less committed to public spending. In the face of strong charitable lobbying which I received at first hand, the Government approach became more positive with a number of actions to assist private initiatives, which rapidly gained remarkable public support.

Alongside this mobilisation of humanitarian relief the campaign for a free post to Poland continued. Within Government the Foreign Office were broadly neutral but the Department for Trade and Industry were concerned that supporting this would create an unwelcome precedent. A question was tabled in Parliament and I briefed the then DTI Minister with responsibility for the Post Office, with the line that such a measure as free postage for Poland was not something that we could support but which drew attention to the many other measures that we were supporting. The Minister did not disagree but the next day when he was due to deliver his response, Parliament was abruptly dissolved for a general election. My memory was that in the general chaos, the Minister said that he was personally in favour of a free post and this was officially recorded. I'm not sure exactly how that was worked through but the whole episode was instructive for me to see, firstly the strength of the public feeling for Poland and the power of targeted lobbying. A foretaste of the huge lobbies that now target the FCO so routinely.

CM: Judith, I wonder if this is the moment to say that in 1981, while you were in this job, you married John Macgregor, a fellow serving Diplomatic Service officer. When you got married to John did you foresee being able to continue in the Foreign Office for the rest of your working life, or was there a question mark in your mind? Did you think you might do something else? Because less than ten years earlier, on marriage, women diplomats had to resign from the Office, so you were a pioneer in this area. What were your thoughts about your future career when you got married?

JM: Well, actually, probably none of the above. We rather took things step by step. We did

think about the professional implications, because we were very hopeful that by marrying we would be able to have a family. It was particularly on my mind that amongst previous female diplomats, who had managed to marry and even to take some Special Unpaid Leave (SUPL) alongside working with their husbands overseas, or not working, but accompanying them overseas: few if any, had succeeded in having children and maintaining a career. The main obstacles being the difficulty of securing joint postings overseas or sufficiently long periods of leave - with 3+3 months paid/ unpaid maternity leave and three years SUPL being the rule. I took six months in the first instance when I had Rachel.

CM: I think it's interesting to compare that with the rights that women, indeed parents, have now, which is six months' paid leave and six months unpaid and still have the right of return to your job.

JM: Of course, subsequently Special Unpaid Leave became a very flexible tool in this respect. At that stage it was only three years and women just hadn't managed to sustain having families and returning to work on these terms. So I was alert to that, but, ironically we hadn't really formed any plans. I think we probably thought that we would continue to work in London quite a bit. We were at that stage of our careers, ie First Secretaries, where you could hang on at home rather longer. Nigel Broomfield, again, in a prescient way said to us, 'You're going to have to think about this, because you're both Fast Stream officers in the Diplomatic Service. How are you going to work this through?'

CM: And in those days, I think I am right in saying, you had the obligation to go where the Office sent you. You didn't bid; you could say, 'No, I don't want to go there,' but that wasn't encouraged. You therefore both had a commitment to move if the Foreign Office posted you, so you were in quite a tight place, in fact.

JM: Quite a tight place. But we had made one decision which was that we would try to sequence our careers rather than both try to work at our preferred jobs at the same time. So I agreed to let John's career - as he was essentially six years ahead of me - be the leading one and I would try to shape my options to his. So when the next posting - to Prague - came up, I took maternity leave and put my career temporarily on hold. I suppose I assumed in a happy, blithe way that I would be looking after the children and that would suffice. It didn't do to think too far ahead, because all one could see were obstacles, frankly.

CM: The wonderful thing about being young is that the young are optimistic and they think that somehow they'll find a way through. We'll come back to what you were doing in your work, but let's just continue to look at your family/work balance. You got married in 1981 and in 1984 your first child was born. That's when you took six months' maternity leave. Did you go back to work in London after Rachel was born?

JM: Yes, I went back to Planning Staff.

CM: Then in 1986 John was posted to Prague.

JM: At that time I was technically on maternity leave, because Ali was born in March 1986 and I had another six months. Then I took SUPL.

CM: We'll come back to all the dramatic things you did in Prague. At the moment I am just trying to group the family events to see how you managed it.

JM: How did I manage it? Well I certainly employed some cunning in handling the unpaid leave issue. When I unexpectedly returned to work in Prague, I stopped the leave clock and when I started it again, I returned the hands to zero - which broadly speaking no one challenged. And when I returned to work in Paris (in the middle of our posting) I did the same again. And by the time I went to Germany, unpaid leave had been extended to five years.

CM: We'll come to the work you were doing in between your children in a moment. Christopher was born in '87 in Prague and James in 1990 in Paris and you were taking whatever was permitted as your maternity leave after the birth of each of the children.

JM: I was on Special Unpaid Leave for two years from 1990 to 1992 and then, good luck again, I was able to do a job for a year, handling the Queen's State Visit and then an official visit to Paris by Princess Diana. Diana's visit and some totally nonsense job which was co-ordinating the European presidency work in the Embassy. That meant that I could start the Special Unpaid Leave thing again after I had finished the 1992 work. So in 1993 I took a little bit more Special Unpaid Leave and then of course we came back to London and I went

back to work in the Office.

CM: If we are to sum up, you managed to have four children and continue working through the six or seven year period of having your children, (and then you've got to bring them up afterwards) with a combination of maternity leave and Special Unpaid Leave when John was abroad, working for various periods in between.

JM: That's right. The working in between popped up rather unexpectedly. As I say, in a quiet way I simply kept stopping the clock and - perhaps life is like this in administrations - I would then apply for Special Unpaid Leave *ab initio* and nobody demurred. There were several women I was quite close to who felt that they couldn't manage working and having their children; there was not enough time to satisfactorily settle the children and get back into work. I didn't want to get caught out. I always wanted to just stay on the books.

CM: It's the subsequent ten years, when you've got young children that are so difficult. You've got to think of their schooling, their particular needs at various stages. Men talk about their careers and what is happening to their children seems to have no bearing at all. You managed to juggle this with your jobs. Did you feel that there was at any stage a crisis moment, a breaking point, when you almost said, 'I can't manage this'?

JM: Oh, yes.

CM: Or did it run relatively smoothly?

JM: It ran relatively smoothly. I was lucky. I had very straightforward pregnancies, which is important, so I was able to work, for example, in Prague while pregnant with James. Although I didn't go to the demonstrations because of the tear gas, I was able to do most things. Another helpful factor - life helps in these things, or doesn't - was that John had quite senior roles. For example, in Prague one Ambassador had a heart attack and was out of action for quite a while and the next ambassador had a back problem and he didn't arrive for quite a while in Prague, so John was Chargé for the majority of the posting, for one reason or another, and therefore there was no difficulty about us having a nanny. We were able to have that on official funds, so I always had support. Also we had these big houses,

both as Head of Chancery and Chargé. When he was being Chargé, we were not resident in, but living quite a bit of the time in the Thun Palace, which is pretty big. So there were staff. That doesn't completely explain things, but it helped a lot. It meant that when it came to the point at which the opportunities arose for employment, I was able, relatively easily, to hand the children over to experienced and friendly child-care, which the children were very happy with. The children were not problematic. They were healthy and happy in what they were doing. At any moment, had you had unhealthy child, or some other factor, the house of cards would have fallen down.

CM: I'm thinking about the upbringing period now. Would you say that London was tougher?

JM: Yes, London was considerably tougher. London was definitely the point when it all began to seem very, very fragile. We returned to London in 1993 and Rachel at that stage wasn't even ten and there were three little ones. You know, you're not paid so well in London, relative to how life pans out overseas. So it's financially tough, tough in what you can afford in hiring the right kind of people to look after your children. It was not straightforward. We had some bad luck. We were lucky before with our nannies, but in London one nanny was hired and simply didn't turn up. I can remember it was the day after Easter Monday and she just wasn't there and I was supposed to be in the Office. Needless to say, friends helped out. A wonderful neighbour, simply took the children in while we desperately rang around for support. There were some Czech friends who'd worked with us previously in Paris and a friend of theirs in Scotland agreed to come down to hold the fort until we could get a new nanny. We then got a new nanny and she disappeared leaving all her belongings behind and didn't come back. Again, the morning dawned and I was due in the Office with an important assignment and what could we do? Our wonderful Czech friend moved back in and stayed! But it was pretty hand to mouth.

Alongside the domestic dramas, it was not straightforward either in the Office. When I returned from Paris, I applied for a promotion because I had been a First Secretary for several years. I therefore became a First Secretary plus and a Deputy Head of Department. But I stipulated that I would have to do this part-time which was pretty unprecedented. But while this was secured in principle, it proved quite tricky in practice. One of the difficulties was that in those days most people didn't get into the Office until about 9 or 10 am and the thing

only really started to hum from about 11 am or even 12 pm. The ministerial boxes would close in the afternoon at 4 pm. So staff would gear their work to that rhythm. But I had arrived at around 8 am and needed to leave at 2 pm and I was the person who needed to commission and then approve the material going into the ministerial box... So I would be chasing up on my team from early morning and finding it really hard to get advice to Ministers easily finalised in time.

CM: Were people co-operative and understanding or was there resentment?

JM: It was mixed. I can't say that women were supportive and men were not. It depended a bit on people's ability to meet my requirements. Some people were very fast and quite liked to get their work done quickly, others were less so. I found a way of working with them all but it was stressful. Luckily, I had a Head of Department who, though a little doubtful at first, came to realise that I was competent and could do the work to a high standard which worked to the credit of the whole department. So he was happy to meet my part-time requirements, but I began to find it impossible.

There was a flashing light moment: one afternoon I was sitting in the office, desperately trying to finish a paper, and a telephone call from my children's school came through asking if I was aware that school had closed two hours earlier. I had just lost track of time. Mortified, I arranged to rush back on my bicycle to collect these two little tots who were cheerful but obviously a little concerned that no one had come to pick them up. I realised that I would have to change my hours: work longer and secure proper childcare. In a way this was a relief because I was finding the part-time schedule in a busy department increasingly irksome and wanted really to give my work more time.

CM: The answer was to earn more money and pay for more care?

JM: A bit more money, but really by my not trying to make the brave new part-time experiment work, because I found it impossible. Mercifully, our wonderful ad hoc non-resident Czech nanny, who was by that time the saviour of the family, said she was keen to start a new course and could manage to handle this with working for us on a live-in basis. This gave us a real shot in the arm. And as time went on, my knowledge and confidence in the job increased so that I was faster in managing the work. But even so, it was

difficult not to work long hours or after the children went to sleep. So by 1995, some two years after returning to London, we decided to look for another overseas posting during which I would again take unpaid leave. And it was in Düsseldorf, our subsequent post, that I started doing the course on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and began to consider teaching as a serious alternative. I secured my teaching certificate but I took care to remain on the books of the FCO especially as unpaid leave had now been extended to ten years. A further sign that the FCO was trying to move with the times.

But, having said that, career discussions and work opportunities were always on the Office's terms. Despite not wishing to lose the women they had, few concessions were made voluntarily by the FCO and the mobile pattern of a regular full time (male) Officer was the model generally followed for assessing all staff. My plans to be a teacher in Düsseldorf were foiled by our sudden move from Germany to Poland in 1998 and I became the Resident Manager in Warsaw for my husband as Ambassador. When I returned to London and full time work in 2000, I faced some fairly unhelpful responses from the FCO who were inclined to regard my distinctly unusual career as lacking in the experience and the evidence to allow me to bid for the more fast-moving positions that I sought. After a further two years however, and a lucky bid during that time to work in security during the 9/11 emergency and other crises, the position had completely changed.

CM: Judith, when we resume we'll take up the course of your work once again.

It is still Monday 25 November 2019 and after a short pause we are starting again with the second interview with Dame Judith Macgregor for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

Head of Recruitment, FCO, 1983-84

CM: Judith, we are now going back to tracing your career. In 1983, when you left East European and Soviet Department, you went to be Head of FCO Recruitment. What did that involve?

JM: As with other jobs at that time, I was just rung by Personnel Department and asked if I would like to take on this particular job. I was coming to the end of working pretty flat out on the Poland and Hungary desk and I thought that doing something completely different would be very stimulating and interesting. I suppose I had an interest in trying to diversify

and grow the mix of people that were coming into the Foreign Office. It was certainly presented to me as a job to diversify us away from public school, privately-educated people and develop more of a non-Oxbridge mix rather than a focus on gender or racial diversity. Encouraging greater diversity as regards disability or LGBT was certainly not mentioned or really taken much into account at that time. I was thrilled to do it. It involved recruiting all grades into the Foreign Office and also specialist posts as well, and it meant that I was the FCO selector on the fast stream Civil Service Selection Board panel, that interviewed and brought forward candidates to the Final Selection Board. At that time also I was the person who looked out for the new entrants in their first year of work in London and helped them settle in - something that hadn't existed when I was a new entrant.

CM: Were you instrumental in getting that post set up or had somebody already thought of it?

JM: Somebody had already thought of it. The post of Head of Recruitment proved a really stimulating job not least because the Home Civil Service were overhauling their own recruitment and I got on very well with Dennis Trevelyan, who was the Civil Service Commissioner at the time. He had come in a reforming brief: to open windows, let in some fresh air and basically secure many more and more diverse applications. This was the problem. It wasn't that less traditional applicants couldn't join the Civil Service, we just weren't getting applications from e.g northern universities, Scottish universities or from scientists or women. We were still getting predominantly applications from Oxbridge. So he and I teamed up together and went round the country to different universities; we visited about ten. He would speak about the HCS and I would do the Foreign Office - helped in my cause by the fact that I was of course a woman. I also went to a number of schools. I went to Eton, I remember, in response to their invitation to talk about recruitment. I was not very keen but was very impressed by their questions. The pupils seemed, not surprisingly perhaps, to know a lot more about what could be involved in working overseas in a professional capacity. They asked searching questions about conditions for families and spouses. I was quite taken aback. But otherwise, when you planned to go to a university, you'd ring up and the careers service people would immediately suggest that I spoke to language or history undergraduates. Actually, we wanted to talk more to the scientists. My particular interest was in inspiring women to apply. Ann Grant succeeded me as the Recruiter after I had left a little early to have my first baby and essentially, having two

women doing the job for about four years meant that after the second year we were seeing a hundred per cent more applications from women, just through our visibility.

CM: Do you know when the Foreign Office reached recruited fifty fifty?

JM: I think we probably reached this as an overall figure for recruitment in the 80s or 90s but in the fast stream, it would be more like 10 years ago. This was not surprising as many women until then simply could not see how they could meet the full mobility requirement and so drew back. That is a factor more affecting gender, because of the social roles involved in gender responsibilities, let's put it like that, than necessarily could be the case affecting other forms of diversity. Each minority has had its own and separate journey towards securing greater equality in the Foreign Office and this journey continues. And it was a time when we were beginning to look more critically at how we trained people coming in to the Office. It was interesting for me to realise that many others found the FCO culturally, a tough organisation to join. I felt well equipped to talk that through and I persuaded quite a few people to stick it out who went on to be very successful diplomats, but who just found the initial culture shock unwelcoming. In my own case, and at this time, I became quietly pregnant, and did not tell my line managers because I was not sure what would be the consequences.

CM: In your notes you mention that in recruiting you were also looking at gay membership of the Foreign Office, something that had previously been a disqualifier.

JM: Yes, my recollection is that it had already become possible to admit that you were gay, but it was something that was still problematic for your mobility. Certainly, our thinking on postings was pretty restrictive then and it was true that in the early 80s many parts of the world were hostile to gay people, or unwilling to accept gay diplomats. So it was still something of a shadow era where official policy was to be open and tolerant but the reality lagged behind in terms of postings or promotion. I would say that was true for gender as well. From my position, I worked hard with other reforming colleagues to try to make our policy more pragmatic. So to try to avoid saying to people - as happened to me - 'You can't learn Arabic because you'll never be able to go to a Middle Eastern country,' I think we did appoint, during my time - and I was closely involved - a couple of new entrant women to

some of the less restrictive for women countries, to North Africa, for example, and to Israel, which previously not been straightforward. These were important decisions as learning a hard language early on was often the route to an Ambassadorial post in that country later on.

Planning Staff, FCO, 1985-

CM: Judith, we are now entering the period of - how long? - ten or fifteen years of doing jobs as and when you could, rather having your career planned either by you or by POD (Personnel Operations Department), because of family constraints. Your daughter was born in 1984 but by 1985 you were back at work in Planning Staff.

JM: Yes, I confess that having my first baby seemed just like the next assignment really. I would have it and then get back to work after a certain period- just as before! Friends and colleagues were encouraging but the reality in 1984 was that the FCO was not an ideal place to be working as a new mother. Not from animosity but because it just was not part of the culture. So on return I was offered work in the prestigious Planning Staff, in order to enhance my experience away from Eastern Europe and to give me a central policy role after my HR work - which was probably and ironically then not so well regarded by Personnel Department. My main task was to write speeches for the Secretary of State about which I felt very uncertain. Mercifully, it turned out that I was quite good at it. Of course, there was no training, no induction; it just didn't exist. You were told that the Foreign Secretary needed a speech for the Mansion House annual dinner for the Diplomatic Corps in London and what sort of themes would you like to recommend to him that he speak about? Geoffrey Howe was in fact a charming and agreeable minister to work for, because he liked to discuss these things and to share ideas. He was friendly, accessible, liked my ideas, was complimentary about my product and it all worked quite well. At the end of the day I don't know how effective a speech maker he was, but he was very nice to work for. But it was time-consuming.

CM: Did you sit down, the two of you, and work at it before you started writing?

JM: He was pretty good, actually, in the sense that he didn't change his mind, once we had had this initial, quite long discussion on what the speech might talk about. He was happy for you to go off and find the quotes and the historical illustrations or the jokes.

CM: It was a very personal relationship, wasn't it? To get someone's voice right.

JM: Yes, it is and I was not able to shadow him in any way. It was interesting that this post was held in Planning Staff not in the Private Office. My successor, Charles Crawford, was a brilliant speech writer working for a number of Foreign Secretaries, but still working at one remove from the Minister himself. It was I think after him that the notion of having a much more personal speech writer gained currency. I was almost an institutional speech writer: speaking for the Office as a whole and not the Minister. And I found it quite nerve-racking writing a speech for someone else, in an unfamiliar context. (I never attended the delivery of any speech.) I felt intensely that I had to get it right, right in a way not only that the argument carried and conveyed the points accurately but that the Minister was comfortable with saying it in my language. Too many last minute amendments would have been fatal. So I would often write the speech at the very last minute when further hesitation was impossible. I can remember writing through the night, with a baby at home, and going to bed at four and then getting up and having to attend to Rachel. I was tired; she might be wakeful through the night. It was quite a tiring period, I remember, but John was very helpful and shared the burden.

CM: Did you do any foreign policy speeches for Mrs Thatcher?

JM: Yes, I was also her foreign policy speech writer. I had had this very positive experience of Mrs Thatcher in relation to Yugoslavia, where I had worked earlier. But probably because there were tensions between No. 10 and the Private Office, at the time, reflecting also differences between their Principals especially over Europe, there wasn't a lot of confidence between the two offices. I would put a draft speech up to Geoffrey Howe who would approve it; it would go across to No. 10 and they would send it back, saying, 'This is absolutely hopeless. This doesn't even address the first principles of what Mrs Thatcher wants to say.' In the culture of the day, it would have been unheard of for me to ring up No. 10 and try to find agreement. So we went through an elaborate minuet. I would amend the speech as I judged No. 10 wished and resubmit to the Foreign Secretary. He would say, 'No, no, no, I think the original version was much better.' So the original version, dressed up a little bit, would go back to No. 10 and No. 10 would reject it again. I can remember thinking, 'This is not a way to run a railroad.' Eventually, third time lucky, we would find

some kind of compromise but gradually I noticed that Mrs Thatcher was not using the FCO texts very faithfully. So it became less of an important part of my job than at the beginning. But I stayed writing speeches for the Foreign Secretary on all occasions and then at times, writing speeches and compiling material for other Ministers to use in the Commons or Lords when the FCO was tops for questions. This involved my staying through the debates and providing quick answers to any queries that came from them when they were on their feet in the House.

So this was an important post for me developmentally. I learnt a lot of useful tradecraft. I also enjoyed working for two inspirational women: Alyson Bailes, who was Deputy Head of Planners and then much engaged in writing policy pieces across the board and developing the public persona of Planners. She lectured and worked extensively with non-governmental organisations; and Pauline Neville-Jones, who was the head of Planners and effectively acted as Political Director to Geoffrey Howe. She spent a lot of time travelling with him and attending policy meetings in his office. Both gave me a free hand but were immensely supportive of myself with a young baby and if I had to go home – we had to change nannies half way through the time I worked in Planners – they were very flexible and, I think, respectful that I was persisting in this married and maternal role, which for various reasons they had not pursued. It was a rather free-thinking and influential part of the Office. There is still a strategy department in the Foreign Office and there always has been, but I think in those days it was more closely brought in to operational policy making.

Prague: Special Unpaid Leave, 1986-88; First Secretary, 1989

CM: 1986 saw the birth of Alexander and you went on Special Unpaid Leave to accompany John to Prague. You were back in your old stamping ground of Eastern Europe, but you spent two years there being a spouse and a support, rather than working. You said earlier you were very careful never to resign and never to go off the books. What brought you back into work? Had you intended to try to go back to work in Prague?

JM: No, serendipity. I recall going to Prague with a sense of relief really, that I could now focus on the children and not having split responsibilities between a very busy job and a baby. I didn't stop working in one sense. I learned Czech and very quickly took the Office language exams, which were open to spouses. Because John was predominantly Chargé during that period, I supervised a lot of the entertaining and glad-handing during ministerial

visits, of which there were quite a few. So I constantly continued to be in the swim of things, and using my Czech. I had good childcare, so I had that chance and opportunity to maintain a watching brief, in a way, as a political officer. Then in 1988 relations between London and Prague deteriorated. We dismissed a number of their diplomats from London as intelligence officers and they in turn dismissed a large number of staff – I think it was about six people, all language speakers – from our Embassy. This was seriously debilitating. It meant that we would have no chance of replacing officers fast, because even if we could train them up, the Czechoslovaks had no incentive to agree visas promptly. We were facing up to a year of not having a First Secretary Political, of not having a Consul, of not having a Second Secretary Information and various other posts. John as Chargé was tearing his hair out. It occurred to me that I could cover several if not all of these jobs in some way. So I rang Personnel Department and pitched it to them. To my astonishment - because there were several taboos involved: including working for a husband and part-time - even apart from the sheer novelty of the proposal. But after one gasp, Personnel agreed in double quick time, recognising that I had the language and the security clearance.

CM: Was there any problem with the Czechs? You had your visa; you were living there. You just told them that you were ...

JM: We just notified them that the new First Secretary Political was Judith Macgregor. I think we did that knowing that I was already accredited as John's spouse. They could have put a spanner in the works, possibly; but they didn't. I found the staff in the Embassy were really nice and welcoming to me, probably relieved that we had found an extra pair of hands so smoothly. I found returning to work at such a pivotal time in Prague absolutely fascinating. It was a time when we had a lot of attention from London because there was a sense that things were really changing in Eastern Europe, more in East Germany and in Hungary and not yet in Prague, but there was an interest in knowing exactly what was going on. I knew a lot of the people, a lot of the dissidents, very well; they had come round to our house, so they were fine with me now being their main interlocutor. I knew a lot of the Western journalists who were covering the scene, who were always hugely great partners in terms of sharing information and tips and understanding trends and so on.

I had one or two lucky scoops. One was when I was walking along the Mala Strana, one of the main streets, of Prague, having dropped the children off at their nursery school. It was

early in the summer of 1989. I noticed there was an extraordinary number of German cars, Trabis, as they were called, Trabant cars from East Germany, just parked all over the place in the city centre. I knew there had been some unusual developments earlier in the summer. Hungary had decided it would not stop East Germans travelling through the country, leaving to go to the West, if they wanted. A number of tourists from East Germany had packed their cars full of everything and gone on holiday to Hungary and had then made the journey to the borders. We knew that this was happening: it had been in the press. As I was walking along the street, a car with East German number plates whizzed past me, went up onto the pavement in a non-parking place, stopped, and a man, woman and a toddler got out, the toddler holding his teddy bear. They took some bags from the car, slammed it, didn't lock it, and started walking very, very fast down the street. I was intrigued and followed realising they must be heading to the West German Embassy. I showed my pass at the Embassy gate but was initially denied entry until I saw my German counterpart whom I knew well. He let me into the Embassy courtyard- part of an old palace - and there to my astonishment I found a huge campsite with tents filled with East Germans on the run. My friend admitted that this had been accumulating over several days recognising it could not be kept a secret for much longer. After further discussion, he agreed that I could inform London but asked me not to tell the media.

CM: These were East Germans who had a claim to a West German passport?

JM: Yes, they just wanted to get to West Germany. The border wasn't open through Czechoslovakia, but they thought that if they could get into Czechoslovakia, they were sufficiently far away from East Germany that they could perhaps secure papers in Prague. The West German Embassy was indeed trying to secure papers for them to leave and to go through. Eventually, a number of trains were commandeered with the compliance of the Czech authorities to take these people out and they left. Once that happened, it was really the writing on the wall, because for the first time an exit had been secured under popular pressure for people who wanted to leave East Germany. I returned to our Embassy and wrote off a report to London. It was quite a discovery as it was the first evidence we had that the West Germans were actively arranging for people to leave the country and that the Czechs were negotiating with them. It was quite a human drama as people ran through the city, with their families, fearing the police and seeking asylum.

This was of course a precursor to an even bigger development, the Velvet Revolution although this was still ahead of us. We were extremely busy with our skeleton staff trying to gauge when or whether similar popular movement or protest might erupt in Prague. The other big thing was being there and working in the Embassy at the time of the Velvet Revolution - and we were still working with this skeleton staff although joined by Michael Tatham, the first of our new recruits since the expulsions. As so often, the darkest hour was before the dawn. It all looked pretty gloomy, and it felt pretty much like it wasn't going to happen. The government became quite spiteful towards the dissidents; they arrested more people and made life more difficult for others. It was a tough life being a dissident in pre-revolutionary Prague. Most people were keeping their heads down. The dissidents did not feel they were particularly supported by the population at large and they paid quite a high personal price. Their children couldn't go to university, couldn't get driving licences, couldn't buy property, all sorts of informal controls which made what was, after all, basically a subnormal life anyway, just more demanding. So the effective uprising on 17 November did come as something of a surprise. Again by chance we had some insight into this before most.

On the night of 17 November, we were having our farewell dinner for the dissidents. Havel was invited, but had decided to stay outside of Prague to attend to some personal matters. But we secured a good turnout from most of the dissident leaders, whom by then we knew well, including Jan Urban who became godfather to our son James born in Paris some seven months later. As the evening wore on, we began to get some reports through journalist contacts that the student demonstration after some initial conflict was proceeding unopposed by the Police who had just retired from the fray. This was most unusual because other recent demonstrations had been roughly handled. Dissident leaders around the table however were unsighted and not inclined to put too much weight on this but gradually the sense grew that perhaps something much bigger was unfolding. Another thing I remember happening at that extraordinary dinner: as we were talking about it all and receiving reports, one of the waiters who was serving at table and holding out a platter to me said quietly: 'Madame, please believe that I had to do what I did, I didn't do it willingly.' I asked equally quietly: 'What do you mean?' and he said, 'I had to report on you and I am telling you this because I think things are changing and I don't want you to hold this personally against me.' I told him not to worry and wondered where all this was going to lead. Then at 11 pm, I remember, we had invited the newly arrived Ambassador Lawrence O'Keefe to join us for coffee. He arrived

with reports that the Government might be about to collapse. So we all put our coats on and went downtown to see for ourselves. The revolution had rather caught us - and the dissident leaders - unawares.

We stayed up late discussing the extraordinary about turn by the Government and what might happen next. We got up the next morning – John to report to London and I to pack and prepare for our imminent return to London and thence posting in Paris. Mid-morning, I went out with one of the children downtown to get some shopping and to my surprise, suddenly realised that I was driving along and on the bus in front of me was a handwritten notice in the back window, saying, ‘ If not now, when? If not us, who? If not here, where?’. I thought, ‘What on earth is that doing on the back of a bus? This is extraordinary.’ Then returning to the car, Rachel and I were walking through the city centre when suddenly a group of children aged about twelve went by with placards, saying exactly the same thing. People were watching them in silence or just quietly clapping. I get emotional just thinking about it, because it was such a big, big change from how it had been, even just the day before. And this had happened so quickly after so many long years. The die was not yet cast. The dissidents were wary and the students were not sure whether the trade unions would unite with them against the authorities, or whether the latter would after all deploy force against them. The government however had just gone to ground. The general strike was confirmed and immediately the leadership resigned and that was the beginning of the end. Just amazingly quickly and peacefully.

CM: It was an enormous historical moment and to actually witness it is amazing.

JM: I recall most vividly looking back on it, the slight banality of it all, mixed with heady excitement. Life after 17 November went on at first as if nothing had changed. Despite the banners, most of the normal controls remained in place and we wondered whether we were imagining this strange sense of the atmosphere suddenly shifting. Then the next evening, I was sitting with the children to watch their nightly cartoon, *Dobrý Večer*, which used to come on at twenty five past seven, just in advance of the news and we always watched it with the children and then they went to bed. We watched *Dobrý Večer* and then we sat there for a moment and the normal news broadcast came on. Then it went off, suddenly and the screen went black. Then equally suddenly the cameras flashed to Wenceslas Square and a voice said, ‘This is the Independent Union of Television Journalists. We have taken over the

television this evening and we are going to bring you live coverage of the people's demonstration.' Then it blacked out again only to resume finally showing what was happening in the streets. By this time I had called John in and it was clear we were watching a live tussle for control of the media. And the people won. But alongside the euphoria were some sourer notes - ordinary people like my waiter who were worried about what was going to come out and whether there would be a place for them. Dissident friends who felt they had been bypassed by other more opportunistic people who professed to have supported reform and change all along but who changed sides very quickly. We were well placed as an Embassy to work with the new political forces that were emerging but the stresses and strains on many of our locally engaged staff were considerable. When we returned a year or so later, we found that many staff had left or become ill - caught up in the changing political forces of the country and the recriminations about collusion. So it was not all jubilation but an exciting and memorable departure for us.

Paris: Special Unpaid Leave, 1990-92; First Secretary 1992-93

CM: You left Prague in December '89 ...

JM: Yes, and arrived in Paris in 1990.

CM: So between '89 when you left Prague and when you took up your job in 1992 in Paris, first of all James was born in 1990 and you had your maternity leave and your Special Unpaid Leave.

JM: I didn't take maternity leave for James, because I wasn't working immediately previous to him being born. You can only take maternity leave if you are in a job and I was already on SUPL.

CM: So 1990-92 you were in Paris; John was Head of Chancery; you were living in the Gate House to the Residence. James was born in Paris in May 1990. In January 1992, a year and a half later, you went back into the Office. Now how did that happen? Were you looking for a job or did something happen, as had happened in Prague, and they needed you?

JM: Yes, again, fortune smiled on me. The Embassy felt that they were not staffed to cope adequately with a big State Visit but were unlikely to get an additional First Secretary from London. So there I was. I had spent the preceding year, as well as having children, in properly learning French and doing the extremely demanding French Extensive Exam so I could handle the language demands and through John's role as Head of Chancery I was quite familiar with staff there and I had followed the political situation.

CM: Where did the idea come from?

JM: I think it was the Ambassador, Ewen Fergusson, who first came up with the job specification. The sort of person they were looking for, who could take forward the liaison with the Quai d'Orsay, manage the liaison with the regional and town authorities, because the visit took place also outside Paris – and work with Buckingham Palace seemed well suited to my language skills and experience. Then at the same time there was the thought that in the second part of the year the UK would take on the European Union Presidency and there were certain administrative tasks associated with that, pretty routine stuff, sorting through material, communications, timetables, just making sure that the Embassy was fully up to speed on doing all that it needed to as host of the European co-ordination meetings and I could do that as well and that would give me a year's employment.

CM: Was it a contract for just a year?

JM: It was.

CM: You were a First Secretary. How did that fit in with the positions you had held in the past? What I am trying to understand is your progress through the hierarchy. Were you being held back? That is, if you had been working without maternity leave and SUPL would you have been a Counsellor by now?

JM: Yes, I would have been, yes.

CM: Did you have any worries about taking a job as a First Secretary when your experience might have led you to think you ought to be a Counsellor? I'm pressing this point, but I think it is interesting.

JM: No, not really. I was just very pleased to have the opportunity to work. It meant that I was back in the system. By that point FCO work was beginning to be a lot more computerised. So returning into the system opened up access to a lot of information from posts overseas and could brief me on what was going on in terms of policy and change inside the Foreign Office. Would I gain from it particularly in career terms? No, but I would have an interesting job and I would be back in the swing of things and it would keep me professionally occupied. Subsequently, I have to say, I don't think those periods of working in Prague or in Paris were much taken account of back in London. But they were very helpful for me developmentally. Equally if I had not taken them on, I would probably have had to resign from the Service as my SUPL would have expired. And I was absolutely intent that I was not going to resign if I could possibly help it. Even if I chose at some point to do something else, that was another matter, but I really didn't want to be forced out, as I saw it. These jobs, apart from being tremendous fun and interesting in themselves, did help me also build networks locally but also with the U.K. - including with different parts of Whitehall and the FCO and with Buckingham Palace.

And indeed it was fascinating working on the State Visit - a visit which was received particularly warmly in France during a difficult personal year for the Queen. I worked with Robin Janvrin who was the Private Secretary to the Queen and responsible for the arrangements for the visit. Together we worked through the programme possibilities, objectives and modalities. I was present at all the meetings at which we decided what we would do for the Queen. So much of the policy success of such visits depends on the agility of planning, strong organisation and co-ordination plus stretching the possibilities to do new and interesting things. As the person leading the Embassy team and working closely with Robin and my French counterparts, I felt that I had quite a lot of influence. The planning was highly developed and meticulous - and highly co-ordinated between ministries, the Palace and the Embassy. I think it was quite a revelation for the French at first, where co-ordination between government departments and agencies was often patchy. But we were able to fuse our styles and developed a very productive relationship. That partnership followed through for the visit of Diana, which was later in the same year.

CM: The Diana visit: it was her first official overseas visit by herself.

JM: Yes. She had operated overseas by herself on two previous occasions. First there had been the rather difficult moment when she was in India and had visited the Taj Mahal by herself. Then after India, she had unofficially visited Hungary in connection with some humanitarian work for children that she was engaged in. I think the FCO had then proposed, with the Embassy's support, that she might further her charitable work and pioneering activity for HIV victims, together with her interest in fashion, design and the arts, by making a first official trip to France. And I think we saw this as complementing well the earlier State Visit: projecting Anglo-French co-operation through the prism of two very different female royal principals. As I had organised the State Visit and was still on the books, it was agreed that I should take on this visit too - with the great Embassy team which had also worked on the State Visit.

Diana's first overseas visit alone certainly did succeed in creating huge public and media interest - probably much more than we anticipated. As planning progressed we realised that this media interest was not just bilateral but that this was creating an international media stir with the prospect of a really massive press corps at all events. At first, not surprisingly, the French were a little sceptical that something that was not a state visit would require so much organisation in terms of crowd control, cortège protection and high level facilitation. But after careful negotiation and patently growing press interest, they shifted gear and provided excellent assistance. Even then, I don't think any of us had expected the numbers that would be out on the streets or present at the different venues or anticipated the non-stop press coverage. The visit took place in Paris and Lille, because Lille was holding its biennial arts festival. Sir Paul McCartney was their lead guest, so it seemed a neat fit if Diana would go to the festival, and also visit Lille which was led at the time by a pioneering mayor who was introducing lots of new social programmes, so it was very appropriate that she should go there. I recall an amazing finale with Paul and Linda McCartney and Princess Diana at this big gala concert, in Lille, a fabulously glamorous way of finishing the visit which had otherwise been very workmanlike and focussed on social causes.

There was a memorable moment during the visit when Diana had said that she would very much like to meet organisations handling HIV patients and care for children with terminal cancer. We arranged for her to visit a noted hospice for terminally ill children where the families and children could spend their last periods of time together. When we went for the recce to the hospice, we discovered there was a particular child aged 12 at the hospice who was in great distress and wouldn't see her mother. For some reason, she didn't

want to see her family and this was causing great stress and grief. The home had asked whether this would make a royal visit awkward or impossible but we agreed that if necessary, Diana would just visit some other families instead. When Diana came, however, she went directly to see this child by herself and after some time, the child agreed that her mother should join them. This was a highly emotional moment for everyone present. Diana herself was very calm and just radiated warmth and compassion. I have no idea what the aftermath was of that visit but it was quite something to witness. She had an extraordinary impact upon all the people she met.

That was a visit that I had not expected to manage so I didn't do too much of my European Union co-ordination role. I finished the contract by the end of that year and in 1993 we returned to London.

Deputy Head, Western European Dept, FCO, 1993–95

CM: As soon as you got back to London you re-entered the Foreign Office as Deputy Head of West European Department, still as a First Secretary.

JM: I got a slight promotion. I had become a 5S, as it was called in the day, which meant that it was a senior First Secretary.

CM: In terms of your progress through the system, as opposed to having an interesting job and making the best of wherever you were, you were a little bit stalled but not significantly held back?

JM: I think that's right. It was certainly very welcome to get the 5S recognition, not least as I had effectively taken a seven year gap. It was an important moment for me to register again who I was. Again, fortune smiled, because taking on a job working on France and Germany meant that I was very much in the forefront of thinking about relations with our two most important European partners.

CM: A clever appointment for someone who has just been working in France and is completely up to date with what is going on there.

JM: Yes, very up to date on the French situation. Not so up to date or briefed on Germany but the German side of my work predominated at first, including with a big visit by Chancellor Kohl which helped me get up to speed fast! I was working part-time. Part-time meant working every day until lunch time. One thirty was my cut-off time and my Head of Department was a new colleague to me called Marcus Hope.

CM: And he coped with having a Deputy like this? One can imagine that all these things are new for everybody.

JM: Very much so. I owe him a debt of gratitude. I had a very good record but I hadn't done it in a very orthodox way. It's not like now. We didn't have mobile phones – and we certainly didn't have smart phones - so we couldn't keep in contact, so I couldn't look at drafts on my Blackberry at home and just say, 'That's fine by me. Please proceed.' If you weren't physically in the Office, you were not around. I didn't take any calls from Marcus in the evening. You were either working in the Office, or you weren't. The part-time work which was a first - no one had done that before at Deputy Head of Department level – was a bit of a trial. As I commented earlier, I worked part-time for about a year. Then I felt I couldn't handle it any longer, because the working style of the Office was geared above all to getting advice to ministers and out to posts towards the end of the day, so post two o'clock was action time, and I had to leave at two o'clock. Unless therefore I was given a draft that didn't need to progress for another day, the timing was a considerable irritant for all of us. And I could not change my hours because of my children's school hours. Despite all this, I remember Marcus gave me an incredible first year report, with gold stars all round, because he said he couldn't understand how it was that somebody who had been out for seven years and was working part-time could achieve such a level of output and excellence. I was pleased with that, obviously, because I felt I was paving the way successfully for others.

It was interesting work, but it was frustrating too, because decisions affecting our policy towards France and Germany were increasingly tied up with our European policy - handled by other departments and we found ourselves effectively rather side-lined. I remember recommending to the Political Director that our department should just be folded into the European Union Departments, which happened after I left. So for professional and personal reasons I was very pleased to finish my work in London and with four children under ten,

take SUPL and accompany John on his posting as Trade Director and Consul General in Düsseldorf.

CM: The Düsseldorf job which John took as Head of Mission in 1995: was the decision to take it because John felt that this was absolutely a job he wanted to do or was it a joint decision that you had four children; it was very stressful working in London; you needed to get out and Düsseldorf came up?

JM: A mixture of the two. He was looking to go overseas and was attracted to working in Germany and with the then Ambassador, Nigel Broomfield. He could also see how demanding the family situation was just then. I felt very strongly that for the coherence of the family, the children being so young, I needed to be able to give them much more time and career-wise I could just set the SUPL time clock yet again ... But I was beginning to wonder how viable this was all going to be going forwards, if I needed to work these very long hours in the Foreign Office and ensure enough time for our four children. Perhaps I should consider doing something else, but for the present we could just concentrate on Düsseldorf and making that work professionally and for the family. In the event we stayed three years in Düsseldorf from '95-'98, and that was where I did my diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. I didn't want to formally resign from the FCO but I was beginning to think maybe my life lay elsewhere. So I applied for a teaching post in a nearby German town where there were large numbers of migrant women who were interested to learn English. However just before I signed on, the decision was taken out of our hands, because John was appointed to be Ambassador to Warsaw, and because of our East European shared experience we were thrilled to bits at the prospect. An amazing job, an amazing time. Poland had just joined NATO and everybody was moving towards change in Eastern Europe. Who could resist? In Warsaw there was a very big Residence and a much bigger staff operation. I was clear that he and the family would need my support - so my teaching ambitions were effectively shelved.

Residence Manager, Warsaw, 1998-2000

CM: You took on the role of Residence Manager. This really hasn't come up in my oral histories up to now; it isn't something that most men are concerned about. Somebody else looks after that stuff. Would you like to talk a little bit about the role of Residence

Managers? This is to do with the evolving role of the spouse, the professionalising of the residence.

JM: The decision to fund people to run Residences throughout the world came about really because of what one might term: the crisis of the spouse. Essentially and especially in Europe by the end of the '90s there were a growing number of mostly male officers taking up senior posts overseas unaccompanied: to allow their spouses to pursue job or family duties back in the UK. In parallel or as a cause, staff generally began to entertain much less at home than previously: either using restaurants or using the Residence as the main focal point for official receptions and meals. So at a time when Residences were being used more extensively than ever, there was also a shortage of women (mostly) able or willing to run them. Thus was the Residence Manager post conceived - separate from either the Social Secretary or the Community Liaison Officer, jobs also often held by Diplomatic wives. The Residence Manager slot also coincided with attempts to introduce greater efficiency and accountability in the running of Residence facilities and finances. And Residences were generally very large houses, with extensive grounds and sizeable staffs. All of this was very true of Warsaw, with an unusual and unwieldy building and a large and diverse staff.

It was also a very busy Residence. Poland being the newest member of NATO and a country which people in Britain had a special affinity for, we had loads of Ministerial visitors, lots of Parliamentary delegations, trade delegations, and many others. It was the time of the maximum input of the DFID Know How Programme, so there were endless sectoral expert visits as well. The Residence was really busy and it needed really hands on management. I knew I would be doing most of this anyway so why not apply for the job of Residence Manager and get paid (a little)? At the same time I was responsible for managing John's *frais*. In those days heads of mission had a separate system for accounting for all their expenses, separate from the main Embassy account. It wasn't possible to do this on a computer when I was in Warsaw. And it was complex sorting out domestic consumption of food and drink from staff or official entertaining. It boiled down to prosaic questions of how much of the milk purchased had been consumed by the family or used at the official meals? Not always an exact science but an attempt had to be made and recorded as we were spending public money. It was very, very time consuming even when we began to organise separate fridges and store cupboards to ease the calculations...

CM: As well as doing the accounts and organising the entertainment, were you also jumping in the car and rushing down to the market to buy the flowers as well as arranging them?

JM: Absolutely. I was an Events Manager and spent much time working on the choreography of each event (with Embassy Staff) and then organising the Residence Staff to deliver as specified. I would draw up event plans for everything with specific timetables and written instructions on where to serve drinks, how long to leave waiting between courses (especially if it was a lunch/discussion) and many other things. It sounds absurd, but the staff really liked it. They loved having a plan and they found it useful to be told that somebody must remain inside the room to be able to be visible to the host or hostess, in case they needed them, because the bells to summon staff were cumbersome or didn't work properly. They wanted the event to work and not feel that they performed badly. Little things can be so important: if someone is trying to have a conversation and the waiters keep coming in and offering more wine or bread, it can interrupt the flow at what could be an important juncture. I am sometimes asked by the Foreign Office to go back to talk about the management of Residences and I find the new ambassadors, are asking precisely things like, 'How did you handle entertaining? Did you ever use round tables?' And you think, Goodness me, surely somewhere somebody is passing on the good knowledge that we have acquired. Tips like the host and hostess moving on one place between courses so if you have a big delegation, you can meet everybody. But I don't think so. There are sensible tips to be learnt about the kind of food, the style of food, the style of event, the seating, the *placement*, the time you allow for this and for that. But at one stage this sort of etiquette was seen as very old fashioned. In fact it is just good tradecraft for entertaining which, if done well, can be valuable for important policy objectives and not just pleasure. I think I showed through this work what value spouses can bring to the work of their partners - especially if they are the partner of the Head of Mission.

Counsellor and Head, Security Strategy, FCO, 2001-03

CM: You certainly weren't idle during your time in Warsaw. And Poland is such an interesting and important country, it must have been a very fascinating posting. You came back to London with John at the beginning of 2001, and you went back straight into the Office in full-time employment. This is the point, after sixteen or seventeen years, you

returned to the Office for good. You went in as Head of Security Strategy Unit and what was your rank?

JM: I was promoted Counsellor and felt lucky because when I had left my post in West European Department I had done so well that I was given what was called a ticket to promotion, which meant that my next post would automatically be as a Counsellor. But during the time I was away in Düsseldorf and then in Warsaw, the Office introduced Assessment Development Centres and people did not progress from First Secretary into the senior management cadre without going through an Assessment Development Centre. I was a little nervous that I might have to do an Assessment Development Centre, because having been out of the Office for seventeen years, effectively, with a number of odd jobs in between, I felt that this would be quite a barrier to me being able to getting a Counsellor job. But Personnel said, 'No, you've got a ticket to promotion that pre-dates the Assessment Development Centres' and they honoured it, which was really helpful. But then disappointment followed because I waltzed in and said, 'Well, I've been living in Europe for the last six years, I'd very much like to do a job involving Europe' and was told very firmly that with my rather patchy career record, with no substantive European policy experience, it would be impossible to take up a senior post in one of the prestigious European departments.

Instead I was offered either a post liaising with the security services or heading up our extensive protective security work inside the FCO. The latter was considered something of a Cinderella job, but I recalled from my work as head of recruitment some twenty years earlier that this area had in fact involved some extremely interesting policy work as well as offering extensive management opportunity. I thought this would draw well on my experience overseas behind the Iron Curtain and in the new post-Cold War Europe. It was then put to me that this job was not considered a fast route to further promotion, but I decided to go ahead with it notwithstanding. It was the wisest decision I ever made. I took over the job just as our security certainties were beginning to crumble. 9/11 came pretty fast – a year after I had started in the job. Even before that we were dealing with Al Qaeda attacks on our embassies overseas; they just weren't hitting the headlines. We were also coping with a resurgence of espionage, not just from some parts of the former Soviet bloc but also from countries in Asia and world-wide whose goal was commercial, technical and data capture as well as defence and intelligence. It was a time when we were undergoing a huge reorganisation of our management information systems. We were introducing a

new complex Oracle base for the management information of all parts of our organisation and a new IT system for the general transmission and accessibility of our political, consular, commercial and intelligence work.

Above all, we were having to learn that while we opened up our systems, we still needed to protect ourselves from espionage, terrorism and crime even though the Cold War was over. It was an absolute mammoth of a challenge and it was fantastic to be in charge. I was in charge of everybody I needed. I was also responsible for the work of our security teams around the world, plans for the built security as well as personal security and increasing the extra investment we were putting into technical and IT security: measures and training. For me personally it was such a big break, because I was at all the important meetings on anything going on inside the Foreign Office and I would be sending off telegrams world-wide on a regular, weekly, if not more often, basis, signed off with my name. So if colleagues inside the FCO or Whitehall didn't know my name or had forgotten that I existed, I was suddenly back in business, big-time. Not only that, they needed to get my agreement to what they wanted to do. It was a world in which women were rather under represented: so my visibility was unusual and helpful in breaking down the myth that women were not able or willing to work in these areas.

I was present and very active on the day of the 9/11 attacks. That morning I was attending a meeting at which I was due to deliver a strategy update on our security policy. It was a large meeting in an even larger FCO meeting room looking mostly at estate issues. Suddenly the door opened and a quite junior member of my staff beckoned me over to the far door. He told me about the explosion at the World Trade Centre in New York and we agreed my team should monitor and report further developments. Ten minutes later a more senior member of the team appeared with the further news of the other attacks. Again I took note but briefed the Chair, who was actually the FCO Chief Clerk, on what was happening. A further ten minutes passed when my deputy entered with the news of the Pentagon attack and evacuation of the White House. At this point the meeting abruptly adjourned in a state of complete shock but also some considerable confusion as it was unclear whether these were isolated or connected attacks, whether they were contained to the US or whether some would also occur in the UK. It was live on television but at that stage totally incalculable. I gathered with my team and we began the urgent task of trying to understand what was happening, to ensure Ministers and senior officials were briefed and trying to decide what action if any we should be taking to alert FCO staff and missions overseas and what advice to give to British

nationals abroad.

CM: Were you making assessments of who might have done it?

JM: Yes, just after the Estates meeting had broken up, COBR had not yet been scrambled, but it was very shortly to happen, and we were simply trying to muster data, draw out emergency plans and gather information to get urgent bulletins up to ministers, essentially, to try and decide what we needed to tell our posts overseas about this, who were watching on their TV screens and wondering what on earth London was going to be doing about it. We were obviously concerned about the safety and security of British citizens - critically who might be in the World Trade Centre and the implications of that - so many meetings were being scrambled and later in the day the Whitehall machinery kicked in and COBR was set up with the Foreign Office at the beginning leading on the briefing to Ministers as Cabinet Office machinery clicked into place. That wasn't technically my side of the house, it was the counter-terrorism side, because by that point it had become clear that it was a terrorist attack.

I remember that Kevin Bloomfield the head of our Counter Terrorism Department and I met with the Secretary of State, Jack Straw, later in the day to clear a telegram of instructions to our posts worldwide. This was our first authoritative communication to the network. The Foreign Secretary suggested in view of the enormity of the attack that we should put all posts on the highest security alert ie Red Alert. Kevin and I pointed out that this level of alert was geared to address a direct and immediate threat on a particular post. If we activated this, it would mean many posts would then have to evacuate their buildings, destroy their communications machinery and prepare to send staff home. This was clearly not right but equally we had no way of knowing that our missions were not at risk. So we rewrote our telegram to instruct posts to mobilise themselves to the fullest extent short of irrevocable actions and to keep alert. The first of many such instructions that I sent out in subsequent days and weeks. It was a reflection of the fact that - rather like with martial law in Poland all those years before - we hadn't got in place a plan for this particular happening which posed a real threat to us but did not give us any clarity on where or how our interests could be affected. And indeed that was becoming the security challenge par excellence: an attack was possible on any of our systems but it could happen in Canberra or Karachi. We had to devise going forwards a more flexible response which kept up awareness but avoided inappropriate

blanket responses. I felt that day that the world had become a very small place and a dangerous if such a big and co-ordinated attack should take place inside the United States, which had no recent history of having its buildings targeted in this way.

We continued to meet in our own COBR arrangements which were chaired by Stephen Wright at the time, I remember. These fed in to the Whitehall COBRAs. It was the beginning of such a major re-think on security. I can recall sitting round a big Whitehall meeting, probably about a week or so after the event, when we were overhauling the situation and looking at all aspects of UK security that could be affected and somebody asking about the security of very small ports or indeed the protection of our reservoirs. Relevant departments pointed out to the Cabinet Secretary that we did not actually have a centrally held list of all of these facilities let alone a statement of their security provision. It was perhaps the first serious time that the notion of ensuring our critical infrastructure should be better identified and addressed, if a small group of people could wreak such havoc in a friendly allied country. But what could we credibly or realistically do while maintaining a free and democratically run country? The 9/11 attacks did lead to further significant change in FCO security policy. We had anticipated it; we had begun to implement security changes before September 2001 but 9/11 gave me all the money I could wish for to actually implement them, which was very welcome. Further change and refinement of our policies followed. The Bali attack launched a big debate on what information we should pass to British tourists and residents overseas when we had intelligence of the possibility of a terrorist attack in a particular country. After this it became obligatory for us to make such risks public even though of course our knowledge was often scanty and there were difficult judgements to be made and serious implications for the host country if their tourism and trade were adversely affected by these warnings. Equally it was my responsibility to ensure that our posts took our security advice seriously and implemented the actions requested. My team expanded exponentially to handle all this and there were worrying moments but equally huge satisfaction at the way our network responded.

FCO Chair, Civil Service Selection Board, 2003–04

CM: You did that job for two years and then you moved to be the Chair of the Civil Service Selection Board (CSSB).

JM: I wouldn't necessarily have left Security Strategy Unit which was very busy

still. During my time there we also had the period when India and Pakistan were particularly at odds with each other with a real threat that they might let off limited nuclear weapons. That involved huge amounts of work with all the posts in the sub-continent and beyond. Then, of course, was the imminent prospect of the war in Iraq and the security consequences for the world-wide estate of that. But in family terms, it was time for John to go abroad again if he was going to do a further head of mission job, which he very much wanted to do. As we still had a retirement age then of 60, we realised we needed to move quite quickly and Personnel offered to look flexibly at what might be available that could work for us both. I was happy after such a full on job to return to unpaid leave for a while and for us to focus on John's posting as Ambassador to Austria. As it happened, I realised that I could work remotely and do the CISSB work, because the boards were only every so often; Vienna was not very far from London. I could do all the preparation remotely and then attend in person for the three or four boards that I was going to do, as the Chair of the Board. People tend to think of that as being soft work, but it's tough work, selecting people. John took up his post as Ambassador to Austria in 2003.

Ambassador to Slovakia, 2004–07

CM: You went to Vienna with him, but were doing all the CISSB work from Vienna and that went on for about a year. You did about four boards. At what stage did the idea of Bratislava come about?

JM: I don't want to make it sound as if I was just floating along looking at the ground and not thinking ahead. I didn't have a game plan as such but I felt confident after two very successful years as Head of Security that something worthwhile would come along. I was also quite enjoying my CISSB work and I was interested to see where that might extend to. Another potential job offer outside the mission had come up in Vienna to do with sustainable development, because Vienna has a lot of UN appointments. I thought I'd work happily in one of these organisations in Vienna. I was beginning to put out some feelers, when the phone rang and the Head of HR said, 'You know the Head of Mission in Bratislava is coming up fairly soon and it is something you are immensely qualified for and it would allow you to work in parallel with John and it's not very far from Vienna. Are you up for it?'

CM: What's the distance?

JM: It's now about an hour by motorway, if that. Seventy kilometres, I believe and around two hours away then. I said, 'Yes, I'm absolutely up for it. How exciting! But I'll need to learn Slovak.' And he said, 'Yes, absolutely, you'll need to learn Slovak. But that shouldn't be so difficult. After all, you speak Polish, Czech and Serbo-Croat.' I was appointed very quickly and the formalities were handled quickly too until we came to the language training. I was determined to do this in Vienna which was after all very close to Slovakia, with many Slovaks living in Vienna and no shortage of language opportunities. But this was unorthodox and irregular by FCO standards. So we battled it out and common sense eventually prevailed. But it took time and ate into my preparation period.

CM: Did you find that there was cross-contamination, if one can put it that way, from your other Slavic languages? Polish and Slovak are relatively close, are they not? Sometimes it's a help and sometimes a hindrance.

JM: I have some facility for speaking foreign languages, learning them very fast and speaking them more or less accurately, but then forgetting them equally quickly! I needed to learn to speak Slovak to a higher degree of accuracy and range than I did either Czech or Polish. So I found really the Slav background more of a help than a hindrance. I had a wonderful teacher, Olga, a Slovak lady who was living in Vienna with her husband who was Polish. She was exacting but patient and she very much entered into the spirit of the enterprise: to teach me well such a difficult language in so short a time. So for example, when I went to present my credentials, she very obligingly came across from Vienna and we went in the car together and she coached me through my speech and particularly on pronunciation, but also on the sorts of questions I thought I might ask the President. I literally learned it as we made this forty-five minute journey. We got out of the car and she was in the entourage. I would never have done that at any other stage. But it really paid off, because obviously I appeared professional and competent in the language. I insisted that she continue to teach me and I used her like a personal speech writer. It was very, very helpful to my wider work and impact - and paid dividends in the contacts that I was able to make. The Embassy was not entirely at that stage really geared to an ambassador who was going to be making so many public appearances and all in the vernacular. But that had really become an essential part of any Ambassadorial post worldwide.

CM: I must say, Judith, to have done that in six months is absolutely amazing. I think we might stop here which means when we have our next session we shall do your three ambassadorial posts.

Today is the 2nd March 2020 and this is the third interview with Dame Judith Macgregor for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

CM: Judith, we finished our last session when you'd just arrived in Slovakia in 2004 as Ambassador, while your husband was Ambassador in Vienna, just up the road. We have the two of you in neighbouring countries, about 70 kilometres apart. Shall we start by talking about how you managed your domestic life and then we can talk about being Ambassador to Slovakia.

JM: I think perhaps it's worth saying that I took on this position as Ambassador in Bratislava because it was a full ambassadorship, which was wonderful granted that I had only returned to full time work four years before. Secondly, because the children were all at a stage where it was feasible for both John and I to be overseas, working full-time and able to see the children during the holidays. So we felt that we could, with a little bit of luck and organisation, manage the family mechanics and at the same time maintain a marriage, because we would be only seventy kilometres distant and it was a very short journey. Now it is a 60 minute journey by modern motorway and even then it was only a couple of hours up the road.

It also coincided with a time when the Foreign Office was beginning to move from a strictly bi-lateral approach to work in its missions to a much more regional approach. For example, Bratislava had been a visa hub for the region and we were linked into the trade people in Vienna and subsequently the U.K. trade offices were combined. I hosted, briefly, the Defence hub for the region, including Hungary and Austria, so it meant that we were able, in some ways, to bring some synthesis to the work that was going on in the region between the older members of the European Union, such as Austria, and this new kid on the block, Slovakia. I think we managed to make a virtue of it professionally - attending each other's events or organising joint team meetings - as well as it being a huge boon for us

personally. At the beginning we would quite often try to be in touch mid-week. But after a little while we settled into a much more Monday to Friday routine. Then it was a question of where we would spend the weekend, and, blissfully, it was so close that often we would spend the morning in Bratislava at the lovely markets, go to Vienna in the afternoon, try to visit the opera in the evening, or, conversely, go to the Slovak opera, which was excellent, in Bratislava.

It was a very happy period for us professionally. And it was generally an upbeat period, as Slovakia had just joined the European Union and was really celebrating fully for the first time its independence from the Czech Republic and its recognition internationally. The Slovaks were very keen to make up for lost time in terms of institution building, very interested to work closely with the United Kingdom, which was seen as a supporter of the accession of the countries of Eastern Europe to the European Union, and, of course, a country to which many of its citizens chose to travel to work. At a later stage the migration of so many young people from the European Union countries to Britain, which opened its markets early, became a more controversial issue, but, at the time that I was in Slovakia, it was a very positive feature of the relationship between our countries.

CM: In your notes, you mention the focus on the EU and on the NATO agenda. Slovakia had already joined NATO?

JM: It joined at the same time as joining the EU. Poland had joined much earlier, but Slovakia joined, pretty much at the same time as joining the EU. There were some close military training relationships ongoing between the UK and Slovakia and the latter were keen and interested to help further the Partnership for Peace Programme. We were engaged with Slovakia on a wide range of international issues at the time, but predominantly it was the European Union agenda, that featured most strongly. We were still engaged in concluding remaining Know How Programmes - especially on judicial reform, social services and employment programmes. I can remember Justice and Employment Ministers coming out quite often to Slovakia to talk to the judiciary there and to ministers who were quite keen to advance relationships and adopt U.K. practice.

There was also a lot of work to do to promote our trading relationships. A lot of bilateral trade with Czechoslovakia in the past had been with the Czech Republic, while Slovakia had

been predominantly a big agricultural producer and also, in its time, the place where the significant Czechoslovak munitions industry had been based. When President Havel came in, he closed down the munitions industry - with tough economic consequences for Slovakia. But Slovakia had worked, even in the period leading up to European Union membership, at rebuilding its iron and steel capacity and strengthening a strong automotive capability. In 2004 they were the place to go to for new, technology-rich, state of the art plants. And this investment helped protect their car industry through and after the 2008 crash.

CM: Working with the Slovak government on EU questions, were there areas where our interests were aligned?

JM: I think they were very disposed to listen to our arguments, absolutely. A major priority for Slovakia was that the labour markets of the EU should be open; they wanted to be able to have the access for their citizens to study, travel, and work across the EU. But several countries, such as France and Germany, had taken the decision not to open their markets immediately to the new members - beyond some existing agreements. We decided that we would open our markets very quickly and this was welcomed politically. The Slovaks, were also disposed to support British agendas in trying e.g. to keep the European budget to more manageable proportions. 2005 was the year of the UK Presidency and the renegotiation of the EU budget which was a big opportunity for us to take forward UK initiatives, and we found the Slovaks were very like-minded on a number of things and keen as a young state to expand their engagement on international matters - including developing the skills and competence of their foreign service. They were interested in cooperation with our universities; they were interested in cooperation in technology and trade, but they were also interested in supporting us in European Union initiatives.

It was a time of real opportunity. My task as UK Ambassador if you like, was twofold. It was not only to encourage the Slovak government and Slovak people more widely to be interested to work with us – obviously all the older EU member states were seeking to develop new friends and new partnerships. It was also to explain to government and people in the UK that this was a new and potentially good partner for us. The level of knowledge of Eastern Europe was not then so high. I think I titled my First Impressions telegram after my first hundred days in Bratislava: ‘Slovakia, which one is that?’ Because there were at that

time lots of new states, new names, and the names sounded unfamiliar. I saw it as part of my job to put Slovakia on the UK map, so that they understood that this was a country where there was a well-educated, very anglophile and increasingly Anglophone state wanting to do business with us. In a busy, complex situation, even as we enlarged the European Union, we were seeing that new countries, the emerging powers as they were called, were becoming more prominent politically and economically. It was important to develop and consolidate relations with the new EU members and help them to integrate and derive benefit from their EU membership as quickly as possible.

The Slovak Government was also keen to work with us on security. Slovakia traditionally - and as the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia – had been the part of the country that supplied the rank and file soldiers and likewise the senior personnel of the armed forces had very often come from Slovakia. The main military bases of the former Czechoslovak Army were in the East. The new Slovak Army was very interested, big time, in modernising their armed forces, to take advantage of the expertise and understanding of armies such as the British Army. They wanted to learn about new military techniques and how these were developing, so we had a programme, a JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) programme in Slovakia, where a number of British forces were there for training and exercise purposes - with Slovakia and other PfP countries- and that was something that was very highly prized by the Slovak army.

Then, as time went on, Slovakia, which has beautiful cities - Bratislava is one of them - became a great centre for British tourism. One of our challenges was handling high numbers of people who would arrive at the weekend for stag parties. After a little, our consular team became increasingly concerned that their weekends were being disturbed by the police ringing up to say that they had a number of high-spirited and well-wined British people in custody for offences against public order. These were generally let off with a fine but it was becoming quite an irritant in a small country like Slovakia. We felt strongly that we couldn't just allow this to spoil our otherwise very positive bilateral work - and there was a risk that through ignorance a British citizen could find themselves facing quite a severe jail sentence. So we decided to form a coalition of all the parties involved - airlines, tour agencies, town councils, police, local media and the foreign ministry. We asked everyone to consider what they could do to prevent this abuse. It was timely - there had just been one group of young lads who ran around the town just wearing towels, saying that they were

wearing nappies and bathing in the fountains and this had gone down extremely badly. We encouraged the airlines and the tourist agencies to explain to their customers about the difference in cultures and to say what was absolutely not on - with the threat of not taking misbehaving customers on board. We did a lot of media to say that as the British Embassy we were concerned about the problem. The hotels explained to people about the licensing laws and when they could drink and when they couldn't drink. The Police set up contact points making our access to detained British citizens much faster and smoother. I wouldn't say that it was all magically solved and we had no more people being arrested for making mayhem, but by putting the information out and talking about it, we did to some extent, contain the problem. That took up quite a bit of my time both on screen and in discussion. But it ended well showing that in a small country and with good will, issues could be addressed and resolved.

CM: This was your first Embassy. What did it feel like being in charge, being the front person? Did you enjoy that?

JM: Well, I was always a bit of an oddball, just by having been a woman, having taken time off from work and with an unusual work record. So I was a little concerned that I wouldn't understand properly how a post overseas operated and that I would have to work very hard to earn the respect of my team. But I was very lucky. I had an excellent deputy, who was in fact two people: Carolyn Davidson and Tom Carter, who were married officers who had applied to share the deputy head of mission role. Carolyn would do it for three months; and Tom would do it for three months; they would split it like that. This was quite innovative and I was asked if I would be happy to accept the arrangement. I thought it sounded wonderful! I saw no lack of understanding between us. I was also sharing: working in the same region with my husband and they were sharing a job, so we would probably be on the same wave length. And indeed, it was a brilliant arrangement. Carolyn and Tom then went on to become joint High Commissioners in Zambia and then joint Ambassadors in Guatemala. This was not straightforward as they had to get the permission of the home state and handle issues of diplomatic immunity. But they succeeded and undoubtedly have set a precedent.

Carolyn and Tom were an immense plus for a new Head of Mission. I got the energy of each of the two spouses coming back from their period of looking after the children and

raring to get back to the office. They had complementary personalities, quite different, so it meant that the Embassy had the benefit of these two different stimuli coming in every few months but not at odds with each other, or discordant. Because they were a married couple they were each in touch with what the other was doing so that it wouldn't be confusing for the staff when the alternate appeared. They had done precisely what I had not done, which is they had worked in different sections of embassies overseas in their career and so they were able, if there had been any gap in my thinking, to explain to me how things worked.

I do recall, nevertheless, on my first or second day, meeting a group of staff – it was quite a small mission, we were about fifteen staff, UK-based, and perhaps another 15 or local staff. I can remember a team coming to see me with a problem and I think I said “Why are you asking me? I've just been here forty-eight hours and you've been working here for two years and understand these issues extremely well. What's your recommendation?” They said, very nicely, ‘But you're the Ambassador and you're the one who will make the decision.’ I realised that it was, indeed, my role to make the decision; it was not my job to throw it back at the team and say, ‘Look, I don't know much about this. You tell me.’ That was a moment of learning that, even though I did not know all the facts or the circumstances as well as the people who were bringing the problem to me, it was my job, nevertheless to elicit what I needed and take the lead, suggest the course of action and make a decision about when we were going to it and how we were going to do it. That was my job: to lead and deliver.

I had a very good team. Although the UK has always offered a comparatively modest salary to local teams, compared to many other diplomatic missions, we have generally attracted bright and able local staff: interested to get the experience and to train with us. Just at that juncture, with the excitement and energy of EU accession and the good image of the UK we were able to recruit many really creative young, educated Slovaks, speaking excellent English. There was a lot of energy and a lot of enthusiasm. Our agenda ranged across European issues, migration, human rights, climate change, public relations and many people facing issues. It was busy and satisfying and we felt we were achieving a lot for a small mission with visits by both the Prime Minister and the Queen.

Director for Migration, FCO, 2007–09

CM: Did your return to London coincide with John's return to London or did you stay longer?

JM: No, in fact I went ahead. Something came up that I very much wanted to do. I was very happy in Slovakia but conscious that I needed to make up for time out of my career. There were lots of initiatives, lots of change and because we were being innovative we were being asked to do more! But I felt I had shown I could run a post successfully and maintain a stable family life. I now wanted to take on more. So when I was asked by London if I would be interested to take on the post of Director for Migration, I accepted with alacrity. This was a reasonably new post created to manage migration worldwide and in particular the specific issues of illegal migration for the UK. It was a post (unusually) financed by the Home Office and working jointly to FCO and Home Office Ministers. A big advantage was that it would bring me home to be with the children but John needed to continue and finish his posting in Vienna.

CM: Director Migration - from that moment it's never ceased to be a hot topic in Britain and elsewhere. What exactly was your job?

JM: Well, the particular task which the Home Office wanted the Foreign Office to assist them to do was to negotiate with foreign states for the return of their illegal migrants. The issue of illegal migration was really rising up the political agenda and involved migrants from India, Pakistan, China, Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana - from all continents of the world. There was increased concern that our visa system should be more robust to keep out undesirable people, but at the same time foster the passage of those we wished to come to the UK for work, study, travel purposes or as tourists and to ensure, against all those pressures of illegal migration, that we were able to maintain an open but effective system. There was also an increasing number of foreign national prisoners in the UK alongside increased pressures of capacity in our prisons. The Government wanted to encourage foreign states to take back their foreign national prisoners, so they did not have to spend their sentences in British jails. This, particularly with countries like Jamaica and Nigeria, was reaching very high numbers. But often because the prisons in the countries from where the migrants

had originally come from were not up to the required international standards, the courts would not agree to the return of these prisoners.

So my brief was to find solutions and to lead some rather unusual negotiations. It was a creative job with a great team of people, including from the Home Office and DfID who were attracted to the issues. I travelled the globe, going out and talking to different governments, effectively, to say what does it take to help to improve your prisons? To help improve other things in your economic structures that will prevent this emigration of talent and skills from leaving your country and facilitate the return of people who had been in the UK for a longer or shorter period? Obviously, funds were involved; resources were involved. Within about six months of coming back, I lobbied for and secured a 40 million pound fund, provided by DFID, to do precisely this. Working with posts overseas, we secured agreements with countries to building prisons and other job providing facilities in countries like Nigeria and Jamaica, that were designed to UK specifications and under UK arrangements, so that prisoners in the UK could be returned safely to them.

CM: How many countries did you get off the black list and onto a list of returnable places that you could send prisoners to?

JM: There were a number of countries of particular interest at that time: Nigeria and Jamaica - with Ghana to some extent, and also Somalia. But illegal migrants - as well as foreign national prisoners came from a range of countries. So we established a new network of Migration Delivery Officers who were recruited from the FCO and the Home Office and who were posted in some twenty countries, world-wide, and their role was to assist locally with returns flights which worked increasingly well as time went on. With some countries like China, our task was to devise a new migration agreement which would facilitate returns but also establish new visa arrangements between our countries. Establishing identity was critical. Migrants who didn't wish to return would destroy their documents and refuse to provide accurate addresses. If they had no evidence on them that they were Chinese, the Chinese government would not accept them back as their citizens, and this is true of all governments around the world and the UK would do the same. If the unfortunate human being caught in this position was not willing to acknowledge their national roots, it was very hard to prove that they were of that citizenship. The UK was then left with the responsibility of providing for people who were essentially economic migrants at a time

when there was considerable unrest and discomfort over what was considered to be the increasing extent of migration.

With China my task was to negotiate a treaty. This had been attempted for several years without success. I went to China three times and, on the third attempt, and with the help of our excellent Embassy in Beijing, I managed to broker an agreement helped by the imminent introduction of biometric visas - on which the Chinese Government were interested to secure some concessions. I do regard that as a real triumph, because it was tough. I think, with very good and very close Home Office colleagues, we were able to keep the energy, to keep the focus and drive a hard bargain and both sides came out quite satisfied.

CM: Did the Chinese government assure you that the Chinese individual being returned would not be punished for having run away? And they had to admit they were Chinese? You couldn't do this with someone who refused to say that he was a Chinese national?

JM: Establishing identity was key to securing a return. Allied to this was a programme of incentives to assist people returning to build up their lives and secure employment, with such programmes often being administered by the International Organisation for Migration to oversee and ensure the proper treatment of the people being returned. Our policy was multi-faceted. On the one hand we devised new incentives, new returns procedures, new investment in work for economic migrants. On the other, we sought to ensure that people who had a genuine reason to seek asylum were protected. Increasingly there was the risk of the genuine asylum seekers being confused or submerged in the welter of economic migrants. Surrounding all this was the domestic political heat being generated by migration. Charles Clarke, a previous Home Secretary, was forced to resign when it was discovered that the Home Office had no accurate idea of the number of people they had detained, because records and systems had been overwhelmed by the numbers. A new Border Agency had been created under the excellent and resilient leadership of Lin Homer. The aim was to try to inject new energy into a system, a programme, a mechanism which, while not successful in every case, would protect people who really needed to seek asylum, who were asylum-seekers, genuine ones, and distinguish them from people who were not seeking asylum from fear of repression or political difficulty, but who wanted to remain in the country for economic reasons.

All of this added up to a pretty big programme; it was huge. My team grew enormously and it was one of the most satisfying aspects of my work that two thirds of my team were Home Office staff plus a further team which was staffed by DFID, who were handling the fund, and then a smaller part who were Foreign Office staff working on EU related migration policy. There was a third area which was dealing with UN migration policy, with the refugees and the UN Commissioner for Refugees, so I had to go abroad quite often to attend international conferences to explain and at times defend criticism that UK returns policy was to the detriment of the human rights of the migrants involved. I think that by being visible and explaining in detail what we were doing, we actually got a lot of understanding. I think most people were coming to the recognition that there were more migrants travelling throughout the world than there had ever been before, and the big worry was the increased trafficking and the organised crime angle of it. The situation for illegal migrants in 2007-9 was perhaps less exploitative than it has subsequently become, with people being sent off in a tiny vessels to float and drown on their way to Europe. But it was always a difficult and dangerous journey, and the problem was growing. Hence the urgency to compel employers to properly employ people and not to bring them in illegally and to exploit them for rubbish wages or in effective slavery and at the same time to ensure with countries that we could return people to the countries from whence they had come. Our job was classic diplomacy. It was to find areas of mutual benefit, to work with those to try to get some kind of system that would ease the political pressures that were building up and actually safeguard, to some extent, the migrants. It was not an easy job and some of the people who were returned had lived a long time in the UK, because these things took a long time to come to fruition. We were able to get more people returned; we were able to get foreign-national prisoners returned, but there were many people who continued to offend, so the prisons didn't just empty out. It was the only job I had with the Foreign Office when I would be listening to the Today Programme at 6am, hearing something and thinking, 'Oh, my goodness, it's going to be a big issue for us today. I must get into work; I must talk to x; I must do y,' a foreign policy issue that was very, very domestically rooted.

CM: Why was it that when asylum-seekers and indeed economic migrants landed in Europe, they all headed for Sangatte and the Channel, in order to try to cross to the UK? They were in safe countries, which very often had very generous policies towards migrants; why then did they want to come to Britain? Can you answer that question?

JM: I think for the most part the answer lies in the more flexible economy and labour market which the UK continues to run and which is well known overseas. As you know, unemployment in a country like France – it's gone slightly down- is still remarkably high, particularly for young or unskilled people and the majority of these migrants are young and unskilled. So the choice of countries, like Germany for instance, wasn't easy for migrants coming into countries before Angela Merkel changed the approach of the Germans and did open the gates and make provision for them to find jobs. Migration is one of those phenomena where the people concerned come from all over the world, and there is a huge grapevine about where they can go and what they can do. Over the years whole communities have upped sticks and gone to places where they've heard that there are jobs and where there is opportunity. When they hear that the situation has become more repressive or there aren't the jobs, it stops. It is an extraordinary economic phenomenon, accompanied by lots of other things such as wars and political conflict - and the physical ability to cross borders or chart boats - as well as the policies of transit countries who may or may not facilitate the journey.

CM: You were a member of the Board of the UK Border Agency, an Agency which at one stage, much later than the period we are talking about here, was described as 'not fit for purpose.' How did you find the UK Border Agency?

JM: Dealing with migration has proved a perilous path for successive Home Secretaries, including Amber Rudd quite recently. And their policies and mechanisms have also proved controversial. The Border Agency at the time I was there was pretty successful in terms of gripping the situation, reducing the wait for asylum seekers, returning more illegal migrants and beginning to make a difference to the number of long serving foreign national prisoners in our prisons. They were constrained by the sheer size of the numbers of both legal and illegal migrants to the UK, the increasing concern over the size of the EU migrant population and the lengthy court procedures that can be involved - rightly- in processing asylum or foreign national prisoner cases. Just recently, there was this instance, if you recall, the deportation of a number of foreign national prisoners was not allowed to go forward, because the courts decided that they had not sufficient ability to be in touch with their lawyers because the wi-fi had been down in a particular detention centre. That sort of action was not unusual, that the courts would decide that a particular process had not been sufficiently well

handled or a foreign national prisoner or a returning migrant had demanded a judicial review at the last minute and the courts would grant this. People were not always willing to understand the full complexity of these processes and the difficulties.

Migration issues are relevant to our relationships with all foreign countries. The directorate continued for a further ten years after I left, perhaps a little less, then the Home Office decided that they wanted to repatriate full responsibility for this work to the Home Office, which I thought was a pity because migration relationships needed to be worked alongside the overall bilateral context and we were well placed to do this. Visa policy is another key policy area which requires careful handling in the context of national requirements and foreign policy interests. During my time the decision was made to pass visa-issuing to the Home Office - though the visa teams predominantly continued to work from UK Embassies overseas and I worked closely with the heads of the new Visa Policy Team in the Home Office. Indeed my last year was spent in negotiating a complete review of all of our visa arrangements with overseas countries: in some cases deciding for the first time to bring in a visa regime. There were some very difficult areas: one was the introduction of a visa regime with South Africa, which was controversial and very unpopular. At the same time visa regimes have come under criticism for not being robust enough in an age of increased trafficking and terrorism. It is an ongoing issue.

Joint-founder, FCO Women's Association (President, 2008)

CM: It was at this period that you were the joint-founder of a new FCO Women's Association and you became its President in 2008. What was the FCO Women's Association?

JM: Yes. The Diplomatic Service Wives Association traditionally had looked out for single women officers. When they became more of a families' association, that aspect of their work became much less pronounced. At the same time a separate organisation had started up, in the late 90s run by two very able colleagues, Sara Everett and Joanna Roper, called the Gender Network. It was essentially a group of junior and middle-ranking women officers lobbying on the issues of promotion and equality of opportunity and unconscious bias. In 2007 when I was newly into Migration Directorate, a number of more senior women who

were working in London just decided that we were not occupying as many of the top jobs as women might have expected to do by virtue of the numbers entering the organisation and making their way up the ranks. We decided a glass ceiling existed and if we didn't try to do something about it in a more organised way, we were not going to benefit nor women coming after us. A number - including myself - who didn't want to be labelled 'feminist' or 'aggressive on the female issue', nevertheless felt we were going nowhere - with no women on the FCO Board and no very senior female Ambassadors.

We met in the canteen, decided that it was irrational that there wasn't a senior women's association, so we created one: only to decide nine months later that it made no sense to have two such groups. The leading light of our group, Diane Corner then left to go overseas and as no one jumped in, I agreed to take over and lead both groups as one. It was a sign of the (IT) times that going overseas meant that running a network would be difficult from abroad and that you needed to meet up in London if the group was to prosper. It was all very informal and rather low key. There were four or five of us who made time to meet. We sent a survey to as many FCO women as we could locate and on the back of their views, wrote some terms of reference and key objectives, and began to develop a website and a network. As Migration Director, I worked to the Chief Operating Officer, James Bevan but also to the Permanent Under Secretary, Peter Ricketts. This gave me the chance to lobby Peter on the possibility that as the Women's Association President I might sit on a newly developed Senior Leadership Forum which encompassed all of the senior Ambassadors and London team. Peter told me that everyone wanted to join this but I said my bid was different as I would be representing the voice of senior women. And bless him, he agreed.

So then our work really began: bringing in speakers to talk on relevant themes both from within and outside the public sector; acting as a listening forum for problems for individuals which often pointed to more deep rooted problems in the organisation; putting forward proposals to the FCO Board and representing the FCO at civil service wide diversity fora. We also began with HR to secure data to show whether bias did exist: unconsciously or not and to track more systematically the comparative rates of promotion, assessment and postings. We lobbied for better treatment of women on maternity leave or SUPL and in line with the Home Civil Service some targets for senior women in the FCO were set. The world outside was beginning to wake up to the need to secure more inclusive opportunities and diverse agendas and other protected minorities were coming into the frame, not just

women. The whole thing just grew and grew and was really becoming more demanding of our time than our small group of women could sustain. We were then very fortunate. Nick Baird DG Economic was appointed as FCO Board Champion for women and Nick agreed that the FCO should pay for a support officer for our Women's Association. He suggested - as I was just leaving for Mexico - that we recruited someone there. So we did and a wonderful woman, Pauline Pina became our lynchpin and helped enormously to establish our organisation, range and professionalism. Data, systematic lobbying and active fostering of the network were key to our progress.

CM: I have read somewhere that more than 50% of the Foreign Office intake now is women. Do you still lose them at mid-career or, at the time you left say, were women much more represented at the top levels?

JM: Oh, yes, considerably more with, for example, the appointment of Karen Pierce as Political Director, then as Permanent Representative to New York, and now to the US. We have many more senior women filling top jobs. And the rate of losing women mid-career slowed somewhat. The FCO Board as I left had 50% women on it - though that decreased again subsequently. To achieve our aims, we needed the role models at the top for women further down the chain to emulate but we had simultaneously to encourage women to push themselves forward and remove systemic barriers to their progression. It was always hard to find outright prejudice or discrimination in the FCO but undoubtedly we had to shift the culture before we could make real change. Our work encouraged also other groups working for LGBT, BAME and Disability minorities and they made great strides too. Your question about the shape of female participation: it did change slowly but significantly during those ten years, but still today we probably have sixty five, seventy women ambassadors out of say one hundred and ninety. So still some way to go but that's very different from the less than twenty when we created our group in 2008. And some remarkable women - serving in Arab countries; sharing the role of Ambassador; being Governors in far flung territories, women having children at post as Ambassador or running regional networks involving constant mobility. All of these things and the confidence to take them on have drawn something from our women's movement. We used to joke that when our Association first attended the annual Leadership Conference, some twelve or fifteen years ago, we would dash to Sainsbury's to buy some coffee and biscuits, for a meeting of 12-20 members. At my last Leadership Conference in 2016 our meeting occupied the whole Durbar Court; we had

ministers attending and were well catered for. Such was the interest and the enthusiasm, we no longer had to buy our own biscuits.

Ambassador to Mexico, 2009–13

CM: That has been a very significant change. Now, the next big move, in 2009 you went to be Ambassador in Mexico. Did you speak Spanish?

JM: No, I did not.

CM: So this was yet another language that you had immediately to get under your belt?

JM: Yes. There were two Ambassadorial jobs coming up in 2009. One was for Jamaica, which I knew well, because I had gone backwards and forwards to Jamaica often on migration work and the other was Mexico. Spanish-speaking, and although I didn't speak Spanish, I was attracted to working outside of Europe and I thought this might be a good move – with the emerging powers coming up very fast on the international horizon. So I bid for both of them, and to my astonishment, got Mexico. I realised I hadn't completely factored in what all this would mean, nor that I would have to do quite a lot of work to understand Latin America, a continent I did not know well either from my migration or security work. It was quite an adventure into lots of different things. I had three wonderful months learning Spanish with two brilliant teachers, one teaching me Castilian Spanish and the other teaching me Mexican Spanish, working out of London University because, of course, by then, the FCO Language School had been abolished. Then there was the good fortune, as I was going out to post, of William Hague coming in as Foreign Secretary with a real mission to restore Britain's role in Latin America. It was fantastic to have that policy priority blessing the country where I was going to work. It set the scene for a very well timed posting and for a great bilateral opportunity.

CM: In Mexico trade was an important element in your work?

JM: Yes, increasing trade was a key priority. Trade and developing a stronger co-operation in education, science and technology, the beginning of collaboration which also became such a strong part of my work in South Africa. Our aim in Mexico was to shake up the status quo

and alert British and Mexican traders more effectively to the opportunities; to grow the trade from a pretty low base, not negligible, but not a very startling trade relationship. We commissioned some work soon after I arrived in Mexico to try to determine the chief perceptions amongst Mexican and UK traders of each other's countries and the opportunities that existed. The results confirmed that both countries thought the other was fine, but there were some pretty clichéd feelings about what Britain was interested in and some equally clichéd ideas about what Mexicans could deliver, not at all consonant with the dynamic economy that Mexico was developing in manufacturing: in aerospace and automotive in particular. We realised that we had considerable scope to improve perceptions and make a step change in the bilateral relationship. In my Embassy I had the good fortune also to have an excellent local staff; we were predominantly local – with ten UK-based and some ninety locally engaged staff, young, bright, well-educated, creative, fun, wanting to make a difference. We decided to work on a sustained marketing and branding campaign prior to a sustained series of trade promotions. We called it 'Think Britain and Think Mexico' and ran it as a joint campaign, organised by two trade organisations, UKTI and the Mexican equivalent. The campaign received a good response - we were the only Embassy doing something of this kind at the time - and we adapted it shortly afterwards to take advantage of the well-resourced GREAT campaign heralding the London Olympics.

CM: And what were the chief areas of trade between Mexico and Britain?

JM: We concentrated at first on our strengths: legal and services were areas we really sought to promote, as well as accountancy and insurance. The Mexican market – like many countries - was one of restrictive practices, so we targeted those, for example, in insurance and we made some headway in getting much more flexibility for British companies to come in and work with Mexican law firms and Mexican insurance companies. This required considerable shifting of restrictions on the recognition and equivalence of qualifications. It took most of the time I was there to get this agreed and embedded. But other opportunities developed especially in supply chain relationships in the automotive and aerospace industries: where U.K. research and specialist part production fitted in well with Mexico's burgeoning manufacturing capability. Several British companies began to come in and set up various factories to work through those, not just in the automotive industry, but also in the aerospace and engineering industry more widely especially in materials development. Then we concentrated on things like fashion and food and profiling British 'coolness' - especially

in innovation and new technology. Other areas were sport and tourism: especially profiling U.K. capability in staging big and inclusive events after the London Olympics. Finally Energy was a big area of development: first in renewable energy provision and subsequently in oil production and consultancy on energy reform.

CM: I was going to ask you about that. Climate change was clearly something that you were working on.

JM: Again, luck played its part. President Calderón elected in 2006, was a passionate advocate of climate change restrictions to stop and to slow down global warming. The UK had just become the first country in the world to have legally binding targets for 2050 to reduce emissions, which were guaranteed by law and with an independent commission to oversee them. We managed to persuade the Mexicans during the period I was there to introduce similar legislation. We obviously worked very closely with them and had a big programme to assist that realisation. In December 2010, Mexico hosted COP 16 (the Conference of the Parties) which came after a pretty disastrous COP in Copenhagen, the previous year when the world seemed to fall apart over what should be done, who was responsible, who should bear the blame, who should bear the cost of restoring order to the world system and who should bear the brunt of reducing emissions. Mexico then hosted a summit designed to try to get climate change back on track, to build a synthesis whereby contributions would reflect how much you could afford and your level of responsibility with countries taking individual responsibility for their own programmes and the beginning of the devising of big international funds to help countries to do so. It wasn't plain sailing by any means.

We went into the COP meeting with some trepidation that this was going to end in complete stasis, with the Kyoto Agreement coming to an end and nothing to replace it and no process agreed to bring the parties together. We worked extremely closely with the Mexicans in preparation for the Summit and likewise conferred with their team during the event. It was huge - staged in an enormous hotel complex in Cancun. So big that Ministers had to cycle to their meetings - thereby generating great press coverage. The Summit came to a great and very exciting climax. The Mexican hosts set out what a huge amount of progress had been achieved on how we were to replace and develop Kyoto, on how we could determine and allocate significant resources to help countries work on mitigation and adaptation and finally,

how we could set in place systems and methodologies to calculate individual contributions. It was quite an achievement but the conclusions were not approved by a very small group of mostly Latin American countries. Debate continued but still deadlock - despite the clear enthusiasm of the conference hall to conclude. Finally the Mexican Foreign Minister bravely declared that she was content that a sufficient consensus had been reached and declared the result as final. The hall erupted and we streamed out onto the beautiful Cancun beach to celebrate until dawn!

Mexico's chairmanship was very important to Cancun's success and Patricia Espinosa's decision to stare down the opposition was unusual for a Government that normally prioritised consensus. It reflected I think her own and President Calderon's conviction that the issues were too important for some constructive action not to be agreed. Cancun certainly give the whole process a shot in the arm. It also paved the way for continuing close UK/Mexican bilateral co-operation in the whole area of sustainable development and renewable energy, as well as strengthening our working links with the Mexican Government across the board.

CM: You also wrote a regular column for a Mexican daily newspaper.

JM: Yes, the Mexican media were remarkably tolerant and welcoming of my views! In preparing for Mexico, I was unsure whether my new role would generate much public interest. I was disabused of that on the outgoing Mexicana plane to Mexico. Rumour had got round that the British Ambassador elect was on the plane and to my astonishment half-way through the flight a whole bevy of air hostesses came up to me with one of the co-pilots, seeking many selfies! It was my first realisation that I would be leading a life that was not going to be in the shadows in Mexico. When I arrived, I asked my team to scope the possibilities and to be ambitious. They secured a regular Monday column in the opinion page of the equivalent of the Telegraph or Independent. And I agreed. Writing the column was brilliant for the first three months, and then it became quite challenging to realise that it was already Thursday and I had to submit the column by Friday lunchtime ... Mercifully I had a great team and would encourage them to think about what we might write about and indeed in turn to produce the first draft, which I could adapt or sign off as fortune dictated. It was a demanding but rewarding experience, providing as it did an extraordinary opportunity to promote the UK and set out the UK perspective. And I got regular positive feedback from many different quarters. I did a lot of broadcasting in my last year and I used to find that I

could hear people around me saying, ‘That’s the Ambassador, the British Ambassador. Have you seen her on the radio programme talking about music or read her column?’ It was a very effective tool for contributing to our overall aim of getting people in Mexico to register that the British government was interested in them and their country.

It was a time of expansion too of British tourism. British Airways opened many new flights; Virgin Atlantic came for the first time. It was a time when we were doing the British Olympics; it was a time when we had a royal wedding, that of William and Kate, which got wall-to-wall coverage and I was able to co-anchor TV programmes, watching the wedding unfold. I remember sitting with one of the Oprah Winfreys of Mexico, watching the wedding taking place. If you remember, the royal couple returned to Buckingham Palace and came out onto the balcony and there were scenes of people running along the Mall to try to reach the palace. I remember the presenter saying to me, ‘Ambassador, what’s happening? Has it got out of control? What are these people running for?’ I said, ‘Oh, no. They’re running to make sure they see the kiss on the balcony.’ Her reply: ‘Wow! This is amazing! Britain, the home of democracy. They’re not rioting; they’re going for the kiss!’ This got such coverage. During the day I could see myself up on the screens wherever I went, with the Oprah Winfrey of the day, saying, ‘It’s not a riot; it’s a kiss!’ It was just fantastic, free and positive publicity.

One legacy of which I am proud was to lay the foundations of a Year of Mexico in the UK and a year of the UK in Mexico, where every month or so there would be an event or initiative in both countries and some new artistic venture which the British Council and Mexican Cultural Ministry agreed to sponsor. My successor did a great job and this worked very well indeed. I look back on Mexico as a time when all of the signs were pointing in the right direction. We had a Prime Minister and a Foreign Secretary who were hugely engaged; we had people in government in Mexico who were disposed to look positively on what we were doing, supporting our policies in international fora in a way that Mexico had not always done before and seeking our support in return. It was a real partnership. You can’t ask, as an ambassador, for anything better than to have the stars aligned and scope to achieve. It was a great time.

CM: It was obviously a very happy time for you.

JM: Yes - personally too. John had finished working in the DS. He had left Vienna in 2007 and had gone to Brussels to work as the Dean of the International School there of the University of Kent. He very kindly stepped down in order to come to Mexico. Luckily, I think that we both had such a personally great time there that I hope that compensated a little for leaving a job he was very fond of.

High Commissioner to South Africa, 2013–17 and (non-resident) to Lesotho and Swaziland, 2014–17

CM: Mexico ended in 2013 after four years and then you went as High Commissioner to South Africa.

JM: The two Ambassadorial jobs that were then coming up and interesting for me were Pretoria and Brasilia - having worked in Mexico and on the Emerging Powers agenda, but there was an extremely strong candidate for Brazil who spoke Portuguese and I realised that to do the job I would have to put on my language cap all over again and really study hard - and for longer than the time that would be available to me in preparation. And Portuguese is difficult. South Africa was attractive for many, many reasons of which the language component was very small, but it was also English-speaking; one of the official languages was English and therefore I could operate immediately in that language. So it seemed the right choice.

CM: What were the priorities when you arrived in South Africa?

JM: They were not dissimilar from Mexico. South Africa was also an emerging power, but a country with a hugely different history. In Mexico we had been seen as the country that historically was on the side of Mexico - without the complex history of our colonial past in South Africa and our role in the period when the ANC were fighting for their independence. A complex history and a complex role for the British High Commissioner. The priorities were: boosting trade for both countries; boosting tourism in both countries; finalising a residual DFID bilateral development programme which effectively finished just as I arrived, but which continued to be very active in the region. The aid programme came to rather an abrupt end, which was something that needed to be finessed and worked through

when I got there: especially maintaining good co-operation in some areas which were extended e.g. supporting work to protect women, combat HIV and assist in mitigating climate change.

Climate change was in fact an area where we worked very well with the South Africans, bilaterally and in the relevant multilateral fora. Expanding trade remained a key objective but it was a difficult ask, because the South African economy had suffered a major blow with the world recession in 2008 and 2009. The reduction, which was just becoming apparent as I arrived in South Africa, of the Chinese beginning to move away from full production at all costs to a higher skilled industry, taking in less of the raw materials and minerals being produced by South Africa, let alone the coal and the other things that they were using previously. So the Chinese market was contracting for South Africa and South Africa was finding it increasingly hard to maintain productivity and increase investment. Eventually we completely restructured our trade work while I was there: our main team was based in South Africa, with its incomparable infrastructure but predominantly the UKTI/DIT office was fostering business in other parts of Africa.

The big area of real growth and real positivity was in science and technology and research collaboration. South Africa has several really well-regarded internationally, top twenty universities: the University of Cape Town, the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Wits, Johannesburg, and others not far behind - which offered the opportunity for researchers in Britain to work on collaborative and shared programmes on issues that were very much happening in the Global South, so particularly in medicine, health and life sciences, but also in oceanography, in climate change, in migration, in the phenomenon of urban development and extreme weather conditions. British researchers were keen to develop more fruitful partnerships in these areas and the new ODA funded research programmes like the Newton and Fleming Funds and then the Global Challenges Research Fund, offered fantastic opportunity. The South African Government was initially wary of the new funds - coloured perhaps by the disagreement over the ending of the formal UK aid programme. But they decided to accept our offer and under the aegis of the then science Minister, Nalefi Pandor, and her U.K. counterpart, David Willetts, a really remarkable period of joint research and scientific enterprise was achieved. I think both sides came to realise that this was really a massive win-win for researchers on both sides to expand in some very important areas of research, where South Africa already had good capability, particularly in big data, aerospace

and also residually some nuclear and space astronomy alongside a wide range of other disciplines. On the back of that co-operation we began to develop better political relations and inject greater energy into joint work to promote youth employment and enterprise which in turn developed into a wider range of social programmes and innovation - which further morphed into some valuable bilateral work to promote finance tech hubs and start-ups.

Our High Commission in Pretoria was the focal point for increasing regionalised work in Southern Africa and throughout the continent. I have mentioned how our trade office expanded to cover the whole of Africa from Johannesburg. Our Consular network for Sub Saharan Africa also gradually centred on Pretoria, as did the main Visa Hub. Pretoria also became a hub for corporate services devolution out of London, out of Milton Keynes. We became the fulcrum for a new Southern Africa Policy mechanism led by the National Security Council in London. We were already a platform for DFID and during my time, Treasury and HM Customs and Excise and a host of other British ministries descended upon us, all setting up regional bases. Like other parts of the world, we became phenomenally busy, just managing these offices and administering the networks that were being created. My role as CEO became busier and busier and the physical challenges of accommodating new teams every few months became considerable. Alongside this, South Africa itself became politically more conflicted between new emerging political parties and within the ruling ANC. It was also a time of considerable unrest and violence on University campuses as young South Africans voiced their frustration at the country's economic underperformance and lack of jobs.

So it was a hugely busy but conflicted time in South Africa with an intense focus on what was perceived as a failure to deliver on the promises made by Mandela and the early ANC governments and a growing discontent with the pace of land reform and economic recovery. The ANC was also preoccupied with problems of corruption and malfeasance inside the ANC and the big state run enterprises. We were active seeking to help with plans for energy reform, urban regeneration, public governance training and a host of other projects and programmes. Compounding all of this was extreme drought - particularly affecting the poorer neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland - and massively increasing the numbers of migrants streaming into South Africa and looking for jobs. Other priorities gripping Britons at home were the protection of Southern Africa's wildlife from illegal poaching and tackling with the South African Government and the AU the problems of

continuing fighting on the continent and the issue of sexual violence in conflict. It was pretty full on.

CM: You had the funeral of Nelson Mandela during your time.

JM: Yes. When I arrived in South Africa, in the autumn of 2013, I was given by my predecessor a folder, called the Nelson Mandela Funeral Plan. Because the former President had already been long ill and was expected to continue to be very frail and, alas, that his end could not be very far off, a huge dossier had been put together of all the things that would need to be done by the High Commission in the event of his death. This folder always followed me around, and I took it home with me at weekends. Of course, as always happens, we weren't taken completely by surprise when Mandela died but it did come suddenly. In the middle of the night I was rung by my excellent Press attaché, Isabel, who said, 'High Commissioner, I think Nelson Mandela has died. The Press are saying this.' It was about half past twelve, at night and as I was digesting this, suddenly my other phone went and I recognised that it was the No. 10 call sign. I picked up the phone and it was the Private Secretary saying, 'Judith, the news agencies are saying that Nelson Mandela has died. Is that true?' I had each phone to either ear, and I said, 'Well, my Press attaché is telling me it is.' The PS laughed and said 'Well, let's hope it is right. The PM is out there right now saying he is so sorry'. The plan of course had been that we would get the news reports in; check them and then confirm to London. Not a hope. It had all happened before I was fully conscious. But then I summoned our emergency team to come to the Residence, quickly got dressed and turned to my folder! Aided with many cups of coffee provided by my husband, we worked and planned through the night for what proved an incredibly busy week.

It had been decided there would be two events: a memorial event in Johannesburg and a burial in Mandel's homeland in the Eastern Cape. This turned out to be quite a complicated arrangement. The majority of people were thinking, hot country, it would happen very quickly, so the attention focussed on the stadium event and that proved to be the one that was really almost beyond organisation. We alone had five or six prime ministers coming out, and others had seven or eight presidents, people who had followed the history of South Africa, or had been active in the anti-apartheid organisations. Mandela had travelled the globe and there were people who had close association with the Mandelas, who wanted to come to pay

honour to the great man. All of the diplomatic missions and many other organisations were finding that more people were coming than could sensibly be handled. There were problems in securing passes, there were problems in handling such a large number of flights, cars, taxis, buses etc. On the eve of the event, we did not have clearance for our official visitors or details of their security arrangements. Everything had to be played by ear and it certainly tested my ability to think creatively.

The more moving ceremony took place in the Eastern Cape - which the Prince of Wales attended. It was a beautiful service accompanied by spontaneous singing, dancing and family reminiscences. There was a real feeling of popular loss in a very African ceremony, attended by world leaders. Unforgettable. I had earlier in the week had the privilege of delivering a message to the Mandela family from the Royal Family. I was asked if I could deliver it directly to Graça Machel and through our various contacts, I was admitted to the Mandela house in Johannesburg. I thought that it might be a very quiet moment, but in fact in the African style the place was absolutely full with about five hundred people who were all sitting quietly, paying homage to the great man. We were shown into an interior room where Graça Machel was sitting with the other women of the family. She was delightful in her memory of the Royal Family, of Prince Charles, and the young princes. She recalled how Nelson Mandela had really enjoyed meeting the Queen and of her confusion when he called the Queen, Elizabeth! When Prince Harry came to visit subsequently in South Africa, she made an opportunity to meet with him and talk about those memories and what they had meant for the President. There were some wonderful personal moments in this great big complex of my work in South Africa and I remember them with extraordinary pleasure.

To finish I think I would just say that through my work as a female diplomat and then as a married diplomat and then as a fellow Ambassador with my husband, I experienced and benefited from to the full, the extraordinary changes in the Foreign Office as an institution over 40 years. This was accompanied by huge changes in the international scene from Cold War to Detente to the multi polar, globalised, diversified, anxious and unpredictable world of today. One of the questions I was asked recently was ‘Why are diplomats necessary when ministers meet their counterparts all the time and devise great initiatives from their capitals?’ The answer, a prosaic one, is that somebody, with knowledge and understanding of other countries has to do the job firstly of thinking up the initiative and preparing the ground and then subsequently of grounding the initiative in real life and ensuring its

implementation. And from that delivery comes real partnership and better and more productive relationships. Diplomacy has gone through huge swerves and changes in my time, but the job I was doing in a bilateral mission in the 1970s and in the 2020s is not essentially so different. It operates differently; and it uses different techniques – big time! But it remains as important.