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Wing: What’s your motto for success in life?
Shaeffer: Work very hard for many hours a day, not just office hours. And, try many different things. When people introduce me and go through my resume, three years here, five years there, I always semi-joke and say that I can’t keep a job anywhere. I think the ideal is to try to move around to do different things. One of the discouraging things about international agencies is people tend to stay forever.

Wing: I’m a believer in that people shouldn’t stay longer than five years.
Shaeffer: That was the idea in the Ford Foundation. People would arrive, contribute and then move on. But that doesn’t happen. People get comfortable. The longer one stays the more difficult it becomes to go back to academia or find something else to do. The idea of being able to move on every five years is a good one, although it’s not necessarily been planned into my career. Neither has going from country level to regional to global, or going from fairly narrow issues in education to a much broader range of education challenges, all of which I managed to do, sometimes more by accident than design. It’s proved to be a very rewarding career.

Wing: How do you like to relax?
Shaeffer: Sitting in my garden in Pattaya on a weekend afternoon with the International Herald Tribune crossword and a glass of whiskey.

Wing: Which of your dreams has yet to come true?
Shaeffer: From a personal point of view I can’t think of any, which worries me. I’ve had a rich and rewarding career. In terms of professional dreams yet to come true, one is assisting the Thai education system to analyze its challenges more systematically and respond to them more comprehensively, but that’s proved too difficult.

Wing: Statistics drip off your tongue but you seem “itchy” about numbers and very wary of saying that anything is 99 percent.
Shaeffer: Why are you suspicious of statistics and statisticians?

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