

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOSEPH D. O'CONNELL, JR.

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the first of December 2011. This is an interview with Joseph D. O'Connell, Jr. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

O'CONNELL: I was born in Washington, DC, on November 15, 1943, in the old Georgetown Hospital, which later became the building where Georgetown's School of Foreign Service was housed. My father was a native Washingtonian, and I lived in Washington (in my paternal grandparents' row house on Neal Street, Northeast, near Gallaudet University) for the first few years of my life. I was the third child of Joseph and Irene O'Connell, and the family's first male. Family lore says that, at the time of my birth, my father rushed to buy sports equipment for me and also that another name my parents were considering for me was Robert.

Q: Let's talk about your father. What do you know of the O'Connell family? Where do they come from?

O'CONNELL: My father was the son of an Irish immigrant named Daniel O'Connell and a German immigrant named Mary Anna Droll. My father was born on April 20, 1914, in Southwest Washington, in a now-demolished row house located at 902 Sixth Street, SW, not far from the Voice of America, where I would work seventy-five years later.

Q: Your grandfather was from where?

O'CONNELL: My paternal grandfather was born on Sept. 5, 1877 -- probably on a farm -- near the hamlet of Tournafulla, not far from the village of Mount Collins, in County Cork, on the banks of the River Feale in the west of Ireland, the starting point for so many of the Irish when they left for America. The river marks the dividing line between County Kerry to the west and County Cork to the east, just downstream from the Cork town of Abbeyfeale, which was, coincidentally, the birth place of my maternal grandfather, Patrick Kelly.

My grandfather O'Connell always said that he was a Kerry man, but when I first traveled to Mount Collins years later, I learned that Tournafulla is actually located on the Cork side of the stream, up a hill from Mount Collins, so I guess he was tossing some of the famous Irish blarney.

By 1898, two of my grandfather's sisters had already immigrated to the United States, and it was in that year, at age 21, that he, too, left Ireland, in the company of two cousins (Ellen (Nelly) O'Connell and Hannah O'Connell Aherne). Like most Irish immigrants of that time, they had embarked from the southern Ireland port city then known as Queenstown, the name that the British had given to the city (today known as Cobh). In all likelihood, they traveled in the ship's steerage section.

From a search of 1900 census data, including a copy of the ship's hand-written manifest, we know that my grandfather O'Connell and his cousins arrived in Boston on the Cunard ship, the S.S. Pavonia, on April 20, 1898. Also according to the manifest, the address that they gave as their destination was 817 Somerville Street, in Cambridge, MA, where the cousins had relatives, but we believe that my grandfather soon made his way to Baltimore, where he worked for some nuns and also tended bar for a time.

He later moved to Washington, where, in 1905, he became an American citizen. Although he later (possibly in 1913) married a German woman named Mary Anna Droll (my paternal grandmother), he had initially married a 24-year-old fellow Irish immigrant named Johanna Harrington, in Washington on April 29, 1908, according to District of Columbia marriage records. She was apparently from County Kerry, Ireland, and had died early in the marriage. They had no children.

One day late in my grandfather's life, my two older sisters and I were speaking with him. In passing, he casually mentioned his first marriage. We were shocked and asked him why he had not told us about it before then. "It was a long time ago," he said, "and I never thought it was important."

My paternal grandmother Droll's family had immigrated from Baden-Baden, Germany, to Mankato, Minnesota via New York, sometime in the late 19th century. She had been brought to the U.S. as an infant.

My great-grandfather, whose name was Adolf Droll, tried farming near Mankato. He apparently decided after a while that the Minnesota weather was too harsh, and he left for a more temperate climate. My father always told us that his grandfather put lock, stock (including his livestock), and barrel into a freight car, and with the family headed for the Eastern Shore of Maryland, near Rock Hall and Chestertown, to a place called Secretary, Maryland. He had heard that there were opportunities for farming there.

It was on my great grandfather Droll's farm that my father used to spend many of his boyhood summers. My father always spoke fondly of those times, especially since they were a chance to escape the heat and humidity of un-air conditioned Washington and to cross the Chesapeake Bay on a side-wheeler steamboat. The boat he recalled most fondly was the "Emma Giles," which would land at Chestertown, Maryland, after crossing the Bay from Baltimore. According to my father, his grandfather -- with whom my father was close -- was initially successful at farming, but a severe drop in crop prices later put him out of business, and the family moved to Baltimore, where my grandmother Droll's brothers worked in the Mt. Clare shops of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

It's unclear where and how my paternal grandparents met or even where they got married, but Baltimore is a reasonable guess. They settled in Washington after their marriage. My grandfather O'Connell had not received much formal education back in Ireland. He used to say that he had gone through the sixth grade. Once in Washington, he either worked for and/or co-owned a saloon, apparently located in Southwest Washington (we have a photo of him standing, with an apron around his waist, in a pair of half-opened swinging doors). My father used to say that my grandfather and his partner drank up the establishment's profits.

My grandfather later found a job in the Government Printing Office (GPO), near Union Station. Later in life, and when I knew him as a youngster, he would apparently collect typed material in the Senate office building (there was only one of them back then) and take it to the GPO, where it would be put into the Congressional Record. He was there for a number of years, and I recall that he received a gold pocket watch and fob when he retired in the early 1950s.

Sometime between my father's birth in 1914, and 1916, according to the few documents that we have, my father's family moved from their row house in Southwest to a house at 103 H Street, Northwest in Washington. Although I knew my paternal grandfather fairly well -- I was a 16-year-old high school freshman when he died in 1959 -- I have only vague memories of my paternal grandmother, as I was five years old when she died relatively young, in 1948. About the only memory that I have is of a woman speaking on the phone in a language which I could not understand (German). My father was baptized at St. Dominic's Catholic Church in Southwest and attended to Catholic schools in Washington, including the parish school at St. Aloysius and later the Jesuit-run boys' school, Gonzaga College High School, both located on North Capitol Street, at Eye Street.

Q: Do you know the background of your mother's family?

O'CONNELL: Both of my mother's parents were Irish immigrants. Ironically, and as often happened among Irish immigrants, my maternal grandmother and grandfather, Patrick Roche and Margaret Kelly, were born within a few miles of each other, in adjacent counties in the west of Ireland.

Margaret Kelly was born on Aug. 11, 1879, near the County Kerry town of Listowel, at the crossroads of a hamlet known as Coolnaleen. Patrick Roche was born in the nearby Cork town of Abbeyfeale, both of which were near Tournafulla, my grandfather O'Connell's birthplace.

Margaret Kelly and Patrick Roche met years later in Pittsburgh. My grandmother came to the U.S. late in the 19th century, around the same time as my paternal grandfather, Daniel O'Connell. We believe that she arrived in New York at Castle Garden, the immigrant reception center in the years before Ellis Island came into use.

There is a story in the family that she went immediately to Denver to work as a nanny and housekeeper. According to the story, she worked for a wealthy Denver family named Phipps, who, I believe, were mining people. After an apparently brief stay, she left for Pittsburgh, where she had relatives who had preceded her from Ireland. She settled continued to work as a nanny. She used to tell us that in her early years in Pittsburgh, she used to see the Heinz brothers peddling pickles from a wagon on the city's streets.

Once they were married, Patrick Roche and the former Margaret Kelly settled in Pittsburgh's East Liberty, later moving to a house on Truro Place in the Oakland section, near the University of Pittsburgh. They eventually had five children, including my mother, Helen Irene Roche, who was born, probably at home in East Liberty, on March 14, 1915.

Like my paternal grandfather, Daniel O'Connell, Patrick Roche worked at several different jobs throughout his life, including bartender and security guard. Although he died at an early age in 1943, just before I was born, my grandmother lived on until I was in my second year of college, so I knew her well. She was a lovely and gracious woman whose beautiful Irish brogue endured until her death in 1964. She could recite poetry well into her later years and had beautiful handwriting. When my sisters, brother and I were small, my mother used to take us to Pittsburgh every summer to visit her and the rest of the family. We loved those trips.

My mother graduated from Pittsburgh's Schenley High School in 1933, not far from her parents' house. After her graduation, undoubtedly seeing that her prospects were bleak in Depression-gripped Pittsburgh, she decided to try her luck elsewhere. In those early days of the New Deal, people were heading to Washington, D.C. in search of work.

My mother left Pittsburgh believing that she had a lead on a job in Washington. Someone who worked for a Congressman from Pittsburgh told my grandparents that he *might* be able to get her a job in the government. With that, she climbed onto the B&O to Washington. Unfortunately, by the time she reached Washington, there was no job.

With her one suitcase in hand, she found lodging on Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest, in what was then called a rooming house. She later lived on lower 16th Street, N.W. The way she used to describe her lodgings sounded to us like something out of a Cary Grant movie from the 1930s.

With the help of a friend from Pittsburgh who was already in Washington, my mother was able to find work as a sales lady at the Woodward & Lothrop department store, also known to Washingtonians as Woodies.

Q: One of Washington's pre-eminent stores.

O'CONNELL: Indeed. Years later, in recalling the Washington of the 1930s, my mother told us of how African Americans who would come into Woodies were not waited on. She had not seen such treatment in Pittsburgh's stores and said that she felt awful about it

then and worse as the years went on. Eventually, in early 1936, she found a federal job, at the Department of the Interior, where she was a junior typist in the National Park Service's Resettlement Administration, later moving to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, where she remained until April 1944, having by that time had the first three of her five children.

Q: Any idea how your parents met?

O'CONNELL: I believe my parents met on a blind date. My father had graduated from Gonzaga in 1932 and was working in the Post Office. They were married in the chapel of Gonzaga College High School in Washington on a hot July day in 1938. My father somehow had a car, and they honeymooned in both Atlantic City and Niagara Falls. We have pictures of them in both places.

Q: I might point out that the early 1930s marked the height -- or perhaps the depths -- of the Depression, and the height of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Washington was the place where young people went. Things were really booming here, and it was a very, very interesting place full of young people.

O'CONNELL: That's exactly how my mother talked about her early years in Washington. I think she enjoyed herself even though she didn't make much money.

In the meantime, after my father graduated from Gonzaga -- not having enough money to be able to accept even the half scholarship to the Jesuits' Georgetown University that was available to Gonzaga graduates with high enough averages, my father had gotten a job in the U.S. Post Office's main mail-processing location, next to Union Station. He was considered, especially by his parents, extremely fortunate to have found work there. My father recalled that his mother had declared that he was "set for life" with his job.

My father had other ideas, and he later began his accounting studies during the day, while he worked the night shift at the Post Office. His intention was to become a Certified Public Accountant, which he did after passing the CPA exam on his first try, in 1948.

After their honeymoon, my parents lived with my paternal grandparents, Daniel and Mary O'Connell on Neal Street, Northeast. During those years, my two older sisters, Jean and Elizabeth, were born in 1939 and 1941 respectively, I in 1943, and my brother Michael in 1946. A third daughter, Mary Louise, would be born in 1952.

Sometime in the late 1940s -- I must have been about six years old -- my parents moved to the then rural Silver Spring, in Maryland's Montgomery County. The area was one of Washington's early suburbs in the late 1940s, early 1950s.

My parents bought a house and made payments of about \$30 a month on the mortgage. My father went into a CPA partnership with a man named Lee Willis. My father worked as a CPA in Silver Spring, in one location or another, for next the fifty years, until not too

many years before he died in October 2005. So my siblings and I we grew up in the early days of suburban Maryland.

Q: The people on your mother's and father's sides, did they influence you? Which were the most influential on you?

O'CONNELL: I knew my paternal grandfather, Daniel O'Connell, and especially my maternal grandmother, Margaret Kelly in Pittsburgh well. All four of my grandparents came to the United States with little formal education, but they did know how to read and write. She was also gracious, tolerant and kind. Even now, so many years after she died, she looms very large in my memory.

It was my paternal grandfather who taught me to tell time, something for which I was very grateful, since I had had trouble with that, and anything else related to numbers. Once in a while, referring to it as the "old country," he would also tell us about Ireland.

Q: Did your parents embrace being Irish-Americans?

O'CONNELL: As the children of immigrants, my parents, for much of their young lives and even into adulthood, were little interested in being what my father used to call "professional Irishmen." In that respect, they probably were not that different from many other children of immigrants. As I child, I realized that, for my parents, the idea of going to Ireland and reveling in things Irish were not things that engaged them. They -- especially my mother -- believed that they were Irish every day, and not just on St. Patrick's Day. They looked askance at people who would once a year don kilts and walk around with shillelaghs and little green hats and often drink too much. Much later, however, when their children began to travel abroad, including Ireland, my parents became interested in knowing about where their parents had come from. They traveled to Ireland, to the towns where their parents had been born and raised, and they met their Irish cousins for the first time.

When my wife and I were in Ireland in 2010, visiting my mother's first cousins, we spoke about how difficult it must have been for my grandparents and so many others to have left, at a young age, their homes and parents for a distant land, probably with the knowledge that they would never see their parents again.

One of my mother's cousins, a man in his 80s named Tom Doyle who lives in Listowel, County Kerry, talked about his mother, Catherine, who was one of my maternal grandmother's sisters. Tom's mother had stayed behind in Ireland, but nearly all of her siblings -- there was 14 of them in all -- left to come to the U.S. or Australia or Britain (one of his sisters had gone to Coventry, in England, and worked there for more than half a century, including during the bombing of that city during World War II, before returning to retire in Listowel).

Tom said that he was not sure that his aunts and uncles realized when they left home that they would probably never see their parents again and quite possibly never hear from

them because their parents might not have known how to read or write. He added, "That's hard for us to grasp now because we always believe that we can get back to see people or at least get in touch with them. That's not the way it was then, and of course they had no idea what they were facing when they went off to America."

Q: In your family how important was the Catholic church?

O'CONNELL: It was definitely a presence. We were all raised as Catholics, sent to Catholic schools. We all went to Mass every Sunday without fail. I went to Catholic schools all the way up through the first two years of college and then went to a secular, state institution, as the nuns used ominously to call non-Catholic colleges.

My mother was a more observant Catholic than my father, but something -- never broached by us, his children -- made him go along with raising us as Catholics and paying endless tuition bills to Catholic schools. We all to one degree or another were marked by the experience of growing up in a Catholic household and of attending Catholic schools in the 1950s and early 1960s.

As so often happens in families, however, some of us took other paths. My brother Michael married a devout Episcopalian whose father was a priest, and he later became an Episcopalian himself. One of my sisters, Elizabeth, married a Jewish man from Brooklyn. She did not convert to Judaism, and in recent years has rediscovered the Catholicism of her youth. She also accompanies him to the synagogue on the high holy days on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.

My oldest sister, Jean, married a near clone of my father, a fellow who, like my father, studied under the Jesuits at Gonzaga College High School in Washington and later became a CPA, too. He and my sister are the most religiously fervent of all of us.

I went off to South America and married a woman from Colombia. Finally, I believe my youngest sister, Mary Louise, who married a German man, also converted to the Episcopal church.

My parents handled these changes calmly and with aplomb, even though many of them would have been unimaginable just a few years before. They probably understood that they had little choice. In any case, how, after all, could they have known that their children would not all be practicing Catholics and, in one instance, would marry outside the faith and, in another, marry a Jewish man? In the end, these things had a salutary effect on my family and on my parents. Who would have thought that my Jewish brother-in-law and my father would become so close over the years?

Q: In many ways your family reflects America, the mixing, the moving, the adapting of different ways. It's very interesting. Tell me, I would assume that your family, maybe not now, but grew up Democratic?

O'CONNELL: We did. To the extent that my parents were political or even discussed politics, which was not a great deal, I knew they were Democrats. They had lived through the Great Depression. I remember my father, who spoke little about those years or about any of the past, saying, "You don't understand how it was back then. Nobody had any money, and there was no fallback."

I did learn later from my father that, before the 1940 presidential election, he joined the ranks of Americans who had become concerned about Franklin Roosevelt running for a third term, believing that he might become a dictator. So my father voted for Wendell Willkie that year. For years afterward, there was a copy of Willkie's book, One World among my father's books. Unfortunately, I never read it, although I subsequently learned that Willkie was a good man and a highly competent lawyer.

Q: After Willkie lost the 1940 election, Roosevelt sent him around the world while we were at war, and Willkie became quite an impressive roving ambassador.

O'CONNELL: He was an accomplished man who clearly had no chance against Roosevelt

Much later, my father's personal political history repeated itself, when he voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 as he sheepishly told us afterwards. I don't believe he repeated that in 1984. Not being very political, he didn't have an explanation, except to say that he didn't think much of Jimmy Carter. His children never let him forget his deviation from the household's orthodoxy, and the needling went on far beyond the 1980 political season.

Q: Any memories of Stevenson's candidacies?

O'CONNELL: I remember my father struggling about Stevenson and saying that Stevenson's problem was that he was an "egghead." Later on I understood better that the meaning was my father's way of saying that Stevenson was too intellectual for most Americans and therefore did not have a chance.

Q: This is sort of skipping a bit ahead, but do you recall how the Kennedy nomination and election went?

O'CONNELL: In our house the Kennedy ascendancy was, for obvious reasons, huge. Kennedy was Irish, and he was a Catholic, and that was enough. My parents remembered Al Smith running for president in 1928 and the strong anti-Catholic feeling in the country at that time, so they were cautious about Kennedy because they were afraid there was going to be another Al Smith-like disaster, when Smith was pilloried with accusations that he would bring the Pope to the White House if elected.

When Kennedy won, there was great joy in our house, although we may not have known exactly why. For some reason, at the age of 15, I joined in on the celebration. I thought he

was an attractive man. He was young, vigorous, effortlessly witty, and better yet -- or so we thought at the time -- he was one of us.

My younger brother and I bundled up and went to his inauguration on a bright and bitterly cold day in Washington in January of 1961. A major snow storm had struck the city the day before, and the cleared streets of the city shimmered with the dried salt.

Security was light, and it was possible to get close to the inaugural stand, which was at that time on the Capitol's east front. We managed to get fairly close to where the tanned and youthful President-elect took the oath of office. It was thrilling.

Q: Particularly if you're a young boy.

O'CONNELL: Or if you were a growing adolescent. My brother, Michael, and I stood there, probably stamping our feet to keep warm. I remember the things that everybody remembers about the day and the swearing-in ceremony. We saw a frail Robert Frost trying in vain to read from a sheet of paper "The Gift Outright," the poem that he had written for the occasion, until the bright sun light finally prevented him from seeing the page. He put the paper aside and impressively recited it from memory. That was breathtaking.

Then, as Boston's Cardinal Cushing started to intone his invocation, smoke began to swirl from beneath the dais, where there was apparently a short in the wiring.

After the smoldering was taken care of, the coatless and hatless Kennedy delivered that great speech. I remember thinking, "I think he's talking to me." I don't want to embellish history or give myself a precociousness that I surely did not possess. After all, I was an ordinary 15-year-old, but I do remember listening to those famous lines about asking not what my country could do for me, but rather, what I could do for my country. Hearing Kennedy that day must have had something to do with my eventual decision to enter the Peace Corps, but I am getting ahead of myself.

Q: Let's talk about a kid growing up in Silver Spring. What was it like as a kid? Were you turned loose after school?

O'CONNELL: "Turned loose" is the right phrase, and in a manner that today's parents would never dream of doing. My wife and I often talk about how different life for children is today compared to back then. Today, there are scheduled "play dates" and structured playtime. In the early 1950s, we would leave the house after school and stay outside until called for dinner. My mother would say, "Go out and play," or, "Go find something to do," or "Go peddle your matches" (I always wondered that meant, since we weren't permitted to have matches.). Such permissiveness was unremarkable at the time. There wasn't any TV, at least in our house -- and there was a great gang of kids in the neighborhood.

Life was simple and, to me, uncomplicated. My father had an accounting practice, and over the years, he practiced accounting by himself or, later, with partners. My sisters and brother and I knew the yearly pattern and rhythm of his work. From January 1 until April 15 (or March 15 when that was the income tax filing deadline), we wouldn't see much of my father. He would work every day, seven days a week during what we referred to as "tax season." We knew that after March or April 15 or, we would see him more, even on weekends. He worked late every New Year's Eve, auditing a bank in Silver Spring, so it was my mother who presided over our annual ritual of staying up and then banging on pots and pans outside of our house at midnight.

Q: So your mother pretty much raised you and your siblings during that time?

O'CONNELL: Yes, the job of raising us was left pretty much to my mother during those years. We lived modestly, and we had what we needed, or so it seemed to me as the first son.

In a family of five children spread over several years, the fact that there are sometimes differences in our respective memories is hardly surprising. Each of us has our individual memories and our collective memories of what growing up in the O'Connell household was like and what our relationships were with our parents. I have a sunny view of my upbringing and the simplicity of life and the freedom that we had to roam around the neighborhood, to go out and play, and, as my mother would say, to find something to do.

While my sisters are not full of rancor at their formative years, they do have very different recollections, particularly of my father and the way that he raised them. He was stricter with them than he was with me and subsequently with my brother.

I experienced many of the usual things that happen to a kid. I fell out of a tree, broke my arm, and had my new bike stolen, all in one summer. At the time these things seemed very bad, but as I think about them now, I realize that they were ordinary parts of growing up. I wouldn't call my childhood idyllic, but I have some good, even wonderful memories.

My father sent my brother and me, and separately, my sister, Elizabeth, to summer camps in southern Maryland. Michael and I went to Camp Calvert in Leonardtown, run by the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier, the same group, as it turned out, that would run the high school that both of us would attend years later. Talk about an idyllic time of my life. I loved camp, went there for several summers, and would have stayed the whole summer if I could have.

As a student, however, I was often unpromising.

Q: I assume you went to a Catholic school?

O'CONNELL: Yes. The local parish school in our part of Silver Spring was the now-closed St. Michael's, on Wayne Avenue. I started out at the local public school since St.

Michael's didn't offer kindergarten, and then I went to St. Michael's for the first grade. At that time, in the very early '50s, there was a large population boom -- the baby boomers. The classes at St. Michael's were enormous, with 30, 40, 50 kids in the early grades.

Q: That was the boomer generation. It was a boom because of the post World War II thing. You were born in '43, you know. You were the kids and the GIs coming home and getting married and having big families.

O'CONNELL: Right. Parenthetically I'll tell you that by the time World War II began, my father was a couple of years older than many of his contemporaries. By the time the war started, he was working as an accountant for a Washington company called the Stone Straw Corp. They made straws and other paper products, and were located in the city's Northeast section, near Catholic University. When the war came, Stone got defense contracts to manufacture shell casings. To my father's undoubtedly pleasant surprise -- although probably with some ambivalence, too -- he was eligible for a deferment for working in a defense-related industry. I looked into this a few years ago. He did report for his draft physical in 1942, passed it and was eligible to be drafted. But with his deferment, he did not have to go into the service.

The fact that my father did not serve in the armed forces was just one of several topics that we did not talk about with him. He never said anything about World War II, and I always assumed that it was a painful subject for him. I imagine that not being in the armed forces at that time, let alone living at home as a civilian, could prove awkward and also expose one to questioning.

Q: I was a kid during that time, and I remember: you were supposed to be in the service. People would ask of a male in civilian clothing, Why isn't he in uniform?

O'CONNELL: I'm sure that happened. Virtually every family had a father, son, brother or uncle who were away, and in those days, unlike today's deployments, people in the service were typically gone for three or four years. Their families often did not know exactly where their loved ones were. I regret that I didn't summon up the nerve to ask my father about that time.

Years later, my mother talked about the day the war ended. It was probably V-J Day. She remembered walking from the house in Silver Spring to Georgia Avenue, pushing me in a pram, with my two older sisters. There was a spontaneous celebration that broke out when people got the news. She used to laugh and say, "I wanted to get out there and start dancing with the rest of them, but I had you kids with me, and I couldn't." Unlike my father, my mother spoke the war years often.

Q: Let's talk about school. You were taught by nuns?

O'CONNELL: Yes. The class sizes at St. Michael's must have been overwhelming for the young nuns who taught us, whom I remember as caring and kind women. In my

mind's eye, Sister Cecilia Rose, my sweet, first-grade teacher, looked to be about 19 years old. I don't know how much she was able to do with the load of kids she faced every day. I stayed at St. Michael's for about three years.

Q: Why such a short time?

O'CONNELL: By the time I reached the third grade, I began to feel a little lost in the crowd. I was fine in every subject except arithmetic, and I especially remember that third-grade year, when I unfortunately -- and probably intentionally -- sat far to the rear of the class room, one of probably 40 kids. It was a split class, so half of the class was made up of third graders, and the other half were fourth graders. Our teacher was Sister Emiline. She would stand at the blackboard doing -- to me -- enormous long division problems. I can remember thinking, "I don't have any idea what she's talking about." I also remember many half-finished arithmetic papers that I would stuff into the compartment under my seat, to the point where, by the end of the year, I couldn't get anything else in there.

My parents were aware of my struggles with math, but they were probably as clueless as I was as to what to do about them. I loved reading, and I could spell like a champ, but arithmetic, that was something else. My memory is not clear, but I probably should have stayed behind and repeated the third grade, but I was unaccountably promoted to the fourth.

I remember arriving at St. Michael's for the first day of fourth grade. What happened well illustrates my state of mind. The nuns told us that, since the classes were so large, there would be split sessions, with one half of the class attending in the morning, and the other in the afternoon.

Well, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven right there, for all I could think of was that I would only have to go to school for half of the day, leaving the other half for what I liked doing best, which was playing with my neighborhood friends, whom, I must have somehow assumed, would be available for play during the school day.

It was therefore with considerable delight that I went home and shared the "good" news with my parents, thinking that they would be as happy as I was. "Guess what," I announced, "I only have to go to school half a day this year!" They must have said something like, "What??? That's it. You're out of there."

Between the crowded classes and my problems with numbers, my father had already been thinking about taking me out of St. Michael's. One of the places he had mentioned was the Immaculate Conception School for Boys, a Catholic school in downtown Washington. Another was a military boarding school known as Leonard Hall, in the small southern Maryland city of Leonardtown.

I don't think I liked the sound of either one, but I liked the idea of boarding school even less and felt lucky that my parents decided on Immaculate Conception. At least I could live at home. My brief career at St. Michael's was over.

Although I did not think so at the time, the Immaculate Conception School was just what I needed. The school's excellent, if strict teachers were religious brothers from Dayton, Ohio (they also run the University of Dayton). They were a tough bunch, unafraid to apply corporal punishment to recalcitrant lads (in our more litigious age today, they would have probably been sued out of business). Not that I needed much corporal punishment, but I did need smaller classes and someone to pay attention to my problems with mathematics.

Q: So what was that like, going from the suburbs into Washington every day?

O'CONNELL: Interesting. The school and world into which I was entering could not have been more different from St. Michael's and my Silver Spring neighborhood. My real education was about to get under way.

The school drew kids throughout the Washington, D.C. area. Most were like me in that they had had difficulties at their parish schools. Unusually enough in the segregated Washington of that time, Immaculate Conception also had several African American kids from the neighborhood near the school. Other than a cleaning lady named Lena, or the men who collected our garbage, or a man named Windom who occasionally mowed our small lawn at home, I had probably never seen more than a handful of people of color in my life.

Q: Let's talk about Silver Spring first. What about the racial business?

O'CONNELL: The schools in Washington, D.C. and the entire Washington area were segregated. I learned much later that there was a separate school system for African-Americans, right there in Montgomery County.

My awareness of people who looked different from my family and me was, at best, slight. Riding the streetcar every day into what is now called the inner-city certainly helped open my eyes. I don't recall feeling any danger, even when I had to stay at school after hours or be there early in the morning to assist at Mass as an altar boy. Occasionally, I would be asked to serve at what was called the printers' Mass, at 2:00 AM on Sunday mornings. The Mass was for printers at the Post, the Evening Star and the Daily News who happened to be Catholics and who wanted to go to Mass after the presses stopped. My parents would of course go with me at that hour.

Looking back, I realize that I rather casually did things that are unheard for a child of today. I would, for example, walk several blocks from our house and, making sure no trains were approaching on the busy Baltimore and Ohio tracks, I would dash across the tracks, sometimes pausing to break a derelict liquor bottle or two, and then walk to the

streetcar terminal at Georgia and Alaska Avenues, what was called back then as the District Line.

There, I would board the green, No. 70 Capitol Transit trolley and ride down George Avenue. About thirty minutes later, the trolley would pass Howard University before letting me out at the corner of Seventh and N Streets, Northwest. The Immaculate Conception School, clad in grim, red stone, sat massively in the middle of the block between Seventh and Eighth Streets. It would be my daytime home for the next five years.

Q: Did it take you to figure out the route to school?

O'CONNELL: I had one shot at learning that streetcar route. The day before I was to report for my fourth-grade class, my busy mother rode with me from the Maryland-DC line to Seventh and N Streets, Northwest. She said, "You'll have to do this by yourself tomorrow because I won't be able to come with you."

If that sounds harsh, it wasn't. After all, she had my siblings back home who also needed her attention. Too, that was a different time, and I accepted her words as perfectly normal and wasn't frightened, possibly because I did not know enough to be scared. Also, my mother was always unfailingly kind to me -- including routinely doing such things as careening down George Avenue in her green '53 Chrysler, clad in her nightgown, as she tried to catch up with the trolley so that I could get to school in time to serve the 7:30 AM Mass.

The one-off trial run continued as we passed Howard University, and my mother started calling out various landmarks that I needed to be aware of and that would tell me that the trolley was getting close to the school. She said, "Okay, here's the Wonder Bread factory. You'll smell the bread baking. There's Griffith Stadium. When you get to Florida Avenue, you know you're getting close. We're getting ready to pass the O Street market, and the next stop's yours."

I am sure she was concerned about me, but she didn't show it, probably a good thing under the circumstances.

Fortunately, I was going to meet up with a new classmate the next day, somebody whom I knew slightly at St. Michael's, so I wasn't going to be making my first solo trip downtown entirely by myself. Later, other refugees from St. Michael's would join us at Immaculate Conception.

I made that round trip from the fourth through the eighth grade. I can't claim that those years and that experience constituted some kind of epiphany, but I must have at least realized that the neighborhood around my new school was not Silver Spring.

Immaculate Conception School (the brothers are long gone) and church are still there. I graduated in 1958 after spending five years there. Ten years later, in the unrest that

followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., much of that area was burned and leveled. The neighborhood went into a decades-long somnolence of poverty from which it is only now emerging.

Q: How did the black kids mix in? Did you ever see any overt sign of racism that you can recall today?

O'CONNELL: The brothers who taught us treated the black children the same as they treated us, which is to say, with a kind of tough love. We played with the African American kids well enough, but we also went our separate ways when the dismissal bell rang every day at 3:00 PM.

One race-related incident from that time remains in my mind even today. I must have been in the sixth grade. We had a baseball team at the school, and we played our games at 16th and Kennedy in Rock Creek Park, not far from the Carter Baron Amphitheater. My father was one of our coaches. Some of the African American kids were on the team, including a quiet kid named John Sloan. After a game one Saturday, the coaches decided to take us to Gifford's, an ice cream place in Silver Spring.

Q: Great ice cream and candy.

O'CONNELL: Right. For us as kids, Gifford's was a kind of paradise. We went to Silver Spring in several cars. As we were approaching the store on Georgia Avenue, John, who was in the back seat with me, whispered, "I don't think I'm going to go in." "Why not?" I asked. "Because they won't serve me," he responded. I remember thinking how strange that was and that I didn't understand what he was talking about.

Fortunately, John did go into Gifford's, and he was served without incident. (My younger brother, Michael, who was also there, he remembers that our father, not known for taking public stands, had quietly told the Gifford's people that John was with us and that he should be served along with the rest of us).

Q: Let's go back, still on the elementary side. Were you much of a reader?

O'CONNELL: Back in my second-grade year, my teacher was a sweet, diminutive nun named Sister Edmund of Jesus (some of the sisters used to take the names of male saints). She got me started with reading, and something must have clicked. I couldn't get enough of the books she gave me. I remember taking home clutches of children's books every night. The little volumes took me away to other worlds. I can't say that I kept up that pace in later years. It was only in college and later, as a young adult that I acquired the reading habits that I still have today.

Q: Did your father as a CPA ever express concern about your math problems?

O'CONNELL: I knew that he was frustrated, and probably puzzled, too. He and my mother would try to help me, although my father was understandably impatient. And

speaking of my math shortcomings, none of his children would become accountants. He nonetheless accepted and supported our academic interests and habits, even though our interests had nothing to do with what he did. The question he would often pose to us later was whether what our studies would eventually enable us to pay our bills as adults.

Q: I take that you don't have the traditional view of nuns, having your knuckles rapped and all that sort of stuff.

O'CONNELL: It was only when I went to the Immaculate Conception School and encountered the brothers that corporal punishment came into play. Those guys were tough, and any behavior problems were dealt with, sometimes severely.

I was a timid kid. I don't know that I was afraid of the brothers, but I kept my mouth shut and did what I thought I should. Just as I would never have thought of "talking back" to my parents, I would not have dreamt of talking back to the brothers. Similarly, there was no thought of going home and telling my parents that, "so-and-so got hit today." I knew that my parents would ask, "What did he do?"

I do recall that, in the sixth grade, I had a young brother who was a decent guy and a good teacher, but he would occasionally let people have it if they really tested him. One day near the end of the school year, Brother Tom was joking and stood in front of the class and asked us, "Has anyone not been hit this year?" Of course the whole class gleefully answered as one, "O'Connell." Brother Thomas said, "Come here, Mr. O'Connell. So I went up, and he said, "Bend over." He gave me a little tap on the backside. I must have been feeling uncharacteristically cheeky that day. As I started to walk back to my desk, I said, *sotto voce*, "That didn't hurt." He then got serious and asked, "What did you say? Get back up here." He gave me a pretty good pop that time to the great delight of my classmates.

Q: I have to ask this only because of the climate of the times. Was there any question about priests, brothers molesting?

O'CONNELL: Fifteen or twenty years ago, when that awful situation in the Catholic Church was coming to light, I asked my father, who had been educated in Catholic schools in both grade and high school, whether he recalled any of the nuns or priests making a pass at him. He thought for a moment and said he hadn't, but he added that he could see how it could happen and also that he considered some of the nuns and priests "odd," which was probably his word for gay people.

Just like my father, I've looked back and have tried to remember, but I can't honestly recall anything like that happening to me. I think I would remember it. I never felt in danger or threatened or anything. That it could and apparently did happen? Of course, and it is a terrible tragedy, the end of which we have sadly not yet seen.

Q: As we talk, between oral history and all sorts of things including race relations and view of different countries, the whole thing. Different time, different place, different attitudes, different perceptions.

O'CONNELL: Speaking of race relations, my father was a native Washingtonian. In 1920s Washington and elsewhere, there were race riots, with returning African American veterans understandably angry at the treatment they received once back home, after risking their lives during the World War I. My father was probably too young to have witnessed the riots, but he definitely heard about them, and he remembered them. In later years, when I would go into downtown Washington with friends in search of places where, as under-aged people, we could (illegally) be served beer, my father would often warn me about the dangers of the city, and he undoubtedly was talking about African Americans. On the other hand, he had sent my brother and me to school at Seventh and N Streets, Northwest.

My mother used to say that when she met my father in the 1930s -- having come from Pittsburgh -- she believed that she had somewhat enlightened views on such subjects as race, but that my father was, in her words, "a little rough around the edges." She liked to take credit for smoothing out those edges and moderating his views. Like much that happened a long time ago, that is subject to debate. In all likelihood and in keeping with the tenor of the times, my father undoubtedly did have strong views about race, but it is probably also true that he was neither a crude rube nor vicious racist in his youth.

Nonetheless, though, we all, without exception among my siblings, grew up having tolerant positions on race and related matters, and my mother took credit for that, too, probably deservedly so, but I also have to believe that my father, in his own way, also had something to do with that.

Q: I spent my teenage years in Annapolis. We had separate drinking fountains and different, all of this sort of thing. My mother was a Chicago liberal and used to fulminate about it.

O'CONNELL: I remember that time, too.

Q: What about high school? Where did you go to high school?

O'CONNELL: For as long ago as I can remember, I always assumed that I would study under the Jesuits at Gonzaga, as my father had done in the 1930s.

Q: Where did that peculiar name come from?

O'CONNELL: The school is named after the Spanish Jesuit saint, Aloysius Gonzaga. I would always tell people that that was where I was going to high school, without a clue of how or whether I was going to get in. The school was -- and remains -- highly competitive. At the same time, there was a new Catholic high school for boys, Our Lady of Good Counsel, being built in the Maryland suburbs.

At that time, Gonzaga had its own entrance exam. I took a multi-week prep course on Saturday mornings, designed to help people pass the exam, which was given in the spring. I used to have to travel to northern Virginia to have English and especially math drilled into me. The result was predictable given my academic history in grade school: I did fine in English, but not so well in the math. I was not admitted to Gonzaga.

This had to disappoint my father, but he did not make a big deal of it, asking only if I wanted him to try to get me in. I told him that I preferred to go to Good Counsel, where I had already been admitted and where several of my friends were going.

My class that entered the brand-new Good Counsel in September 1958 was the first one to go all four years. We were taught by a group of religious brothers called the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier (named after a Jesuit missionary in India in the 1500s).

The Xaverians, as they were called, had schools up and down the east coast, including Massachusetts, New York, Baltimore and Louisville. It was said of the Xaverians that they were the “poor man’s Jesuits.” They were excellent teachers, and Good Counsel turned out to be the right place for me.

Good Counsel’s college-prep curriculum was rigorous. We were required to take two years of Latin, but for some reason -- probably because my Dad had taken four years of the language at Gonzaga -- I took four. I probably should have taken more science instead, but, much later, Latin proved helpful in learning Spanish, Portuguese and, more recently, Italian.

Q: Does Good Counsel still exist?

O’CONNELL: Very much so, but at a different location. Some years ago, the school moved to another part of Montgomery County, in Olney and right across the street from the famed Olney Theatre. In the late 1980s, the school finally went co-ed.

Q: So the school was all male when you were there?

O’CONNELL: Resolutely all-male.

Q: You’re in high school. The hormones are beginning to pop, so where did you go for social life?

O’CONNELL: I still cringe when I think of my limited, early-high school social skills. It’s fair to say that I was painfully shy and socially inept. The usual teen-age outbreak of acne did not help. I had two older sisters, and they were always trying to steer me in the direction of meeting members of the opposite sex, mostly without success.

My perception of my fellow students was that they seemed much more socially advanced than I was. All I used to hear on Monday mornings was how much fun my fellow

freshmen had had over the weekend, going to dances, even drinking, while I had stayed home with my neighborhood buddies, shooting pool in my parents' basement. Things seemed bleak, even if I did not fully realize it at the time.

It was only in my third year at Good Counsel that I began my tentative progression from homebody to an entry-level social butterfly. I began, tentatively, to get the hang of social life. I met a young woman who attended a now-defunct Catholic girls' school in Silver Spring. We were together -- an "item" -- for several years after that, well into young adulthood.

Q: How about studies? Did your interests broaden out?

O'CONNELL: The Brothers of St. Francis Xavier (known as the Xaverians) were excellent teachers. There was also a strong emphasis on study and research skills. We did extensive reading and writing. Our reading lists were broad and long, and even at times daring for a Catholic school. We read, for example, Graham Greene, who was famously a convert to Catholicism and yet whose books always seemed to feature crises of faith in their plots. That was an interesting topic for a bunch of young Catholic boys.

Q: Greene was a very strong Catholic.

O'CONNELL: Also an ambivalent one. Think of The Power and the Glory, about priests in revolutionary Mexico. I was fascinated by the story, especially because I don't think I had ever read anything about priests being anything but unshakable in their faith. Greene gave us a different view.

I did well enough at Good Counsel. I was a B, B+ student, but my mathematics struggles dogged me the whole time I was there.

Q: Do you recall applying to college?

O'CONNELL: In sharp contrast to the protracted and *angst*-producing application process of my own children, my experience seems in faint hindsight to have been relaxed. I probably had expectations for myself that were far lower than those I had for my children years later. I do vaguely remember completing applications. I got into four or five schools, mostly of the same type, small, Catholic, liberal arts institutions in the east.

Q: I was born in 1928. I applied for two colleges, one the University of Virginia. I was going in just when the war was over and so veterans were starting to apply to college. UVA wasn't taking anyone from out of state, so I also applied to Williams, which admitted me. I thought, "Okay, a small school," so I went there.

O'CONNELL: Wonderful school.

Q: It was a different world. How about extra-curricular stuff?

O'CONNELL: I doubt my high school athletics helped me get into college, but taking part in sports at Good Counsel did help me with self-confidence. I played football for three years, and, almost as an afterthought, played basketball in my senior year. My athletic abilities were limited. Good Counsel was brand new, and we were just breaking into the local leagues, so that helped me get on the teams. Once on the teams, I had instant friends, some of whom I am still in touch with. The good news was that I didn't get hurt, and I wasn't nearly good enough to go beyond the high school level.

Q: Where did you eventually go?

O'CONNELL: Belmont Abbey College, run by the Benedictine monks and located about 12 miles west of Charlotte, North Carolina. Back then, the area around Belmont Abbey was still an important textile-manufacturing region, although the industry was already ailing because of cheaper imports from overseas.

The town of Belmont was right out of the film, "Norma Rae." The textile workers lived in tiny bungalows built years before by the mill owners. The Benedictines had improbably had a monastery in that Bible-Belt area since the 1800s. They added the college sometime in the late 19th century.

In more modern times and a few years before I arrived, Belmont Abbey College won the national small college basketball championship under Coach Al McGuire, who later won the big-time national basketball championship at Marquette University. A New Yorker himself, McGuire recruited heavily from the New York-New Jersey region. The school was also popular with non-basketball players from that same area. As a result, the student body was an interesting mix of young southern men -- and it was all male at the time -- from North Carolina and Virginia, and tough city kids from some of the grittier parts of New York and New Jersey.

In the late summer of 1962, accompanied by my parents and family, off I went to North Carolina. A new chapter had begun.

Q: Were you ready for college and being away from home?

O'CONNELL: As I have said, I was only an adequate high school student. By my senior year, I had my mind on other matters, especially my girlfriend who had moved overseas the previous year. Fortunately, Belmont Abbey College turned out to be just what I needed. I liked the place, and I did reasonably well, once I understood that my original major -- pre-med chemistry (I had dreamt of becoming a physician) -- was not going to work out. I turned gratefully to the liberal arts.

Belmont Abbey's classes were small, and I was able to get close-in attention from my professors. Most of the faculty was made up of lay people, but I had a few priests as teachers. With the encouragement of my professors, I broadened my reading, both continuing my exploration of Graham Greene, e.g., The Heart of the Matter, and discovering -- or trying to discover -- other writers, such as Arthur Miller and the French

Jesuit-paleontologist-philosopher, Tielhard de Chardin. I don't believe I made much headway with Father Tielhard in his dense writing on evolution!

As good as the education I received at Belmont Abbey College was, I think I learned more outside of the classroom than inside during my two years there.

Q: What about the civil rights movement? Any sign of it where you were in North Carolina?

O'CONNELL: By the fall of 1962, the civil rights movement had not yet reached hard-scrabble, south-central North Carolina, where I was, but it was gaining traction elsewhere in the state and the South. I was interested in what was happening nationally, but some of my most striking lessons were right under my nose in Belmont, North Carolina.

The memory of the first time I saw "white" and "colored" signs posted above public drinking fountains as I walked along the town's dusty main street remains with me in sharp relief.

I don't recall seeing African Americans step off the sidewalk for whites, but I do remember attending a dramatic murder trial in the nearby town of Gastonia. The court house and the trial could have been the set for To Kill a Mockingbird. A young African American man was accused of raping and killing a white woman, and he was on trial for his life. Feelings were running high in both the black and white communities. Some fellow students and I cut class and caught a ride to Gastonia to sit in on the trial. To our great surprise, the young man was acquitted.

Q: Did you work during the summers when you were in college?

O'CONNELL: I did. During the summer of 1963, between my first and second years of college, I was lucky enough to get a job at the Friendship Heights branch of the Post Office on Wisconsin Avenue, Northwest. Oddly enough, and almost without exception, the mail carriers at that facility, which served the all-white and upper-class section of Washington, were African American. I worked closely with and got to know many of the carriers. Some of them shared their life stories with me. Several had college degrees, but carrying the mail was the only job they could get. Some expressed quiet bitterness as we sorted the mail every morning. One fellow whom I especially recall was a graduate of Howard University.

In the mornings, I delivered mail in the posh neighborhoods of Spring Valley and Friendship Heights. In the afternoons, I drove a route to collect mail from boxes around upper Northwest, loaded all of the mail gathered from the branch's boxes, and delivered it to the central Post Office downtown, next to Union Station.

Q: So you were in Washington at the time of the massive civil rights march in the summer of 1963?

O'CONNELL: I was. As a summer postal worker, I was not given days off, so on that the warm August afternoon of the 1963 march, I was driving a mail truck down Massachusetts Avenue, toward Union Station. The march had already ended as I drove through the downtown streets. Marchers still holding protest signs walked toward their busses to return home.

I wish I could say that I immediately understood the meaning and historic significance of the march, but I didn't.

I do recall, however, thinking that I should have been marching. It was only afterwards, and especially after seeing the news coverage and then reading Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech that I got the significance of the day. A few years later, at Penn State, I would have the opportunity to see and hear Dr. King in person.

As I returned to Belmont Abbey College a few weeks later for my sophomore year, the national debate about civil rights was growing heated, even extending, although tentatively, to the College's small campus.

Belmont Abbey in the fall of 1963 was far from being an island of racial tolerance or concern at the situation of blacks in America (I don't recall any African American students during my time there), but some of the priests at Belmont Abbey encouraged us to think and talk about race and the inequalities in our country, as well as in the state and the local communities. I had many loud and lengthy arguments with my Florida-born roommate and other students from the south about voting rights, integration and the like. Most of my classmates were unhappy about my opinions, and they were not shy about letting me know. With only a few exceptions, I usually felt alone in my views.

In the spring of 1964 -- that summer would become known as Freedom Summer -- an important and far-reaching civil rights bill was pending in the Congress, and President Lyndon Johnson was pushing hard to get the measure passed.

I learned that a march through downtown Charlotte would be held in support of the bill, and a few Abbey students and I decided to take part.

When a young, Richmond-born Benedictine heard of our plans, he tried to dissuade us from going. I can still hear him saying in his deep Tidewater Virginia accent, "Y'all are going to come back with a bullet in your heads." We went anyway and met other marchers at the staging area on the campus of the historically African American Johnson C. Smith University. From there, we began our slow and, except for occasional verses of "We Shall Overcome" and other civil rights anthems, silent progress through the streets of Charlotte. A few white onlookers stared wordlessly. Occasionally, cars full of young white men would swerve toward us as their shouts of "nigger lovers" trailed from the cars' open windows. Probably armed with the naïve invincibility of my youth, I don't recall feeling frightened. Months later, President Lyndon Johnson would sign the civil rights into law.

Not long after the march in Charlotte, a recruiter for the Mississippi Freedom Summer came to Belmont Abbey's campus looking for recruits to do voter registration work that summer in Mississippi. I was torn about what to do, although I still don't know whether I had the courage to actually go to Mississippi. I now believe that I never seriously considered going. I knew that it was a dangerous place. More than that, though, I had already planned to travel to Europe that summer, ostensibly as part of an exchange program that arranged jobs overseas for American students.

A few weeks after the Freedom Summer recruiter's visit, three civil rights workers -- Cheney, Schwerner and Goodman -- were kidnapped and murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan, near Philadelphia, Mississippi. With great interest and more than a little guilt, I followed the tragic news of the missing workers and the eventual recovery of their bodies, all the while wondering what might have been had I gone to Mississippi. To this day, so many years later, the memory of that time still haunts me.

Q: What were your final weeks and months at Belmont Abbey College like?

O'CONNELL: Looking back, I think that, mentally, I was already at Penn State. With my TR-3 roadster parked outside of my dormitory, the lure of the open road looms in my memory of that time much more than my studies. On one spring weekend, my roommate, Tom Morgan, and I bravely -- I was not sure how well the aging sports car would do on such a long trip -- drove north through North Carolina and West Virginia, to the down-at-the-heels city of Wheeling, and the Jesuit-run Wheeling College, where some of my high school classmates were studying. To this day, I am not sure what I could have been thinking. Or whether I was thinking at all!

Wheeling is an hour or so from Pittsburgh. Tom -- who today is a neurologist in Rhode Island -- I decided to push on to the steel city to visit my maternal grandmother, Margaret Kelly Roche, whom we called Grandma. I didn't call ahead.

When we reached the house on Truro Place, we walked around to the back door, which was open, and peered thru the screen. There, at her kitchen table -- where my siblings and I had spent so much time during the summers when my mother would take us to Pittsburgh for our annual summer visits, was Grandma. She was sipping her tea (which she loved to brew Irish style -- always with leaves, never bags. She used to read the tea leaves for us.

I knocked gently, and when she turned to see who it was, it was as if she was expecting me and I had only just stepped out. "Oh, Joe," she said in her almost musical County Kerry brogue, "Come in and have some tea." I introduced her to Tom, and we sat at her old kitchen table, chatting away the rest of the afternoon. Later, we our good-byes and headed back to Wheeling, returning to North Carolina the next day. Luckily, the TR-3 made it without problem.

I saw my grandmother once more after that, in State College the following fall (1964), right after I had enrolled at Penn State. One of my Pittsburgh cousins had graduated from

Penn State the previous May, and he and his fiancée had returned to the campus for their wedding in the University's chapel, named after former Penn State president Milton Eisenhower, brother of Ike. My grandmother traveled to State College for the wedding, and my parents and two of my sisters drove up from Maryland.

Grandma loved a party and enjoyed herself immensely at the wedding. My mother drove her back to Pittsburgh, through the glorious fall footage of western Pennsylvania.

Then came the terrible news: Grandma had dropped dead in the doorway of the house on Truro Place, on her way to Sunday Mass at St. Paul's, Pittsburgh's soaring gothic cathedral, her purse in her hand and her ever-present hat on her head. I had to leave Silver Spring for Pennsylvania right for Penn State's registration. I then caught a bus from State College to Pittsburgh for the funeral, where I was one of the pallbearers.

Q: So you went to Europe in the summer of 1964?

O'CONNELL: I did. My girlfriend's father was a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey. A month or so after my graduation from Good Counsel, he took an assignment to Pakistan, and later to Afghanistan with the U.S. Agency for International Development. My girlfriend had finished high school at the international school in Lahore, Pakistan. Rather incredibly, since her parents had been strict with her when they lived in Silver Spring, they sent her to the American College in Paris (later the American University in Paris). My focus was on getting to Paris and not so much on spending the summer working in a Belgian factory.

Q: Where was your job and what did you do?

O'CONNELL: My job was in an electrical equipment and cable works (ACEC) in the gritty town of Charleroi, Belgium, south of Brussels, and it was to Charleroi that I went after briefly meeting my girl friend in Paris (it was summertime, and she was working as an *au pair* for an American family living in the Neuilly section of Paris).

Along with another American in the program, I rented a room on Charleroi's Rue de la Science, number 44, and began my job at ACEC as a kind of junior factory worker. The work was hard and even dangerous. I remember working on wire-manufacturing machinery, in which the newly formed copper wire had to pass through a bath of acid before being strung for shipment. The place would have failed any OSHA test for safety.

Q: What were your Belgian colleagues like?

O'CONNELL: They were lovely people. I well recall them -- most were French-speaking Walloons -- asking me cautiously, "*Vous etes alleman?*", and seeing their obvious relief when I responded in my very rudimentary French, "*Je suis Americain.*"

It had been only nineteen years since the end of World War II, and Belgians' memories of that time remained raw. Another thing that I recall about my fellow workers at ACEC

is that many of them enjoyed bottles of beer with their lunch in the company cafeteria. I think I was mildly shocked. Talk about an innocent abroad!

Q: So you learned some history while there?

O'CONNELL: The Belgians' feelings about Germans was only the first of many history lessons that I would learn that summer. Another was an encounter on a train with a German woman from Hamburg. Once she realized that I was an American, she told me angrily of the Allied firebombing of that city that had killed thousands of civilians, including members of her own family. I think I sat there in stunned silence.

I had heard of Hamburg, but I did not know much about any Allied firebombing. Clearly, I had a long way to go in my education!

Q: In that same vein, while you were in Belgium in the summer of 1964, did you become aware of the Flemish-French division in the country?

O'CONNELL: Very much so, although, just like the gaps in my knowledge of recent European history, I had no notion of Belgium's serious linguistic and social split before I arrived there. The residents of Charleroi and its environs were mostly French-speaking, but the city was also home for many Flemish speakers, including several who worked at ACEC.

As I walked out of the factory at quitting time on one of my first days on the job, I saw people outside the gate handing out leaflets and shouting angrily at each other. I had no idea of what was going on (my command of French was limited and of Flemish non-existent). I managed to get a copy of the French-language flyer and began to understand the division between the two language groups, which of course continues today.

My time in Charleroi was brief. After traveling to Paris the first few weekends that I was in Belgium, I decided to abandon my factory job and go to Paris once and for all.

Q: Where did you go after you left Belgium?

O'CONNELL: The story of that summer deserves a separate telling. Suffice it to say that I was reading The Sun Also Rises and probably imagined myself as a character in Hemingway's first novel.

Along with two other similarly naïve Americans, my girlfriend and I drove south through France and into Spain, passing through San Sebastian, the Basque country and on to Pamplona. There, we took part in the Fiesta of San Fermin, saw bullfights (after hearing an American pontificating outside of the bull ring that the *corrida de toros* was like the Catholic Mass), and looked for the ghosts of Hemingway and his friends at the Hotel Quintana and the Café Iruna. We stayed up all night, swigged strong red wine from goat skin *botas* and danced the *jota* and *riau-riau* in the streets. One morning I ran ahead of

the bulls and at the last minute clung to a downspout to escape and watch the confused and frightened beasts race by.

We thumbed our way to Barcelona, stayed in the seaside town of Palamos on the Costa Brava, and traveled through Provence back to Paris. As the time of my departure for home approached, we took the boat train to London and crossed the Irish Sea from Liverpool to Dublin to find cousins and a great uncle on both sides of my parents' families, as well as my girlfriend's own family.

Our farewell came at London's Kensington Station as my girlfriend returned to Paris to resume her classes, and I went home to Maryland to face my skeptical parents, who understandably wondered what I had been doing all summer. Speaking of naiveté, I had somehow imagined that they would be utterly fascinated by my tales of lolling about on the Left Bank and, especially, visiting relatives in Ireland. In fact, they were less than mesmerized!

Q: Were you aware during that summer of 1964 of what was happening at home, specifically the political scene? What about the news from Southeast Asia? How much did you know about U.S. involvement there?

O'CONNELL: Not a lot. While at Belmont Abbey, I had some slight awareness of the conflict in Southeast Asia, but it seemed very far away. I had looked at a classmate's paper about U.S. advisors assisting the South Vietnamese armed forces in the early 1960s, so I knew about that, but not much more.

Q: How about in Paris? Did you hear much about the home front and especially about the developing war and the domestic political scene?

O'CONNELL: I knew from the Paris editions of the New York Herald Tribune and the New York Times about the Democrats' nomination of LBJ in late August and, earlier, the Republicans' suicidal selection of Barry Goldwater. I also heard about Nelson Rockefeller aiming his middle finger at the heckling right-wing convention delegates as they booed his anti-extremism plank. And I read with dismay Senator Goldwater's statement that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

As if the chaotic GOP convention and the Goldwater nomination were not worrisome enough, especially reading about those events while so far from home, another troubling bit of news caught my eye in early August: the report of a North Vietnamese torpedo boat's alleged attack on a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, and the skirmish between U.S. and North Vietnamese ships that reportedly followed.

Days later, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which became President Johnson's legal justification for eventually sending thousands of U.S. troops to South

Vietnam to wage war there. No one knew it then, but that disastrous war would last a decade and claim over 57,000 American lives.

As I prepared to head home and resume my studies, South Vietnam began seriously to occupy my thoughts.

Q: That was indeed a crazy summer here at home. So you began your third year of college that fall?

O'CONNELL: Right, but not at Belmont Abbey College. I had transferred to the Pennsylvania State University. By the beginning of my second year at Belmont Abbey, I must have been feeling more confident about my academic abilities -- without much basis -- and I started thinking that I needed to be at a bigger school. My reasons were, well, thin: I wince when I recall that I wanted to go to a school "that people had heard of."

My thinking did not advance much beyond wanting a large institution, preferably with a football team. So, I picked Penn State, in the rural, geographic center of Pennsylvania. At the time, I wasn't even sure where the university was.

Q: Quite a stark contrast between the two schools and, I imagine, quite a difference between your departure two years earlier to Belmont Abbey, and your departure to Penn State?

O'CONNELL: When I left home for Belmont Abbey College, my entire family accompanied me to North Carolina, but when I left for Penn State, my parents handed me a map, wished me luck and said they would see me at Thanksgiving. Not only did I go from one extreme to another, but I was in for some serious culture shock.

Q: What had you heard about Penn State before you got there?

O'CONNELL: People kept telling me how "lucky" I was to be going there. "The parties are legendary," they said. I must have absorbed that bit of nonsense: my initial academic performance was lackluster, and by the end of my first quarter, I was on academic probation.

Soon after returning to Penn State after the Christmas break, I found myself sitting across the desk from my unsmiling academic advisor, Dr. Wallace Brewster, Chair of the Political Science Department. He had also been my professor the previous quarter in his introductory political science course. As he peered over his half glasses, he said, "You're something of a *dilettante*, aren't you, Mr. O'Connell." I wasn't sure what that meant, but I knew it wasn't good (I later looked it up and realized that Professor Brewster was more correct than he might have realized.)

Dr. Brewster told me something more ominous that day: "If you don't get yourself together," he intoned without a trace of irony, "you are going to be out of here." His

admonition was a well-timed kick in the pants. I figured I had better take his advice, and quickly.

Not, however, that I went on to set the academic world afire. I did well enough in my political science major and other courses that interested me, but otherwise I actually was a *dilettante*.

I cannot quite re-create my state of mind that that time, but the following provides a hint about my thinking -- or was it day-dreaming -- in early 1965.

In January, The New Yorker ran a long and riveting John McPhee profile of Princeton's Bill Bradley who was starring in basketball -- and academics. I think I dropped everything in order to read the piece. Bradley's team was on its way to basketball's Final Four. He would later go on to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar before starting his career as a professional basketball player and, later, as a U.S. Senator.

Bradley was one of my heroes at the time, mostly for his effortless intelligence and enormous range of interests. The New Yorker quoted him as saying that if he happened to be walking across the Princeton campus to study at the Firestone Library, and if he happened to meet someone and become engaged in an interesting conversation, he would not go to the library but would continue the conversation, for as long as it took. That's for me, I thought, although it did not occur to me that it was one thing for Bill Bradley to say that, and quite another for me.

Despite -- or perhaps along with -- my mediocre academic showing, I was also becoming more politically aware, if only still in rudimentary fashion. The war in Vietnam was continuing to heat up, and, after all, I was subject to the draft. Clearly, my newfound concern for self-preservation had much to do with my sudden interest in how the war was going. I soon became obsessed with following the news about it.

Q: You were at Penn State from when to when?

O'CONNELL: '64 to '66.

Q: So the war in Vietnam was picking up. When we resume our talk, let's talk about the anti-war movements and the '60s and how all that played out.

Today is the 16th of December 2011, with Joe O'Connell. Joe, we were talking last time about the '60s. Let's first talk about Penn State. What was your impression of the place? Where is it?

O'CONNELL: That it was enormous, almost overwhelming, and many times larger than Belmont Abbey College. Penn State is at or near the center of Pennsylvania, in a rural area. Then, as now, the university is not easy to get to from almost any direction. Partly because of that, there is a sense of isolation about the place. It is not for nothing that the students call the area around the university "Happy Valley."

Just beyond the campus and prosperous-looking State College, the area quickly turns poor and almost Appalachia-like. Oddly enough, however, Centre County, where Penn State is located, is and was then, except for the campus and surrounding area, solidly Republican.

Q: Despite its rural location, did Penn State strike you as a cosmopolitan campus in any way?

O'CONNELL: I wasn't exactly Mr. Cosmopolitan myself, but Penn State did seem provincial and firmly conservative, both politically and culturally. By far, the most explosive flash point raging on campus when I arrived was not U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Rather, it was the university's strict policy of *in loco parentis*, or, the university acting for the absent parents in the interests of the students, specifically female students. Penn State's administration was intransigent in enforcing its rules prohibiting male visitation in the female dorms. The punishments for violations of that rule were severe and may have included expulsion.

Q: How about the social life. How did you fit in?

O'CONNELL: At that time, Penn State assigned transfer students to a dorm that also housed first-year students. The transfers had either come from one of Penn State's two-year campuses around the state, or, like me, from another school. Many of my dorm mates were products of working class families from some of Pennsylvania's economically depressed areas. More than a few were the first in their families to attend college.

(One of the people I met on the evening I arrived at Penn State was a shy first-year student from Altoona, PA, named Ted Kattouf. His parents owned what was colloquially known as a "tap room" that catered to the workers at the old Pennsylvania Railroad's Altoona shops. Ted later joined the Foreign Service, and went on to become U.S. ambassador to the UAE and, later, to Syria.)

I had been in a fraternity at Belmont Abbey College, and the same fraternity had a chapter at Penn State. By the time I got to State College, however, my enthusiasm for "Greek life," never very serious, was on the wane.

Nonetheless, once the brothers of Penn State's Phi Kappa Theta chapter learned that I was already a member, they wanted me to move into the fraternity house, mostly because they needed to sustain the place financially. I declined, although I did take some meals there and got to know the brothers, particularly a brilliant Cuban-American graduate student named Jose Ramon de la Torre. His informal tutorials about his former homeland were my introduction to Cuba and its revolution.

Q: I gather that, in Pennsylvania at least, being a Penn State alumnus is a big deal.

O'CONNELL: Penn State has an enormous presence throughout the state, where many alumni live. Being a Penn State graduate automatically puts one into a kind of state-wide fraternity or professional association, with a body of common experiences and shared memories, many of them revolving around football. The feeling of belonging can be comfortable, almost clubby. If on the other hand you were from outside of Pennsylvania, you were regarded as different, almost exotic, as in "You mean you've come all the way from Washington, D.C.?" Which was scarcely 150 miles away.

Penn State is no Michigan or Berkeley and might have been a tad provincial, but it is a fine university and a wonderful place to study and learn, notwithstanding the football-related scandals of recent years. I remain in frequent contact with one of my teachers, the now-emeritus professor of Middle Eastern history, Dr. Arthur Goldschmidt. Even in the enormity of Penn State, Art is as close to a Mr. Chips professor as I ever met. I long ago lost count of how many letters of recommendation, including those for graduate school, the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service, that he wrote for me.

Q: When you arrived at Penn State and during the two years that you spent there, what was your take on how much the growing war in Vietnam -- along with the protest movement against it -- were on the minds of your fellow students?

O'CONNELL: Very little at that point, but that changed almost with a vengeance a few years after I graduated, when Penn State saw a near-Kent State incident. While I was there, however, it seemed to me then that most Penn State students -- except for a small minority, and most of those seemed to be from New York -- neither knew nor cared about the conflict, or even the world beyond Happy Valley.

Between my growing anger at the war and Penn State students' indifference, it didn't take long for me to allow myself to feel like an outsider on a campus that appeared to care more about the next fraternity party than about the prospect of having to head to the jungles of Southeast Asia.

I began to think seriously about the war and what I regarded as the near certainty of my eventual participation in it. I started having a recurring dream that I was in combat. I heard the same thing from friends. I must have convinced myself that that was what would happen to me.

In spite of my aversion to entering the armed services, at one point I took -- and failed (my math nemesis again) -- the test to get into the Navy's Officer Candidate School for aviation. Another time I spoke with a Marine Corps gunnery sergeant-recruiter at a recruiting office in Silver Spring about joining in the Marines. He could not figure out why I wanted to leave school and enlist. I couldn't either. My father hit the ceiling when I told him about my visit with the gunnery sergeant, and that ended by stillborn stint with the Marines.

While I on the one hand could not get enough of the dispatches from Vietnam by the New York Times' David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan or Malcolm Browne, or the AP's

Peter Arnett -- or the coverage of the anti-war movement that had begun to rage in Berkeley, Ann Arbor and other campuses -- Penn State stayed maddeningly quiet on the other.

The war reporting helped form and harden my opinions about the war. Among them were my beliefs that the U.S. had gotten itself into the Asian quagmire that we had been warned about, and that the conflict was actually a civil war in which we had no business. President Johnson, McGeorge Bundy and the others in the Administration whom I judged to be responsible for the war were never far from my thoughts, and I could get myself into a lather just by talking about them.

I used to ask myself what my fellow students could possibly be thinking. I wondered as I stewed, and waited for some sign of life from them.

I eventually witnessed what was likely Penn State's first public protest against the Vietnam war. A handful of undergraduates burned their draft cards on College Avenue, State College's main drag, as a few other students, including me, looked on, probably vacantly. The story in the next day's edition of the Daily Collegian, Penn State's student-run paper, made the card burnings sound like acts of treason. Most Penn State students of that time probably agreed with that assessment.

(It wasn't until later that I took part in anti-war demonstrations, both in Washington and in Pittsburgh).

I probably imagined that I was both morally superior to and far more sophisticated than the average Penn State student. I wasn't sophisticated *at all*, of course, but for reasons that I can no longer conjure up, I thought I was, perhaps only because I read The New York Times every day. I was pretty insufferable.

Hindsight, as the saying goes, is 20-20. As I look back at my years at "dear old State," in the words of the *alma mater*, I have realized that I spent way too much of my time both worrying about the war and also waiting for the day when I could leave Central Pennsylvania. In later years, when I have visited Penn State and have thought about all that the university had to offer me nearly half a century ago -- much of which I ignored -- I have asked myself what the hell **I** could have been thinking!

Q: You were on a student deferment, right?

O'CONNELL: I was, precarious though that was at the time. In the spring of my senior year, I received a notice from the Selective Service informing me that I was to undergo my draft physical. I well recall the day. One early morning a couple of weeks later, I joined about a hundred or so other young men in Bellefonte, PA, which is the next town to the east of State College. Like many small Pennsylvania towns, Bellefonte was an appropriately gloomy place for the business of the day. We climbed onto chartered busses for a two-hour ride to an Army depot near the state capital of Harrisburg. The facility's barracks looked to be of WWII vintage. There were other Penn State students in the

bunch, but what I most remember were other potential draftees who looked like they had stepped straight out of Appalachia, which they had. One poor fellow actually had no shoes and seemed -- whether genuinely or as part of an act to avoid getting inducted -- to be mentally challenged and could only make unintelligible sounds. The physical itself was uneventful and even perfunctory. We moved, semi-naked, from room to room, clutching paperwork, and were poked and probed. I passed, although, for reasons that I have never understood, I continued to hold my student deferment.

Q: You were a political science major, right? Let's talk a little bit about that field as it is and presumably was then taught in universities. I believe -- and this is stating my prejudice -- that it took a tragic turn toward the excessive use of mathematics. You had all these political scientists running around with slide rules looking for the philosopher's stone or whatever it was that they would find the formula for human conduct and political conduct. It did not make much sense.

O'CONNELL: It was almost like trying to reduce the question as to why people vote Democratic or Republican to a mathematical equation.

Q: Was that happening?

O'CONNELL: It was certainly beginning, and by the time I got to graduate school four or five years later, it was pretty widespread in the political science literature. The material became almost impossible for me to read, let alone grasp. Many of the articles in The American Political Science Review were nothing but pages of equations, with only as minimum of text. I read a lot of political theory in my courses, including Plato, Aristotle and the others, along with more contemporary material.

Q: Looking back, what do think you got out of your major in political science?

O'CONNELL: It awoke in me a curiosity about and a critical approach to our own society and others around the world. I have already mentioned my absence of focus as an undergraduate. A happy by-product of that was that I became voracious and eclectic reader, something that I was fortunate enough to be able to continue a few years later as a Peace Corps Volunteer, where there was little to do at night but read the books in the book locker we were each given, and listen to shortwave radio.

Q: Speaking of shortwave radio broadcasts, which of the two, the BBC or the VOA, did you tend to listen to when you were later a Peace Corps Volunteer in Colombia?

O'CONNELL: Probably about even, although the BBC World Service's signal usually came into my mountain-top perch more clearly than VOA's. I also listened to U.S. Armed Forces Radio out of Panama, which was, as the crow flies, relatively close to where I was. One of my years in Colombia was 1968, so I tuned heavily into VOA for its superb coverage of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (I stayed up all night to hear the developments from the streets of Prague), President Johnson's announcement that he would not run for re-election, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther

King, Jr., the ensuing riots in Washington, etc. Unlike VOA, the World Service has as part of its mission to broadcast to British ex-pats overseas, so I also became a fan of the Saturday morning program which broadcast British football and cricket scores and game summaries.

Q: Going back to your undergraduate days at Penn State and then as a Peace Corps Volunteer, what were you reading?

O'CONNELL: My reading, both at Penn State and in the Peace Corps, was all over the place. If something sounded interesting to me, I would -- just as I had with the New Yorker piece on Bill Bradley -- read it at the expense of my study time. As a result, I read far more outside of my course syllabi than inside.

I recall especially fondly Richard Hofstadter's The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, Fulbright's Old Myths and New Realities (after I heard Senator Fulbright speak at Penn State, he became and remained for the rest of his life one of my heroes) and, later, David Halberstam's The Best and The Brightest and Eric Hoffer's The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements. I read Black Like Me by a fellow named John Howard Griffin. He had colored his skin and walked through the South as an African American. Later I read The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley, which remains one of the pivotal books of my life. For pleasure I went all through Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and some of the period pieces -- such as Of Human Bondage of the little-read Somerset Maugham.

I became interested in why we Americans are like we are and why we view the world as we do, cyclically wanting either to isolate ourselves from the world or convert it to our way of thinking and living. I was also trying to understand how we became enmeshed in something like Vietnam.

Q: Did you concentrate on looking at political developments? You had of course Vietnam, China, the USSR. Did any of this or other places attract your attention?

O'CONNELL: They did. I took courses in comparative political systems, looking at the U.S., the U.K and France; Middle Eastern politics, another in African politics, and still another in Asian and mainly Chinese studies. Oddly enough, given my later time with the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service in Latin America, I didn't take anything on that region.

Q: From those courses you got a pretty good sampling compared to most students.

O'CONNELL: Yes, at a basic level and all quite accidental. The good news is that those courses prompted me to do more reading than I would have normally done in those areas.

Q: Did you work while you were at Penn State?

O'CONNELL: Off and on, I waited on tables at a couple of different State College restaurants. Hard as it is to believe today, Penn State football in those days wasn't anything like it became later. Joe Paterno was an assistant coach and became head coach just as I was graduating, in September 1966. I went to the games during my first year at Penn State, but by the following season, I pretty much stopped, mostly because I was working on Saturdays.

Q: While you were at Penn State were you pointed at anything career-wise?

O'CONNELL: President Kennedy's words about the idea of service must have gotten into my head. While at Penn State a few years after his inaugural speech, I happened to see a flyer about Peace Corps recruiters coming to campus, and I went to their briefing one evening. I came away from the session thinking that I might want to go into the Peace Corps at some point, although I did not decide to apply until midway through my senior year, undoubtedly as I was beginning to think hard about what I was going to do with my life.

Q: Did the Foreign Service, foreign affairs, or the State Department run across your radar at all at that time?

O'CONNELL: A couple of friends had gone to Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, but my first experience with an actual Foreign Service Officer was not until I was in the Peace Corps in Colombia. I had come into Bogota from my village to borrow films at the U.S. embassy. While there I met an FSO at the USIS office, and he asked me what I was doing, where I was from, and so on. He also talked about his career. I didn't leave the embassy thinking that I might like to join the Foreign Service some day, but the idea must have stayed in my mind.

Q: When did you finish up at Penn State?

O'CONNELL: I eventually arrived at what were supposed to be the final months of my senior year, in the spring of 1966. By that time, my girlfriend had moved from Paris to New York. I was spending more time in New York, which is not close to State College, than I should have. My inattention to my studies would soon catch up with me.

In order to graduate that spring, I needed an elective in a non-political science course, so I signed up for a lower-level course in contemporary social problems, which I figured would be the minimally challenging and which would be a nice way to move toward graduation and, best of all, my departure from Penn State. I could not have been more mistaken.

The course was large, perhaps a few hundred younger undergraduates filling a huge lecture hall. I did not pay much attention to the material -- which was probably interesting -- and at the end of the quarter I received, for the first and only time in my life -- even in mathematics -- a failing grade.

I went to see the professor to plead my case, to no avail. Unsmiling and clearly unsympathetic, he said, “You should have come to see me a couple of weeks ago. Maybe we could have worked something out. Sorry.”

I did not graduate with my class.

I was unhappy, but not desperately so, which is remarkable in light of my real jeopardy of being drafted within weeks.

I had only myself to blame for my situation.

Astonishingly, my plan was *still* to spend that summer in New York, so I first got a bus to Silver Spring, my idea being to grab some clothes, see my parents, to whom I would break the news and explain somehow, and then quickly head to NYC.

I did not realize it, but Penn State had sent a telegram to my parents informing them of my academic failure and the fact that I would not be graduating. After riding the all-night Greyhound from State College and arriving at my parents’ home about 7:30 AM, I unexpectedly met my father at the front door as he was leaving for work. I had no idea that my parents already knew what had happened. My father first asked me what I was doing at home, especially, he added, since “you are not going to graduate.” He calmly put down his briefcase, and we began what turned out to be a “spirited” discussion of some eight hours’ duration. All the while, my distraught mother came in and out of the living room imploring us to lower our voices and calm down.

Early that evening, my mother handed me my duffel bag packed with clean clothes, and she and my father drove me to the bus station for the overnight trip back to State College. My father gave me a blank check and told me to register the next day and to finish my degree by summer’s end.

I moved back into my un-air-conditioned, fire-trap apartment on South Barnard Street in State College (central Pennsylvania is very hot in the summer). I signed up for a couple of courses, including African history, and graduated in September. Lesson learned.

Q: Let’s take you to the Peace Corps. Talk about the screening and the training.

O’CONNELL: At that time -- the 1960s -- most Peace Corps applicants and Volunteers were “B.A. generalists,” people who had bachelors’ degrees in the social sciences or humanities, but who had little to no practical experience. That described me exactly.

I originally wanted to go to India. The Peace Corps told me there were no programs opening up there, but that Chile had a forestry program. I knew little about trees, but was assured, “We’ll train you,” and Chile sounded far enough away. “Sign me up,” I said.

A few months later the Peace Corps told me that the Chile program had been cancelled, but that Colombia had a program in something called “rural community development”

opening up soon. Although I was unsure of just what that meant, I took it. From such seemingly insignificant turns in the road come life-changing experiences and encounters.

A few months later, in early March of 1967, after having roomed with a high school classmate in New York City, worked briefly in an anti-poverty program, and taken a semester of evening graduate political science courses at St. John's University in Queens, I reported to a hotel in Philadelphia where the Colombia training group was assembling before leaving for the first phase of training in Puerto Rico.

Q: Where did you go in Puerto Rico?

O'CONNELL: The Peace Corps at that time had two training camps on the island, in the hills near the rain forest, above the city of Arecibo. Ominously, they were named in memory of two Volunteers who had been killed in a plane crash in Colombia a few years before.

Camp Radley looked for all the world like the summer camp I had gone to years before, complete with cabins, bunk beds and a chow line. We spent six weeks there, mainly studying Spanish, along with courses in Colombian history and society, in addition to instruction about how to be community organizers. The regime was rigorous, almost military-like. We were awakened early each morning not by a bugle but by a recording of the Colombian national anthem blaring from loud speakers. We were expected to learn the words..., "O, Gloria inmarcesible...", some of which I can still remember today.

Q: Aside from studying Spanish, what else sticks out in your memory of the weeks you spent in your training camp?

O'CONNELL: One event especially sticks out. On a Friday near the end of our training, we were told to pack for the weekend and then handed a piece of paper with the name of a town somewhere on the island. We were taken to the bus station in Arecibo, where we were told that our task was to locate our assigned town, get ourselves there, find a place to stay and eat, familiarize ourselves with the town and the local authorities, and, by Sunday evening, get back to Arecibo and then write a report on our experiences.

The name on my piece of paper was Carolina, which was a village outside of San Juan and also the birthplace of baseball great Roberto Clemente. As I later learned, there are at least two towns on the island whose names included "Carolina." The one I chose was simply Carolina (I was actually supposed to go to another one).

By the time I got to Carolina after several hours of travel by bus and taxi, it was late in the day. I quickly discovered that there were no hotels or other public accommodations. I went to the police station, where a sympathetic officer offered me his one jail cell for the weekend. I spent a fitful night on a hard slab being attacked by clouds of large mosquitoes (there were no screens on the cell's barred window). The townspeople were friendly enough but probably puzzled as to what this young, tongue-tied *gringo* was

doing in their village. That would prepare me well for the similarly puzzled reception that awaited me in my Colombian village a few months later.

Q: What were your fellow Peace Corps trainees like?

O'CONNELL: There were 30 or 40 of us, a real mish-mash, and probably a fair reflection of mid-1960s, middle-class American youth. All were white, and most were single, but there were also a few couples. A couple of the trainees were from Texas, the Southwest or California, and they had decent Spanish-language fluency. A few others were of Hispanic or Puerto Rican descent, and their Spanish was of course fluent. But the bulk of us were people like me who had never been exposed to Spanish. In addition to the four years of Latin I took in high school, I took some French in high school and college. No Spanish, however.

Q: What was the approach to your Spanish instruction?

O'CONNELL: Heavily conversational. Our instructors -- some of whom were former Volunteers themselves -- used the Foreign Service Institute language-teaching method and materials. We were tested and rated in our ability, from the lowest to those who were nearly fluent. I was in the "no Spanish" group and placed in a class with three other trainees of similar inability.

On the first day of class, three other trainees and I sat nervously at a table in one of the camp's wooden frame buildings. We were given no books, not even a dictionary, let alone pencil or paper. Right from the start, the teacher spoke only in Spanish.

"*Buenos dias,*" he said. I knew that much. For the first couple of weeks, we begged for a book, or anything that would remind us of how we had studied language in high school or college, where the text book was a security blanket. The teacher told us, "No books. We will be doing dialogues at first, and then we'll give you a book, so you can put together what you hear with what you see on the page." I felt like a dunce endlessly repeating mindless dialogues.

Q: Your training was in an era when encounter groups, team groups, whatever you want to call them, were being used widely in training. Did you experience that in your Peace Corps training in Puerto Rico and Colombia, and, if so, did you have the feeling that somebody, psychiatrists or something, picking your brains?

O'CONNELL: It was more than a feeling. A couple of psychologists -- or "shrinks," as we called them -- were resident members of the training staff. Beginning in Puerto Rico, they would slide into our classrooms to observe us silently observe us, or they would watch us in the role-playing sessions, in team groups, or during the encounter groups. We would also have periodic, individual appointments with them, and they would ask us questions such as, "What's on your mind today?" or another favorite, "How do you think you're doing?" They followed us to Bogota and were an eerie presence until the end of our training.

Q: I gather that the involvement of psychologists in Peace Corps training was especially pronounced in the early years. In a way you were a test group, and the trainers were playing games with you as well.

O'CONNELL: We did feel like the training staff, especially the psychologists, were often playing mind games with us. Many of the staff people were odd ducks themselves, but we also knew that they held our futures in their hands, so we took them and their sometimes whacky activities seriously. I didn't much care for being monkeyed with, sitting across a table and being asked questions to which there really did not seem to be answers. Looking back, though, it was probably pretty mild stuff.

Q: You had to be playing back to the psychologists, weren't you?

O'CONNELL: We knew, or at least we thought we knew what they wanted to hear. They were looking for people who weren't going to "freak out," in the expression of those days, who would be able to cope psychologically and otherwise in difficult living situations, who would be able to cope with and overcome culture shock, etc.

We heard a lot about culture shock, including the loss of familiar things, people, places, etc. "Are you up to it, and could you be effective in your work as a Volunteer," they would ask us over and over? Who the heck really knew?

Q: In a way it's easy to make fun of it, but the point was they really were sticking it to people.... A very difficult situation.

O'CONNELL: I often had the idea that they were flying as blindly as we were.

Q: This was the period in corporate and government hiring where you would go in and often somebody would sit down and ask questions, and you had to learn to say, "I love my father more than my mother, I really like the work ethic." There's a litany of what you should say and of what they were looking for, so you read manuals on how to outwit them.

O'CONNELL: I think we took the famous -- or was it infamous? -- MMPI, or Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test. We were given a list of statements to which we were supposed to react. Some of the statements were just nutty.

Fortunately, one of my Penn State political science professors, a fellow named Nicholas Masters, had studied personality tests like the MMPI. I recall him talking about some of the statements in the Minnesota test, such as, "I hear voices? Do you?", or "When was the last time you heard them?" I had some idea what this was about, and Dr. Masters, who was something of a wise guy, made a joke about how, through these kinds of psychological tests, it was possible to identify and deal with people who were true believers, a la Eric Hoffer, so, going in, I felt like I could deal successfully with the Peace Corps psychologists.

Q: Did some of the trainees not make it?

O'CONNELL: Just before we left Camp Radley, and again in Bogota at the end of the training there, several trainees were, in the language of that time, "de-selected" and sent home, their Peace Corps stints over before they began.

Q: "De-selected." What a wonderful word.

O'CONNELL: Wonderfully Orwellian, but some trainees took their terminations hard. De-selection day was almost Biblical, complete with actual weeping and the rough equivalent of gnashing of teeth. Some of the de-selected trainees seemed to be in denial that they were about to be sent home. I am not sure they were ever given reasons. There was one fellow from New York who, I thought, was a natural Volunteer but who, it turned out, had apparently engaged in anti-war activity while in college. Then there was a couple, and somebody suggested that they might have been deemed insufficiently mature, but I couldn't see any difference between them and myself.

One Puerto Rico "de-selectee" who took her termination especially hard was a young woman of Polish descent from Texas, to whom I had briefly taken a shine. I was somehow volunteered to accompany her to the airport in San Juan to catch her flight home, which strikes me now as an odd way to handle a sad situation.

Q: Did you have a potential significant other hovering around at that time, the young woman in Paris?

O'CONNELL: She was in Paris and had moved to New York, but we had fortunately parted ways around the time I graduated from Penn State.

Q: So you finished up in Puerto Rick and went on to Bogota. Where did you go once you got there?

O'CONNELL: Six weeks after arriving in Puerto Rico, we were bussed onto the tarmac of San Juan's airport where we climbed onto an aging Avianca Airlines Lockheed Constellation and headed south toward Bogotá. I still remember staring at the vintage aircraft's frayed red rugs as I wondered whether we would make it all the way to Bogota.

We did, however, arrive safely in Colombia's isolated, high-altitude capital, where we spent two and a half months living with non-English-speaking Colombian families and studying at the Center for Colombian University Studies (CEUCA in its Spanish acronym). CEUCA had been set up by a consortium of mid-west colleges, including Grinnell and Beloit, as a location in Colombia for the schools' junior-year-abroad programs.

Along with more Spanish, we worked on area studies, community organization techniques, and, with the psychologists still around, more “fun” encounter groups and role-playing.

I lived with a young couple named Ligia and Alberto Zembrano. They were only a few years older than I and received me warmly. My time with Ligia and Alberto was a wonderful introduction to Colombian family life in Bogota.

Q: Was there any social life during your training in Bogota?

O’CONNELL: Peace Corps Volunteers are deservedly well known for their ability to have a party for the slimmest of reasons. At a CEUCA party a few weeks after we arrived, one of my fellow trainees introduced me to a striking young Colombian woman named Stella Sarmiento Ricaurte. She lived with her mother and her brother and worked as a bilingual secretary for Wyeth Laboratories, an American pharmaceutical company. She had spoken English since she was a child, having gone to a school run by American nuns. I still had a long way to go with my Spanish, so we “met” in English.

Q: So you liked her right away?

O’CONNELL: I was smitten. A little over a year later we married.

Q: How did the Peace Corps determine where Volunteers were to be assigned?

O’CONNELL: Good question. I’ve always imagined, only half-seriously, that the Peace Corps must have put a large map of Colombia on a wall. Somebody would be blindfolded and given a set of darts, and then throw them at the map. Wherever they landed would be the place where a Volunteer would be assigned.

Q: When did you receive your assignment, and where did the dart send you?

O’CONNELL: We were given our assignments after three months at CEUCA, and mine was as a rural community organizer in the village of Junin (pronounced *HOO-NEEN*), in the department (state) of Cundinamarca, which surrounds Bogota.

Junin is about six hours to the northeast of the capital and is almost indistinguishable from hundreds of other small villages and hamlets around Colombia. It was also a place which the typical Bogota resident -- *Bogotano* -- let alone the rest of the country’s population, would have never heard of, let alone visited. As my father remarked when he came to Junin a year later, one would have to want to go to Junin. Otherwise, there would be no reason to go.

Q: Before we talk about your Peace Corps assignment, let’s talk a bit about the situation in Colombia when you arrived there. At the time, it was not a nice place, right?

O'CONNELL: It was not a nice place, but not for the same reasons that it became such a dangerous place many years later.

Q: Did you and the Volunteers whom you knew in Colombia wonder about the country would look like in the future?

O'CONNELL: Regardless of where they may be in the world, Peace Corps Volunteers love been to try to predict what will happen to their "host country" in the future, and the Volunteers in Colombia were no different.

The essence of the Peace Corps experience has always been that volunteers travel to their assigned countries, learn the local language, become involved in the culture and way of life, immerse themselves in the country's problems, and figure out the reality of the place, including so-called "felt needs," in the odd Peace Corps jargon of that time.

In Colombia, my colleagues and I had all sorts of ideas about what was going to happen to the country in the future. They included a military coup (there was one in the early 1950s), chaos, or, optimistically, a more complete democracy. Without exception, our predictions were dead wrong, because nobody could have guessed Colombia's situation of just a few years later; i.e., the descent of the country into the maw and death grip of cocaine, with its accompanying corrosive effects on Colombian society, including its governance.

Not that there was a scarcity of reasons, in the Colombia of mid-1967, to be worried and extra careful. Scarcely a decade before, the country had endured a period (1948 to 1958), of ghastly, mostly rural, internecine political and class violence known as *la violencia*. Estimates of the number of Colombians who were killed during those years are in excess of 300,000, but no one knows for sure what the total was.

For the most part, however, *la violencia per se* had subsided by the time we arrived in April 1967, but the effects of that orgy of blood-letting continued, largely through the creation of a generation of people who were rootless, orphaned and bitter at what had happened.

The period of *la violencia* was followed, almost seamlessly so, by a deadly spiral of score-settling, which in turn helped create a wave of people migrating from the *campo* (rural areas) to a mean existence of living on the margins of Bogota and other Colombian cities. Once there, many of the migrants subsisted on pick-pocketing, purse-snatchings, and brazen house invasions.

Q: Were you taught in your training about precautions that you needed to take to avoid being robbed or assaulted?

O'CONNELL: The Peace Corps built basic safety measures into our training. We were told to be to be aware of our surroundings and never to wear easily-snatched wrist watches or, for women, pierced-ear earrings or other jewelry. But Colombian thieves are

well known for their skill and innovative methods. I don't think I knew any volunteers who weren't robbed, usually more than once. By sheer luck, it never happened to me.

Q: Tell me more about Junin. What was it like, and what were your thoughts when you first got there?

O'CONNELL: Junin is in a region -- known as the Guavio, after the river flowing through the area's valley -- which at that time was regarded as peaceful. Not too far away from Junin, however, were some of Colombia's most important emerald mines, in a place called Gachela. Because of that area's endemic violence and frequent gunplay associated with the emerald trade, we were instructed never to go to there.

Junin had an overall population of some 2,500 people, counting those who lived in town and others who lived in the surrounding rural area. Small-plot farmers, whose lands were known as *minifundias*, or extremely chopped up parcels, predominated (Colombia uses *primo geniture* for property inheritance purposes).

The owners and their families subsisted on these postage-stamp-sized plots and raised some livestock, often including a few chickens and, if they could afford it, a dairy cow or two. Junin was situated at an altitude of about 2,500 meters, so the air was thin, especially to newcomers like me. The weather -- far from being tropical -- was more often than not gray, chilly and rainy, particularly at certain times of the year.

Seeing the place for the first time was a shock, not so much culture shock, but rather the sudden realization that I was there by myself, and for a long time. Fortunately, there were other Volunteers in the area, the nearest about an hour away, and we eventually formed a team.

Each newly-assigned Volunteer was given a folder containing what was generously dubbed a report on his or her "site," which was Peace Corps-speak for the place of assignment. In reality, the site report was typically a couple of lightly-detailed pages which someone, probably another Volunteer, had written after visiting the town perhaps once.

The drafter of the report on Junin wrote that he had spoken with the local priest, the police commander, the mayor and maybe a few others, with the conversation probably going something like this: wouldn't it be nice to have a young American here in Junin, doing things that were at best vaguely defined? Not particularly in-depth but probably appropriate in light of the dartboard approach that I've described. Also in the site report was the date on which I was to arrive in Junin: early June, 1967.

Q: Once you finished training in Bogota, did you go to Junin right away?

O'CONNELL: After a couple of days of making my good-byes to Stella and taking care of last details in Bogota, a young Villanova graduate by the name of Ken Collins, who was a Volunteer Leader, met me in a battered and green Peace Corps-owned Jeep

Cherokee at the Zembranos' apartment, and off we went. I think I had a surplus duffle bag and a beat-up suitcase. My trunk from home had not yet arrived. Neither had the vintage Underwood portable typewriter, given to me by Father John Murphy, the parish priest at St. Michael's in Silver Spring. On that same machine, whose "e" worked only fitfully, I would -- using the hunt and peck method -- tap out a stack of windy letters to my parents over the next two-plus years, often by candlelight when the local generator failed.

Q: What was that first trip to Junin like?

O'CONNELL: The trip from Bogota -- which I would eventually take dozens of times -- lasted a bone-jarring six hours over rutted dirt roads with non-stop switchbacks and jaw-dropping (easily a thousand feet or more) drops at the sides of the road. So deep were some of them -- and there were no guard rails -- that it was often not possible to see the bottom. Bus accidents in Colombia were -- and are -- common; they are one of the biggest causes of Peace Corps volunteer deaths worldwide. Two young men from my training group -- including a young Puerto Rican from the Bronx and a working-class kid from Flint, Michigan -- were killed in separate bus accidents in other parts of the country. I experienced a couple of close calls myself.

Around the five-hour mark of the trip, and after passing through a few villages and an area of permanent fog and rain known as the *paramo*, we made one final climb and pulled into the muddy and car-less streets of Junin in early afternoon, coming to a stop in the village's main plaza, which was dominated by an unpainted and unfinished, cathedral-size church.

"Well," said Ken, "here we are." I unloaded my bags, and as he got back into the Jeep, we shook hands, and he said something like, "Good luck. We'll be in touch."

I can still remember watching the Cherokee slowly disappear back down the mountain as headed toward Bogota. My thoughts at that moment could probably be summed up with the question, "What the hell have I got myself into?"

Q: What did you do then?

O'CONNELL: I picked up my stuff and walked to the priest's house next to the church. I knocked on the door and, after being announced by the housekeeper, introduced myself to Father Nemecio Montenegro. He appeared to be aware that someone was going to be coming to Junin. He offered to let me stow my bags in the house's storage room, which he indicated was down the hall.

As I opened the door to that storage room, in a kind of abrupt welcome to Junin, I saw tall stacks of brown paper sacks of flour, on the outside of which was the American flag, a drawing of two joined hands and the words (in English) "A Gift of the people of the United States of America." I wondered whether the flour was going into the stomachs of

Father Montenegro and his associates, the boarding students at the parish's teacher training, or normal school, or maybe even to the people of Junin. I never did find out.

As the afternoon wore on, I walked around Junin's streets and found, just off the plaza, the town's only "hotel," although it was more of a rooming house.

People in town were shy, but they could also not stop staring at me. I was considerably taller than everyone, so that undoubtedly accounted for their gawking. Nutrition has improved in Colombia since then, and Colombians are now taller, but they weren't in 1967. During my weeks back in Bogota, I had experienced people looking at me as if I had come from Mars, in part because of my height, but also apparently because of my size-13 feet, which never ceased to draw attention.

Pedestrians who passed me on the street would often say -- probably unaware that I could understand some of what they were saying -- "Look at that guy's feet, and just look at the length of his legs. One of his steps would make three of mine." I never got the idea that these things were said out of hostility, but rather more in disbelief. Also, when children passed me on the street or on the trails outside of town, they would unfailingly say -- in English, if they knew a few words -- "Good-by, Meester," the literal translation of the "*adios, senior*" that country people would typically say to each other as they passed on the rural trails, or *caminos*. I soon learned that the appropriate -- and expected -- response was, "*Que este bien, senior (or senora)*).

Q: How were you doing with your Spanish?

O'CONNELL: There was a lot of early frustration. Fortunately, there was no one with whom to speak English. Almost imperceptibly, though, and despite my own gloomy estimate of how I was doing, I was catching on here and there. I was learning some of the expressions that were either not taught in our Spanish courses or which were colloquial and peculiar to that area of Colombia. For example, I remember being puzzled -- I spent a lot of time in puzzlement then -- when I kept hearing the word *tocayo* when being introduced to anyone named *Jose*. I eventually figured out -- or more likely, asked Stella -- that *tocayo* means having the same first name.

Much later, after Stella and I were married, I began to be asked by townspeople about my *costilla*, as in, "How's your *costilla*?" Talk about being puzzled. When I consulted my pocket dictionary, I saw that the word meant "rib." I could not imagine why anyone would ask me about my rib. Someone must have explained that the colloquial meaning of *costilla* is "wife," possibly from the Bible story of women emerging from one of Adam's ribs.

Fortunately, I learned many other, more cultural and even religious lessons happened, both then and throughout my whole time in Junin. The following March 19, for example, townspeople whom I encountered on the street warmly congratulated me, and it was only after someone told me that that day was my "saint's day," or *dia del santo*, as in the Feast of St. Joseph, that I understood. In Catholic Colombia, especially among rural people,

and unlike back home, saints' days are a big deal. When March 19 rolled around the next year, I remembered and thanked my well-wishers.

Q: How were your first days and weeks in Junin?

O'CONNELL: I spent my first days introducing myself to the town's clearly puzzled residents. They were probably wondering who this lost-looking young *gringo* was, with his elementary Spanish, who had seemingly parachuted into their town. I called again on Father Montenegro and, later, the mayor.

My welcome was not exactly a red carpet, however, and the most common reaction was a kind of cautious indifference, which was a good reality check in case I had been thinking that I would be received like some kind of savior. I would get questions like, "What are you and why would you come here?" I would try to explain that I was a "Cuerpo de Paz," which translates literally as a "body of peace." No wonder they thought I was from Mars!

Q: How long did you stay in the hotel?

O'CONNELL: Eventually, after a mercifully few days, I was offered a place to stay for free in the town's health station, or *Puesto de Salud*. It was in a formerly private home and had a couple of unused and windowless storage rooms. One of them became my room for the next year. Like most of Junin's houses, the room had a double door and a ceramic tile floor. There was of course no heat, and nighttime temperatures in Junin could get down into the 40s.

As a visiting Volunteer quipped after seeing my quarters, "Joe, you could probably hang a side of beef in here." The roof leaked badly -- a major problem in a place where rain was a constant -- and housed at least one family of mice. One night, during a particularly heavy rain, a mouse ran across my poncho-covered sleeping bag and across my face. Luckily, all of that happened before I realized what was happening!

The *Puesto de Salud* was down the street from Junin's plaza and was staffed five days a week by a nurse, with a doctor coming from Bogota for part of every week. Later, a recent dentistry graduate arrived for her "rural year," which the Colombian government required of all new dentists and doctors. Her name was Dr. Francia Rodriguez. We became good friends, and I accompanied her on some of her trips to the *campo* (the rural area outside of the village) to treat patients, which consisted mostly of pulling people's badly decayed teeth.

Q: So what about the "rural community development" for which you had trained in Puerto Rico and Bogota?

O'CONNELL: I was never sure what that meant in practice, even less so once I got to Junin. The Colombian government already had in place a program known as "community action," or *Accion Comunal*, which helped farmers organize in rural communities like Junin, into committees or *juntas*, the members of which would then determine their

communities' needs, such as a school, road, latrine or community pharmacy. They would then approach the government for grants of funding through the *juntas*.

I pretty quickly realized that Junin's people -- and those in the area's other settlements where Volunteers were serving -- were already well organized. They certainly didn't need foreigners -- whose initial command of Spanish was limited -- to show them how to organize themselves.

There were two Volunteers in other villages in the Guavio region (Ubala and Gacheta), and we began meeting every week or so to discuss our similar challenges. We had all reached the same conclusions about how we could best assist the people in our towns, and it was not through the Accion Comunal program. What they needed, we decided, was assistance, on a basic level, with their farming.

That might at first seem unlikely coming from a group whose knowledge of agriculture was sub-basic. Fortunately, we were able to count on Walter Price, a recently-arrived Volunteer who had been raised on a farm in southeastern Ohio. Although Walter had no formal training in agronomy, we called him our resident agronomist, a title which he cheerfully accepted. Later, a Volunteer from Pennsylvania who knew about raising chickens joined our team.

The area's *campesinos* were using potato, bean and corn seeds that weren't especially productive, and, with a few exceptions, they were not using fertilizer (they could not afford it). Looking back at that time, however, I am not certain that they actually needed as much help as we thought. Even then, I had a feeling that the farmers indulged us a bit, for they were respectful people and undoubtedly knew all too well that they knew far more than we did.

We approached the Peace Corps office in Bogota and were able to arrange several weeks of retraining at the *Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario*, or ICA (Colombian Agricultural Institute), located just outside of Bogota and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. There, we learned the basics of potato cultivation, using new seeds), fertilizers and planting practices. The strain of potato that we were introducing was known as *Purace*, named for the region in Peru from which they had originally come. We also worked with new strains of corn and beans, two other staples of the Colombian diet.

Once back in our sites, we identified what we called the "natural leaders" in each of the small farming communities, or *veredas*, in our areas. Some of these were farmers who had already shown an inclination to try new crops. Many of them self-identified.

We would then, with the assistance of the local priests who would make announcements from the pulpit at Sunday Mass, organize demonstration plots and field days and invite other nearby farmers for the initial planting. We would repeat the demonstration field days midway through the crop season and then again at harvest time. I was surprised when we met with some initial success, although that success was later blended -- or perhaps diluted -- with some unforeseen results.

Q: Potatoes are of course an Andean phenomena.

O'CONNELL: Right, and an essential part of the Colombian diet. In fact, several types of starches are typically part of what many Colombians eat every day. It was not unusual when dining in a rural Colombian home to be served potatoes, rice, yucca, and, on special occasions, maybe a small piece of tough meat or chicken.

Q: You mentioned that your initial success was diluted. What was that about?

O'CONNELL: Despite our good intentions, we encountered some unintended consequences of introducing "improved" potato seeds in Junin and the area's other villages. To be sure, the yields were many times what the farmers had been achieving with their native seeds. Unfortunately, the yields were so large that they began to depress local potato prices.

Worse than that, however, and contributing to the low prices was the fact that many people did not like the taste of the new strain of potatoes. They thought they were too "sweet" for their palates. I remember thinking that this was just the kind of thing I had read about in The Ugly American, i.e., the well-intentioned but naïve American believing that he or she was doing a good thing which turns out to be not so good.

All was not totally lost, however, for at least -- or so I humored myself -- the farmers had absorbed the idea that there were better ways to farm and that change was possible.

And there were other, more successful projects, including the establishment of a community pharmacy in one of Junin's *veredas*, and the construction of a school with the help of a contribution from USAID in another.

Q: What were your evenings like? You had a short wave radio, I assume?

O'CONNELL: I did have a shortwave radio and either listened to VOA or the BBC World Service, read, or wrote letters. I was listening to the BBC one evening in October of 1967 when I heard of the Bolivians' capture and execution, with the assistance of U.S. Special Forces, of Ernesto "Che" Guevara in their country's mountains. The Argentine physician turned guerrilla had been leading a ragtag group of fighters attempting to overthrow Bolivia's military government. The Colombian media's over-hyped coverage of Che's demise made his death sound like all of the continent's problems had suddenly been solved. As I sat in my mountain-top rooms many miles from where Guevara fell, and considered the challenges that I faced in Junin, I could not help thinking how far from the truth such a conclusion was.

Q: Was there guerrilla activity in Colombia at that time?

O'CONNELL: Along with the advent of Colombia's drug trade, another phenomenon that we Volunteers could not have guessed was the rise of guerrilla activity that would eventually -- long after I left the country -- threaten the country's stability.

By the late 1950s, probably one of the consequences of *la violencia*, Colombia began to experience small-scale guerrilla activity. Around that time, the FARC, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, was established along with other, smaller groups such as the National Liberation Army or ELN. Those guerrilla groups were, however, more of a minor and largely regional irritant for the government. Even when I arrived in the country in 1967, the FARC's existence seemed to be more of a pretext for the Colombian army to seek more funds and equipment than a genuine threat to the country.

Although there was no guerrilla activity in the Guavio region at that time, we would read about the FARC's clashes with the Colombian army in the country's warmer, lowland areas where the violence was the greatest in the '50s.

By the 1990s, that had changed, and in more recent years, the FARC operated in areas near Junin, and at times in Junin itself.

Q: What were they up to in Junin?

O'CONNELL: In the past decade, Junin's Beltran family, which still owns the house where Stella and I lived, has sent us photos of the village, including some taken after FARC fighters had briefly occupied the area. A few showed the façade of the Beltrán's house. Its familiar white adobe exterior was riddled with pock-marks from small-arms fire, reminiscent of photos of the Balkans during the wars there. The family told us that, some years before the attack, the town's police station had moved next to their house, and FARC gunmen had shot the place up, apparently to make a statement to the local people that they were around.

A few years after completing my Peace Corps stint in Colombia, when I was assigned to Brazil with USIA -- and well before the FARC arrived in the Guavio, we traveled to and from Brazil and would occasionally stop in Bogota to visit Stella's family there. That was a more innocent time. On one trip, I took our two young sons to Junin on the bus to introduce them to the Beltrán's. Despite Stella's misgivings, stemming not from fear of the FARC but rather from the danger of bus accidents, off we went. The trip turned out to be uneventful and wonderful. The wide-eyed boys with their blond locks were warmly embraced by my old friends in Junin.

When we have traveled to Colombia in more recent years, however, members of the Beltran family, many of whom moved to Bogota in search of work, have adamantly urged us not to travel to Junin, so dangerous had the Guavio become.

Q: Did you have much of a chance to sit around the equivalent of the campfire and talk to the elders?

O'CONNELL: Yes, especially with Roque Beltran, patriarch of the Beltran family. He was both a businessman who owned the town's principal store or *tienda*, and who was also a farmer and village wise man. Although not wealthy, Don Roque, as he was universally known, was considered to be relatively better off than most of the town's residents. He and I used to talk, especially in the evenings as he closed the store for the day.

Q: What did you talk about?

O'CONNELL: The topic was often about what he regarded as the sad state of affairs in Colombia and its relationship with the U.S. He would say, "You know, Don Jose (like everyone in town, he would use the honorific "Don" before my first name, something which I hardly merited), "the way I look at it is that we owe so much money to the United States and have received so much from your country that maybe it would be best if we just became your 51st state." His logic was faultless, and I did not try to disabuse him of his thinking.

Q: What were the campesinos like? How much formal education did they typically have?

O'CONNELL: Junin's *campesinos*, like peasants everywhere, had a simple view of the world, conditioned, undoubtedly, by their isolation and limited formal education. Many of them had gone to school for only a total of five or six years, so they did know how to read and write, but their awareness of the larger world, beyond Junin, was necessarily limited.

The time of the moon landing in 1969 comes to mind. One afternoon, I was working with a farmer plant, planting potatoes on a muddy, steep hillside. It was a typically rainy Junin day, low ceiling and plenty of fog and mist. We were talking about the first manned trip to the moon, which had occurred a few days before. He asked me, "Don Jose, do you really think they really made it to the moon?" "It's true," I responded. "How could they?", he asked incredulously, "How could they get there? I look at the moon, and it just seems so small." "It is a long way away", I said, "and they have powerful rockets," "Well, I'm not convinced," he said finally, as we returned to our digging.

Similarly, whenever an airplane would pass over the town, which was rare, I remember being asked by adults, not children, "How many people fit in that plane?" "Well," I would say, "it depends on the size of the plane. Some of them carry three or four people, but if it's a bigger plane it could be many more, maybe a hundred people or more." The response was usually, "How is that possible? How can so many people fit into something so small?" The people of Junin were not stupid, just isolated.

Q: What were some of the things that they believed about the United States?

O'CONNELL: Colombians from both Junin and Bogota would also ask me questions about the United States, usually the same ones, over and over. They would say, for example, "We hear that you Americans only eat canned food". "Not exactly," I would

respond. “We do have canned food, but we don’t actually eat that much of it,” and then try to explain. Some people would be open to my explanation, although I often felt like they did not really believe me.

Then they would often say, “So you left your parents to come here? Why did you do that?” They clearly could not fathom why I had left my home to come to Junin. “Are you going to go back to see your parents? Are they ever going to come here?”, they would often continue. I told them that my parents would come to see me, which they eventually did.

Or they would express their views about Colombian politics. They typically had no use for politicians of either party, whether Liberal or Conservative. Even though most of the people in Junin were nominally adherents of the country’s Conservative party, they were really not political. They would usually end discussions by saying glumly that, no matter what, nothing is ever going to change anyway, adding that politicians did not care about the people living in places like Junin.

During our Peace Corps training, we had read about the phenomenon of the peasant mentality, some of which I was able to corroborate, and some of which I thought was off the mark. I remember reading Oscar Lewis’s anthropology classic, Five Families, in which Lewis wrote about Mexican peasants. He said that it was not uncommon among the peasants that he studied -- from whom he extrapolated to peasants elsewhere -- that they regard the world as a kind of pie, e.g., “if my neighbor manages to get a slice of that pie, there will be that much less for me, and there’s no way out of that. Therefore, I need to get more than you before you get yours because there may be less for me.” I didn’t get that sense in Junin so much except for a kind of selfishness or maybe it was an expression of extreme self-reliance.

For example, like so much of Colombia, the region around Junin is mountainous, and I remember seeing some poor fellow, seemingly in desperation, trying to cultivate his “field” with a rope around his waist attached to a tree high above him, because the “field” was really more like a steep cliff, and there was a real danger that he might fall from it. But it was his land, and his space to cultivate and grow potatoes, and maybe a couple of coffee trees. It might have been the difference between providing food for his family and starvation.

There is other evidence of the small and limited world in which the people of Junin lived. A dramatic illustration of this occurred when I went returned there a year after I had completed my Peace Corps service. “Where have you been? You left recently, right?,” people would ask. When I told them that I had left a year ago, they looked puzzled.

The difference between my perspective and theirs was always a challenge, not that I was such a world-wise person, but I had to be ever-mindful of the differences between my friends in Junin and myself, and constantly adjust in order to avoid appearing or sounding condescending or patronizing.

Q: Did the potatoes sell in Bogotá?

O'CONNELL: They did. The farmers would take burlap sacks full of potatoes to Bogotá on one of the three or four busses that ran each day between Junin and Bogota. The busses, or *flotas*, looked like American school busses, but instead of being painted yellow, there were decorated with the bright, even garish colors of the bus company. The company that served Junin was the *Flota del Valle de Tenza*. The farmers would put the potatoes or other produce into burlap sacks and, if the drivers consented, throw them into the back of the bus. Seemingly whenever they felt like it, the drivers would refuse to carry all of the sacks that a farmer standing along the road had with him. "That's too much stuff. I can't take that," the driver would yell through the open bus door, slamming it shut and crunching his bus into gear.

I often wondered what happened to those who were left on the road with their produce. Sometimes the farmers would try to load chickens or, in one instance that I remember, even a pig onto the bus. The driver roughly told the pig's owner that "he did not carry swine," so off came the squealing pig. Most of the drivers and especially their assistants, known as *ayudantes*, were unfriendly and condescending. They seemed to enjoy lording it over the *campesinos*.

Once when I was traveling to Bogota, a *campesino* standing along the road and holding two piglets waved down the bus to a stop and tried to get on with his squirming animals. The driver shouted that he did not carry pigs, only people. The crestfallen man went back down the bus's steps and back out onto the road.

Sometimes the drivers overcharged their passengers for fares and cargo, although not without protests. The farmers usually lost those arguments. The drivers and their *ayudantes* were no more educated than the *campesinos*, and most of them had probably grown up in villages like Junin, but they clearly felt that they enjoyed a higher status than the farmers.

Q: Did the central government intervene or make its presence felt much?

O'CONNELL: Not much. The most visible evidence of the central government in Junin was the small -- usually two or three officers -- Colombian National Police post.

The police officers' green, woolen uniforms reminded me of those used by Spain's *guardia civil* under Franco. Some of the commanders I met over my years in Junin seemed genuinely interested in the people and in doing what they could to help them. At the same time, as I had learned during the months that I lived in Bogota while in training, citizens' regard for police officers in Colombia could not have been more different from how police officers were generally regarded by citizens back home.

Especially in rural areas like Junin, the Colombian police were feared and even loathed. The idea of going to an officer to seek assistance would never have occurred to a resident of Junin. Far from it. I would always try to maintain good relations with the police. They

walked around the village with shotguns or sub-machine guns, but there didn't seem to be any immediate purpose to their presence.

Colombian mayors at that time were appointed by the provincial governor, who himself was appointed by the central government, under the power-sharing agreement, known as the National Front, or *Frente Nacional*, that had ended *la violencia* in 1958. The aftermath of the military coup that ended *la violencia* had brought about a compromise between the Liberal and Conservative parties, which in turn created the National Front.

Under that arrangement, the two parties shared power and alternated the presidency. The power sharing reached all the way down into the countryside, which resulted in mayors and other municipal officials who were not from the cities they governed, which created considerable distance between those who governed and the people, with predictably bad results. Today, I believe such officials, along with those as the national level are elected.

The small, Junin branch the Colombian government's national farmers bank made small loans to the *campesinos*. Other national government representatives in Junin were the Ministry of Health's dentist and physician. For the most part, however, the national government was something far away and not involved in the people's lives, except when the Colombian army would periodically come into town to pick up young men -- sometimes forcibly -- who had been drafted into service. I witnessed at least one of the round-ups, and it was a painful sight to see.

Q: In those early days they tried really hard to keep the Peace Corps and the embassy apart. Did you feel that?

O'CONNELL: We began to get that in our training, that the embassy was one thing and that we were another. We did, as I've said, borrow films from the USIS office in Bogota, but the rule was that we should otherwise maintain distance from the embassy and its people in order to avoid any misunderstanding about why we were in Colombia.

Q: Did you show films in Junin?

O'CONNELL: We learned quickly that the best way to attract a crowd in the villages was to show films. We would go into the rural areas, traversing steep, muddy and usually slippery trails, with an enormous and heavy gasoline generator (there was no electricity outside of the village) strapped to the back of a struggling burro. We would show USIS films in the open air, usually using the side of a church or school as a make-shift screen.

Q: How did people react to the films?

O'CONNELL: Just showing films was yet another interesting cultural experience. Many of the USIS films were 1950s-vintage anti-communist reels. I tried to be selective about the films I showed, not only for that reason, but also in order to preserve some relevance to the people's lives.

The reaction to the films was usually enthusiastic, even if the audience did not completely understand what they were watching. Many of the newer USIS films were wonderful introductions to American life and culture, but a few others stick out as either heavy-handed propaganda, or boring, or both. Among the latter was one whimsically entitled “The Magic Trolley” and dubbed into Spanish. From the opening scenes, the viewer was none too subtly made to understand that the trolley was cruising the streets of Communist-controlled East Berlin. That was not hard to grasp: the film’s use of black and white enhanced the shabby and down-at-the-heels look of East Berlin. The film went on to show wretched-looking East Berliners walking along derelict streets, looking even more grim and hopeless in shades of gray and white.

Almost imperceptibly, the trolley magically (hence the film’s title) made its way into West Berlin. It was unclear how that happened since the Berlin Wall was still in place. At that time of course, the western half of Berlin was prosperous and free, and its people in the film looked clean, happy, carefree, and prosperous as they went about their shopping and clutched their abundant purchases.

Q: How come you showed that particular film?

O’CONNELL: Good question. Why indeed was I showing such a film to a group of *campesinos* in the Colombian mountains. Probably because it happened to be available on the day I happened by the embassy’s film library. There was little question that the viewers in Junin were puzzled as to what the movie was about. In fact, as they almost always did in looking at those films, they focused on and were utterly fascinated by such ephemera as the height of the Germans shown in the film, or the trolley itself, clearly something most of them had never seen before. “What is that? Does that thing run on tracks?”, they asked spontaneously and out loud. Nonetheless, on that and many other occasions during my time in Junin, what happened was an unintended and yet also delightful.

Q: Apropos of Volunteers’ concern about steering clear of the U.S. embassy, did the question of Peace Corps Volunteers actually working for intelligence services ever come up?

O’CONNELL: Yes, and not long after I arrived in Junin.

One evening, I went into one of Junin’s few cafes. The place was more like a proverbial hole in the wall where they served beer, coffee and soft drinks, than an actual cafe. At that still-early stage, my Spanish was halting at best.

Once inside, I encountered a fellow in a shiny suit and semi-darkened glasses of the kind favored by upper-class Colombians, so I figured that he was not from Junin. He also sported a layer of brilliantine dressing on his dark and swept-back hair. Someone told me that the fellow was a judge in town. As soon as he spotted me, he came over, and, in an ironic and unfriendly tone, he said, loudly, “So, you’re the Peace Corps guy I’ve been

hearing about.” I knew right away this wasn’t going to a nice conversation. Without taking a breath, he went on loudly, “Aren’t you people really CIA agents?”

Just like in the old westerns, conversation in the café seemed to come to a stop. I had the feeling that everyone in the room was watching this encounter between the *gringo* and the judge, who turned out to be from Colombia’s Caribbean coast, where the Spanish is fast and, especially for a novice like me, far less intelligible than the Spanish spoken in Junin. I knew that I wasn’t going to be able to hold my own against the nasty judge.

He kept firing remarks and questions my way, “I know what you’re up to: you’re gathering information about us and these people,” gesturing toward the *campesinos* in the room. I said, “No, no. I’m here...,” and he cut me off. “Yeah, I know what you mean.” I so wanted to tell him that if I really were a CIA agent, I sure as hell wouldn’t be in Junin.” But of course I couldn’t, both because I was not yet capable of using correctly the Spanish subjunctive, and also because I did not want to find myself in a fist fight. I also would not have wanted, in front of half of the village, to imply that Junin was so remote or so wretched that no one would care about it.

Q: And, obviously, you shouldn’t do that.

O’CONNELL: Right. I did see the judge off and on after that evening, but he never again said anything to me. There was no resolution of his charges except to me to say, “No, I’m not. I’m working with these people.” The happy result of that encounter was that I was even more determined to master colloquial Spanish.

Q: How would you observe, or maybe it wasn’t an issue, the treatment of the indigenous people?

O’CONNELL: The people in the area of Junin -- and this is generally true in much of Colombia -- are made up of a blend of indigenous and the original Spanish that resulted from generations of inter-marriage, going back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Elsewhere in the country, especially in the Caribbean and Pacific coastal areas, the mixture was more between the Spanish and African slaves, with some additional intermarriage between people of African descent with indigenous people. There are areas in Colombia where purely indigenous peoples live, primarily near the Amazon region, as well as near the border between Ecuador and Colombia and the northwestern border with Venezuela, in an area known as the Guajira, but the purely indigenous presence in the Colombian population is far less than it is in, say, Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala, or even Ecuador,

Suffice it to say that on the socio-economic-ethnic continuum of Colombian society, the people one saw in Bogotá wearing suits and running the country looked white and European. They had fancy last names, lived in nice areas of the city, had shined shoes and drivers and maids and university degrees, along of course with money.

By contrast, those at the other end of the spectrum, the people I worked with in Junin -- and this tracked well with their income and status -- looked much more like indigenous

people than they did white Europeans. At the same time, they were far enough removed from their indigenous forebears that they had no memory of or interest in indigenous life, language or culture. Ironically, for them, many of whom who “looked” like they might have indigenous ancestors, just as it was among the white upper class people in Bogota, the word “*indio*” (or Indian) was a strongly racist expletive and insult, to be avoided in polite conversation.

Generally speaking, and especially among the country’s urban upper class, people who look like the residents of Junin are regarded either benignly and condescendingly as quaint “*gentecita*” or “nice little people, out in the *campo*, working as small farmers, just as they should be.” It’s either that or, somewhat less charitably, people from places like Junin are disparaged precisely because they “look” like Indians to the upper-class eye, with their high cheekbones, characteristic noses, and thick, black hair, even though they do not dress in any kind of manner that could be identified as “indigenous,” save perhaps for their wide use of the *ruana*, a kind of cape, made of woven wool, with a hole in the center for the head in the male version and more of a wrap for the female version. Oddly enough, upper class women in Bogota and other cities commonly use a stylized and well-tailored version of the *ruana* for evening wear, just as the flight attendants have for years on Colombia’s national airline. Just like in the United States and elsewhere, Colombia’s racial and ethnic landscape is complicated

Q: Did you have any chance to travel around Columbia?

O’CONNELL: We had occasional Volunteer meetings, and would go to Bogotá and also some of Colombia’s other cities. After Stella and I were married, we went to the Caribbean coast to Cartagena and, later, to San Andres, one of Colombia’s Caribbean islands. I also took a trip down Colombia’s Rio Atrato to the Caribbean Sea in a ramshackle river boat that could have been something out of either “The African Queen” or Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. The few passengers and I slept in hammocks strung across the deck and ate fish and coconut -- with our bare hands -- for each of the seven or eight days that the trip took before we reached Colombia’s historic coastal city of Cartagena. It was quite an adventure.

Q: What was your courtship with Stella like?

O’CONNELL: Stella comes from an atypical Colombian family in that it was small, consisting of only her mother and her brother. When she and her brother were toddlers, their father left the family and went to Venezuela, ostensibly to find work. He never returned, and as my mother-in-law, a tough woman named Ines, liked to like to say, “That was the best thing he ever did.”

Once Stella’s father had gone, Dona (which roughly means madame) Ines found herself alone, with two small children, little money and limited job skills. She had to find a job, and quickly. In a recurring theme in many Latin American families, Dona Ines’s own family did have money at one time, but by the time her marriage ended, the money was pretty much gone. Fortunately, the young Ines was able to get a job in what was then

called the Esso Corporation -- today's EXXON -- and worked for fifteen years as a secretary to support and educate her children.

What Dona Ines lacked in stature, she more than made up for by the strength of her personality, something that Stella clearly inherited from her. Once I got to know Dona Ines -- that took several years -- I would occasionally refer to her as the "little general," which she loved.

Dona Ines was also world-wise. I remember the first time I met her. Colombians, especially *Bogotonos*, tend to be formal, and at first, she was certainly that, even reserved toward me. She was probably asking herself, "Just who the hell does this guy, this *gringo* think he is, dropping out of the sky and wanting to take my daughter out?" As was the custom at that time, Stella and I had to be accompanied by another couple on our first date, kind of a chaperon, or, as the Colombians used to call a chaperon, *una vela*, or literally "a candle."

(In those early years, my relationship with Ines was rocky, largely because I did not try to get to know her and recognize her as a friend, as well as the mother of my wife. She could be prickly and nationalistic about Colombia, and from time to time she would make pointed comments about the United States, probably to needle me. Instead of ignoring her, I would often -- childishly so -- take her bait and, largely through body language rather than words, I would let her know of my displeasure. That was a bad idea that got me nowhere fast with her. I have often looked back with great regret at my sophomoric behavior).

Q: Were you ever able to establish a better relationship with her?

O'CONNELL: Fortunately, I would have a second change. Years after Ines and I first met, when Stella and I were in Washington after our assignment to Brazil, I did a stint with USIA's Office of Inspections and, as luck would have it, one of the countries to which I traveled was Colombia.

Our inspection team was in Colombia for five or six weeks, and for part of that time I traveled to several cities to visit and evaluate consulates and bi-national centers. I was also back in Bogota for a good part of the time, and, although I stayed in a hotel with other members of the team, I frequently dined with Ines and Stella's brother, Hernando. I also spent some weekends with them, so it turned out to be an unexpected opportunity to get to know both of them in a way that I was not able -- or willing -- to do years before. Slowly, Ines and I relaxed and began to listen to each other, in the process resolving -- often awkwardly -- the differences that seemed so important all those years before, but by then had lost any significance they might have had. Ines lived for a number of years after that, and our relationship continued to grow. I was enormously fortunate to have had the chance for a do-over with the indomitable Ines Ricaurte de Sarmiento.

Q: When did you and Stella get married? Did you have to get the permission of the Peace Corps?

O'CONNELL: Stella and I had dated for about a year before we decided to get married, and, yes, I did need to get the permission of my Peace Corps supervisor. Dona Ines took the news surprisingly well. I had feared the worst. After all, I had walked into this little band of people that was Stella's family and that was held together through difficult times by Ines's strength and determination. For Ines, there was also the prospect of her only daughter leaving, not only away from Bogotá, but, she probably understood even then, eventually away from Colombia, permanently. That leave-taking was to be wrenching, especially for Ines, but, really, for all three of them. It was something that none of them had ever anticipated. The original plan in Stella's family had been that Hernando, who was slightly older than Stella, would go to law school while Stella would work to support the family and pay his fees (Stella and Hernando had prevailed upon Ines to take early retirement from Esso a few years before I arrived on the scene).

According to the plan, once Hernando completed his studies in law and economics at the Jesuit-run Xaverian University in Bogota and began working, Stella would begin her university studies.

Right in the middle of that arrangement, I arrived, and everything changed. Stella eventually would earn her degree, at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, at the same time that she was bearing and raising our three children. She used to joke about being the "world's oldest undergraduate," but she did it.

Q: So you were married in Bogota? When was that?

O'CONNELL: Stella and I were married in July of 1968, in Bogota, in the tiny chapel of Divine Savior School, where she had studied as a young girl. The priest was a kindly German whose accent in Spanish was so thick that I understood a little of what he said during the ceremony. Stella paid for a small reception in Ines's apartment afterwards. Guests were a mixture *ruana*- and boot-clad Peace Corps Volunteers along with Stella's friends and relatives.

The apartment was so crowded that I don't recall getting anything to eat. Later that day we flew to Cartagena, Colombia's historic city on the Caribbean, to be met there by my brother, Michael, who had come to Colombia for our wedding. We all still laugh about that odd honeymoon threesome. Shortly after returning from Cartagena, Stella and I boarded a bus for Junin.

Q: What was it like for Stella to join you in Junin?

O'CONNELL: For her, living in rural Colombia was a kind of a Peace Corps experience, too. Junin was precisely the kind of place, as a life-long city-dweller, she would probably never have visited. She was much more popular with Junin's townspeople than I. She was, after all, better looking, and her Spanish was flawless.

What followed was a challenging but ultimately wonderful way to begin our life together. For years, we have regaled our children with stories of what it was like living in Junin on my Peace Corps allowance, which broke down to about thirty-five cents an hour. Fortunately, life was cheap in Junin. I think our rent was something like \$9.00 a month.

Later, after Stella and I had become more or less settled in Junin, Ines and Hernando made a day trip from Bogota to visit us in what for them was a strenuous adventure. As a couple of city people, they could not wait to get out of there and back home in Bogota.

Q: What was the role of the priest in Junin?

O'CONNELL: As was certainly the case throughout Colombia's rural areas, the priest was by far the most important person in town. Indeed, the church was the most important institution, both in the country and in villages like Junin. Padre Nemecio Montenegro, the pastor at the time, was treated with great deference by his flock, regardless of whether, I should add, he deserved such treatment. He and the other priests I would later meet in Junin were probably not the worst of their kind. I heard from other Volunteers that some of the priests that they ran into were pretty nasty characters who lorded it over (no pun intended) the faithful.

Though friendly enough, Padre Montenegro, with his glistening, slicked-back hair sometimes reminded me of a used-car salesman. It was clear that he had an eye for the ladies, including Stella, so we were not surprised to learn later that he had left the priesthood and gotten married.

One priest, however, struck me as exemplary in his behavior. He was a young man named Padre Bonilla. Even now, he remains in my memory as decent and genuinely caring for the people. I can still see him in his work pants and cowboy boots as he rode his horse to visit parishioners in remote areas. I have long wondered what became of him and whether he remained in the priesthood. He saw his mission as both spiritual but also temporal in trying to help the people survive and cope with enormous challenges.

During those years, I had stopped going to Mass regularly. Once in Junin, however, mainly because the people knew that I was a Catholic (they asked me), I went to Sunday Mass regularly. On the Sundays that I did not attend Mass, it was not unusual for people to accost me and say -- nicely -- "We didn't see you at Mass today." So in order to avoid that, I went, both on Sundays and for big festival days.

Q: What made the village work?

O'CONNELL: There was a definite pecking order and social structure in Junin. The people who lived in the small urban area -- consisting of several white-washed adobe buildings with red tile roofs, huddled around a square dominated by the hulking and unfinished church -- were at the top of the social structure. They included the priests, teachers, nuns at the small teacher-training, or normal school; the mayor and town council, the small staff of the government's agricultural bank, the police officers

stationed in Junin, the owners of the few stores (I have already mentioned Don Roque Beltran, whose store sold dry goods, staples and gasoline, etc., and in whose house we lived).

The normal school -- which had both day and boarding students -- was probably the most important economic activity in Junin outside of the church and farming. Along with a small community of nuns, the school employed a small staff of teachers, with whom I became friends. The teachers enjoyed a respect and higher status in town. I spent time speaking with and listening to them, along with holding informal, semi-regular English lessons for them.

The boarding students took their meals in the school cafeteria, and for a time I did, too. (I use the word "cafeteria" loosely, as the dining hall was actually a poorly lighted structure made of adobe). The food was plain and included the usual multiple starches much favored by rural Colombians.

The mountainous area around Junin has several microclimates, ranging from almost sub-tropical to cold and rainy at the higher elevations, where the village's urban area is located. In the areas which the local people called "temperate," crops like coffee, oranges and even bananas are grown. Higher up, it is corn, potatoes and yucca (known as *cassava* elsewhere).

I am still not sure, however, that I can adequately answer the question about what made Junin work or, more basically, why it was even there. Towns like Junin and so many others like it in Colombia and throughout the developing world have existed since indigenous and then colonial times. The village's name, "Junin," is the name of a famous battle in Peru during the war for independence in which Simon Bolivar was involved. Before that, the settlement had an Indian name, Chipasaque, a word from the language of the Chibchas, the people who inhabited the area before the Spanish arrived. I was told that it meant "the place where the Chibchas sleep." I often heard that there were the remnants of Chibcha tombs near Junin.

I used to wonder why Junin was even there. The place certainly wasn't growing economically or in population. Quite the contrary. Many of the young people who were able to do so left in search of what they thought would be a better life in Bogota (it usually wasn't). The people of Junin might have been happy in some ways, but, clearly, it was not an easy place in which to live or to try to make a living. I recall thinking of the words of the English economist, Thomas Hobbes, when he described life in the "original state of things" as "nasty, brutish, and short." In fact, life spans were probably short in Junin, although I never saw any data to back that up. I do know that death, including the frequent death of children and infants, was a constant, almost unremarkable and usually very public occurrence in Junin.

People there -- and I, too -- were constantly exposed to death in a way that I had not seen before. That was exacerbated by the custom followed in Junin of burying the dead on the

very same day they died. It seemed, to my untutored sensibilities, harsh, and it was, just as was the apparent fatalism and black humor about death displayed by the living.

Q: When did you leave Junin?

O'CONNELL: August of 1969.

Q: How did you feel about your experience in Junin and in the Peace Corps?

O'CONNELL: Throughout the 50-plus years of the Peace Corps, most Volunteers have given a pretty standard answer to that question, and it is still mine, too, all these years since I left Junin, i.e., I got much more out of my experience and my service than I put into it. I can point to things that I did or helped work on with others, e.g., the construction of a rural school, the creation of a community drug dispensary, etc. But whether I did anything that was of lasting value is an open question, even after 46 years.

I had always heard about the so-called super Volunteers, both in Colombia and around the world, either through word of mouth, lore, or from seeing glowing articles in the Peace Corps magazine. The super Volunteers enjoyed an almost mythical status in our conversations and in our imaginations. There was one in Turkey, and another in Somalia. They were so good and so beloved by the people in their villages, according to the story, that they each stayed on for six years.

With such stories came the inevitable comparisons between myself and other Volunteers. I often felt that my work in Junin was mundane and even futile. I thought, "There is no way I can come close to their achievements." I recall spending plenty of angst-ridden time questioning what I was doing in Junin. These feelings were surely made worse by the constant rain of the wet season -- although it rained so often that it was hard to tell the difference between the seasons -- and the accompanying mud and gloom of that cold mountain top where I lived. That kind of thinking was not uncommon, at least among the Volunteers I knew. We all wondered whether we were doing anyone any good, including ourselves.

Even now, there is a part of me that still feels that way, trying to figure out whether I made a difference. I realize that this sounds like so much thumb-sucking and whining. One thing is as clear as it is obvious, however: the experience changed me in fundamental and, thankfully, enduring ways. When I try to recall my pre-Peace Corps interests and how I viewed the world and especially the way I regarded my own country, there is no comparison.

As is well known, once one spends time away from his or her country, viewing it from afar and, to the extent possible, through the cultural and linguistic prisms of others, things can never be the same. Fortunately.

If this all sounds trite, it is also true: I learned much about myself and my fellow citizens. Even more importantly, I began to grasp the complexity of the world beyond our borders.

Sounds obvious enough, yet I had little idea of that before I went to Europe as a student or, especially to Colombia as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Q: How did you feel about the United States as you looked on from Colombia? We were still at war in Vietnam. How did you feel about that?

O'CONNELL: A kind of necessary ambivalence about my country set in once I went abroad, especially during my years in Colombia. I started thinking about my country in a way that was different from before. Far from seeing my affection for the United States decrease, however, I came to love it more deeply -- warts and all -- the more that I learned about it from a distance.

Most Volunteers I knew in Colombia -- I suspect elsewhere, too -- shared my concern, not to say outrage at the war in Vietnam. Some of them seemed to feel more strongly than I. We were frequently reminded, in communications both from Washington and from the Peace Corps office in Bogota, that our role in Colombia was nonpolitical and that we were not to express -- publicly, at least -- our personal political views. We were given to understand that any deviation from that stance would lead to an immediate return ticket home. That, however, did not prevent us from talking, debating and venting among ourselves.

Some Volunteers were drafted out of Colombia and, we heard, other countries, too. I assumed I was going to be drafted eventually. Even now, another of my unanswered questions is how much of my opposition to the war had to do with my own skin and how much had to do with anything like a moral stand against the conflict.

(My brother, Michael, who graduated from college in 1968, would later go to Vietnam as an Army enlistee from 1970 through 1971. I remember the sad day we took him to Dulles to catch his flight to Oakland, California and on to Saigon. Fortunately, he came home safely. I confess that, despite Michael's entreaties to me over the years that such thinking is nonsense, I continue to feel remorse and guilt that, while he and thousands of others had to go to Vietnam, many laying their lives down, I did not.

(I remember some agonizing conversations with my father right after Stella and I arrived from Colombia. Michael had enlisted in the vain hope that he could avoid SE Asia and be sent to Germany or Korea. He had a degree, so once he enlisted, the Army offered him the "opportunity" to go to the 36-week OCS and become an instant second lieutenant, something that interested him not a whit (he knew too well the stories of such newly-minted officers getting "fragged" by their reluctant troops, but even more than that, he felt that he did not want to lead young men into battle in a war in which he himself did not believe.

(My father, who had not served in WWII, nonetheless felt strongly that Mike should become an officer. Michael and my Dad had already had many difficult conversations about that by the time I returned from Colombia, so my Dad then turned to me to try to convince Michael to go into OCS. I tried to explain about Michael's thinking and my

own, mostly to no avail. Later, as Mike's departure date to Vietnam approached, my father began to change his views. It only took a couple of conversations with friends who were the parents of draft-age sons -- conversations in which the friends insensitively said -- bragged, even -- to my parents that their son had "lucked out" and had gotten into a reserve unit rather than being drafted, with the implication that Michael (and by extension my parents as well) had neither been well-connected enough nor sufficiently adroit to get into a reserve unit himself. That did it: although my father never became what I would call radicalized -- my mother actually did -- about the war, he became quietly angry.

(Michael worked in Army intelligence while in Vietnam, mainly investigating instances of sabotage of equipment by U.S. soldiers themselves rather than by the VC. He had on occasion to interview officers, so he carried an ID that identified him as a civilian employee of the DOD and mainly did not wear a uniform. As he tells it, aside from being under a mortar attack once in Da Nang (their quarters were next to the Marines), the only tight spot he ever got into was, to be sure, dangerous, but the danger came not so much from the enemy as it did, in *Catch-22* style, from a green second lieutenant still in his first 6 months in country. Earlier in his tour, Mike was stationed at Long Binh, the large U.S. base north of Saigon. The main road into Saigon was Highway 1. On one occasion, I guess intelligence showed that the VC were planning attacks on U.S. vehicles on Highway 1, so the word went out at Long Binh that U.S. personnel were not to go into Saigon and were not to travel on that road, especially at night. One evening, in what Mike described as the middle of the night, he was asleep in his quarters when he was awakened by his lieutenant, who told him that, despite the order, he had commandeered a jeep and had driven into Saigon, probably for some female company. On the way back to Long Binh in the dead of night, the jeep broke down and the officer walked the rest of the way to the base, somehow getting in without problem. He told Mike to get a couple of men with weapons and go down the highway until they found the disabled jeep and then tow it back to the base, all without letting anyone know about what had happened. Mike recalled that all he could think of was that our parents would get a telegram informing that their son had been killed in action, while in reality he and buddies would possibly be killed trying to save their officer's skin, but they did as they were told. As they approached the jeep, Mike wondered if it has been booby-trapped. Two of the tires and the battery were already missing, but they chained the jeep to their jeep and dragged it back to Long Binh and returned to their bunks. No one was the wiser.)

Q: So you were still in Colombia when President Johnson announced that he would not run in 1968?

O'CONNELL: I was. One day in the spring of 1968, after I had been in Colombia for a year, I remember vividly seeing a headline in Bogota's leading newspaper, *El Tiempo*, announcing that President Johnson would not be running for re-election later that year, and that he was calling for peace talks with the North Vietnamese. I was incredulous and remember wondering whether Johnson was really not going to run, and whether the war was really almost over? Little did anyone I or realize then that the war would go on for several more years, with several thousand more deaths of American troops.

Q: When you finished your Peace Corps service in Colombia, how was it coming back home? Did you experience what some have called reverse cultural shock?

O'CONNELL: I don't recall whether I had been told about reverse cultural shock or, if I had, whether it colored my views, but reverse cultural shock hit me hard. I remember feeling like no one outside of my immediate family understood, let alone had any interest in what I had been doing for the past few years. Fortunately, my parents, sister and brother had visited me, so they felt some attachment to the Junin and the people with whom I worked.

Also, as almost everyone who has spent time in a developing country says, while life "back there," seemed to plod along slowly, life at home seemed -- at first anyway -- to be going at warp speed, and I kept feeling like I could never catch up. I thought of the title of that play, "Stop the World, I Want to Get Off."

I wasn't exactly moping, but I now realize that I was a difficult, even tedious person to be with, with my all-too-frequent observations about the contrast between the abundance of life in the U.S., or at least in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and the village of Junin, Colombia. I wasn't paralyzed into inactivity, but I probably had a kind of mild depression. I think I also missed the people with whom I had grown so close.

A happier aspect of that time was that I had the pleasant opportunity to introduce Stella to those in my family who had not met her in Colombia, and to the United States, a place where she had never been.

While still back in Colombia, I had been admitted to graduate school, so that is where we were headed in late summer 1969.

Q: Where?

O'CONNELL: The University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, or GSPIA for short. The school had apparently papered Peace Corps offices the world over, including in Colombia, with its brochures and catalogs.

When we arrived in Pittsburgh in September 1969, a city I knew well from having gone there every summer as a child to visit my maternal grandmother and many cousins, there were other former Volunteers arriving with me, including at least three from Colombia. The curriculum at GSPIA was a public administration master's program, with options in international development, urban affairs, and economic development.

The idea of the program at GSPIA was to prepare its graduates for careers in the Foreign or Civil Service, as well as international development, city planning and public administration in the U.S.

Q: How was it for Stella coming here? Was that her first trip to the U.S.?

O'CONNELL: It was her first trip to the U.S., although she had met my parents and sister during their trips to Colombia. On a warm August evening in 1969, they met us at National Airport. About ten minutes into the drive to their home in the Maryland suburbs, my father earnestly asked Stella how she liked the United States "so far." We have all laughed about that over the years. The answer was that she liked it just fine, although, as I did in Colombia a few years before, she had her bout of culture shock, especially in Pittsburgh, where we went not long after arriving in the U.S.

As it would be for almost anyone -- even Americans -- arriving in the Steel City for the first time, getting used to Pittsburgh's deteriorating cityscape of the late 1960s and its gray, harsh winter took some effort by Stella. Fortunately, she is a strong person, and she triumphed and even flourished there. My Pittsburgh relatives, who were very kind to her, told us apologetically that the winter we spent there was the worst in 50 years. All we know was that it was bitterly cold.

We rented a ramshackle and apartment in an old Italian neighborhood near the University's campus. Stella found a job with an international construction company. Her western Pennsylvania colleagues were charmed by her, although she repeatedly had to explain where she came from and that Colombia was not near France!

Unfortunately, and despite performing well in my course work at GSPIA, I did not complete the thesis that was required to earn my degree. I had not thought out my thesis topic very well. My plan had been for me to return to Junin to conduct research using the "participant-observer" method that I borrowed from Oscar Lewis of Five Families fame. I would then write on the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of what I had done there at a Peace Corps Volunteer. If that sounds half-baked, it was.

After I completed my courses in the late spring of 1970, Stella and I traveled to Colombia, and I returned to Junin to interview the *campesinos* with whom I had worked. It was wonderful to be back, and Stella was especially happy, after her difficult year in Pittsburgh, to be re-united with Ines and Hernando in Bogota.

Months before, my advisor at GSPIA had told me that, unless I completed my paper before I left Pittsburgh, my chances of ever finishing it were low. I must not have paid attention, for his advice was spot-on.

There were other problems with my thesis project. Even as I was transcribing my interviews in Junin, I was beginning to doubt the viability of my project as well as whether I could come up with something that might be even a minor contribution to the understanding of rural social change, and also be acceptable to the University of Pittsburgh.

I returned to the U.S. in late summer 1970. (Stella stayed on in Bogota. Her mother had wisely urged her to remain there "until he finds a job." Luckily for both of us, a job would materialize later that same year.

The only tangible result of my “research” in Junin was an unruly sheaf of papers and a stack of dog-eared index cards full of my scribbling.

Work on my thesis was already stalled by the time I entered USIA that fall of 1970, and between my Agency training and our later assignment to Brazil, I never really returned to the project. I still have the material, however, and have thought of turning it into a book, even if for my own consumption and memories.

(Nearly five years later, when Stella and I returned to the U.S. after our assignment in Brazil, I resolved to re-start and complete my graduate school career, even if it would not be at the University of Pittsburgh, where my amassed credits had long since gotten out of date. I enrolled at the University of Maryland in College Park, where I later earned my master’s degree with honors in American politics and government. I needed to complete that unfinished business).

I had twice taken the written Foreign Service exam in Colombia. The first time, not long after I arrived there, I missed passing by about 6 points. I was prepared to forget the idea of a Foreign Service career, but the following year, my father sent me materials to sign up for the test again. By then, having had an entire year in Junin to absorb the eclectic collection of volumes in the Peace Corps book locker, along with the Saturday Review and the international editions of Time and Newsweek, I again sat for the examination in Bogota and managed to increase my score enough to pass.

Later, in October 1969, after I had begun my graduate studies in Pittsburgh, I traveled to Washington to take the oral portion of the exam. I had heard probably apocryphal stories about the orals, e.g., that examining panels would torment candidates with specific and obscure questions, or create awkward situations -- such as offering and lighting a cigarette (this was a long time ago) without providing an ash tray, supposedly to see how the candidate would react. None of that happened to me.

Q: Did you get any questions about Vietnam during your oral examination?

O’CONNELL: My oral exam took place in the fall of 1969, so I was not surprised when Vietnam came up. One member of my panel was a -- dare I say “crusty”? -- retired U.S. ambassador named Claire Timberlake. He pretty quickly took my measure and had only one question: “imagine that you were assigned as first secretary of the U.S. embassy in, say, Helsinki, and the ambassador asks you to speak to a group of Finnish professionals and business people about the U.S. policy in Vietnam and, more specifically, to explain why there was so much apparent dissension in the U.S. about the war. How would you handle that?”

As Ambassador Timberlake coolly awaited my response, I began by recalling JFK’s pledge in his inaugural speech that the U.S. would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty” as one of the reasons for our involvement in South Vietnam. I ended with what I would say to the Finns to explain the phenomenon of many Americans’ dissatisfaction

with the war, i.e., that the United States has a long history of robust citizen dissent, that we are a diverse people and a vibrant democracy in which disagreements over policies are taken seriously and sometimes debated loudly and even unpleasantly, and that, with respect to the war in Vietnam, there was growing concern about how and when the U.S. role in the conflict would come to an end.

I held my breath as I looked at Ambassador Timberlake's impassive face. My answer had clearly not impressed him, but he mercifully elected not to pursue the topic, except to harrumph about hiring and training new Foreign Service Officers, only to have them resign in protest against the Vietnam policy.

To my great astonishment, I passed. A year later, in October of 1970, I was sworn into USIA and joined a State-USIA A-100 course at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: Both when you were in Pittsburgh and later in Washington, the Vietnam protests were at their height. Did you take part in any of the demonstrations while you were in Pittsburgh or Washington?

O'CONNELL: I did, initially in Pittsburgh and later in Washington. More than once, Stella and I took the bus from Pittsburgh to Washington to march. In the spring of 1970, after the shootings at Kent State University, I took part in an enormous rally on the lawn of Pitt's gothic skyscraper, the grandly named Cathedral of Learning.

Around that same time and not long before we left for our assignment in Brazil, I particularly recall a large march in Washington. With our full-time FSI Portuguese course, our free time was limited. In fact, at that point, we were, properly so, more observers of demonstrations than participants.

One day, at the height of that 1971 march, I was on Pennsylvania Avenue near the Justice Department. Marchers were sitting in the middle of the Avenue, awaiting arrest. At that moment, I noticed that Dan Rather, then the CBS White House correspondent, was standing next to me. He was looking at the upper floors of the Justice Department building. There, on a small balcony, was then Attorney General John Mitchell, puffing away on his pipe as he impassively observed the arrests of the demonstrators. A few years later, in an appropriate turn-about, Mitchell would himself be serving time in a federal prison for his role in Watergate.

On the day of another march that spring in Washington, as I was crossing Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, I realized that standing next to me, in civilian garb, was General Maxwell Taylor, then an advisor to President Nixon on Vietnam. I heard him say to a companion -- and of course he could have been talking about anything -- "I think the President is in for more than he bargained for on this thing."

Q: What was your A-100 class like? What sort of people were in it?

O'CONNELL: In our combined State-USIA A-100 course, there were about 15 USIA Junior Officers in Training, and the rest, probably around 30 people, were headed to the State Department. Most of the members of the combined class were in their mid-twenties. Most of the class had either been to graduate school, served in the military or Peace Corps, or worked elsewhere. In the USIA class, there was only one fellow who was just out of college.

Q: How many women and minorities were in your combined class?

O'CONNELL: There were three or four women in the USIA group, along with one African American and two men of Asian descent. The male- to- female ratio in the USIA group was similar in the State class, although I don't recall any minorities in the State group. For that time, the mix wasn't bad. I should also note that, for one reason or another, each of the women in the USIA class left the Agency and the Foreign Service within a few years. One of them, who had been assigned to Singapore, decided to get married there, to a non-U.S. citizen, which under the rules of that time meant that she had to resign. That subsequently changed.

Q: How did you find the course of instruction?

O'CONNELL: It was more rigorous than I had anticipated. We were given a thick syllabus of readings that we were expected to complete every evening. Each day, representatives from the Department came in to discuss the various cones, bureaus and offices. We had area studies, security training (far less rigorous then), tips on raising and educating children abroad, instruction on what life at an overseas mission was going to be like, etc. Several people in the class were married. The wives (there were no dependent male spouses) sometimes joined our classes, while at other times they had their own course. Then-Secretary of State and Mrs. William Rogers spoke to the class on a day when wives were present.

One occasion remains sharply in my memory, the day the administrative support man came in to talk about how our personal effects would be shipped to our eventual posts. Once the fellow completed the formal parts of his presentation, he spoke about how we could order duty-free products once we were overseas. He gave as examples fine china, cameras and stereo equipment that were available via the pouch from a duty-free vendor in Denmark. Not that I didn't sit up on my seat, too, but I also noticed that my classmates had suddenly shed their usual glassy-eye expressions. It seems quaint from here, but I remember thinking that there we were, scarcely a year removed from the 1960s, with all of that decade's braying about anti-materialism, salivating at the prospect of duty-free Royal Doulton and Nikon cameras. Ah, well.

Q: How stood this group in discussing the Viet Nam War?

O'CONNELL: Surprisingly -- to me, anyway -- there was a range of views about Vietnam, from a couple of former military people who thought that the U.S. ought to fight the war more aggressively to others, I among them, who were against U.S.

involvement in Southeast Asia. I don't recall, however, any especially contentious discussions of the war during our course, which was odd, given that contentious time.

Q: What were your thoughts as you went through the training? Obviously, every junior officer wonders, my God, what is my first post? What were you after?

O'CONNELL: Right from the start, there was the usual intense interest in knowing our overseas assignments. I was ready to go pretty much anywhere. I wanted to learn another language besides Spanish, but beyond that I don't think I had anything specific in mind.

Q: Was there the thought that you might be assigned to Viet Nam?

O'CONNELL: Very much so, although junior officers were apparently not being assigned there at that time.

Q: There weren't any "wish lists" floating around?

O'CONNELL: There was the usual daydreaming about Paris and London. One of my USIA classmates had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Brazil, so we asked him about life in Brazil and learning Portuguese. We were eventually given a list of openings and asked to indicate our top three preferences in priority order. One of them was the consulate general in Sao Paulo, so I circled it as my first preference. On assignment day, I was given a little Brazilian flag.

Q: How did you find switching from Spanish to Portuguese?

O'CONNELL: Not as easy as some think it is. Portuguese is maddeningly close to Spanish, and Spanish speakers often approach Portuguese thinking that the language will be the proverbial piece of cake. It isn't.

FSI was then launching a new Portuguese-language course for Spanish speakers, and we, along with another Spanish-speaking couple, were the linguistic guinea pigs for that trial period. The new approach to learning Brazilian Portuguese worked for us, or at least it was a good start. We realized early, however, that, once in Brazil, we would have to actually speak Portuguese and not "*Portanol*," or a mishmash of Spanish and Portuguese.

We had our FSI instructors to thank for that. They took advantage of our inexperience with -- and ignorance of -- Brazilians and their language: the teachers told us that if we dared to arrive in Brazil with even a hint of Spanish, Brazilians would be turned off in droves, so allegedly sensitive were they about their language and foreigners trying to learn it. It was fear that drove us to try to master Portuguese, and it worked.

Q: So the Brazilians were not as your teachers described?

O'CONNELL: The teachers' warning was precisely the opposite of how Brazilians really were: enormously patient, understanding and encouraging . We had a good laugh later as we recalled our teachers' effective ruse.

Our course was scheduled to last 20 weeks, but our teachers decided that we had had enough -- or more likely, that they had had enough of us -- and they declared us ready for Sao Paulo.

In reality, we were far from ready. Then, a couple of things intervened to worsen our still shaky Portuguese. We finished our course in March of 1971, but we weren't scheduled to go to Brazil until the end of June. For that interim period, I was assigned to the USIA personnel office, where I delved into officer evaluation files and wrote profiles (without using people's names) of particularly well written and particularly poorly written officer evaluations. It was an interesting introduction to the evaluation system because I saw some well written evaluations, along with others that were hilarious. In that long-ago time it was still acceptable for the rating officer to make personal comments in addition to comments about spouses. I both winced and laughed as I carried out my task. I never found out whether any use was made of the material I wrote.

Q: I know it was the so-called secret portion that the rated officer could see when he/she came back to the States. Sometimes it would be a really nice glowing report, and then there were these 'except for the fact that I would never hire this officer, he or she is doing fine.'

O'CONNELL: One rating that sticks in my mind -- maybe it was funnier at the time -- tried to describe the environment in Madrid at the time the rated officer was there. It said something like, "Franco died, ushering in the post Franco-era."

Q: Did you fly directly to Sao Paulo?

O'CONNELL: We stopped over in Bogota to visit Stella's mother and brother. It was a lovely visit, but a week or so of speaking nothing but Spanish was not helpful to our Portuguese competence.

When our Sao Paulo-bound flight from Bogota by way of Lima left the Peruvian capital, reality hit us. The flight attendants started making their announcements in both Spanish and Portuguese. Stella and I looked at each other in horror as we realized that we understood almost none of what was being said in Portuguese. That was our comeuppance about how clever we had thought we were in Portuguese.

Q: So off you go to Sao Paulo. When were you there?

O'CONNELL: We were in Sao Paulo for just about a year, from early July of 1971 until June of the following year.

Q: How would you describe the situation in Brazil at the time?

O'CONNELL: The Brazilian military had taken power in 1964, and, by the early 1970s, when we arrived in Brazil, the country could still be an uncomfortable place. A few years before, in 1968, Brazil saw disturbances at the University of Sao Paulo (USP) and at elsewhere in the country. The military reacted by closing USP and, along with the feared federal police, clamped down harshly on dissent and political activity. By mid-1972, those measures were still firmly in place, including censorship of the news media. Brazil's president was a dour army general named Ernesto Geisel who rarely seemed to have anything to say.

By the time of our arrival in Brazil, the University of Sao Paulo had been re-opened -- although not its dormitories -- but students and professors were being very careful about what they said and did. There were widely believed and probably true stories of government agents being in the classes, particularly in the social science courses. At the consulate general, we paid close attention to the situation, and we constantly worked to reach out to the affected people, in my case especially to university students.

(I recall meeting with a friend who was at that time a student leader at Sao Paulo's Universidade Mackenzie, which had been founded by a Scotsman many years before. The university was regarded as a much more conservative institution than USP, and this young man certainly reflected that in his views. We were discussing the war in Vietnam, and I expressed my personal view that U.S. policy there probably needed to be re-examined. In what sounded like an "ah-ha" moment, he said that he regarded it as "functional" for the U.S. government to have someone like me in my position, since my views were apparently opposed to U.S. policy and I could therefore more easily engage with leftist students in Sao Paulo than someone who simply hewed to the Nixon Administration's line. I told him that our thinking was far from being that complex, and that, if what he said happened to be true, it was purely accidental!)

Q: Who was your Consul General?

O'CONNELL: A man named Robert Corrigan whose father had been an ambassador, and Corrigan himself later became ambassador to Rwanda.

Q: I interviewed him a long time ago.

O'CONNELL: A man named Fred Chapin followed Mr. Corrigan as Consul General in Sao Paulo. Like Corrigan, his father had also been an ambassador.

Q: What kind of work did you do during your JOT year in Sao Paulo?

O'CONNELL: Sao Paulo's consulate general was larger than many U.S. embassies, and it afforded a wide variety of assignments for a new officer. There were the usual sections, political, economic, consular, administrative, the so-called POL2 group which had a fairly large office in the consulate.

I was assigned first and for the longest period of my rotational year to the consular section. It turned out that another junior officer assigned to that section arrived in Sao Paulo without her commission, due to a delay in her paperwork, so she was unable to sign visas. That is where I came in, and she and I did the tourist visa work together.

That operation was always busy, with daily long lines of visa seekers stretching out into the street. Consular work turned out to be a real welcome to the complicated world of tourist and immigrant visas. I enjoyed its challenges, but I also decided that I would not want to make it my career.

Q: Did you find your tourist visa applicants to be legitimate or not?

O'CONNELL: That was always the question. Many people who clearly did not have the means to travel as tourists to the United States nonetheless wanted to try to go, and that always raised suspicions about whether they would actually be tourists. Applicants often had to submit their tax returns and other evidence of links to the community.

The consular section's Brazilian staff was even tougher on their visa-seeking countrymen than the Americans, and their knowledge of U.S. consular law was vast. Interestingly, the key national employees were Anglo-Brazilians, from a community of Anglo-Brazilians in Sao Paulo. They had grown up in and might have even been born in Brazil, but they spoke English with a British accent.

It often seemed as if the Brazilian employees were in charge, particularly when it came to deciding whether an applicant was legitimate or not. The consular officers took their word very seriously, and many tourist visa applicants were turned down. When someone was turned down, the Brazilian staff would, before returning the passport to its owner, write in tiny letters on the last page of the passport a code indicating that the bearer had been turned down in Sao Paulo. That was for the benefit of American consular officials at other U.S. missions. I wondered whether the action of the Brazilian employees was improper, if not illegal.

Q: Where else did you serve in the consulate general during your JOT year?

O'CONNELL: I did stints in the economic/commercial and political/labor sections, along with the press and information, and cultural sections of the USIS office.

Q: You mentioned the political/labor section. When you were there, did you follow Brazil's politics or were there any politics because of the military?

O'CONNELL: In both the political and economic sections, one of the main tasks was reporting on what the military government was doing, along with the sectors of Brazilian society -- especially Sao Paulo's business elite -- which for the most part strongly supported the military government. The reporting opportunities for a new junior officer, especially in the political section, were varied and fascinating. With the encouragement of an outstanding FSO named Tony Freeman, I jumped right in.

Since arriving in Sao Paulo, I had read about and seen public demonstrations by a conservative, Catholic group named Tradition, Family and Property (*Tradicao, Familia, e Propriedade*, or TFP for short). I was intrigued that, while the military government forbade all other demonstrations, it permitted TFP demonstrators in the streets of Sao Paulo. The demonstrators, or adherents as they were known in Portuguese, were made up exclusively of serious-looking young men dressed in ill-fitting suits, with closely-cropped hair and bearing large, almost medieval-looking crimson banners, on which was written in gold script, "*Tradicao, Familia e Propriedade*." Although the adherents' garb was civilian, they had an almost military bearing.

I was curious about them and about why they seemed to enjoy a degree of political freedom that other groups could only dream about in the tightly controlled Brazil of the early 1970s. TFP was based in Sao Paulo and had branches in the U.S., Latin America, especially in Chile, where they were apparently aligned closely with the Pinochet regime.

The positions and activities of the shadowy group -- probably consciously so -- were reminiscent of *Action Francaise* in France before World War II. I suggested to Tony Freeman, the political officer, that I look into TFP's origins and activities, possibly try to visit its Sao Paulo headquarters, and then write a report about it for the Department. With Tony's blessing and with surprising ease, I made an appointment to visit TFP's founder and longtime head, former law professor, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira.

TFP's headquarters was located in a gated estate on the outskirts of Sao Paulo. When I arrived, I was met by polite but unsmiling adherents, ushered into the mansion and shown into a darkened inner-sanctum-like chamber to await Professor Corrêa de Oliveira, as his followers reverentially referred to him.

The aged but impeccably dressed professor walked regally into the room and greeted me in a friendly but somewhat formal manner. He invited me to take a seat and asked what brought me to visit TFP (as if he did not already know). I explained that I was from the U.S. Consulate General and was interested in the group and its activities. I don't think he was fooled in the least by my "curiosity," but he had clearly decided that speaking with a representative of the U.S. government was useful to him and his organization, and so he was prepared to indulge me and my questions. He was generous with his time. We spent a couple of hours together, including a tour of the mansion's public areas, which were decorated with medieval regalia, heraldry, a full-sized suit of armor, paintings, and jewelry exhibited in glass cases.

At one point, the professor showed me into an even darker wing, threw a light switch, and gestured toward a case which was illuminated by a floodlight. In it was a crown of some kind, encrusted with jewels (unclear whether they were genuine). In a breathless whisper, he said something like, "Mr. O'Connell, behold the summation of our great western, Christian civilization, and this is precisely what we are fighting to revive and preserve from the forces of darkness." I wasn't sure what I was looking at, and the professor did not elaborate.

From time to time during my visit, young adherents wordlessly entered the sitting room to serve tea. TFP's active publishing operation was also located in the compound, and I was shown that, complete with stacks of pamphlets with lurid covers and titles about worldwide Communism's master plan to control the world through subversion and corruption of western youth. Professor Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira ceremoniously presented me with several titles.

Our meeting concluded. I thanked Professor Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira and returned to the consulate to capture as much as I could remember on my IBM Selectric (taking notes during my conversation seemed out of the question). Tony Freeman was pleased with my report, and he sent it off the State Department. Later, I received a nice compliment from the Department. For the briefest moment, I thought that I might have missed my calling and that maybe I should have gone into the State Department instead of USIS.

Q: What was your impression of this group?

O'CONNELL: My visit to TFP headquarters was at once fascinating and troubling. It seemed obvious to me the organization in the person of Professor Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira did not care for Jewish people, whom he seemed to regard with suspicion and worse, but he softened his anti-Semitism with coded language for Jews and others whom he and his associates regarded as undesirables, including people of color, something which, in multi-ethnic Brazil, seemed laughable.

Professor Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira told me that Brazil needed urgently to return to "Catholic-Christian principles, private property, freedom and the great traditions of Catholic Portuguese and Iberian history [as he defined them]."

Something else that I observed about TFP -- backed up by the Professor -- was that the organization appeared to take in young, rural, lower-class men -- there was no evidence of women -- and give them new suits and a status that they would not have had otherwise.

Q: You mentioned there were no women. The kinder, kuchen and kirche, or something?

O'CONNELL: I saw no evidence of a TFP ladies auxiliary. Whether they actually stressed masculine virtues I don't know, but the environment at the estate was decidedly male.

As far as I know TFP is still around, even though the military is long out of power in Brazil, and the group had clearly flourished during those years. In fact, not only were they left alone by the military, but I believe there were military officers who were members. I have often thought that the TFP might have been a forerunner or a parallel group to the conservative Spanish group, *Opus Dei*, which was, incidentally, a favorite of Pope-- and now Saint -- John Paul II.

Q: Was there any -- well, not necessary connection with this group -- but what about Nazis having come to Brazil after World War II. Was that a topic of conversation during your visit to the TFP?

O'CONNELL: Not in my conversation with the Professor, but there have always been questions as to whether Brazil had harbored fugitive Nazis in the 1940s and 1950s.

Q: We now know that Mengele had been living in Brazil, although nobody knew that at the time, or even where he might have been, right?

O'CONNELL: Correct. Interesting story, speaking of Mengele. During our first year in Sao Paulo, 1971-72, we would often drive on Sundays to small villages on the outskirts of the city. One was Embu, which held a large open-air fair every week. The village was not far from Brazil's Atlantic coast.

Years later, after we had left Brazil, the story of Josef Mengele came out, including that he had been living in the same Embu that we had visited so often. The thought that we might have passed the infamous Nazi on the street as he lived out his life in quiet anonymity probably produced a *frisson* in both Stella and me.

A USIS colleague named Steve Dachi, who later became embassy public affairs officer in Brasilia, had also been a dentist in another life, and it was through his former profession that he became involved in the search for Mengele. Mengele's remains, specifically his teeth -- he was buried in Embu -- became the basis for conclusively identifying him, and Dachi was part of a team that performed the forensic examination and identification via dental records from Germany.

After the end of World War II, Mengele had somehow made his way to Brazil -- via Argentina -- and had lived in Embu under an assumed name for many years with a German family, working as a handy man. It was not clear whether his hosts knew who he was. One day, a few years after we had left Brazil, Mengele went for a swim in the Atlantic surf near Embu and, perhaps after a stroke or heart attack, died in the water, although his body was recovered and an autopsy performed. He was buried in a cemetery in Embu. The discovery that he had been living in Brazil for many years became a worldwide news story, and of course Stella and I remembered those Sundays when we used to take our infant son, Joe, to Embu.

(Our oldest son, Joe, had been born a few months after we arrived in Sao Paulo. His brother, Andres, followed a few years later. Both were born in the Maternidade de Sao Paulo, delivered by the same doctor.)

On more than one occasion we met German-Brazilians who were about the right age to have served in the Wehrmacht. One was married to a member of the Brazilian staff in the USIS office. Nice fellow, name of Johann. He spoke freely about having been in combat on the Eastern Front during the war. It was never clear whether he was an

innocent conscript who like so many others had immigrated legally to Brazil after the war.

Q: At least publicly, Brazil extols the fact that it is free of racial prejudice, and yet everybody who serves there asks what the hell that is all about. How did you find that aspect of life there?

O'CONNELL: Race is an enormous topic in Brazil, the real elephant in the room. Many Brazilians will tell you -- unprompted -- that, unlike in the U.S., there is no racial discrimination in their country. We met Brazilians of various shades -- not hard to do there -- including people who were quite dark. There was at that time -- and this was over 40 years ago -- a budding yet miniscule move toward black consciousness, at least in Sao Paulo, Rio and the historic city of Salvador da Bahia.

The history of how people of color came to Brazil, how they mingled, and how the Portuguese were different from the Spanish in their approach to race -- all of these factors make race in Brazil at least as complicated as it is in the U.S., perhaps even more so. Unlike the Spanish in their Latin American colonies, the Portuguese vigorously and openly embraced miscegenation.

Q: Historically, how does the concept of race in Brazil and in the United States differ?

O'CONNELL: It has been said -- quite over-implistically -- of race in Brazil and the United States -- by both Brazilian and American observers -- that, historically so in the United States, if a person has one drop of so-called "black blood," he or she is regarded as "black." By contrast, in Brazil, if a person had one drop of so-called "white blood," he or she is regarded as "white." That bit of nonsense is supposed to illustrate how the question of color and race differs in the two countries.

Brazilians would always make much of that. "We Brazilians have a much more tolerant society than you Americans," they would relish saying to Americans, "and we don't have the kind of problem that you have." Of course, anyone with any powers of observation knows that, just as in Colombia, where people on the lower end of the socio-economic scale tend to exhibit many more indigenous features, and those at or near the top of the socio-economic scale tend to be more "white," or European, there is a like situation in Brazil. There, people lower on the scale tend to be much darker than people in, say, the government in Brasilia, for example.

I'm sure that some of this has changed since we were in Brazil. But it was fascinating to us because always, just below the surface, the topic of conversation with Brazilians was race, especially if the conversation was with a (white) American. It was possible to have a reasonably frank conversation with Brazilians who were genuinely interested in coming to grips with race, but many other Brazilians would bring race up as a platform to express their view that they were so much better off than we Americans because they knew how to treat "their Blacks" (*os pretos*) and to keep them in "their" place. Thus, there was, in

their view, no racial problem in Brazil. It was amusing how some Brazilians would go to great lengths and contortions in order to say that they were not racists.

Q: I've interviewed a lady who had a dark boyfriend, and she had to use sort of the freight elevator to bring him to her apartment.

O'CONNELL: The subject of race in Brazil can quickly become contentious and ugly. There is a book -- I believe the title in Portuguese is *Pioneros e Bandierantes*, or Pioneers and Cowboys -- that was at one time a standard work on Brazil's early history. It favorably compares the ways in which Brazil and the U.S. were settled. I have not read the book, but I understand that it makes much of the historic papering over of the significant differences between how Brazil and the United States were settled. The book also discusses alleged differences between the way the Spanish viewed what they were doing in Latin America and why they came in the first place, and the reasons -- described as much more benign -- that the Portuguese came to Latin America, along with the manner in which the Portuguese treated the indigenous peoples they encountered.

The facile delineation between the Spanish and the Portuguese approaches had long been that the Spanish were interested in getting rich quickly and then returning to Spain, while the Portuguese were supposedly less interested in getting rich than they were in creating settlements and converting the natives to Christianity. Some of these notions were -- and still are -- over-simplifications, but they contained some truth, too.

For example, as I've noted, the Portuguese apparently did differ from the Spanish in their approach to sexual relations with indigenous people as well as with African slaves. Not that the Spanish were more pure or acted out of lofty thoughts, but their sexual interaction with indigenous people or with slaves was apparently not as open or pronounced as was the case with the early Portuguese. But it was also a fundamentally distinct way of looking at sex and miscegenation.

To this day in Brazil, there is a Portuguese word (*branqueamento*) -- not unlike the old expression here of "marrying up" in social terms -- for "whitening" in racial terms, in the sense that in Brazil it is regarded as not unusual for a darker man to marry a woman of lighter skin, in order to produce whiter children. Among the more famous examples of *branqueamento* was the marriage years ago of soccer super star, Pele, to a white woman (they later divorced).

Q: The soccer star?

O'CONNELL: Yes, perhaps the all-time international soccer star. Brazilians would point to Pele's marriage, sometimes favorably and sometimes not so favorably, as the essence of Brazil. They would say that in marrying women of lighter complexion, they were "whitening" the race. I never heard Pele say anything about race, so I don't know that Pele consciously subscribed to that notion.

Q: What was the attitude from the perspective of your wife and others of Brazilians towards the rest of Latin America?

O'CONNELL: Comparatively open and flexible as they are, Brazilians generally understand Spanish far better than Spanish-speaking Latin Americans understand Portuguese. That has probably changed somewhat with the somewhat increased integration of the continent's nations, but during our years in Brazil, a Spanish-speaking Latin American coming into the country -- we saw this in spades in both my mother-in-law and brother-in-law -- might as well have been coming into China, so linguistically clueless were they.

One would think that inhabiting the same continent and being so close, Brazilians and other Latin Americans would understand each other and have much more in common than they do. They are close enough, but they are, culturally, linguistically and every other wise quite different, particularly if you compare Brazilians with the highland people of the Andean regions, who tend to be, at least stereo-typically, more taciturn.

We found Brazilians to be more open to and curious about the larger world. They are also lovely to be around. Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, particularly those from the large cities such as Bogota, Lima, Buenos Aires, etc., can be formal, even a little chilly. Perhaps not so much anymore, but historically, *Bogotanos* have regarded themselves as superior to others, both their fellow citizens and fellow Latin Americans. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Bogota was known -- probably mostly among its own literary set, and for reasons that had to do with the flowering of Colombian literature -- as the "Athens of South America." I don't believe it would qualify for that name today.

Q: On the social side I've talked to people -- this is earlier -- especially those who served in Rio, and there was a real problem because so many upper class Brazilian men had mistresses.

O'CONNELL: I've heard those stories, too, and they did not surprise me. During the few times that we visited Rio, I wondered whether I could work there. The city and its setting are so beautiful, and its way of life so laid-back that they seemed to conspire against working very hard.

Someone has said that Sao Paulo is like Chicago with its broad shoulders (actually, there is a story, perhaps apocryphal, of the time William Faulkner came to Sao Paulo under the Consulate General's sponsorship. He was drinking heavily at the time, and, when he was taken to his hotel room, he reportedly opened the blinds or a window, looked out, and pronounced that the city did in fact look like Chicago. As the story went, Faulkner remained in his hotel room for the rest of his visit.).

Paulistas, as Sao Paulo residents call themselves, enjoy saying that their city is like a locomotive pulling Brazil's other states, which are empty boxcars. Historically, there has been some truth in that. Today, despite its economic ups and downs, Brazil is more prosperous, although its distribution of income has great inequities.

One of the first things that struck us about Brazil after having lived in Colombia, where so much was imported, was that virtually every single thing you could look at in a room was made in Brazil. They imported very little, and it was almost a mark of national pride that they were able to manufacture so much.

Q: They had a policy, too.

O'CONNELL: Yes, a policy of strict importation substitution. Their cars were all made in Brazil, in three industrial cities just outside of Sao Paulo. The automotive industry, incidentally, is where Lula, the former and possibly Brazilian president, got his start, in the metal workers union. The only thing that Brazil did not have enough of was oil, but they have made some oil discoveries in recent years, off the coast and maybe even in the Amazon.

I have been assured by my Brazilian friends that the things that I liked about their country -- their spontaneity, joy, and music -- have not been -- and won't be -- diminished by industrialization. There is still plenty of poverty and, with it, crime. Stella and I thought nothing of walking in the streets of Sao Paulo late at night, but that is apparently not advisable today.

Q: I'm told that rich people commute by helicopter.

O'CONNELL: The Sao Paulo traffic was bad enough when we were there years ago. I can only wonder what it's like today. I believe the city's population now approaches 12 million people.

Q: And what about the military? When did they give up power?

The military relinquished power in the 1980s, and my impression from afar is that they are not missed. There are probably some older folks who fondly remember the military in power, not unlike some older Russians who say they long for a new Stalin. But there is no sentiment for bringing them back. By the time the military returned to their barracks, they were discredited, especially as Brazilians began to feel more confident about being able to run the country themselves. Today, unfortunately, the current president is being accused of having taken part in widespread corruption, especially in the oil industry.

Q: How did you find the Foreign Service national staff in Sao Paulo? How competent how would you rate them?

O'CONNELL: In Sao Paulo they were excellent, both in the consular section and elsewhere in the consulate. These were people who were well educated -- often in the U.S. -- competent and experienced. Many of the USIS staff had come out of journalism schools, the Brazilian media or major cultural institutions.

Q: Talk about your time on the USIA side of things. What was going on?

O'CONNELL: One of the U.S. goals in Brazil was to establish and maintain contact with groups that were on the outs with the military government: students, labor union people, political dissidents of one kind or another, and intellectuals. Much of what I did as a junior officer was fun because I was able to get out of the consulate and go to events and then have people come to our apartment for good conversation, particularly during our second tour in Sao Paulo. More than once, either the political officer for whom I had worked or even people from the CIA, would come to me and say, "I understand that you are going out to the University of Sao Paulo or meeting with a group of students. Do you mind if I come along, or do you think you could get me an invitation?"

I remember the first time this happened with one of the CIA people, a fellow who was about my age. He had made a point of befriending me not long after we arrived in Sao Paulo and would often stop by my office at the end of the day. He loved to point out that he and I were about the same age, that his agency, like mine, had a junior officer program, and that therefore he and I ought to work together. I was wary of his approach. Fortunately, nothing came of that, but it was clear that some of my colleagues in the consulate were convinced that the USIS people had all the fun.

Q: What were the expectations as to how much you could accomplish there, in that enormous metropolis?

O'CONNELL: One of the great things about being a junior officer, especially in a city like Sao Paulo was that I had few specific responsibilities, so I could try lots of things, like the report on the TFP organization. I also came to understand pretty quickly that doing public affairs work in that enormous metropolis was probably not unlike doing similar work for, say, the French consulate in Chicago in terms of the amount of influence one could hope to have on the Chicago Sun Times or the Chicago Daily News. That did not, however, mean that we despaired about being able to accomplish anything, but we knew that we had to be judicious and strategic in what we were trying to do there.

Q: So the city had strong institutions?

O'CONNELL: There is -- and was -- a lot of money in Sao Paulo. In spite of the repression, the city had several great universities. In the social sciences, the hard sciences, and in the arts, there were people doing important work that rivaled that of New York, Chicago or Los Angeles. In addition to the quadrennial Sao Paulo Biennale, the city has a great philharmonic orchestra and a world-class art museum in its Sao Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), so the level and sophistication of the cultural life there is high, something that our colleagues at USIA in Washington did not always grasp. We would receive offerings from Washington that would say something like, "You may never have heard of him (or her), but we have this terrific pianist," (we used to call them "piano players" since we didn't think they rose to the level of being actual pianists), he (or she) is just out of Julliard and is looking for some performance experience and is prepared to come down and play some concerts."

Our response was usually that we would be happy to schedule the piano player in the cities in the interior of Sao Paulo state, but not in the city itself. The people who ran the performance venues in the city of Sao Paulo were looking for Van Cliburn or Andre Watts or Itzhak Perlman, and someone just out of the conservatory. The local impresarios would rarely tell us that they were not interested in our offering. Rather, the response was more that perhaps they might consider the artist at another time. We kept trying to persuade Washington that they needed to step up their musical and cultural offerings, or not make them at all.

An example of a cultural offering that was up to Sao Paulo's standards and on which I had the opportunity to work was the time that the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with our co-sponsorship, sent a major exhibit of paintings to Sao Paulo's Museum of Art. The show was full of works by many of the greats of 20th century art.

When the Pan Am 747, jammed with exquisitely-crated art works, arrived at Sao Paulo's airport, I accompanied the exhibit's curator to help unload the paintings. I didn't actually handle any of the paintings, but being there in the middle of the night, with loads of security and media about, plus helping to set up the show's opening and helping with the publicity and logistics, was heady stuff for a newly minted, 20-something Foreign Service Officer.

Q: You mentioned Faulkner. Given the size and importance of Sao Paulo, I imagine that you had your share of prominent visitors.

O'CONNELL: Privately, we called them visiting firemen, and they were a constant. For example, Dizzy Gillespie appeared unannounced at the consulate one morning. A Brazilian colleague told me that the jazz great was in the waiting room. I thought it was some kind of joke, until I walked into the waiting area. There he was, by himself, his trademark skull cap on his head, wispy beard below his lower lip. "Hey, man," he said in his raspy voice. "I'm Dizzy Gillespie. Where's the nearest Baha'i temple." Turned out that the legendary trumpeter was a longtime member of the Baha'i faith. The temple was around the corner, and he was gone, as quickly as he had arrived.

Another time I helped the then-chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, William Casey, who would later be President Reagan's CIA chief during Iran-Contra. He and his wife were visiting Sao Paulo, and as the "control officer," I assisted Mr. and Mrs. Casey with some purchases and shipping back home of some of Sao Paulo's folk art paintings. I recall Mr. Casey as a kindly fellow. He wrote me a lovely note of thanks once he had returned to Washington.

Q: Was there a Japanese community there?

O'CONNELL: There was and is an enormous Japanese community in both the city and state of Sao Paulo, dating back to the late 1800s. By the 1970s, the Japanese and their descendants were still mainly a force in agriculture, but that was changing. At the time we were in Brazil, the country's petroleum minister was a Nisei.

Not atypical of Brazil's Japanese-descended population is a longtime Brazilian friend in Sao Paulo -- with the very un-Brazilian name of Teruo Massita. His parents were Nisei farmers in the interior of Sao Paulo state, and today he works in the equivalent of Sao Paulo state's prestigious general accounting office. His life progression is an example of how Brazil's Japanese community has gone from agricultural to professional work in an urban setting, very much part of Brazilian society. Many of its members have married outside of their ethnic group.

My friend, Teruo, for example, married a woman who is also from the interior of Sao Paulo state and whose parents were of Italian and Lebanese backgrounds. Anyone meeting Teruo for the first time would think that he is Japanese. He is and he isn't. He told me about his first trip to Tokyo. He knows only a very few words of Japanese, but, as he cheerfully admits, he does not speak Japanese. Not unlike in immigrant families in the United States, he was not interested in learning Japanese, despite his parents' attempts to teach it to him. So the first time he went out onto the streets of Tokyo, passers-by began to speak to him in Japanese, and of course he was mostly clueless, to the great puzzlement of the passers-by.

Q: You mentioned media censorship. Was it strict in Brazil during those years that you were there?

O'CONNELL: There was fairly tight censorship of the news media, and it was an everyday occurrence at that time. The censorship took an odd form, however. When one was reading Sao Paulo's -- and Brazil's -- newspaper of record, O Estado de Sao Paulo -- the reader would unfailingly come upon, in the middle of an article, a fragment of a recipe, usually for beef stroganoff. Depending upon how much space the censors needed to get rid of what they didn't want published, sometimes an entire recipe would appear, but usually there would be one line, such as "add cream." So Brazilians, who have an excellent sense of humor, would write letters to the editor about the recipes, which would be published. One reader wrote, "I tried your recipe for beef stroganoff, and it was awful." Although there were some more serious speaking out about the censorship, it throughout our years in Brazil.

Q: Obviously you were a junior officer there with some of the more senior officers who would get together at staff meetings or something would you say they were comfortable with the military because the military was keeping power?

O'CONNELL: Your question has me remembering something that Consul General Corrigan said at one of the first morning staff meetings that I attended. There was a visitor from the State Department, and Mr. Corrigan was giving him a brief *tour d'horizon* of the Brazilian situation. "The military is in power," he said, "and they are strict, but of course there was an **excess of democracy** [emphasis mine] here before they had to take over in 1964."

I remember wondering just what “an excess of democracy” could be? I doubt that Mr. Corrigan’s view was very widely shared in the mission, and perhaps I misunderstood him. I did understand what he meant, however, that Brazil was not in good shape in 1964, and there was in the view of some chaos before the ouster of President Joao Goulart.

Q: I take it the social life was pretty active in Sao Paulo.

O’CONNELL: Very much so, with at least one -- and often more than one -- event somewhere every night, and often two or three. We -- especially the junior officers -- were also expected to hold frequent representational functions in our homes and also to attend functions elsewhere.

I remember a discussion with my first boss in Sao Paulo, a veteran USIA officer and artist named Alan Fisher who was mainly interested in cultural activities. He had installed in the USIS library a gallery space in which paintings by Brazilian artists were displayed. He regarded that as a good way to reach out to the Sao Paulo arts community, and it probably was.

Q: How did you and Mr. Fisher get along, concerning both this and otherwise?

O’CONNELL: Mr. Fisher had a different view, but, happily, we later resolved our differences. When he wrote my annual evaluation that I had done well, but that but that I needed to understand that part of my job was to attend social functions and also hold them in our apartment. I had not refused to do those things, but he thought I should do more, which, thinking back to that time, was probably true. Stella and I had a young baby at the time, and going out frequently was impractical for us. I wasn’t anti-social, but I felt like I owed my young family at least some of my time.

I wrote a rebuttal, the memory of which can still make me cringe. The country Public Affairs Officer in Brasilia suggested that I reconsider it, but in keeping with my youthfully foolish bravado, I decided to let it stand. Fortunately, this all had a happy ending: by the end of my junior officer year in Sao Paulo, Alan Fisher and I had become and then remained friends until his death years later. I learned some valuable lessons, especially about taking myself too seriously, although no one could have told me that at the time!

Q: Part of the evaluations or efficiency reports kept changing, but at one time there was a place where you could respond. This used to be known in personnel as the “suicide box.”

O’CONNELL: That’s probably the message that the country public affairs officer was trying to convey to me. Obviously, representational work is a big part of our occupation. I never really liked it, but I did it.

Q: I’m with you. I’ve never responded well to it, but some people are really good at it.

O'CONNELL: I can go out there and work a room, but I could never get beyond the artificiality of it even though I (now) recognize that serious business can sometimes be conducted at social gatherings.

(Jumping ahead a bit, when we returned to Sao Paulo after my assignment in Fortaleza, I had a new immediate boss, who believed that officers' spouses had duties, and my wife wasn't carrying them out. I recall the discussion I had with my new boss, and -- respectfully -- telling her that my wife was very supportive of my career but that she also had a young baby along with other responsibilities. By happy coincidence and at about the same time of that discussion, the Department sent out a worldwide cable stating clearly that dependent spouses were not obligated to hold representational functions).

Q: In the early '70s?

O'CONNELL: Yes. I didn't exactly go in and throw the cable on my boss's desk. I did not need to: she had seen it, too.

Q: Despite all the disclaimers it's still...often people I know in personnel say, "Well he's alright but his wife is really great, or awful."

O'CONNELL: I had seen plenty of that in the evaluations that I reviewed back in Washington before we went to Brazil.

Q: So after Sao Paulo, you went somewhere else in Brazil?

O'CONNELL: At the end of my year in Sao Paulo, I was assigned, with the grand-sounding title of "sub-branch public affairs officer" to the northeastern port city of Fortaleza, which is in the Brazilian state of Ceará. "Sub-branch public affairs officer" was pretty far down the USIA food chain, but I would be running my own operation in a distant outpost. The assignment seemed attractive, and Country Public Affairs Officer, Tom Tuch, assured me that it would be both interesting and helpful in my career progression.

Q: Recife?

O'CONNELL: No, we were off to the city of Fortaleza, on the Atlantic coast and well to the north of Recife. At that time Fortaleza's population was about a million people. Today, it is more like two million.

Instead of flying to Fortaleza from Sao Paulo, Stella and I, and our then infant son, Joe, decided to take a ship from Rio de Janeiro to Recife, where the plan was that we would disembark in order to call on Don Jones, my boss, and the Branch Public Affairs Officer. Looking back, taking a ship -- something that was permitted at the time under the State Department's travel regulations -- seemed like a good idea at the time. It turned out, however, to be less than fun.

The ship was a small and aging cruise vessel that the Brazilian Lloyd Brasileiro shipping firm had acquired from Yugoslavia to ply between the port of Santos and Manaus, Brazil's city on the Amazon deep in the interior of the country. Suffice it to say that we had scarcely left Rio's harbor when Stella complained that she was feeling ill with sea sickness. Although we followed Brazil's Atlantic coast, making two stops, the weather was rough, with choppy seas, rain and fog. The old ship bobbed like a proverbial cork, and after two-plus days on the ocean we all, including little Joe, had full-blown *mal de mer* and could not wait to get off that creaky scow in Recife.

Our arrival there, however, did not end our problems, for almost as soon as we climbed off the ship, Joe, who had virtually never let out a peep since his birth, started wailing, non-stop, continuing for nearly twenty-four hours. We, especially as still-new parents, were desperate. He was running a fever and clearly in pain. The Brazilian pediatrician suspected an inner-ear infection, but he was unable to see far enough into Joe's ears to be certain. Someone in the consulate told us that the hospital ship "Hope" was docked at Natal, a port city to the north, between Recife and Fortaleza, and that perhaps we should consider going there to have the doctors look at Joe. We jumped at the chance.

After calling ahead to make arrangements with the ship's staff, the consulate provided a car and driver, and we headed off into the warm Brazilian evening on the two-lane road to Natal, with Joe screaming the whole way. A couple of hours later, we drove into the port and there, bathed in flood lights like a mirage, was the old ship, painted in bright white and flying the American flag. We felt like we had made it and help was at hand. We were escorted to the pediatrics ward below decks and there met a young doctor who had arrived in Natal the day before with a team from UCLA. He took a quick look at Joe's ears before reaching for an instrument which he said he had brought with him from Los Angeles and which he said he was introducing to his Brazilian colleagues. Undoubtedly old hat by now, back then it was state of the art in its capability of looking around corners. In an instant he spotted the infection and immediately started Joe on antibiotics, which would clear up the infection within a day or so. We were elated.

Q: What was your work in Fortaleza like?

O'CONNELL: As for Fortaleza, the "post" was comprised of a thriving bi-national center, where I was the *ex officio* director, and a small USIS office with a staff of four, including two contract employees. In addition, I held the diplomatic title of Vice Consul and, although I was not authorized to issue visas, I was the sole official U.S. representative in a three-state area of Brazil's vast Northeast. I was therefore the default "protection and welfare" officer for any American citizens who found themselves in difficulty in the area. I don't recall whether I realized what that meant, but I would learn soon enough.

My office was on the first floor of an old storefront building on the busy downtown Rua Floriano Peixoto, so all manner of people would stop in, either to pick up USIA pamphlets and fliers about life in the U.S., how to apply for a visa or even how to file U.S. income taxes. A few Brazilian retirees who had worked in the U.S. or on U.S. flag

ships used to stop in monthly to pick up their Social Security checks which came in our APO mail pouch. We also loaned USIS films from a small collection, and we could order others from the central USIS office in Rio de Janeiro, so that brought in considerable foot traffic, too.

Q: So people would come in to borrow Agency films?

O'CONNELL: Quite a bit. The ease of entry into our office -- which would be out of the question in the post-9/11 world -- led to some interesting encounters. One sticks in my mind even today.

One morning, a small, delicate-looking, silver-haired man came in to borrow films. Both his Portuguese and then his English were heavily accented, so I asked him where he was from. He said that he was a French-Canadian Jesuit priest doing missionary work in a remote and very poor area some 700 miles in the far interior of Ceará state. He said that he had been out there for many years. This was at the time when the American Jesuit Daniel Berrigan, along with other protesters against the war in Vietnam, had been arrested for damaging draft records in Pennsylvania. I asked the priest if he had heard about Berrigan. When he said he had, I asked him how Jesuits doing work as distinct from one another as his own in the interior of Ceará state and Father Berrigan's in Pennsylvania could co-exist in the same religious order. "It's very simple. Such differences were precisely what St. Ignatius Loyola (who founded the Jesuits in the 1500s) wanted." He added, "Ignatius wanted a group of 'diverse characters' to carry out God's work, and that that was what he got, even today." It was a touching moment. He placed the films in his rucksack, and we shook hands as he walked out into the street. Sadly, I never saw him again, and I've always regretted that I did not try to keep in touch with the Jesuit with the piercing blue eyes.

My experience in Fortaleza was mostly positive but also full of some unexpected challenges. My supervisor was 500 kilometers to the south, and I seldom saw him. Communication with Recife, as well as with Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro was unreliable. I was largely on my own, which suited me at the time.

The bi-national center, known as the *Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos*, or IBEU, had a thousand or so tuition-paying students of English. The center made money. It also housed a library of American books and materials, mostly provided by USIA, and had space for USIA-sponsored exhibits and cultural presentations. IBEU also offered counseling services and reference materials for Brazilians interested in studying in the U.S., either under the Fulbright or other scholarship programs.

In other words, the IBEU was very much a profitable and going concern whose board and staff were more than capable of managing the organization. Much as I enjoyed working with IBEU, I realized early that, while the organization might have needed an American officer to run it back in its formative years, it did not need one any longer. I figured that it was a only a matter of time that the American officer would be withdrawn from IBEU. It turned out that I was right.

Fortaleza was a beautiful place, but it had its problems, one of them being the region's chronic water shortages, which figured importantly in our living situation. We rented a house from a local doctor. Eventually, during a period of sustained drought, the house's well went dry. We bought water from the fire department, until even they ran short and couldn't deliver anymore. We then had to move in a hurry to a nearby apartment with its own water supply. Our son was about a year old, so we needed water, all the time. The owner of our former residence, a prominent physician, sued me for breaking our lease, disregarding my argument that, as the owner of the property, he had an obligation to ensure that the house had an uninterrupted supply of water. The embassy in Brasilia, clearly uninterested in becoming involved in a legal battle in Ceará's courts, instructed me to find out how much I owed the doctor and come to a quick settlement, which I did.

My duties in Fortaleza as the *de facto* Vice Consul took me into some interesting situations, in which I essentially had to learn by doing.

On one occasion, a Holiday on Ice show came to Fortaleza, improbable though that might sound in such a warm place. The show's cast was multinational. Its road manager, a Dutchman, appeared one morning at my office door and asked if I was the American consular officer. He explained that one of his performers was a young American woman who was ill and behaving strangely. He went on to say that the troupe had to leave town that very day, and that they could not take the woman with them. He asked if I could take responsibility for her until her mother, whom he had already called, could arrive from Chicago in a few days. In the meantime, he told me that the young woman was in her hotel room.

The road manager and I went to the hotel, where we found a slight young woman who seemed to be in a confused state. Except for asking me over and over for a match so that she could light a cigarette, the poor thing made no sense. When she calmed down a bit, she told me that she was fine and wanted to go home, so after a doctor examined her and pronounced her fit to travel with a fellow cast member, we took her to the airport to try to put her on a plane. Once she boarded, however, she again became agitated, and the flight attendant alerted the pilot. He came into the cabin and after taking one look at her, he said that she would not be able to stay on board. After that, we were able to get her confined at a local hospital until her mother arrived from Chicago a day or so later.

Q: Did you ever have to handle the death of an American citizen?

O'CONNELL: I did, in the case of a young American woman who was killed in an auto accident on the highway coming north from Rio de Janeiro to Fortaleza. Her name was Tina Mourad, and she and her Brazilian boyfriend worked in New York for Varig, the Brazilian airline. They had traveled to Rio and were driving to Fortaleza, where she would meet the young man's parents for the first time. There was an accident. The young Brazilian man was driving and possibly fell asleep. The car turned over, and Tina was killed, about an hour south of Fortaleza. Many Brazilians are terrible drivers, and the driver probably also speeding.

Ms. Mourad's parents were already unhappy about her relationship with the Brazilian, and her death and its circumstances made a bad situation much worse. The morning of the accident, the police notified me that they had a deceased U.S. citizen and requested that I take responsibility for dealing with and shipping her remains to New York. Fortunately, I received guidance by phone and telex from the actual consular officers in Recife, but they didn't come to Fortaleza. I had to arrange for an autopsy and embalming, the latter not being a skill that is common in Brazil, where the dead are typically buried within 24 hours. With the assistance of Brazilian friends, I located a pathologist who knew how to embalm.

I went to the local medical school where the pathologist, clearly proud of his work, showed me the young woman's embalmed and shattered remains. I also remember having to go through Ms. Mourad's suitcase to select clothing before her body was placed in a simple wooden coffin, the kind with a small glass window for viewing her face.

Varig had already informed Ms. Mourad's parents in Queens, New York, of her death, so fortunately it did not fall to me to have to call them with the awful news. I did, however, have to call her father to ask for his wishes concerning his daughter's remains. Mr. Mourad was distraught and angry, and my conversation with him was brief and difficult. He said, "I don't want my daughter buried in that awful country." At the airport, the Brazilian authorities asked me to look through the window in the coffin's cover in order to verify that the remains were those of Tina Mourad. Once I did that, Varig shipped her remains back to New York via Rio de Janeiro.

Another time, a large, ruddy-faced American with a strong Cajun accent walked into my office accompanied by a tiny Brazilian woman. He introduced himself as a tug boat captain from Louisiana (I believe his name was Tibideau). He asked if I could marry him and his girlfriend, then and there. There were some off-shore oil operations to the south of Fortaleza, and the captain and his crew had been delivering supplies and workers to one of the rigs. I told him I was not empowered to marry them but that I could serve as a witness for a civil marriage. So we all walked a couple of blocks to the notary's office, and I signed a big, old-fashioned ledger to help make the marriage official.

Then one night, somewhat later, another of the U.S. tugboats -- this one out of Morgan City, LA -- accidentally ran over an unlighted Brazilian fishing raft. Those craft were, known as *jangadas*, were common along Brazil's Northeast coast. Luckily, the tugboat -- whose helmsman was not aware that he had struck a *jangada* and kept plowing ahead in a northward direction -- did not kill any of the crew, but the fragile and small raft was destroyed. The crew was rescued, and the Brazilian Navy pursued and caught up with the tugboat, by which the tug had reached Belem at the mouth of the Amazon. The craft was escorted back to Fortaleza, and the authorities called me. The captain and crew had been arrested and were being held at naval headquarters in Fortaleza. The local media had a field day with the story, which was then picked up by national outlets. The papers labeled the American crew as "dangerous and uncaring" about the "poor Brazilian fishermen

whom they wantonly left behind in the night sea, possibly to drown,” (they didn’t). My involvement was to act on behalf of the U.S. embassy in Brasilia in order to get the crew released. After several days, the tug’s company wired money from Louisiana to pay a fine a fine, and tug continued its voyage.

Q: Was there much interest in the United States in Fortaleza?

O’CONNELL: Tremendous interest. IBEU housed an active American Field Service teenage exchange program which each year sent many local young people to the U.S. to live with American host families. There was also great interest in learning English, along with curiosity about life in the United States. It was a simpler time, and I’m sure that today, many more young Brazilians travel to the U.S. than back then. Even so, with AFS and other youth exchange programs, the number of travelers was significant.

Q: What was it like politically in Fortaleza and in that part of Brazil?

O’CONNELL: The political situation at that time in the state of Ceará, and in the Northeast region more generally, was about like it was in Sao Paulo, i.e., tense. I had made friends with several young physicians who wanted to come to the U.S. for their residencies and who had a difficult relationship with the local federal police, which kept tabs on dissidents. After the doctors graduated from the Federal University of Ceará, there was some question about whether they would be allowed to leave Brazil. They needed clearance from the federal police in order to obtain a passport. In the printed program for their medical school graduation, the student designers had slipped in some irreverent but harmless comments about the government, the federal police and Brazil’s political situation. Not known for their sense of humor, the police hauled the design committee in for questioning. They were released, but the episode injected a chill into what was otherwise a happy event.

Q: When did you leave Fortaleza?

O’CONNELL: We returned to Sao Paulo in mid-1973. Among my final duties in Fortaleza was to close the USIS office. I was the last in a long line of USIS officers there. My memories of that time are of giving away the old and quite beat-up furniture that was in the USIS office.

Q: Was there was a significant leftist maybe Cuban movement, or not?

O’CONNELL: There was a definite leftist bent to Brazil’s dissidents, but except for tiny and ineffectual Maoist- or Cuban-inspired and ultimately defeated guerrilla groups, the “movement” was more culturally leftist, or what was called -- derisively -- the “festive left.” Much of that took the form of passive and usually private criticism of the military along with the wish that it would simply go away. Like Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, Brazil also had its brush with dirty war during those years, with arrests, torture and disappearances, but the situation in Brazil never rose -- or sank -- to the levels of numbers of victims of repression that the other Latin American countries saw.

In mid-1973, when we returned to Sao Paulo from Fortaleza, and when I became assistant cultural affairs officer and, later, assistant press officer in the consulate general, reports of arrests and harassment among friends and contacts in Sao Paulo were rampant.

Q: What was the harassment about, teaching a lesson, to obtain information or what?

O'CONNELL: To say that the Brazilian military was paranoid about what it always darkly referred to as the "Communist threat" would have been an understatement. They saw conspiracies everywhere and were determined to root them out at any cost. Some of the torture was harassment. Some of it was a control mechanism aimed at those who dared to express dissent, and some of it was aimed at obtaining information.

Brazilians who had been ostracized by the regime and who had lost their jobs because of their views had to find other ways of making a living. In Sao Paulo, a group of former University of Sao Paulo professors whose political rights had been suspended (the term in Portuguese is *cassacao*) established, with support from the Ford Foundation, the Center for Brazilian Studies and Research, or CEBRAP in Portuguese.

CEBRAP, whose work was respected both in Brazil and internationally, became an intellectual refuge for people like Dr. Paulo Singer and many others. Before his *cassacao*, Dr. Singer had been an eminent economist at the University of Sao Paulo. I became acquainted with him and his CEBRAP colleagues not long after I returned to Sao Paulo.

The regime permitted CEBRAP to operate -- possibly because of its association with the Ford Foundation -- but it was an object of constant monitoring by the federal police. It was during that period of intense scrutiny in late 1973 that Professor Singer was arrested and taken to an unknown site for about a week (he is Jewish, which could not have helped his case, since there was at that time a strain of anti-Semitism in the Brazilian military). I don't recall whether the consulate made a *demarche*, but I do remember that we made our position on this matter known to the authorities. Dr. Singer had been made aware that we were supporting him. The day he was released, he came to my apartment. He wanted to express his gratitude to the consulate general for its support.

Stella was frightened when Dr. Singer appeared at our apartment door. She thought he might have been followed and that there might be repercussions for us. I had met people in the federal police, and one of them casually asked me why it was that I "hung around" with people who opposed the government, adding, "Don't you know they are against our national security interests?"

As we sat together that evening, Dr. Singer calmly described his experiences of the past week. Although he was clearly shaken by his ordeal, he said he wasn't touched but that he was threatened. He was blindfolded the entire time and taken to a location where he could hear people screaming and apparently being beaten. With a trace of wry amusement, he said that one of his tormentors kept asking, "Why is it that the Ford Motor Company supports a bunch of traitors like CEBRAP?" Clearly, the interrogator did not

understand the difference between the Ford Motor Company and the Ford Foundation. Dr. Singer tried to explain, but was repeatedly cut off by his questioner. He said that his captors wanted to know whether CEBRAP was a front for the then-outlawed Brazilian Communist party, or whether Singer and his colleagues were making seditious plans to overthrow the government.

(I remember when the U.S. went into Cambodia. We watched Nixon on Brazilian TV making the announcement. A day or so later, at the end of the work day, the young CIA officer whom I mentioned earlier stopped by my office. He wanted to talk about the incursion into Cambodia. I said that I personally did not agree with it. The change in his demeanor was immediate and striking: he became angry and, calling me a “traitor,” suggested that I resign forthwith.” I told him that I was expressing own view and that I thought that that was permitted. Fortunately, he never spoke to me again.)

Q: Where did you go afterward you completed your second assignment in Sao Paulo?

O’CONNELL: We returned to Washington in the fall of 1975 for what was to have been a three-year assignment before going back overseas. While there, I was variously desk officer for Mexico and Central America; editor of Portuguese-language version of one of USIA’s magazines; graduate student in American government; member of a team inspecting Agency posts in Colombia and Costa Rica; and temporary press officer for then Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Patt Derian.

Q: Did you have any say in where you would be assigned in Washington?

O’CONNELL: Before leaving Sao Paulo, I had given the Agency some ideas about where I wanted to work in Washington. What actually happened once I was back in the Agency was a classic case of walking down the hall and unexpectedly having a hand reach out from an open door and pull me into an office.

Q: What happened?

O’CONNELL: Events in once-sleepy Portugal earlier in 1975 would determine my initial Washington assignment. The Portuguese military had overthrown the Salazar regime, and USIA was scrambling for relevance in that unfolding situation. There was concern on the part of the U.S. and NATO that the generals who took over were leftists and wanted to lead the country into socialism or even Communism.

Unbeknownst to me, an idea then emerging at USIA was for a magazine for Portugal, specifically a Portuguese-language publication that would focus both on the lives of Portuguese in the U.S. and also give a sense of the freedoms that Americans enjoy. Fortunately, USIA already had *Horizon*, a glossy monthly which circulated in English and 20 or 30 other languages, although not Portuguese. What the Agency did not have was a Portuguese speaker who could edit and publish the magazine. While I had the first qualification, my knowledge of magazine publishing could have fit into a thimble. No matter, apparently, for I was hired, almost sight unseen.

My immediate task was to gather a stable of contract translators and a graphic artist -- quickly -- and to get cracking on the first issue of what would be called *Horizontes*. The embassy in Lisbon was anxious to get the magazine into circulation. Fortunately, my office -- or cubicle -- was located in the office of the English-language version of the magazine, so I was able to call on the writers and graphic artists there for guidance and much-needed moral support.

I managed to line up a young graphic and a courtly Portuguese woman who would become the magazine's language editor. Thus began my year as editor and publisher of USIA's Portuguese-language magazine for Portugal. The job of saving Portugal from Communism was in my hands!

Q: How did that go?

O'CONNELL: I spent much of my time worrying about deadlines and scouring the country for stories about Portuguese communities and people in the United States. I wrote pieces on such sons of Portugal as the "March King," John Philip Sousa; the author and Hemingway contemporary, John Dos Passos, along with articles on the Portuguese -- Azorean, actually -- community in Fall River, Massachusetts, in addition to smaller communities in Union City, New Jersey and San Diego, California. I wondered what my Portuguese readers thought of all of this. It was hard to imagine that reading about their forebears who had gone to the United States would have made them want to reject Communism.

Q: Cranberry farmers, too?

O'CONNELL: No cranberry farmers, but explorers, politicians, you name it. I later did an article on the Portuguese explorer Cabrillo who is credited with discovering what much later would become San Diego.

After a year at *Horizontes*, I worked as a special assistant for the director USIA's Press and Publications Service, a senior FSO named Bob Beecham. My duties were troubleshooting with people across the organization, which at that time was vast and included printing plants in Manila and Mexico City, and a distribution center in Vienna for USIA's many magazines and publications. My year with Bob Beecham was terrific, and I learned much from him about how large organizations function. I also learned much from him about the art of editing.

Q: And after Horizontes? You mentioned that you had worked briefly for Patt Derian at the State Department. What was that like?

O'CONNELL: For about six months, while the regular press officer was away on another assignment, I filled in as press officer for Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Derian. That was my brief introduction to life in the Department and specifically in the office of a high-profile Carter political appointee

whose job was to push hard on the President's aggressive human rights policies around the world. Aside from Secretary Derian's enthusiasm and stamina, what I most recall about the months that I spent there was the amount of effort required to move press guidance through the State Department's cumbersome clearance process. Ms. Derian's husband was Hodding Carter, Jr., who at the same time that she was serving as Assistant Secretary for Human Rights on the Department's eighth floor, was serving as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs and Department spokesman on the first. I would often join press officers from around the Department in Carter's office where we would gather to prepare him or the alternate spokesperson, Tom Reston (son of New York Times columnist, James Reston) with the day's guidance for the mid-day media briefing.

Q: What about your stint as a graduate student?

O'CONNELL: At that time, USIA had a sabbatical program known as the Jefferson Fellowships, and I was accepted. The program allowed younger FSOs to spend an academic year at a university of their choice, studying and doing research on a topic relevant to one's career. USIA was then trying to keep the Fellows at Washington-area universities. I had already been taking graduate courses at the University of Maryland, and I remained there, trading my suits for jeans, sneakers and a backpack.

Q: While you were at Maryland, were you getting any feel -- this is after we pulled out of Vietnam -- was there any commitment or was there a feeling that time had moved on and that the war was all over?

O'CONNELL: Concern about the war in Vietnam was on the wane. The students were more interested in getting their degrees and jobs. At the same time, both at State and USIA, I met officers who had had tours in Vietnam. They were a couple years older than I and had served in places like the Mekong Delta or the Central Highlands, typically doing civic affairs and rural development work. Some of them appeared to have emerged from their Vietnam experiences well, while others seemed troubled, even bitter, either because they felt that they were sent to Vietnam against their will or because of what they regarded as the futility of the war, or both.

Q: How long were you at Maryland?

O'CONNELL: I spent an academic year, about ten months, there. I considered myself extremely fortunate to be able to study full time. It was a rewarding time of reading, inquiry and writing. I was able to make a good start on a master's degree in American government and politics and was able to complete it a few years later, thus resolving and maybe expiating the guilt for not having finished my degree at Pittsburgh.

As I was finishing at Maryland, the Agency's Office of Latin American Affairs had an immediate need for a desk officer for Mexico and Central America. Similar to what had happened with my assignment as editor of *Horizontes*, my single qualification for the job, aside from the fact that I was available, was my ability to speak Spanish.

My days as a rookie desk officer were filled with phone calls, cables and -- this was the 1970s -- telexes from posts in Mexico and Central America, typically the Public Affairs Officers urgently requesting speakers, exhibits or cultural programs. The PAO in Mexico, Stanley Zuckerman, was especially active and placed many demands on me and, by extension, the Agency. The work was challenging; desk officers worked pretty much by themselves. I may have shared a secretary -- they still existed back then, though barely.

The Central American wars had not yet heated up, but it was clear even then -- especially with the disastrous policies of the Reagan Administration toward the region -- then that they were on their way, especially in El Salvador.

Q: Sort of a focal point of those policies. Were you feeling that?

O'CONNELL: I did toward the end of my stint as desk officer. Things were already not going well in the region. In addition to El Salvador, Guatemala was unstable; in Panama the transfer of the Canal had recently happened, so that was relatively calm, although General Omar Torrijos had taken over. Immigration was already becoming a problem, but nothing like it would be later.

Q: Where did you go after you finished up in the Latin American affairs office?

O'CONNELL: I received a call from an FSO friend who was at the time in the Agency's Office of Inspections. He had just been assigned to Dublin and was looking for someone to take his place on an impending inspection of Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua. It took me about a minute to say, "Sure."

The inspection team was made up of about seven members, most of them veteran FSOs, along with a retiree and a couple of Agency auditors. We started out in Bogota. I was given responsibility for visiting and evaluating the post's bi-national centers which were headed by FSOs and arrayed around the country in various major cities. I spoke Spanish and knew something about the country from my Peace Corps days, but my grasp of what the USIS post did was sketchy. Dealing with the successes and failures, weaknesses and strengths of the post and its people was a new and interesting experience for me. After Colombia, a senior officer and I went on to Costa Rica, where we spent a week in the embassy's basement while driving tropical rains dashed against the windows virtually the whole time we were in San Jose.

Q: Was Colombia undergoing its drug war at the time?

O'CONNELL: This was 1978, and what would become Colombia's drug wars were still a ways off, but the ingredients were already present. The main thing I remember about Colombia during that trip was the sometimes hair-raising stories we heard about the already-pervasive presence of the drug trade across Colombian society. I went with another fellow to the two major cities on Colombia's Caribbean coast, Cartagena and Barranquilla, where there were USIS offices and bi-national centers. In both places we heard incredible stories from local people, about clandestine airstrips, crashed planes,

drops of drugs into the sea to be picked up by other craft, etc. I remember one particularly chilling time when one fellow near Colombia's Caribbean coast told us, "If you are in a rural area at night and you hear a small plane coming down at an airstrip, you just turn around and go the other way. It is not prudent to know what that might be about."

Q: And after your inspection stint, what happened?

O'CONNELL: My time in Washington flew by, and as the end of my assignment approached, I received my onward assignment, as press officer in Guatemala. At the time, however, I am not sure I fully realized that I was on the cusp of a career change.

I very much enjoyed my time in Brazil as a young FSO. At the same time, during the years that Stella and I were back in Washington, I felt like I had returned home. My parents and siblings lived in the D.C. area, and the more I was here -- surrounded by my extended family -- the less I was inclined to leave again, especially now that we had children of our own. I wanted them to know my parents and family. This of course created a dilemma for me.

I thought hard during those months about what I wanted to do with the rest of my career. At some point, I decided -- reluctantly -- that I would leave the career that I had come to love. I would, if possible, remain with USIA and transfer to the Civil Service. I met with my career counselor, a lovely fellow named Harlan Rosacker, to inform him of my decision. He could not have been more understanding (I learned later that he was himself considering the same action).

In 1979, I resigned from the Foreign Service.

It took me a couple of weeks to draft and clear the inspection report, which also gave me time to find an open Civil Service position in the Agency. Fortunately, USIA's Congressional and Public Liaison Office had an opening. The head of the office was a remarkable human being, Foreign Service Officer and, later, U.S. Ambassador to Malawi named Mike Pistor.

Mike would turn out to be a great friend and mentor for many years, until his death a few years ago. By happy coincidence, he was looking for a speech writer, something for which I was not particularly qualified, but he also wanted someone who had overseas experience.

I had written a few brief sets of remarks for the Consul General in Sao Paulo but never a real speech, so, as my new job got underway, I was facing some serious on-the-job training, usually under tight deadlines. I thought that the whole thing sounded like a potential disaster, but, dismissing my doubts, Mike Pistor told me that I was precisely the kind of person he was looking for, i.e., someone with overseas experience but who wanted to remain in Washington. Mike asked me when I could start, even as he showed me my office and my IBM Selectric. "By the way," Mike added breezily as he headed

back to his office, “the (USIA) Director (Ambassador John Reinhardt) has a speech next week.” That was only about a week away at that point. Yikes!

Ambassador Reinhardt was fond of giving speeches, and the brainier the better. So did USIA’s Deputy Director, Charles Bray, who had been State Department spokesperson and who later became an ambassador himself. I had my work cut out for me.

After some momentary paralysis as I thought about how I should start to draft the speech, I started calling speech-writing friends around town for some commiserating and guidance. They all recommended that I sit down with Ambassador Reinhardt and Mr. Bray and find out what they wanted to say, something easier said than done. The next step would be to build a draft and go through with each of them the process of writing and re-writing.

Both men were demanding editors and exacting about what they wanted in their remarks. After a few stumbles -- once, after reading an early draft and handing it back to me, Mr. Bray turned to me and in, a clearly indulgent tone, said, “Good start, Joe” -- I managed to figure out what they wanted to say and how they wanted to say it.

Both Ambassador Reinhardt and Charles Bray wanted to use their remarks to highlight their belief that Americans needed to improve their skills in coping with the changing, interdependent and increasingly wired world. They sought speech venues, including world affairs councils such as the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, along with the Detroit Economic Club, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, and academic settings, think tanks, etc.

According to both, Americans needed better foreign language ability, a deeper awareness of the world, and less insularity, familiar goals all but by then enshrined in the vague “Second Mandate” of the Agency -- which was known after 1977 as the International Communication Agency. Other than Reinhardt and Bray making speeches about the “Second Mandate,” it was never clear how it was to be achieved, and, by and large, it wasn’t.

Q: So Charles Z. Wick came to Agency in the wake of the 1980 presidential election? Did his arrival shake things up?

O’CONNELL: Very much so. That election turned out to be a watershed event for ICA/USIA. Out went Ambassador Reinhardt and Charles Bray. In from California came a short, flamboyant friend of the new President named Charles Z. Wick (the “Z” was a remnant of his birth surname, Zwick, which he had changed to Wick years before. He would explain later that in his show business career, it was better to have a name that was “a little easier.”).

Wick had raised a lot of money for Reagan’s campaign, and he also chaired Reagan’s first Inaugural Committee. Wick liked to say that the President-elect had asked him what job he wanted in the new Administration. Wick said the only job he wanted was the ICA

(USIA) Director's job because, he said, 'telling America's story to the world' is the most important job in government."

Q: What was it like for you and your colleagues when Wick arrived at the Agency?

O'CONNELL: Wick's arrival at USIA in the spring of 1981 signaled the start of an eight-year ride, the likes of which I had not experienced in my previous years with the Agency, and which I would not experience again in the years after he followed Reagan back to California. For all of Charles Wick's ups and downs while in Washington, his tenure at USIA was arguably the high point in the United States' public diplomacy efforts.

Q: Wick didn't like the name that the Carter Administration had given to the Agency -- the International Communication Agency, or USICA, right? Didn't it make people think of CIA?

O'CONNELL: He did not like the new name at all and regarded it as yet another mistake by the reviled (to Reagan people) Carter Administration. He understood that USIS, or U.S. Information Service, which was how the Agency was long known overseas, had become a widely recognized brand, which people understood to mean a place where they could get information about the U.S. He could not fathom why the Carter Administration had banished such a valuable brand. And you're right: ICA did sound a lot like CIA. All in all, it was a bonehead move to have changed the Agency's name, and Wick was determined to reverse that change.

During his Senate confirmation hearing, he said that the first thing he would do after being sworn in would be to remove the USICA sign on the front of the Agency's headquarters building, and re-hang the USIA sign whose subtitle had read "Telling America's Story to the World."

He did just that.

Q: Reagan and Wick went way back, right? What was the origin of their friendship?

O'CONNELL: The friendship went back to the days when Reagan's acting career was in its descent. Wick had moved to California from New York some years before. Both the Reagan and Wick children attended the same private school near Los Angeles, and it was there that Mrs. Reagan and Mrs. Wick became friends in 1959. That led to the friendship between Ronald Reagan and Charles Wick. For years, including during Reagan's presidency, the Reagan and Wick families, alternating between the White House and the Wicks' Washington residence, spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day together.

(One Christmas Eve afternoon, not long after Dick Carlson had joined the Agency as public affairs director (later director of the Voice of America), I had the opportunity to see first-hand the extensive preparations at Wick's home for the President's visit. A colleague and I were working on a speech that Wick was scheduled to deliver right after

Christmas, and we all, including Dick Carlson, went to Wick's residence off Woodley Road, near Connecticut Avenue.

(The house was in an uproar. Secret Service agents were conducting their preliminary security sweep. Vacuums were humming. Tables were being set. Wick was in his bathrobe as we sat down near a coffee table which was full of tiny, mostly crystal knickknacks. Many of them were tiny ballet dancers which could only be set up on one leg. Wick had his half glasses on as he looked over the speech draft through his half glasses. Dick Carlson was sitting to one side, and he had his legs partly under the coffee table. A couple of the draft's pages accidentally slipped off the coffee table and onto the floor. Dick got up quickly and, as he did, his legs hit the glass top coffee table, lifting it up. The knickknacks started to fall, crescendo-like. Wick glared at poor Dick, who at that point was on his hands and knees, trying in vain to gather the pages, muttering all the way. Meanwhile, we went back to work on the draft. Dick and I have laughed many times about this, but we weren't laughing then. Miraculously, none of the crystal figurines broke.).

Q: Who was Charles Wick and where did he come from?

O'CONNELL: Before becoming a Republican in 1980, Wick had registered as an Independent. He was born in Cleveland, where his father was a businessman. He told me once that his father was a kind of corporate doctor, who would go into troubled businesses and figure out what was wrong. Wick earned a bachelor's degree in music at the University of Michigan (where he had his own dance band) and studied law in Cleveland at what was then Western Reserve University. He never practiced law but became involved in show business early in his career. He was musically talented and played the piano decently (I heard him play once at an early Agency gathering. Later, Wick appointed his piano teacher to establish and head the Agency's Artistic Ambassadors program, a fairly successful effort to send young American pianists overseas to perform).

While at Michigan in the 1930s, Wick caught the attention of swing band leader Tommy Dorsey who would from time to time fly him to New York to do musical score arrangements for the Dorsey band and to coach the band's vocal group. Later, he worked for the William Morris talent agency in New York, where he represented Peggy Lee and Benny Goodman. When Dorsey moved to California, Wick did, too.

Along with his frequent bluster, Wick really did know celebrities. I remember being in his office one afternoon when he took a phone call and, when my colleagues and I got up to leave, he signaled for us to stay. It was clear that he was speaking with someone he admired greatly. As he was preparing to say good-bye to his caller, I heard him say the word, "Benny." As Wick hung up, he looked at us with his broad, toothy smile and said portentously, "The great Benny Goodman."

By 1949, after leaving the Morris Agency, Wick had his own talent business in New York and London. His clients included Winston Churchill for whom, Wick said, he

handled U.S. sales for his History of the English Speaking People. While in England, he also helped revive the Twickenham Film Studios and produced a BBC police series known as “Fabian of the Yard.”

In the mid-1950s, he returned to California and began to make money in venture capital. Along with outboard motor magnate Ralph Evinrude -- who was married to singer Frances Langford, one of Wick’s former clients -- he co-founded a successful, national chain of nursing homes under the name United Convalescent Hospitals. Although he sold the business in 1978, a blistering 1984 article (“What the Senate Didn’t Know About Charles Z. Wick: How the USIA Chief Ran His Nursing Home Business”) in Mother Jones magazine luridly described the poor conditions uncovered by a 1977 investigation of a Visalia, California facility run by United Convalescent.

If Mother Jones intended the piece to be a “gotcha,” it wasn’t successful, and the article provoked few, if any, repercussions for Wick. Besides, when the article came out near the beginning of the second Reagan Administration, Wick’s reputation as a player in Washington had greatly improved.

It was also during his early years in California that Wick dabbled briefly in movie production. He had written a children’s story for his five children and then -- to amuse his own kids, he would say later -- he turned it into his only feature film, “Snow White and the Three Stooges” in 1961. During Wick’s Washington years, many -- myself included -- erroneously believed that Wick also produced a 1951 movie entitled “Bedtime for Bonzo,” which starred Ronald Reagan. (Wick’s son, Douglas, is a successful movie producer).

Q: Reagan had been a Democrat, too, right?

O’CONNELL: Yes. He had also been associated with the labor movement (Screen Actors Guild) in Hollywood and was a big supporter of the New Deal. His turn to the right apparently happened after he completed his stint as host of television’s GE Theater in the early 1960s, not long after he and Wick became friends.

It was during the Carter Administration that, as Wick would later tell journalists, he began to feel that “something needed to be done to save the country.” He became active in GOP circles, especially among major contributors to the party, and, along with other like-minded Republicans, began to envision Ronald Reagan as their standard bearer at the national level. Mrs. Wick became especially active in raising money among Republicans living abroad. Wick himself was said to have raised \$15 million for Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign. He also served as co-chairman of Reagan’s first presidential inauguration committee. Early in Reagan’s first term, Wick was a member of the President’s so called “kitchen cabinet” of informal advisors, along with California businessman Justin Dart, department store heir Alfred Bloomingdale, future Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Paul Laxalt, Edwin Meese, among others.

Q: When did Wick take over as ICA/USIA Director?

O'CONNELL: Wick was confirmed by the Senate in the first months of the Reagan Administration, and he was sworn in March of 1981.

Q: What were your first impressions of Wick?

O'CONNELL: No nonsense. He had been a longtime businessman, and he came to the Agency armed with some predictable chestnuts about government workers and public service, e.g., government workers have never met a payroll; they can't be fired; they're unimaginative and risk-averse, etc., which were very much in line with Reagan's thinking. Wick saw his mission as energizing USIA.

Charles Wick was far from being a rube or unintelligent. He could also be tough to please. Even today, twenty-seven years after leaving USIA, he is usually described as demanding and mercurial. He was both.

Q: Was there any secret to getting along with him?

O'CONNELL: If in fact there was a secret to getting along with him, it was in knowing how to react to his often tough verbal assaults. Over time, I learned, through trial and error, how to work for the man, but, like almost everyone else in the Agency who had contact with him, I received my share of verbal backs of his hand over the eight years that I was associated with him.

Q: Was he an ideologue?

O'CONNELL: Wick was not particularly political in the sense that he was not an ideologue and seemed to have little interest in right-wing politics *per se*. Rather, his interest lay in unflinching loyalty to Ronald Reagan and his agenda and in finding ways to make USIA responsive to and supportive of the ideas and policies of Ronald Reagan, even though it was never entirely clear how that was going to happen with an entity whose work was nearly all done overseas and which was at that time prohibited by law from operating in the United States, the thinking being that an information entity might one day be used by a nefarious administration to "propagandize" Americans at home. I was never sure what that thinking said about the Agency or its work overseas.

Following the lead of President Reagan, Wick spoke out frequently about what he regarded as the menace of the Soviet Union, and, he added later, the urgent need to bring the assets of the Agency to bear in combating Soviet propaganda and disinformation.

Q: What kinds of work did you do for Charles Wick in the beginning?

O'CONNELL: I started by writing speeches, which was an interesting and challenging exercise. Wick had never given set speeches and really did not know what to do with a speech draft, but his staff -- and eventually he, too -- always insisted on having an advance draft. He would often begin his remarks by holding up a sheaf of papers and

telling his audience that he had been given the pages about what to say but that he really did not want to use it. Nonetheless, I had to produce speech texts no matter what, a process which brought about considerable back and forth with him and his staff.

Speaking of his speeches, Wick, knowledgeable about show business as he was, would always, typically as he was being introduced and could look out at his audience, count the house. I learned early, whenever he would ask how many people I thought were in the audience, to estimate low rather than exaggerate, for he would always have a far better idea of the audience size that I did.

Q: Doing public affairs work for him must have been challenging.

O'CONNELL: It was certainly never dull. With his experience in show business, Wick believed that he was his own best public affairs person. While that did not work out very well when he was still new and trying to establish his public persona, he did, after a fashion, grow into the job, especially during the second Reagan Administration.

Q: Were political appointees placed in your office?

O'CONNELL: From the time Wick arrived at the Agency, he hired what turned out to be a long series of political appointees to head the public affairs office. Although a few of his public affairs directors had some experience, most did not. In the end, none of the appointees could cope with him, and he repeatedly fired them. During his eight years at ICA/USIA, he parted ways with eight or ten of these people -- I've lost count -- regularly and rapidly. In all of those instances, I became the acting director of the office, so it would all to me to break in the new appointees.

As time went on and as the latest public affairs incumbent began to wear out his or her welcome, Wick would use me as the advance person before firing them. A sure sign that he was about to show someone the door was when he and his special assistants would start to deal with me directly as they iced out the hapless and usually unsuspecting office director. My position in these circumstances was often uncomfortable, since on more than one occasion, the incumbent had already guessed that he or she (there was one woman) was in trouble.

One early candidate for the public affairs job, a former FSO with the Agency, literally lasted a half a day. In the fellow's initial, chilling interview with Gilbert Robinson, Wick's first deputy director, Robinson told him that working for Charles Wick was like having a bank account with a small opening balance. Each mistake would constitute a withdrawal, and no new deposits could be made. Once a zero balance was reached, he or she would be gone.

I spoke with the former FSO just as he was about to go into the interview, and he told me that he was excited about the position and looking forward to working with me. As he later told me, however, once he sized up Gilbert Robinson and realized what he was about to get himself into, he literally ran to the nearest phone to ask for his old job back.

Q: Political appointees can be a hard group to deal with. As a Foreign Service type, you could sit down, talk professionally and say, look, here is what you have to deal with. I mean we are used to with it but that is probably more difficult with political appointees.

O'CONNELL: It was more difficult to level with political appointees. Some listened, while others didn't. Another of Wick's early appointees to the public affairs job comes to mind, although my encouragement to him to persevere with Mr. Wick came too late.

I'll call him Bill. He had worked at Eastman Kodak in Rochester as a senior member of the company's corporate communications team (this was at a time when Kodak was still a big deal company). He was in some ways representative of the kind of people Wick repeatedly invited to run his public affairs operation at USIA. Even the manner in which Wick found this fellow -- and others -- suggests how almost random his "selection process" was.

In Bill's case, it all started when Wick happened to be in New York for a meeting one day. The trip followed the quick and involuntary departure of the previous public affairs director (which meant that I was serving in one of my many "acting" stints), so Wick was looking for a replacement. Bill later told me that the meeting with Wick was spontaneous and occurred literally in the rest room down the hall from Wick's meeting. With his usual gregariousness, Wick fell into conversation with Bill -- who, incidentally, was a decent man and who looked every bit like the corporate communications man that he had been.

As he always did, Wick went straight to the point and asked Bill if might like to "come to Washington and work for me at USIA." Intrigued, Bill said, "Sure." The first I knew of his appointment was when he arrived at the Agency a week or so later. It was then that he met the real Charles Z. Wick, not the same man he had spoken with in New York a few weeks before.

As near as I could tell, Wick must have figured out in the very early going that Bill was not going to work out, because he began to savage him right away. I remember vividly walking into Bill's office after he had been on the job for only a few weeks. On his desk I spotted a row of white pills and a glass of water. Bill's face was ashen, and his hands were trembling visibly. He had just returned from a meeting with Wick.

I don't remember what the problem was, but it didn't make any difference. Bill looked up at me and said, "Joe, I've never seen anything like this." I tried to be circumspect in my response, but I did feel sorry for him and told him that, yes, Wick was demanding but that there were ways to work with him. I encouraged him to stick it out.

He continued to shake as he looked up at me, clearly unconvinced. A week or so later, he left the Agency, probably just before he would have been fired. It was clear that he wasn't well and that the job was making him sicker.

With each of these departures, Mr. Wick, either in a quick phone call or after summoning me to his office, would tell me that I would (again) be the acting office director until he found someone else. I was soon able to predict whether and how long someone would last, so I was never surprised when new incumbents suddenly were not there anymore.

Q: I was talking to someone just yesterday saying Wick was ahead of his time.

O'CONNELL: In many ways, he was.

Q: WORLDNET and all that?

O'CONNELL: He was something of a visionary, particularly with satellite television. WORLDNET was the name he gave to the Agency's satellite television operation. Wick did not start TV at USIA. It had been there for years, but he had a single-minded notion, which seems obvious in retrospect, that satellite-borne television programming was a largely untapped resource that could be used to great effect in the Agency's public diplomacy work. He was right.

WORLDNET's best known and probably most effective programs were the live "interactives," or interviews of top U.S. officials in Washington by foreign journalists who would gather simultaneously at several U.S. missions overseas. These were unrehearsed and no-holds-barred exchanges that would then be broadcast in both the countries where the journalists were and, depending on the topics being discussed, other countries in the same region. With his Administration-wide clout, Wick was able to line up and lock in high officials, including cabinet secretaries. The electronic dialogues took off and became a staple of USIA's public diplomacy work.

If Wick was a visionary, however, he could also be his own worst enemy. As smart as he was, he exhibited in the early going the visceral mistrust of government employees that I mentioned. I used to wonder if that might have been a cover for his fear that career people, especially Foreign Service Officers, might be not taking him sufficiently seriously and that they might have regarded him as a Babbitt-like hack and clueless pal of Ronald Reagan.

He of course would never have admitted it, but I believe that he did overcompensate by displaying a persona that could quickly run to the unpleasant. As with most cartoonish characterizations, there was some truth to them, but Wick was far more complex than most people gave him credit for, which was not unlike the perceptions many had of his friend, Ronald Reagan.

In fact, many otherwise perceptive senior Agency officers underestimated Charles Wick and only came to appreciate him after he left Washington, and after USIA disappeared as an independent agency. The cry then, even by people who did not like him, was "Where is Charlie Wick when we need him?"

Along with his humor, Wick would come out with some wonderful malapropisms. It's possible that he used them on purpose. I was never sure whether he understood the differences among, for example, *analogy*, *anathema*, and *anachronism*, since he would sometimes use them interchangeably.

Q: Something like Samuel Goldwyn's legendary malapropisms?

O'CONNELL: Yes, and speaking of Samuel Goldwyn and people of his generation, Wick's brand of humor was a throwback to the one-liners and puns of the old Hollywood, Borscht-Belt and Vaudeville comedians, many of whom he had known personally. His puns were corny and sometimes dreadful, but he didn't seem to care. He could be, in the right circumstances, a very funny man. He loved to quote people like Goldwyn, with aphorisms such as the famous, "if you need a friend in Hollywood, get a dog."

Wick's humor was never salacious or suggestive. One joke he would tell over and over with variations illustrates: "There was this guy who went to see a psychiatrist and said, 'Doc, my brudda thinks he's a carrot, and I'm very worried about him. So the doctor said, 'hmmm...that sounds serious.'" But then the brother said, "Yeah, but I gotta tell ya, Doc, dat carrot sure tasted great."

Almost juvenile, but after telling that or other similar jokes, Wick would usually exhibit his most wolfish grin. His listeners, including foreign visitors whose English was not always up to understanding American humor, would sometimes look on in obvious puzzlement.

Wick also loved to squeeze humor from foreign-sounding diplomat-speak. He would, for example, often quip when the word *denouement* would come up, regardless almost of whom else was in the room, including foreign journalists or diplomats. His laughingly delivered comment on *denouement* would be something like, "Whatever happened to denoue-DAD?" I learned not to cringe at the blank expressions that his question would often produce.

Nick Cull, professor of public diplomacy at the University of Southern California and author of two volumes on the history of U.S. public diplomacy since 1945 (*The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda, 1945-1989*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, and *The Decline and Fall of the U.S. Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1981-2001*, Palgrave, 2012) -- the Cold War volume includes the Wick years in the final two chapters -- has observed that Charles Wick's need to be amusing could seem "pathological." Professor Cull told me that when he first met Wick and posed his initial question of, "how did you first meet Ronald Reagan," Wick replied: "Who?" That was vintage Wick.

Nick, who has an obvious respect for Wick's achievement, notes in his second volume the contrast between the Agency's effectiveness under Wick and the years that followed Wick's departure in 1988. I'm betting Professor Cull has also taken note of a sometimes

reluctant respect for Charles Wick among many former USIA people who knew him or worked for him, myself included.

Q: How were Wick's interactions with foreigners, especially those whose command of English was not great? Did they understand him or think him odd?

O'CONNELL: Many of them probably thought that he was odd, although they were also undoubtedly aware of his close relationship with President Reagan, so they tended to be deferential to him. Once, during an interview with a Japanese reporter whose English was not great, the fellow's camera stopped working, and he began to try to fix it. Wick asked him to hand over the camera, and then he, too, started fumbling with it. The interview came to a halt and the room went awkwardly silent as Wick continued to struggle with it, muttering to himself. Finally, the puzzled reporter started to say, in labored English, that he really didn't need the camera, even as Wick kept insisting that he could fix the thing. Finally, Wick gave up and the session came to a merciful close, with the puzzled Japanese reporter being escorted from the office while undoubtedly wondering at those inscrutable westerners.

Q: I gather he enjoyed anti-Soviet humor.

O'CONNELL: He loved to make frequent use of anti-Soviet humor in his remarks. I kept a stack of large index cards (this was largely in pre-computer days) on which I would keep examples of that brand of humor. I recall devoting considerable time to searching for new anti-Soviet jokes, which I would dig up here and there and which would usually delight him, especially if they exposed the frailties and contradictions of the Soviet system. One that I recall went as follows, "Did you hear the one about the cardiology ward on the fifth floor walk-up of hospital number 26 in Moscow?" Another one talked about a Soviet citizen who was walking along the street one day, holding two empty shopping bags, and she suddenly could not remember if she was going to the market or whether she had just left the market. Wick often said that he shared the anti-Soviet humor with President Reagan.

Q: I've talked to somebody who served in Moscow and who said he had been tasked during the Reagan administration with collecting political jokes. The Russians were just full of those, just as other peoples living under dictatorships usually are, too.

O'CONNELL: Right. The best ones came from the USSR itself.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia, and the one I recall the most is a sardine is a whale that has passed through all stages of communism. It was of that ilk.

O'CONNELL: Wick would have loved that one.

(Apropos of his humor, I recall Wick's morning staff meetings, when the Agency's top FSOs and Civil Servants would be seated around the big table in the Agency's seventh-

floor executive suite. Wick would often launch into a joke, and of course everyone felt like they had to laugh).

Q: Did he notice and care whether Agency people laughed at his humor?

O'CONNELL: Wick did not mind a little adulation and deference, or laughter at his puns and jokes, but his distaste for excessive obsequiousness was less apparent and even unexpected. He did not seem to care for Uriah Heap-like behavior from those who worked for him, which I used to think make him nervous. With Wick, the line between deference and slavishness tended to float, and more than one Agency officer apparently decided to err on the side of obsequiousness, at least until Wick in his own way let them know he didn't like it. Some Agency people never grasped that he was less happy when laughter at his humor got a little too enthusiastic. I wondered if he suspected that some were laughing because they thought that doing so might help them somehow. It usually didn't.

Q: Did you find yourself cast in the role of translator? In a military organization the colonel is supposed to be gruff and hardy and adjutants the sons-of-a-bitches; somehow or other you need somebody, particularly with professionals, to interpret their boss to others.

O'CONNELL: Mostly unwittingly so. As the years went on, I and some others would often find ourselves in that position. Colleagues would come into my office to ask what I thought the Director meant in what he had just said to them at the staff meeting.

Q: Did Wick show preference for FSO's over Civil Servants?

O'CONNELL: Wick basically did not distinguish between Foreign Service Officers and Civil servants, although he did know who did what in the Agency, and he was, after a few years in office and if somewhat begrudgingly, respectful of language and area expertise.

What most interested him was whether someone was capable of doing what he wanted and was prepared to do it with dispatch but without deviation. Another question was whether one's skin was sufficiently thick to be able to handle his anger and still do his or her job without showing anger or pique, which was never a good idea.

An even worse idea, however, was, in the face of a screw-up, to try to blame someone else. Doing so would play right into Wick's notion that public servants were reluctant to accept responsibility for mistakes. That would only infuriate him further, and guarantee that the torrent would not stop.

I decided early that the best way to deal with Charles Wick when something went wrong -- regardless of whose fault it was -- was to say immediately that I would take care of it right away. That would usually staunch the bleeding.

Q: Was his humor sometimes at others' expense?

O'CONNELL: It often was. In fact, Wick's humor could appear cruel. More than once, I saw him, usually at staff meetings, present an award to an Agency officer. He would typically praise the recipient lavishly and describe how valuable the person's hard work and advice had been. Then, when it appeared that he was finished, he would pause for a couple of beats while the award recipient would beam and receive the applause of his or her colleagues. Wick would then turn to the just-praised officer and say, "Oh, and one more thing, you're through." The first couple of times he did that, there would be a stunned silence, with the award recipient wondering what was going on, until Wick would display his toothy grin, and the whole room would laugh uneasily.

Instances like that one -- and they happened frequently -- used to remind me of the testimonial dinners often shown in movies about the Mafia, in which one of the underbosses would be praised and showered with love, only to get the baseball bat over his head afterwards, or other similar film scenes in which pals would stand up and utter words of praise for the *capo de tutti capi* or everyone in the room would be trying to impress the boss and laugh loudest at his jokes, hoping that he would not get up and start swinging the bat in their direction.

An extra thick skin was a valuable asset for anyone working for Charles Wick.

Q: Again, in the interviews in which Wick's name has come up, I get people who would say now Wick was a difficult person and also say but he had good ideas, was ahead of his time. Basically he earned his way as opposed to later Joe Duffy. People talked about him as being a disaster.

O'CONNELL: Not only did Duffy seem clueless, but even worse, he seemed indifferent or at times even hostile to the mission and work of the Agency, including, surprisingly for an academic and former university president, even the Fulbright educational exchange programs.

Q: I heard people say that he would question why there should be USIA. I mean can you imagine someone like that as your fearless leader?

O'CONNELL: Duffy basically folded his arms when in the late 1990s -- Wick was long gone back to California -- North Carolina Senator and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jesse Helms teamed up with Secretary of State Madeline Albright -- to be sure, a couple of odd bedfellows -- to try to fold several foreign affairs agencies, including USIA, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and, especially, the Agency for International Development into the State Department.

Q: Right.

O'CONNELL: Senator Helms's original aim was to eliminate USAID and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, but, thanks largely to the efforts of Brian Atwood,

USAID's adroit Administrator at the time, his agency survived, while USIA and Arms Control and Disarmament were merged into the State Department in October 1999.

Q: I'll state my prejudice here: I feel that USIA was one of the most potent weapons and I also think the officers had more responsibility and more influence than are often given credit for. I think it was a real loss to see it go.

O'CONNELL: Who knows whether Wick would have been able to stop Senator Helms, but anyone who knew Wick would agree that he would have put up a hell of a fight, especially if he had the backing of his friend, Ronald Reagan, so chances are that the Agency would have survived and, presumably would have been in a good position to go into action in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the years since 9/11, especially in light of what has happened in Iraq and Afghanistan and now with ISIS, USIA would likely have been a useful tool in getting the U.S. message out.

Ironically, and in the absence of a USIA after 9/11, many who had been critical and even disparaging of Charles Wick and his leadership of USIA in the 1980s were among those who longed for those days and for Wick's energetic stewardship of the Agency as the U.S. confronted who challenges of worldwide terrorism.

Q: Did you ever work in Wick's office?

O'CONNELL: No. He did ask me once to join his immediate staff, but I told him (nicely) that I thought I could be more helpful to him in the public affairs office. Fortunately, he agreed. That said, I might as well have worked in his office, since I spent so much of my time there, working on speeches, having the riot act read to me, being told that I was yet again the acting director of public affairs, etc.

Q: Did you find yourself in a way helping new people as they came in to that office adjust and say, sit down, let me tell you how it is, or something?

O'CONNELL: Yes, but I tried to avoid serving as the jailhouse lawyer, preemptively telling newcomers how things "really" worked in the Agency. I also tread very carefully in this area with the parade of Schedule C (political appointees) who came through during those years. I always thought it was better to provide guidance by responding to neophytes' questions.

Q: Did Wick develop a palace guard?

O'CONNELL: Yes, but its composition changed almost as often at his public affairs directors.

Q: Can you explain what we are talking about for somebody who's...?

O'CONNELL: When Charles Wick arrived at USIA, he brought with him people who would serve as his special assistants. Some stayed a while, but many of them were gone

within a few months because, like the people he recruited for the public affairs job, they couldn't get along with him or he didn't like them. A couple of them have gone on to some fame. One was Robert Kagan, who is today a respected scholar of defense issues at Brookings. He publishes regularly on the Op Ed page of the Washington Post. His tenure was brief, but he might not have intended to remain for long in the first place. Some of the others who didn't last are more forgettable.

Wick would lean hard on these people, and some of them were in effect his henchmen who were prepared to do his will in the Agency. Many were feared by the career people.

Q: Wick had his problems with the media, right?

O'CONNELL: Right, especially in his early years at USIA, during the first Reagan Administration, he invited and was an easy target for ridicule, with his flamboyance and \$1,000 Savile Row suits, wonderful malapropisms, and rookie *faux pas*. The major media outlets, notably the Washington Post, skewered him gleefully in those years. The titles of two Post pieces during illustrated the kind of media attention Wick was attracting: "The Wick Whirlwind: Reagan's ICA Chief Brings Hollywood Hustle to Washington," (5/11/82) and "Wick Adds Flair to U.S. Story: Hollywood-Style Diplomacy," 7/13/83.

It was in the wake of those early pieces that Wick established his practice, which lasted for the rest of his time in Washington, of responding to every critical article, in lengthy, point-by-point rebuttals, written by me in close cooperation with Wick himself and his assistants. Although Wick had never practiced law, his missives to the Post, New York Times and any other outlet that went after him became almost like long, detailed and annotated legal briefs, complete with tabs and numbered re-statements of the papers' allegations followed by his counter-arguments, as if he could use letters to the editor to show that the outlet was dead wrong in its treatment of him. Clearly, Charles Wick did not subscribe to the adage that it is not a good idea to get into a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel-full!

In the nearly eight years that I worked for Wick, I must have written -- and for the most part signed -- dozens of letters. I once received a call from a Washington Post writer who had seen one of the letters and wanted to know how many people had worked on the document and how long it had taken to write. I have copies of many of the letters and still find it hard to comprehend how much of my own work and time, and that of colleagues, went into producing them.

Wick did not make things any better by unapologetically claiming that the wealth and ostentation flaunted by some members of the Reagan Administration were actually a "comfort" to the nation's poor, just as happened, he added, during the Great Depression, when Americans flocked to see glamorous Hollywood movies and presumably left the theater feeling better about being unemployed. As he admitted later, those sentiments "got translated into something like 'let 'em eat cake,' I guess."

Despite the frequent pillorying, Wick was determined to bring USIA into the forefront of the foreign affairs community, a place where it had never been and did not, in the end, actually reach.

Q: But, early on, weren't there, in addition to being an easy target for ridicule, weren't there repeated and genuine controversies that landed Wick in trouble more than once?

O'CONNELL: During Wick's first four years at the helm of USIA, that there was one gaffe or self-inflicted crisis after another, with accompanying media coverage. It is probably safe to say that, especially in his first months and years in office, Wick often had a difficult time making himself understood. One of his earliest missteps came in October 1981, when he began a meeting of the National Council of Community World Affairs Councils by -- apparently dramatically -- proclaiming, "We are at war." His later explanation that he was only referring to a "war of ideas" with the Soviet Union probably did little to calm the concerns of the cultural and educational exchange community.

The following month, as reported on Nov. 4 in the New York Times, the Agency -- still known as ICA -- launched the Orwellian-sounding "Project Truth," described as a program designed to "provide a fast reply to posts abroad when rumors or news reports about American activity thought to be untrue begin to circulate."

But by far the biggest of the early flaps, coming also that late 1981 busy season, which the Washington Post covered heavily, concerned allegations that Wick was intent on politicizing the Voice of America.

Q: What happened?

O'CONNELL: A senior foreign affairs reporter at the Post named Murrey Marder got hold of some documents which suggested that Wick wanted the Voice's broadcasts, especially those aimed at the Soviet Union, to be "harder hitting," even if doing so would violate the Voice's Charter which called for the programming to be "accurate, objective and comprehensive."

This was at a time when the right, particularly the conservative publication, Human Events, was regularly charging that VOA was "too soft" on the Soviets. One piece of evidence cited by Human Events was that VOA's Russian service had elected not to read on the air lengthy passages from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's massive The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956.

While the book certainly deserved VOA's attention, Solzhenitsyn's prose is difficult enough to read, let alone to listen to it via a short wave radio broadcast. Conservative commentators nonetheless delighted in comparing VOA's "softness" with what it called the "bold and aggressive" Russian-language programming of Radio Liberty, which carried long, verbatim chunks of The Gulag.

Wick took seriously those charges from the right and decided to do something about them and to change things at VOA, vowing to make it “a weapon in the campaign counter Soviet propaganda” and at one point accusing VOA of “erring on the side of imbalance against our Government....” He brought in a Falstaff-like, former public relations man and ex-editorial writer at the conservative Washington Times named Phil Nicolaides to look at VOA, an assignment that was apparently unknown to the Reagan Administration’s first VOA Director, an avuncular former CBS Records and Bonneville Broadcasting president named Jim Conkling.

On paper, Jim Conkling was perfect for the VOA job as well as being Wick’s kind of guy, both generationally and professionally. Conkling had been in the music business and had connections with show business (his wife had been one of the famed King Sisters). But despite his years of experience in the rough and tumble worlds of records and broadcasting, it was clear from the start that the poor fellow never knew what hit him once he got to VOA (soon after arrival, Conkling candidly confessed in the VOA newsletter, “I’ve got to learn the news end of the business.”). And that was before he ever heard of Phil Nicolaides. Conkling lasted about a year before he decided that he’d better return to his California retirement.

Even on a good day, the multi-ethnic, 24-hour-a-day, and deadline-driven Voice of America is not easy to run, and Jim Conkling did not seem capable of dealing with the place or with the drumbeat from the right about VOA’s broadcasts.

Nicolaides himself was an engaging chap who happened to be given a desk in USIA’s public affairs office, so I got to know him during the months he spent working on the assignment for Wick. Nicolaides later told me that Wick’s instructions were to tell him what was needed to make the VOA the hard-hitting broadcaster that right-wing pundits thought it should be.

For weeks, Nicolaides sat in his closed-door office, surrounded by stacks of books, pounding away on his typewriter, clearly delighted with his project, whatever it was. In fact, Nicolaides would produce a dense, 18-page memo to Wick in which he described VOA as “a propaganda agency” which should abandon the contention that it is a “journalistic enterprise” and function like an advertising agency selling soap. He urged that VOA’s broadcasts be both “hard-hitting” and gussied up in order to attract more listeners. In his most famous line, he insisted that, “In advertising, people buy the sizzle, not the steak.” The memo was leaked to Murrey Marder at the Post (VOA Director Conkling insisted that the memo had been stolen from his office) and became an instant sensation at VOA and beyond. Wick may not have realized it, but any designs that he may have had on the Voice of America had just come to a stop, even before they got started.

Then as now, it does not take much to stir up VOA employees -- they come to work stirred up -- and any hint that the news independence of the Voice is being tampered with is more than sufficient to bring about something like open revolt.

Marder was all over the story, and it wasn't long before a producer for ABC's "Nightline" called to invite Wick to be Ted Koppel's guest, along with VOA's legendary newsroom chief, Bernie Kamenske, and R. Peter Straus, one of President Carter's appointees as VOA Director.

With his raspy voice constantly barking orders at his reporters and correspondents, Bernie was a character straight out of "Front Page" for a crusty, demanding and almost ascetic journalist. He lived only to gather and report the news for the Voice of America. He would brook no attempt to violate VOA's Charter to report the news, "warts and all."

With the Post's Marder reporting his well-sourced story almost daily -- including the picketing by off-duty VOA employees in front of the VOA building on C Street, SW, at what they thought was going to happen, "Nightline's" stage was set for Wick and Bernie. Koppel clearly relished the prospect.

By the time of the "Nightline" show a few days later, on December 22, 1981, Wick had decided that he'd better back off. Although he was not exactly the soul of reticence on the show, he did respond to Koppel's and Kamenske's questions by insisting -- with a straight face -- that there had never been any plan to politicize the VOA. He even pointed out with obvious delight that VOA had covered the picketing by its employees.

Apparently sobered by the experience, Wick left VOA alone for the rest of his years in office. As for Phil Nicolaides, he was gone, and the next thing I heard about him was the news of his death a few years later.

Q: What came next?

O'CONNELL: Wick next made news when, believing that he might be a target of the KGB, he had a \$32,000 security system installed on the Agency's tab at his home off Calvert Street, N.W., in Washington. White House aides reportedly saved the president from possible embarrassment by persuading Wick to reimburse the government for some \$22,000 of the cost (and, apropos of security and alleged threats from the KGB or others, Gilbert Robinson, Wick's hapless and mean-spirited first deputy director, was said to have persuaded Wick to accompany him to a Washington-area shooting range for some target practice with a Glock automatic. Then, on the eve of one of Wick's first overseas trips, the USIA security people persuaded him to wear a very heavy, bullet-proof overcoat during his stay in Berlin. I was told that Wick, who was of short stature, tried the coat on just once and told Robinson that it was simply too heavy for him. The garment was then hung in a coat closet at USIA, apparently never to emerge again. For all I know, it is still there.)

Q: And about the so-called "kiddie-gate" controversy? What was that about?

O'CONNELL: That was also in the ill-starred year of 1983. Wick was a great friend to people that he liked, and he appeared to have believed that if he could give jobs to the children of fellow high Administration officials, what would be the harm? The result was

that the Agency hired children of several leading members of the Administration, including former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger (whose child was briefly attached to my office, although he worked in New York), along with, among others, children of two National Security Advisors, William Clark and Robert McFarlane, one of whose daughters worked in the public affairs office with me.

As Agency spokesperson, I had to deal with some sticky questions from reporters about how these people got their jobs, a couple of which were plum positions overseas. I think I said something like, "They are highly qualified." Fortunately for Wick, the story had no real legs and receded fairly quickly.

Q: So you worked with young Cap Weinberger?

O'CONNELL: I did. He was a twenty-something young man, and a nice enough fellow. He was living in New York. I always wondered whether the origin of this matter might have come about in a casual conversation between Wick and Secretary of Defense Weinberger, in which the elder Weinberger off-handedly mention that his son Cap needed a job. Wick probably responded that he could help. USIA at the time had foreign press centers in Washington in the National Press Club building, New York and Los Angeles. They provided assistance to foreign press covering the U.S. government and the United States. Young Cap lived in Westchester County, so getting to the press center into Manhattan was a long commute, but that did not seem to bother him.

Somehow young Cap's employment with USIA was leaked to the media, and we started getting calls from curious reporters asking what Cap Weinberger, Jr., was doing for the Agency, how much he was earning, etc. The same thing happened with Barbara Haig and a few other children of Administration officials, including one who had a job in Paris.

I remember calling Cap one day about a press inquiry that I had received, and I had a devil of a time finding him. He finally called me back a couple days later and said, "Hey Joe what's going on?" Not long after that, Cap left the Agency. I never heard from him again.

Q: And wasn't there also something about Wick secretly recording his phone conversations with people both in and out of the government?

O'CONNELL: Right, and New York Times columnist and language guru William Safire, along with his Times associate, Jane Perlez, jumped on the story. In late December 1983, they reported that Wick, *a la* Nixon, had been secretly -- without obtaining the consent of the people with whom he was speaking -- taping his phone conversations in his office at USIA headquarters. Safire was already a foe of secret recording since his time in the Nixon White House during Watergate, nearly a decade before, but there was also something else that whetted his appetite for the story: he did not like Charles Wick.

Safire's additional antipathy for the USIA director apparently stemmed from the columnist's longtime association with the aforementioned Gilbert Robinson, deputy director of USIA before Wick blamed him for "kiddiegate" and fired him. Safire was angry with Wick for having canned his pal, and he allegedly wanted to settle a score with him. His discovery of Wick's secret recordings presented itself as an opportunity for some score-settling.

(In the 1950s, long before Safire joined the Times, he and Robinson were in the public relations business together, and they teamed up to help mount the U.S. exhibition in Moscow that famously became the setting for Richard Nixon's 1959 "kitchen debate" with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev).

Q: Did anything happen to Wick in the wake of Safire's reporting?

O'CONNELL: Remarkably, Wick experienced no long-term damage from his secret tapings. There were investigations by the General Services Administration and House and Senate Committees, but it was not even clear that he got so much as a slap on the wrist. President Reagan stood by his old California friend, whom he benignly lauded as doing "a splendid job."

Q: Wick was USIA Director for eight years. Didn't his image and reputation -- initially not the best -- improve somewhat in the second Reagan Administration?

O'CONNELL: Correct on both, although near the end of the first Reagan Administration, there were rumors -- bolstered by the ridicule that he continued to receive from the Washington Post and New York Times -- that Wick would not survive into a second Reagan Administration. With his uncanny good luck and ability to dodge bullets, he did, of course.

(It was around that time, when Wick found himself under the heaviest criticism and ridicule and in danger of losing his job, that, undoubtedly encouraged by others, he decided to put together a dinner at the Cosmos Club that would be a "spontaneous and unprompted testimonial" for him. I was too far down in the food chain to be invited to the dinner, but I did work on preparations for the event, which in my mind seemed redolent of something out of "The Godfather.")

Q: What happened?

O'CONNELL: One morning, Jim Bryant, the Schedule C appointee who was latest head of the office of public affairs, was summoned to the Director's office by an arrogant, young FSO who was serving as Wick's special assistant. Jim, who correctly sensed that he was already on thin ice with Wick, came into my office to tell me nervously about the summons and to ask me to accompany him.

As was his practice with perceived underlings, the FSO/Special Assistant got right to the point: we were to produce, on very short notice, a slick, printed booklet containing a

collection of verbal testimonials about Charles Z. Wick and his leadership of USIA, including one from former USIA Director and Democrat Leonard Marks. When Jim started to object, saying that he wondered if the project was legal and appropriate, the FSO -- whose dealings with William Safire during the secret taping episode earned him some biting criticism in a Safire column -- cut Jim off and told him that if he did not carry out the order he "would be on the street," i.e., fired. That ended the session.

As Jim and I left the Director's suite, he said weakly that he had never heard of such a thing and that he did not know what to do. As it turned out, Jim needn't have worried. He did not involve himself with the project, leaving it to me to complete, which in turn required me to work directly with Wick's staff, bypassing Jim altogether, which by that time had become the norm. His non-involvement with the booklet's production hastened his departure from the Agency not long after the project was completed.

Curiously enough, and although Wick was apparently unbothered by the (official government) time that I, the Agency graphics person who designed the booklet, and members of the public affairs staff who helped mail it spent on producing and distributing the publication, he made sure to pay out of his pocket for the printing and postage. I recall going to the printing plant to inspect the galleys and, later, to the Post Office to purchase sheets of stamps.) The whole thing seems surreal in retrospect.

Q: But, the dubious testimonial dinner at the Cosmos Club aside, wasn't it Wick's growing engagement with the Soviets and the serendipitous appearance of Glasnost that combined to help pull him back from disaster and a possible involuntary departure from USIA?

O'CONNELL: Exactly. In a remarkable and unexpected turn-about and bit of luck, it was precisely -- and fortunately for Wick -- at the early stage of *Glasnost* that he began to be taken more seriously, especially as he started to deal successfully with Soviet officials, including an unpleasant fellow named Zamyatin and another named Alexander Yakovlev, the Communist Party secretary in charge of propaganda, along with Soviet radio and TV people about exchanges of programming. Wick seemed to understand that, in *Glasnost*, he had an opportunity to improve his standing in the Administration and beyond, and, more importantly, to survive. He seized it.

So, as President Reagan's second Administration got under way, Charles Wick appeared to have triumphed over his earlier critics. Thanks to him, or so it seemed, his Agency was at long last on the map and beginning to matter in Washington.

But not all was smooth sailing. Perhaps not surprisingly, Wick's second-term rehabilitation was not without its stumbles, the most noteworthy of which was the so-called "black list" affair. Again, he remarkably escaped serious harm.

Q: Indeed, didn't the "black list" business, which happened at around the same time as Wick's apparent triumph, detract from his new stature?

O'CONNELL: It did, but not fatally so. There is no doubt that Wick's arrival as a serious player was temporarily tainted by revelations of a "black list" of perceived enemies of the Administration who were not to be invited to travel abroad to speak for USIA. Although he was eventually able to recover and move on from the black list and other stumbles, they did remain questions that would dog him for the rest of his time in office.

Q: What was the "black list" all about?

O'CONNELL: As near as can be determined, sometime early in President Reagan's second term, one or more people among USIA political appointees -- it was never clear which one(s) -- apparently came up with the idea that the names of experts sent overseas to speak on behalf of USIA should be vetted politically and philosophically before being approved for travel. This may have occurred in the wake of a previous speaker having criticized the Administration in remarks overseas.

Going back many years, USIA had sent speakers overseas, from a variety of fields -- and view points, including those critical of the administration in office. They explained and discussed such topics as the American political system, literature, and the U.S. system of justice, etc. The objective was to show that there is robust debate in our country, as well as strongly held differences of opinion.

The program typically included federal judges, eminent academics, authors, media people, politicians of various stripes, members of Congress, and others. It was a very successful program, and it continues today under the Department of State.

Far from being well padded junkets to the world's garden spots, the program took speakers to places that were challenging, both to get to and to be in, including Central and Southeast Asia and remote areas of Africa and Latin America.

Over time, as names of potential speakers were being secretly vetted and not "approved" for overseas trips, an informal, almost cuff list apparently began to take shape. The list, which was eventually leaked to the media and dubbed by reporters as the "black list," was a compilation of illustrious Americans, both known and obscure. When I first saw the list, the name of Walter Cronkite jumped off the page. What was an almost universally beloved American doing on such a list, I wondered. Others on the list, which did not seem to have any rhyme or reason as to how names made it onto the odd compilation, included such people as James Baldwin, Madeline Albright, Ben Bradlee, David Brinkley, McGeorge Bundy, Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Nader, Paul Samuelson, Tom Wicker, and many others.

As it happened -- and in yet another stroke of luck for Charles Wick -- the revelation of the "black List" coincided with the nomination of a fellow named Leslie Lenkowsky as deputy director of USIA. He had come from a conservative think tank. Before his Senate confirmation hearing, Lenkowsky served -- unwisely so -- as acting deputy director. It was possibly during his acting status that he had the idea for codifying the informal compilation of names into a "black list."

Once the list was leaked, New York Times reporter Joel Brinkley called and insistently wanted us to confirm the list's existence and to explain its origin. USIA's wagons immediately circled. Fatefully for Lenkowsky but fortunately for himself, Wick put the aspiring deputy director in charge of the Agency's response.

As acting director of USIA's public affairs -- yet again -- I was summoned to an urgent strategy session in Lenkowsky's office on Feb. 3, 1984. I was the only career person in the room. Others present were the Agency's general counsel and the head of the speakers program, both of whom I had worked with in the past.

Lenkowsky, who acted as if he did not know much about the list, began with me by outlining guidance on what I should say to Brinkley and the other reporters who were now calling. He also directed me to develop background material on how the list came about (odd, since I was already thinking that he probably knew something about the list's origins). He told me to stay for the rest of the meeting, but the tasks he assigned to me were already worrisome. I was not sure where to turn, if not to Lenkowsky himself. My focus waned even further as I considered how to handle his orders, and I must have paid little attention to what he said to the general counsel and the director of the speakers program.

My inattention to what else Lenkowsky said would later take on considerable importance, for he allegedly instructed the general counsel -- this was in the days before documents could exist in electronic form -- to "get ahold of the list and get rid of it."

Later during the week after the Feb. 3 meeting, Lenkowsky called me in order to, in his word, "crystallize" his thinking about what had been discussed at that session and to ask me what I recalled from it. I told him that I had told Peter Galbraith that I could not recall that the destruction of the list had come up at the Feb. 3 meeting. Lenkowsky replied that "that was what he felt, too."

In March, as the black list story became headline fodder in the New York Times, Washington Post and other outlets, I wondered if it would be the undoing of Charles Wick, but, again, he survived when Leslie Lenkowsky -- who still needed Senate confirmation to become USIA's full-fledged deputy director -- became the focus of the controversy, leaving Wick largely unsullied by it.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee scheduled a hearing on the black list, and I was called to testify along with the general counsel and head of the speakers program. Days before the hearing, two Committee staffers came to my office to question me about my memory of the meeting called by Lenkowsky to discuss handling the story, specifically whether Lenkowsky had told the Agency's general counsel to "get rid of the list." One of the Committee staffers was Peter Galbraith, son of John Kenneth Galbraith (who himself was one of the names on the black list) and Committee Chair Claiborne Pell's top aide. The other was a Republican Committee staffer named David Keaney, who sat through our meeting silently.

Galbraith briskly got straight to the point: “We are going to call you as a witness, along with Lenkowsky, the general counsel and the head of the speakers program. I want to address just one point with you. I understand that you were in the room when the black list was discussed and that you heard Mr. Lenkowsky order the general counsel to destroy it. Is that your recollection?”

“This is going to sound lame,” I responded, “but I cannot recall. I was so preoccupied with what Lenkowsky directed me to do that I just stopped paying attention to the rest of the conversation. It is possible that that is what Lenkowsky told the general counsel to do, but I cannot say with any certainty.”

Peter was clearly not happy with my answer. He gave me a hard look and said, “You do know you are going to be under oath at the hearing, and you are aware of the penalty for perjury, correct?” I told him that I was well aware of the penalty for perjury, but that I genuinely could not tell him whether Lenkowsky had given an order to destroy the list. He narrowed his eyes and gave me a look of disgust as he and Keaney left my office.

Q: What happened at the hearing? Were you called to testify?

O’CONNELL: Even now, year later, the day of the hearing in the Hart Senate Office Building is vivid in my memory. Lenkowsky had already testified by the time I and the others were called. A photo of him, with his right hand raised as he was sworn in, appeared on the Post’s front page the next day. The photo’s caption had a wonderful, almost Orwellian quote from his testimony, to wit, “I stand by what I meant to say.” He also uttered something else that took its place in USIA lore: in trying to explain how the black list happened, Lenkowsky mused out loud that it might have been “mindless gnomes in the bureaucracy” who hatched and leaked the document in order to embarrass Director Wick and the Administration. Early the next morning, Agency employees could be seen in USIA’s corridors wearing freshly-minted pins with the words “mindless gnome” on them.

During the hearing, I was seated as far back in the Committee room as I could while still remaining in the room, hoping that I would be lost in the overflow crowd.

The hearing droned on, and I was beginning to think that I might not be called after all, when the next voice I heard was the funereal tone of Senator Pell asking, “Are Mr. O’Connell and the director of the USIA speakers program present? Will they please come forward to be sworn in?”

“Raise your right hand, take a seat,” Senator Pell intoned, Peter Galbraith at his side, smirking. The Chairman then said, “Mr. O’Connell, I understand you were in the room when the order was given to destroy this document. You have said that that didn’t happen. What do you have to say about that?”

“Senator,” I said, hearing my voice quake, “I have not said that that order was not given. I did say that I could not recall that such an order was given at that meeting.” He looked at me over his half glasses in clear disbelief and said, “Are you sure? Is that your response?” I said, “Yes, I cannot recall. I was distracted as I considered the challenging orders I had been given to me by Mr. Lenkowsky.”

Q: Sounds nerve-wracking.

O’CONNELL: It was, and the hot TV lights only increased the third-degree feeling in the room. From the gallery, a hundred or more pairs of eyes drilled into my back, along with another ten or so from the stone-faced committee members and their staffs on the other side of the witness table.

I did not want to say that the order to destroy the list happened because I wasn’t sure (although I was inclined to believe that Lenkowsky had given such an order). Either way, I did not want to make something up. In the event, my brief testimony was inconsequential, although I must have come across as doofus-like and just another weak and dissembling federal functionary. My moment in the spotlight was mercifully over.

It was already clear that Lenkowsky’s nomination as USIA deputy director was not going to garner enough votes to be voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he submitted his resignation not long afterwards.

Q: So USIA would select people to go tell a story abroad and the Agency would pay their air fare and other travel expenses. It sounds like an idyllic exercise. But then someone in the Agency decided that the names needed to be vetted, right? So I’m guessing that sending Mothers Theresa would have been all right, but an extreme proponent of the left or even, apparently, Walter Cronkite would be regarded as enemies and therefore would not be sent?

O’CONNELL: Right, except that the list did not exactly follow such a neat delineation. For example, along with the likes of beat poet Allen Ginsberg of “Howl” fame, the list also had the names of such Establishment types as former Washington Times editor Arnaud de Borchgrave, sociologist Amitai Etzioni, Douglas Feith (who would later achieve a kind of fame as one of the neo-conservative Pentagon’s architects of the disastrous invasion of Iraq in the second Gulf War); James Schlesinger, former Republican Governor of Pennsylvania, William Scranton; and Paul Warnke. Not a raving leftist in the bunch.

Q: How did this happen?

O’CONNELL: My guess is that something specific had sparked it. I don’t recall in detail, but it seems to me that at least one speaker had gone overseas and had criticized the Reagan Administration’s policy in Central America. Somebody in the Administration heard about this and started asking questions that probably went something like this, “What the hell is USIA doing sending our critics on paid overseas trips?” And Wick

might have said to one of his staff, "You're right. We can't have this. Look into it and let me know."

Q: But there must have always been a blacklist or some means of selecting speakers and determining their suitability. I mean, you just don't send any speaker out.

O'CONNELL: I believe that was brought up, if not by Wick then by others, by way of explaining that the practice of being appropriately selective about which speakers should go overseas was not new.

There is, however, a difference between selecting speakers based on qualifications and credentials versus political or philosophical criteria, which were presumably the reasons that there was a "blacklist" in the first place. Again, the reasons for Walter Cronkite's presence on the list remain murky, but less mysterious are the names of professors and pundits regarded as liberals and therefore unfriendly to the Reagan Administration.

University of Southern California professor of public diplomacy Nick Cull has another, more rather more byzantine -- yet plausible -- thought about how the list came about. As he told me later, "it wasn't only political or necessarily driven by people who had misspoken overseas, but rather by people who had declined USIA invites in the past." The list, he added, "began as a way to avoid inviting people who had indicated that they were too busy for that sort of thing." "The negative spin," Cull concluded, "was part of the desire of the hard-line Republicans to use Wick as an avenue of attack against a President they saw as too soft, which is ironic given Reagan's later beatification."

Q: So how did the black list business end?

O'CONNELL: The black list controversy ended with Lenkowsky's departure and Charles Wick's survival. Wick was able to show that he was unaware of the practice of vetting potential overseas speakers for political and philosophical purity. I learned recently that, along with Wick, Lenkowsky apparently and eventually emerged unscathed from his brief and unpleasant USIA experience, and is now a professor on the faculty of Indiana University.

Q: Turning to something else, did you sense at the time, particularly with Central America, ... was there the equivalent of the neo-cons of later on? In other words, I'm particularly thinking at one time there was a very strong Jewish left which switched over and became a very strong Jewish right. Norman Podhoretz comes to mind. Was that prevalent?

O'CONNELL: One of the things that Wick did at USIA gets right at your question.

Along with his other pre-USIA beliefs about government employees as risk-averse and all the rest, Wick probably believed that they were also liberals and, more likely, Democrats. Therefore, as he -- and President Reagan -- thought, ways had to be developed to involve (carefully selected) members of the private sector in the business of

the government. That way -- or so the public explanation went -- new ideas and vitality would be injected new into what Wick thought of as a somnolent and unimaginative bureaucracy.

Accordingly, and starting in late 1981, when he announced the creation of the first of what would later be several "private sector advisory committees," divided thematically into areas in which USIA worked -- or, in Wick's view, should have been working -- including publishing, broadcasting, film, books and libraries, advertising and public relations, marketing, film, labor, sports, film and entertainment, and even intellectuals. The purpose of the groups of private citizens would be to "provide advice and expertise to the Agency."

Some of the people whom Wick invited to join the committees were accomplished. And some of the committees functioned usefully. Interestingly, however, neither the concept nor the committees themselves survived after Wick left office.

For the sports and film committees, Wick was able to entice his friends from Hollywood and the sports business. For example, he had the legendary mogul and MCA founder, Jules Styne on the entertainment side, and Sonny Werblin, CEO of Madison Square Garden, headed the sports group. Leo Jaffe of Columbia Pictures chaired a Film Acquisition Committee.

There were also TV and radio broadcasting committees, the members of which included many of Wick's friends from those industries, Rupert Murdoch, for example. Other prominent Americans Wick recruited ranged from actors Charlton Heston and Kirk Douglas to AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, who chaired a Labor Committee.

The intellectuals' group, known as the "New Directions Committee," was one of the more active of Wick's groups, and was made up of several people who, both then and later, became known as neo-conservatives. Norman Podhoretz, for example, the longtime editor of Commentary magazine, chaired the group, and his wife, the conservative firebrand, Midge Decter, was a member, along with the conservative columnist, Michael Novak; Heritage Foundation president, Edwin Feulner, and Evron Kirkpatrick, husband of Reagan's U.S. ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick.

Along with Podhoretz, a fellow named Ernest Lefever was representative of the kind of neo-conservatives that Wick was trying to attract. Lefever was at that time an obscure right-leaning political theorist who had founded the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington in 1976. In 1981, President Reagan nominated him to be Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. In his confirmation hearing, Lefever testified that "the United States should not act to promote human rights in sovereign states." Once his nomination was roundly rejected by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Lefever was available for duty on the New Directions Committee.

Q: Why do you think these people wanted to join Wick's committees? Also, didn't bringing such people in, if only under the guise of the committees, give him a measure of

respectability along with some leverage as to what people thought of him and the President?

O'CONNELL: I think some of them came in thinking -- sincerely so -- that joining one of these committees was an opportunity to do something for their country. I believe that was how Wick sold the committees to prospective members, along with pointing out that membership would look good for both them and for the President, regardless of whether the committees actually did anything.

I have already said that Wick was not particularly ideological, nor did he appear to have much intrinsic interest in these people or their fields, but he did understand that they could potentially and politically be helpful to Ronald Reagan.

Q: Did Wick ever try to bring private sector committee people together with people from overseas?

O'CONNELL: In a way, he did. In May 1987, at the height of the Iran-Contra episode -- and possibly because of the bad publicity that Reagan and his Administration were getting at that time because of Iran-Contra -- Wick presented Reagan with a new idea to enhance U.S. public diplomacy: a bipartisan "International Council of distinguished opinion makers" who would be brought to Washington to meet and be briefed by senior administration figures. The first USIA International Council Conference took as its theme "U.S. policies and foreign perceptions." Wick assembled 103 senior media and business figures from thirty nations. The delegate list read like a conspiracy theorist's dream.

The first International Council conference was scheduled for October 1987. My office and seemingly almost everyone else at USIA office were mustered into action to plan and manage the gathering, some of which was held in the Old Executive Office Building (OEOB) next to the White House. The two-day event's schedule was chock-full of high-level briefings by Administration officials, including -- if memory serves -- remarks by the President himself, along with the vice president, White House Chief of Staff, National Security Advisor and the secretaries of the Treasury, Defense and State.

Wick, who understood the value of a headline name, invited Rupert Murdoch to act as co-chair of the council, and the Greek financier Alexander Papamarkou was vice chair. Honorary co-chairs were Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller, Robert Strauss, and Jeane Kirkpatrick.

(I am indebted to Professor Nick Cull for providing details of the International Council which had, along with much else over the years, escaped me.)

Every participant in the briefings at the OEOB had to first go through security, including having their names vetted through the Secret Service's data base, before they could be permitted to enter the building. In an embarrassing sidebar to the star-studded gathering, the check of the name of one participant -- a Turkish mogul of some kind -- revealed an outstanding arrest warrant for some offense or other.

One of the final items on the schedule, in addition to an evening gala at a Washington hotel, was attendance at a White House press briefing. I believe the spokesperson at the time was Marlin Fitzwater. The reporters were of course aware of the presence in the briefing room of the non-media but high-profile guests, so in their usual fashion, they decided to have some fun at Fitzwater's expense by asking especially difficult or embarrassing questions. One of my undying memories of the Wick years will always be sitting in that briefing room and watching Rupert Murdoch, and the flamboyant Czech-born British newspaper publisher, Robert Maxwell -- who later died under mysterious circumstances -- and Washington super lawyer Edward Bennett Williams seated side-by-side and thoroughly enjoying the skewering directed at Marlin Fitzwater.

Q: I imagine that people in the Administration were aware and probably respectful of the close relationship between President Reagan and Charles Wick.

O'CONNELL: Very much so. Whatever senior Administration people may have thought of Wick privately, they were always careful in dealing with him because they knew how close he was to the President and how much access he had. Not that Wick would confide in me about this kind of thing, but after a while it was apparent that Wick felt that some of the people who were around the President were good for him, others weren't.

Q: So he was protective of the President?

O'CONNELL: Wick was nothing if not protective of President Reagan. He seemed to understand Reagan very well; they had the same kind of humor, same kind of (brief) attention span, and had both come out of show business backgrounds. Reagan was older than Wick, but they probably felt like they were contemporaries. I always had the feeling that Wick knew things about the President and his family that nobody else in the Administration knew, and, in discreet ways, Wick would let others know that.

Q: Once Lenkowsky had left, did anyone come in to be Wick's deputy director?

O'CONNELL: Marvin Stone, the longtime editor of U.S. News and World Report, came in and pretty quickly became the adult in the room. Although quite different in their experiences and personalities, Stone and Wick understood each other. Marvin, who died a few years later after leaving USIA, was a no-nonsense, straight-shooter, and he acted as a useful brake on some of Wick's eccentricities.

Q: How about VOA? Who was the director by that time, and how did he or she get along with Wick? In fact, how about your own office at USIA? Who was your latest boss?

O'CONNELL: The answers to those questions, round-about and digressive though they are, say much about the power of the right in Washington back then.

The director of the Voice of America at the time was a former NBC correspondent in Moscow named Gene Pell. It had taken a long time to get him confirmed by the Senate

and on the job, but he was no sooner at VOA when he abruptly quit after receiving an offer to become president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Munich.

Wick was extremely upset with Gene Pell and concerned that it was going to be difficult to get someone into that job quickly (the VOA director's position required Senate confirmation at that time, and Senator Jesse Helms was riding high on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee).

Wick and Marvin Stone quickly lined up former ABC News president Bill Sheehan as a candidate who, on paper, appeared to have the right credentials for the VOA job. In order for him to get into position to be nominated, however, and in a sign of the right's clout at the time, Sheehan had to be vetted by what amounted to an informal committee of conservative elders. The group was assembled by Senator Helms's staff and included the head of the Heritage Foundation among others. On the appointed day, Wick, Stone and Sheehan went up to Capitol Hill.

At the last minute, Wick and Stone decided to take with them the new director of the Agency's public affairs office -- my new boss and yet another of the many political appointees to have that job under Wick, but by far the best of the many who had come and gone during those years -- a decent man named Richard Carlson. Carlson had only recently -- perhaps six weeks before -- joined USIA. He had been an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of San Diego and, before that, an investigative reporter and anchorman at television stations in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The latter experience would soon become important.

Sheehan's session with the conservative elders did not go well. When they asked him, among other questions, whom he had voted for in the last presidential election, he took -- I am reliably informed -- serious umbrage and apparently -- with his Irish up -- told the group to undertake an anatomically impossible act. That ended the meeting and any consideration of Mr. Sheehan's as VOA director.

When Dick Carlson, returned to the public affairs office later that afternoon, he stopped by my office and said something like, "Guess what? I'm going to be the acting director of the VOA, and I'm leaving today." He added, "Why don't you come over to VOA with me?" I was probably speechless, but I did tell him that I would quickly consider his kind offer. Several months later, I would join Dick at VOA.

On the trip from Capitol Hill back to Agency headquarters, still stunned at the outcome of the session with Sheehan, Wick and Stone pondered their next steps in finding a candidate for the VOA job. They turned to Carlson and, recalling his journalistic background, asked if he would be interested in running VOA. Just like that, he was gone, to become the final and, in my view, most successful head of VOA under Wick.

Q: Do you want to talk about Wick's travel and his relations with U.S. ambassadors, especially in comparison with Joe Duffy during his term as USIA's final director? I understand that he did not travel.

O'CONNELL: Concerning Duffy, I had already moved to VOA by the time he became the Agency's director, but I am not aware that he went overseas at all as Agency Director. By contrast, Wick viewed overseas travel as a big part of his job.

Wick did get some flak for his travels, specifically allegations that he required an entourage while traveling and that U.S. embassies were required to make extensive preparations for his visits. Some of that was exaggeration, but much of it was also true. It was true, for example, that he did demand top treatment, including a full schedule of appointments with the most senior officials of the countries he was visiting, up to and including the heads of state or government, ministers of information culture, whom he regarded as his equals.

It is also true that, whether for his overseas travel or for appointments in Washington or media and public speaking events anywhere, Wick required enormous preparation, including copious amounts of briefing material in large binders that had to be toted everywhere by staff people. The books would have everything about the engagement, from the location of the rest room to the name of the wife of the president, to everything in between.

In the second term, Wick started traveling to the Soviet Union where he established a relationship with the aforementioned senior Gorbachev advisor named Zamyatin. He also saw other officials, such as the famed Georgy Arbatov at the Institute for the USA and Canada and people at Radio Moscow, but it was with Zamyatin that Wick started and continued discussions about the media exchanges between the U.S. and the USSR that figured so importantly in his being taken more seriously by the U.S. media.

Q: What was it like when Wick went abroad? What kind of treatment did he get, both at U.S. embassies and with foreign officials? Was he taken seriously?

O'CONNELL: He was taken very seriously. Just as U.S. officials in Washington understood that Wick was, because of his relationship with the President, much more than the head of a small, sub-Cabinet agency, ambassadors and their staffs knew that they needed to treat Wick with considerable deference. Doors opened for him that probably would have remained closed for anyone else at his level. Nor, I imagine, would his predecessors have demanded they be opened in the first place. Wick demanded -- and got -- royal treatment.

I think back to Mike Pistor, my one-time boss in the public affairs office and later public affairs counselor at the U.S. embassy in New Delhi and U.S. ambassador to Malawi.

When Wick traveled to New Delhi during Mike's tenure there, Mike rolled out the equivalent of the red carpet. Along with the prime minister, Wick saw officials and media moguls throughout India. At a *fete* for Wick that Mike arranged in New Delhi, he somehow got a parade of elephants to march through the gathering. Later, when I heard

Wick describing the event, it was clear that he was mightily impressed with the pachyderms.

Q: What did Wick achieve with respect to the USSR?

O'CONNELL: With the advent of *Glasnost*, and the opening up of relatively constructive U.S.-Soviet dialogue, Wick was able to achieve some gains, some more important than others. For example, he reached an agreement with the Soviets under which they would stop jamming the Voice of America.

Another agreement permitted greater circulation in the Soviet Union of America Illustrated, USIA's hugely popular, Life-magazine-size publication. In return, the Soviets could increase the U.S. circulation of their drab equivalent, the English-language Soviet Life, which was virtually invisible in the U.S.

One particular issue of America Illustrated that featured page after page of high-resolution, color photographs showing display shelves in an American supermarket, packed with the usual array of goods, including meat, that were usually scarce in the USSR. The piece struck me as a bit cruel to a people whose stores typically had nothing but mostly empty shelves.

There were other areas covered by bi-lateral agreements, e.g., private American publications and newspapers could circulate in the Soviet Union (I'm not sure whether or not this ever happened to the extent Wick thought it would). The *quid pro quo* of that was the Soviet publications and media outlets would somehow (this was never defined very clearly) have greater access to American media.

The large USIA exhibits that used to tour the Soviet Union on some aspect of American life and progress were also stepped up under Wick. On one occasion, I traveled to Chisinau, the capital of what was then the Moldavian Soviet Republic (now Moldova), with VOA director Dick Carlson to open an enormous exhibition on American communication and transportation, including a gleaming Chevrolet Corvette. The show, which occupied an entire exhibit building, was chock full of all sorts of gadgetry. The Moldavians seemed to love it.

Whenever the President had a summit with Gorbachev, including the fateful one in Iceland, Wick went as a full-fledged member of the official delegation, with his own schedule of meetings. Thus, Wick always felt like -- and was -- a player. Like USIA directors before him, possibly going back to Edward R. Murrow in the Kennedy Administration, Wick would from time to time talk about getting USIA a seat on the National Security Council. That, however, did not happen.

Q: Fulbright, for example, was very strong and very concerned about USIA becoming a strong propaganda vehicle. The suspicion manifested itself in a number of early pieces of legislation covering USIA.

O'CONNELL: Fulbright was not the only one worried about that. Senator Edward Zorinsky, a Democrat from Nebraska at the time, was concerned, both about what he regarded as Wick's excesses and that the USIA director was trying to make the Agency into a domestic propaganda agency.

Again, Charles Wick could be and often was his own worst enemy. For example, he got himself in trouble when testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee about the reach and audience size of WORLDNET.

He rightfully claimed credit for bringing WORLDNET into the satellite age and for making it the important public diplomacy tool that it became, but, either because of a misstatement or because he actually believed it, he wildly exaggerated the number of people that it reached. During a hearing, he came up with a number of viewers that was so enormous that one Committee member was moved to say, "Wait a minute, Mr. Wick, that's more people than there are in the world." It was a famous exchange which was duly covered. Wick was momentarily embarrassed and eventually backed off that claim.

Q: What about Wick's Z-Grams?

O'CONNELL: Throughout Wick's tenure at USIA, people throughout the Agency became all too familiar with what were called "Z-grams." He would speak into his pocket-sized Dictaphone with something like, "Find out how many people are really watching WORLDNET and get that to me by three o'clock today." The Z-grams would come in the form of hard copy, and sometimes they were in his barely legible handwriting and delivered by some special assistant. If they were given to you personally as opposed to coming through the interoffice mail you knew you better get on them right away because he would write in his scrawl "F/U." To the uninitiated it represented the familiar expletive, but of course it meant "Follow Up." The Z-grams are now legendary, and USIA veterans still talk about them.

Q: There must be legions of Wick stories.

O'CONNELL: There are. Like me, many former employees have dozens of Wick stories. Former colleagues frequently ask me to tell my stories once again. One stands out for me: there were always several schedule C employees in our office. Late in the first term, we had one who never trusted the rest of us and always kept her own files in her office. She thought we were a bunch of wild-eyed liberals who were out to get her. On one occasion, I had gone with Wick to Philadelphia where he spoke at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communications. We took the train to and from Philadelphia from Washington.

As we boarded Amtrak for the return trip to Washington, Wick called his office to ask about the draft of another speech that he was to deliver the following day. The speech writer on that occasion was the same woman whom I just mentioned. When his assistant told Wick that the draft had not yet been turned in at his office, he became apoplectic. By that time it was 6:00 PM, and he was scheduled to speak the following afternoon.

The next morning, he came into the office and was told by his staff that the speech was not ready. The next thing I knew, I received a call from Mr. Wick. He was shouting so loudly that I was able to hold the phone as far from my ear as my arm could extend and still hear him as if he were in the same room.

“I need your help on this speech, right away, but first I want you to fire (Ms. So and So), right now,” he bellowed. With as much courage as I could muster, I said, “Mr. Wick I can’t fire her; she’s a Schedule C, and I am a career person.” That technicality only enraged him further, and he said, “Joe, I don’t care. If you don’t fire her right away, I’m going to fire you. I want her out of the building in 20 minutes.” He then slammed the phone down, as I sat there wondering what my next move should be. I didn’t care for the woman either, but I wasn’t about to make things worse by going in and saying, “You’re fired,” so I called one of Wick’s special assistants. Thanks to his efforts, the woman was not fired, and I was never sure whether she knew that Wick had ordered me to fire her.

Apropos of this occurrence, I had a separate experience with the same employee, which illustrates the perils that can arise for federal employees in working with political appointees. Later, as the Schedule C employee was finishing her time at the Agency, she casually asked one of the secretaries to pack “her” files and send them to her new home in another state, at her expense. I was aware that, in her mistrust of the career people, and especially me, she kept classified material in her office rather than securing it in the office’s files. I had cautioned her about that practice more than once, to no apparent avail. When the secretary told me of the woman’s request, I asked her to delay any packing and sending until I had the opportunity to go through the files and make sure that any classified of “limited official use” materials were removed. That task took some time, so when the now former schedule C employee called the office once day a few weeks later to ask about “her” files, my colleague suggested that she speak with me. The former employee was predictably angry and began pulling out all stops, including writing to Mr. Wick and Orin Hatch, her home state U.S. Senator. Mr. Wick asked me about the matter, and I explained what had happened. He said that he would ask the Agency’s Inspector General to look into the matter, but that I should not worry about it. Months later, one of the inspectors came to see me and said that he had just come from the U.S. Attorney’s office and that he had some “good news” for me. When I asked what that news might be, he responded that the U.S. Attorney had decided not to prosecute. And who might that be, I further asked? When he said, “Why you, of course, on charges of destruction of government documents,” I asked for the opportunity to explain. Once I told the inspector what had transpired, he remarked that his office should have been going after the former employee. Right, I said, and I urged him to obtain a search warrant in order to go into the woman’s apartment in another state and make sure that she had removed no classified materials from the Agency. That apparently did not happen, but I was in any case cleared of any wrongdoing.

Q: Did you find that political appointees in your office or elsewhere in the Agency were spies for the front office?

O'CONNELL: At times, yes.

Q: You think in an office everybody has a job and enjoying it. Were they kind of running on a separate agenda?

O'CONNELL: As it turned out, many of the ones who came into Wick's immediate office over those years didn't understand that there was only one agenda in the office: Charles Z. Wick's. They did not last long, but those who did understand lasted. Some of them also came to understand that there were career people around the Agency with whom Wick worked well and trusted.

Q: Would Wick be seeing public affairs officers or ambassadors coming from India or Russia or what have you to ask or pontificate in other words both to inform but also to sharpen the message?

O'CONNELL: He would listen to senior officers whom he respected and at times even heed their advice. Among that group, there were some who were more adroit than others in working and dealing with Wick and in giving him advice and guidance. Some officers were probably afraid of him and/or were telling him what they thought he wanted to hear, or perhaps holding back what they thought might anger him.

There were also people like Mike Pistor who knew how to approach Wick, especially with resource questions -- this was at a time when USIA's budget was relatively flush, thanks largely to Wick and his special relationship with the President -- whether they needed more speakers, more Fulbright scholarships to award, more exhibits, etc. Depending on what he thought of the officer making the case, Wick would often make those things happen with dispatch. He eventually came to understand that overseas was where the Agency's work was.

As far as Wick's involvement in filling senior Foreign Service positions overseas, he had the final chop on them, especially for the countries that interested him, such as Germany, the USSR, China, Australia, Nigeria, Brazil and a few others. He wanted to be assured that he would know the top Agency people in those jobs.

Q: Jock Shirley is a name that comes up. I think I met him once when I was Consul General in Naples and he was in Rome. He was quite a figure. Did you work with him?

O'CONNELL: I did, when he was the Agency's first Counselor, a position which Wick created as the Agency's most senior Foreign Service slot. The principal duties of the Counselor were to provide advice and counsel to the Agency Director. Jock Shirley was smart, smooth and skilled, and he served Wick very well.

Thinking about Jock makes me recall one of Wick's first big projects, which came in the wake of the imposition of martial law in Poland during the time of Solidarity. There were worldwide protests against the Polish regime, and Wick decided that this provided the Agency -- and probably in his mind, the President, too -- with an opportunity, so he came

up with the idea for an international satellite television extravaganza entitled “Let Poland Be Poland.” There were live feeds from around the world showing mass protests, video statements from leaders, including President Reagan; and even performances by well-known singers, such as Frank Sinatra, singing “Ever Homeward” in Polish.

Jock Shirley was already the Agency’s Counselor at the time, and he became the effective coordinator of the show. Preparation for the program consumed the Agency. Indeed, Wick himself was consumed by the show, and he wanted everybody -- in the United States and, for that matter, the world to know about it. He even proclaimed to the Washington Post that the program would be “probably the biggest show in the history of the world.”

With Wick’s bombast, we in the public affairs office were under great pressure to get the word out, whatever it took. The day after “Let Poland” aired, reports came dutifully pouring in from the posts overseas about how many people saw the show (unclear how those numbers were compiled).

We started getting media questions about audience size. Every time there was a new cumulative audience figure, we would issue another press release loudly proclaiming that “Let Poland” had been seen by millions around the world. On a single day, we issued three -- or maybe it was four -- releases with banner headlines like “New Reports: Six Million See ‘Let Poland Be Poland’.”

Later that afternoon, I recall showing Jock the draft of yet another release, perhaps the fifth or sixth of the day. Exasperated, he said, “Joe, this is enough, no more of these things.” When I told him that the releases were Mr. Wick’s idea, he frowned and said, “I’ll take care of it. This is ridiculous.” Somehow he must have taken care of it, for we heard nothing further about issuing any more releases on “Let Poland Be Poland.”

Q: I don’t know whether you know him, but I was interviewing Philip Brown recently?

O’CONNELL: I met Phil in Moscow. Good guy.

Q: He was talking about when he was press attaché in Paris. He said he had a lot of pressure to get “Poland Be Poland” on TV there.

O’CONNELL: I am not surprised.

Q: I must say that I never met Mr. Wick but he comes across as being obviously difficult but at the same time productive.

O’CONNELL: He was both. Many of the people who were his most severe critics have admitted in retrospect -- mostly positively -- that there had never been a USIA director like Charles Z. Wick. I don’t know if he would have agreed with that, but it was clear that he did grow into his job over time. Did he end up being a peerless statesman? Of course

not. He would have laughed at that thought, but he was a far better Director when he left the Agency -- and much more mellow -- than he was when he started out.

Q: Did you get any feel for not just Wick but the front office. What I've always been told it was such an important element of USIA efforts and it's the exchange program both the Fulbright one which is a longer term but also bringing potential world leaders...

O'CONNELL: Right, the International Visitor program.

Q: ...this is very important arrow in our international quiver and is often overlooked.

O'CONNELL: When Wick came to the Agency in 1981, he had a somewhat skewed notion of USIA's capabilities and what it actually did, and he tended to focus on the information side. With time, however, he came to gain an understanding of the exchange programs and their power to being about enhanced understanding of the U.S. He also grasped that the figures showing how many world leaders has been introduced to the United States through the International Visitor (IV) program gave him some excellent bragging material, and he used that example frequently in public remarks. He kept in his pocket a list of the 100 or so current world leaders who had come to the U.S. at an early age thanks to the IV or Fulbright scholarship programs). He loved to say, for example, that Margaret Thatcher had come to the United States as a young woman on one of the Fulbright familiarization tours, and I am sure he reminded her of that when they met

Q: Jacque Chirac, too, right?

O'CONNELL: Yes, and many others. In addition to the list of world leaders, Wick had a sheet of USIA facts and figures which eventually grew to several pages. My office was the keeper of that compendium. Mr. Wick would send us an unending stream of Z-grams saying things like, "I just learned that Prime Minister so-and so-was an international visitor ten years ago, and now he is prime minister; add that to the list." Or numbers. He loved numbers, sometimes, as I mentioned, to his own detriment.

Q: What about International Visitors or Fulbrighters seeing poverty or African Americans not being treated fairly, some of the underside of the American life? Was he ok with that?

O'CONNELL: Counter-intuitively enough, I don't think Wick had as much trouble with showing some of the underside of American life as one might imagine, so long as the country's achievements and the people who helped bring about those achievements were also shown and given greater prominence.

Wick was on the one hand an enthusiastic and unapologetic participant in the glossy high life the Reagans were criticized for. Unexpectedly so, however, Wick also seemed to understand that at least some of our warts needed to be talked about, although his heart was probably not in that side of the Agency's work. And he could not have been delighted about anyone going overseas and talking about how the U.S. has a terrible

racial problem, or the division between the haves and have-nots. Wick was a shrewd man and probably realized that trying to hide the less attractive aspects of our national life wouldn't work, but he also thought that the U.S., in the guise of the USIA, should always put its best foot forward overseas.

Q: When I was in Yugoslavia I remember some Soviets came in to visit the embassy and asked if we had any handouts. I didn't have any handouts, but I did happen to have a couple Sears Roebuck catalogues. At the time, they were good for doorstops so I gave them away, but then other Soviets started coming back and pretty soon our supply of Sears catalogs was cleaned out. My point is not that Sears catalogs were so important but that, in a larger sense, people in denied countries were interested in the rest of the world, especially in countries whose citizens were free and able to live their lives in the manner they wished.

O'CONNELL: Wick got that in spades. He knew that people in denied countries would respond favorably to the story of freedom, and he saw his role as one of telling that story through as many channels as possible.

Q: How do you think historians will treat Charles Z. Wick?

O'CONNELL: I believe they will render a mixed judgment of Charles Wick's years at USIA. He had started slowly and moved from an object of early ridicule to one of near respect in the second Reagan Administration -- if grudgingly so on the part of some.

As far as his approach to his Soviet counterparts, I would not go so far as to say that the Wick's final few years in office were a succession of enduring triumphs, but he at least got some useful conversation going in those *glasnost* years. Sadly, yet tellingly, neither he nor his patron Ronald Reagan were around at the time that USIA was eliminated in 1999.

(Speaking of Wick and his dealings with the Soviets, I am reminded of a cultural official at the Soviet embassy in Washington named Sergei Motorin who, during the 1980s, used to stop by my office and also appear at Wick's press events when Wick would discuss his ideas and initiatives for stepped up exchanges with the USSR.

Thanks to Aldrich Ames, the convicted former Soviet mole in the CIA, and another, later mole, former FBI agent Robert Hansen, several Soviet double agents were exposed and subsequently executed in the USSR. One of those was Sergei Motorin. He wanted to befriend me and used to call and, on at least once occasion, came to the office at 1750 PA Ave, ostensibly to pick up some of our fact sheets. Every time he showed up at the office, and as were often reminded to do, I would inform the Agency's USSR desk. Motorin would also attend the Soviet-related public events that we had during that period when Charles Wick would appear with one of his counterparts on the Soviet side, I remember introducing Motorin to Wick. Motorin was a nice enough fellow who would say things to me such as, "your job and mine, they are very similar, right?" One time he sent me a

small bottle of Stolli Russian vodka at Christmas time, and when I told the security people about it, they told me to keep it but not open it.

(After a time, Motorin stopped coming to the office or to our public events, and I never saw or heard from him again. Fast-forwarding to the time much after Ames's arrest, when the FBI agent Hansen was nailed, I was sitting on the Metro one evening reading the stories about what Ames and Hansen had done, how they did it, how the Soviets used Hansen to corroborate and validate the names of the double agents that Ames had given them. I happened to notice a smaller article about the people whom the two spies had exposed, and I nearly fell off my seat when the piece named Motorin and described how he was summoned to Moscow -- Motorin's wife and children had remained behind in the Soviet Union during his U.S. assignment, possibly to discourage defections -- under some kind of ruse, taken from the airport and hustled to the basement of a prison in Moscow and promptly shot through the back of the head.)

Professor Nicholas Cull has obvious respect for Charles Wick's achievement and notes the difference -- and decline -- in USIA's work and effectiveness after Wick's departure. Moreover, I'm betting Cull has also taken note of a sometimes reluctant respect for Charles Wick among many former USIA people who knew him or worked for him, myself included.

Q: Well, Wick produced. If you look at any other organization when the chips are really down, the question becomes one of whether the person at the top produced to the benefit of the organization. Wick did.

O'CONNELL: He did, and he also brought to the Agency a level of respectability in the U.S. foreign affairs community -- brief though it was -- that it had not enjoyed in its entire history.

Q: You mentioned that the media's treatment of Wick improved markedly during the second Reagan term, when it seemed that he (Wick) was being taken more seriously, something that could not have been imagined in the early going.

O'CONNELL: The change in Charles Wick's image was gradual, and it was reflected in the media's coverage of him, including in the same Post and Times that had at times so skewered him in Wick's early years in Washington. He loved it that he was being taken more seriously and was even surprised at the change in his fortunes. One day when the New York Times published an article crediting him for his approach to the Soviet Union, he turned to me and said, "Can you believe this, after the way the media treated me before?" He relished the change, and no wonder.

The titles of a few second-term articles illustrate the media's sea change toward Wick: "Wick Has Met the Enemy," NYT, 1/24/85; "Wick is Surviving the Criticism," NYT, 6/26/85; "Talk Not Cheap at USIA: Well-Funded Propaganda Machine Pursues 'Public Diplomacy'," Washington Post, 3/31/86 (front page); "Chernobyl and the 'Global

Village’,” NYT, 5/8/86; “Wick Finds a High Profile Need Not Be a Target,” NYT, 6/2/88; “Wick Legacy: Making a Difference,” Broadcasting magazine, 11/7/88.

Q: Joe, you were with Wick from when to when?

O’CONNELL: I worked for him from March of 1981 until December of 1988, when he returned home to California..

Q: What happened after Wick left the Agency? Did you remain in the public affairs office?

O’CONNELL: I did, until September of 1989, when I took up Dick Carlson’s offer to join him at the Voice of America.

Q: Let’s talk about the culture at VOA. Let’s do the corporate culture first.

O’CONNELL: VOA’s founding predated USIA by eleven years. USIA was created under President Eisenhower in 1953.

Q: So it’s World War II?

O’CONNELL: The generally accepted date of the first broadcast of what later became VOA is February 24, 1942, although some U.S. government-sponsored broadcasts had been beamed to the Pacific since 1940.

Seventy-nine days after Pearl Harbor, a German-speaking American named William Harlan Hale, using a borrowed (from CBS) studio in New York, went on the air in German with the words, “This is a voice from America. [Hale did not say ‘voice of America,’ because the broadcaster, which was technically part of the State Department at that time, did not yet have an official name]. Every day at this time, we will bring you news of the war; the news may be good, the news may be bad, we shall tell you the truth.”

Using those words was a fairly gutsy act in those dark, early days of World War II, when the outcome of the conflict was far from clear, and the Allied cause was not going well. Nonetheless, Hale’s final sentence -- “the news may be good, the news may be bad, we shall tell you the truth” -- became VOA’s central governing principle. Later, in the early 1970s, the same sentiment was embedded in what is known as the VOA Charter, which became law in 1975.

The Charter contains three points: VOA will be an accurate, objective and comprehensive source of the news. VOA will broadcast about all of America and not just one segment of America. And VOA will broadcast the policies of the United States along with responsible commentary about those policies.

Illinois Republican Senator Charles Percy and New York Democratic Congresswoman Bella Abzug, another pair of improbably bedfellows, were the members of Congress who are credited with making the Charter a matter of law. The facts surrounding the Charter are actually far less glamorous. It appears that no one except congressional staff and backers at VOA had paid much attention to the wording, which was inserted into an appropriations bill which the President signed.

Q: Talk a bit more about the historic relationship -- and, if you would -- the tension between the Voice of America and the old U.S. Information Agency.

O'CONNELL: From its establishment in 1953, USIA had an advocacy role which sometimes created tension between the two entities, since VOA's job was to report the news, "accurately, objectively and comprehensively." Over the years, U.S. ambassadors, undersecretaries of State and other Department officials would occasionally call the VOA Director, either because they had heard that VOA was ready to broadcast something that they believed might negatively affect U.S. policy or interests, or, more often, had already been broadcast. Sometimes these contacts were handled behind the scenes, but others made news.

The lore at VOA -- and my sense is that, in the modern period, this has been true in practice -- is that if the Director believed that VOA was acting responsibly and within its mandate, he or she has responded to such calls with a polite thank you, and that is where the matter stays. The State Department has no authority to stop VOA from broadcasting something, assuming that the content of the broadcast is in keeping with the VOA Charter.

Q: Were you ever involved in one of those instances?

O'CONNELL: During my time at VOA, the highest-profile instance of disagreement between the State Department and VOA came some years ago when VOA's Pashto service managed to obtain an interview with the elusive, one-eyed Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Omar.

Q: Tell me about what happened with the Mullah Omar story.

O'CONNELL: Along with the Hartman gender discrimination case, the Mullah Omar story was the biggest public affairs brouhaha that my public affairs colleagues and I handled during my VOA years.

VOA broadcasts in both Dari and Pashtu to Afghanistan; Pashtu being the language of the Taliban. Historically, perhaps reflecting what happens in Afghan society itself, there was been tension between the staffs of the two broadcast services. In the years after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the services had attempted to land an interview with the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar.

Over the years, even before 9/11 and the invasion, the Pashtu service had been in occasional touch with Mullah Omar's people about interviewing him, although without success. Finally, during a Pashtu call-in show, the distinguished Afghan woman named Spozhmai Maiwandi who ran the service found herself on the phone with the Taliban official in charge of education (a portfolio which, in light of the Taliban's view of education, seemed especially bizarre).

The service chief told Taliban official that she had long wanted to interview Mullah Omar. The fellow responded, surprisingly so, that he thought that he could make the interview happen.

A week or so later, the service chief received a message that she could call the Mullah the following morning. She went to one of VOA's top news analysts to formulate a series of questions to use in the interview. The next morning, to the service chief's great surprise, she had the Mullah Omar on the phone.

The Taliban chief began by announcing to Spozhmai that he did not know why he was wasting his time giving an interview to VOA, since, he added, there was not a chance that it would ever be aired. The service chief assured him that his voice, along with those of others would be heard in a VOA broadcast piece. The Mullah harrumphed as the interview got underway.

This signaled the start of an enormous and very public brouhaha that reached the halls of Congress, the White House and, and the U.S. and overseas media. VOA's management informed the members of VOA's umbrella entity, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, of the impending interview. The Board looked at what was planned, i.e., that the Mullah Omar's voice and voice would be accompanied and leavened by other voices and views, and that the resulting balanced piece would be done in accordance with VOA's journalistic standards and in keeping with the principles of the Charter.

The Board decided that doing a segment in which the Mullah Omar's voice would be heard was within VOA's mandate, especially since this would be the first time that Afghans and others would be able to hear the Mullah juxtaposed with other, countervailing voices, instead of the usual Taliban broadcasts which carried the religious leader's harangues in undiluted fashion.

In fact, the resulting piece included excerpts from the interview with the Mullah, along with excerpts from interviews with Georgetown University scholar of Islam, John Esposito, and Northern Alliance leader (and current Afghan vice president) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. Within a day or so, VOA produced and broadcast the piece in both Afghan languages along with other languages of Central Asia.

In its balance and adherence to VOA's journalistic standards and the VOA Charter, the piece was unremarkably similar to the kind of programming that VOA does every day.

But the point was that the piece was anything but unremarkable, and not only because VOA had managed to secure an interview with the elusive Taliban leader. Even more importantly, the broadcast of the story underscored -- perhaps more than any other in recent history -- VOA as an independent source of news for millions around the world.

After the Washington Post broke the story of the interview, we received calls for a month or more from virtually every major American and many overseas news outlets. On their editorial pages, virtually all of them praised VOA for having obtained an interview with the Mullah and for the quality of the piece in contrasting his voice and views with those of others who were critical of him and of the Taliban movement itself.

Q: Did everything think that the interview was a good idea?

O'CONNELL: Not surprisingly, no. There were other, less supportive views, based in part on an almost willfully erroneous understanding of what really happened and what the piece actually contained. The allegation by the Heritage Foundation and others on the right that the VOA had provided a "open microphone and platform for terrorists" by interviewing Mullah Omar and then broadcasting his extreme and unexpurgated views on a taxpayer-supported network could not have been more inaccurate or pernicious. The piece had been done in a critical context, just as VOA handles all material in order to achieve the balance called for in its Charter and journalistic standards. Again, the story was no different from what VOA does every day, and yet it took on a kind of white-hot luminescence.

Q: Obviously. But was it not part of VOA's currency that you gotta tell the dark side in order to get the full side out?

O'CONNELL: That's right. Warts and all is how the practice is usually described. I think "warts and all" may be one of Murrow's quotes, although it -- or words to the same effect -- has also been used by many others.

During his years as USIA Director, Charles Wick understood the significance of those words, even if he privately did not necessarily always agree with them. He figured out at the time of the allegations of politicization of VOA that that it would be far better to leave the broadcaster alone than to try to meddle. In that, Wick was following a long tradition of separation -- maintained by Agency directors over the years -- between USIA and VOA, a phenomenon which I have sometimes called an "unconsummated marriage."

Q: When did VOA move from New York to Washington?

O'CONNELL: VOA's broadcasts continued from New York until 1954, when the entire operation moved to Washington to become part of USIA, which had been established under President Eisenhower in 1953. Since that year, VOA has occupied the original headquarters building of the Department of Health and Human Services -- whose architecture has been called Stalinesque -- across from the National Mall, at 4th Street and Independence Avenue, SW.

Q: So there was historic tension between the missions of USIA and the Voice of America?

O'CONNELL: Not only that, but the two never operated in the same building. Until USIA moved to Southwest Washington in the mid-1980s, it was located a few miles away, at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, so there was always physical separation between the Agency and the Voice. That apartness underscored the deep and, in the end, unbridgeable difference between the missions of VOA and the rest of USIA.

On the one hand, VOA was charged with broadcasting the news straight. On the other, the mission of USIA was, among other things, to put the best foot forward for Uncle Sam, to be the country's overseas advocate, and to explain, persuade and defend the country's policies around the world. VOA believes that the best way to "put the best foot forward for Uncle Sam" is to broadcast the news objectively and accurately. By contrast, USIA believed that the way to accomplish that was by serving as an advocate for the country and presenting it in a favorable light.

Q: It's curious, but VOA is not well known in the U.S., right?

O'CONNELL: Paradoxically, although the VOA building is one of the more cosmopolitan places in Washington, it can also be insular and even provincial. That is certainly a function of the fact that the Voice historically broadcast only overseas and had no real domestic constituency.

Q: Were Foreign Service Officers assigned to VOA?

O'CONNELL: Historically, most of VOA's staff was made up of civil servants, but there were always FSOs working there, too, typically as heads of language services while serving on Washington tours. Even before USIA went out of business, however, that practice was becoming rarer, and now of course it is non-existent.

Q: Didn't the presence of FSOs, whose mission is after all quite distinct from those of VOA's journalists, cause friction?

O'CONNELL: Not as much as one might think. What's more, FSOs, who had typically served in the countries to which their VOA language services broadcast and who were usually fluent in the services' languages, were able to bring recent, real-world experience to the language services. They actually enriched the services' broadcast programming.

Q: But don't VOA broadcasters see themselves as journalists and not advocates?

O'CONNELL: They do, emphatically so. VOA's people, especially in the modern era -- in contrast to the Cold War years -- regard themselves as journalists whose main pursuit is gathering and broadcasting accurate, objective and comprehensive news and information. VOA's journalists chafe at the very expression "public diplomacy," along with any suggestion that what they do can be placed under that rubric. Moreover, the fact

that many of VOA's people have come from the very countries to which they broadcast makes for a heady and sometimes troublesome mixture and dynamic.

Q: I spent nine years in the Balkans and can only imagine what VOA's services in those languages must have been like.

O'CONNELL: Talk about scorpions in a bottle. When I would escort visitors through VOA, and as they looked through the studio windows and saw people reading copy with earphones on, I would often say something like, "One of the many things that makes the Voice of America interesting is that we have people from widely different cultures and countries -- some of whom do not care for each other because of long-running historical reasons. Some of these people have to share scarce studio space and so are in very close physical proximity to each other."

For example, there were Turks and Greeks (the Greek service was subsequently eliminated), whose people back in Turkey and Greece do not care for each other, but at VOA they had to find a way to be colleagues and even work together, and they did. The question we would always get from visitors at junctures like was, for example, "Do you speak Albanian?" I would respond, "No, I don't speak Albanian." The next question would usually be, "Well, how do you know that what that woman in the studio is saying what she is supposed to be saying?" The best answer I could think of as an explanation was, "We can't, no one can, and no one here speaks 45 languages or has the time to review all of the broadcast copy every day. But if somebody does make a mistake, either willfully or in error, we'll find out about it pretty quickly, because our listeners and our viewers pay close attention, and they will let us know quickly, and these days they have e-mail or text messaging, so they can get in touch almost instantly."

Q: I would imagine that working at the VOA might cause personal conflicts for some of the language broadcasters. They are, after all, broadcasting into their former homelands.

O'CONNELL: From time to time, yes. I recall the time in the early 1990s, when U.S. and NATO aircraft were bombing Belgrade in response to Serbian attacks on the Bosnian Serbs. The national and international media knew that we were broadcasting into the former Yugoslavia, and they wanted to come in and shoot video of the broadcasts. On one occasion, a crew from ABC had arrived and wanted to shoot the evening news show in Serbian. As was our custom in the public affairs office, we asked the broadcast talent in the control room if we could escort outside news crews into the area, promising all the while that they would be quiet and unobtrusive. The first thing I noticed as I walked into the control room was that one of the Serbian broadcasters was in tears, and quite distraught. The ABC producer sensitively said that he would not tape anyone's face and would certainly understand if anyone did not wish to be taped at all. That seemed to work. Then, as I quietly went into the TV studio to ask permission from the talent already seated on the news set as they waited the show's start, I did not even have a chance to speak, when one of the broadcasters barked to me, "Don't even think about it." The point of all this was inescapable: here were a group of Serbians, working for a U.S. government agency, broadcasting into their former homeland news of a bombing campaign, in which

U.S. aircraft were participating, and possibly dropping ordinance on their own loved ones back home. Although most of the broadcasters were entirely professional and able to do their jobs, the conflict was simply too stark and too much for a few of them. VOA management understood and gave the broadcasters the option of not taking part in the news shows in which news of the NATO bombing broadcast was being carried.

Q: I gather that there are also people who listen and monitor and will let VOA know immediately if there are errors in a broadcast.

O'CONNELL: Right. Beginning with the listeners and viewers themselves, who are often the best monitors. As you know from having lived in many of these parts of the world, people on the other end of the broadcasts, especially in denied areas, pay much more attention to the words than we Americans might, so flooded with information as we are. I remember once some years ago, when we received an e-mail from a fellow in Haifa, Israel, who listened to VOA in English (VOA doesn't broadcast in Hebrew although it did years ago). He wrote, "On June 22nd at 3:00 a.m. you referred to Yasser Arafat as the Palestinian president. You people need to get your facts straight: he is the president of the Palestinian Authority."

Q: But it still points out that somebody is keeping track.

O'CONNELL: Indeed. The listeners, viewers and VOA website users pay close and constant attention. For VOA's part, the broadcasters and editors are given enormous responsibility for accuracy and quality control. Also, all language services and other entities at VOA, including the news room, are subject to a formal review at least once a year. Outside language-qualified people are brought in to look at a lengthy sampling of the broadcast copy, and they undertake critical reviews of it. They also look at the broadcasters' and editors' performance and adherence to VOA's editorial standards.

Q: It's a job, and they don't want to lose their job.

O'CONNELL: Yes, and the broadcasters take their work seriously, especially since they are broadcasting into their former homelands.

Q: I gather they are a proud group, especially the broadcasters who come from other lands.

O'CONNELL: They are certainly that, and many of them also take themselves quite seriously. Historically, there has been at VOA what I used to call the self-importance syndrome among some of the language broadcasters, especially those who actually *were* important personages in their own countries, including government leaders, writers, artists, intellectuals, etc. Their notoriety in their former countries often continues because of their VOA broadcasts. Sometimes a broadcaster would make clear -- often in not-so-subtle ways to such lesser mortals as members of the public affairs staff -- that he or she was a very big deal back home and that we should show proper deference and respect.

Q: But many of them really were celebrities back home, right?

O'CONNELL: Right, there are people at VOA who were -- and still are -- well known in their home countries, in great part because of their VOA broadcasts. Elez Biberaj, who is from Albania -- actually, Kosovo, is one of them. Although Elez is no longer a broadcaster (he is head of VOA's European division), he still enjoys rock-star-like status in Albania and Kosovo. Even today, when he goes to Albania -- which he was unable to do during the Enver Hoxha dictatorship -- he is mobbed by people. As far as the Albanians and the people of Kosovo are concerned, Elez is bigger than U 2.

Q: Let's talk about the movement of resources, retention and all, and all of a sudden we are looking at Albania, Mongolia....What were some of the ebbs and flows?

O'CONNELL: The sudden fall of the Berlin Wall presented a crucial juncture for VOA. The Cold War had been the effective *raison d'etre* for VOA and other western broadcasters. When it suddenly ended, the major international broadcaster around the world, VOA among them, had to scramble to adapt to the new reality. Questions were being raised in Congress and elsewhere about whether there would be a need to keep investing in broadcasting, or for the need to support the broadcasters at all.

Over twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin wall, it is fair to say that the broadcasters are still dealing with the aftereffects.

We all know that large organizations can be resistant to change, and VOA and the other western broadcasters were no different. Back then, someone compared VOA to an aircraft carrier which was steaming along at 30 knots under clear and unambiguous orders, when it suddenly received new orders to reverse course. It takes a long time to turn an aircraft carrier around.

So it took a long time to turn the Voice of America around -- and I am not still sure that VOA has changed as much as it needs to. The same, in my view, goes for the other U.S.-government-supported broadcasting services such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the others that have been established in recent years, e.g., Radio Free Asia and the Middle East Broadcasting Network, with its Arabic-language radio and television services. With the Obama Administration's recent announcement of its intention to establish normal diplomatic relations with Cuba, the future of Radio and TV Marti is unclear.

Q: Is there any tie, official or unofficial, between Radio Free Liberty/Radio Liberty and the others with VOA?

O'CONNELL: That is a central question. Historically -- and in the settled and predictable world of the Cold War -- each of the U.S. government-supported broadcasters had its function. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were established as so-called "surrogate broadcasters" to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union respectively. Those stations used to broadcast to those areas as if they were domestic broadcasters for say, Hungary or

Poland or Russia, with the difference that they would broadcast information that was objective and not put out by their governments.

During the Cold War, the unspoken but certain relationship between VOA and “the radios,” as they were always called, was that there was no relationship, and purposely so. VOA had nothing to do with RFE/RL, and vice versa. Curiously enough, a culture of separation and even superiority grew between the two sides, with RFE/RL clearly having far more supporters in the Congress than VOA. Then-Senator Joe Biden was a major supporter of the radios and once said on the floor of the Senate that the journalists working for RFE/RL were genuine journalists, while those at VOA were not. He reinforced the point by proclaiming on the Senate floor, “there is no such thing as a government journalist.”

In that statement he was embracing the fiction that since the people who work for “the radios,” as they were called, were not U.S. government employees, they were “real” journalists, while VOA’s claim that its people were journalists was bogus because its people were government employees and therefore, he implied, incapable of being objective. It was a tortuous but effective logic.

RFE/RL’s favorable post-Cold War position can in large part be attributed to the strong network of support it had built in the Congress over many years. Much of the credit for the radios’ effective lobbying has to go to former RFE/RL president Thomas Dine who had come to the radios from what was once the granddaddy of all Washington lobbying groups, the America-Israel Political Action Committee, or AIPAC. Under Dine’s take-no-prisoners leadership, AIPAC wrote the book about building support among members of Congress, and he brought those same skills to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. With all due respect to the people who were at VOA during the time in the ‘80s and ‘90s that Dine was at RFE/RL, VOA turned out to be no match for him.

It was not that VOA did not have supporters, however. In the early post-Cold War years, a steady stream of newly-free Eastern European leaders made a point of scheduling VOA during their first visits to Washington. I remember when Czech President Vaclav Havel came to VOA, accompanied by the then-U.S. Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, and movingly described how important Voice of America broadcasters were to his people during the long years of the Cold War, as well as to him personally during his years of imprisonment by the Czech authorities.

In a curious anomaly, and despite such public and heartfelt expressions of praise and support for VOA from foreign leaders, RFE/RL was in a much better position when the Cold War ended than the Voice to survive and find new missions. Despite keeping its old name, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty has long since stopped broadcasting in its traditional Eastern European languages and, to a lesser degree, those of the former Soviet Union. Now, for example, it broadcasts to Afghanistan.

The point of all this is that around 1990, when all U.S.-government overseas broadcasting was placed under the Broadcasting Board of Governors -- supposedly in a move to

consolidate the broadcasters and bring about economies of scale -- the radios' private company model quickly became Board's preferred arrangement. The typical governor had, after all, come from the private sector, so it was no surprise they preferred private companies over a "stodgy" government agency like VOA.

That view conveniently overlooked the fact that the radios and the newcomers in the broadcasting family -- to Asia and the Middle East -- were no more private companies than the Department of Agriculture. The real allure of the radios to Board members was their perceived flexibility and nimbleness, especially in personnel matters. The employees of the radios, in contrast to those at VOA, could be easily and quickly fired or moved from one position to another without the annoying -- to the governors, anyway -- need to adhere to government regulations and processes.

Far from the BBG achieving consolidation of the broadcasters -- something that would seem to make sense in this time of scarce resources -- there has been a plethora of broadcasters (the Arabic and Asian broadcast entities) which are soaking up scarce resources.

Q: Where is all of this going to end?

O'CONNELL: Where this is going I don't know because there are strong forces against meaningful consolidation of U.S. government-supported international broadcasting, among them the fact that the part-time Board supervises a mix of broadcasting entities, both public and "private," without a full-time CEO at the top. (Note: in February 2015, after a change in its legislation, the Board was finally able to appoint former NBC News president Andy Lack as its full-time CEO. Unfortunately after a little more than a month on the job, Mr. Lack resigned abruptly to return to NBC in the wake of the suspension of NBC news anchor, Brian Williams. Recently, the Board has hired a replacement, so we will have to see how he works out.)

Q: What was your job at VOA?

O'CONNELL: I was director of VOA's public affairs office and press spokesperson. There was rarely a dull moment during the years that I was at VOA, but there were a couple of stories that really dominated my time there and the time of the people that I worked with.

Q: Talk about those stories.

O'CONNELL: In addition to the Mullah Omar story, another important one occurred not long after I arrived at VOA. It concerned a long-running gender-discrimination class action suit named Hartman v. Wick that had been filed years before but which was only settled in the early '90s. The court found that there had been a pattern of gender-based discrimination in hiring and promotion in the Agency, especially at VOA.

Ms. Hartman was a woman who in the mid-1970s alleged that she had been the victim of gender discrimination when she applied for a position at USIA, which at the time of the suit included the Voice of America. After expensively and unsuccessfully litigating the case for several years, the government decided to settle the case, which, at some \$500 million, made it the largest gender discrimination case in U.S. history. One lawyer told me later that, had the government continued the litigation instead of settling the case, the final amount could have reached one billion dollars.

Although Ms. Hartman was no longer part of the suit by the time it was settled, some 100 women -- most of them either VOA employees or unsuccessful applicants for positions at VOA -- remained in the class. All of them shared in the cash settlement and several were hired or promoted retroactively with back pay. Once word of the settlement got out, our phones never stopped ringing.

Q: I'm guessing that a lot of time had passed by the time the case was settled and that people had moved on, perhaps working elsewhere. How did the agency manage rehiring people?

O'CONNELL: Surprisingly, there weren't that many problems, partly because of the time that had elapsed between the filing of the suit and the settlement. Some of the litigants had died in the ensuing years.

Q: How did the Hartman case get started?

O'CONNELL: In 1975 or early 1976, by coincidence, I happened to be working for the USIA editor who -- although he did not cause the conditions which would eventually be the basis of the Hartman case -- inadvertently got the ball rolling. After returning from Brazil, I had just begun my Washington assignment, as editor of the Portuguese-language version of USIA's worldwide magazine, Horizons, for distribution in Portugal. I worked in the offices of the larger Horizons staff and attended their staff meetings.

At a Horizons staff meeting in the fall of 1975 or early 1976, the magazine's editor-in-chief, who had recently joined USIA after years as a foreign correspondent with Newsweek, mentioned in passing that he had just had an informational interview with a young woman named Hartman about writing and editing positions at Horizons. The editor went on to say, with an air of bemusement rather than concern, that he had told Ms. Hartman that "we already have too many women on the staff." (There must have been a gasp in the room; most of Horizon's editorial staff was made up of women.)

According to the story, Ms. Hartman went home that evening and told her husband, who happened to be an attorney, of her experience speaking with the editor of Horizons. Although the rest, of course, is history, Ms. Hartman's conversation with the editor was not the basis of the eventual suit, but it was the start of a closer examination of VOA's long-time practices concerning the hiring of women, which became the heart of the massively successful suit and settlement. That one kept us busy for several months.

Q: When you were in the job at the Voice of America the suit was on-going?

O'CONNELL: I arrived at VOA in the fall of 1989, just before the government decided to settle, but by that time the suit had been going on for several years.

Q: That was a period the whole government was going through this. The State Department had the same thing and it was bad; there is no doubt about it.

O'CONNELL: When Charles Wick became USIA director in 1981, his name was attached to the Hartman suit. Most of the people in the suit's class already worked at VOA or had been turned down for jobs there. The group included some American-born female broadcasters, but the bulk of them, as I recall, were foreign-born female broadcasters who worked for VOA's East and Central Asian broadcast services, such as Dari, Hindi and so on. They had signed on to the suit.

Part of the government's defense strategy in the case, at least with respect to VOA, was that the cultures represented in those services ascribed to women a different and less-respected status, both in society and in the work place. The argument was that, in such cultural environments, including VOA's, placing a woman in positions of seniority over men would be unacceptable. The federal judge presiding over the case had no patience for that line of argument, saying, "This is the United States. We go by American law here."

Q: I would think that another argument, probably fallacious, saying that if you are broadcasting to Saudi Arabia to have a woman broadcast doesn't carry the same authority as a man speaking Arabic or something like that.

O'CONNELL: That is correct, but it didn't work, either. I knew a couple of the women in the class, and for some of them who had stayed with VOA despite not having been promoted, the settlement was quite a financial windfall.

Q: Did you receive press guidance from the lawyers and the Justice Department?

O'CONNELL: We did, regularly. Neither I nor the colleague with whom I worked most closely were attorneys, and we were always careful not to speak or act like attorneys except to the extent that we got the guidance and the briefing from the lawyers in our general counsel's office.

Q: Was there a time when the agency said that it had been wrong in its practices and that it needed to mend its ways?

O'CONNELL: Although I understand that there were some people in both the Agency and the Justice Department who steadfastly -- if not stubbornly -- wanted to continue the litigation and not settle, apparently believing that the luck of the government would change, wiser heads prevailed. I don't know what the anti-settlement camp was thinking, but it didn't seem to me that they had a very good case. I do recall that our press guidance

did say that the Agency was already well on its way to bringing its hiring practices into compliance with the law, but I don't recall a lot of sack cloth and ashes in the Agency's overall stance.

Q: Where did the money come from that was used in the settlement? Out of the Agency's budget?

O'CONNELL: The Justice Department had a fund to pay settlements in suits against the government, so the funds did not have to come from an agency's appropriation. I later heard that the use of those funds to pay settlements was subsequently changed to make it tougher on agencies so that for future such suits they would have to pay them out of agency funds.

Q: How about Wick's successors as USIA's director? What were they like?

O'CONNELL: With the exception of Ambassador Henry Catto, there was no comparison between Wick and the directors who followed him after he left in the fall of 1988. They were a mostly forgettable bunch.

Of course the bench-mark director in the Agency's modern era is Edward R. Murrow, who was, by the time President Kennedy nominated him, already quite ill, so he was sadly not at USIA all that long.

Q: But Murrow did give the Agency a name, right?

O'CONNELL: He did give it a name, and his own stellar reputation lives on, along with his many memorable quotes. Although Murrow regularly sat in on National Security Council meetings, USIA was never an actual member of the NSC, which put him and every other Agency director, including Charles Wick, in the unenviable position of trying to communicate the government's policies and actions, sometimes without much -- or any -- prior knowledge of them, the same situation that Murrow faced in the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

In the wake of that fiasco, Murrow ruefully observed, "If USIA is going to have to deal with the crash landings of foreign policy, it will also need to be in on the take-offs."

Except for Murrow, whose top spot in the pantheon of USIA directors is assured, it is likely that historians will judge Wick's successes to be more significant than his foolishness.

Q: Who succeeded Wick at USIA?

O'CONNELL: Wick's successor was a George H. W. Bush appointee named Bruce Gelb. His older brother was Richard Gelb who at that time was the chairman of Bristol Myers (the Gelb brothers were the sons of the couple who invented Clairol hair-coloring products, which later was the basis of Bristol Myers).

Q: So you worked for Gelb for a while after Wick left and you went to VOA?

O'CONNELL: After Bruce Gelb's arrival in early 1989, I remained in USIA's public affairs office until the fall of that year, when I moved to VOA to work for Dick Carlson. Although a new political appointee had been named to head the Agency's public affairs office, I often had occasion to work with and get to know Mr. Gelb

One day, a few months after I had moved to VOA, Mr. Gelb called to ask me to return to the Agency's public affairs office. He explained that he was about to fire the current appointee and wanted me to come back. I was pretty certain that I would neither accept the job nor that the White House would permit a career person to fill a job long occupied by Schedule C appointees, but I agreed to meet with Mr. Gelb.

He confidently assured me that there would be no objection from the White House to my appointment as USIA's public affairs director. Before I could call him the next morning to decline politely, he called me to say that the White House had nixed my idea. I remained at VOA until I retired some twelve years later.

Q: What was the relationship between Gelb and Carlson?

O'CONNELL: Terrible. The two men were like oil and water. Almost immediately after taking office in 1989, Gelb clashed with Carlson. At the time Gelb joined the Agency, several language service cuts had been proposed at VOA. Gelb was very much for the cuts, and Carlson very much against, making himself instantly popular if not heroic among VOA troops.

The sniping between Gelb and Carlson became public and messy. In what became the final *denouement* of the conflict, Gelb and Carlson decided to hash out their differences in an open town meeting in the VOA auditorium. Both Gelb and Carlson asked me to accompany them on the stage of the auditorium, which was awkward: I think I was sitting between the two of them. To the delight of the VOA faithful, fireworks started immediately. To the extent that the encounter was a debate, the result was probably a draw.

The Washington Post covered the session, and an article appeared the next day.

The reaction from the White House was swift. Gelb and Carlson were quickly -- and separately -- summoned to the office of Chase Untermeyer, then director of presidential personnel. Untermeyer was a fellow Texan and an old friend of the Bush's. The summons to the White House was the rough equivalent of a trip to the wood shed, although its outcome was hardly wood-shed-like for either Gelb or Carlson. Gelb was sent to Brussels to be U.S. ambassador to Belgium, and Carlson became U.S. ambassador to the Seychelles Islands.

Q: So Chase Untermeyer became VOA director after Carlson's departure?

O'CONNELL: He did. Unfortunately for Chase, since he had had a longtime interest in VOA, his move came at the beginning of what turned out to be the last year of the George H.W. Bush Administration, so his tenure was brief.

Q: Who did Bill Clinton appoint to direct the VOA?

O'CONNELL: President Clinton's first of three appointments to the VOA job was Geoff Cowan, who had been a friend of the Clintons at Yale law school. He came to VOA from the University of Southern California where he taught in the communications program. Geoff was a genuine renaissance man. He had, for example, both written a respected book about Clarence Darrow and was part-owner of a California minor league baseball team. He also had a personal connection with VOA. His father, Louis Cowan, was the second director back in the 1940s, and his sister, Holly Cowan Shulman, wrote a definitive book about VOA's French-language broadcasts during World War II.

Geoff was followed by Sandy Ungar who had been the long-time dean of American University's School for International Service and, years before, was one of the original anchors on National Public Radio's "All things Considered." Sandy brought a broadcaster's understanding of VOA's mission.

Q: And the third of Clinton's VOA appointments?

O'CONNELL: The third of President Clinton's appointees to the VOA director's job was Evelyn Lieberman, a former high school English teacher from Hicksville, Long Island, and, later, assistant White House chief of staff under Clinton.

Q: Didn't Ms. Lieberman achieve some notoriety stemming from the Monica Lewinsky matter?

O'CONNELL: She did. Evelyn would later become known not for her association with VOA but for her previous position at the White House at the time of the Monica Lewinsky affair. It was Evelyn Lieberman who, once she discovered the relationship between President Clinton and Ms. Lewinsky, transferred the intern from the White House to the Pentagon. Evelyn's prescient action would later prove to be a critical juncture in the Lewinsky-Clinton story.

Although I did not know it then, Evelyn Lieberman's arrival at VOA would unexpectedly provide me with a brief and peripheral entrée into the story.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, for when Evelyn took the VOA job, no one outside of the White House had heard of an intern named Monica Lewinsky, her relationship with the President, or Evelyn's role in the story.

Not long after taking the VOA job, Evelyn invited her predecessors to come together to share their experiences at the Voice. The day before the meeting, one of Evelyn's assistants asked me if, during the session with the former directors, I would escort the fiancée of Peter Straus, on a tour of VOA's studios. Peter was one of President Carter's two VOA appointees. He was from a prominent New York family. His grandfather had been co-owner of both Macy's and the Abraham and Straus department stores, and his first wife was a member of the Sulzberger family, the owners of the New York Times. I had never worked for him, but I had met him a few times over the years. Evelyn's assistant gave me the name of Peter's fiancée (significantly enough, it was not Lewinsky, but at that time, the name Lewinsky would not have meant anything to me anyway) and said that I was to meet her (the fiancée) at VOA's C Street entrance the following day.

Later, as I stood at the door greeting the former directors, Peter arrived with his fiancée and introduced us. She told me that she was looking forward to the tour of VOA and that she would see me later in the morning. Suffice it to say that I never saw the woman again. When she did not appear at my office, I decided that she had lost interest in seeing VOA's studios, and I forgot about the whole matter.

Much later, after the Lewinsky story broke, including Evelyn Lieberman's role in it, I learned that when Peter Straus and his fiancée had gone upstairs to meet Evelyn before the session with the former directors, the fiancée suddenly confronted Evelyn -- who until that moment had no idea that that Peter's fiancée was also the mother of Monica Lewinsky -- and (apparently angrily) asked why she (Evelyn) had moved "my daughter out of the White House and to the Pentagon."

Evelyn, who was nothing if not quick on her feet, reportedly kept quiet, retreated into her office, and closed the door. Weeks later, the story broke, and we all learned who Monica Lewinsky was and what had occurred at the White House before Evelyn Lieberman moved her to the Pentagon, and, finally, that Peter Straus's fiancée was Monica's mother. My brief moment in the sun passed quickly and mostly unknown to anyone except a few people in my office.

Q: How did VOA handle the Lewinsky-Clinton story?

O'CONNELL: VOA covered it straight. Once the story broke, we saw a spike in inquiries from U.S. and overseas media asking whether and how VOA was covering the story. More than a few callers assumed that VOA would be downplaying it.

On the morning the Lewinsky story broke, Evelyn Lieberman attended VOA's morning news meeting. Attendance was much heavier than usual. All eyes and ears were on Evelyn. Once the session was called to order, she said simply, "This is an important story, and we will follow it where the facts take us." She then she left the room. That was the only thing I ever heard her say about the Lewinsky story.

Q: Talk a bit about the changes in the late 1990s in both U.S. public diplomacy and U.S.-government sponsored overseas broadcasting. Both VOA and USIA were affected, right?

O'CONNELL: In October 1999, USIA went out of business, with all of its non-broadcasting elements being folded into the State Department and placed more or less under the supervision of the newly created position of Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

Q: USIA's final director was Joe Duffy?

O'CONNELL: He was. He left no footprints.

Q: What happened to VOA and WORLDNET Television when the rest of USIA were put under the State Department?

O'CONNELL: They were placed under the jurisdiction of a free-standing federal agency known as the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which had been created by Congress some years before. If the public diplomacy undersecretary has an unwieldy title, the BBG has proven to be an unwieldy and even dysfunctional creation made up of four Democrats, four Republicans -- all part-time and all appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Secretary of State is an *ex officio* ninth member of the Board, although he or she routinely designates the public diplomacy undersecretary to attend the monthly Board meetings. By now, some eight or nine people have held the public diplomacy undersecretary job, most of them only briefly. I don't know what the average time that the incumbents have stayed in the job, but I believe it is about 16 months.

Q: Why such short tenures?

O'CONNELL: I think they have been the result of the newly-minted undersecretaries arriving at the State Department only to realize that, despite their presidential appointment and confirmation by the Senate, the reality is that they don't command any troops. That plus the fact that public diplomacy work is -- I think it is fair to say -- (still) not regarded in the State Department as a good career move by those who perform the Department's traditionally "elite" areas of political and economic work. In addition, Foreign Service Officers do not, under this arrangement, remain in public diplomacy work for the duration of their careers, but only for stints here and there, so there is far less specialization in public diplomacy than was the norm when USIA was still around.

Another problem that affects public diplomacy's role in the Department and overseas is resources, which, just as they are for the entire foreign affairs account, are scarcer than ever. When Congress looks to cut, it has often looked at what can be done with a few fewer Fulbrighters and probably more for, say, security.

Q: Let's talk about Radio Marti and TV Marti. I have talked to Foreign Service officers over the years who as soon as you mention those they say they are worthless.

O'CONNELL: They usually roll their eyes.

Q: Isn't this a welfare program for Cuban exiles in Florida, and they really don't penetrate or anything. How did you view it?

O'CONNELL: Radio Marti went on the air in 1985 and predated TV Marti by about 15 years. The radio broadcasts were a good idea, and, early on, whatever feed-back they could get from Cuban refugees arriving in the U.S. indicated that people in Cuba were listening and that it was, despite Cuban jamming and government harassment of people who dared to listen, becoming an important source of news.

At the same time, the very creation of Radio -- and later TV Marti, was a textbook example of how a group of exiles, with considerable help from domestic supporters gained power in the U.S. political system and made it work for them. In this instance, it was the Cubans, principally in south Florida, and their once-powerful lobbying group -- the Cuban-American National Foundation, which was founded and headed by a veteran of the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba named Jorge Mas Canosa.

The Foundation took pages from the how-to-lobby manual of the aforementioned AIPAC and became a respected group in the halls of Congress and the White House during the 1980s. Mas Canosa's heyday coincided with Charles Wick's, and the two of them got along famously. Mas Canosa died a decade or so ago and with his death, the Foundation's clout diminished. While he was alive, however, members of Congress -- from both sides of the aisle and from parts of the country far from south Florida -- would compete for face time with Jorge during his frequent visits to Washington.

Mas Canosa pretty much single-handedly made Radio and then TV Marti happen. It is an amazing story, and someday the mother of all Radio and TV Marti histories will be written.

Q: Where did the political power of Mas come from?

O'CONNELL: He was a strong, even ruthless leader, and he knew how to raise money. It was said that, during the Cuban American National Foundation's strongest period, it had a cash turn-over that rivaled AIPAC's.

Mas Canosa also knew how to reach out to politicians of all stripes. He knew that he had to broaden support for Radio and TV Marti and show that the broadcasters were not merely the creation of a group of desperate Cuban refugees but were, rather, part of the U.S. effort to free Cuba from the Castro brothers. His challenge was to persuade members of Congress from across the country to buy into the creation of the Martis. He pulled it off. For example, former Democratic Senator Fritz Hollings of South Carolina was a Mas intimate and strong supporter of the Martis. I don't believe there are many Cubans in Charleston.

Q: How does this reflect from your perspective? When you were doing your public affairs work, did you always have to keep the Cuban factor in mind?

O'CONNELL: Very much so. During the '80s and well into the '90s, Radio and TV Marti were being covered -- heavily and entirely critically -- by the Miami Herald and the national media. Both broadcasters were at that time in Washington, with Radio Marti located a few blocks from VOA. At times during those years, I practically lived at Radio Marti's headquarters, so frequent and numerous were the media interviews and visiting camera crews. In the early years, Radio Marti was afforded a begrudging respect by the U.S. media for its apparent penetration into Cuba, despite the government's heavy jamming.

Once TV Marti came on the air, however, and it became apparent that the Cuban government's jamming of it was effective, the U.S. networks' evening news programs -- along with "60 Minutes" somewhat later -- all wanted to do stories on TV Marti for their popular "fleecing of America" slots. The two U.S. broadcasters to Cuba were, after all, receiving, year after year, some \$25 million dollars of taxpayer money, including about \$11 million for the TV broadcasts that few Cubans were seeing. As far as I know, that continues today.

Every year at budget time, a few brave members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike, would proclaim that that would be the year that Radio and TV Marti would stop wasting money and close down. A Democrat from Arkansas named Bill Campbell took his turn, followed by a Republican House member from Colorado, and then Republican Congressman (and now Senator) Jeff Flake from Arizona. And every year, in "Perils-of-Pauline" fashion, the broadcasters would at the last minute get their appropriation. There seemed to no way to stop them, and they are still in business. The question these days is whether President Obama's announcement of changes in U.S. policy Cuba might finally bring about the demise of Radio and TV Marti. I doubt it, although a former colleague who follows Radio and TV Marti closely and who is well known among the Marti employees has told me recently of receiving many calls from worried colleagues about whether they will continue to have jobs.

Q: I've talked to people who worked at the U.S. Interest Section in Havana, and they'd run around and see whether they could catch TV Marti's signal. I gather the radio was a somewhat different matter, but that the TV apparently did not get through.

O'CONNELL: Right. No one could see it, despite attempts to broadcast from a dirigible anchored on Cudjoe Key and sent aloft every evening, and an airborne transmitter in a cargo plane flying in circles over the Florida Straits.

Q: No one could see it, and if anybody had a fairly good antenna they could probably pick up Miami commercial TV anyway.

O'CONNELL: They could, and that was well known. The answer we used to give to reporters' questions about why TV Marti continued if virtually nobody -- or less than one percent of Cubans and only under certain weather conditions -- could see it. With a straight face, I would ask them -- only to have to listen to their loud guffaws -- whether,

during the long years of Soviet jamming of VOA, anyone seriously suggested that the Voice cease broadcasting. I would quickly answer my own question by saying, "Of course not." Once off the phone, though, I would laugh, too.

Q: What was Mas Canosa like?

O'CONNELL: He was relentless, both about keeping Radio and Marti on the air, but also in defending his fellow Cuban-Americans. He was ever vigilant for any stereotyping hint that Cubans were "crazy" or overly emotional or too zealous in their anger at the Castro regime, or for anyone whom he regarded as insufficiently supportive of Radio and TV Marti. His angry reaction to any of these would often bring on a quick charge of racism, along with, "you don't understand what it is like to live under Castro," or, "You haven't lost your country like we did, so, while you are a nice person, you just you don't understand."

When Jorge was at the peak of his powers, he got into a very public row with the Miami Herald. I don't recall the precise basis of the rift, but at the very least, Jorge regarded the Herald as far too liberal, especially on correcting on Castro's Cuba. Never one to mince his words, he began declaring that the paper's coverage of Cuban-Americans was biased and that the newspaper was sympathetic to the Castro regime. He called for a boycott of the paper and then financed a lengthy campaign of billboards and signs on busses throughout Miami proclaiming that the Herald "does not tell the truth," and urging Miamians not to read the paper. Things started to get rough when coin boxes in the Herald's vending machines were vandalized. There were also threats of violence against the newspaper and its staff.

(An after-action report on the dispute compiled by a human rights organization revealed that Dade County authorities had urged Herald publisher David Lawrence and his wife to start their cars by remote control as a precaution against possible bombs being planted under their vehicles.)

That sounds extreme, but there were some in the Cuban community in Miami who believed that there could be no compromise with anyone who advocated a moderate approach to dealing with the Castro regime. With the passage of time, the generation of zealots who took part in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba are passing from the scene. Some of the rhetoric has also been toned down -- although it was stoked anew recently by President Obama's announced changes in I.S. policy toward Cuba -- but in their day, those guys played hardball.

Q: What happened with Mas Canosa's fight with the Miami Herald?

O'CONNELL: The campaign went on for many months, and Herald publisher David Lawrence fought back, principally through editorials. Finally, Mas and Lawrence called a truce, probably when Jorge decided that he had made his point, but I am not sure that the Herald ever quite recovered from it.

Q: Did you feel within the Cuban community the anti-Castro element obviously was there but almost more was the fact that the creation of Radio and TV Marti was something done as a benefit to being a Cuban in the United States?

O'CONNELL: Not only that but there was also the notion among many Cubans of Mas Canosa's generation that they were entitled to have Radio and TV Marti and that the U.S. government had a responsibility -- even a solemn duty -- to create the broadcasters. Many of these same Cubans believed that they deserved jobs at Radio and TV Marti and/or to be closely involved in how the stations were run and what they said to Cubans on the island.

Not surprisingly, critics of Radio and TV Marti, both in the news media and elsewhere, were convinced that Jorge Mas Canosa was involved in the broadcasters' daily programming and editorial approach. That in fact was the second-most-asked question from reporters over the years, after the one about the broadcasters' staying power. A third had to do with the move of the Marti broadcast studios and executive offices from Washington to Miami under the guise of re-locating to the heart of the Cuban-American community, ostensibly because it was nearer to both Cuba and the principal pool of Cuban broadcast talent.

The move had apparently been on Mas Canosa's mind for some time, and, around 2000, he got started, both to convince USIA management and the Congress of the need to move Radio and TV Marti, although I don't believe he lived to see it happen. For critics of the broadcasters, the move to Miami eliminated any question that the stations were under the control of the U.S. government. The Cuban community now had its own broadcasters.

I recall a chilling conversation I had around that time with one of Mas Canosa's top lieutenants, a zealous young acolyte -- and more recently and briefly a Member of Congress -- named David Rivera. Rivera held the title of chief of staff of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, the umbrella entity that supervised the two broadcasters, but his real job was to be Mas Canosa's man on the inside, one of many who carried out that duty over the years.

I was dealing with the usual questions from the Miami Herald about charges of Mas Canosa's allegedly intimate involvement with the Marti's editorial policy and the alleged practice of ensuring that supporters of Mas Canosa were frequent on-air guests and that critics of the Cuba American National Foundation were kept off. Rivera wanted me to issue the usual denial of any involvement by Mas Canosa in the stations' programming or editorial policies. I remember urging Rivera to keep in mind that Radio and TV Marti were U.S. government agencies, paid for by American tax payers, and they didn't belong exclusively to Cubans." He responded evenly, "You are wrong Joe. They are ours."

(Years before, in a similarly disturbing moment, I sat in on Washington Post reporter Guy Gugliotta's interview of a senior Radio Marti program host about whether the broadcaster genuinely followed the principles of accuracy and objectivity contained in the VOA Charter and to which Radio Marti was supposed to adhere. The program host had been named in an article critical of Radio Marti's strident programming. After the interview --

in which the program host stubbornly refused to concede that the station should follow VOA's editorial standards -- and after Gugliotta had left the building, the program host turned to me and said (in Spanish), "the problem with Mr. Gugliotta is that he thinks that Radio Marti should be like the Washington Post or the New York Times. Let me tell you something, Mr. O'Connell," he went on as he tapped his finger on his desk for emphasis, "this is not the Washington Post or the New York Times and it is not supposed to be."

Q: What did you tell the Herald reporter who had asked about Mas Canosa's involvement in the Marti broadcasts?

O'CONNELL: My response was the one I always gave with a straight face, that Mas Canosa had no involvement in the management or broadcasts of Radio or TV Marti and that his unpaid position as chairman of the Broadcasting to Cuba Advisory Board was strictly that, advisory. Although he did not laugh, I knew the reporter was not convinced.

Q: Mas Canosa died some years ago? Did his passing from the scene diminish the clout of the Foundation?

O'CONNELL: Without question. The Foundation still exists, but with significantly diminished power and resources. Today there are other Cuban voices in Miami and on the national scene, including the New Jersey Democratic Senator Robert Menendez and Florida Republican and now presidential candidate Marco Rubio, although both of them have been outspoken in their opposition to President Obama's opening to Cuba.

Q: And what happened to the Miami Herald in the wake of its critical coverage of Radio and TV Marti and its public feud with Jorge Mas Canosa?

O'CONNELL: Quite apart from its feud with Mas Canosa, the Herald was coping with the same challenges that confront all American newspapers in the digital age, including decreases in both readership and advertising. The paper did establish a Spanish-language version known as El Nuevo Herald some years ago. Knight-Ridder, the chain that owned the Herald, sold the papers and got out of the newspaper business altogether. What remains is a foundation that supports journalistic training and causes. The papers are shadows of their former selves. In my final years at VOA, they had all but dropped their coverage of Radio and TV Marti, quite possibly because the broadcasters seemed impervious to any genuine oversight.

Q: Did you ever look at the programming and if nobody is seeing it, who cares what they are doing?

O'CONNELL: In one the "fleecing of America"-type stories about TV Marti that all of the networks did, an NBC reporter spent an entire week looking closely at the TV Marti operation, including watching the daily taping of the telecast and interviewing the on-air talent and management. This was before Radio and TV Marti moved to Florida. The reporter did not speak Spanish but came armed with an interpreter. I helped him understand what was going on, but I figured the best way for him to gain a grasp of the

programming and its quality was to let him listen, observe and ask questions. More than once during that week of long hours, he would, unprompted, turned to me and remark, “These guys are good; they are dedicated, and they are very professional about what they are doing.” But, he also said, “It’s sad if no one watches their stuff. I don’t know how these people come in and do this job everyday with the dedication that they so clearly have.” My sentiments exactly.

He was right: most of the Radio and TV Marti broadcasters, especially the younger ones at TV Marti, were professionals who believed in both the mission of TV Marti and in adhering to high journalistic standards.

One consistent problem with the radio broadcasts was the quality of their guests, who were usually from the Cuban community in Miami. All too many of them were local firebrands who would come into the studio and rant about getting rid of Fidel by any means necessary and that the U.S. should never negotiate with him, adding that anybody who advocated negotiations or moderation was automatically suspect. U.S. journalists covering Radio Marti would invariably ask whether more moderate or even pro-Castro Cuban-Americans were invited to appear on the programs. The answer from Radio Marti people was always no, that the listeners tuned in to hear people who opposed the regime and that giving them any other opinions, let alone a pro-Castro view, would be an anathema that would drive them away, so we can’t have that, they said.

It remains to be seen whether Radio and TV Marti they will continue as U.S.-Cuban relations move toward complete normalization.

Q: Let’s turn to the other thing must have made you concentrate, and that is China.

O’CONNELL: By the time of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations and massacre, VOA had been broadcasting via short wave radio in both Mandarin and Cantonese to China for many years. Those dialects were among the very first to be broadcasts when VOA went on the air early in 1942.

By late May and early June of 1989, the dramatic Tiananmen Square story was breaking so rapidly that the then-VOA-director, Richard Carlson, in a first for VOA, placed television cameras in the radio studios and put the Chinese-language news broadcasts on the satellite to China. There was some evidence, even at that early time, that people in China could access the satellite-borne telecasts via small home dish antennas.

The set-up at VOA was primitive. There was no professional-looking backdrop, and production values were virtually non-existent, but the telecasts were getting through to some Chinese. I remember a VOA Chinese broadcaster in a tie-less shirt sitting at a table outside of the newsroom. The scene looked like something out of early TV, circa 1955.

The Chinese government was infuriated. They had been jamming VOA’s shortwave radio broadcasts for years, and they stepped up their jamming during Tiananmen. When the TV broadcasts went on the air, Beijing tried unsuccessfully to jam the satellite. Throughout,

they denied that they were jamming (they called it “technical interference beyond their control,” even as today they deny that they block VOA’s web site along with those of other western news outlets).

The broadcasts also made a lot of news in the U.S. Despite its humble beginning, VOA’s improvised operation to China turned out to be the seed of what became the broadcaster’s full-blown TV operation of today, not only for China but also for language broadcasts to other countries, most notably in Persian to Iran.

Q: Were there ever VOA broadcasts aimed at Formosa, and how about broadcasts to Tibet?

O’CONNELL: There were possibly radio broadcasts to Formosa in the ‘50s, and for the past several years, VOA has broadcast on shortwave radio in the Tibetan language, along with Uighur, the language of China’s the predominantly Muslim area.

Q: Does VOA have Tibetan-language broadcasts?

O’CONNELL: VOA has broadcast in Tibetan for over a decade. The Dalai Lama visited VOA and the Tibetan Service at least twice during my final years there, the first time right after the broadcasts started. Seeing him was extraordinary, especially so for the Tibetan staff.

Q: What was he like?

O’CONNELL: We had been told that the only thing that we were to prepare for the Dalai Lama was what the Tibetans called “white tea” which was really just hot water, maybe with a slice of lemon.

As he arrived at the Tibetan service, with the Tibetan staff eagerly awaiting him, I was standing next to a Tibetan woman of short stature. As the Dalai Lama approached the door of the service, the woman fell to the floor and. At first, I thought she had fainted, until I realized that she prostrated herself at his feet. The Dalai Lama reached out to her gently and said, “Please, please, don’t, and he helped her to her feet. His voice was deep and sense of humor excellent. His simple robe was of a beautifully woven fabric, and on his feet were -- not sandals -- but rather, a well-worn and sensible pair of Rockport shoes.

Q: Any reaction to the broadcasts from the Chinese?

O’CONNELL: Predictably, the Chinese were extremely unhappy. They immediately began jamming and, as far as I know, they continue today, although they roundly deny it. Years later, I gave a tour of VOA to a group of young Chinese government officials who were in Washington on a State Department-sponsored visit. At the start of the tour, I took the picture-snapping group into the VOA visitor center, on whose walls hung larger-than-life-sized photographs of prominent visitors from the past. Among them, right at the entrance, was an enormous photo of the Dalai Lama.

No sooner had the Chinese officials walked into the room when their two leaders saw the poster and turned to me to demand angrily -- in English -- why the photo of “this crazy, bad Tibetan monk” was being displayed at the Voice of America. Before I knew it, they were in my face, furiously spitting out their words and waving their arms. The others in the group of some 30 watched their leaders carefully, clearly waiting to take their cue. Some of them, if only half-heartedly, started in on me, too. Between the visitors’ shouts, I tried to explain that people come to VOA every day, and that everyone is welcome, including the Dalai Lama. I added that VOA broadcast in Tibetan, and that of course set them off again. There were no more smiles after that.

Q: What changes and challenges do you see coming to U.S. international broadcasting?

O’CONNELL: There has to be much more consolidation and far less duplication among the entities of U.S. government-supported international broadcasting. There are signs that the Board recognizes this.

In recent years, there has also been discussion at the BBG, in Congress and elsewhere that VOA should be “de-federalized” and re-established based on the model of RFE/RL, i.e., that it would, technically, become a “private company” which would receive an annual grant of congressionally-appropriated funds for its operations. Instead of being federal employees, VOA staff people would then become employees of a private company.

I don’t sense any ground-swell in Congress for “de-federalization” or even the elimination of VOA or the other broadcasters. I do, however, think it is an unanswered question about what the BBG and its member broadcasters will look like in five or ten years.

VOA and the other broadcasters also have a demographic problem which began to manifest itself in the years after the end of the Cold War. As the formerly closed societies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union started to open up, and some of their citizens were able to travel to Washington, one of the first places many of them wanted to visit was VOA. Among the older visitors, this made for some emotional scenes such as when the listeners would for the first time see and speak with the broadcasters to whom they had been listening for so long. Visiting listeners would often be invited into the studios and asked to join the program.

By contrast, when younger visitors from formerly closed areas would visit, they would almost unfailingly tell us that they recalled their **grandparents** listening to VOA in Russian or Polish or Hungarian. When we would ask the younger people if they listened - or, now, watched or logged on -- they would often say sheepishly that they didn’t, that they preferred to use social media or watch pop music videos on television instead. I knew then that VOA and other international broadcasters were in trouble.

Q: Turning to another topic, how did you view the effectiveness of the broadcasts and what role do they have in promoting America in the world?

O'CONNELL: Effectiveness of the broadcasts, especially as to whether they succeed in promoting America around the world, has never been easy to gauge, let alone prove. I am not even sure that causality can be applied to the broadcasts, unlike, say, the experience of spending a period in the United States as a Fulbright student or an International Visitor.

In the Fulbright program, for example, it might be possible, through pre- and post-program interviews with foreign participants coming to the U.S., to determine their "before" and "after" views of the U.S. There is of course no guarantee that every Fulbrighter or International Visitor or any kind of foreign student will come home loving America and understanding it better. There have been cases to the contrary -- including that of the Egyptian scholar Sayyid Qutb, who, although he was not a Fulbrighter, studied in Iowa in the early 1950s. He later wrote that Americans' "loose morals" and especially his shock at the freedom afforded to American women helped radicalize him and turn bitterly against the West. Once back in Egypt, he became involved in anti-government activities. He was later arrested and executed by the Nasser regime. Today, his writings are regarded by many in the Middle East as one of the seedbeds of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. Qutb's case is probably rare in the annals of international educational exchange, and it flies in the face of the usual litany of the benefits of the Fulbright and other programs, but at least it is possible to achieve a rough measure of some outcomes.

Not so with international broadcasting. I have already mentioned anecdotal evidence of effectiveness, such as the testimonials of Vaclav Havel and others. After the end of the Cold War, we received many other similar testimonials about the value of VOA in keeping hope alive and in serving as an irritant to the regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. These stories are not measurable in the statistical sense, but they do serve as evidence that the broadcasts made a difference in many people's lives.

Former VOA director Geoff Cowan has argued that VOA broadcasts to Rwanda in the 1990s might have served as an antidote to those of hate radio stations, such as the infamous Radio Mille Collines, which urged members of the Hutu tribe to keep slaughtering their Tutsi countrymen. But the challenge there is formidable: how to demonstrate or measure something, e.g., more slaughter than was already taking place in Rwanda but which was believed not to have happened, and then link that causally to VOA broadcasts urging peace.

As far as the VOA's role in promoting the United States in the world, it is best to look for an answer in the VOA Charter, which serves as the Voice's mission statement. Specifically, VOA promotes the United States by presenting accurate and objective news and information -- the good and the bad -- about the United States and the world, and by serving as a daily and living beacon and example of how much Americans value freedom of the press and the free flow of information.

Q: How does VOA fulfill the third point of the Charter, i.e., “to broadcast the policies of the United States and responsible discussion of those policies?”

O’CONNELL: VOA fulfills the third point of the Charter by broadcasting daily editorials, which are separate from the news and clearly labeled on the front and back as being statements of the policies of the U.S. government. Just as the publishers of the Washington Post or the New York Times get to have their say on the editorial pages of their newspapers, so the U.S. government has its say via the editorials, which are drafted at VOA and cleared, often laboriously -- by the State Department.

In the view of most VOA journalists, the editorials are a distinct negative for VOA’s reputation. Their argument is that VOA more than adequately gets the government’s views and policies across by covering the U.S. government as heavily as it does.

Prior to the Reagan administration, VOA fulfilled the third point of the Charter by broadcasting summaries of editorial opinion from a cross section of American newspapers. Once the Reagan administration took office in 1981, its appointees at VOA ceased the round-ups of U.S. editorial opinion and instituted the in-house editorials. They are about a minute and a half in duration, and they are neither strident nor, normally, very remarkable, but they do purport to be summaries of U.S. policies.

Q: I’ve always thought of the BBC World Service as being sort of the gold standard in international broadcasting. Is the BBC still seen in that way?

O’CONNELL: Among many VOA broadcasters, there has long been a kind of “BBC envy.” The World Service, which has been around since the 1920s, is widely perceived to be more distant from the British government than VOA is from the U.S. government, and therefore more independent. For one thing, the World Service does not carry editorials representing the views of the British government. Then there are those British accents, that wonderful theme song -- which recalls the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, and those stentorian words at the top of every hour, “This is London, and it is 1600 hours GMT,” followed by the sound of Big Ben.

Q: Is there a formal relationship between the VOA and the World Service?

O’CONNELL: Historically, the VOA and the World Service have enjoyed a collegial relationship. The VOA director and the head of the World Service meet at least once a year, alternating between London and Washington. The World Service and VOA also share research material and even conduct joint research projects. In more recent years, however, the relationship has taken on a more competitive edge, as the two broadcasters strive for listeners and viewers in many of the same markets around the world.

Q: Does CNN present a challenge to VOA around the world?

O’CONNELL: Not really, since they serve two different markets.

Some years back, when CNN was younger and stronger internationally than it is today, Members of Congress used to ask during budget hearings why, with the end of the Cold War and the growing presence of CNN around the world, VOA was still necessary.

Fair question, though, except that media freedom in some previously denied countries, Belorussia, for example, has not happened at all, or, in others, such as Russia and Hungary, has deteriorated into new threats to freedom of the press.

More important, with a few exceptions, CNN broadcasts overseas only in English and is generally available only in hotels. In addition to English, VOA broadcasts in the languages which people speak and hear in their homes around the world, so unless you go to a hotel or have cable at home are not going to get CNN.

Q: Thank you, Joe, for your time and interest in the oral history project.

O'CONNELL: I enjoyed out time together, Stu. Thank you very much.

End of interview