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

NAOMI F. COLLINS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

English "Revolution"

Annapolis, Maryland: Constitutional Convention of Maryland, Research Staff — 1967-1969
- Drafting Bill of Rights
- FSO Husband, Professor at Naval Academy
- Birth of son
- Washington, D.C. riots
- Senior Seminar
- Vietnam War
- Racial segregation

Arlington, Virginia: Accompanying FSO husband at Foreign Service Institute (FSI) — 1969

Comments on Women's issues

Izmir, Turkey: Accompanying FSO husband — 1969-1971
- "Duties" of wives
- Archaeological sites
- Environment
- NATO base
- Local friends
- Congressional delegations
- Security
- Verbal harassment
- Family
- Vice Chair American Women's Club
- Parents visit
- Birth of son Jonathan
- History teacher, University of Maryland, Izmir campus

Washington, DC: Awaiting husband's FS assignment — 1972-1973
- Husband accompanying Soviet exhibit in US
- Comments on Foreign Service life
- House-hunting
- Comments on dissertation
- Husband's illness

Moscow, Russia: Accompanying FSO husband — 1973-1975
- Work in Public Affairs Office library as Contact Management System Contact Officer
- Housing
- Ambassador Walter Stoessel
- Environment
- Daily living problems

Household help
Restrictions on contacts
Staff divorces
Professional counseling
Embassy radiation and cancer
Pollution
Access to world news
Comments on Russian public
Attitudes toward regime
Jewish community
Dissidents
The Arts
Surveillance
Stress
Russian children

Washington, DC (Husband assigned to State Department) 1975-1982
Enjoyment of environment
Work at Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service (CRS)
Research, 17th Century English Radicals
Work at Institute for cultural programs about the Muslim World (Middle East Institute?)
Traveling exhibits
Children of Abraham
Iranian hostage taking
Parents' views on Islam and other religions
Ambassador Lucius (Luke) Battle
Advisory Committee members
Religious tolerance
"What is Islam?"
Hartford Seminary
Mother's illness
Children's education

Washington, DC; Executive Director; MD Humanities Council 1981-1992
Programs
Funding
Culture's New Frontier: Staking a Common Ground
The National Endowment for the Humanities
Discussion on race and religious issue
Husband's assigned to Amman, Jordan (1982-1984)
Temporary Separation
Separation allowance problems
State Department response to spouse and family issues
Family visits of Amman

Embassy wives' views on spouse and family separations
Children's education
Husband return to State Department
Maryland politics
Racial mix
History projects
Underground Railroad
Historic Black Colleges and Universities
Labor, ethnic mix

Washington, DC: Executive DC Director, NAFSA: Association of International Educators 1992-1997

Agenda and Programs
Visiting Chargé husband in Moscow (1973-1975)
Changes in Russia
Role of wives in Moscow embassy
Moscow environment
Attempted coup (1991) and outcome
Yeltsin's message of assurance to President H.W. Bush
Russian characteristics
CNN reporting from Moscow
Gorbachev
Ambassador Strauss
Return to Washington
Organization history
Membership
International Exchange Programs
English as Second Language
General operations
Foreign meetings
Foreign female representation
Foreign students in US
Effect of 9/11
Chinese students
NAFSA's oversight role
US government relations
Student visas
National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA)

Moscow, Russia: Wife of the United States Ambassador 1997-2001

Responsibilities
Spaso House
Russian agriculture
Population growth
Status of women
Role of the Ambassador's wife

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is 9 February 2012. This is an interview with Naomi F. Collins. What does the F stand for?

COLLINS: Feldman, my maiden name.

Q: This interview is on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Naomi?

COLLINS: Yes.

Q:" Naomi," by the way I just checked on it. In Hebrew it means "beautiful" and in Japanese it means both" beautiful" and "honest".

COLLINS: Well this is good to hear! I only recently learned of the Japanese meaning from Japanese visitors. And I've heard that the Hebrew word has also been interpreted as

"pleasant." But I was named "Naomi" for the more mundane reason that my mother was named "Ruth," and taken with the lovely mother / daughter (actually mother-in-law, daughter-in-law) story in the Bible. This is the good news. The bad news tuned out to be that people often mis-spell or mis-pronounced it.

Q: Well they are the same people who talk about the A-rabs.

COLLINS: Probably! So that is how I started out. A little girl with a big name.

Q: OK, well let's start out. When and where were you born?

COLLINS: I was born in Brooklyn in January 1942. I just had my 70th birthday. We lived in a very small apartment in a neighborhood that would now be called "ethnic," but was then just "normal" for New York City and its boroughs.

Q: Well let's start on your father's side. What do you know about where they came from?

COLLINS: Both my father's and my mother's families came from areas that have been at different times in different countries. They were in Ukraine, Latvia, Poland, and/or Russia. I recall that my father's mother came from what today is Ekaterinoslav and his father from Brest-Litovsk on the border of Poland and Russia. I believe they all lived within the "Pale," the region to which Jews were confined.

Q: What was your grandfather, grandparents doing?

COLLINS: They were all very young when they emigrated, around 16 or 17 years old. My father's father joined his older brother in America. My father's mother joined her father. My maternal grandfather reported that he escaped in the dark of night to avoid possible arrest for his revolutionary political activity, and may have joined cousins in the States. My maternal grandmother likely joined cousins on her arrival alone at about 16 years old.

Q: So they got to the States when, around the turn of the century.

COLLINS: Probably around or just after 1905.

Q: Then where did they settle and what were they up to?

COLLINS: My father's mother moved in with her father into a rooming house/tenement in lower Manhattan. She worked as a seamstress. He, although educated to be a Rabbi, chose instead to work as a carpenter. She was the oldest child so she had to migrate first. They both worked full time to pay for the passage of one child at a time, her sisters and brothers, to come join them in the States, through about eight children, until at the last shipment, they brought her mother / his wife /with the remaining children, those that had been babies at the time they had emigrated some 10 years earlier.

My father's father joined his brother, already working as a custom tailor on Fifth Avenue. They sat side by side for the next 60 years or so creating fine suits and dresses for ladies and gentlemen who brought their excellent Scottish and English wools for working. And sometimes the luscious fabric remnants and scraps trickled down to my mother and me.

My mother's father worked in several crafts in the U.S. – cabinet making, mirror and window glass, shades – furnishing homes. After she married, my maternal grandmother worked with him in the shop, bookkeeping and organizing things. Her father, she told us, had been the manager of a large estate in Ukraine owned by Polish landowners. She grew up on what she referred to as a farm, a very rural setting in which she milked the cows and did other chores. She lost her mother at an early age: her mother died in childbirth after having had a number of children.

Q: Had the Great War started?

COLLINS: They were already settled in the States before World War I. A good thing!

Q: Were there any stories that came down to you about the Cossacks or life in the Shtetl or that sort of thing?

COLLINS: Ekaterinoslav (now called Dniepopetrovk), where my paternal grandmother was born and raised, was a fairly urban center, not a village. She had seen railroad trains and steamboats as a child. And we learned that her father had chosen when he educated his sons, her brothers, to have the tutor teach his daughters as well. So she and her sisters were literate and readers. Brest, where my paternal grandfather was raised, was also more urban than village.

My maternal grandmother was born and raised in a less conventional setting for Jews, on a "farm" as she called it; a large rural estate in Ukraine. She did speak of Cossacks, pogroms, and anti-Semitism. Interestingly, the lesson learned for her (and my grandfather) seemed to be not more hatred and revenge, but more "tolerance" and less divisiveness (although they would never have phrased it this way).

My sense is that they all grew up without safety or comfort, and with a level of fear. But I think they also thought this was "normal" – but not good. This likely drove their emigration. I also now realize that they spared their children and grandchildren upsetting stories about their lives.

Q: Yes. And these pogroms and violence probably popped up depending on where you were. It wasn't like the Third Reich under Germany.

COLLINS: That's right. It wasn't systematic or systemic the way it was in Nazi Germany. I think we all felt that they preferred not to talk about these bad memories, so we're missing a lot of stories.

Q: So your family name was "Feldman." Do you know how that name came about? Was that an immigration clerk's idea?

COLLINS: My father's father's name was Feldman. We understood that this was their real name, not changed at Ellis Island, although it may have been more like Feltsman. It sounds German, "field person." But they didn't know their history, hardly knew the stories of their own parents' or grandparents' lives. The future, I'm sure, seemed more promising than the past.

Q: What language was spoken at home.

COLLINS: My parents spoke only English to my brother and me –and in general -- and excellent English at that. They both chose to master English in school and both were well beyond proficient. They saw it as a way "up" – as it turned out to be.

All four of my grandparents spoke Yiddish at home and in their neighborhoods. They also spoke Yiddish to our parents. This was a great incentive to me to figure it out early, because I already knew that the interesting stories would be in Yiddish, especially those they didn't want me to hear or know.

Over the years, my grandparents spoke less Yiddish and more English, as they were motivated to understand and speak with their grandchildren…as well as to get around. I wasn't very old before English predominated. My maternal grandfather actually studied English at night school, much like the character in the book, The Education of Hyman Kaplan.

My great grandfather also had a full life in America. My paternal grandmother's father lived in Brooklyn and died at about 95 years old (none of my grandparents knew their exact age), never having seen a doctor, died a natural death during a heat wave. In the old country, I mentioned, he had chosen to have his daughters as well as his sons educated, taught to read and write. Because all Jewish men had to be literate (at least in Hebrew, to read the Bible), families brought in tutors for their sons (think "Fiddler on the Roof") – but I'm not sure how many included their daughters. So my paternal grandmother was always a reader--not so much in English as in Yiddish. And of course then the Yiddish newspapers were a popular source of world and local news.

What I remember of visits to my great-grandparents' home (they lived until I was about 10 – 12 years old) – was the "old world" smell: of stale tea and lemons, musty and closed. They seemed glad to see us, but the age, language and cultural gaps were too large to bridge in conversation: not much exchange with them. And my great grandfather had a big beard, which scared me as a little kid. Plus, they never had anything children liked to eat – no cookies or milk, just tea and plain, hard biscuits.

Q: Let's move to when you are a kid. You grew up in what sort of neighborhood?

COLLINS: In a neighborhood with a mix of "ethnic groups," they're called today. This is what certain parts of Brooklyn were about. Some still are.

Q: In an ethnic neighborhood. You know I have talked to people who grew up in ethnic neighborhoods like Brooklyn. One woman Foreign Service officer said, "You know it wasn't until I went away to college that I met somebody that wasn't Jewish."

COLLINS: I grew up in that part of Brooklyn between Borough Park and Bensonhurst. At that time, it was a mix primarily of Jewish and Italian families. But there were also Polish and Irish and Greek families. Balkans. Southern and East Europeans, all living together. They didn't have all the clear barriers up then. Now the same neighborhoods are ethnically and religiously delineated very sharply, which I personally find unfortunate. I thought it was better the way we all lived together then in a great mix. Sometimes I think that may have helped in the Foreign Service life, living with different cultures. By the time I went to high school, I was with a mix not only of cultural and religious groups, but also of races: an integrated school in Queens.

Q: Well let's talk about your experiences. How Jewish was your family?

COLLINS: They were not observant or religious on either side of the family. They didn't go to services or keep kosher and they ate everything. So I guess the answer is they were culturally Jewish but not religiously Jewish. Secular Jews. Not unusual for Jews.

Q: Did you feel any pressure from outside family with kids saying you mean you eat pork or things like that?

COLLINS: There was some of that. Some religious police in the neighborhood. But the neighborhood was mixed too. We were not alone in being secular. Politically, I guess you'd now say, my family was on the liberal left; my mother's family more than my father's. Sometimes to avoid any religious pressures on the intense holidays – Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, we would get up early and head for a delightful outing somewhere like to the Bronx Zoo, or Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, Museum of Natural History, or Coney Island. And there were no crowds! But my mother always made us dress properly to be respectful of others.

Q: Well would you say at the time (it is a little hard to say) -- Were you poor or did you feel poor?

COLLINS: I did not feel poor at all. Yet when I look back on it today, all I can think of is by today's standards, this would not look like a very comfortably off family. I think the reason we didn't think we were poor was because we were surrounded by people who were less well off than we were; and also because we were fine. We had enough to eat, warm coats, shoes, boots (often hand-me-downs, and usually too big the first year and too small the third year).

But when I look back on it, and speaking to friends who grew up in an average size house, I realize in retrospect how small our living space was. It had one bedroom, one living room, and a tiny kitchen, for four people. My brother and I shared the bedroom, and my parents slept on a sofa bed in the living room. I think there were two closets total – in which all our clothes apparently fit. But we didn't think this was unusual because we knew families that lived in less space than that, who didn't even have the one bedroom. And those living in basements or those sharing their apartment among three generations. So we thought we were O.K. – at least until I became a pre-teen!

Q: As a kid where did your family fit politically?

COLLINS: On the left.

Q: When you say on the left what do you mean by that?

COLLINS: They were huge fans of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. They were all, including my grandparents and my aunts and uncles, conscious of thinking of those who were less fortunate than we were, and what could be done for them. They had great empathy for them. They were also aware of problems that black people (then called "Negroes" of course) had to endure, prejudice. I remember my mother saying one day, when I was just a kid in elementary school – she was reading one of those women's magazines women then exchanged with each other, Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping – she said: "Do you realize if you were a Negro, you wouldn't ever see your face in any of these magazines. In the ads or stories. You just would never see your face anywhere." I had never thought about that. We didn't live in a neighborhood in Brooklyn that had black people. But this awareness of prejudice and unfairness – that is something they had. And a tolerance for the beliefs of others – that others shouldn't impose their beliefs on us, but that we had to be respectful of their beliefs. When things came up about Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, or Jesus Christ, we were told: "Now be respectful. That is what they believe. But don't say anything about it to them."

Q: I would think there would be a certain slippage only because it is fun --into Christmas and things like that.

COLLINS: Our family didn't personally celebrate Christmas--or Chanukah--but they had no problem joining others at their invitation. So our neighbors, particularly our Italian friends downstairs, would always invite us down to eat and drink with them at Christmas, and see their tree, lights, electric trains, and share Perugina chocolates. Same for Jewish holidays when people gathered…

Q: I assume you got a good mixture of foods.

COLLINS: Some were better and some worse! Some were the real old east European staples that we somehow grew up not liking very well: the overcooked beef, boiled potatoes, mushy vegetables. Every time we visited my father's mother, she would top those specials off with canned peaches. As kids, we found these slimy and unpleasant…

but of course were told to behave ourselves, taste everything, and make no comments about things we didn't like. We would sort of try to do our best to do that. So the old people did cook old style. But my mother discovered fresh and tasty foods, light cooking, herbs, not overcooking foods -- rare meats, raw vegetables, and much better desserts, like cake, cookies, and ice cream (though not all at once or in big portions). And my father was truly adventurous, taking us to the first Chinese and Japanese restaurants or introducing us to raw fish, rabbit, beef tartar, and other "delicacies" he'd discover.

Q: You mentioned your mother wanting to be American. Did you feel a conscious effort of acculturation making you American?

COLLINS: My parents did that for themselves first. They didn't have to work on us very hard because they had worked so hard on this themselves from the time they were children. My mother when she started high school in Brooklyn wanted to be like the other girls of course. She was actually born in Detroit. My grandfather had worked at the Ford factory there as a "tool and dye" man. So she was born and raised in Detroit and spent a few years there, a more "American" place than New York; and then moved to New York, to Brooklyn. By high school she wanted to be like the other girls – and what they all saw in movies. You know. The dress, the lipstick, makeup, the heels and stockings and all that. Then when she went to work out of high school – as a secretary, then executive secretary, for the rest of her career (today, an "administrative assistant") – she watched the way her bosses and her colleagues acted, dressed, etc. That plus the magazines. She got a kick out of finding out how you are supposed to behave, dress, etc. What is "lady-like" and what is not.

My father became Americanized inadvertently when he signed up to serve as a commissioned officer in WWII, I believe in 1943. I was about a year and a half years old. He spent many months at different bases within the U.S., in New Orleans, Charleston, and I understand also in Illinois and California, followed in some cases by my mother and baby me. But of course I don't remember that. He was an officer because he had graduated from City College, today City University of New York.

Then he went overseas and fought in the Pacific Islands, behind General MacArthur, reclaiming the Islands one by one in the front lines of those battles. When he got there, and had to lead a group of men – he was a Captain -- he became very aware of American speech outside Brooklyn. When he came back at the end of the war, he felt much more Americanized in general. But he told us much later that when he returned, and heard me speak -- I was three and a half by then, and do remember this --he tried to teach me not to sound like the streets of Brooklyn – but more "American." My brother, too, later.

Q: Was there any talk or concern or discrimination against Jews during this time, particularly in your young years?

COLLINS: Yes. Absolutely, although I didn't know it in my younger years, but learned about it later. My father told us when we were adults that he had graduated from City College with top grades and a major in chemistry in 1936. And people made it clear to

him they weren't hiring Jewish scientists. Earlier, he had learned that the Pulitzer scholarship committee did not tend to support Jewish applicants at Columbia (which is why he was unable to go there). So he went to City College because it was free of charge.

After the War he realized that there was less discrimination in the hiring of engineers – or at least other opportunities for them – so he went to graduate school at NYU for an advanced degree in engineering. Civil engineering. I understand that's still true today – that engineering offers opportunities for first-generation graduates. He passed the exams and got an entry-level job with the City of New York – as a clerk. And worked his way up from Grade 1 to Commissioner, taking exams every step of the way until the last positions.

Q: What was he doing?

COLLINS: Although he started as a Clerk Grade 1, he became – through this testing and his advanced degree – a "Junior Engineer," some time while I was in elementary school. Then he became a "Senior Engineer" and was then moved into management and senior management, first at the Department of Sanitation and then Public Works/ Water Resources. He worked on creating and maintaining landfills, incinerators, clean water, other infrastructure civil engineers do.

He was ultimately appointed Commissioner by Mayor Lindsay. Not willingly, I should add. He resisted. But the Mayor needed someone to replace the then commissioner charged with corruption, taking bribes. And my father was a stickler for ethics. But my father kept saying: "I don't want it." And then the Mayor started calling my mother. He invited them to movies, to dinner, hoping to win over my father to take on this job. . Then he said to my mother, "Every man has his price. What is his price? Is it money? What is it he wants?" My mother said, "No, you don't understand. He doesn't have a price. When he says he doesn't want to do it, he doesn't want to do it. He doesn't want money." So finally the mayor convinced him, "Please just take it for the very short term until we find someone else." Famous last words. He took it and the rest is history.

He ended up doing it for about two years because they couldn't find somebody else. The mayor wanted to be re-elected, and he wanted someone whose hand was never in the till. So he got that. After that, my father went on to water resources and then on to advise the State of New York on environmental issues as those issues became prominent. So his trajectory – and this was in his New York Times obituary-- was a "rags to riches" story. Not that he was ever rich. Nor was he ever in rags. But it was a steep rise against some odds, including the likelihood of anti-Semitism. He wasn't paranoid either. He never saw it in places where it wasn't or used it as an excuse. But there were places where it was for real. My mother also encountered it in her work as a secretary in her office.

Q: All the major universities had their quotas, so that was why I am bringing up the subject.

COLLINS: Yes, it is very much a part of American history – discrimination and prejudice. Now there are books documenting how much the universities relied on quotas – and the impact of these on Jews (and others). I think people forget this part of American history. He and his friends had the deck stacked against them not only in college admission, but also in medical school admissions. He had hoped to go to medical school, but was unable to get financial support for that. One of their friends, in fact, was so determined he went to Scotland to study at Edinburgh to get his medical degree. And he returned to become a neighborhood general practice doctor in a less affluent part of New York for his whole career.

Q: Well, it was like going to Boston and seeing "No Irish Need Apply for the job."

COLLINS: Yes, exactly.

Q: This was very much a nativist attitude.

COLLINS: And then of course the position of black people: it is just an astounding history. But even for people who – as they say – look like white people (as Irish and East Europeans do) – it was still a real problem.

Q: How about your neighborhood? You say it was mainly Italian and Jewish.

COLLINS: Yes, primarily that.

Q: Often these two groups don't work together you know. If you were Jewish you were Christ killers or something like that. Did you run into any of this?

COLLINS: We did actually. My brother came home when he was in Kindergarten and he asked my mother, "I didn't kill Christ did I?" Then my mother had to explain the whole story, at his level. But my mother came across that, too, in her work. She worked with an ethnic mix, people from Italy and Ireland, South and East Europe. There was a lot of ignorance. It was different of course from the upper class anti-Semitism of clubs and Universities… the "gentleman's" kind. This was the street level, the uneducated ignorance. In some cases, we learned, people were taught this in their churches, too – that the Jews killed Jesus Christ. So the kids on the street would echo that. But when my mother worked in an office for years as a personal secretary to a CEO, she found the office girls (as they were then called) throwing this accusation at her. She got used to it, but it never made sense to her or us. What we knew of Jews then, they were more the killed than the killers.

Q: I know boys would get out in the street and play stickball. What about girls?

COLLINS: It was coed. We, too, played on the streets all the time because the apartments were so small that my mother threw us out the door as soon as we finished our milk and cookies after school. We were out there until dinner or darkness, whichever came first. We played stickball, punch ball, and stoopball because we didn't have any equipment.

We had only very few toys. So you could hit the ball with an old broomstick, with your fist, or against a stoop. And the girls alone would jump rope. This of course was when we were in elementary school.

Q: Today there is so much concern, probably overplayed, about crime. Were the parents worried about that?

COLLINS: No. I was recently telling my children that. They are all very protective now of their kids. Oddly enough, on the streets of Brooklyn when I was a kid, there was no crime. There was fighting – among kids and even adult fistfights. And there were property crimes, people taking your bike. But kidnapping, murder, rape, muggings – we never heard of these things at all. (I think police records might substantiate this – but I don't know.)

So we ran loose from morning to night in summer, after school during the year, blocks from home. We were often in the playgrounds alone and, in fact, they allowed me at eight to take care of my baby cousin of two, take him everywhere with us. My brother was about five then, and my other cousin, about seven. We were gone for hours. We climbed garage roofs and fences, created our own imaginary worlds. I was expected to return before dark or in time for dinner – with the younger kids in tow. We never worried about crime at all.

Q: I am from that era, too, in a different context, but it was feral…

COLLINS: Yes it was sort of feral. Some people later used the word "tomboy" for girls running around like this, but it was normal for us then. I don't think we ever really saw a policeman, except occasionally visiting the shops along the avenue. Rough, too. Fist fights. Boys particularly beat each other up a lot, but girls did, too. I remember beating up a couple of girls myself after they bullied me. My mother supported me when their angry mothers showed up on our doorstep. And my parents taught us that bullies are cowards: beat the hell out of them once, and they'll leave you alone. That's the only language they understand. So I did.

You can see that this was not the training in gentility that a Foreign Service wife most needed, an attribute they never would have valued. But although violence and physical force were around us, no one in my family used physical force against each other, or had brawls or fistfights. We had neighbors who did fight – sometimes but not always after drinking. Very violent. At some point other men pulled them apart. Perhaps we were better able than others to understand violence and anger in the world.

Q: You also had museums and theaters and those kinds of places. How did these enter your life?

COLLINS: We were a bit unusual in our neighborhood because on weekends my father and mother would take us to these places. It was usually my father's idea. Tops on his list was the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. We also went to the Brooklyn

Botanical gardens in the spring to see a the species blooming. And the Brooklyn Museum and the Children's Museum. And Coney Island and other beaches. The Planetarium. He was very much a scientist, maybe "naturalist" at heart; he never gave up teaching us about rocks and trees and evolution and flowers and stars. The concerts that we saw were always local and/or free. My father played the bass in a community orchestra, so we saw those concerts. Also, Gilbert and Sullivan. Performances had to be free or close to it. Yet in New York at that time there was so much that was free.

My father never got over the urge to educate children, and did the same with his four grandsons, as possible. In fact, he was still dragging me past the dinosaurs when I was 55! This is a brontosaurus right? He still hoped I'd take to them. Very few other kids on our street went to these places, so it made us seem a little bit weird to them.

Q: Were you a movie kid?

COLLINS: No, because anything that cost money we could do only rarely. I did see Bambi. Not sure I ever got over it. Couldn't do much with theater either, but as possible, my mother and uncle traded off taking my cousin and me together to the theater (one adult ticket, two kids). Peter Pan with Mary Martin was totally memorable, so splendid. .
Q: Were you much of a reader?

COLLINS: Yes, I read all the time. I should add that my parents did, too. They read all evening every evening and on weekends.

Q: Can you think of any books that struck you as a young kid?

COLLINS: Once I started reading on my own, I went through the kid's section, then the young adult section of the library. But what stayed in my mind was the series I couldn't get from the library: Nancy Drew, the girl who solved mysteries. I loved those books. We couldn't buy them, but I had friends who lent them to me. These were about the only books I can recall that featured a girl as hero and one who could do things! At some point I finished the young adult books when I was too young to be allowed to read the "adult" books at the library, regular literature. So with my mother's permission, I forged her name at the library to borrow books by authors like John Steinbeck and Somerset Maugham. As I look back on this phase – I was probably about 11 – I see the irony of having to lie to librarians to read books. Fortunately my mother supported me in this ruse.

Q: I assume it was a pretty good library, perhaps a Carnegie library?

COLLINS: Oh not at all! This was a small storefront branch library in our Brooklyn neighborhood. It didn't take long to finish all their books. Fortunately we then moved from Brooklyn.

Q: Where did you move to?

COLLINS: I was 13 and was headed from junior high school to high school in Brooklyn. The Junior High had been very rough: there were gang wars and knife fights – switchblade knives. Like "Blackboard Jungle." We lived on the periphery of the Mafia neighborhood. So life got physically rough and scary for me. I got beat up. So my parents realized they had to move as soon as they could manage it. After a long period looking, we moved to Flushing, Queens, a few miles from La Guardia Airport

We moved into a modest house, but one in which I had my own bedroom for the first time ever and I didn't have to share with my brother. He had his own. And we now had two bathrooms for the four of us, so we didn't have to wait in line. It was heaven. I couldn't imagine what more a person might want!

Q: Well let's talk about elementary school in Brooklyn. What was your elementary school like?

COLLINS: It was called P.S. 180 because elementary schools in New York had a number rather than a name. I might as well have been in the Soviet Union already! The school was enormous, but I didn't see that as unusual. I thought all schools took up one full city block and had prison-height metal spiked fences around them. Each grade in the school had six or seven classes in it, all in the same grade. I guess that would come to over 40 classes in the building in K – 6. So my first day of Kindergarten was a little daunting. I thought – "Wow, this building is so big!" But all the kindergartens – all six or seven of them -- were on the first floor. And I remember thinking: "I'll just go to mine, the one right at the end of the hall." "And that's what my teacher looks like." It also prepared me for large institutions at an early age.

As we got older, we got higher up in the building, walking more stairs. But it was a little intimidating at first. And boy did they have rules. Couldn't go up the "down" staircase, or down the "up" staircase. Before school or after lunch, we'd line up outside the building, by two's, with our classmates, until the bell rang. Then in we'd march in succession, like a miniature army. Once inside, at our assigned desks, we'd watch as the teacher went up and down each row inspecting each of us for clean fingernails, a handkerchief, and sharpened pencils. Starting in fourth grade, it was straight pen and a bottle of ink, once you learned to do script. And we got graded for these traits. Now I look at this and think: I could have been in Victorian England. Nothing much had changed from the time my parents had gone to the same schools. In fact, I had some of the same teachers that my mother had had. So that was really weird.

Q: Were you teachers mostly Jewish or Irish or what, mixed?

COLLINS: Mixed actually. I think in my elementary school, they were mostly Irish or Jewish. Then in Junior High School, many were Irish – but not sure about others, probably Polish, Italian, and other parts of Europe originally. Finally in high school in Flushing we had more of a mix.

Q: In elementary school what courses grabbed you and what didn't?

COLLINS: Since our school had a half dozen classes at each grade, they sorted kids according to the levels at which they were working. And within each class, further division into groups was done for each subject. This was important in reading, math, and social studies, because it meant we weren't slowed down by anyone. I was in the first class in each grade, and remember working hard all the time – new lessons all the time.

But what grabbed me were stories…loved to read and be read to. I was not particularly taken with arithmetic and math. And they didn't really grow on me with time, except perhaps for geometry later on. I liked that: shapes and spaces and solving problems about these, seeing relationships. But the rest of the math always seemed just too abstract. I think I enjoyed the little outings we did as part of what they probably called "social studies" – coming to know your community, neighborhood, other countries. And like most kids, I liked music and singing. The teacher played the piano – even into 5th or 6th grade – and we would sing songs.

Q: Did you play any instrument?

COLLINS: I tried the piano and I tried the flute. I didn't seem destined for music, but maybe my standards were too high. I did always enjoy listening to music – and singing, but probably not well.

Q: Later on in your school career did history hit you at any point?

COLLINS: My first memory of "history" was actually outside school. I was 11 and my parents took us to see Washington, D.C. and Williamsburg, Virginia. The drive seemed very long and the places very far away. In D.C. we saw monuments – which seemed abstract to me-- but Williamsburg was a different story. Reconstruction was rather new then, I think. (This would have been about 1953.)

Q: It would have been the beginning, when they were just starting. Wasn't it the Rockefeller Foundation that developed it?

COLLINS: I think it was. And they had only a few buildings and homes at that time, and a few re-creations of life in the 17th / 18th centuries. I was awed by that. Surprisingly, I hadn't seen anything like that in New York City, although there are many historic buildings there. And I thought – "this is like another country." That was decades before I found the L.P. Hartley poem with the line, "The past is foreign country; they do things differently there." Ever after that, that is how I saw it. People lived at that time and place in a very different way from the way we live now – even though they're people like us. They put shoes on horses; they used candles instead of lamps; they rode horses instead of cars (although there were still some horses then on the streets of Brooklyn) .

Q: Milk wagons were usually horse drawn.

COLLINS: Yes, although our milkman had a little truck. So did the bakery man. These carts—homemade looking wooden jobs-- mostly had fish, fruits, and vegetables. And the peddlers rang big cowbells and called out their wares…and women would pop out of the buildings to check out what was on offer. Some of the peddlers collected rags. I suppose these were for re-cycling, we'd call it today. Years later in Turkey I had the sense of déjà vu seeing similar men and carts; also in the villages of the former Soviet Union.

Q: By this time had the pushcarts pretty well disappeared?

COLLINS: Well I think they were still there in lower Manhattan, but we didn't go there much. My father had grown up on the lower East Side where pushcarts thrived for years. He lived in a tenement within walking distance of what is now the Tenement Museum. But we rarely went to those areas because my parents, I think, were glad to get away from places where people pushed, shoved, shouted, and grabbed. And didn't bathe daily. My mother came to prefer Macy's!

Q: About those early times, there were two major world events, mainly before you were around or aware, but wondered if there were residues that affected you. One was the great depression and the other was W.W.II.

COLLINS: The earliest world event I was aware of was W.W. II. I didn't really understand what it meant at one to three years old, but I knew what it meant having my father away and my mother daily awaiting a letter from him. I knew he was fighting a war. Only later did I know he was missing for months. The postman would buzz her when a letter came, so she could leave us long enough to run downstairs and collect the mail from the stacked mailboxes downstairs. I suppose I understood it at a toddler level.

And then one day – I later learned it was VE day – people all ran out on to the streets singing and dancing and crying and hugging each other. Adults, dancing in the streets: that made a huge impression. At VJ day she told me that my father would be coming home. I'm still affected thinking about how difficult this must have been for her: two "toddlers" and missing husband on the front lines of the war, gone for so long. Then – it must have been two or three weeks later as he crossed the Pacific by boat, arrived in San Francisco, and awaited a train with space for one more soldier – one day she said this was the day he was coming, cleaned and dressed us up and sat by the window watching all day until he emerged from a taxi. And when he came upstairs with huge, high, heavy boots – and of course the whole uniform and gear – I didn't know quite what to think!

Q: What was your mother doing this time? Was she a secretary then?

COLLINS: No. She had worked during the Depression and until I was born. Both my parents were fully employed during the Depression. She worked as a secretary in a government social work agency in New York. She didn't go back to work until my brother was 8 and I was 11 – and then worked until her retirement.

Q: Was there a lot of pressure when you were a kid to eat up your food, not waste anything, because of the scarcities of the depression, using the depression as a yardstick for when things were not as good as they were then.

COLLINS: I think we were all at that time told to waste nothing, be aware of scarcity and hunger. My parents never forgot the Depression. It shaped what they sought in the way of security over risks. Of course the other argument we heard was that children in Armenia were starving. I don't think I ever thought of Armenians or Armenia without the "starving" adjective and image. Even though we were not made to eat up all the food on our plates, we were made very aware of children all over the world less fortunate than we were.

It was hard to understand what "going hungry" really meant or felt like, since we never lacked food. But we were always served only small portions, given more only if we ate that first, so nothing would be wasted. I had some awareness, perhaps from the news, of refugee children and of those shipped to England alone from the Continent – to me, scarier than being hungry. Nothing was wasted: stale bread became crumbs. Leftovers became soups or omelets. Our clothes included hand-me-downs that we in turn passed on to other children. I'm afraid this caution passed on to me – with the no-waste mindset. And of course you saved your money before you bought anything. There were no credit cards. But they did take a mortgage on our house in Flushing.

Q: You went to Junior High School in Brooklyn – and you were saying how feisty it was getting there before you moved to Flushing…

COLLINS: Yes, the streets got rougher on the route to Junior High School over the one to elementary school. We had a little protection plan for that half-mile walk. I'd start out with one friend from our street, and then at our corner, meet up with other girls, adding others at each corner along the way until we had quite a bunch. So not only were we a social clique, but a mutual protection group. And we were OK in groups. But when one of us had to go anywhere alone – that could become threatening as little gangs would emerge from no where to taunt and fight. The schoolyard was very rough, too. Policemen were stationed in our school because of knife fights, gangs. Going to the bathroom you took your life in your hands, so they sent us only in two's. My group of friends was a real target for guys (and some girls) who despised what we'd now call the eggheads, elite, intellectuals, or whatever terms. People who studied, read books and liked school. Several of the rough kids had families that did peripheral Mafia jobs: drivers and such. Nothing gentle.

Q: Were there any teachers in elementary or Junior High that stand out for you?

COLLINS: I had wonderful teachers in elementary school, particularly. I remember the kind teachers in Kindergarten and first grade – and several other grades – and then my excellent fifth and sixth grade teachers. They were warm, patient, intelligent, and committed. I don't remember their names, but can picture them today. I think we got the

best teachers in part because we were in class 1 in each grade and the kids were on what today might be called a college bound track, although nobody ever said this.

Q: Was there what we would call today a tracking system?

COLLINS: I think today you'd call it that. But because they could arrange the classes according to ability, with six or seven classes in each grade, it amounted to that. Yet it was flexible: kids were moved, especially at the ends of the year for the next year. And there was one class for what we would now call "special ed." I went through school with pretty much the same kids throughout. Then in Junior High School we were more strictly tracked, and again, I had the same group throughout. We did the three years of Junior High School in two years – in a special program called "S.P." It may have stood for "special program or special progress," although I'm not sure. It meant accelerated work, compressed time, three years in two.

Q: Looking back on it now, does it seem that the Jewish kids were being pushed more in doing more or faster?

COLLINS: If you flip it the other way: who was in the accelerated or first classes in these schools, then, yes, these classes did have a greater proportion of Jewish kids; and the lower number classes had very few if any Jewish kids. (Except for special ed. with a mix of kids with difficult conditions.)

Q. *Did you feel your parents were pushing you? That you were bright and were going somewhere?*

COLLINS: In that context, I didn't think of being unique. There were many kids doing similar level work to mine, some behind and a couple ahead. But I guess since my father had gone through college and my mother had started, but couldn't afford to finish, it was assumed that I would just keep going through school. An expectation. My uncles went to school at night to finish their degrees. And it was true my parents were happier at seeing good grades than bad ones, although there were no rewards or punishments for grades. So I don't think I felt pressured or pushed. And I didn't find schoolwork hard – at least at those ages!

Q: Well what about around the dinner table: were there discussions? When you think about Russia later, but also in America, often the dinner table is where the family comes together.

COLLINS: Yes, we did eat dinner together every night. I was responsible for getting the meal started once I was 12 or 13: setting the potatoes to bake; preparing the meat and vegetables, so that when my mother and father came home from work, it could all be put together into a meal. By the time I was in high school, I was the main chef. But my mother was still the planner and buyer – until I was about 16 – when I had to do that, too (because of her ill health). So everybody was there for dinner every night.

We did talk about current events or other topics of the day. Sometimes larger scientific questions or themes came up. Some lessons in logical thinking, too. And they did ask about our day at school or after school. It was never formal or round robin, just what was on my parents' minds – especially my father's. My father would talk about the politics of New York City at the time. Even though sympathetic to a cleaner environment – clean water and air – he had no patience with the sentiment that you could have it all for nothing, without paying the price of cleaner industry. And he didn't like the public posturing of politicians, their drama and affected ignorance. He didn't respect their two voices -- like gentlemen in private, but common street accents before the cameras.

Q: What about Israel? Was Israel a factor in your family's discussions?

COLLINS: Not too much: mainly in passing when it tied to the news. The family was not Zionist – although of course not anti-Zionist either, and in fact supportive of the idea of Israel, having seen what they had. There was some discussion of "diaspora" in the persons of distant cousins who migrated to Buenos Aires or Canada. And there were stories about our own family history and those who stayed behind in Russia, who did not emigrate when my grandparents did.

Q: What about the Cold War and the Communist menace?

COLLINS: One of my earliest memories of a national event – and the political aura in our house – was of the dreaded Senator Joseph McCarthy. Since our family was left leaning, some perhaps toward socialism, they feared and hated Senator McCarthy and his hearings. However, they were never apologists for Stalin and the Soviet regime either: never saw it as paradise on earth.

Q: This is the Senator from Wisconsin.

COLLINS: Yes, the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy and his notorious interrogations of people he deemed questionable, ruining their lives, often through innuendo. My parents watched these broadcasts in horror. And the Senator's despicable sidekick, Roy Cohn. I was sure these men were both evil, going after people in Hollywood, in the government. This paranoid notion that America was permeated with Communists who were ready to overthrow the government seemed so excessive. And they tried to link treason and anti-Americanism to liberals and liberalism.

Q: ... used for all sorts of purposes.

COLLINS: It was very destructive and it made the family very cautious. I remember they feared that because my father worked for the City, the FBI might come check on what books they read. This was not paranoia: the FBI did knock on the doors of people we knew. I was told if I was alone in the apartment (my brother and I stayed alone after school), and they knocked on the door, not to let them in. That was scary. But it probably gave me some understanding of what it was like for non-conforming Russians as they

listened for those dreaded knocks on their door from the KGB. I learned early about the First Amendment, search warrants, and other constitutional rights.

Q: What about another factor, that some of your family may have been members of the Ladies Garment Workers Union?

COLLINS: We had a few people we knew – relatives and neighbors -- in the Ladies Garment Workers Union and other unions. One of my uncles worked in the "rag trade," as they called the clothing industry. And my maternal grandfather had worked in Henry Ford's car factories in Detroit and Tarrytown. I knew about the Triangle Shirtwaist fire when I was in elementary school. For several years, we went for two weeks to a sort of summer colony vacation spot run by a union. They had a place in the hills outside of New York.

Q: Is that the one Paul Robeson went to?

COLLINS: I don't think it was the same one, but I think a lot of unions had an affordable place for workers to vacation: a lake, some trees, some "cabins." You had to book a year in advance because everybody wanted to go. Even when my father was in management, we went there, steeped in the union environment. Nice setting, good rates. Cook and clean yourself.

Q: What did you do at the camp?

COLLINS: Well my father believed we should know how to swim, row, and be able to do outdoor things. It wasn't exactly a camp. Rustic, it was. They used old railroad cars for housing. They turned each into a small home with an added porch. Almost like a trailer. Beside swimming, rowing, and hiking, we saw a movie every night on a big screen outdoors. We hoped it wouldn't rain. And explored "nature." This was part of my father's idea of what we needed to know. These along with how to sew a button or hem, how to type, how to ride a bike, skate, and later, drive a car. No pressure – it was just what he did. Teach.

Q: Well then you move to Flushing and go to High School there.

COLLINS: Yes, we moved there when I was 13. I had already done ninth grade in Junior High School, so I started in tenth grade in high school, Flushing High School.

Q: The Worlds Fair had already taken place.

COLLINS: Yes, and had become a park. They had a great indoor ice skating rink there. I would go with my girl friends on Friday nights to skate. But when we first moved to Flushing, I didn't know a soul. Yet I look back on it and wonder why that didn't upset me at all. The first day of high school I had to walk into this big strange school I had never seen before, filled with strangers. But I was so excited that the high school was so

beautiful compared to my elementary school, I loved it immediately. It had grass outside and no fences.

Q: No policemen?

COLLINS: No police. The elementary school was some five or six stories high, a city block in bulk, fences and gates for several feet around it, and all cement in the schoolyard. Here was a school with a lawn out front. It looked like a small college. Still does today. It's one of the oldest high schools in N.Y. I walked about a half mile to get there, but without fear. And I immediately found the teachers were great, the classes good, the students, nice. No gangs, fights, or knives. There still was tracking: academic, commercial, and general diplomas.

Q: How did you find the class work?

COLLINS: It was hard. I realized later that I had been placed in advanced classes in English, social studies, math, and sciences. Plus two foreign languages. We did a great deal of reading and writing, even research papers with footnotes. I remember doing one on the history of the English language. A lot of tests, too—pop quizzes and scheduled exams. We were required to do critical thinking and analysis; for example, comparing the coverage of a single world event by seven different New York newspapers. Social studies then meant history, civics, government, and other social sciences. I understand that later the term acquired different meaning. And the teachers were first rate because they were selected during the depression when jobs were very scarce and competitive. If they had lived at a later time, they might well have become doctors, lawyers, mathematicians, engineers, and managers. The teachers were both men and women and came from a range of backgrounds.

Q: Was it sort of scary to have a man teacher at this point?

COLLINS: In junior high school I had a couple of male teachers. But, no: I was never scared of men. In high school my favorite teachers were in history: one man, Mr. Esterowitz, and a woman, Mrs. Goldman—who also showed me that a woman can major in history. And although I had good English teachers, like Mrs. LaBarbara, somehow the analysis of beautiful poems and prose was ruining literature for me. I loved reading, but not deconstructing a work.

Q: What sort of things were you reading?

COLLINS: It's hard to recall what I read when, because I read in a steady stream from junior high school to today. I can picture J.P. Marquand, Jack London, Thomas Wolfe, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis. I also remember Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner. And Theodore Dreiser, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Tennessee Williams. And Dorothy Parker. A friend and I traveled downtown to borrow books from the Donnell Library to supplement those we could get from the main Flushing Library. Sadly, the Donnell Library, around the corner

from St. Patrick's Cathedral and across from the Museum of Modern Art, was closed not too long ago. It was huge, bright, and inviting: they had any books we wanted. And we'd trudge back to Flushing on the trains and buses with our arms loaded with volumes.

Q: I imagine Dickens was one of them…

COLLINS: Not so much. I was more taken with current American and English writers than with Victorian ones. I guess the modern ones resonated more. Later it was Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Henry Roth, and the so-called New York school.

Q: During that period – I was older than you and from a solid Protestant background—but I remember reading and absorbing the whole Jewish experience through these books.

COLLINS: So you read the Jewish writers, too!

Q: The Jewish writers particularly in New York.

COLLINS: Exactly. Although Saul Bellow was an exception, in Chicago. I read them all, even though I cannot recall all titles and authors 50 years later. But I do remember not realizing that there were "schools" of writing. After that, I read what I later knew as "Southern Writers."

Q: Yes, these are the two schools that we were all exposed to: the Jewish New Yorkers and the writers from the Deep South.

COLLINS: I'm not sure what it was about the culture of the Deep South that resonated, but it did. The writers were so good. Later it was the Irish writers, from Ireland and the U.S. – and also the "WASP" writers, like Louis Auchincloss and John Updike. Maybe what they had in common was depicting individual human beings and their relationships with one another, all within a particular cultural context (a region, ethnic group, class). It may seem odd that although I studied, researched, taught, and wrote history, I always loved to read literature, even for understanding cultural contexts. And I never regretted my choice of major. In addition to the extra-curricular reading, I also had to do reading that went with my studies, three years of Spanish and two of German; chemistry and physics; math through trigonometry, including algebra and geometry of course. And English and social studies, as mentioned. Year after year. And we had to take those anxiety-provoking New York State Regents Exams in every subject.

Q: Let's talk a bit about how in your high school there was study or discussion of foreign countries.

COLLINS: We did study world history and were tested in it in the Regents Exam. When we studied Spanish and German, or any other languages, we always studied the respective cultures in that language. I remember Spanish poets and short story writers, topped off by the entire volume of Don Quixote in Spanish. I believe that in the world history course we had an overview of the entire world in one or two semesters. It may

have been superficial, but was a whole lot better than not knowing there was a world outside the U.S.

Q: You were probably given a stiff dose of English history.

COLLINS: Yes. English and European history were the staples, the heaviest concentration of what "history" was in those days. Of course it made sense with the roots of American history, law, government, and culture in England. It impressed me sufficiently that I went on to get a Ph.D. on the 17th century connections between England and the Colonies. I was particularly taken with revolutions and constitutions, the Bill of Rights and so forth. Perhaps I was inspired by what I saw go wrong with rights.

Q: What about American history?

COLLINS: I loved American history right through college and graduate school. But in graduate school I decided I was interested in the place where American history and English intersected in the 17th century. I started with colonial history and started moving backwards in time. That is what got me into English history – 17th, 16th, medieval, and constitutional.

Q: In high school what about extra curricular activities.

COLLINS: We didn't have what today's suburban kids have, like lots of lessons in music, dance, gymnastics, sports. I hung out with my girlfriends. We went into the City, got tickets for off-Broadway shows, went to Greenwich Village, went window-shopping on Fifth Avenue. We also went ice-skating and roller-skating, and sometimes swimming in public pools or out to a beach. We went to co-ed parties and went out with guys: social life was important. And I recall that although I was not a cheerleader, I was a "pom pom" girl.

Q: What was the dating pattern like?

COLLINS: Well by high school, many of us were "going steady" with one guy at a time, or dating several people in a looser pattern, or switching from one mode to the other. Co-ed parties. Single and double dating. Some blind dates.

Q: Where would you go?

COLLINS: Mostly to the movies, as I recall. But sometimes – especially with a "steady" – we went to parks, museums, sights like the Cloisters or Central Park or took the Staten Island Ferry.

Q: You had a great deal to do there.

COLLINS: Yes, there was always something to do. And there were plenty of movie houses. The historic RKO Keith in downtown Flushing where Main Street and Northern

Boulevard met had been a vaudeville theater. Grand old theater, it was, with red velvet curtains and plush seats. I could walk there.

Q: Did any of the plays you saw strike you?

COLLINS: Oh, yes, "The Diary of Anne Frank," with Susan Strasberg. I had read the book. You can imagine what an impression it made on me as a young girl. I immediately identified with this candid but doomed young girl. Then there was "My Fair Lady" with Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison. I was awed by the costumes, music, lighting and all. And when I was younger, I had seen "Peter Pan" with Mary Martin. Later, as they came out, I saw "South Pacific," "Oklahoma," and "Carousel." And later still, "West Side Story." It's hard to imagine topping these, especially with their original casts.

Q: Did the Holocaust figure into your thinking or not?

COLLINS: Not so much. There weren't close family members directly affected. So it was more about what was in the news or books or overheard stories.

Q: You weren't of the German Jewish wing.

COLLINS: No. We didn't have relatives in those parts of the world. It was more second hand. And I think my parents tried to protect us, to shield us from graphic images and from knowing too much. Remember in those days you were not assaulted by visual images all day. Newspapers were restrained in the images they used. Horrifying pictures did not show up in my parents' New York Times and Herald Tribune as far as I can recall.

Q: As you approached graduating from high school, what were you thinking about what a woman could do? Were you feeling a "glass ceiling," or being limited?

COLLINS: The strange thing about looking backward is how much we took for granted then. I remember while in college learning of scholarships and fellowships – like the Rhodes, Wilsons, Fulbrights – that were, as I recall, available to men only. I certainly remember thinking: "Oh, I guess I can't do that," without ever thinking this might be wrong. And of course at that time the advertisements for jobs in the newspapers were classified under two columns, "male" and "female." For my summer jobs of course I looked under "female" – and worked every summer from when I was 15 on – but also glanced at the "male" jobs out of curiosity. Categories were a "given," as so many cultural assumptions are -- until they're not anymore!

In high school, I already thought I would have a career: would go to college and do something interesting. And be able to support myself. My mother had thought that important for a woman, to be able to take care of herself if she were alone. Since I was most interested in different cultures, even then, I had thought I would be a social studies teacher. So in high school, and then in college, I studied history, geography, anthropology, sociology, economic geography, and political science. My real interest was

anthropology. Then I got practical and figured out that history was more likely than anthropology to lead to a profession.

I had wanted to go away to college rather than commute from home, but my parents made it clear that I was not going away, partly because of the costs, and partly because they didn't feel I should live away from home at 16. That really limited my options. And I envied my girlfriends who did get to go away to college, although most of us had to live at home and commute. So I applied to Queens College of the City University system of New York because it was nearby and free. My New York State Scholarship gave me some money for books, transportation, and extras. My parents covered food, clothing, and housing, but also allowed me use of the family car when it was available. So I had advantages that other kids didn't have and felt fortunate about that.

Q: What about summer jobs before entering college?

COLLINS: For two summers I worked for the New York City Board of Education grading student multiple-choice tests. Students filled in black dots, and we scored them, my friend and I. Since I was only 15, I got the job through a friend of my parents. He was off for the whole summer and left the two of us in the charge of his secretary. And we literally punched a clock, the old fashioned kind with cards. Thump! My new friend and I were grateful for the job and pay checks. Her mother was widowed and worked at a bakery counter. In this and other summer clerical and secretarial jobs, I got to go to lunch with the "office girls" in the "typing pool." Learned a lot, including some real facts of life. One summer I did this kind of work at the Lenox Hill Settlement House.

Q: What is a settlement house?

COLLINS: I believe they started in Chicago in the 19th century. Jane Addams was one of the founders. New York had several of them. I believe they were designed to help immigrants settle into American life through learning English and other skills. They had recreational facilities, too, within the immigrant communities. Basketball court, swimming pool and such.

One of the famous ones was the Henry Street Settlement House in New York – where I went several times while in college. I got the summer job through the Jewish Federation that had an employment agency that was free. By then I had had a few summers' experience. At that point, the neighborhood consisted mainly of Czechoslovakian immigrants who spoke only Czech. It had previously been a German immigrant area.

My summer jobs made me realize that I didn't want to spend my life doing secretarial work. Among other things, I went nuts over the multiple carbon copies of each letter I would type: one mistake, and what a job to correct it – if indeed they allowed you corrections. For some of those summer jobs I did straight copy typing – what a Xerox machine would do today. In others, I had some leeway in organizing projects.

Q: Had you had a significant other or boyfriend or not?

COLLINS: By that time, I had had three or four successive boyfriends and other dates. I may have been a "typical teenager" when it came to social life, but I remained serious and studious.

Q: Were clothes important?

COLLINS: Well, sort of. I had a weakness for them, probably inherited from my mother. She would shop with me and talk about colors and accessories and such. We would put outfits together. We'd go into the City about twice a year to pick up a few pieces that would "round out" the existing clothes. Some people found this frivolous, but it was really something we enjoyed, an innocent hobby, not a compulsion. And something we could share.

Q: In high school were you all wearing skirts?

COLLINS: Oh, yes. And not only did we wear skirts in high school, but all the way through college we were not allowed to wear trousers even in winter. Public college, public high school, these were – and winters in New York. You'd be expelled, sent home, if you wore anything but a skirt or dress. It was only when I went to graduate school at Indiana University in 1962 that I could wear trousers in a classroom. Of course I was wearing them outside school from the time I was a kid. My mother thought it allowed me freer movement, even when I was a toddler, before it was common for girls to wear pants. Hard to believe that today when young women wear flip-flops, tank tops, and shorts to class.

Q: Today is 15 February 2012. We were finishing up discussion of your high school years…

COLLINS: Yes. As I drove home last time I remembered that I had also been reading other books popular at the time, nonfiction like The Organization Man (William H. Whyte) and The Lonely Crowd (David Riesman and Nathan Glazer), studies and observations on our society, corporate life, mores. And sometimes more popular fiction, like Marjorie Morningstar, (Herman Wouk), later a movie with Natalie Wood. My girlfriends and I loved these, identified with her.

Q: For me as a Gentile, this is all about growing up Jewish in New York.

COLLINS: Yes, that's true. But I've also seen since then how universal some of these experiences were. Margaret Atwood, for example, captured it all in Cat's Eye, about growing up a girl in the 1950s. Even though she was Canadian, her experience totally resonated.

It also struck me on my way home that I had read two authors who came to influence my whole life, although I didn't know it at the time: Pearl Buck and Margaret Mead. Their curiosity about other cultures, world travel and living among people different from

themselves and reporting their stories fascinated me. This was before deconstructionism and other theory questioned the meaning around "subjective" and "objective" perspectives in this type of observing – and the effect of the observing on the observed. But I know when I read them I learned that women could be professionals and explore cultural issues, commonalities and differences, all very far from home; the idea that you could look at a culture and see that it had its own system of values, of mores, of explanations for mysterious events like birth, death, and the cycle of the seasons.

Q: I'll just add for those who read this and may not know: that Pearl Buck wrote extensively about China.

COLLINS: That's right, and about going there as an American.

Q: Yes, as an American. And Margaret Mead was an anthropologist who worked in the Pacific Islands, and wrote extensively about the cultures there, which were quite different.

COLLINS: Coming of Age in Samoa was one of her books. She had discovered that adolescence and its attendant angst and drama were not based in "nature" but in culture. I suppose two things intrigued me about these writers: that they were women with serious professions, and that they had entered other cultures, which they tried to understand and explain to Americans. It was only much later that I realize how much I owed to their inspiration.

Q: Did Eleanor Roosevelt have any impact on you?

COLLINS: She did in a way. But her level was so much above mine, I couldn't really identify with her. My mother and father were big fans of hers. My mother, particularly: she read her newspaper column daily [*"My Day*"]. I respected her enormously and admired what she did, but her life seemed far from mine. She was the wife of the President. She was from a wealthy and prestigious family herself, went to private schools, had large homes—a life I could not imagine.

Q: Obviously there was a tremendous class difference.

COLLINS: Yes, that's right. We went to visit "mansions" of famous people, like the Vanderbilts, Roosevelts, and Rockefellers. It was almost impossible for me to imagine those worlds.

Q: But Buck and Mead were working class.

COLLINS: I don't know for sure, but I thought they seemed like people I could have known.

Q: Well was there a high school teacher, a woman, who struck you as doing something that you would like to do?

COLLINS: Having female high school teachers was important. And my parents had friends who were teachers. These were the only career women I had met by that time. Mrs. Goldman for social studies. Mrs. LaBarbara for English. Mrs. Lepowsky for math. These were all serious, committed people who worked with substantive material all day, with history or civics or literature or math. They were real professionals. And they also had what seemed to me normal lives: families, children. Nothing "weird."

Q: Did you encounter what today we would call anti feminist sentiment? Men who say disparaging things about a woman? We still see that day: people attacking Nancy Pelosi as heading up the House, but not Harry Reid for heading up the Senate (when they did).

COLLINS: And the attacks on Hillary Clinton.

Q: There is obviously a strong ant-feminine streak within the body politic that keeps coming out. I certainly remember as a kid the ditty during President Roosevelt's time, supposedly sung by Mrs. Roosevelt: "I'll kiss the niggers, and you kiss the Jews, and we will stay in office as long as we choose." Isn't that a pretty awful thing?

COLLINS: Wow. Yes. I've never heard that. But people say the equivalent things today, don't they? One hears comments about President Obama. Racist ones.

Q: These things don't go away. What a horrible thing to remember.

COLLINS: It is actually good you did remember because this should be part of the record, too. It is part of our history. It shows what people were up against. As I look back at those times, I think of them not so much as anti-feminist, but pre-feminist, lacking the awareness of equal rights for women. But at some level as a little girl or a little boy you are already picking up these messages from society. Little boys should not be "sissies." Little girls should not be "tom boys."

When I went to Queens College, there were three different male professors that made blatant remarks against women considering higher education or advanced degrees. It's probably jumping ahead to say this now, but I had an "advisor," Mr. Saladino, in college, in the history department. I was a straight "A" student who graduated magna cum laude, and he told me directly: "You should not aspire to much as a woman. You should not go to graduate school. Not even teach high school. Perhaps kindergarten." "And if you insist on going, consider those that it would be easier to get into, not the elite schools, but those in the Midwest that might be glad to see someone from New York."

As it turned out, I did, but not because he suggested it. The head of the history department, Mr. Hallberg, declared that he would never in his life hire a woman to teach history in the department at Queens College. There was a third professor in another department, I believe in psychology and education, who told the class that women should not go to graduate school because they would lose their looks. All that study and hard work would make them ugly. I was so angered by these comments I was driven to go to

graduate school and go right through for a Ph.D. in history. Which I did with straight "A"s.

Q: Again, for the reader, I am trying to reconstruct the period. It's hard to go back and understand such comments.

COLLINS: Today they are illegal, but they were not then.

Q: They represent a thought process and may have been said without malice.

COLLINS: I think that is possible. I don't know about the head of the history department, but the other two thought they were giving sound advice I think. There's probably also an element of "power" in such comments, especially where the relationship is so unequal.

Q: But my point is that you are – or were -- the recipient, even if it was 50 years ago. These things are daggers.

COLLINS: You never forget them. People react differently to them. There are people who might have taken these guys seriously. I suppose I was more resilient because my parents and relatives were not ignoramuses. They were OK with graduate school, even for a girl. But I think if I had parents who already had said, "Forget graduate school. Get a job. Get a husband, home and children," that would have been harder. But it packs a wallop. And it makes you realize the need for the Civil Rights Acts (of 1964 and 1972) that made it illegal to do this to women and girls, or to provide them lesser educational opportunities.

Q: Today I think of the one that affects sports for women, beyond cheerleading.

COLLINS: That is right. But Title IX was not intended to be just about sports. It was about equal opportunity for women in colleges and universities across the board. Originally, it was about access to courses and majors and laboratories, not to be denied admission to Chemistry 404 or whatever. But where it's most active today is in equality of opportunity in sports.

Q: …and it is a double whammy when there was usually a Jewish quota as well, especially in Eastern colleges. And particularly about Jews from New York. The kids from Brooklyn Tech, for example, getting into M.I.T. had to know they would admit only five or six of them.

COLLINS: The quotas were very real at that time.

Q: They were acknowledged.

COLLINS: As there are some Asians today that argue that they face this as some schools, like Berkeley. They claim that a higher bar for admission is set for them, tougher

standards. And they're joining a lawsuit going to federal courts. I think Yale recently acknowledged and apologized for quotas for Jews.

Q: As I kid I grew up hearing around me that you shouldn't date Irish girls because they were Catholic. And then if you date a Catholic girl your children will be brought up Catholic. This would be horrible.

COLLINS: Yes, I heard that when I was a kid, too. I had understood that the Church required them to bring up the children Catholic. Of course I didn't realize that some people would choose to pay no attention to that.

Q: I remember people were categorized. People would say, we have a nice little Jewish cook or a nice little Irish maid or something. There was always the "nice little" part, even if they were big and husky.

COLLINS: It is almost like the term, "a Chinese gentleman." People seem to use that term when they want to appear to be without prejudice. In the 40s and 50s there was a lot of categorization by religion, ethnic group, race, and perhaps class. But at the same time, and by the 60s, there were people trying to be more universal, more "tolerant," and what we call "inclusive" today. I mean those engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, trying to make things more equitable. What has come full circle is the new self-identification of groups used for the purpose of gaining rights for people as an ethnic, religious, or racial group – using these groups for class action purposes. Turning categories the other way, to advantage not disadvantage.

Q: While we are on this subject, it just occurred to me that humor, too, is different among ethnic groups.

COLLINS: That is true. "Three Irishmen went into a bar…"

Q: Absolutely. For me like so many listening to the radio, I learned a lot of Yiddish through humor because it was all part of the stock in trade.

COLLINS: That is right. Yiddish has a lot of words that migrated into English. Filled in some blanks. Adds spice, gusto, and imagery.

Q: Yes. There would also be the stock Jewish character and also the stock black character that you know is rather demeaning. I suspect we have come a ways.

COLLINS: I think we have. I think we do want to avoid grouping for the purpose of stereotyping, but also want to be careful about ethnic identification that is designed to be positive but may have the effect of becoming exclusionary or creating new inequities.

Q: Let's move on in our chronology. You are getting ready to go to college.

COLLINS: Yes. I finished high school in 1958 and went on to Queens College, from which I graduated in January 1962.

Q: You were 16 when you entered college?

COLLINS: Yes. Technically 16 ½.

Q: Was there any concern about turning a 16-year-old girl loose in college?

COLLINS: Lots of concern by my parents who wouldn't let me go away from home for college. I guess when I look back in it I can see why. My sons didn't leave for college until they were 18.

Q: Yes, there is a big difference.

COLLINS: There is a big difference between 16 and 18. At the time, I thought myself very mature. Don't most teens?

Q: So you started at Queens? What was it like at the time?

COLLINS: It was close to home: one or two buses away. It was technically co-ed, but had more women than men, partly because many men went off to men's colleges, like Columbia. Many of the women aspired to get their teaching degrees, but they were in a range of fields. A couple of my girlfriends were in math, for example. I was almost the only one in history, but a couple were in English and education. The curriculum was strictly prescribed for the first two years. They followed Columbia's and Chicago's lead, using the Western Civilization courses and volumes. Intellectual history. We also were required to study chemistry, physics, algebra, calculus, statistics; music and art history and understanding; surveys of English literature; and of course foreign languages. We did a lot of reading and considerable amount of writing.

Q: How did this western civilization course strike you?

COLLINS: That was one of the courses that grabbed me right at the beginning. Intellectual history. I had never read people like those before: Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and the range of western thinkers. Fascinating reading, analyzing, and comparing. We also studied American history. And I started realizing how interested I was in the range of these humanities and social sciences fields: history, sociology, anthropology, geography, economic geography, economics, philosophy, political theory. These fields interested me from high school, through college, Ph.D., and to today.

Q: What kind of history were you getting?

COLLINS: I don't recall the names of all the history courses I studied, but recall that we studied the entire scope of American history. Oddly, what I remember even better was the economic geography course I took as part of my major, one of the most interesting and

lasting courses I studied there. I can still picture the professor, but cannot recall his name. One semester he focused on world economic geography and one on American. He covered everything from natural resources and topography to industry; for example, the impact of hard and soft coal on particular regions and industries, steel production, shipping, railroads. And one could quickly see how and why particular cities or ports developed. Resources, industry, trade, development, transportation. This is one set of courses and ways of thinking I've remembered long after college.

Q: Did Marxism hit you at all? I'm thinking not of Communism, but of the "Forward" newspaper and that kind of thinking, in that context, of being in a Jewish community, not well off.

COLLINS: Marxism as a theory, yes. And also Socialism. There was a lot of thinking that a more shared life, with a large public sphere, would be a great thing for everyone. A mutual support system. Some people were serious Socialists. And some were Marxist. Marxism may have been more alive and well in New York than in Russia.

Q: Yes, it was really intellectual, and wasn't dead.

COLLINS: Oh, yes. My parents knew people who debated Marxism and Marxist principles. My father tended to argue against them. He was a more traditional "liberal" or "progressive." But there were things about Marxist theory that resonated in that setting. The rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The importance of capital. The exploitation of workers. And everyone could see that a lot of people were making a lot of money, a lot of profit, off the labor of others, the underpaid workers. Over the years, one of my parents' friends "gave up" Marxist theory and went out to sell his brain to the highest bidder, deciding that what Marx said about capitalism – and how money grows more money – seemed more appealing than spending his life in relative poverty. Tired of living in a walk-up in the Bronx, he went corporate and made millions. He was a mathematician. And I spent time trying to figure out the meaning of these high level arguments about capital and labor.

Q: In Queens I just don't think of a school dominated by women would be as interested in Marxism…

COLLINS: People used to quip that the women were there for their "MRS" degree. Of course not all of them were; many were very serious about their studies. And some career-minded women students went on to grad school.

Q. How long were you at Queens?

COLLINS: I was at Queens for 3 ½ years because I wanted to get out quickly. I didn't find that it had a lot of intellectual stimulation outside the texts. There were a few good professors I met along the way, but it tended to be an impersonal place. The professors did not have a lot of time for students. They were all commuting as well. Some of them may have had second jobs. But few had any long-term impact.

One of the only female professors I had there, an anthropologist, I found impressive. The other, in "writing," was a dud. And I mentioned the economic geography professor. But overall I didn't feel challenged in any creative way. It felt more like rote. And outside the classroom, not much went on other then getting back on the bus. Some girls joined sororities, but I didn't. Many students had responsibilities to families and to garnering support – much like what we hear today of Community College students. I was eager to get out and go off to grad school.

Q: Did you work and where?

COLLINS: I worked every summer, from the age of 15, but I didn't work during the school year. My parents didn't want me to, and were in a position to support my food, clothing, housing, books, and transportation. I mentioned the New York City Board of Education for two summers and the Lenox Hill Settlement House for one. I also worked after this for my father's agency in New York for half a summer in the typing pool. I also did courses each summer so that I could make up one semester and graduate early.

Q: Why were you in a hurry?

COLLINS: Because I didn't care for my experience at Queens College. I had loved high school and had felt so inspired there, open to new ways of thinking, creative opportunities; and later, in graduate school, loved the chance to focus on specialized studies, do research and writing. In both high school and later in graduate school I had teachers who were interested, who connected to students, who knew us and cared; at Queens, almost none was very engaged at the personal level.

Q: Was there much dating or other kinds of girls getting together and doing things

COLLINS: My girlfriends and I did many of the things we had done in high school: go downtown to museums and theaters, go ice-skating, do co-ed parties and events. Movies. All of it was self-generated. I didn't get to meet a lot of new people except in my classes, and especially if they had the same or similar last name, as we were seated in alphabetical order in every class. (Feld, Feldman, Field…) More out of Madeleine in Paris than 20th century college, except we didn't have to walk in rows.

Q: What drew you to Indiana?

COLLINS: I had applied to Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana and got into all three. I didn't apply to private colleges because I thought they would be too expensive. When Jim applied and got into Indiana, and we were already dating, I had a hard time deciding whether to choose to follow or go elsewhere. He hoped I'd go there. Then when Indiana wrote me offering me a unique fellowship in history (they had only one Woodward Fellow per year) that would pay my first year, comp my tuition, and such, that seemed persuasive. So I went there and never regretted it for a moment. I had the best experience possible – but we'll come to that later.

Q: What world events were you following then? These were the Kennedy years. Did new things like the Peace Corps attract you?

COLLINS: I was very attracted to Kennedy and what he stood for and loved the idea of the Peace Corps. But it didn't fit with my going straight from college into graduate school and then overseas for other reasons. What I remember best in world affairs at that time was the Bay of Pigs in the fall of 1962. By then I was in graduate school of course. The previous world event that startled me was the launching of Sputnik in 1957.

Q: Of course it was the Eisenhower period up through 1960. Sputnik was a shock to us all.

COLLINS: All the talking heads were saying: kids in school have to learn more, especially of math and science. But I don't remember that it had any impact on my education or me. And I wasn't particularly fearful of the Cold War, as some people were, figuring that somehow countries weren't all going to annihilate one another. But people were building air raid shelters. And we had regular air raid drills in elementary school. What I also remember of that period was the beginning of suburbs. Levittown and others. It was probably because I wanted so desperately to exit Brooklyn that I drooled over those little square boxes made of ticky-tack, as the song goes. I saw the bedroom for each child, a lounge chair on the patio for reading, a carport, hoses, flowers. I thought it all marvelous. We forget that before it was considered "urban sprawl" it was "grand opportunity" to escape from urban blight. These were the beginnings of major transformation in American life, some of it quite happy.

Q: Were you and your family concerned about conditions in the South? For example, about lynchings, segregation, and racial issues?

COLLINS: It's odd, but I don't remember much about that situation until the Civil Rights movement began. I don't recall seeing things in the New York Times or hearing them on WQXR, the classical music station on which my parents listened to the news. I remember general comments my parents made from time to time about how hard things were for Negroes, how almost invisible they were, and how people treated them badly. Of course in New York there were many black people everywhere; and when I went to Flushing High School perhaps a third or fourth of the student body was black, then called Negroes. We didn't think about it in a big mega way, though, except as we thought about Harlem, and people there at that time being poor, not living in a good situation. Of course there were also black sections of Brooklyn and Queens, too. But with the Civil Rights movement later we all became more aware. One of the "Freedom Riders" murdered in the South was, in fact, a Queens College graduate, Andrew Goodman.

Q: How did you meet your husband Jim, a man – I should say -- I have been interviewing off and on for about five years.

COLLINS: Yes, it is important for him to do this because he has not yet organized his boxes of notes, papers, and calendars. How I met him: I was in college, having dated several people by then, and went off for a six-week term at Harvard Summer School to get some of the credits I'd need to graduate early from Queens College. I was taking a four-credit course in anthropology from a well-known professor who had written a book on the subject. The course was offered in the Peabody Museum itself. I loved it – including walking daily through the empty museum, past the displays, hearing the echoes of my feet to get to the hidden classroom upstairs. It almost got me back into anthropology.

Meanwhile, comes a Friday night, July 30, 1960, in what other schools would call the "dorm," but at older universities is a "house" instead. "How would you like a blind date?" asked a couple of girls from across the floor. I said "no," I didn't like to do blind dates, and really preferred to stay behind and read… but they pressed and convinced me I must go to round out the numbers. They had 12 guys cooking dinner for 12 girls… but, alas, they had only 11 girls at the moment…Although this did not sound promising, I finally agreed to go, thinking: It's dinner. It's free.

So a few hours later, there was Jim in the hall below to take me to the dinner at the house a few guys had rented. And I thought it was nice of him to pick me up and not just meet me at the place. I later learned that he had done the shopping for the lamb chops and other foods since the other men didn't know how to shop and he did. We had a very pleasant evening. It was a nice group of people, and I did thank the girls who invited me. Jim and I had lots to talk about: current events, political views, and books we read, our studies. And got along fine. So when he took me back to the dorm he asked if I'd like to go the following weekend out on a boat with his cousins in Marblehead. He said they were about his parents' age. So I figured: cousins, old, safe. And I had never been on a boat, if you don't count rowboats, canoes, and ferries. He also invited one of his friends with his girlfriend. And his cousins were very nice and very gracious. That was comforting and endearing. After that, there were movies, walks, and outings. It wasn't a whirlwind – more a steadily growing friendship. And the rest is history. Over 50 years of it.

Q: So you went out to graduate school at Indiana University in Bloomington in 1962. What was it like there then?

COLLINS: I got off the airplane in January1962. It was my first airplane flight. I was 20 years old. I took a Greyhound Bus from Indianapolis to Bloomington. I think it is some 50 miles away. It was all snow and ice. I looked at the campus and thought it lovely. I settled into the girls' graduate dorms. Hard to believe they had graduate dorms for single men and single women. Since I was still under 21, I was theoretically subject to the "parietal" rules on campus, but since I was a graduate student in the graduate dorms, those rules didn't apply. That gave some resident assistants a headache, trying to imagine what to do to supervise me without supervising me. The undergraduates had to be in by 10:00 p.m. And there were no male visitors in female dorms and vice versa – even in the graduate dorms. When I arrived, the cornfields were covered in snow; but when spring

showed up, so did the cornfields, grass, trees, and flowers. Gentle bubbling streams. The campus was big and very attractive. Hilly. And people were very warm and friendly, almost a cliché.

Q: Of course we are talking about the Midwest and not New York City. New York City is a pushy place.

COLLINS: That's right. And of course with eight million people somewhat more congested than Bloomington, at that time, with something like 15,000 people. Even during registration, people were helpful and courteous, and I did appreciate that. They are still that way. We've been back for visits since.

On the first day of classes I biked to Ballantine Hall, the building that housed the history department. As I parked it in the stand, a white haired gentleman whom you probably knew, [the late] Bob Byrnes, who was then head of the history department and of the Russian institute, looked down on me from the steps and said: "You must be the new graduate student." I was so shocked after the impersonality of Queens College, I couldn't believe it. Then he exclaimed: "God! You look like kid!" I wasn't sure what to say, and probably agreed that I did but I hoped to grow up soon. Then he introduced himself and shook hands.

Q: Well you were on your way not just to a Master's degree but also right through your Ph.D.

COLLINS: Yes. I decided that if I stopped at a Master's, I might never get to finish a Ph.D. It occurred to me I was likely to marry and perhaps to have children, so I'd better "do it now" while I could. And I've never regretted that choice. My parents encouraged me to get as much education as I wanted, and said they could help a bit. By that time, my father's job was more advanced, and they could afford to get me clothes or plane ticket or help with other costs if necessary. I didn't need much, but it was a comfort, and I did accept those things. So I just went on through, not stopping after the first year when I got my Master's.

Q: Did you have to declare early on what field in history you were going to study?

COLLINS: I recall telling them that I planned to get a Ph.D. and the Master's along the way so that I could be a teaching assistant. I had the Woodward Fellowship for one year and an "I.U. Fellowship" for one semester to bridge me over to when I could be a teaching assistant. Beside the money in these, there was also free tuition. So I felt fortunate – though anxious each semester as I awaited news of what would support me. And at 21 I walked into a classroom of undergraduates to teach them Western Civilization. Of course I was nervous. They were all bigger than I was, and several were older. My other job was to earn 60 credits in course work and select a thesis topic and advisor for my years of research and writing of my dissertation.

Q: Did you run into any prejudice or concern about the fact that you were a woman?

COLLINS: No. That was the remarkable thing: I've never forgotten it. They did not demean me and never spoke in a prejudicial way. They were very supportive. I remain grateful to this day. They were gender blind as we now say. There was no opportunity that I didn't get. This was still before the Civil Rights laws. And I was very fortunate in my thesis advisor, Leo Solt. He was not only a fine person, but responsive and supportive beyond the call of duty. This jumps ahead a little bit, but when Jim was assigned to Turkey in the Foreign Service, and I was not yet finished with the final draft of my thesis, he arranged for it all to work out for me in a way very few people might have done then or since. I was glad to be able to thank him even 30 years later when I realized that he changed the course of my life; and also to tell his grown daughters the story more recently.

Q: Did you find coming out of the New York atmosphere that you had to sort of tame yourself?

COLLINS: Well, despite being from New York, I tended to be a bit shy at that time, diffident. I've become more outgoing since. Although I sometimes had to fight on the streets, I was not aggressive or bold. I was fairly gentle and overwhelmed by aggressive people. So I was actually happy not to have to push or fight or argue. But it was a cultural adjustment in many ways!

Q: I'm sure it was! How did you choose your subject and what was it?

COLLINS: Well, I had already decided on history and fields related to it, like anthropology and government. I started with American history, in which I thought I might major. Then I studied European intellectual history and political theory. As I pushed back further in time from American Colonial History, I found myself in English history, 17th century. I wanted to look at the roots of American Colonial history in England: constitutionalism, political theory, intellectual history, history of science. Newton, Locke, Hobbes. A time of radical change in thinking. Secularization and revolution. Questioning the status quo. Perfect.

Q: Did Indiana have a particularly strong cadre of people in these areas?

COLLINS: They had a lot of faculty in American history because they had always taught Indiana teachers. There were two professors, as I recall, that specialized just in Indiana history to prepare teachers to teach that. Then they had a variety of people specialized in the history of Russia, East Europe, Western Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and so forth – long before other institutions were teaching these fields. In Russian history, Jack Thompson and Bob Byrnes. In European, Gerald Strauss and C. Leonard Lundin. There were two in American Colonial: Renee Vassar (one of the first women there), who left after a short period; and Trevor Colburn. In English history, beside my advisor Leo Solt, there was visiting professor from England Michael Wolfe, and also Arthur Hogue who taught English constitutional history.

One of the most memorable and erudite among them was Gerald Strauss, educated in Germany, who taught European intellectual history and Western Civilization. The day after I received my Master's degree, he called me in and said, " I would like you to be my teaching assistant next year." I was too shocked to reply before he added, "Most graduate students are so half-baked. You are less half-baked than others." I'm thinking – Is this a compliment? So I ended up one of his four teaching assistants. He taught about 100 students in a large auditorium, lecturing at a high level of expertise, synthesizing Western thought over the centuries. Each of us had a section of 25 students with whom we met a couple of times a week. As it turned out – and I hadn't known it at the time – all they needed was translation of what he said to the level they understood. These were not Harvard's entering class: they were not pre-selected. They qualified by having graduated from an Indiana High School. Many were first generation, many from rural areas without strong schools.

Q: So were you basically translating?

COLLINS: Yes, in large part. We four would sit at the back writing notes furiously during his lectures. And, as mentioned, he left us completely on our own to teach, create and grade exams, submit final grades--without any supervision. I did have to gather my courage to enter the classroom at 21 years old to about 25 undergraduate college students almost all of whom were bigger than I, including football and basketball players – and some older than I. I'm not sure if it made it easier or more difficult soon to learn that they were starting from scratch in this kind of thinking and learning, had not been taught in high school the critical thinking and analysis I had been taught.

Q: What were you getting out of on your own studies? Were there areas in English history that particularly interested you?

COLLINS: I was interested in the 17th century because it was a time of such profound change. It was the beginning, in many ways, of modern secular thinking, especially in sciences, philosophy, and political theory. Locke, Newton, Hobbes and others were part of ferment in intellectual life.

I was also fascinated by revolutions because they spur radical change in a short period. I was intrigued in part because revolutions begin in the minds of men, in ideas that change the world. And they are truly radical in the sense of getting to root causes, changing things "root and branch." How do people reach this tipping point? What changes and what doesn't in each revolution? How are revolutions similar and different? Crane Brinton wrote a classic book comparing the revolutionary movements in America, France, Russia and England, The Anatomy of Revolution.

Q: As a Foreign Service Officer, I found the course that served me best was one that compared the American, French, and Russian revolutions. It well behooves one to look at these things today or any time in history.

COLLINS: You're right. I would love to see someone update that book today, adding newer revolutions, reinterpreting older ones in light of new evidence.

Q: Well it was a little different in England…

COLLINS: Well, they did decapitate the King in 1649. And Parliament took control. Some people argue that the American Revolution wasn't truly a revolution because it didn't change the class of the people in charge, did not effect social change. Brinton's book was certainly influential. It has us thinking even today about the dynamics of revolutions.

Q: Well did you find at a university in the Midwest a place of intellectual ferment? One doesn't always picture these schools that way.

COLLINS: There was a difference between graduate and undergraduate experience. At the undergraduate level, social life played a larger role than sitting and discussing large topics. But graduate students were very serious. They were from all over the United States and the world. One contemporary, Bob Gates, became Secretary of Defense. There were lots of bright and interesting graduate students and top faculty, interested in good discussion. Their faculty was drawn from select universities, and several had experience in the "real world" outside universities before they began there. We still have friends we met there. We also remained in touch with several faculty members after we left. Most of our classmates became university faculty, but some ended up in government agencies in Washington.

Q: You went at a time when the full impact of the G.I. Bill was being felt. That made a tremendous difference in higher education.

COLLINS: True. Almost all the graduate students in history, government, and area studies were men, and some were on the G.I. bill – or had been. There were also interesting people Jim picked up through his use of Russian. Indiana then taught several very uncommon languages, including Albanian, for example. Jim came to know the six men who taught the language and who could speak to almost no one else but each other – and Jim (in Russian), as they had no English. And they had dramatic stories of wars and survival. He also befriended a graduate student from Germany and a Greek-American from the Bronx. They truly gave us a cultural perspective.

Jim also worked a deal in which the three guys – Greek-American from the Bronx ("Columbus" his last name), German foreign student (Peter), and he, Jim, would grocery shop together on Friday afternoons at the small "supermarket" across the railroad tracks. Columbus supplied the car, which we didn't have, and Jim supplied the "know how" on how to select the best meats and vegetables, unit pricing, and sales.

And there was the single Russian graduate student (Victor) who was ostracized by all – for being a Communist. He was a geneticist more interested in fruit flies than politics. We sat with him at dinner in the dining hall. Food there was unlimited, except for the meat.

He was thin as a rail, but inhaled with each dinner what seemed like a half a loaf of bread and a quart of milk in addition to the full meal of meat, potatoes or rice, and cooked vegetables. And there was a young professor from Greece, brought home to America as a "mascot" by a unit in the American army after the war. They "adopted" him as a child. He earned a Ph.D. in America and came to teach at Indiana. George Soulis, an amazing man who died way too young.

Q: How did the assassination of Kennedy hit you all?

COLLINS: Oh, God! Like the proverbial ton of bricks. They say you never forget where you were at the time. I was in our little graduate apartment, a one-room efficiency. We were now married. I just couldn't believe it. Nobody could. The campus just came to a dead standstill. People walked around like zombies. I think it is the first shocking major event in my life, outside the fright of the Bay of Pigs in 1962 and the childhood excitement over V-E and V-J days in 1945. It affected everyone at the same time in the same way, with a sense of disbelief. They stopped classes. Everyone went home or wandered about aimlessly. This kind of universal shock and awe happens rarely in a lifetime. The next time was 9/11/2001.

Q: How long were you on the campus?

COLLINS: We were there for a couple of years while doing our course work. I stayed long enough also to finish my five days of oral and written exams in five fields before leaving to start my dissertation research. We managed to get one year in Cambridge, Massachusetts to use Harvard's libraries. From there we went to Moscow for one year on the official university exchange program, with State Department and Ford Foundation support. This official program exchanging graduate students between the U.S. and the Soviet Union started around 1959. We went there in 1965. We had saved up a little money from our fellowships and assistantships to spend a second year abroad, in London. The program paid the overseas round-trip fares.

Q: Let's talk about the year in London. How did you find the resources?

COLLINS: That was the best. At Harvard I was able to use rare books at the Houghton Library. When I got to London I could research original sources. I spent most of my time at the British Library (then called the British Museum), with visits to the Lambeth Palace Library and the Bodleian Library at Oxford. I worked primarily in two kinds of sources: printed books, old and new, and 17th century broadsides, small printed pamphlets arguing political points of view. Sort of blogs of their day. The Thomason Collection of broadsides was incredibly valuable.

Beside those printed works were the manuscripts, original writing of the time. A lot of these papers were not catalogued, but rather secured in little piles, tied with red ribbons. You untied the bows and searched what might be valuable treasure troves of information – or irrelevant. This was the greatest fun. I could have done it forever, could have spent my life doing historic research and writing. At some point I started outlining and then

writing my dissertation. We had a wonderful year in England while knowing almost no one, living in one small room, and having no money. A letter from my advisor gave me access to all these collections. I was also able to visit and talk with two British professors of English history. One was the renowned Christopher Hill. He was author, among other things, of The World Turned Upside Down.

Q: When were you in Moscow?

COLLINS: The year before we were in England. We were in Moscow the academic year of 1965-1966 and in London, 1966 – 1967.

Q: What were you doing in Russia?

COLLINS: Following Jim. Accompanying him as his wife.

Q: Jim was not in the Foreign Service then, was he?

COLLINS: No, this was a graduate student exchange program that still exists today. Today it is run by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board), but in those days it was run by the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants, supported by the State Department and Ford Foundation, and run out of Indiana University, by chance. While we were living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jim had fulfilled the paperwork requirements, but interviews were still required. On a blizzardy day, two professors interviewed each of us in succession in their hotel rooms in Cambridge. They declared we passed the first test just by showing up. We had to do it on foot, with knee high boots. I still picture the unhinged galoshes on one of them, which probably means I was looking down too much.

Q: What was their concern?

COLLINS: Well, psychologically it was a very trying, vexing environment to live in during the Cold War, in the dormitories. I think they were assessing our stability, our ability to survive the tedium and pressures of a year at Moscow State University (M.G.U. in Russian.). They already had experienced graduate students and/or spouses who didn't make it through.

To describe the spooky but tedious environment there would take a long time. To try to capture it, I wrote a book on what it felt like to live in Russia as a foreigner through four decades. In it, I tried to recreate the environment of the 1960s in Russia. The book, which came out in 2008 is called Through Dark Days and White Nights: Four Decades Observing A Changing Russia. I've given about 40 book talks since, and have made it available now in all electronic formats: Kindle, iPad, Nook, and such, as well as in "hard copy" via Amazon.

Of course I was ready for winter, coming from New York and Bloomington, Indiana, and had the right gear, although I learned that 40 degrees BELOW zero, where Fahrenheit

and Centigrade meet, made other "cold" feel just "cool." I should have been alerted when they commented during the interview, "Hopefully you have some sort of hobby or something that will keep you busy like Arthur's knots where you can master all the knots in the book over the year…" because, as it turned out, one of the biggest problems there was plain old boredom. People could hardly survive the monotony of the place, without color or life. I asked whether I could use the libraries there, and they said I could.

So in August of 1965 we took a small student ship, the "Aurelia," out of New York's west side docks, and a train for three days across Europe into Moscow. My grandparents, who had come with my parents to bid us goodbye at the dock, were in tears. They pictured Cossacks, poverty, ignorance, cold, and hunger. They could not imagine why we would choose to live in the place from which they worked so hard to escape.

We actually had luxury living for Moscow then: our own small suite with a bathroom. There's much more about how we lived and what we did in the book: I had taken notes at the time as well as written letters to our parents. I should add that I was sick a lot: caught lots of bugs. Suffered months of strep throat, for example. Not to mention intestinal parasites.

Q: Had you picked up Russian?

COLLINS: That was required. When Jim was accepted for the program, along with about 15 others, everyone had to study Russian at their own level. Jim's, advanced; mine, beginner. A very intense summer it was, from about 6:00 AM to bedtime, daily. We were housed in a Russian-language-only dormitory. No English was to be spoken. Of the graduate students going then, two were women, the other 14 or so, men. The best known today among them is Bill Taubman who wrote the award-winning biography of Khrushchev.

Q: Did you see yourself as the wife of a diplomat?

COLLINS: No, I had no idea. I still thought I was a graduate student. We might be graduate students forever the rate we were going. I was picturing an academic future. Turns out that the seven years it took to complete my degree is and was less than average. But the Foreign Service life had not even entered my mind.

Q: Were you picking up any feel for the Soviet System, the Russians and the Soviets?

COLLINS: Not while we were in Bloomington that summer doing intensive Russian. Between talking with tape recorders and teachers and one another, it was all we could do to get through each long, hot day. The teachers were primarily White Russians who escaped the Russian Revolution, or their parents had. They were very old, or seemed so to us at the time. In retrospect, I'd guess they were in their 70s. This gave us no inkling about the KGB, security, and being foreign.

Q: When you got to Moscow what were your impressions?

COLLINS: My first impression was that I had entered a time warp. I was back in the Brooklyn of my early childhood—or actually, of my parents' youth. I pictured the 1930s. The graphics of the city were so retro; the buildings so shoddy, worse than those in Brooklyn. Luxury housing for their top party officials was more like Brooklyn apartments. It was far poorer and more backward than what I could have imagined. We all had this built-up image of Russia, how strong and powerful our enemy was. And there it was, all chipped and broken and cracked and malfunctioning, dreary, gray, and monotonous, lacking spirit or hope. While they were technically proficient in the arts, with beautiful renditions of "Swan Lake," let's say, they lacked the freshness, creativity, and originality of inspiring arts. No new writing of interest then, no visual arts. Stagnant. Television news and movies were stylized, predictable: men with tractors, fields of grain. Aspirational. "Boring" understates it.

Q: Sometimes you could see them building a dam, too.

COLLINS: Sometimes there was a dam. They did love WWII also as the subject of film. And this lasted right through from the 1960s (and before) at least until the end of the Soviet Union.

Q: How about the students there?

COLLINS: The students were bright and interesting. The ones we lived with were in graduate philology. Languages. I realized before too long – and wrote about it at that time –how little interest they had in ideology, theory, Marxism and communist theory. They found these tedious and boring requirements. They were already quite cynical then, even in the 1960s. At the time we thought that the regime could not last forever with this lack of interest; that at some point, it would crumble. There was also a lack of interest in the parades and forced holiday hoopla, not to mention TV and radio. What we did not realize then was how quickly, suddenly, unexpectedly, and soon the Soviet regime would collapse. We did not then guess that it would be in our lifetimes.

Q: I have talked to people who have served in Warsaw in the 60's and 70's. One thing they were convinced was that there were only about five really convinced Marxists.

COLLINS: That's right. In Moscow at that time, the only convinced Marxists we met were those who were hired by the KGB to work with us, follow us, travel with us, keep an eye on us. They were allegedly with the foreign student office.

Q: How did you know who the KGB types were?

COLLINS: Oh, it was easy. As soon as we arrived, they greeted us at the station. All smiles and good cheer and positive thinking. I was suspicious. One good thing about coming from New York, I was cynical enough not to trust these professionally cheery people.

When we first met our "keepers," we had been on the train for three days after a ten-day boat trip on a small ship. I was a bit spaced. A young man and young woman greeted us all chipper and bright – and spoke perfect English. I thought, well this is convenient, anyway. They had some sort of vehicle into which they piled our footlockers and us to drive us to the dorm. By then we had met up on the train with many of the other American graduate students who had somehow been assigned to the same train and same cars. These two young Russians wanted to be our friends – in a big way. They wanted us to come to tea. They wanted to come to our rooms for tea. They showed great interest in our lives. So I saw as little of them as I could manage to do.

The people who were actually interesting to talk to were not those two, but the people in the dorm around us. The dorm was totally mixed. Foreign students were right next to the Russian students in a way that seems surprising in retrospect. One would have guessed they'd have isolated them from us, but they didn't. Although foreign students were scattered throughout the huge dormitory, the Americans, British, and Canadian students were assigned the same rooms year after year. On our floor there was one other American and three British students. The other foreign students and Russians we spoke with, we met in the hallways and kitchen, a shared, common kitchen. And sometimes we sat in their rooms drinking tea and having cookies and jams; or invited them to our room for those. The Russian students were careful but incredibly curious. They asked questions constantly.

They would look at America magazine, the glossy publication of USIA (the U.S. Information Agency). These were hot items, this U.S. propaganda. We could also acquire books by American authors and share them with Russian friends. I remember, as they were reading, wide-eyed, a piece about Harlem. A friend asked, "These pictures of Harlem, are they real? Are those houses the ones they really live in?" I looked at the brownstones and said, "Yes." I told them that many people shared these: they were not for one family alone. But then they looked at the streets parked up with cars and asked, "But they have those cars?" I said that some of them do. They so distrusted their own government to tell the truth, that they assumed any government publication was all lies.

While that magazine tended to look on the bright side, it was broadly speaking accurate. Then they wanted to know whether an entire family lived in one room. And whether they had coats and hats, because they had read that Negroes in America were very poor. Did they really have a TV set? And for washers and dryers, I said they likely shared them. But they couldn't believe that these "poor people" treated so badly as "Negroes" could have had access to a automatic washers and driers. (I described Laundromats.) "So it is not so bad they are living, no?" And I wanted to say they are living far better than most people across Russia, as possessors of indoor plumbing, hot water, cars, and Laundromats. (This doesn't get into rural black poverty of course.)

But the point I'm making – if longer than it should be – is that they were trying very hard to check the verisimilitude, the authenticity, of these random bits and pieces of information that came their way. Could they trust these sources? It wasn't long before

they came to trust and believe what we said, because we were always candid and did not sugarcoat America.

I should add that we also got trips into the countryside; to historic towns like Suzdal, Vladimir, and what are now tourist sights but were not yet developed at that time. Old monasteries. Of course our assigned "friends" always accompanied us.

Q: Were you taking courses?

COLLINS: No, I had finished my Ph.D. coursework and exams in my fields. I had decided to read while there. Since I didn't have original sources or manuscripts in Moscow, I read secondary sources, which they had in the Lenin Library [now called Russian State Library]. I also read a lot of American literature from the Embassy library.

It was also hard to believe how much energy and time were expended in the efforts of daily living: procuring food, taking crowded transport, lugging gear, walking a mile in the cold to get to the Metro train. Exhaustion stalked me--and Russians. So did illnesses.

Q: I was going to ask where you got your food…

COLLINS: It took forever. You'd go into a store and stand in one line, for cheese, let's say. Then you'd order your half-kilo of so-called "Dutch" cheese. Then into another line for rice to be measured out or set aside in a bag. Then to the cashier to pay for and get chits for each item at each station, and return to pick up items you had ordered at each. We had no refrigerator, of course. Very few people did. So we had to do much of this almost daily. We left things on the windowsill to keep them cool. But in the winter they'd actually freeze on the inside sill. And the products you bought had not been refrigerated, so one wanted to be careful, especially about eggs, milk, or poultry. But by Russian standards we were well off. Our stipend provided a significant number of rubles per month [200 @ $1.20 each equivalency]. So we got our yoghurt, cheese, bread. And the meat they sold called "Bifstek," I'd cook it up on an electric frying pan we had brought with us. Sauté a few onions, add some potatoes, and we had a little stew. Our staple. The British students dubbed it "Beef Magoo" for beef M.G. U. (*Em Ge Oooh*)

Q: Did you pay on the bus?

COLLINS: Yes we did. It wasn't very much. It was an honor system, but we certainly didn't want to appear dishonorable for what were a few pennies.

Q: I was in Bishkek sometime later, and found the bus was so crowded you couldn't really pay. It didn't cost much and I wanted to pay but I couldn't figure out how.

COLLINS: Yes, they had a complicated system. I would get on and I couldn't get anywhere near the cash box, so I'd pass my money along through others. There was a specific expression you would use that meant something like, please pass this along. And I would give, let's say, five kopeks to the next person to pass along. But – along the way

– other people, who needed change and didn't have five, would take the five and add their ten kopeks to the bucket brigade. This could get more and more complex, and sometimes led to arguments if the math didn't seem to be coming out right. There could be multiple steps of making change, returning change to people, and such. And people would scream at those who had only larger coins, say 20 kopeks, because you can imagine the number of people then involved in getting and making change. And eventually some coins would make it into the box. OF course you would never know, never able to see the box, but would end up getting your ticket. All this negotiation required a set terminology and specific phrases. Fortunately, we were taught this stylized language.

Q: I can remember getting on a bus in Bishkek and discovering all of a sudden something licking my hand. I thought what the heck is that? I turned around and looked and there was a big St. Bernard on this crowded bus. They had the biggest damn dogs.

COLLINS: Yes, and to add to that – in the countryside – on buses and trains, some pigs, goats, chickens, roosters, hens. Real animals. Not a petting zoo. That was culture shock (even though we didn't call it that then). As we awaited a train once, watching these animals in the station ready to board with us, I commented to Jim, "What are *they* doing here?" To which Jim calmly replied, "But how else can they get there?" Almost no cars or trucks at that time. So weird to experience Russia then, so strangely static and so strangely old fashioned.

Q: I heard of a Soviet specialist, who ended up in a little village, and he had the radio on, and they were talking about a space flight and here was a woman in the middle of the square pumping water into buckets to hang on the yoke on her shoulder. Draw a contrast from that.

COLLINS: Exactly. I wrote a poem on that theme a few years later. I was struck by the contrast between Soviet rockets and satellites heading for the moon with young girls in Moscow walking home from school in their heavy khaki cotton stockings and stiff white organdy hair bows, the way my mother looked in pictures when she was a child in the 1920's or so. It was so anachronistic. And those village pumps.

The disconnect between rocket science and shared village pumps for water, outhouses instead of indoor plumbing, was so stark. In those villages – beginning just outside the windows of our high-rise building -- the roads were unpaved, impassible mud in spring when the snows melted. The gaps were so enormous, with the 18th and 20th centuries coexisting in one place. There were also the stories of highly trained brain surgeons performing surgery in hospitals without hot running water. And the drugs they lacked would fill a book: aspirin, penicillin, as well as birth control devices and condoms. For so many years, the only way to limit family size was through abortions. Estimates suggest some five to eight per woman, which is a lot. Especially when anesthesia was not available. I try not to imagine how that would feel.

Q: This is your first time there. What did you think when you left? How did you feel about going back?

COLLINS: I returned from our student year there thinking that it was a long way from home, and that its economy and basic life were so primitive compared to ours that they had an incredibly long way to go. Such a conspicuous absence of consumer goods, of detergent, plastics, implements, and of course large goods, washers, driers, refrigerators, and cars. And I was thinking, "My God, if this is our superpower enemy, and they are so fragile at home, and so far from being "advanced"-- well that was unexpected and a shock. The second thing I thought was that I didn't want to go back there again. It was really good to be home. It was not just about the material side which was not so important to me, but about the psychological side both for the Russians and for us. The surveillance. The worry about being framed for something, particularly when we were students. And we were, it seems—or perhaps it was by chance. How Russians had to live daily with fear and intimidation: there's no good way to think about this.

People lived with a lot of bad options: were you going to be true to yourself or were you going to do what was expected of you and be rewarded for it, get better housing and special coupons to buy nice winter boots and nice toys for your children and maybe a washing machine or a refrigerator. We all have that to some extent, knowing our "price," but not with such dramatic consequences. And those were the lucky people. Many had fewer choices because they had been blackmailed into making a deal between living a life as a coal miner in a remote part of Siberia or going to the top university and spying on other students. They wouldn't otherwise get to the university because their father or mother or both had somehow crossed the regime and found themselves in a Gulag. The "sins of the father" could be used against the sons and daughters, limiting their options. If they were lucky. Some of them actually told their American, Canadian or British "friend" this story. We had already suspected some of this, especially from the more reluctant, less gung-ho, "friends" assigned to other American, British, and Canadian students.

Maybe this is a good place to retell how our student year ended. Sometime during the winter or spring, a stranger knocked on our door. He said he was a student and wanted to talk to Jim. He suggested taking a walk because he knew our room was bugged. We all knew this. So Jim went off with this young man, then returned, then went off for another walk with me to explain what happened. (I don't have to tell you how cold it was outdoors.) Jim told me that the young man told him that he planned to defect from Russia. This put us in a difficult position, of course. Jim discouraged him. But some months later we got a call from the cultural officer at the Embassy who was in charge of students. He (I think his name was Christiansen) told Jim to come down to the Embassy right at that moment. And Jim did. The officer told Jim that they have to get Jim and me out of the country very quickly because a young Russian man had jumped ship in the Philippines and claimed to be a friend of Jim's. Jim and I spent our final night there totally awake, for fear the KGB might get to us before we got out in the morning. We had our door wedged with a chair under the doorknob.

We weren't being paranoid. This was a realistic possibility. We knew that an American Professor, Frederick Barghoorn, had in fact been arrested and jailed on trumped up charges just a year or two before. The image of being in a Russian jail was not something I could sleep with. We never knew and never learned what the truth was: whether the man had simply defected and wanted a cover story, or whether he was a plant who made up the whole story to frame Jim. But we did know that we were going to leave immediately. The officer had told us that he and a car would be waiting for us outside the gates of the Embassy at 8:00 A.M. (I believe it was). And we were to leave as if it were just a normal day for us, going to the bus or Metro to go downtown. That is, we were not to carry anything with us. Take your passport and we'll put you on an early Air France flight out of Russia, he had said. We did as he said. We left everything in our room. (They found another American student later to pack up our things for shipment to London.)

They put us on a plane that we thought, and they thought, was going nonstop to Paris. The officer waited until the plane took off. We relaxed immediately. But what a shock when the plane landed in Warsaw! And we thought – oh, God, we're vulnerable here. Maybe they've caught up with us. The pilot made us all get off the plane. So we did the most defensive thing we could think of: stayed with the crowd of French tourists on our plane, followed them from booth to booth as they shopped for knickknacks at the airport. As young as we were then (I had turned 24), we had survival skills. We imagined that no one would want to break through this cheerful crowd to capture us in the middle of it, making a distressing scene. We did not allow ourselves to be isolated for a second.

We landed in Paris not sure what to do, but managed to get a plane to London that night, arriving quite late. When we arrived in London, the immigration people were of course suspicious. We had no baggage. No money. Your passport is stamped with Russian visas and you've been living there, they said. What are we supposed to think? So they separated us and questioned us each individually. Of course we told them the truth, but the story seemed a bit weird even to us. Finally they said, "OK, you can sleep over in a hotel tonight, but tomorrow morning, first thing, you need to show up at the nearest police station and explain what you're planning to do in England and how you're planning to pay for it." They were worried that we would go on the dole, which almost happened. But of course we're here today, so it all turned out well. And they always treated us with courtesy.

Q: And we talked earlier about your year in London. That would have been 1966. Basically your time in Moscow was Jim's time; this is your time.

COLLINS: That is right. We had agreed to that. I had given up a fellowship from the American Association of University Women to go abroad with Jim. They would not delay it for the year, so I lost that support and award. We had to save from our previous fellowships for that year in London.

Q: So today we will talk about your Ph.D. dissertation and what you were proving or disproving. Today is 24 February 2012.

COLLINS: I probably should have said sooner that during this entire period – while we were in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Moscow, and London, Jim and I both were both officially enrolled as graduate students at Indiana University. By the time we went abroad, I had done a lot research in Bloomington and in Cambridge, MA. I had taken my oral and written exams, which allowed me to go on to the research and writing of my dissertation. At that point, the average time to a Ph.D. in history, after the B.A. degree, was about seven years (today it's some eight years or more). So that's where we were when Jim got this offer for us both to go to live at Moscow State University in Russia.

I was prepared for the libraries, archives, and original materials I would find in London afterwards. But first we had to sort out our housing, finances, and nuts and bolts. We rented a bedsitter: one small room with kitchen appliances and bathroom, and had some of our money wired from the States to American Express in London. We had almost a week until we could cash it, with only enough cash for some light foods – a loaf of bread, dozen eggs, yoghurt and cheese-- wondering what we would do if something didn't come through soon. Had no idea what to do as penniless foreigners who knew no one there. But London was so cheery after dreary Moscow. It was a delight – daffodils and bright faces. I fell in love with it.

Q: This was when?

COLLINS: This was spring, 1966. And I was soon able to settle in to do what I had planned to do. I had a letter of introduction from my advisor at Indiana University, Leo Solt, and was able with that to sign up to do research at the British Museum (now called the British Library). I worked with their rare books and manuscript collections. I think I mentioned that the manuscripts were not catalogued, but tied in piles with red ribbons. They bore the name of the collector. So it might be called the Thurloe collection. And the printed 17th century broadsides in the Tomlinson collection were these delicious screeds, the intemperate positions of individuals on the subjects of the day—including issues of church and state. Sort of the blogs of their day.

Each pamphlet noted the pamphlet to which it was responding. Many, but not all, were anonymous. And the printers of London would just turn these out. They were short. I read them all, not knowing which might contain relevant information. I was trying to find out something no one had written about before (nor has their been a book about them since). It was about two commissions that Oliver Cromwell set up allegedly to purify the church.

One of them was to try all the ministers and schoolmasters in England, to test them for their Godliness and their appropriateness and - some would say – the content of their beliefs, their views. The ministers and schoolmasters had to win approval of these commissioners in order to get certified, to receive a certificate allowing them to practice. One justification for this was that ministers and schoolmaster were paid by the State, by the government. After all, it was an "established" church. And many of the "schoolmasters" were themselves clergy.

Beside this commission for the "Approbation" of ministers and schoolmasters, was that with the unlikely title, the Commission for Ejecting Scandalous, Ignorant, and Insufficient Ministers and Schoolmasters." Then again how did you define these? Well "licentiousness" was a common charge, that they had relations with their chambermaid. I guess it was hard to prove you weren't, or in fact so common it always stuck. There is some question of how much they were pursuing "orthodoxy," conformity.

In addition to pamphlets and manuscripts, there were some original books of notes by these two commissions. I also traveled to three local record offices in three counties to review local records for remnants of the work of these commissions. Some of the stories were very touching; about how badly a minister felt he was treated, how unfairly, and without due process. And the decisions of these commissions were consequential. I ended the dissertation with a discussion of the sources. My thesis is available today at the Library of Congress. It's called: Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate Church Settlement: The Commission for the Approbation of Publique Preachers: The Triers; and the Commission for the Ejecting of Scandalous, Ignorant and Insufficient Ministers and Schoolmasters: The Ejectors. [Reference at end of document.]

Q: Were there anonymous accusations?

COLLINS: Oh yes. There were anonymous ones and then there were some signed with initials only (e.g., JMB). It seems that others at the time knew or guessed at who wrote which broadside. I should add that I also worked in the Lambeth Palace Library, where I crawled around an attic space searching bundles of manuscripts, and at the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Today many of the works I used are digitized. I should add that reading those handwritten manuscripts was a challenge: if you can picture writing from Shakespeare's time, this wasn't too different. Took me a while to figure it out.

Q: Did you have to prove your credentials each time you went to a new library or archive?

COLLINS: No. The first time I went to each, I showed them my letter of introduction. People were so nice and so trusting, courteous and polite. They assumed we were all ladies and gentlemen, and that we were not going to harm or deface or steal materials although they did protect and watch out for their collections.

Q: What was Lambeth Palace?

COLLINS: Lambeth Palace is the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in south London. And of course he had his own library! I went by Underground. It was on the south side of the river. I didn't have to spend a lot of time there, because they had only a few items. I should add that I also did research at the Public Record Office in London. That was more formal, with bound folio volumes, official government records.

I was working to figure out what these Commissions were really trying to do and whether they succeeded. I concluded that they were fairly active and affected a number of people.

They likely had a chilling effect. It was rather a conservative move on Cromwell's part to attempt to stem the disintegration of the church. First you had Henry VIII breaking the Anglican Church from the Roman, Pope-controlled Church. Then you had the Calvinists, Quakers, Seekers, Anabaptists and others breaking off from the Anglican Church into lots of congregations. Finally you had the growth of "sects," like the Family of Love. Even communes. There were "non-conformists" and "dissenters," the latter sounding a lot like the Soviet "dissidents." In some ways, these movements seem forerunners of the 1960s, this breakdown in central authority and the proliferation of small groups based in individual visions. Cromwell knew he had to gain control over the Puritan movement and wrest control from the Anglican leaders. And he wanted to have in place only like-minded ministers and schoolmaster, people who had had a conversion experience, had been "saved." He sought to weed out "heresy" and "blasphemy" – as he defined these. Needless to say, not everyone shared definitions of those terms. So he "tested" for grace and salvation. But the irony in the end was that he was forced to "establish" a dis-established church, in part through the structure he created in these Commissions.

Q: Was the government still paying all of these people?

COLLINS: I believe the government continued to pay those "in a living." I've assumed they paid those already in place as well as those approved to a place. But I'm not sure what happened to those who broke away into congregations and sects, and assume they had to raise their own funds. One assumes they were paid partly in chickens and grains.

Q: As soon as you pay people, you are established.

COLLINS: A good point. And with that, control. This wasn't about letting all the sects run loose. Cromwell's nightmare must have been picturing all these Anabaptists, Quakers, and "love" communities just splintering further, without the control of the leader at the top. And, as you say, you pay the piper, you call the tune. Some argued that Cromwell was seeking not only religious correctness, but political correctness as well. The line was thin.

Q: This is during the time of rule by the Major Generals, isn't it?

COLLINS: The period I studied was from 1654 to 1660 (or at least 1658 when Oliver Cromwell died). The Protectorate years, the Interregnum, the years without a King or Queen (which had actually started in 1649 with decapitation). The Major generals ruled. It was fascinating, the larger themes were. They had to do with church and state, and the role of clergy in advocating political positions, and political leaders in advocating religious ones. The "separation of church and state" issues, of course, were one of those the Colonists fought against, and much later were incorporated into our Bill of Rights. But not in England.

Q: It is an issue that will never go away.

COLLINS: That's true. What is secular, what is religious and where do they intersect remains a continuing challenge. Think about churches' stand on gay marriage today. They don't see it as a civil or civic matter, a matter for the secular society to decide. So many of these issues are about power and control and defining what's "acceptable" for society – and who gets to determine it. This period in England was certainly about revolutionary times, radical change, and fluidity. And asking big questions.

Q: Having had your Russian experience, were you running this against the Russian Revolution? Were you thinking about whether the issues were similar?

COLLINS: Some issues were similar. The Russians in their upheavals of 1917 also got rid of their King, their Tsar. And then had to figure out what's next. We were discussing Crane Brinton's book on the four major revolutions, including these two. I had been interested in revolution before we went to Russia. What are the dynamics of revolution? How do revolutions happen and how do they resolve themselves? How do you stop or control change once it starts, what with disintegration and splintering – and what happens to the "middle" position? And someone grabs control. Cromwell or Lenin. Tries to consolidate things. More recently in Russia, from 1989, 1990, 1991 on, Gorbachev, then Yelstin, now Putin, trying to figure out the next steps, especially in a country like Russia in which security, status quo, and inertia are usually what people crave. Some leaders who try for balance or stability may be swept away either by the radical changers or the conservative consolidators.

Q: In England, did you run across the doctrinaire leftists in all this? They tended to be powerful in English academic circles.

COLLINS: Yes. One of the best-known historians of the mid-17th century was the distinguished British historian, Christopher Hill. He was very much on the left. With the English Revolution, some people stressed "class" or economics more than the content of religious belief.

Another influential historian, controversial in his day, but I think hard to label politically, was Lewis Namier. He was the first one I know to use data—numbers and statistics—to analyze what was going on during this revolution. For example, he analyzed the members of the Long Parliament and showed that it was not the young members but the old ones who led the radical and revolutionary activity. Most people had assumed that "Young Turks" of their day were the leaders, trying to take out the old guys, but the numbers indicated just the opposite. This led him to suggest that the English Revolution was not actually a radical revolution, but rather a conservative one, seeking to revert to an imagined past. I believe he argued that the "reformers" wanted to take England back to a time in which there was a better balance of power between the Parliament and the King, before the King actively sought to overrule. Their touchstone was the Magna Carta against King John, which was designed to limit royal power, suggesting it was not absolute. Namier's arguments, based on dates of birth of members of Parliament, may not seem so radical today, but a half century ago it was certainly a new way to look at historical analysis and understanding. Demographics.

Q: Did you get caught up in this?

COLLINS: I was very intrigued with new ways of looking at things. The debate went on for years in England and to some extent in America over that kind of work. Years later when I discovered the field of demography, I regretted that I hadn't studied more of that field. In the 1960s I didn't see courses in that field, but believe today that demographics explain a great deal and can even be predictive. Look at what Russian demography reveals about the declining Slavic populations, growth of Muslim populations, short life expectancies, and shrinkage of today's Russia.

Q: In 1968, things were really popping the U.S., too. Vietnam, Civil Rights. Were you caught up in that, too?

COLLINS: Nineteen sixty-eight was certainly an emblematic year. We were in Annapolis then, from 1967 – 1969, between London and our second trip to Moscow. We both needed to get jobs because our fellowship funds had ended. Jim got a job in 1967 teaching history and related fields at the U.S. Naval Academy. We came back to the States and settled in Annapolis. And I found a fascinating job with the Constitutional Convention of Maryland, in which we drafted a new constitution for the State.

Q: Where did you live there?

COLLINS: We lived in Eastport, across the drawbridge from downtown Annapolis.

Q: My mother had a small house on Prince George Street, right across from the Academy. It was little, not much bigger than this room.

COLLINS: I loved Annapolis. We had a grand time. It was a modest garden apartment, but it was on a creek. In 1968, the year of so many major historic events, our own event was the birth of our first child, our son Robert. We had waited until finishing graduate school: I had wanted to have my thesis done before caring for a child. Although I didn't quite make it, at least most of the writing was done. Who could forget the world events of that year? Some people thought we had named Robert for the recently assassinated Robert Kennedy, but we had planned on that name before that. I have vivid memories of the riots in Washington, D.C. We were visiting friends who then lived in Potomac and watched in horror from their porch the flames and smoke rising over the City.

Q: This was right after Martin Luther King was assassinated….

COLLINS: Yes, a scene I never thought I would see (nor of course the two assassinations).

Q: I think most Americans, including me, never thought we'd see paratroopers in the streets with rifles and bayonets, walking up Wisconsin Avenue. And I will never forget

seeing there a "white flight" heading out of the City, and the blacks gathering around bus stops, not knowing what they'd find when they got back. Flames and disorder.

COLLINS: Yes, the flames and smoke so huge you could see them miles away. We must have been over a dozen miles from the scene.

Q: Almost all of us of who served in the State Department had seen real civil disorder, but it was not common for most people in the United States to have seen this before.

COLLINS: That's a good point. I did think how fortunate we were to be here then and not overseas. If you miss these large transformative American experiences, it's hard to represent the U.S. overseas.

I should add that we were also fortunate – by chance – to be here when Nixon resigned from the Presidency in the summer of 1974. We were on medical leave between our two years serving in Moscow. I relished watching him resign. But I was also grateful to be able to experience this unique act in American history. I've wondered how you can represent America for all those years without having really experienced America during your whole career? At the end of their careers, some people do get to do the Senior Seminar and discover the U.S. they never knew. Too many people serving abroad haven't experienced the depth and breadth of this country.

Q: I found the Senior Seminar very important.

COLLINS: Indeed it is, but I think it would have greater value earlier in an Officer's career. If I were establishing the curriculum for the Diplomatic Service, I would have a "Junior Year at Home." When people have proved themselves worthy officers at mid-career, I'd select those with promise and provide them this Seminar, including travel to different regions and cities in the U.S. and the chance to learn about industry, corporations, nonprofit organizations, tourism, and education.

Q: Did you identify with groups about Vietnam? How did you feel about this situation?

COLLINS: I wasn't as clear in my views on Vietnam as some people were. The people who felt it was absolutely and entirely wrong and the people who felt it was entirely right -- I wasn't actually on either side. I understood the idea that the Communists, Chinese and Russians and others, had some dangerous designs on this part of the world. On the other hand, there was something distressing about being involved in that part of the world, being engaged in someone's civil war. So I was ambivalent. I was never a fan of Communist rule or wiles, nor was I a "Cold Warrior." I did understand that it was a hopeless mess. There was an incompetency question as well: did we lack the competency to perform well there? Today I ask myself what the U.S. role in the world should be, say in Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and other places. What should our criteria for involvement be? I thought us very wrong to go into Iraq, but I know that some other situations are less clear. Concerning Viet Nam, I was not marching in the streets. But, then, once Jim was in the Foreign Service I tended to behave discretely.

Q: How about the civil rights.

COLLINS: Oh, on that subject, people would say I'm on the "left," I suppose, simply because I cannot see any good arguments against the complete range of rights for everyone, unrestricted by race, sexual preference, gender, religion, or lack religious belief.

Q: Well it is a little bit hard in retrospect to have been in favor of the subjugation of a people…

COLLINS: True. How can you? And yet today gay people cannot always marry; women do not always get equal pay for equal work with men. I'm sure there are many people today who say they're on the side of civil rights, but who were passive or silent at the time they could have made a difference. Their silence mattered. I did some marching, voting, helping candidates, helping friends. But I didn't travel to the South to register voters. And Jim and I did what we could to help a friend who was the first black professor the Naval Academy had ever hired. He did encounter difficulties in getting housing, using restaurants, and generally being treated equally in the larger community of 1967 Annapolis.

Q: I started in Annapolis when my brother was in the Class of 1940 at the Academy. My mother moved there, and we lived there until about 1950. Annapolis was a very Southern town. There were separate drinking fountains, different schools, movie theaters, and all that.

COLLINS: Much of that was still true in the 1960s. It was a real culture shock for me. Our friend was told when he arrived that he would teach in the same department as Jim, but when it came to housing they said he could live off West Street, where their maids lived. He said he wanted to live where the other professors lived, as he was a professor and held an earned advanced degree. For that to happen, he had to go all the way up to Admiral Zumwalt – over the heads of the Academy leaders. It was shameful.

We ourselves had chosen housing that *said* it would admit anyone regardless of race – and we passed up nicer buildings to do so – but when it came to his application to our buildings, suddenly they thought they had no empty apartments. With help at high levels and pressure on the buildings (the Academy was an economic giant in the town), they relented. But a couple of neighbors then moved out. And when he hit the swimming pool, it emptied. When we went to restaurants with him, they tried to deny him a table. For jogging, it was wise for him to choose a white partner to avoid suspicion ("black man running fast, must be running away"). So it's a shameful and disgraceful fact of our history. Jim and I were both deeply shocked by all this. I think this radicalized me even more than I was coming from New York, and gave me deeper understanding of what the Civil Rights movement was about.

Q: I know my mother came from Chicago and was very much a New Dealer. She got into a hassle with the Rector of St. Mary's Church, which was the main Episcopal Church in Annapolis, the one on Church Circle, about not having blacks there. I will never forget sitting there when I was just a kid, and my mother had some Annapolitans, old school Southern, over for tea. They were talking about the wonderful South and everything. This was 1940. My mother in her sweetest way said, "Oh yes. My father traveled extensively through the South. He said it was a beautiful place." They all cooed and said, "When was he there?" She said, "Oh, he was an officer with Sherman." Which he was.

COLLINS: Oh that is a great story!

Q: That sort of wiped us out in Annapolitan society.

COLLINS: That's like the story of Jim's mother. She once was invited to be a member of the D.A.R. She said told them she could not join because they had no musical taste. What do you mean, they asked? How could they deny Marian Anderson the chance to perform a concert at Constitution Hall? She could not be a member of an organization who treated barred a performer because of her race. You have to stand for something I think, even when your stand appears to change nothing, because each individual can make a difference.

Q: All these things are likely to be forgotten if you don't peel back the wallpaper that has covered some of them up.

COLLINS: Sometimes a novel, or a movie, like The Help, reminds people of those days. I had probably noticed it more than some people partly as an "outsider" in some ways, and partly because of my family's awareness of these issues. But I realize it was also a transitional time for Foreign Service Officers. What they represented when they first went abroad was changing radically while they were abroad! Their home context changed.

Q: Well, at the time I didn't quite understand the depth of feeling about Viet Nam. I had been in Annapolis, and understood and subscribed to the Civil Rights Movement. But at this time, I was getting ready go to Vietnam as Consul General in Saigon.

COLLINS: That would certainly be seeing things from a different position.

Q: I had a different feel for our efforts, there, although I don't know how well I expounded it. But I did I support our effort there.

COLLINS: I understood why we were doing it.

Q: I haven't been able to say, in retrospect, that I was dead wrong, because I think if we had not gone in there, other things might have happened in that region.

COLLINS: It wasn't that clear at that time or since.

Q: I mean we stopped something from happening.

COLLINS: I think that is probably right.

Q: We did it poorly, but at the same time it was a holding action.

COLLINS: It's hard to generalize the role of involvement. Today we think about these issues again in Libya, Egypt, North Africa and the Middle East in this so-called "Arab Spring." What do our actions – and non –actions – accomplish?

Q: Take a look at Vietnam today. We are really very close to Vietnam. Not only that, but it may well stand in the way of a resurgent China. Who would have thought this might be?

COLLINS: Well, at the time I thought that might be part of the reason we were there. It just struck me as unfortunate that we seemed not to understand what kind of warfare this was, with the generals fighting the last wars. But the questions of strategies and tactics are different from those of principle and diplomacy.

Q: Well, on the subject of diplomacy, were you in Annapolis when the Foreign Service raised its ugly head?

COLLINS: It had lurked in the background for a while. We had already been married for five years by then. Jim was teaching at the Naval Academy, and I was working for the Constitutional Convention of Maryland, an unusually interesting job. I had offers for career positions to follow that, both in university teaching and in the State Legislature. We were both paid what we considered a happy sum of money. And baby Robert was on his way, born in July of 1968. Meanwhile, too, we each worked as an adjunct, teaching for the University of Maryland – on separate evenings to share babysitting Robert.

Jim told me when he took the State Department position that it was a trial: he would see how it went and if I liked it. He would decide then whether to stay or find another track. I'm afraid that's not the way it worked out, but that comes a little later, with our second stay in Russia.

Q: I recall on the Maryland Constitution that the gun lobby and others blew it apart.

COLLINS: They and others. One of the alleged reasons for its defeat was that it lowered the voting age from 21 to 18. But it was largely because it dealt with local rule and the role of sheriffs and so forth. I don't think the delegates were politic enough to realize how easily local and county government officials in the State could defeat this, when their power was threatened. It was a "good government" project, based in Jefferson's rule that every 20 years you ought to re-write your constitution. The constitution then in effect preceded the Civil War.

Q: How did you know about and get the job at the Constitutional Convention?

COLLINS: When we arrived in Annapolis, I went to the Director of Legislative Research for the State Legislature, Carl Everstine. I told him I knew how to do research and needed a job. He replied, "I could use you here to do legislative research, bill checking, background for legislation, and so forth, but more interesting and a unique opportunity is that they're putting together a research staff right now for the Constitutional Convention." I had just moved to Annapolis. I had never been in Maryland in my life. I had never seen Annapolis until we moved there. And I had only a vague idea where Baltimore might be.

He gave me the name and number of the person to call for an interview. Lacking a car, I took the Greyhound Bus to Baltimore. He told me that it was the tallest building in Baltimore, the Mercantile Trust tower, and that the driver would know it and let me off there. Well, I figured, I'm from New York so I should be able to spot a tall building! Anyway, I did get the job and joined a staff of around a dozen researchers, male and female. All but me had studied Maryland history and government, grown up in Maryland. And someone really special, Jean Spencer, hired me. I guess she figured I could figure it out. Jean and the other staff friends have remained friends for life, although sadly she passed away prematurely. Five of us remain close friends.

During the fall, we researched and we drafted: we worked for the elected Delegates. When we were to be assigned to a committee, I requested the Bill of Rights Committee, thinking my studies of English and American Constitutional History could be useful. And so I helped draft the Bill of Rights for this draft Constitution. What could be more fun than that? After it was drafted, it had to go to a vote of the entire citizenry. By that time, there were well-organized efforts by all kinds of special interest groups to defeat it. And they won. Basically, "good government" does not work for everyone, and often gets defeated.

Very significant, though, is to know that almost every last provision of that draft Constitution has been passed in referenda since that time. Piecemeal. So the Constitution is still a pre-Civil-War document that includes provisions for both slavery and its abolition. And I sure learned a lot.

Q: That must have translated nicely into your research and professional interests….

COLLINS: Oh it did. And later I got a job at the Congressional Reference Division of the Library of Congress; and still later, at a session of the State Legislature in Annapolis. But not at that time. That's when Jim got the call in 1969 to join the Foreign Service. He was told that all new Officers, in order to gain entry, had to serve at the U.S. Embassy in Viet Nam. Alone, of course, separated from baby Robert and me. Jim was not fearful and had no problem making sacrifices, but also was not interested in serving there. In any cases, he took the risk of turning it down.

Q: How did you feel about the Foreign Service?

COLLINS: I didn't feel anything at the time: I was neutral and ignorant. I was not pleased with the idea of moving because I was so happy in Annapolis: nice apartment, good friends, good salaries, healthy baby, playground, pool, parking. What's not to like? And I saw a good start to my career, with an interesting position and offers beyond it. I was curious about the larger world, but had already spent two years abroad. In any case, they soon offered Jim a position at the Consulate in Izmir, Turkey. He had some interest that region. So he said "yes." Next thing, we were packed out and living in temporary housing in Arlington, Virginia while Jim studied at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington for three months. Baby Robert had his first birthday there.

Q: Well did you feel any trepidation about being a Foreign Service wife? Did it seem a bit too "high society?"

COLLINS: I had no idea at the time what it might mean. I was 27 years old, had started a career and begun raising a baby, and was very happy where I was. I'll admit that the "social" role or even the new status as "wife of…" was not something I had contemplated. Of course I did socialize and come to know people in Jim's class and then at postings. Some became friends. Some were a bit self-important, bordering on arrogant.

Q: Full of themselves.

COLLINS: The perfect term! I believe Jim's class was at least 90% male.
Many of the wives seemed prepared for a life that revolved around their husband's career and they looked forward to the social side – and of course to the servants and large homes they pictured. I had never really imaged a life in which my activity would be a derivative of Jim's. I had indeed planned to stay at home with young children. I figured I had a few years before I would seek a full time career position, in any case.

Q: We were talking before we started recording about the feminist movement that seemed to be reaching people around 1968. Did this come your way?

COLLINS: It hit me over the head a bit later, probably around 1970.

Q: Greer was it?

COLLINS: Yes, Germaine Greer.

Q: And then Gloria Steinem.

COLLINS: Yes, and also Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. There were others: Marilyn French, Carol Gilligan, Gail Sheehy. Those authors wrote seminal books, but I didn't get to read them until we returned from Turkey in 1971.

Q: Did you have good conversations on these subjects with the wives of Foreign Service Officers?

COLLINS: My sense in these early years was that most of the wives were not thinking about their own careers. I was not yet thinking in the larger context in which these author's wrote, at the level of politics, power, and the society at large. These cultural assumptions I had not fully articulated for myself. That came later. But just from the fact that I had chosen to earn a Ph.D., that I had a deep interest in an academic field and in academic research, writing and teaching probably meant that I was destined to start to think in larger terms. And of course my fields of interest included political theory, bill of rights, revolution and radical change. So at an intellectual as well as personal level these writings engaged me.

In Izmir, Turkey, I was indeed relegated to the role of supportive wife. One telling moment I still remember (and I describe in my book), was this: We were standing out on the deck of the home of the Consul General in Izmir, looking out over the Bay, right before the start of one of the many receptions that were part of Jim's work there. I was about to give birth to our second son (who was born about a week later), standing in high heels and dressy dress in the heat. There were only two other wives at the Consulate. One officer wasn't married; two others were. One of the wives turned to me right before the guests arrived, and informed me in a crisp and self-certain voice, "Because your husband is in a lower position at the Consulate than my husband, *I* get to pour the coffee and *you* get to pour the tea." Who ever knew my status would depend on Jim's, and that such issues could determine whether I got to pour tea or coffee in this class system?

Q: I know there is this discrimination. God knows where this started.

COLLINS: This is "protocol" she said. Unfortunately, the only association I had with that word was in the title of the infamous book that bolstered Nazi ideology, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. But I was also thinking: with all those servants running around, why don't they serve the tea and coffee? Of course I had never had servants, but it made sense to my young mind and very pregnant body. I was sure put in my place fast! I never forgot that and learned to live with but not love the charming phrase, "Rank Has Its Privileges"…. in which mine were to be derivative of Jim's. Even if I didn't find this personally anathema, I did find it dramatically hypocritical, antithetical to the ways in which we should be representing our democracy abroad. Was this what America was about?

Q: I was wondering this, because you had also been at the Naval Academy with a lot of those behaviors, too. As I kid I could see that.

COLLINS: Yes, the military is totally that way, too. But at the Naval Academy I didn't think about it because Jim was a civilian on the faculty. The two most formal things we did were to eat at the Officer's Club from time to time – a real treat; and to attend the reception of the Commandant. I knew I had to behave myself. I drank tea and ate little cookies and said "please" and "thank you" the way I was taught as a kid. But I was also disturbed by a large anomaly: that virtually all midshipmen and officers were white and virtually all servants were Filipinos. That troubled me at the time.

Q: It is a long tradition.

COLLINS: Yes. But Jim's position and career did not much affect me at the time; it fit with "normal" family life – dinners, evenings, and weekends together. Taking a walk. Going to the movies.

Q: So you were in Izmir from when to when?

COLLINS: We went to Izmir in 1969 and returned in 1971.

Q: What was Izmir like?

COLLINS: It was a small city, but attractive and interesting. And there was a lot of history there. And in the region.

Q: Smyrna.

COLLINS: Yes, it is ancient Smyrna. We were told that Alexander the Great marched through there in the 4th century. All around us were the ruins of Ephesus, Pergamon, Sardis, and so forth. These were Hellenistic cities being revealed through contemporary archaeology. We had a comfortable life there. We could come to know Turkish families, European ex-pats, Levantines, and the American military stationed at the base there, some 2,000 Americans, I think.

To picture Izmir then, think of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandrian Quartet. Among the Levantine Community I met a couple of Jewish families settled there, they believed, since about 1492 when they were expelled from Spain. One was an astronomer (female). Another was the mother of a small child like ours. We bonded over the children and their lives, birthday parties, dinners, parks. Her husband was in his father's olive oil business, pressing oil from the pits. And my dearest Turkish friend, an architect, born the same day and date as I also had a small child. More recently, she was murdered. By her watchman. Her husband had many businesses, including growing chickens.

Q: And the base?

COLLINS: I recall it was NATO Land Southeast, Army headquarters. Our support – clinic, doctors, PX, Commissary, APO mail--came from the U.S. Air Force (European Command, TUSLOG). These military benefits made life easy.

Q: Did the Foreign Service intrude much other than at tea parties?

COLLINS: More than I expected it was going to, actually. There were a number of expectations for wives. One, for example, was when a family from the American Embassy in Ankara visited, husband of higher rank than mine, they foisted their three ill-behaved boys on me to babysit. I was told I *had* to watch them, as if I were some intern

or paid staff. They were dropped on my doorstep, out of control. And I already had one little boy and was pregnant with another. I was angry, but could not do a thing.

What I quickly learned was that my life as the wife of a Foreign Service Office was going to present a challenge between being able to do what I was trained to do professionally and what I might want to pursue personally while avoiding hurting Jim's career. But sometimes the cost to my dignity was high. The worst came later in the mid 1970s in having to serve a business dinner to Foreign Service Officers in our home at which I was not a guest or seated at the table, but the cook and server.

Q: Well this was the very end of the period where wives were rated.

COLLINS: And I was rated in Izmir. And I knew the rating would affect Jim and his future.

Q: In the efficiency report there was a section about how well the wife performed her role. Sometimes it was perfunctory. But once I remember reading one that said, "His wife was too friendly with people and often has affairs." I thought, oh my God he has got to read this.

COLLINS: Or, " she drinks too much. " That would be awful. And I know there were wives who were considered a detriment to a husband's career. But I seem to have passed muster. The Consul General found me "charming," he wrote.

Q: Who is this?

COLLINS: It was Tom McKiernan, a wonderful man and lifelong friend. Although I was grateful for the positive account, I know my parents' reaction was that they hadn't helped support me to earn a Ph.D. and gain a profession just to be a charming trophy. They had hoped I'd contribute in some way and work toward larger goals.

Q: This is Foreign Service speak for, "I have to write something. What am I going to say?"

COLLINS: A bit lame, but Jim the optimist said, "Aren't you glad he said that rather than something negative?" Fair point. It could be funny, really. Afterwards. But what wasn't funny was to put up with other wives prevailing on me to do required, unpaid, duty.

Later I was pressured to go shopping for a visiting Congressional delegation that wanted gifts to take home to their wives (at least they said it was for their wives). Each described what he wanted and gave me cash to purchase it in a souvenir store. Some just said, "use your own judgment." We were not asked whether or not we wanted to perform these unpaid functions. And of course the hours of required entertaining, cooking and hosting dinners, attending others was all unvolunteered "volunteer" time.

Q: Were there problems in Izmir? I am thinking of Fundamentalism or Xenophobia.

COLLINS: There was some violent activity at the time. One evening we heard a huge explosion. A bomb had exploded in the PX. I don't remember what the radical groups were called. We weren't yet using the word "terrorist." When the bomb went off, we happened to have guests for dinner. A couple of guys who had served in Viet Nam quickly ducked under our furniture. Of course I was too naïve to think of such a thing, even with an explosion so loud and so close.

The countryside was a more uncertain place, which could be dangerous for foreigners. At least two deaths occurred that way. In fact, early in Jim's time at the Consulate, as a new officer, he had to go out into the countryside and collect the body of a murdered American man. Jim had to get out there before they buried the body. And he did, and returned with a body bag at about 2:00 or 3:00 AM. The man had been a tourist, motoring around Turkey alone. Jim was a bit shaken. Later the same fate befell a German tourist.

Q: Did you feel any restrictions in your dress?

COLLINS: We were told we shouldn't go around undressed, but we didn't have to do what I later had to do in Jordan, where I had to cover my arms and legs completely (in that summer heat). We simply had to dress conservatively. So I was able to wear skirts and blouses with bare arms and legs. The Turkish middle-class women dressed the same way, as we would have done in a big city in the U.S. That's before people wore flip-flops, tank tops, and short shorts in American cities. In the Turkish countryside, women wore kerchiefs and coats; and the same women took these into the cities. That said, and less pleasant: women walking down the street without a man had to take verbal harassment. I had no idea what the men were shouting out, but my Turkish female friends told me that I wouldn't want to know, it was very disrespectful.

Q: When I was Consul General in Naples, my daughters and wife found themselves pinched by men.

COLLINS: I'm not sure if it's the same or different kind of thing the men in Italy and Turkey were doing, but it seemed to me that Italian men imagined what they were doing was a compliment (even though it feels intimidating and harassing to women), while the Turkish men (and later the Arab men in Jordan) meant it as an insult. They were calling you things that implied you were selling your body. Not nice words, and not great for my children to hear, if they had understood the language. The only thing that spared me slightly in Turkey was not the presence of my two little boys, but being a brunette rather than a blonde. They were merciless on blondes.

Q: Did you feel the hand of the Consul General telling you what to do or how to act or were you left to do your own thing?

COLLINS: I didn't feel pressure from him. The only pressures came from the two wives wanting me to hold up my end of the social activities requirements. I understood why they thought this fair, because they were doing their duty as they saw it. So we had to

show up at a lot of command performances: cocktail parties, luncheons, and dinners, co-ed and ladies only. I didn't mind because I like people and learned new things. I just tried to make sure I was spending enough time with the kids. It was easy abroad for mothers to leave kids for long periods with housekeepers and other minders.

I should add that the Consulate wives also pressed me to run for office at the American Women's Club of Izmir. The group included approximately 200 American women who lived there permanently. Some had lived there for generations: the ex-pats (picture Graham Greene). Others were wives of men in temporary assignments in the military and business, American women married to Turkish men, plus the three of us with the Consulate General. The Club held a monthly luncheon attended by almost all members. It was a pleasant way to connect and a cheerful occasion, excuse to dress up.
There were also special events. I remember being pressed into service to read Easter bunny books to assembled kiddies at Easter. The kids loved it.

In any case, the other two wives convinced me I must run on the ballot for vice-chair of the Club, as they both had already served, and the Consulate, way outnumbered by the military, should at least have token representation on the ballot. Famous last words, as they say. I reluctantly acceded, and as luck would have it, got elected. Shortly thereafter, the Club Chair, the wife of a military M.D. there, had to return to Texas. Suddenly, I was Chair. I was twenty-something, following a seasoned Chair, and having to conduct the business meetings with Robert's Rules. So I read the book. They also had a parliamentarian. It was a formal and serious group. And although all this was a shock at the time, I drew on that experience years later as I got to chair boards, working groups, and committees. Started at the deep end of the pool.

Q: Did your parents come?

COLLINS: Yes, they came not long after Jonathan was born to see their new grandson. They were world travelers in any case. They had been to visit Egypt and traveled the Nile, climbed inside pyramids; went to Africa on a photo safari; and were all over Europe, even in less usual places like Norway. They were also in Central America. I recall all this travel occurred after I had grown, married, and left home, so they were likely in their retirement years.

Q: Did you move to Istanbul or Ankara?

COLLINS: No, we spent our two full years in Izmir. When I was ready to give birth in June of 1971, the U.S. Air Force no longer had a hospital in Izmir. They had only a clinic, with about six doctors. So I was medevaced to Ankara for that occasion! The Turkish hospitals at that time lost women in childbirth: too high a risk.
And in those days, without ultrasounds or other equipment, the ob-gyn had to guess when it was time to put you on the plane to Ankara. Too soon, you spent ages staying in temporary housing there, shared with five other pregnant women; too late, you were in labor! So at the end, he checked you twice a week – with nothing but his hands and a

stethoscope – to determine which of the bi-weekly planes you were too take. This was Dr. Bruce Laubaugh, a head doctor at the clinic.

Jonathan wasn't due yet when he told me I should take the Thursday plane… I asked if I could wait for Monday's, and he said "no." Jonathan was born on Sunday, June 6, 1971, in Ankara. Because the military hospital was more like M*A*S*H than, let's say, Suburban Hospital, I was glad this was not my first baby. Very basic. One large ward for women in labor screaming along with those trying to sleep because they already had their baby. Perhaps a dozen people, and never quiet. The women with whom I shared the apartment while awaiting the right moment were very young, scared, and alone. We were all alone. So one evening I organized a trip for us all to go to the Officer's Club for dinner. They were not officers' wives, and found this a real treat. But what we looked like walking down the street, getting taxis, bursting out of our clothes …all just about ready to give birth.

Q: A bunch of blimps.

COLLINS: Yes, picture six blimps in Turkey – without a man. That caught people's attention. The other ladies had not been eating well, mostly canned soup, so it was a great opportunity to eat a full meal! I feasted on steak, salad, potatoes, dessert, and even drank some sherry. In those days, remember, we were not prohibited from drinking moderately while pregnant. We all went back to the shared apartment (where there was always a line for the single bathroom). When I awoke at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning thinking, "Oh, I shouldn't have eaten so much." But after a short time it occurred to me it wasn't indigestion; it was a baby on its way.

Later in the day on Sunday I called the hospital telling them it was time for me to get there. "Oops, they said," "Sorry our single ambulance it out elsewhere…you'll have to wait…" And I lay there alone (I have no idea where the other women had gone) – until finally the ambulance arrived, almost too late. Baby was born quickly on my arrival in the hospital, before the doctor on duty or I could wash or change. A casual hospital it was. Want a robe or towel or gown? Try the closet down the hall. Oh, none there? Should come in with the next laundry truck. After four days (longer than usual), they popped baby into an open cardboard box, set formula, diapers and instructions at his feet, and sent baby and me on a bumpy bus ride to the airport; up the stairs of a large plane, and flight to Izmir where Jim, baby Robert, and Clarence Pierce awaited us on the tarmac.

Q: Well did the Foreign Service take for you?

COLLINS: At that point I was perfectly happy, yes. Life was pleasant and we had some family time. We used a pool at a nearby hotel; I had one then two bouncing boys; and I taught a history course for the University of Maryland, overseas division. I taught Air Force men Western Civilization 101 and 102. I also finished editing and retyping my Ph.D. dissertation, sending it chapter by chapter back to my advisor in Bloomington, Indiana. Bless his heart, he returned each to me promptly, with his suggestions, questions,

and edits. We ate well, slept well, had interesting work, and a comfortable modest apartment.

I had no idea what would follow this. Life then turned more difficult, into a long limbo. We were shipped back to the States in November of 1971, but with successive changes in assignment, first one set of orders then another. Each time we thought it would be one place, it was changed to another. Meanwhile, they couldn't ship any of our goods, because no forward orders were in place. Very disruptive with new baby and three-year old.

Q: This was 1971.

COLLINS: Yes. There was confusion in Jim's orders following the Turkish assignment. He can explain more about that. So we just went "home," but we had no home. And we had no idea how long we'd be "home." We took temporary housing in Silver Spring, in a gritty dump for which the State Department paid for three months. We had none of our things: no crib, high chair, carriage, clothing, beyond what we had taken on the plane. The kids just played on the bare floors; the washers and driers were in the basement of a nearby building. We had no car, either. And no place to go after those three months.

By then I felt I had just had enough. I was not feeling good about this life for two little people. Just then, Jim was assigned to a nine-month travel assignment around the U.S. – without family – to accompany a Soviet arts and crafts exhibit from one U.S. city to another, living for about six weeks in each city. No provision was made for the rest of us. All I could think is: What do I do now? Obviously, find a place to live. All this not knowing how long we'd have before being shipped overseas again.

Q: Today is 6 March 2012 with Naomi Collins. Naomi we left you in a squalid little apartment in Silver Springs with two kids and no effects while Jim is out gallivanting around with USIA….

COLLINS: That's what it felt like at the time. Of course Jim had a real job to do, keeping the Soviets and the exhibit safe, intact, on track. He found it very interesting.

Q: So how did that come out?

COLLINS: Well it didn't endear me to State Department life! Having unaccountable people in charge of my life and our family's well being did not make me feel confident of a good future. They also saw no reason for Jim to visit us more than once every six weeks. Jonathan was five months old when we left Turkey; Robert about three years. Jonathan could not yet remember who a person was for longer than a very short time. It struck me then that this was not the way to treat a professional Foreign Service officer and family, not with dignity or respect, let alone any concern.

Q: It wasn't.

COLLINS: I was already struck then – and continued to be -- by the gap between what lay people viewed as the glamorous life of a diplomat and the day-to-day roughness, discomfort, instability of family life. Weak support system, even compared to what military officers had in all branches of service. It seemed as if those who backed them up felt more sense that they were serving their country than those who backed us up, although we were at the same posts.

Q: So you were in the States in this particular time while Jim was off traveling around the States…

COLLINS: Yes, he had been slotted into a one-year travel assignment. So I popped the tots in back of our rented car and started driving around the D.C. area – where we had never lived – to see if I could find an apartment. When I viewed several I noticed that the rents were – at that time – about $350.00 per month for a two-bedroom place. I was no financial whiz, but wondered what a mortgage would cost per month. I learned it would have been about the same. So I decided to find a house – never having done this nor even knowing the region – while the kids kept falling off the back seat of the car without car seats (remember those days?). Getting frustrated, I did what many people would do: I called my mother and asked if she'd watch the kids for a few days while I drove around finding a place to live.

Q: While he was doing this was there any contact with the Foreign Service for you?

COLLINS: No, none. Jim was soon off for L.A., Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston, and NYC, for about six weeks each. I was on my own. But right before he left D.C., I spotted Bethesda and thought: "This is nice; I could live here." Gut instinct. Next thing, I found a house across from NIH and thought, "Someone will always want to live here if we need to sell or rent." I urged Jim to come immediately; he did; we signed; and it was soon ours. The only bad news was that they wanted to live there for another four months before leaving, and I had no place to live in the interim. So, again, I did what many others would do in this situation. "Mom" "Pop" "Here we come!." So the kids and I moved in with them in Flushing, N.Y. for three months. Neighbors and friends came running with enough equipment to start a day-care center.

It was one of the best things I've ever done, to find and buy that house. We loved it all the years we lived in it. Had the best neighbors, who became lifetime friends. I should add that my parents, although glad to know the grandchildren, were also glad when we left. Exhausted them.

Q: Had you received your Ph.D. yet?

COLLINS: Yes, I had. Although my work was complete and approved earlier, the degree was actually awarded in 1970, while I was in Turkey.

Q: Did you have any problem defending your thesis and all that?

COLLINS: That is a good question. With another advisor, I might not have been supported getting through the degree while sidetracked with the Foreign Service travel and birth of two children, as well as necessary employment along the way. But Leo Solt was such a strong feminist, he helped make it all happen. For example, he scheduled a "preliminary defense" for the day before I left for Turkey! I flew to Indianapolis, drove to Bloomington, while shipping out to Turkey. Left baby Robert with my parents in New York. And Leo Solt was willing to review chapter by chapter as I mailed them from Turkey, returning each promptly (through slow mail of course). I owe him a great deal – and was fortunate to be able to tell him so during his lifetime, and then his two daughters later on.

Q: You say you had five professors who examined you in five different fields. What was that about?

COLLINS: It was intense. At that time, and possibly since, we were required to select five fields. For me, four in history and one in political science. After your coursework, you had five days of written exams, followed by oral exams, in all five fields. Only then could you start your thesis research and writing. Days of exams. Of course you also had to have passed language exams in at least two foreign languages, too.

You had one main advisor, and four others in their respective fields. So my fields were first in English history, 17th century, and one in European intellectual history, one in American intellectual history, one in American colonial history, and one in political theory. I still remember the professors and their faces at the exam. And when the exams and dissertation writing were completed successfully, Anne Moore, the secretary for the entire history department, very generously offered to take the document to a shop for photocopying and binding. In those days of course people didn't have their own copiers, and even today, we cannot bind our own volumes. She did this as an act of kindness and would not accept remuneration above actual cost.

Q: And what would you do next to get a position in teaching history?

COLLINS: Before opened advertising of positions was required jobs were circulated from one history professor or department to the others, so you had to depend on your advisor and his contacts. It wasn't a public or transparent process. If you could attend the professional conferences, that could help, too. But as we were sorting out what to do next, and considering universities that were considering us, Jim got his position at the Naval Academy. Friends of friends had introduced him to Academy faculty. I've talked about my work in Annapolis, at the Constitutional Convention. After our two years in Annapolis, Jim went into the Foreign Service. Fast forward through the two years in Turkey, and I'm in Washington and Jim is traveling around the States with a Soviet arts and crafts exhibit. It's now 1972.

Q: Were you having any contact with people in the Foreign Service at that time?

COLLINS: No, at that point I was just out there on my own. My relatives thought Jim had left me; they assumed that's why my parents were housing the two toddlers and me. They had that look, "Sure he's coming back…." But, no, no contact with the Foreign Service for me. I assume Jim was in regular contact. And then they sent orders for Jim in the spring of 1973 to go to Moscow.

Q: This was a full time position in Moscow.

COLLINS: Yes. He was to serve in the political section. By that time, baby Jonathan had almost figured out who Jim was and no longer cried when Jim "babysat" him. But as we prepared to rent out our house and ship out, another shock occurred. Jim was diagnosed with cancer. Two weeks later he had surgery, followed by six weeks of radiation every morning. Cobalt they said it was. It was a grim and scary period, dwarfing other concerns. We were both 30-something and the kids were too young to understand. Although the surgery was not difficult, the radiation sickened him. Daily I drove him to the treatment at Sibley with the two little ones bouncing around in the back seat of our used VW Beetle.

But Jim was determined to continue working, and went from radiation treatment to bus stop to State Department until he could no longer stand up the last two weeks or so….in bed being sick all day long. As you can imagine, the State Department didn't want to give him medical clearance to go to Moscow and I could not fault them for that. But he fought it and won. He argued that the conditions in Moscow would be no different from those in Washington regarding the recurrence of cancer.

On the face of it, it made sense. That was before we knew about the microwave radiation trained on the Embassy. If somebody in the State Department had known this in 1973, they sure didn't tell us. They let Jim go anyway, rather than factor in this possible threat. The rest is history. We went. Jim had an exemption that required him to return to Washington after one year for a medical checkup. I thought he needed more frequent sophisticated checkups, but could not complain about a visit home during the summer of 1974.

Q: From when to when were you there?

COLLINS: We went out in August 1973 and returned in August of 1975.

Q: What kind of quarters did you have?

COLLINS: We had excellent housing. It was in a new building at the outskirts of Moscow, about eight miles from the Embassy. They had merged two Russian apartments to create a three-bedroom flat with two bathrooms. Very comfortable. Of course we didn't yet know that we would be without hot water during much of two cold summers.

Q: Where was this?

COLLINS: Moscow was then built out with high-rise buildings from Khrushchev's era, massive ugly housing projects growing from the center to periphery for about eight miles. Just beyond that you suddenly found old villages with small huts, village pump, muddy dirt roads, chimneys spewing smoke in winter. We were in the last of the buildings before the fields began. These were new buildings, built for foreigners, fenced, gated, and guarded. There was – as far as we could tell – only one other American family (with children) in the three-building complex. Others were from all over the world.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time, and how was the spirit?

COLLINS: When we arrived, there was a chargé, Spike Dubs. Then Walter Stoessel became Ambassador. The morale of the Embassy in Moscow has always seemed to me to have been poor during the periods I've known it. Some people say that in the Foreign Service people become like the place they're in. In a city that was gray, dilapidated, and monotonous; topped by the Cold War suspicions and surveillance, there wasn't much to cheer. And daily frustrations. Nothing functioned. People were rough, in survival mode since the war, at least in the 1960s and 1970s. It made New York seem gentle and civil.

The embassy was large and bureaucratic as you can expect. Many people were complaining about something. Most things were in short supply, so if people wanted a washer or needed a crib, they couldn't get them easily or quickly. I became one of the gripers when the embassy seized the crib from under two-year-old Jonathan, who loved it, to give it to another child because they didn't have another crib. Jonathan was unhappy and insecure in a bed, so he chose to sleep on the floor instead, sometimes under the bed. Small things can get to you when you're living in a taxing and vexing environment, both inside and outside the embassy. That said, of course, there were wives who enjoyed living in Russia during the Soviet times. I admired them. It wasn't a good fit for me.

Q: Did you have a servant?

COLLINS: The State Department did not pay for any hired help in Moscow, even though we were expected to entertain. Other countries' embassies we knew of did supply help for their officers in Moscow both for entertaining and for the hardship shopping there. And we couldn't just go out on the market for a teenage babysitter. So with my working, the kids needing some babysitting, and the need to entertain, we were forced to pay out-of-pocket for a housekeeper, for Olga, something we would never have considered doing at home on our salary.

Q: Was Olga part of the system in which the Soviet government would essentially assign somebody?

COLLINS: Absolutely. You couldn't hire anyone without going through, UPDK, the diplomatic services department (Administration for the Diplomatic Corps.) They could ask the prices they wanted and collect the pay in "hard currency," dollars not rubles. And they would send whomever they wanted. One giveaway was that the people they sent to

clean house seemed a tad "overqualified": they usually spoke English well, were educated, and- in the case of Olga – refined.

Q: Everybody felt this was part of the KGB apparatus.

COLLINS: Yes, for good reason. There was evidence they reported back to the "authorities" about us. We had nothing to hide, yet the invasion of privacy went with living there, and made me uncomfortable. But I did need help babysitting during the times between the end of nursery school and my arrival home from work; and of course welcomed the cleaning and even some preparation for meals.

I think I may have mentioned that I did get a job with the embassy after a number of months seeking professional work there. I worked for a wonderful Public Affairs Officer (PAO), David Nalle, and worked in the "library" slot. I replaced Ann Odom, who was peerless, General Bill Odom's wife. Unfortunately, they are no longer living. My job was to maintain contacts with influential Russians in organizations in the arts, culture, and education, helping to determine whom to invite to embassy events, or who might enjoy having a particular book we had available as a gift. David taught me a lot.

Q: How would you say your relations were with Russians then: were you being shunned or could you meet people?

COLLINS: It was possible for most of us to meet only those Russians who were cleared to associate with foreigners. There were people at the embassy whose job it was to know dissidents, minorities, and nonconformists. They did befriend and socialize with people "on the outs." We chose not to because it seemed, overall, that many Russians had enough risks in their life without associating with suspect foreigners. We felt it was the right thing for them not to have us enter their lives.

At the time, we knew a Russian pianist, Lev Vlasenko, whom Jim had met when he came to Harvard in 1960. As soon as we arrived in Moscow, we looked up his performances at the Conservatory. When we attended one and went backstage to see him, he hugged Jim with tears in his eyes. I guess we said something about getting together, and he looked into our eyes, and simply said, "I hope you will understand." And that was it. We could greet him after performances, which we did. But it would have been selfish to impose our well-intentioned hospitality on him. He had occasional clearance to travel outside Russia. When he did, he'd send Jim a postcard. But we didn't want to jeopardize his career or travels, or his wife's career.

Now to jump ahead from the 1970s to the late 1990s concerning Lev: when we returned to Russia after it opened up, we walked on our first day to the Conservatory. Outside was posted a notice of a concert to be performed the next day-- at his memorial service. The soloist was his daughter. Jim had managed a brief visit with him in the early '90s, but how inhuman it was that we couldn't maintain a friendship during most his adult lifetime.

As for other Russians, we would meet and talk in casual relationships, parks, restaurants, trains. Like Americans, Russians talk to "strangers." And they were curious. But developing deeper relationships was dicey, other than with those sanctioned to know you. This didn't mean that everyone at the embassy felt or acted the same way: this is what we chose.

Q: What about daily living: did you have to stand in line for things? How good were you?

COLLINS: How good was I? Well patience has never been my forte, so I wasn't good at the standing-in-line thing. But I had learned in the 1960s the multiple-line-dance of procuring something to eat. Also ate up a lot of time – and kept consumer demand down. Life was easier at the embassy than it had been as students, because we had a car and we could shop at the "diplomats store" using dollars rather than rubles. The embassy basement housed a very small commissary – a very small room. It had some canned and packaged American items at random. Breakfast cereals and tuna fish were among the more popular. And the appearance of Oreos could really get a rush of people. Several of the goods were rationed. I bought things at the Russian stores of course, as I had when we were students. Prepared foods. Fresh bread. That was not too difficult. But it was hard to find specialty items, like cream for cooking. Fresh milk and eggs. What I truly missed – as did our little sons- were fresh fruits and vegetables. That said, we were way above deprivation or hunger. So I was "good enough," I suppose: I shopped and cooked daily while working … did the things that had to be done.

Q: Well did you find there was a grouping of a "wives mafia" or something like that?

COLLINS: Probably several little groups. I did make some wonderful friends of wives who were there, friendships that have lasted to today. There were several, unfortunately, whose marriages didn't survive Moscow, women with advanced degrees and professional experience that they were not allowed to use there, and so they went home. They did well in the long run.

Q: The Foreign Service has been particularly rough on marriages, especially in eastern European assignment. I know when I was in Yugoslavia, Jim Lowenstein, Larry Eagleburger, David Anderson, all of them when we served in Serbia together ended up divorced.

COLLINS: Yes, some hung in and remained married. Some wives left but didn't divorce.

Q: Spike Dubs didn't remain married.

COLLINS: Spike Dubs, the DCM at the time, got divorced.

Q: What's the problem? Why would this happen?

COLLINS: That is a good question. First, we would have to ascertain whether the incidence of divorce was indeed higher among this group than among those who served in other regions or worked in D.C. I don't know. I'm also not sure if it's higher than it is in comparable professions, although it appeared to be higher than that among military officers. If it is indeed higher, it's probably because of the strain put on families: difficult and challenging setting, few cheering sides to life, and of course officers working seven days a week, evenings, weekends, and holidays, leaving families on their own in an unappealing setting. Constant surveillance even in the "home." So few outlets. In the few spare hours, professional "entertaining" and attending events is virtually required. As for cause and effect: hard to know if East Europe drives people to greater divorce, or if officers who select that area are already less concerned with family life than, let's say, those who choose Latin America. I'd love to see longitudinal studies…but I do agree that divorce rates appear to be high.

Q: I know times change, so I wonder whether there was an effort at that time to send out any marriage counselors or the equivalent? Or was anything else being done?

COLLINS: They did have a chaplain, but I don't know whether he was trained in counseling. I know that when his wife was killed in an auto accident in which he was driving, he stayed at the post in denial as if nothing had happened. There was one American MD there, but I don't believe he was trained in counseling either. I think there may later on have been an occasional visiting psychiatrist on circuit, but I think he was there more to assess people with issues and decide if they should be sent home rather than to counsel them during his short, intermittent visits. If there was help available, I doubt people could avail themselves of it in that fishbowl setting and believing it could not help their "efficiency" report.

Q: I was wondering if there were any efforts by senior wives to encourage junior wives to go and speak with Jane Doe who seems to be experiencing some difficulties, and maybe you can help here….

COLLINS: I didn't see that, but it may have been occurring. It didn't seem as strong as the military wives' community efforts.

Q: And a senior wife, like Jane Dubs?

COLLINS: She did take her role as a senior Foreign Service wife very seriously in the formal and social sense of the word. She asked me to tea and when I said I was working at the embassy she said I would just have to come anyway (remember the theme: "my husband is higher than your husband.") I was young and felt in a bind. So I asked David, my boss, what to do. Of course he said, "Just go." I felt bad about "skipping work."

I do think that the wives overall were very good at helping one another, reaching out and supporting each other, especially at times of need (like illness). But when marriages unraveled, women left. Interestingly, several of them might have stayed and worked things out had they been able to use their professional expertise in a paid position. One

with top of the line Russian, one Ph.D. economist, one accountant, budget and fiscal specialists – all were frustrated at being unable to use their experience there. And many others with great talents – writing, teaching, nursing, social work, administration – stayed and did what they had to do to support their husbands.

Q: Were you aware of the radiation in the embassy at all?

COLLINS: Not at all at that time. Jim learned of it after we completed our two years living there. I first read of this in the New York Times. Jim went out there with the assumption that he would be no more subject to recurrence of cancer there than at home; we left our children in the embassy basement nursery school; we worked in the building near windows– we had no idea the possible risk. But we all knew the considerable number of people who contracted cancer then or in the years following, numbers greater than we knew in comparable populations in our neighborhoods or other offices. One telling story – and it's in my book – is of a high level officer's experience. He later told us that he knew there was something afoot when he came into his embassy office one day to discover that the fluorescent light bulbs he had left on the floor – unplugged – were lit up on their own.

Q, I am not an expert on this, but understand there was a building across the way that was irradiating the embassy. There may have been the idea that somehow this radiation could feed microphones or pick up signals or relay conversations. But the real concern was of course the question of what was happening to the people who were being fried by this radiation.

COLLINS: I have no idea why the Russians did it, what they thought they were getting from it. One assumption was that somehow they were gathering intelligence that way. Whether it was from microphones planted in the walls, or from electric typewriters, or from radio frequencies and cables , or something else completely – not sure anyone still knows. But what we do know is that the measurable level of microwave radiation at the embassy was higher than what the Russians themselves considered to be a safe and acceptable level for human exposure.

Q: I wonder if there were policy reasons that prevented doing something about it, like saying, "stop that or we're pulling out," which we could have done.

COLLINS: I think there were things that could have been done. They later added special screening to cover the windows, which they could have done sooner. Perhaps they could also have arranged desks away from direct line with windows, against walls instead.

And whether the medical department at State knew about this and made decisions about sending or not sending people accordingly, we never knew. Or whether attempts were made simply to say: "enough already," as you suggested. That we can't subject Americans to this. What most of us at the embassy at that time observed then and later, beside the number of cases of cancer, was those among younger people. In the couple who had our apartment before us, both of them – in their 30s – contracted cancer, and one

survived (a good thing, with their young child to bring up). There were few couples in which at least one didn't get cancer, although, happily, many have survived it. The scientific study that the State Department commissioned from the Johns Hopkins University Department of Public Health was, to my mind, faulty. When the surveyors called to question me, I asked whether they had spoken to individuals A, B, and C. – all of whom had contracted cancer. The interviewer told me they had not been given those names. Nor did they follow up a few years later, either, with the additional cases that sprouted. So I think they missed many key people and cases that might have shown a higher incidence, in keeping with what most of us observed.

Q: I think what we are talking about here is something that many of us in the Foreign Service are concerned about, and that is that there are many instances in which it's best not to make waves, not to mention it if it might create waves. There's a strong suspicion that policy had priority over health.

COLLINS: Over people, human life.

Q: Over people.

COLLINS: I think there was a culture of secrecy and lack of candidness that pervaded the Service. You obviously didn't want people breaching security, saying things harmful to American interests. Yet under that cover not enough distinction was made between things that did or didn't have to be secret. Policy issues, relations with Russia, security issues were one thing; the health and welfare of families, of children, that is another. Another example of not knowing enough – beside radiation – were intestinal parasites.

Q: Now things have reached such a state that our Embassy in Beijing gives a daily report on air pollution, which the Chinese government does not. So people in China are checking what the American Embassy is saying because they don't trust their own government.

COLLINS: Now that is a good one! Moscow, of course, had foul air in summer's heat when the peat bogs burned in July or August, filling the city with the acrid smell and smoke of burning peat. We were supposed to suck it up. But you're right that the Embassy did nothing to warn people or suggest what they might do to avoid asthma and bronchitis. One American wife and mother died of it while we were there. Perhaps they do things differently today. When I talk to younger people today, they're apt to say, "Why would you put up with this?" Or, "We'd never put up with that." The discomforts, secrecy, and disregard. They feel entitled to more respect and better treatment, professionally and personally.

Q: I think there have been so many suits in court, some things may have changed. But the government is not a benevolent mother to its employees.

COLLINS: No signs of benevolence, no. It was a battle all the time. It's probably true of many bureaucracies, places where employees don't necessarily feel it's in their interest to

serve those they're paid to support, those who were filling the State Department's mission in the field, those who do diplomacy, economic and commercial reporting, consular work for U.S. citizens, and such. There seemed to be little or no accountability for performance. On a bad day, I would picture callous people leaving their office at 6:00 p.m. to drive to their comfortable suburban homes around D.C., with electricity, hot and cold running water, washing machines, air conditioners – even a crib!

Q: *You did get this job for the cultural affairs officer. You mentioned it was probably the only professional level job for a spouse. What were you up to?*

COLLINS: Technically, this was a "librarian" slot because it was in the American library. It later became an Officer's slot. These embassy libraries, as you know, are opened to the people in the host country to learn more about America. But in Russia it was impossible in most cases for a Russian to breach the walls and enter past the Russian guards outside. It had a nice little collection of literature by American authors, as well as books that were designed to be given as gifts to Russians to provide them greater understanding of American life. So the goal was to promote American culture.

David Nalle, the PAO I mentioned, had me engaged as a "contact management system officer," the title it was given when it became a regular USIA (United States Information Agency) Officer's position. Nowadays I'm sure it's done on computers. The notes and records I developed, and systems for sorting these, were designed to help us know which Russians in the arts and culture might be interested in and invited to which events at the Embassy. Whether it was the university rector or the head of the Bolshoi Ballet or dancers, artists, educators, or others, it was about maintaining these relationships. I also got to help determine which books to give to which Russian officials. I attended events, met people, and noted later those who attended and who didn't, to see interest level. In large groups, it wasn't always easy. We would try to do a head-count. Simplest way was to set out, let's say, 200 coat hangers on racks, and count the empty hangers – or extra coats! I mentioned that David was wonderful to work for, and I learned a great deal. He and his wife Peggy are still good friends of ours.

Q: Were you able to keep up with world events at that time?

COLLINS: It was very difficult to keep up with world events, a great frustration for me, feeling uninformed. Those at the Embassy had the wire services. With Internet today people cannot imagine how isolated one can feel abroad without fresh news. By the time Newsweek arrived, or the shared copy of the Tribune, the events had long passed. Sometimes Jim could bring home the ticker tapes, but I couldn't count on that. We could sometimes tune into the soporific sounds of the "Voice of America" (VOA); and on a good day, hear the BBC World Service. The Soviets tried to jam all those stations. Even today there are holes in my knowledge of these years.

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Q: Was Jim trying to keep up with the Middle East?

COLLINS: Yes, his job entailed working on Russian relations with the Middle East. Of course he'll tell you more about this, but he was always interested in Russian foreign relations.

Q: What sense did you have from your two stays in Russia about the Soviet government's efficiency, popularity, and other things?

COLLINS: In our student days I found the Russian graduate students disinterested in ideology, both bored and irritated. But somehow I did not then project ahead to what would happen when these 20-somethings became 50-somethings, and in good positions in government, education, and the professions. We knew that they felt the restraints of a hermetically sealed and isolated country; fears of the uncertain hand of "Authority;" and backwardness of development. It's almost impossible today to imagine such a totalitarian state, or a place so cut off from world news, now that we have Internet. During those years, people's gait and carriage were different from what they are today: they tended to look down at their feet or straight ahead, not wanting to see too much, I always thought. The popularity of the Soviet state, system, and regime did not run high among its educated subjects. As for efficiency, outside the military, it didn't abound. Many sights we saw looked like the proverbial (and of course stereotypical) "Polish jokes."

Q: Avoiding eye contact, you say.

COLLINS: Yes, avoiding eye contact, avoiding looking too much to one side or the other, avoiding looking up from the ground. "I am minding my own business." That made me feel a sense of fear, uncertainty, closedness. People were careful to avoid appearing to know anything that might bring knocks on their doors in the middle of the night to question them.

Q: This is interesting because I am told that some of the old timers look with nostalgia at the Brezhnev era because of the stability; it lacked the turmoil of elections.

COLLINS: No chaos, for sure. Stability.

Q: Everything was pretty well ordered and so there wasn't much of a challenge.

COLLINS: That's right. And this was especially true if you were privileged, a party member who was part of the elite. So if you can look back to this "special status" life, perhaps it looks pretty good in retrospect! Even in this country, many people look back in nostalgia to what they see as easier and better days, forgetting the bad parts, the discrimination and lack of equity, especially if that didn't affect them.

In Russia if you managed to get yourself into the higher levels of the party or had a good job to go with that, you had a life of relative comfort and ease. The advantages came with "station." This was not yet a monetized society, so some people were rewarded with special benefits. Two main ones were housing and access to rare goods. So those at the top had large enough flats not to have to share kitchens and bathrooms, and for couples to

have their own bedroom. Through special stores they could acquire appliances like a refrigerator or washing machine. A coupon book came with their paycheck. These coupons allowed them to shop in stores that might have boots from Eastern Europe, nicer things. We knew those shops because we could shop there with our U.S. dollars.

Several people we knew were members of the "Academies," the National Academies of Sciences. (The Russian "Academies," unlike the American ones, included history and other fields we do not include in "sciences." "*Wissenschaften*" is a better word for it.) They not only had secure positions, but support staffs and the benefits anyone covets in that kind of research environment. There were not a lot of women in these positions compared to the number of men, especially at the top. So you can see that there was a lot for some people to be nostalgic about, to remember fondly because the system worked so well for them. Some people in this country now call that "entitlement."

Q: Being of Jewish background means that you're likely to be more sensitive to Anti-Semitism. Were you sensing that in conversation?

COLLINS: I was not so likely to hear that because we dealt mainly with "official" Russians. So their conversation was constrained, restrained, careful, narrow, and limited. They were not apt to wax eloquently on any subject. But I know you don't have to scratch deeply below the surface to find anti-Jewish sentiment in Russia. And many Russian Jews who lived there encountered prejudice in university admissions and/or a "glass ceiling" in their profession. There was reason to believe this was true. Some did not appear to notice or encounter it, or at least to find it an issue. But if most Russians were careful to avoid raising doubts of their loyalty to the Party, Jews may have been even more so (e.g., by avoiding visiting with foreigners). There were some Jews who did rise to higher positions, served as military officers, were active in the Communist party, and may or may not have believed what they professed, like others.

Q: Well the dissidents of course.

COLLINS: Yes, many but certainly not all dissidents were Jews; but most Jews were not active dissidents. All dissidents were "anti-system." They lived in a sort of limbo.

Q: I know that Communism was taught throughout the eastern bloc. People told me at our embassy in Warsaw that in Warsaw there must be at least three dedicated Communists in the country.

COLLINS: Yes, they taught courses in Communism, Marxism, theory at the university and at lower levels. These were required courses.

Q: Did you think when you were there that Communism had lost its luster? Was too far removed to be meaningful to people?

COLLINS: I think even in the 1960s and 1970s there was a lack of "gung ho" spirit for the whole idea. The ideology, theory, ceremonies, phrases, banners and buntings all seemed so stale and uninspiring. The exhortations on posters, so anachronistic.

Q: Striving toward a greater future….

COLLINS: Yes, and the visuals. The graphics were so retro. They harkened back to a period before I was born. They looked like the older photographs and movies I saw in my childhood, images from the 1930s. I had the sense that the Brooklyn I knew in the 1940s as a small child was more "modern" than the Russia of the 1960s and 1970s. Stale and static. And almost nothing had changed over the decades we lived there; when we returned in 1973 from having departed in 1966, everything looked frighteningly the same, right down to the location of the ladies with their ice cream carts on street corners. I wasn't sure whether they were the same ladies or not. But it was so incredibly stagnant, unprogressive. It was like a still picture frozen in time. Should have been in sepia tones…but was actually gray.

Q: Well it is like the ballet. They do wonderful ballet of the Tsarist times but modern dance, fancy free, has moved way ahead of them.

COLLINS: Yes, modern dance in America dates back to before I was born. Martha Graham and company. And later, Twyla Tharp, Merce Cunningham, Alvin Ailey. It was part of the orthodoxy of Russia and the Communists that you could not have a female dancer who was not *en pointe*, on her toes. Any dance with soft shoes or flat foot on the ground was not "kosher" and was not going to happen. New choreography was as unlikely as abstract art. In the 1970s it struck me was that they had achieved fantastic technique in the arts, but lacked create spirit, at least in the public venues. There wasn't the freshness and originality that you get from new interpretation.

I understand this was true in music as well as in dance and visual arts. In theater you had greater and richer range because you could do more with acting, tone, and the selection of traditional material interpreted in ways that could seem current. Subtle, sometimes. You could do *The Brothers Karamazov* with shifting emphases. Puppet shows also allowed greater candor. But I found that the stasis of the times extended to the arts. I think some people who saw one performance of *Swan Lake*, for example, might swoon in awe. But by the 16th performance it would lose its luster, without the fresh interpretation or uniqueness of each performance. That said: performance arts were of the highest quality, amazingly proficient and professional. And sometimes truly awesome.

Q: Well the talent was there and nobody was tapping it.

COLLINS: Right. And the talented artists and performers, and film and theater directors, knew just how far they could go. They had some very good films too, as you know, but they also knew the range of subject matter and the range of attitude that you could express in any of these. I had always thought then that if they hadn't stalled in the 1920s and could pick up from there (with Malevich and Kandinsky and all) – amazing art could

emerge. And today they are picking up in literature, modern dance, and graphic arts with new interpretation. So with free reign, I think the arts can again flower in Russia. Of course without confidence in the safety of free expression, the arts can whither again…or burrow back underground for safety…or just not flourish.

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Q: Well, any of us who have had liberal arts education were brought up with Russian 19th century authors and composers. They dominated – and still dominate – those fields. Then, "thump," it stopped.

COLLINS: It was with a "thump" – a bang not a whimper – that it stopped, but before all of us were born. Lenin, Stalin, the 1920s and on. Why risk your life for the arts? Of course many people did and many didn't survive that bet.

Q: Did you feel that you were living in a conflicted world?

COLLINS: For me, personally, and I assume for other Americans living there, we were living in two worlds at once. But I'm not sure if the Russians really felt they were living in a conflicted world. They may have felt a need to "compromise." Perhaps some of those in higher education, arts, sciences, academic fields, did sense limits and uncertainties, calibrating their choices. We felt that people in professions wanted to know more and do more than they were able to in their setting. And the more sensitive people knew there was more and were aware of parameters. Of course for us, living between two worlds was living at the intersection of being foreigners in Russia and being the enemy living in their midst and listening to their propaganda, being under surveillance 24/7 (as we now say).

Q: Did you have any problems with surveillance?

COLLINS: I had a real problem living with it. And I had a problem with the concept. I found it very disturbing, intrusive, and discomforting. I didn't take it very well. It made me edgy even though I had nothing to hide. I don't think Jim and some others necessarily felt the same way because he and they were less bothered by it. Knowing our bedroom was bugged bothered me a lot. Knowing my movements were monitored… like a mouse in a maze. They kept close tabs on us, close scrutiny. It's inhumane. I like to talk candidly, as you've probably figured out, but I couldn't do that in Moscow for fear that my grievances, annoyances, and ideas might be used against me – or more likely, against Jim. He tends to be far more careful in what he says, controlled, and good at secrets. Living with that pall made me more cautious, careful, and less opened: I didn't like what it did to me.

Q: How did you talk?

COLLINS: Well, we didn't really. We didn't talk candidly when we were indoors, ever. Conversation was very limited. When we had something that was really important that had to be shared, we had to discuss it outdoors in the open air in any season, sometimes freezing. Sometimes if there was enough background noise from a crowd of people in the

apartment or the music up loud, it might be possible to speak and not be overheard. Perhaps this brings us back to the high divorce rate we were discussing earlier. A marriage can survive temporary travel for a few weeks, but over months and years, this kind of constrained living takes its toll. Couldn't even talk about one's own children or their issues, let alone exchange or share concerns of daily life. Openness, privacy, luxuries that could not be afforded during all those years living in Russia.

Q: Did you find there were wives who couldn't take it at all?

COLLINS: Well, the stresses were hard on everybody. I would be surprised if anybody thought all this was fine, fun, comfortable, easy, or joyous. And if the pressure of Russian surveillance weren't hard enough on families and marriages, then there were the incredible and endless working hours of the Embassy--weekends, holidays, and evenings all considered normal working hours. When people in Washington have those schedules, at least there are outlets for their families: movies, playgrounds, restaurants, children's events, a beach or pool or mall. There wasn't even one good working playground for children in the whole city. No place for the slides and swings and climbing for a little child.

Q: Well, Russians love their children and I would think there would be children's parks.

COLLINS: There were parks, but without equipment. So kids could run around and make up stories and that's fine, too. And little play spaces with broken swings and bars, rusted metal and splintered wood. But the Russian kids would play in the building courtyards with granny, and mostly dig in the earth with their little shovels… fill their pails, dump their pails. And so we did that, too. I took the children to those places to play with the kids and the earth and shovels and pails. And the Russian kids and ours also had toy trucks they could push around or use to move earth and such. And that was fine for the little kids although I think for larger children it would have been a challenge, finding what to do. The grandmothers would talk to me and ask questions, such as why my toddlers were not wearing more clothes than they were. Why they didn't have more scarves and more hats and more mittens.

One time I was walking down the street with Jonathan in the stroller and Robert walking along and somebody stopped me and said "Why is he in a stroller?" I was thinking he is in a stroller so we can carry our stuff, so he doesn't escape, so we can cross the dangerous streets, so I can keep track of two kids -- all these complicated things going through my mind that seemed natural for a two-year-old or three-year-old in a big city in the States. The woman declared, "But he can walk, can't he?" (Insensitive question, in case he couldn't actually.) "Yes, I said, he can walk." "Then why are you pushing him in a stroller if he can walk?" I stumbled over ways to describe the many reasons I found wheels a better idea, but was mainly thinking, "mind your own business." No one had any qualms about butting into your life. So much intrusiveness. Culturally acceptable there, but irritating to me. I know I should have been more tolerant of it and I admire those who were. I did, however, always remain polite and courteous.

Q: We had this experience, too. Our first child was born in Germany. People would keep stopping us and tucking the blankets in and then looking at us with our German shepherd puppy as well, and wondering why we had a child and a puppy at the same time. So we were getting instructions on the street all the time about what we should be doing.

COLLINS: Well we did too! We certainly got instruction about the kids. If we let them climb or do anything active, we were warned to be careful or not let them do it. The big difference – and I find this culturally significant – is that they kept their children under very tight control from an early age. In retrospect, I think part of the reason was that it was grandmothers rather than mothers caring for the kids: now that I'm a grandmother I see that I keep closer and tighter watch on my grandchildren than I did on my children. They held their hands tightly all the time. The Russian kids actually did not run loose. They did let them play in these little courtyards or play areas, while they sat on the bench chatting with the other grannies, keeping close watch not just on their own child, but on all children.

One day, when I was walking in Gorky Park with Robert and Jonathan running loose, I heard my name called by a Russian we had known when we were students almost a decade earlier. (God knows how he found me right then and there, but….) He walked with me for a while, and then observed, "Your boys, they are so free." I said, "What do you mean so free?" He replied, "Well they are just running around by themselves. You're not holding their hands." They were probably at that time three and six. He said he always held his children's hands, and wondered if all Americans let their kids walk on their own in parks. I said once they were this age, sure. They weren't infants or toddlers any more. He added, "That is not true with Russian children. We hold very tight by the hand and not so free." Then he thought about it for a while, because he always had a very free spirit, and had been a risk-taker. He thought to wonder whether this difference might be significant. I thought it was.

Q: You hear studies about Soviet children and swaddling clothes, and how they're all bound up when they are very young.

COLLINS: They are. But that wasn't unique to Russia. I understand that Greeks and others do this, too. Yet they did bind their babies tightly in wrapped blankets from birth. Perhaps in some cases they did it with a board, too, like the American Indians. Their babies looked like little burritos. I don't recall when they stopped swaddling, but I'd guess it's when babies could hold their own heads up, weren't so floppy any more. They would air babies out year round, including in the dead of winter. Bundled up until they got used to short periods of cold, increasingly longer. But you could hardly see the baby at all for all its wrappings. Now I hear that some Americans have found that it calms babies to swaddle them so they don't flail all about, with their uncontrolled arms and legs. The tight controls continued into nursery schools at which they were treated more strictly than in ours. It seemed they had to give up teddy, bottles, and diapers at a very early age, around one year old, much earlier than we would have done. So I didn't send our kids there, feeling there is enough time to build discipline in later years, but let them enjoy being babies or toddlers.

Q: So you left there in 1975. How did you feel about leaving?

COLLINS: Oh, I was always happy to leave there. When the airplane took off on the way home I always felt exhilaration. Of course we were going to a nice home in Bethesda, to family and friends, and I couldn't wait.

Q: So what were you up to?

COLLINS: First, we had to move back into our own home. But I also quickly wrote notes – as I always do – on my experiences. I was interested to capture my first impressions on my return, in part because it also helped illuminate the experience of not being there, the contrast.

I think I told you that I kept notes, diaries, and journals during all the periods we lived in Russia, jottings from which I was able to develop a book a few years ago. What made that possible, was capturing my observations, impressions, and senses while they were "fresh" and before I took too much for granted, going there or returning home. My first joys of daily life came with finding fresh newspapers on my doorstep every morning, as well as TV and radio news. That meant a lot. And everything looked so bright and so saturated with color. It wasn't because of the season, because Moscow in the summer is very sunny, very hot. You know how endless summer days are there. The sun barely sets. Yet coming back to Washington everything seemed so much more cheerful and colorful. Of course the next joy was going to the Giant and filling a cart with fresh fruits and fresh vegetables – lettuce, celery especially – that we had missed and craved deeply for two years; and the fresh milk for the children. Jonathan was then four years old and spoke sophisticated English, but had no idea the names for all these items. So he quickly decided to call all vegetables "salad" – and that lasted for a while. He also caught on to new words like peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots, blueberries, cantaloupes, red grapes and so forth.

Q: Well what were you both up to then.

COLLINS: Jim can better answer that question for his work, but I recall he worked at INR, Intelligence and Research, and then at the Near East bureau, for several years together. He was working in Washington and that's what shaped my life.

Q: How long were you there?

COLLINS: We wanted to stay as long as possible for the kids' schooling. So from 1975 to 1982 were able to do this. But then Jim was required to go abroad again, and was sent to Amman, Jordan. We did have seven happy years in Washington. Things were going well and I had been able to resume my career.

Q: What were you doing?

COLLINS: During that time I got both kids into the same public school with after school daycare and started looking for a job. Having been away and having a gap in my resume made it harder. But I got a job at the Library of Congress in the Congressional Research Service (CRS), based in part on my work at the Constitutional Convention in Maryland. So I understood the legislative process and legislative research. CRS took in research inquiries from Members of Congress and their staffs, ascertained what needed doing, and sent the request to proper researchers. Although it was not a high level position, it got me back into the workforce during an era in which people did not look kindly on those who took time off to raise children or follow their husbands abroad. I worked there for two years and learned a lot about the Hill. During my lunch hour I did research on 17th century English radicals for a series of books being published in England at the time. In those days I could work in the stacks, a real treat.

But when it became clear that I might not have a future at the Library, especially without a degree in Library Science, I looked for other positions. I moved on to a small start-up nonprofit organization doing cultural programs about the Muslim world, working for Bill Crawford, a retired Foreign Service Officer and Ambassador, who had served in Cyprus, Yemen, and other Middle East positions. The Chair –and "Founder" -- was Ambassador Lucius Battle, who served in Egypt among other places. The point of the organization was to present cultural programs that would help Americans understand more about Muslim culture, history, beliefs, arts. The organization was not partisan or religious. So I was fortunate there to work for Bill and then later, Chris Van Hollen, also a retired Ambassador, and also a wonderful and very smart person.

In the five years I served as number two at that organization we created (with consultants) a traveling exhibit of Islamic arts and artifacts, developed books and other print materials, sponsored panel and lecture programs, and did a short AV piece. David Nalle, the former Cultural Attaché for whom I had worked, did a splendid job on a slide show that compared Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in ways that helped people grasp what they had in common.

Q: The Children of the Book.

COLLINS: Exactly, the Children of Abraham they would say. He has used it for years, including at American University. And a small exhibit was developed by John Jacobs, formerly of USIA, that was displayed at National Geographic Hall. The large, cultural exhibit showed at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution, as well as at museums in Houston and elsewhere in the U.S.

Q: This is the period before Islam was considered a threat.

COLLINS: Not quite. The Iranian hostage taking—and other world events – had propelled the Islamic world into American lives. Things were becoming difficult and radicalized on both sides. At first, people were as baffled as they were angry, but of course the nastiness has only increased since then. I think 9/11 was – naturally – a turning

point. Before that, there was some anger, but still some curiosity. Remember some of the anger came from gas prices, cartels, and gas lines, too. This is the 1970s and early 1980s.

Q. Where did you go from there?

I learned a lot those five years, working every side of nonprofit management – from initial incorporation and bylaws, to staffing, fundraising, budgets, and of course programs, as well as working with a Board. While I was at this institute, I was elected to the Board of the Maryland Humanities Council, a nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington. Every state has one of these cultural organizations. So in 1981, I became Board member and then Chair; and in 1984, when the then Executive Director left for another position, I interviewed for, and was hired to be, Executive Director of MHC. On the side, I led the usual suburban life—soccer, swimming lessons, driving kids, keeping up the house. All good things, and I was doing things I enjoyed most in my professional life, imaging, creating, and implementing cultural programs.

Q: You know in a way this is quite a remove from being professor of English history.

COLLINS: Not as much as it might seem. My involvement with history had always been on the cultural side, intellectual and social. So it wasn't such a big leap into doing cultural program for the "general public." It was really about educating a different audience—not matriculated students but the general adult public-- about history, ideas, and cultural expression. In fact, today, there are academic fields for "the public humanities" and for "public history." But before it went formal and academic I knew it was what I wanted to do. Now it has a name.

Q: Did developments in the Soviet Union intrude?

COLLINS: Not so much on my life, although I expect they did on Jim's. At that point I was happy returning to fields I enjoyed, doing work I liked, and of course being with the kids. So Russia seemed far away.

Q: How did your parents feel about your work explaining the Muslim world?

COLLINS: I don't think they were thrilled with that because they, too, were affected by the disquiet and uncertainty of living with radical Islam (hostage-taking and other manipulation and violence). On the other hand they were never prejudiced against a particular religion because they were not adherents themselves. They did not believe one religion or another had exclusive truth. They saw that strict observation of religion and fundamentalism often divided people and led to war and killing, each side assuming it held the only truth and could not co-exist with others. Once they realized I was not advocating Islam, or an apologist for it, they were OK with it. Some people may have felt the organization might have been "soft on Islam" – but I never felt either uncritical or partial. I did realize that a billion people – and growing – were and are part of the world we share, and not acknowledging this won't make them disappear.

Q: You were working with people who had risen up in the Foreign Service. Did the State Department intrude at all?

COLLINS: No. The State Department never connected with it. The funding came from the private sector. Big construction companies like Bechtel and Shlumberger, oil companies, the "usual suspects" with interests in those parts of the world. One big point we tried to make in public education was that most Muslims are not Arabs and are not in the Middle East, and that some Arabs are not Muslims. Actually the biggest group of Muslims in the world isn't the Middle East at all, but Indonesia. Not to mention the huge number of Muslims in India, beside the more obvious number in Pakistan. But you know all this.

Q: Who was your audience?

COLLINS: It was literally the general public. The exhibits were at large public museums. And the short film was used in many places and for many years. In reality a lot happened around universities, so the students did become an audience, too, for the print and media works. And they were mostly starting from zero as well in knowing about the Muslim world. Of course the topic itself made people very uncomfortable. So it was not an easy time.

Q: You weren't preaching to an oblivious public, but certainly one that was hearing only the bad side of Islam.

COLLINS: Yes, for sure. And understandably it has only become worse since 9/11. I think the detachment Americans felt about "foreign" cultures became deadly fear when the foreigners came here: that changed everything. When they landed on our doorstep, it mattered a lot more.

Q: What were you up to on the Humanities Council?

COLLINS: I mentioned I was first I was on the Board and then elected Chair, from 1981 to 1984. Then I was selected as Executive Director -- the full time professional job--in 1984 and stayed until 1992 when the commute to and from Baltimore got wearisome. I had the opportunity to imagine, create, and implement cultural programs for the public in history, literature, ethics, education, the arts… a range of programs at a variety of places. We also supported the efforts of cultural organizations – museums, libraries, colleges, historic organizations – to produce their own programs. We worked with historic places, like St. Mary's City and with public archaeological digs in Annapolis. It was great fun. We also did big programs, one that took place in the historic State House in Annapolis. I got to meet a lot of wonderful people with whom I remained in touch.

Q: And where was Jim during this period?

COLLINS: Jim had to go abroad again after our period living in the Washington area. In 1983 he got orders to go to Amman, Jordan, to be a political officer, from 1983 – 1985.

Q: Let's talk a little more about the period doing programs on the Muslim world.

COLLINS: The organization had been imagined and created by Ambassador Luke Battle. After he had served in Egypt and other places, he became aware of how ignorant Americans were of the Islamic world.

Q: The Middle East is a great area for career Foreign Service officers. You have crises – and those in politics want to steer clear of such areas.

COLLINS: That's right. It is one of the most difficult areas. As I reminded Jim, the Middle East was in crisis 4,000 years ago; troubles spilling out of the pages of the Bible. Tribes, battles, fights over land, water, resources. But hope springs eternal, I guess, that there might be ways of addressing cultural tensions and hatreds through understanding. This was at the 1,400th anniversary of the beginning of Islam, we might say the "founding." The hope was that understanding would come not through a religious, biased, or political lens, but a cultural, historical, and social one.

Q: Who constituted your intellectual base? Who gave intellectual heft to the work?

COLLINS: That is a very good question. The first move was to create an advisory committee of public figures and experts, including the Imam of the Mosque in Washington, Abdul Rauf. He was a scholar. Then there were other American scholars of Islam involved, like John Voll, John Duke Anthony, John Esposito, Barbara Stowasser, and other university faculty and scholars. There were also scholars of religion, one from the Hartford Seminary. And there were retired Ambassadors who had spent their entire careers in the Muslim world, knowing the languages and cultures well, like Richard Parker, as well as Bill and Chris and Luke. So it was a mix of scholars, government officials retired, Muslim, Christian, and secular people. A rabbi and interfaith minister as well. Some people who retired out of USIA did cultural programming. During my five years there, the organization merged with The American University and became an Institute on its campus. I mentioned some of the programs earlier: two exhibits, a film, some books, lectures and panel groups.

Q: Was there much of an academic establishment in Islamic Studies?

COLLINS: There were some. The ones I mentioned were not the only ones, but it was not really a large field, either. And we needed people who would not have to travel from overseas or too far away. And they had to be dispassionate.

Q: Did you find that you had to be really sensitive and careful because it is easy to inflame people in the Muslim world and you didn't want to start riots or get people killed?

COLLINS: Yes, it was tricky. The radical Muslims, including the native born Americans sometimes referred to as "Black Muslims," had very strong feelings about what we were trying to do. Their problem with it, intellectually, was that adherents believe you cannot talk about Islam in a secular way because it is the word of God. So you cannot speak of it within history, as taking place at a certain time and place. From their perspective, it was totally revealed, outside history or analysis. And they did not say: OK, we can agree to disagree here. There were some threatening people.

My worst experience came when I was alone in the office at the end of the day, maybe about 6:00 p.m. when it was still light, in a nice neighborhood right near American University, Spring Valley. In walked a large, threatening man who turned out to be a radical Muslim with a fanatical glint in his blue eyes. He tried to threaten me against proceeding with exhibits, programs, and so forth. I could see that he was not a person with whom I could reason – and he was twice my size. He had plopped himself down in a chair next to my desk. Unsure what to do next, I relied on my street instincts, never to look afraid. So I looked him straight in the eye, and asked: "Are you threatening me?" "This sounds like a threat." That seemed to get him to back down a bit, because he didn't want to be accused of threatening me. As soon as he left, I called the police. They had a special force, a sort of Secret Service Unit that arrived. They were already monitoring activities of radicals, and had an album of photos they showed me. I immediately found my man – and they knew who he was. They confirmed that he was a tough one. Another time we canceled a program because American anger was too high over another incident, and I felt the best idea was to quash the public program (and Luke backed me up).

Q: There was a murder in our embassy in Pakistan.

COLLINS: It may have been that, but there were more and more nasty events, making the endeavor increasingly difficult.

Q: Did you have any trouble from your experts or others because you came form a Jewish background?

COLLINS: I think from the side of religious Muslims, all non-Muslims were equally problematic. And anyone who saw Islam as a historic instead of simply revealed phenomenon was fair game. The Americans with whom we worked – clerical or academic—were open-minded, interfaith people or they would not have chosen to work with the organization. Those for whom the exclusive truth of their religion was paramount – in any of the three religions – was not interested in this kind of enterprise. It wasn't about "understanding" for them.

Q: Unlike the Bible, which can be taken historically.

COLLINS: For some people. There are a lot of people who won't consider the Bible as history or literature, either. Fundamentalism has people seeing the Bible and its revelations literally. And of course those who worked with this organization were not

those, nor were they the proselytizers, but rather those who respected all faiths and wanted to bring them together. One would hope the tolerance also extended to secular, humanist, agnostics as well.

Q: Those who tried to be open, you are saying.

COLLINS: Exactly, tried to be open and broad minded and accepting, not those who said "my faith is the only true faith." The tenets of some faiths do teach that they are the only right way, that they are exclusive and unique truth, a position that makes cross-faith acceptance impossible.

Q: I was wondering whether you had not only Muslim cranks but also Fundamentalist critics from all three religions….

COLLINS: Right, the anti-Muslims thought there was no reasonable justification for going about doing this kind of thing, because they already knew that all Muslims were radicals and up to no good. So it came from all sides. Some did not realize that Muslims did consider Jesus Christ a prophet; many did not know that Abraham is fundamental to all three religions. One of the hardest concepts to get across, as I mentioned, was that the majority of Muslims weren't in the Middle East and were not Arabs—or Iranians. And conversely, that not all Arabs are Muslims. And of course also that Iranians, Turks, Pakistanis, Indonesians, and some Indians, are Muslims but not Arabs. A billion people and growing. We wrote a short piece – about eight pages, called "What is Islam?" that has been widely used then and since, even in college courses.

Q: Was there contact with the Virginia theological seminary or others?

COLLINS: We worked most closely with the Hartford Seminary, which had good scholarly focus on Islam and a professor who had devoted her life to these studies.

Q: Well let's turn to what happened when Jim went to Jordan and you didn't.

COLLINS: When we returned to the States from Russia in 1975, Jim worked first in the intelligence and research bureau, INR, then in the Near East Bureau, NEA at State. But time came he had to go overseas again according to the rules. The vacancy that arose was of political counselor in Amman, Jordan. That's when the crunch came, in 1983, when the impact of Foreign Service life affected my kids, my parents, and me.

First I thought of the kids, who would not have had any international or English-speaking high school in Amman. (One was set to go and one was at Bethesda's Walt Whitman high school). Then, they were at the volatile ages, 11 and 14 and doing well in school with friends, sports and various activities. That's when my "Jewish mother" genes rose up. I could not outsource my children to boarding schools in Europe or leave them behind in boarding school in the U.S. And local schools in Amman I thought might not have the kinds of labs, math, physics, and so forth that they were studying. Why would I uproot two kids who were not causing any problems, no piercings, drugs, or orange hair?

But what clinched it was not only the kids – or the career I loved -- but also my mother's diagnosis of terminal cancer and less than a year to live. She was about 66 years old and I about 40. This was just around the time that the orders to go to Jordan arrived. I could not go abroad and leave my dying mother for the last nine months of her life. I did not care about the consequences or what people said. I felt I had no choice, so I stayed, and traveled to NYC regularly on Fridays after work, with the kids (because I had no one to leave them with), and returned Sunday nights, and back to the office Monday.

I'd like to say the State Department was sympathetic to this difficult position, but quite the opposite. They were decidedly officious and unhelpful, trying to deny me the $5,000 separation allowance we earned through our separate living (which itself was no picnic). They saved hundreds of thousands of dollars on not having to ship us out there, send kids to private schools, etc. We paid for our own travel to visit one another at intervals of several months. Yet their excuse for trying to deny us this minor sum (compared to the cost of our being in the field) was that I had visited Jim with the kids during the summer. It had been at our own expense, from personal savings. I have conveniently forgotten the name of the extra-officious (female) officer who treated me with such disdain and lack of respect. It was only when I insisted on speaking to her boss that the matter was quickly resolved in our favor. And then when my mother died we faced the choice of having Jim come home then to support me at this difficult time or have him come home in time for the formal memorial service some weeks later. Perhaps we chose wrongly, but it was a difficult choice for a distraught person.

Q: Did you in later years work to try to make the problems you had experienced improve for others, trying to make the regulations more humane… though I realize such a term – humane – is almost an oxymoron in this context of bureaucracy.

COLLINS: That is right. Humane regulations, like compassionate conservatism, are an oxymoron. Jim did try later to improve things, serving on committees that were supposed to deal with family issues and making the organization more "family-friendly." I don't believe he felt he was successful in getting people to realize that to get the best and brightest officers in the future, they would need to consider the lives of spouses, children, and aging parents. I know that people did not want to hear from me on the subject of families. I learned that when I tried in Moscow to convince the "administrators" that leaving five-year-old children unsupervised in the school yard before and after school in the below freezing temperatures was neither humane nor safe. Children had developed chilblains – their hands would bond to metal surfaces if they took off their mittens. I had no success in this, so I felt it unlikely I'd have success with other issues. Jim was also hoping to get people to think about how you manage diplomacy in the 21st rather than 19th century. Of course some things have likely changed since the 1970s or 1990s, so I'm not in a position to speak of today's accommodation to family issues and compassionate or supportive reforms. I assume they have become more responsive and accountable.

Q: What did this do for your attitude?

COLLINS: The first crunch had come when we returned from Turkey in 1971, with orders that had changed daily, no place to live, no money; furniture stored on a dock somewhere, two toddlers (as mentioned earlier). I had hoped this was just an anomaly, being treated with callous disregard. Jim, too, thought it was just temporary bad luck. He didn't then realize that the lack of concern for what it felt like to live the diplomatic life abroad seemed to be inherent in the organization. After the leaving-Turkey episode, of course, life did not improve a lot when they sent Jim for almost one year's travel without family at all. And all this before the complications of the Jordan assignment in 1983 with issues surrounding children's education and a dying parent.

Q: I am really a generation before you. I came in 1955. My attitude was that we were up against a Foreign Service that assumed that it was still hiring people from wealthy families, aristocrats, who might have to clip an extra coupon to make it all work out for them. So they didn't have to worry about money, comfort, or ease. Of course I came into the Service flat broke!

COLLINS: So did we. You are so right. If you came from a modest or average family and didn't have any capital behind you or independent income (to fly back and forth, absorb expenses to provide yourself comfortable housing, etc.), you were not understood at all. "They just didn't get it," we would say today. Also, it was not a luxury to ask that your wife be "allowed" to work. Her not working meant you lost half your family income, potential savings to send your children to college. Sometimes people claimed I was being "selfish" for wanting to pursue the professional career in which I was educated and experienced. I look back and realize that I felt guilty about asking anything for my career or financial ability to send the kids through college.

Q: In that era around the early 70's was the first time that families really needed two incomes to be able to afford college for your kids.

COLLINS: I have read that the period of the 50's and early 60's to which people look nostalgically, with the "Leave it to Beaver" and "Brady Bunch" families – with mother home full time and father's income supporting that crew, was historically anomalous. In almost all other periods it took both men and women to support families, especially on the farms. But after that short period in which women could be "stay at home moms" in middle class families, it certainly became necessary for both to work to maintain a mortgage, home, cars, and college. Perhaps it was partly rising expectations – for larger homes and more cars – but for whatever the reasons, including inflation, slow or no rise in real wages, the assumptions changed. And institutions moved slowly.

I am also reminded as we were talking the other day about the rise of feminism, women's issues and equal pay for women, that Ms. Magazine was founded by Gloria Steinem in 1972. But in the Embassy from 1973 – 1975 when I started recognizing these perspectives, some officers and some wives saw this discussion as threatening, as stirring up trouble. I remain grateful to Jim for not gagging me, supporting me in those views, unpopular then, and today, again, unpopular with some people.

Q: To put it in context, this wasn't only a matter of pounding on the table for equal rights, but the practical issue of being able to deal with the problems of money and families.

COLLINS: Yes, that's right. I don't think we did place ourselves in any historical context at the time. That came later. But I did expect to pursue a lifetime professional career; and of course money was always a practical concern.

Q: Let's talk a little about the Maryland Humanities Council. Maryland, I remember as a kid when I lived in Annapolis, had a lot of poverty and not a strong educational system. How did you find the attitude of people toward these programs?

COLLINS: It was one of the most interesting jobs I ever had, first as board member, then chair, and finally, Executive Director, full time. If not for the commute to and from Baltimore for eight years, I might still be doing it today! By that time, education and higher education were improving in Maryland, too.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency, provided public funds to each State. Public programs were to cover the entire state and every constituency: poor or rich, black, white, Asian, Latino, rural, urban and small town. We would prepare a report every year about progress we had made, starting with the State's demographics. A lot has changed since the 1980s, but the programs are still intended to cover the range of fields in the humanities and the geography and ethnicity of the State.

We would go out and do program development. We would go to the smallest towns all over the state and find institutions that might be willing to do – let's say – a program on local history. Or on the development of the railroad there. We would go to the libraries, and talk to them about doing reading/discussion groups people might enjoy in fiction. And we would visit even the tiny historical societies in – let's say – Berlin or Snow Hill on the shore. In St. Mary's City and in Annapolis, there was public archaeology. There were Maritime and Marine museums we supported. There were programs that focused on the black community and their history, including a new museum that opened in Annapolis, the Benjamin Banneker Museum with artifacts of black history, including slavery, in Maryland. Of course there were programs in Baltimore, especially in the art museums, illuminating a particular exhibit. Some projects involved what people call "crafts" and also "folklore."

My favorite program – and this is a little self-serving because I came up with it – was one we called "Unlocking the Secrets of Time: How We Know What We Know About Maryland's Past." We featured a range of speakers who talked about a range of ways of knowing the past – through photographs and newspapers and diaries and oral histories, as well as official records and the artifacts from archaeological digs. The answer was it depended on what kind of history you wanted to know. So to know about political history you used documents in the public records office and State House, but if you wanted to now about the history of women, you might use diaries you found in attics or inventories of goods in houses. We packed the State House and turned people away. We also looked

at labor history and the Underground Railroad through Maryland…so many topics, really, in so many fields. We even explored the ethics of health care and life and death decisions – back in the mid 1980s, some 30 years ago. Teachers, the general public, lots of people came. So we developed our own programs, but we mainly worked with existing organizations to support their development of programs that worked for their communities.

Q: Did you work in oral history, too?

COLLINS: Yes. Actually, this was just the beginning of professional oral history in the 1980s. One of the founders of the field, Linda Shopes, taught us the value of the field, and how it was becoming a profession, then, with certain rules and training, rigor and ethics.

Q: The one I know was the guru (was it Martha Hook?). She was at the University of Maryland. I belong to an organization called OHMAR Oral History of Mid Atlantic Region.

COLLINS: It may have been both of them, because the field was new and people were helping each other shape it. At the beginning, some traditional scholars in history believed it wasn't a discipline, so several individuals started formulating principles, rules and ways of going about oral history to "professionalize" it. Since then there have been additional rules and approaches about the treatment of human subjects and so forth. But standards and criteria were all part of the early stages, and we worked with some of this.

Q: I remember hearing an account about interviewing women working in Baltimore, Italians in the canning business – about those facets of working life that are mostly lost today.

COLLINS: That's right: it is hard to recover. We did work with people looking into the oyster shucking plants, the breweries, and the canning industries (tomatoes and sea food), among others. The Museum of Industry in Baltimore started up during those years, and we helped sponsor some of their early exhibits and programs in their effort to capture the history of labor. It was conceived and created by a scholar of labor history.

Q: How did you find working with the National Endowment for the Humanities?

COLLINS: It was an easy and good relationship, collegial and trusting, that made it all work out well. They avoided a heavy handed bureaucracy and provided non-intrusive oversight. And it worked! Nothing ever went amiss with the funds, either those the Council managed or those we re-granted to institutions in Maryland. There was integrity, care, and responsiveness on all sides, without unnecessary regulation or inflexibility.

Q: How did you find Maryland politics worked?

COLLINS: Fortunately, we didn't have to involve ourselves in Maryland politics at that time. We kept good relations with the Governor and Comptroller, and the House and Senate leaders. The Governor did have a few appointments to the Board, about 25%. At some point, other state councils started requesting and receiving additional funds from their state, above what NEH awarded them. So I requested the same. It took a couple of years, but we then did receive a small grant annually from the State as well. I probably should have noted sooner that the organization itself was a nonprofit incorporated organization, what they call a 501.c.3 for its status in the IRS tax code.

Over the years I came to know the Comptroller well, the storied Louis Goldstein; he was then the longest serving elected official in the United States. He was very supportive of our programs and attended many of them. Although he talked like a "country boy" and relished that role, he had a steel-trap brilliant mind, which I came to know and respect over the years I knew him.

Q: What was your impression of the historic community, the people who were involved developing these things? Did you run across people who really wanted to do just black history or just women's history or just the history of oysters?

COLLINS: We did have some specialists out there. And we also had a mix of professional historians, academic historians, and history buffs. Think of the Civil War buffs and reenactments at Antietam. And for specialists, those who were engrossed in carved ducks, the wooden decoys for which there are, today, two museums in Maryland. A sort of "folk life" field. Of the academic historians – and those in other humanities fields – there was a core of people who enjoyed working with the general public, talking to people outside the university walls about the topics they loved. But there were some in academe who felt that programs like these might compromise rigorous standards. I don't believe they have to, but I think it remains an issue today.

Q: You are speaking to somebody who is going to be walking the battlefield at Chancellorsville this Thursday for three days. I go with a civil war group. We don't re-enact, as we are a bit elderly for that, but we walk the battlefield and discuss it.

COLLINS: That's exactly what I'm talking about. The so-called "lay person" relishing history. And isn't it great if you can engage the broad public in their own history? Of course there were other fields as well – ethics, literature, music and arts discussions.

Q: Were you finding any change happening? That is, are we becoming more public minded about history, compared to academics presenting small monographs or classifying articles into cases and labeling them?

COLLINS: I am not sure how much change is occurring. It seems that many in the academic world still develop monographs and articles that few people read. I don't think specialization is declining: from what I hear, it's very much with us today.

Q: Specialization of course is also needed.

COLLINS: Yes, although it seems that professors' specialization has increasingly affected the course offerings for undergraduates, who may be exposed to a great range of particular topics and fewer broad, comprehensive overviews of history, literature, philosophy in context and with perspectives as we were offered in our undergraduate education.

Q: Then an organization like yours might help to find ways to present these things?

COLLINS: It seems that the out-of-school adult public is hungry for experiencing history and other fields as they grow further from their classroom days. I believed then – and still believe -- that presenting interesting ideas and information and ways of thinking to people outside school always calls for creative thinking. We tried to do that and tried to sponsor organizations that did this. And today we have even more media in which to do this. I think some of the best public programs – with the scale and resources necessary to have a larger impact – are documentaries for TV, the PBS stations, BBC, the Discovery Channel and others. In these, specialists are tapped to provide "content" for the public. Good writers and interpreters and visual arts people turn these into intriguing features. Think of what a great job they've done with pyramids of ancient Egypt, for example; or archaeology in Jerusalem—or the Civil War. You are right that translating the more specialized knowledge to a general public is a very important goal. Many who do this best, like David McCullough and Shelby Foote, are not necessarily professional or academic historians. Some of the journalists and writers have done excellent work.

Q: So many of them are journalists. And the historians hate this.

COLLINS: Yes, some discredit these works, but of course the alternative would be to get in there and do that job themselves. The word "accessible" is often used, but I'm sure there are better ways to talk about disseminating and sharing significant knowledge and ideas. And we forget that "high brow" vs. "low brow" culture is a more recent invention. Neither Shakespeare's performances nor opera were elite arts when they originated. And you're right that you can start with a base of thoroughly researched knowledge, story, and information and still be able to translate it to a general public in a way that is not only usable, but also fascinating. And not condescending. Otherwise you have a general public cut off from its own past, hardly the kind of citizens Jefferson envisioned.

Q: I would think Maryland, which as I recall as a kid, had separate drinking fountains and other segregation for blacks and would not allow blacks in to the main church there at Church Circle, might have found it hard to evolve into having black history and other programs about the black community? It also must be a sensitive area. How did you deal with those?

COLLINS: The most sensitive matter I had to deal with as soon as I arrived was not about black history, but an immanent program discussing Marxism. The University of Maryland had scholars speaking on Marxism as a philosophy, as a force in history, as political theory, and an ideology with impact for better and worse. A Congressman got

wind of it and was all over us. But we did not withdraw the funding for the program nor ask them to halt the event. We did again affirm that the program was not to be advocatory, pro-Marxist, or biased (as were are rules). NEH sent a witness to the event, but it turned out to be as advertised, an analytic and historic look at Marxism. All programs were to avoid advocating a point of view, avoiding proselytizing, or providing a one-sided, uncritical view of its subject. So for black history and other topics, we reviewed proposals very careful. Learned to sniff out the unbalanced programs. It took serious discussion by Board members sometimes to ascertain what constituted a balanced program.

Q: I would think it would be a little hard to say now, " here are the good sides of slavery and here are the bad sides."

COLLINS: Very good point. There are some subjects that don't have two sides to them. But you might want to look at slavery in a larger context; for example, how it was practiced in Africa and other areas before it came to the colonies. Why people brought slaves to the American colonies. What the economic impact was of slavery (on all sides); and the most obvious, the human cost, the violation of tenets of democracy and equality of decency. And yet how several of the revered "Founding Fathers" fostered and benefited from it. So even slavery as an institution can be discussed and understood.

Q: Yes, I realize there are other aspects to slavery, economic and historical perspectives.

COLLINS: Yes, with a subject like that, it might be useful to consider that slavery was not unique to the colonies, nor did it originate here. Africans were enslaving each other long before slavery came to our shores, before the colonies existed. The colonists or Europeans often picked up people already enslaved and shipped them across the sea. None of this makes it any better, but does enlarge understanding. But there are people who are uncomfortable talking about slavery in the larger historical context or the global or economic one. So even those analytical approaches can be controversial.

Q: Did you find that dealing with the black experience in Maryland it was hard to get the black community involved? In some cultural institutions, at least in the past, you did not see many black visitors.

COLLINS: It usually worked best to have programs in places the audiences already were. Local communities, churches, and such. The venue matters. Many of the cultural institutions – at least at that time – were not drawing a lot of black visitors. We were required to present and support diverse programs, and to present programs in all regions and communities; also to have an integrated Board of Directors – which we did. Discussion raised everyone's awareness about what should be done and where, how to go about programming so it's not "top-down," and is sensitive to audiences, a community enterprise.

We were urged to have boards represent not only our state's geography, professions, and ethnic groups, but also be comprised of equal number men and women. It was also to be

half "academic" – from universities; and half "public" members – from outside universities. The latter were usually from museums, libraries, newspapers, and civic organizations. These were the people who reviewed and approved proposals, set guidelines and helped develop programs. We had enough mix to avoid having a single "token" person left to represent an entire race or gender, or to express the views of a group. People who opted for a board devoted to programs for the general public tended to be open minded and generous, rather than prejudiced, narrow, or biased; but for all of us there are areas in which we may need reminders of our own lack of sensitivities or awareness of cultural differences, differences in basic assumptions.

I should add that I was given a splendid opportunity while Executive Director to get three months sabbatical to research and write on the humanities. Out of this I developed the publication, Culture's New Frontier: Staking a Common Ground, published by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in 1990. [Referenced at end of document.]

Q: How did the Jordan thing fit?

COLLINS: Well – not so easily. I found it difficult to have a full time career, a house, two kids to take care of, and then regular travel to NYC weekends to see my mother during her last months, weeks, and days. And we did not in those days have email or telephone lines for regular conversation overseas. Letters – slow moving correspondence – is what we had, plus a short phone call every week or two. As mentioned, Jim visited us every few months, at our own expense. During the summer I took the kids to Amman (having been granted leave without pay). Jim rented a house - or actually, half a house - from a Circassian family who lived in it. You probably know that ethnic group, appearing in Turkey and Jordan. They have a distinctive coloring, blond or red hair, blue-eyes, very white skin.

Q: I was going to say the young ladies from that particular sect enhance the harems of Sultan.

COLLINS: I hadn't realized that. It's just such a surprise to see them. His landlord liked to rent to Americans because their son was a pilot who flew to the U.S. and spoke English. It was a nice house on the outskirts of Amman, at the edge of the desert.

There wasn't a lot for us to do once we got there, though. I'm not sure what I would have done for two years, but in two months we were able to do a couple of outings and could swim in a nearby hotel pool. If I had been there longer, I would have become involved with the wives groups, perhaps a book group. I don't believe there were professional jobs available for wives there. While there, I did daily shopping at local stores, but men's comments to a woman alone on the street were uncomfortable and unpleasant. I covered my arms and legs. When I had the young boys with me, the men usually left me alone – even though the boys were smaller than I. It was irritating. Even with "cultural understanding" and "cultural sensitivity" it felt insulting and denigrating.

While there, I met with the Embassy wives. Some were doing very well and enjoyed the experience; others expressed their boredom and frustration with life there. But I understood why they were not sympathetic to my choice not to be there. They rightly knew that my absence made it harder for them because they had to pick up the kinds of things that I would have to have done had I been there. So although several were unhappy – some even in tears – they also did not condone the idea of not being there.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

COLLINS: Richard – Dick – Viets.

Q: I have interviewed him.

COLLINS: His wife, as you may know, became sick and later died. I think it was cancer.

Q: Yes, she was a heroine of the underground in Poland in WWII.

COLLINS: She was. She was an amazing woman. She did work abroad with Catholic Charities. It was an untimely death.

Q: Well did you find it hard to be betwixt and between with Jim?

COLLINS: Yes. I would never recommend this "lifestyle." I struggled to find a better way to balance all these issues. Even when Jim was in the States his working hours precluded being together as a family.

Q: Where did your sons go to college?

COLLINS: They both went to Wesleyan University, in Connecticut. They had previously gone to Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda.

Q: Did your father survive your mother? Was he there when she died?

COLLINS: Yes, he took care of her at home until she died. By himself without a nurse. It was very difficult. He lived another fourteen years, until 1996.

Q: Did you get any support or encouragement from any element of the State Department during this difficult time?

COLLINS: No. I think they saw me as a troublemaker for wanting the separation allowance to which we were entitled. And as for the dying and death, we had one trip for Jim – to choose between the death and the memorial service. But of course we were grateful for that airfare.

Q: So how did this period play out?

COLLINS: We stayed married. And when I was alone, fortunately I had friends, family, neighbors, colleagues who supported me, so I was never all alone.

Q: In the military, I know from my brother, there is usually a support system, especially for wives and children separated from the husband who may be deployed somewhere. Was there something like this in the Foreign Service?

COLLINS: Perhaps for people at posts there is informal support by other wives for those experiencing difficult times. Certainly among friends. And I assume the Family Liaison Offices make it a more systematic effort. I'm not sure it was ever as systemic as it seemed to be for the military wives I knew. But in the States – of course – I was on my own, not on a "base," and without institutional support.

Q: So the Jordan assignment….

COLLINS: It ended in 1984 and Jim returned. He can tell you more about the positions he then filled, but I know they were very intense, some close to 80-hour weeks. The kids of course were older by then. They needed rides to soccer, parties, events, music, and other suburban kid activities.

Q: I was at an Embassy where people show up on weekends. There really isn't a damn thing to do.

COLLINS: I never knew what they did weekends, but I do know that Jim worked almost every weekend of his life. And certainly at the Moscow Embassy. There were occasional Sundays he took off. I don't recall that he took holidays except Christmas Day and New Year's. Whether it was "required" or "optional" I knew he saw this as a normal workweek, whether here or abroad (although here it was easier to compare it with the schedules of neighbors and friends).

Q: It is normal I guess, but also includes a certain amount of unnecessary things.

COLLINS: I would imagine that. It seemed almost like a sect, the culture of a special group of people who shared a set of beliefs, who support one another in what they believe to be true without reference to an outside world.

Q: It is very much a culture. And since he became Ambassador to Russia, you can say it paid off.

COLLINS: It did. And he loved what he did. I think that the career required tremendous stamina and just being there, a physical presence, all the time. And like sects, it required denial, denial of sleep, regular hours, family time, social and personal time, recreation and entertainment.

Q: When the principal has a question it would be good to know that good old Jim is always there.

COLLINS: Absolutely. Totally reliable. Perhaps some of that has changed with the cell phone, texting, and email generation. But at that time you had to be physically there to be reached and reachable, always on call. I think that gave Jim an advantage in advancement, but I really believe that his abilities, to think, judge, interpret, analyze, work with people, solve problems – and not create them -- also counted… his intelligent and temperate approaches.

Q: What were you up to during this time? Going back and forth to Baltimore?

COLLINS: That is right. Heading up the Humanities Council, including attending some evening events.

Q: What kind of evening events?

COLLINS: For example, an opening of an art exhibit, with a discussion of – let's say – the Cone sisters, friends of Gertrude Stein, and their amazing collection of Impressionist and Early Modern Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA). A reading group, a historic reenactment, a Chautauqua event. Or a talk and discussion at a senior center or community organization. Museums, libraries, universities, and other public places were the sites. I limited myself to about two or three per week while Jon was still at home in high school so he wouldn't have to have dinner all alone too often: I had always had dinner with the kids until I had that position; but when Rob left for college, they didn't have each other's company. I continued that job until 1992. Jim meanwhile had several positions – about which he can tell you – but I know that in the 1990s he replaced Strobe Talbott as Ambassador At Large to the Former Soviet Union.

Q: Strobe Talbott became Undersecretary of State. He had previously been a correspondent for Time Magazine in Moscow. He had been a roommate of Bill Clinton's and so very close to him. So at first he was put in charge as the Soviet Union was falling apart.

COLLINS: That's right. Of the "Newly Independent States (NIS)," "Former Soviet Union (FSI)," and other names used in that period to describe a geographical entity that was no longer there. A Eurasian "space" without a name.

Q: Then Talbott moved to be undersecretary of State and I guess Jim moved into his place…

COLLINS: Jim inherited Strobe's portfolio (after Jim was DCM). After that, Jim was named Ambassador in Moscow.

Q: While he was doing these thing, did you find yourself called in to do Foreign Service things?

COLLINS: I attended almost all significant events with Jim. In Washington, I didn't have to host business events for Jim, but did do some dinners for his colleagues and friends. Mostly it was about attending rather than hosting.

Q: Were you following developments from 1989 on as the Soviet Union went into a slow collapse, and ended up as Russia and the various "stans," and Baltic States all becoming independent? Did this have any effect on you?

COLLINS: For certain. My mind turned to Russia as things became interesting there. With the end of stasis, and beginning of change (after so many decades) my ears and eyes perked up. By 1992 I had left the Maryland Humanities Council (reluctantly, but the long commute exhausted me), to become Executive Director of a large, international organization in Washington. "NAFSA: Association of International Educators" was comprised of professionals who worked on college and universities campuses to provide study abroad programs, counseling for foreign students, administering English as a Second Language (ESL), admitting foreign students to campus, and hosting students. By 1989 – and certainly by 1990 and 1991, with the kids out on their own I could focus on my professional life along with Jim's life and larger world events. Rob had been graduated from Wesleyan University (in Connecticut) in 1990. After a couple of years working, he headed for law school. Jon, graduating from the same university in 1993, after one year working, went off for his MFA at the UCLA film school.

Interestingly, watching revolutionary change in Russia took me back to my research as a historian. As we discussed, I loved to study times of revolution and radical change: how societies experience accelerated change; why they do. That intrigued me in 17th century England and intrigued me about Russia from about 1989 through the end of the century. Of course it is not the same culture, context, or sets of issues, but in both cases, a period of radical and substantial change occurred in which many things were turned upside down. In both countries, it was not only political, economic, or social – it was also about "ideas," whether of religion or of "capitalism" or "democracy" replacing "socialism" or "authoritarianism" – using these terms loosely. Far more dramatic in Russia (in part because we were living in faster times), suddenly there was an economy that had not been about money to one monetized over night, relying on cash in hand more than position, status, and privilege awarded through membership in the Communist Party. Of course the disintegration of the Soviet Empire was consequential as well. It may not have been the Byzantine or Ottoman Empire, but was substantial and long-lived. For Great Britain of course, the acquiring and losing an Empire came much after the 17th century events.

And as Russia was going to pieces, there was Jim, in 1990, on his way out there once again, and me, following a little behind him.

Q: When he was DCM, Deputy Chief of Mission?

COLLINS: Yes, when he was the number two at the Embassy. I went out there for periods when I could and then commuted back home again to my office.

Q: What was your impression when you got back to Russia?

COLLINS: A sense of amazement and disbelief. For the first time, it looked different from previous times. First, although I had complained about the limited quality and range of food available in the 1960s and 1970s, that was nothing compared to the absence of food in shops, the empty shelves in 1990-91. This was scary. There isn't really time to get into all the reasons for this dearth of food and drink, or the collapse of a governance system, or the question of who was in control and when there might be food again. It was shocking. As the Soviet system came to an end, it was eerie: the shops were virtually empty, little kiosks sprouted up along the curbs selling an assortment of miscellaneous goods…e.g., a pair of stockings or one chocolate bar or a pack of cigarettes, or other miscellaneous and unrelated items that somehow got into the country or somebody had stashed somewhere. For the larger economy, as the economy transitioned, it was as much about barter as money. Jim likes to tell people it was a time when an academician from the National Academy of Sciences was out-earned by the guy at the corner selling Snickers bars. It was also a good time to play loose with acquiring the nation's resources and properties. Some people became very rich very quickly. Much of it not illegal, in the absence of new laws.

Of course I spent time trying to imagine how people were surviving. Jim had guys going around the country reporting back or looking at charts of economic statistics, graphs going down down down. But one day it occurred to me – and I shared with Jim – the thought that although all the charts and graphs were diving or flat lined, what my eyes saw often conflicted with those assessments. "Why don't you ask people to report what they are actually seeing on the ground?" I asked. In Moscow, at least, it seemed clear to me that people on the streets were not starving. They were not hungry, desperate, or malnourished. I looked at their eyes, their hair, their skin, their pace. And to top it off, they were walking dogs. Large dogs. People who are hungry don't keep big dogs. So now the job was to find out how they're getting their food.

Even today no one knows for sure, but a few hypotheses are: that people were doing what they've always done: black market and bribery, food disappearing off the backs of trucks that never make it to groceries or restaurants. Another factor of course was the free mid-day meal provided at workplaces and schools. This hot meal, supplemented with bread, cheese, and such, could get a person through the day. Then there was barter, as mentioned – sometimes so complex an arrangement that it required exchanges of IOUs that came to be called *veksels*. Multi-dimensional barters. And, finally, people grew things for their own use at their dachas or in villages, on small plots, in rural areas—or their mother or grandmother did.

Q: What were you doing at the Embassy?

COLLINS: I didn't look for any job at the Embassy at that point. I was still active in my career at home. By this time, we had email, allowing us to keep up easily with one another. So I spent blocks of time in Moscow, but not full time.

Q: Did you find at the Embassy you were viewed as a part timer?

COLLINS: That, and possibly worse. By the time Jim served as Chargé, and later as Ambassador, I think some people perceived that either we were not married or that I was shirking my responsibilities, not holding up my end as a spouse. Of course there was no job description for spouse – and obviously no pay. But my absence, I always realized, made it more difficult for those who were there. I sympathized with their position, as I might have felt that way myself, had I been there and others had bugged out on wifely roles at the Embassy. But with time, we needed the second salary more, not less, with kids in college and graduate school. Of course we were not unique in this, not special, in lacking trust funds!

Q: How did you find morale, or whatever you want to call it, especially among the wives at the Embassy? How well were they coping?

COLLINS: My sense has been that the Embassy in Moscow has almost never had really good morale. I don't know if it is because it reflects a pessimistic land, or for other reasons. Certainly the context, a historically drab land with low life expectancy, heavy drinking, and a heavy hand of oppression lacks cheer! And for the wives with professions it was difficult not to be practicing these. Increasingly some wives could pursue careers on the ground in Moscow. That helped. The Embassy also started hiring qualified spouses for appropriate positions instead of importing people with the same qualifications to do the work. Another positive change. Then there were always spouses who made the most of a place, going to shops and sites and finding things to do, exploring, or pursuing crafts or arts that were portable. But the Embassy over the years I knew it was often replete with complaints, and sometimes gossip, sometimes over seemingly small things that loomed large in that environment (back to washers and cribs). I never saw it as a pleasant, cheerful, or happy place to be, especially compared to the more positive and happy communities in my other endeavors. This was unique in my experience.

Q: Were there efforts to do anything about the morale of the wives – or I should say spouses?

COLLINS: There were a few male spouses of female officers I met throughout Jim's career. I don't believe it worked out for the ones I knew: they either divorced or went back home. But I assume some succeeded as "dependent/husband" for a full career. For families, the invention of the Family Liaison office, the FLO, was a positive step. A lot of women put great energy into that position, creating special events, outings, activities, and support. The hope was to keep people engaged and connected. The Embassy also had built a nice facility with a commissary and a swimming pool. I found the pool a daily treat when I was there – until a man with a mop shooed me out, claiming that if I drowned, he'd have to clean up the mess. Put a damper on things.

Q: Did you find that relations with Russians had opened up?

COLLINS: By that time, yes. You could actually have a real life on the ground starting in the 1990s. And for wives who went out there for the first time and hadn't known the past, I think they had an easier time. There were more opportunities. Lots more products. Lots more going on. You could live off the economy. And you could live more the way you might in another European city.

Q: Did you feel concerned about the political situation in Russia when you returned around 1990?

COLLINS: Oddly, yes. I had the sense there was something in the air. I had no idea what it was, but I just intuitively knew I felt uncomfortable with the atmosphere. I told Jim that at the time. He also sensed something. And then, of course, the attempted coup in August of 1991. I was there for the summer when it occurred.

I'll admit I was terrified. I was in the DCM's house. Jim was the chargé, in charge, because Jack Matlock had finished his term and his replacement, Bob Strauss, hadn't arrived. This wasn't Jim's first stint as DCM, but of course nothing this dramatic had ever occurred (since 1917). When he first learned of the coup attempt, he told me simply to stay in the house and not go out. And so I did. I sat down at the computer and just wrote, wrote about the day as it was happening. These notes made it very immediate for me later when I sat down to write my book.

I had turned on the TV set and was surprised to see CNN still broadcasting. I saw the tanks rolling slowly toward the Embassy compound, toward our house, where all our walls were made of glass. Where there was no fence or high wall, only a low brick wall that I could have scaled myself. So I did not feel personally safe or secure. What I was most worried about didn't happen, that we could be surrounded, stormed, and/or held hostage. We were right across the street from the Russian Federation Government building, Yeltsin's headquarters, his so called "White House." The noise of tanks -- I had never heard tanks before – was frightening, the deep, low rumbling sound they make as they tear up the pavement, like prehistoric monsters. Nothing like this happened in Bethesda! But not so terrifying that I didn't go out into the garden with my camera to take pictures of tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other heavy equipment. They were not great pictures, but they aired on ABC evening news.

Jim remained in his windowless office, like a bunker, so I called him from time to time with updates on what I was seeing on the street outside our house. He did not emerge until lunchtime. By then I had a couple of thoughts: that he ought to suggest that people not sleep in outside rooms with huge glass windows facing the streets with the chanting crowds; and that they ration the food and water in the commissary before people make a run on these supplies. I feared that Molotov cocktails could come flying through our plate glass. I tried to avoid panicking, but also worried that this was a return to the bad old times. There was every reason to believe that at the time. Even Jim Billington, Librarian of Congress who happened to be in town at the time, thought that we could be witnessing a return to hard line old Soviet rule. After staying with us overnight, he had booked into a downtown hotel, along with his former Deputy, Winston Tabb, a colleague and friend of

mine. Winston called me the following morning, asking, “Are you OK?” I said, “Yes, but are you OK?” He said, “Yes, but there are tanks down here in Red Square.” And I said, “I know.” He was still connected to the Library of Congress email system and could get news I couldn’t get, while I had other news. So we talked back and forth during the day, trying to keep our hopes up.

Then about noon or 1:00 Jim came into the house, which is on the compound there. He started driving a Coke it in lieu of lunch. I said, “What’s up?” He said, “I got a call from Yeltsin’s office.” This, right across the street. “They said they have a message for me for my President and that I should come and get it.” I said, “The crowds are very thick in the streets, perhaps tens of thousands marching and chanting. There are also tanks in the street, and jersey barriers. Are you going to go?” “Yes,” he said. “Are you going to call Washington first?” “No, “ he said. “But this is the right thing to do.” I am selfishly thinking – “I’m too young to become a widow.” So he got into the Embassy car, which was armored, with a driver and another large man. They drove slowly through the crowd, dispersing them; American flag flying on the hood. Then he disappeared inside the building where he received the message. Although it seemed as if hours had gone by it was perhaps an hour. Right before he left, I had said, “Jim, you know you would be an ideal hostage.” “Yes,” he said, “but the Russians do not have a tradition of taking hostages.” “Well,” I said, “You know that and I know that, but do *they* know that?” So he said, “I will be fine.” Yeah, right, I am thinking. Of course he was and it turned out to be all right: they had no intention of taking hostages at all. It isn’t their tradition.

So Jim came back through the crowd and returned to his office at which he had a call from President George H.W. Bush, the father not son. He told him that he had a message from Yeltsin, basically to the effect that he should not take the coup leaders seriously. They do not have control of the country. Do not give credence to them – and broadcast this to the world, so others will know this, too. That evening on network TV, we later learned, President Bush told Americans that he had talked to Mr. Collins and he had assured me that everything will be OK in Russia and the coup leaders will not succeed.

Some of this started emerging during the day. Jim had first noticed that the radio and television stations had not been taken over by the insurgents. He could tell from what they were saying. There were other signs as Embassy staff went around the city counting tanks, the direction of their drive, their locations, what they actually controlled, if anything. At this point, things were very physical, not abstract. We later learned that the insurgents did try to get CNN to stop broadcasting. The people in the CNN tower had refused to stop. They apparently said, “No, we are going to continue to broadcast. What are you going to do?” It is good no one got shot. If things had turned bad, people could have been killed. You saw the people defying those in tanks, standing on the tanks, blocking tanks. Although a couple of young men were killed one evening, the coup leaders did not gain control, did even gain control of radio and TV. Perhaps it wasn’t a well thought out effort or perhaps they believed that the nation would rise to support them. Their weakness in numbers and planning became apparent only later. But at the time you had no idea how it would turn out. I learned the basic lesson of history: when you live through it, you cannot turn to the last page to see how it turns out.

COLLINS: Picking up again today: What I thought of since last time is a much bigger thought. We have been talking about how the 1990s were different from earlier decades we were there. I mentioned that people's demeanors had changed – as well as the basis of the economy and the impact on people's lives. But what I didn't say explicitly enough is that when I went back to Russia in the 1990s, I was looking through a different lens, through different eyes from those I had used in the 1960s and 1970s. I was not in the 1990s a 23 year old – nor was I a 60 + year old in the 1960s. There is an essential difference even beyond that of maturing. For example, I know that when Russia experienced radical change in the early 1990's, if I had been 23 years old, or even 44 years old, I probably would not have seen the impact of this change on middle aged or older people. I would not even have thought about them, I think. (Do younger people ever imagine the lives of the old?) But I knew in the 1990s what would have happened to me in midlife or older if the entire world around me had changed radically. I could empathize with people of my generation and even a little younger than I who had trained for and experienced their entire careers, and now suddenly, the field was gone and with it, the assumptions about life and their position in life. Although Americans may lose their jobs and not find it easy to redesign their lives, for Russians their entire *context* collapsed along with their jobs.

So that got me thinking that if you observe a place over four decades, it is not the same person observing as the one who was there 40 years earlier. Conversely, I looked back to things I had seen at 23/24 years old that were harder to understand then than they became later. One rather minor example, but telling: in the 1960s I observed and wrote about how in the shops, little old lady shoppers would come up to me with a bag or can of rice or peas and hold it up to me and ask me, in Russian, "What does this say?" I would look at the can of peas or the bag of rice and tell them. I assumed at the time it was a test to see if I spoke Russian with an accent, to see if I was foreign. But they never went further than their initial question, thank you, and off. It was only when I turned about 50 and suddenly needed eyeglasses to read that I realized that those old ladies did not have glasses… and a rare person it is who can read without glasses at 50 or 60. So that is just one issue about seeing and eyes and the lens through which we view the world differently at different times.

Q: Did you notice when you went back in the 1990s that in the shops there was a lot of surliness and unresponsiveness, hustle by the clerks?

COLLINS: I don't think that people instantaneously changed their character or behavior. "How may I help you?" was not the phrase one heard. It wasn't London. Perhaps clerks were a little less rude and perhaps a bit more aware that their jobs might depend on courtesy and responsiveness. So some attempted that. The typical question of store clerks in Soviet days was, "*Chto vam*!" (*shto vam*) which came across as, "What the hell do you want anyway?" When we recently went to "Little Russia" at Brighton Beach I noticed a high degree of surliness even today. And pushiness, too, reminiscent of "the old days." The behavior was exported with the people of that era.

So: did the Russians change their character because of the radical revolution that they had experienced? I think the simple answer is "no." For young people and the rising generations, yes over time. One returns to generational issues. And young people increasingly emulate their peers in other places. Attitudes – in all places and times – die with the old people. Moscow was rougher in the 60s than later, as the survivors of World War II still remembered fighting for their food and survival and others came in from the countryside. A lot of adjustments. It takes generations.

Q: Going back to when you got there in the 1990's, did you find it apparent that there was more tolerance of ethnic groups, different people?

COLLINS: I am not sure I was in a good position to know. Usually prejudice in people's hearts dies only slowly. I'm not sure whether or how they dealt with hate crimes, or whether people looked the other way. There was a sense that people didn't condemn treating darker or different people badly. We do know when we were there in the 60s there were cases when black students from Africa were beat up or killed – especially if they tried to date a Russian girl.

Q: We were going to start today with the coup attempt of 1991.

COLLINS: Yes, it is a good place because it is the taking off point for almost everything after it. It was followed of course by the dissolution of the whole Soviet Empire about four months later. The morning of August 19, 1991, when Jim called me from his office while I was still dressing after breakfast, he told me something serious was going on, and that I should not to leave home. I looked into the closet where I had just a few outfits I had brought for the summer. And the oddest thought hit me: "What do you wear for an attempted coup?" Very mundane question, but I had no idea what would happen that day. Will we be evacuated and therefore have a long flight? Will there be press with cameras in my face at my doorstep? Then I thought to myself how truly frivolous a question this was – especially with only four choices in the closet. But I realized that nothing my mother prepared me for in dressing fit this occasion. And nothing in life, for the occasion itself.

Q: When the Cossacks come through.

COLLINS: Exactly. What should you be wearing aside from the clean underwear bit? So I put on a sort of a proper outfit thinking of the event planned for the evening, heels and hose. And I turned on the TV set in the living room. CNN was still reporting at that point in English from Moscow, Steve Hurst and a couple of other people. I thought, "Oh, this is interesting, watching ourselves on TV…"

Q: Were your kids there with you?

COLLINS: Our younger son Jon happened to be there for the summer. He was 20 at the time. He had an internship with CNN to run around with the camera crews. He also had a job as a laborer with the Embassy, with the people who load and unload airplanes and

trucks. I found him and told him not to leave. He argued that the CNN people would be all over town and he didn't want to miss that. But I told him he was in a different position and it made Jim more vulnerable – so he stayed at home with me.

Then we saw on our screen, narrated by Steve Hurst, a row of tanks and other heavy equipment rolling down the street toward *us*. They were only about a mile or two away, so we could watch them pass the CNN studio and head for our place. And then it showed them right outside our house, right at the Embassy, while I heard their deep, low rumble. Suddenly we both ran outdoors into the garden, as I mentioned, to watch over the very low garden wall, see the tanks and armored personnel carriers and the artillery pointed at us. It was a very scary moment. I could see the color of their eyes of the men in the tanks. The guns were pointed at us. Jim later told me they weren't intended to be pointed at us, they were pointed away from the headquarters of the Russian Federation which was across the street from us. Meanwhile people were throwing up barricades, jersey barriers, turning over buses and starting to defend the Russian Federation building. Tanks also rolled toward Red Square. It was a long morning. Then came lunchtime and Jim's return to the house for a can of soda, and what I related earlier: that he told me how he had been called by Yeltsin's office to come and get a message for the President of the United States. Which he did – while Jon and I watched outside the window…and I've already talked about the rest of the day.

Q: And then what?

COLLINS: Well, after Jim called President George H.W. Bush and given him the message… and the other duties of his day … as evening came, we were slated to host the Gannett Foundation's Freedom Forum group. But with communications and transportation all fouled up, I had no idea whether they were coming. So I called someone at the Embassy snack bar and asked if they could supply mini-pizzas for everyone – in case they showed up. And of course we had a full bar. Goes with the turf. The buses did show up with people streaming into the house while Jim was still at the office and I stood shaking hands and greeting people as if it had been an ordinary day. I was on automatic pilot, in a daze, pivoting from one to another. Meanwhile, outside our windows, huge crowds were milling, tens of thousands of people, chanting.

Q: Was this at Spaso House?

COLLINS: No, although Jim was in charge, he was actually the Deputy, the DCM, so we were in a house on the Embassy compound, a pleasant town house, but enclosed in glass without serious fences or walls to separate us from the streets or crowds. There was no protection. The Russians who came to the reception were in tears. They thought they saw the return of the communist regime. So did I. So it was a very scary evening. Very difficult to act normal at a time like that. But we did. Jim eventually showed up. We did the social thing. But people were distraught, crying and upset at the uncertainty and the likelihood of the return of the old Soviet, authoritarian system – after they had gotten used to more openness and a less fearful life, of perestroika and glasnost. Then they left

and I went to bed. I found it hard to sleep with the chanting crowd – and moved to a bedroom facing inside the compound.

Q: Did you sense which side the crowd was on – or was it mixed?

COLLINS: No, we didn't actually know at the time whether they were unified or mixed. When Jim had ridden through the crowd earlier in the day, with the American flag flying on his car, and the demonstrators milled all around his car, his instinct was that they were not hostile to Americans. On his return he realized that what they were chanting was, "Americans please help us save our freedom." But by evening it still wasn't entirely clear what the crowd's intentions might be. Plus I knew where Molotov cocktails had originated, and it wasn't in Bethesda. So I was scared of finding any lobbed at us.

Q: Named after the Soviet Foreign Minister.

COLLINS: The immortal Mr. Molotov. I had also mentioned to Jim that we should all sleep in rooms that were not on the street side of the house, with glass windows right on the roiling crowd. When we awoke, Jim checked the radio and noted to me how odd it was that the coup leaders had not taken over the radio stations. That made him realize that they probably were not succeeding in their quest to take over the government and restore the past. And you know the rest of the story, how Yelstin, the President of the Russian Republic, came out of the Russian Federation building and stood on the tank, then stood firm against the coup. In the chaos, drama was added when Jim received orders to go to the airport and fly with a delegation of diplomats down to where Gorbachev was being held in the South.

Q: Yalta.

COLLINS: No, at his southern Russian retreat. Turned out the plan was ill conceived and no one effected it well – so they lacked the airplane they would have needed to fly South. Reaching the airport was a nightmare of jersey barricades, traffic, and confusion. But it was so secret that nobody knew where they were going, when they might return. Jon and I did worry about what might happen to us – especially without Jim there during this possibly dangerous time. (I again pictured crowds storming the Embassy.)

Q: Was there sort of a wives' network, calling each other and saying what is happening?

COLLINS: I don't recall such calls – but admit that I, myself, did not do anything to lead such an effort. In retrospect, I realize I should have, but I was so busy trying to find out what Jim was doing and what he might need and where he was – and keeping him company – and thinking about Jonathan's and my safety, I did not turn to helping others cope. And I really had nothing to offer or say – I didn't know anything. I did suggest to Jim that he gather people and speak to them about what is going on – before the rumors become any worse. (That Embassy, like Russia, was fueled by rumor as the main means

of communication.) He did, and spoke of what was known at the time, what they should and shouldn't do (e.g., wander the streets).

And of course I spent most of the day writing … writing an account of the day to document it for myself and for him. Whether some of the other wives were calling each other or getting together I am not sure. I think everyone was concerned with his or her own family. Should we be packing? Could there be an evacuation? That was an immediate question for everyone. ("Not yet" is not much comfort.} And here is the strange part: that when I planned to go out to Moscow for part of the summer, I had booked a return ticket home for August 21st. Of course I had no idea at the time that I would want to stay longer. After the coup attempt occurred, I tried to change my ticket to stay longer and be with Jim, but it turned out that if I gave up that ticket, there would be no empty seats for weeks: flights all booked quickly. So I pressed Jon to take my ticket and leave – please – but he refused. He wanted to stay and watch the action. There was nothing I could do to force him, of course, but I really wanted him not me out of there in case of future danger. Jim of course pointed out that he was old enough to serve in the army – which was true. But even Jon didn't know how upsetting it was going to be to have Jim disappear at this time – and unable to get any information and contact, and be on his own.

So I left reluctantly. I think I told you that at the time it was not at all clear who would triumph or what our fate would be. I'm not sure I told you the really poignant story of a seasoned, tough CNN reporter. She had an infant. She called Jon, very scared for the baby and herself, and asked: "If the American Embassy gets evacuated, get flights out of Moscow, would you please take my infant with you?" That is when I knew how serious it was. I choke up thinking about it. Of course he said "yes." Well fortunately it didn't come to that, but makes me realize in retrospect how scary it really was, having no idea of outcomes – or even survival. You stood there on the ground watching it and thinking this could be the return of the entire Soviet regime and the KGB. It could be civil war. It took 24 or 48 hours before there was some recognition that the whole city had not been occupied by the coup leaders, nor was there going to be much popular support for them. That these coup leaders were not taking control of the media and locations they needed to control.

Next morning I was off to the airport where a plane was waiting. It had spent the night in Helsinki with other evacuated American airplanes in the face of possible harm. When the airport seemed stable, back they came into Moscow. And off I went. Jim worked to take care of Americans in Moscow. That night, he reported, came the sounds of gunfire, and the Embassy staff's need to sleep in the underground gymnasium. That included Jon and other young people who had not bargained for this. That was the day in which two young Russian men were killed.

I arrived home uneventfully and headed for my office in Baltimore the next day when I got a call from a network news station in Baltimore asking if I'd appear on the 6:00 PM news. They also asked for my pictures: took my camera and had them developed and

showed them on TV, fuzzy though they were. Headline – with my face - was: "Maryland Woman Caught in the Coup" – the lead story.

Meanwhile, President George H.W. Bush quickly realized he needed someone with political stature to deal with the situation on the ground in Russia. He had appointed Bob Strauss to be Ambassador. This was not for lack of competency on Jim's part at all but rather to lend support for those resisting the coup and to deal directly between President Bush and Gorbachev and Yeltsin. So President Bush immediately got Strauss on to a plane to Moscow. When Jim rode out to the airport to meet him, the road was so strewn with jersey barriers and overturned vehicles, it took hours to go to and from the airport. No alternate routes. On the way back from the airport Jim saw the tanks retreating, and commented to Strauss, "It looks as if you came at the right time. The tanks are retreating from the center of Moscow to the outskirts." Their drive from airport to house took about three hours.

Because the Embassy was not expecting the Ambassador until later, his residence, Spaso House, was uninhabitable. So Strauss had to move in with Jim, staying in a guest room. Jim, Bob, and Jon had their own BOQ – and their Bourbon and Branch. Jim and Bob made a very good team: they each brought different strengths to the position – Jim's years of experience and expertise on Russia, language, history, contacts, cultural knowledge; Bob brought tremendous political skills that were essential at the time, talking regularly to Gorbachev and the Yeltsin team about the challenges they faced. He understood political dynamics and government. Together they held things together and got through that dramatic transition about as well as anybody could have, I believe.

Q: What was the attitude you were seeing here in Baltimore and Washington?

COLLINS: I think that Americans at the time seeing these very far away grainy pictures from Moscow and then seeing Yeltsin take charge probably never really grasped the depth of uncertainty and what was at stake. I got the sense they didn't fear the real possibility that this could be a successful Communist takeover. They did not see that Americans could have been harmed or evacuated. They didn't see it as a threatening or scary event, perhaps because it happened fairly quickly in the news cycle and it didn't show people fighting in the streets, only some tanks and people atop tanks. This isn't to say that our government didn't take it seriously. They did. President Bush "Senior" of course was very experienced in international affairs. But I think for average Americans at home it was not as frightening or worrisome as it felt on the ground.

Q: Did the State Department get in touch with you?

COLLINS: When I got back? No, they didn't. I went back to work and Jon returned home and back to college.

Q: Where was he going to school?

COLLINS: He, like his brother Robert before him, went to Wesleyan University in Connecticut.. He had spent Junior Year Abroad at the University of Edinburgh. For graduate school, he went to UCLA film school for his MFA.

Q: What has he done since?

COLLINS: After he earned his degree and won some awards for his scripts and worked in L.A. He moved into "new media, " web sites, and other Internet possibilities, all new in the 1990s. He has worked in that area ever since, advancing along with the media into interactive social and game sites, endeavors tied to the entertainment industry and corporations. He works on the managing, producing and creative side, including written and visual content, but others develop the actual software. And with the convergence of film and Internet with streaming and other technologies advancing daily, it's an exciting place to be.

Q: It is a different world.

COLLINS: It sure is. It's a world that didn't exist even at the time he went to college, let alone when we were young. He has moved forward with the field. But it's hard for us fully to understand it…although I've seen examples of his amazing work.

Q: And your other son?

COLLINS: Rob has been in a field that is both old and new. He graduated from law school, on Law Review, and has been engaged in technology law for his career. After being a partner at two firms, he now has his own firm, with his wife Alex. It's about start up companies in tech and biotech fields who need help with legal, business, financial, and structural issues.

Q: I must say it is a whole new world. My son is a vice president of ABC and Disney for research. He said he wanted to be an actor.

COLLINS: He and Jon probably have a lot in common. People in the entertainment industry often go into related fields as the areas shift daily.

Q: His son, my grandson, is going off to Shanghai for a semester at the university there.

COLLINS: Good for him. Yes, it is a new world. China is an important place to know and this experience will parachute him into an entirely new culture. I traveled there on business and saw that you are entering a country with a different worldview, a different framework for thinking, and thinking in a language that is structured differently even in the brain.

Q: So now you're back in Baltimore. What are you doing?

COLLINS: I am back at my desk at the Maryland Humanities Council, still Executive Director. I had started on the board of the Maryland Humanities Council in 1981. I was chairman of the board in 1982. I became Executive Director when the then director left in 1984 for another position. And I stayed until 1992 when I took on a position in Washington.

Q: What did you find about the politics of Maryland?

COLLINS: Well we were lucky at that point. I don't know if they are still so lucky today, but everybody left us alone. We knew and visited with elected and appointed leaders, kept them apprised. I went to the legislature and the governor and the comptroller. I would update them on what we were doing and invite them to all the events. Some of them used it as a chance to greet large audiences. It went well. At that point they didn't have any dog in the fight. Then we started getting a small grant from the State. I had requested this and it finally came through. But the terms we all understood were that they were not going to interfere in the work of the Council. It would remain an independent nonprofit, not a state agency. To my last days there, there was no interference from the State and no involvement by the State. The Council's value lay in its independence. If it were seen as an arm of the state or anyone else it was just not going to have the independence it needed to do good open discussion on controversial topics or issues. But I think over time the influence and involvement of state officials has increased.

Q: How did you touch on the slave and black experience issues?

COLLINS: We were fortunate that people had started grappling with those issues by then. By the time I was there , there was a lot of attention paid to understanding what black history had been about in Maryland. There was slave history but also that of free blacks in Maryland, a significant percentage of blacks before the Civil War. The Benjamin Banneker Museum was founded in Annapolis during that period. Its director was on our board. Then there was public archaeology that explored the lives of black and white Marylanders, rich and poor. There were numerous programs on black history, literature, the arts, and so forth. And there were "living history" projects, with trained impersonators of historic figures like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. The Underground Railroad ran through Maryland and provided another topic. And we did programs at the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Maryland.

Q: There is a significant Hispanic community who comes to Maryland to pick crops.

COLLINS: Yes. The sharecroppers being so transient tend not to find a place in educational systems or public education – have no political voice. But the settled immigrants from Central America and Mexico are starting to become a more significant percentage of the population and I assume today are becoming part of some of these programs. The demographics have shifted since I was at the Council. I'm sure they've expanded their efforts to reach the newer groups. There were other ethnic groups then that had wanted to explore their history and culture, such as the Swedish Americans in Northern Maryland near Delaware and German Americans in Baltimore and other places.

But immigration had not yet swelled. I also attempted to get more programs on other cultures outside Maryland and the U.S., and we did get a few: on China, Russia, other countries or cultures. My main goal was to get people to become more aware of cultures, their own and others, then and now, as a way of getting to know themselves better, to understand others, and to share life in a civic society.

Q: Did you get into the Jewish community of Baltimore?

COLLINS: I did come to know people in that community. And also in Montgomery County in which the Jewish Center in Rockville, on Montrose Road, did a lot of programs during that time, not all of them focused on Jewish themes. Some were on arts, music, history. In Baltimore the Jewish community was just becoming involved with the Council.

Q: Well then you moved from there…

COLLINS: Yes, I moved from heading up the Maryland Humanities Council to heading up NAFSA: Association of International Educators. NAFSA had over 8,000 members, mainly from college and university campuses, and from nonprofit organizations engaged in international exchanges. Members were the people on campus who worked with study abroad students and programs, foreign student advising, ESL (English as a Second Language) administrators, foreign student admissions, and community issues, as host families and such. That was the association I headed for five years, from 1992-1997.

Meanwhile, during the 1990s, Jim worked in different ways with the Russian portfolio. But he was living in Bethesda from approximately 1993 to 1997. Kids were grown. I had a challenging job and met lots of new people. Its scope was global. Its members and programs extended everywhere: I got to China, Mexico, Germany and other parts of Europe, Canada.

Q: Well let's talk about this job. The title was what?

COLLINS: Executive Director. CEO. I was a board member, ex-officio. The board was comprised of members of the Association.

Q: What was the history of the organization.

COLLINS: The organization began after WW II, along with other international endeavors, like the Fulbright program. It seems to have had early ties, or derived from, both the YMCA international division and the Institute of International Education in New York, which goes back almost 100 years. Members of those organizations apparently convened to create an organization of practitioners, those who did "hands on" work on campuses and in organizations to further international educational exchange, to make these programs work.

The members of NAFSA deal daily with foreign students and scholars coming to their offices for help with visas, health care, English language proficiency, housing, and cultural issues. Others dealt with preparing students to study abroad, how to live in another culture. They have worked to professionalize these fields. And there are always issues, including those surrounding recruitment. So in all areas, ethics, principles, and practices are essential to the profession. Since the overseas undergraduates pay full freight (in most cases), they are attractive targets for American universities and colleges seeking to fill seats with full-fare students. Graduate students are a different story. We have approximately half and half, undergrads and grads, among students coming here to study from abroad.

I should add that NAFSA, besides working with the professionalization of the field, also did and does advocacy work to persuade Members of Congress and others about the value of international exchanges. The organization also sponsors a large annual conference, at that time drawing 6,000 – 7,000, more since. People come from around the world to convene in a different city every year for almost a week of workshops, sessions, and events. There are and were regional conferences for each geographic region in the U.S. plus the overseas group. And magazine and book publications. So – with so many members, regions, governance groups, professional and interest groups, advocacy, professional development, publications, and conferences, it was a very full agenda daily.

Q: You must have felt the tidal wave coming out of China…

COLLINS: Yes, at that time, and again now. Interestingly there was a ebb between the two tidal waves. But there are also great numbers coming from Korea, India, Taiwan, and Japan. From outside Asia, the only larger numbers came then from Canada, Germany, Great Britain – but none of these numbers was comparable to those out of Asian countries. And I paid a visit to about eight university presidents in China. Although it was largely symbolic, it mattered. They were then as now trying to balance "control" – especially of Internet bandwidth and access – with the need to develop and modernize. Perhaps that's not unique to them among developing countries. Stability, tradition, and control vie with innovation, creativity, and modernity. It was certainly a learning experience for me, the formality of the meetings, the subtlety of signals.

Q: Very hard.

COLLINS: Very hard for me just to sit there and keep my mouth shut, but I did. I sat there quietly and waited as I was advised. Fortunately, all but one president decided he would speak to me. In some cases it took a very long time. In other cases it would take a shorter time before he would open with something generic like, "I am glad you came. We enjoy having exchange programs," and so forth. Then I was able to say my appropriate and polite things for a certain amount of time. Michael Brzezinski, the NAFSA member who accompanied me, would give me the signal for when to get up and leave. He sensed when the meeting was over… gave me the cues. And I knew always to take the tea and sip it. That was the easiest part, especially in the unheated indoors in January. Of course

you had to arrive early for every meeting (as in Germany) to avoid any chance of being even one minute late to the appointed time.

Almost every night there was a banquet in my honor at which everybody got to eat a great deal of food. Almost everyone I met or dined with was male. A full "Lazy Susan" was centered on each table. Michael told me that as the guest of honor, I would have to take the first piece of food – with my chopsticks – and lay it on my plate before anyone else could eat. Then they all dug in fast. I had practiced at local Chinese restaurants in Bethesda before leaving home, and quickly learned that broccoli was a better bet than mushrooms because it was less slippery and had a grab spot between stem and flower. Because their hospitality was so great, they always quietly set a fork down to my left at each occasion, avoiding embarrassing a foreign guest who might not deal with chopsticks. (I always pictured this little fork sitting alone in the kitchen, in its own little box, awaiting the next western guest.) I learned a lot that intense week. On the weekend, when Michael visited his in-laws in their village, I went with a rented car and driver (who didn't speak English) to the Great Wall and Forbidden City. I was alone walking the Great Wall in January, an awesome experience. I could not grasp the enormousness and grandeur of that enterprise, the most amazing man-made thing I have ever seen. This was not my only foreign travel for NAFSA, but the most memorable – or furthest from familiar.

Q: Did you find women represented on the Chinese side?

COLLINS: Of the university presidents I met, there were no women. But even in the U.S. at the time, the percentage of female presidents – especially in co-ed or large universities – was small. Over dinner with university officials, there was occasionally one women among the 10 or 12 men. But the most notable was – I believe – the Deputy Minister of Education. She had been educated as an engineer in Germany. Unfortunately, I wasn't there long enough to get a feel for what women's professional lives and standing were like, but it did seem clear they did the shopping and household stuff. Not unique in that.

Q: Did you feel there was a good system for receiving and educating foreign students in the U.S.?

COLLINS: First it's important to recognize that most foreign students are concentrated at a small percentage of colleges and universities. They are not evenly distributed around America. So those universities that do have a lot of incoming students, like NYU, USC, and many state universities like Michigan State, the University of Minnesota, Illinois, and Indiana University have very solid infrastructure of student support services. But even those schools with smaller numbers often have people really dedicated to the welfare of these students. And in many parts of America – in cities and towns – there is (or at least was) good community support as well, host families and other volunteer efforts.

Q: Did you feel any repercussions from 9/11 on Islamic students?

COLLINS: I'll admit I was glad not to be Executive Director of NAFSA any longer at that point, in September 2001. My successor, Marlene Johnson, had a very intense time during that period, as did the people on campuses. They had to be concerned with the safety and welfare of Muslim students on campus. Although there has always been some level of potential tension (starting with the hostage crisis in the 1970s), this was obviously a very worrisome time. But as far as I can recall, I don't remember any major incidents occurring – which may reflect how well people were doing their jobs. Of course visa issues remained a challenge.

Q: I would think so – that these would be affected by 9/11.

COLLINS: The government obviously did start cracking down on visa processes. NAFSA did and does advocate for fair processes and for enabling appropriate students to come. They also advocated for a review process by which people could appeal visa decisions, which sometimes appeared very arbitrary and even contrary to facts. I don't have to tell you that deciding who does and doesn't get to study here is a topic way too big for simple answers. And it's not only difficult for Muslim students, but of course for many others, especially Mexican students. Some of it is financial, but most has to do with the student's likelihood of staying, of overstaying his or her visa.

Q: As a consular officer, you had to look at a student and think, fine; then all of a sudden, he or she is offered a very good job because he or she is smart, or he or she gets married or something like that.

COLLINS: That is right. That is what they do – sort of like students everywhere. Sometimes people think this country benefits from inheriting the global brains, our "brain gain," especially in STEM subjects. Others worry about the "brain drain" in other countries. Others claim these graduates are taking jobs Americans would otherwise have.

Q: It wasn't that the student was plotting any of this, it just happens.

COLLINS: Yes, young people aren't predictable. One interesting story concerns Chinese students. We seem to know – or guess – that many Chinese students come here and stay. But it depends on what point in time you look at it. One year, two years, five years after schooling, they may still be here. But if you look 8, 10, 15 years out, many have returned to China. So figuring the "overstay" rate is tricky – depends on whether you take the short or long view. Problem now is we know who is coming, but we don't know who is leaving or when… I believe people are trying to address that issue now.

Q: You mentioned this before, but I know that even at my little prep school in Connecticut the head master had sort of an unwritten, unacknowledged understanding that China is like a cash cow for many of our institutions because so many students come from there and are willing to pay full rates. They are getting a good education, of course, so it's not as if there are any false pretenses or anything like that.

COLLINS: That's right. There is no reason to believe that they are cheated or exploited, at least in prep school and undergraduate education. As graduate students in research, they do work incredibly long and hard for little pay – as do American students – but it appears they are willing to work even longer and harder for that minimal pay. But they welcome the Ph.D. in engineering or sciences. I believe I read that the Chinese government, families, and community associations are sending some 500,000 or other significant number of students outside of China for their studies. And the foreign undergraduate students – not only from China – do not get the scholarships or loans or in-state rates that American students get, so they bring greater sums to the institutions. They fill top dollar seats, not the bleachers.

Q: Did you feel pressure to say all this is a good thing? And were there currents in America that opposed having all these foreigners using our universities?

COLLINS: I do believe that global mobility of students is a good thing for everyone. But there were strong pressures, especially by elected officials, to limit or eliminate foreign students in the U.S. I recall an official in Chicago arguing that foreign students at the University of Illinois graduate programs in math, science, and engineering were taking seats from inner city students in Chicago. It was true that more than half the Ph.D.s in those STEM fields were often granted to foreign students. But the other side to the argument was that without the foreign students, some universities would have to close down the programs all together and deny all students in Illinois the opportunity to earn Ph.D.s in those fields. The foreign students were "subsidizing" these programs, filling the needed number of seats.

The other argument was that there were not enough qualified American students – that is, people who had earned undergraduate degrees in STEM subjects so that they could seek Ph.D.s in these fields – to fill those seats. Without foreign students, those seats would not, at least for now, be occupied. Nobody could provide examples of American students who were denied admission because of foreign students. Of course there are other Americans who just don't believe we need foreigners in this country at all. And after 9/11, there was the argument that some of the people who committed these heinous acts had actually come to America on student visas. One, two, or three of them I think. So I am not an apologist for all foreign students, because there have been some who have taken advantage of the visa they were granted, and should probably not have been awarded visas in the first place. And in that flight school in Florida…someone should have questioned that guy….

Q: The one who said, " I don't need to know how to land the plane," you mean?

COLLINS: Yes, wasn't there some suspicion about him? Or did that disappear when he paid his tuition check. Of course the other recent issue goes the opposite way: students on legitimate visas for practical experience in the U.S. that get exploited by businesses. The most recent, colorful one was of the students at the Hershey factory in Pennsylvania as interns, but used like free labor. That upset a lot of people for all kinds of reasons. The rules have since been tightened, and that program contract agency is no longer able to

repeat that fiasco. Some agencies were getting away with things they shouldn't have been doing; businesses were happy to save money on labor; students were brought under false pretenses. So the trick is not to close your eyes as a government agency or nonprofit organization to the misuse or violation of programs and visas, to breaches of law and ethics.

Q: Did you at NAFSA look at dubious programs?

COLLINS: The Association, at least at that point, did not set itself up for policing the field. Its policy was to allow any organization or individual to become a member. Members were required to agree to abide by the Code of Ethics, Principles and Good Practices that NAFSA had developed, but there was not a strong enforcement mechanism in it. There was an ethics committee that looked at complaints. However, as in all professions, including medicine and law, despite the pressures on members to abide by ethical practice, it can take a while before those who violate the rules get "caught." I should add that NAFSA's membership included both nonprofit and for profit organizations and institutions.

Q: Did you find during this time that the State Department and you crossed swords?

COLLINS: There were two areas with shared interests. One of them tended to be more adversarial than the other. That was about rules and procedures surrounding the J-1 visas, which they then controlled. (I think now that the INS and Homeland Security may do so.) The other on which there was agreement was simply support for international programs, and NAFSA's advocacy with Congress for support of these programs.

Q: J-1 being…

COLLINS: The sponsored students. There were other visas as well, but they were not controlled – at that time – by State.

Q: J's are exchange students who can only stay for a certain period and then had to return home…

COLLINS: Exactly after a certain period in your home country you could return again. There were issues surrounding those visas and also the F-1s as well.

Q: Straight student visas.

COLLINS: Yes. There were also M visas for community colleges. And of course not everyone had the same views on every type of visa… definitely an area of discussion. This was a huge area for NAFSA because without visas, no students. One other area – beside visas – that pitted NAFSA against a government agency in this case, the Department of Education, was over the portability of financial aid, whether American students could take this abroad with them. Obviously students could not afford to give

this up. So those rules were always in debate. Beside these advocacy areas, the Association focused on the professional development of members.

Q: How did you supply this? Did you send teams out?

COLLINS: There weren't funds for that. So most training was done at the conferences, both the national and regional conferences, in workshops and other forums. They were on all kinds of topics, from visas to health insurance, from cross-cultural training to how to deal with religious issues. There were also publications on all kinds of topics. But since I left, the electronic possibilities have grown enormously. Today, Webinars and other on-line discussion and training help enormously. One of the most sensitive issues for foreign students and one of the harder to handle included health care issues. These were basically cultural issues – including such things as female students seeing male doctors, alone; or seeing a doctor at all.

Another area surrounded proselytizing. When foreign students came into a small town, particularly, the churches might reach out to them, sometimes in a way they found uncomfortable or pressuring (if they were not Christians). But advisors could not say that churches couldn't do this – because they could and can. So you wanted the students to understand that although they strove to be courteous as guests, and make their host families happy, they also had the right to choose not to participate: they shouldn't feel that this attendance was required. And they were vulnerable as they were far from home, innocent of what was required of them. And for church members to encourage them to embrace Jesus Christ as Savior was perfectly legal. But for non-Christian students, it could feel challenging, leave them feeling unsure what to do, conflicted. So this was a very sensitive area.

Q: How did you communicate to students both foreign and domestic?

COLLINS: The Association members were the advisors, administrators, and faculty on campus--and program directors at other organizations – rather than the students themselves. I saw members at the regional and national meetings, at committee meetings, and wherever else I could. And when I traveled, I also met with college and university presidents in an effort to raise their awareness of the work of NAFSA members on their campuses, because sometimes those at the top did not realize the support they had for these programs "in the trenches."

Q: So the Association works.

COLLINS: It works and it has been around for over 60 years, growing steadily. It still uses the acronym NAFSA but that no longer stands for what it originally did in the late 40's and 50's, which was the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors. But along the way – recognizing that there were five distinct groups within the Association – they realized they had to broaden the name to include "Association of International Educators." And they kept the old acronym, as the NAACP did, even when it didn't stand for anything anymore.

This probably gets us up to 1997 when I left NAFSA. And when Jim became Ambassador to Russia. I was not yet sure what my next gig would be and was looking at possibilities as Executive Director of another national organization… but realized I probably did not want a third such position. And since I was freer than ever, I went out with Jim right at the beginning of his tenure as Ambassador. This was after waiting nine months through the nomination process.

I had left NAFSA because the Executive Committee had changed in those five years and we were not in the same place any more. The Board that had voted unanimously to hire me had turned over in that time. And the new Chair and Past Chair had different ways from mine at looking at things. So I left knowing I had done what I could in those years, grown membership and conference attendance, funds, and programs. Time to move on. So off I went with Jim to Russia, spending enough time to get a feel for Spaso House and what the job of "wife of…" might entail.

Q: We will just write you off after that.

COLLINS: It wasn't over yet… Lots ahead, including writing my book on observing Russia over four decades. And several projects in international higher education and in the humanities, plus a number of boards. Most happily, we have in the last eight years, gotten four wonderful grandchildren – from 2004 though just now in 2012. Tristan, Parker, Eden, and Anabel Collins. But that's more recent.

Q: Today is 23 April 2012 with Naomi Collins and Charles Stuart Kennedy. We left off in 1997. You were talking about what you might do next. You were considering other professional positions in the States – but meanwhile thought you would spend some time in Russia, seeing if you could get into something there.

COLLINS: Yes. Jim was appointed ambassador in 1997. I was completing my work at NAFSA and interviewing for my next professional position. By that time, I knew what questions to ask – and what spelled "trouble" - in interviewing for Executive Director positions. So that ended my interest in heading up a couple of national organizations that invited me.

Meanwhile, I got asked to do several projects. I did research and writing for publications in higher education for the American Council on Education, researched and wrote the entry for the "The Humanities" for the Charles Scribner's Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History [reference at end of document], reviewed proposals for the U.S. Department of Education, and worked with several other endeavors – including serving on nonprofit boards. When Jim first got the appointment, I was open-minded about considering what I might be able to do as "wife of…." the Ambassador. I don't mean things to amuse myself or keep busy, but rather something useful I could do, something that might make a difference, be of use to Jim or the field.

The obvious thought was that I was expert in nonprofit management, with about two decades' work heading up these organizations (call them NGOs, nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations, the third sector, or whatever). I knew they made a real difference in delivering services, helping create what they call a civic society. So I thought I might do something useful there, or teach at the university level, as I had done. There was certainly no shortage of issues surrounding historical humanities questions. So I spoke with Jim and others, but it became clear to me that it would be hard to be taken seriously as an independent professional while being wife of the Ambassador. And I knew I could not do it as a volunteer and be taken seriously. So I was not able to find a position at that time. I know opportunity has increased since then. Perhaps another person would have been much better than I at figuring this out, perhaps be more imaginative in finding options. But it seemed difficult to be viewed in any way other than as "wife of…."

We know that the Russians then as now hold ambivalent and suspicious feelings about NGOs… so I didn't want to be in the position of creating perceptions that could cause Jim trouble. When I realized that I wasn't going to be able to do anything productive or contribute in any way, I decided that I would not stay full-time in Russia, but continue to go back and forth while doing the kinds of projects and boards I mentioned.

Q: And you mentioned your inability to find professional work in Moscow, being able to contribute in some way at the professional level?

Yes, as I look back, I've always wondered whether I could have had a productive career that was more compatible with Jim's. The most obvious of course would have been to become a Foreign Service Officer. But that didn't interest me. However, I had an interest and credentials in the kinds of educational and cultural endeavors then undertaken by U.S.I.A., the United States Information Agency. Somewhere in the middle or late 1970s or early 1980s, I took the exam for U.S.I.A.

I passed the written exams. But I had a peculiar experience at the orals. By that time, I could conduct myself well in interviews, public speaking: had even passed hours of oral exams for my Ph.D. And I had been told that the questions would be hypothetical and general, to test my judgment, problem solving, dealing with crises, analytic thinking. So I went into the exams confident. I was up to date with current events from reading the New York Times, Washington Post, and Newsweek. What a shock it was when the examiners turned on me asking for the actual provisions in the GATT, for example, and other very precise data. Their tone felt intimidating and even harassing. When I asked whether they might suggest at least one point, they refused to discuss anything. And they forged on asking other very specific legalistic points. I was quite upset of course and knew that they were hoping to prevent my serving – which they did. I have been cross-examined many times before and since: by members of the State Legislature, by Boards of Directors, and of course oral exams - and have never been treated that badly before or since. So I went home upset. By chance, Jim had a few young officers over at our apartment, three or four young men. They had taken the oral exams not too long before. I told them what I had been asked. Their mouths fell opened. They said they could not have answered those

questions themselves, but they were given only hypothetical situation questions, not such particular points questions at all. It was consoling, I guess – if frustrating. I later learned that none of the women I knew who were also wives of officers (as opposed to women who were not wives) were passed on the orals (although they had passed the writtens).

Q: I would like to say back in the 70's I used to be on one of those panels. This wasn't the attitude.

COLLINS: It shouldn't have been, of course. And "real gentlemen" did not behave this way. There was as you know a huge class-action lawsuit after this that became high profile. The women – and wives – did win it many years later. But the remedy was the opportunity – get this – to take the exams again. I did not think I wanted to work with people who treated people this way. But it also obviated the opportunity to have a professional career parallel to Jim's, which could have made family life easier. (I should be clear that I'm not arguing that wives of officers should get preferential treatment either.) But if Jim was not going to consider other career choices, I felt I should continue to try to find a compatible professional life. I regret I was unable to do so.

Q: When did you take this?

COLLINS: I think it was in the middle to later 1970s, perhaps early 80s. I've tried to forget it!

Q: At middle or end of the 1970s, I spent a year giving the exam. Certainly the individuals I knew weren't interested in "let's get them" or something like that. And we did try always to have at least one woman on the panel when interviewing a woman.

COLLINS: I think there was one woman on the panel with perhaps three or four men. She didn't say much, but had a severe officious manner that did not feel welcoming. When I've conducted professional interviews, I've always made sure the tone in the room was pleasant and respectful in manner and approach. One owes that to candidates… to people.

Q: The women who made it were rough. By god, I had a rough time and so will you…

COLLINS : Yes, and wanted to show their … "macho". Not all of them of course. But acting tough or intimidating never impresses me: confident and competent people don't have to "act tough." In any case, one man did almost all the questioning, a former Ambassador (I believe to Asian countries). The others deferred to him.

But I do know that when I wrote their questions down immediately after the test, even before driving home, and tried them out on Jim's male colleagues, they were astonished. These were not even in the same ballpark. They told me the kinds of questions they had been asked, all of which I would have found easy to address. That doesn't mean I am confident I would have passed – only that I would have been able to feel it was fair. And if they had disclosed in advance that the nature of the exam included very specific points

and "right and wrong" particulars – rather than a test of judgment, analysis, reasoning, and hypotheticals—or even about American culture or education--I would have felt differently about any outcome.

Q. Returning to what Russia was like when you returned in 1997….

COLLINS: Huge changes had already started in the early 1990s. At that point, I've mentioned, we saw stores closing down and deserted, and goods appearing in impromptu kiosks germinating on sidewalks. Government owned businesses dissolved. By the time I returned in 1997, the first thing I noted was the change in the visual imagery, of the signage. The iconography had changed. Russia has always been about iconography: the iconography of onion shaped domes, the icons themselves of course, and even the visuals on the lovely painted enamel Palekh boxes. During the Soviet period, of course, we had Socialist Realism, a style akin to "Uncle Sam Needs You" posters. A government iconography, iconography of an authoritarian State, and very retro.

Q: When you say that I am reminded of a painting I saw when I was in Yugoslavia. "Vote for the Best" in very big letters. Of course you know who the best was.

COLLINS : That's right. Mao in China did the same. In Russia it was these smiling blond boys and girls happy on the farm. Wholesome and unquestioning.

Q: Looking lustfully at a tractor.

COLLINS : Yes, exactly. And next to the tractor, acres – or hectares - of tall golden grain growing. Ideal grain of the type I never saw there. Another thing I noticed immediately on my return – beside the change in visual images – was the traffic. Progress of course for those who coveted cars and now had them; hell for anyone trying to get anywhere. And it has only become worse since. Cars at a standstill. Unbreathable air. Sitting in such a traffic jam,

I was intrigued by the signs. In the Socialist Realist – pre-capitalist – days, the signs extolled work. The Russian leaders were for decades striving – as Jim puts it – to turn Russians into Germans, to motivate them to be very disciplined and to work very hard. They seemed to think if you had enough exhortatory posters around, people would just start working harder. Propaganda. Making large political points. And never subtle – in words or images; more comic book. Now it's 1997, inching out of the airport, all those graphics have been replaced with crude looking advertisements for modern products: detergent, toothpaste, automobiles. Stuff. Advertising had not yet gone slick. It was not Times Square. Not at that point, anyway. So I was amused by how radically the visuals had changed. And I thought suddenly about the underlying themes. In the past, they were trying to get you to buy Communism. Buy hard work. Buy Lenin and his ideology and his successors, and the concept of a New Soviet State with New Soviet People…. Men and women marching toward the future with hammer and sickle in the air. But now – in 1997 – they were trying to get you buy "stuff" – cars, toothpaste, detergent… in huge letters and not subtle visuals. Not sophisticated graphics. That said a lot.

And of course this was the first time I was going to Spaso House as a "home." It was – is – huge… probably some 35,000 square feet. My image was of Marjorie Meriwether Post. I had read of her tenure as wife of a much earlier American Ambassador, and the tons of frozen food (Bird's Eye of course) that she had had shipped for her entertaining in Russia. Talk about a contrast of people filling this role: an heir to a fortune, raised with servants and privilege, and average people like me, raised in modest circumstances, in an apartment of perhaps a 1,000 square feet for a family of four. She and her husband hosted magnificent parties for which they imported fresh flowers and rented live animals. I wrote about these lavish affairs in my book because I was so intrigued with the excesses – and how one could not get away with this today, even using your own personal wealth if you happened to have it. So I pictured their life in Spaso House, and then the gap between that and everyday life even for an average person at the Embassy, let alone for an average American at home, or an average Russian.

Spaso House is regal. It is splendid. It may lose some of the glamour when you imagine the house's history: that the merchant who built it was murdered in it by his own son. The house dates to the turn of the century, 19th into 20th. He spared nothing. The stunning Czech crystal chandelier, they say, is the largest in any private home in Russia. And the furnishings, museum quality. I thought about that, and about how you would work at having a comfortable everyday life in so public and so large an edifice. And I thought of the practical side behind the glamour, the day to day running of an institution, like a hotel and restaurant. The 10,000 guests entertained each year. The staff of thirteen. Fortunately, they knew what they were doing and didn't need direction.

Q: Who paid for these official visitors, for their meals?

COLLINS : If they were not Americans, it came out of the set allowance an Ambassador was allotted for representation. If they were Americans, I don't believe you had funds for that. But most events were designed to bring Russians and other nationalities together in honor of visiting Americans. Support was quite limited, though, so it required a staff that could stretch the budget as far as they could, including by recycling leftovers. We were not in the position to provide out-of-pocket money for public representation, for doing Jim's job. But there were out-of-pocket costs to us of his career that we had to absorb, that we would not have had in a "normal" government job in D.C. The State Department also expected – at least when Jim was DCM (Deputy)-- that I would do the accounting and keep the books and do the entertaining, order the food, etc. That is, provide staff services without pay. When I said I was not going to be able to do the books, the accounting, the ordering, the managing a household, the inventories (that they should pretend that Jim was a bachelor or widower), the State Department then hired an American from the States to do the job, and paid him at that time about $ 60,00 per year (today's equivalent perhaps $70,000-$80,000?). That is, a professional salary. They never offered me that option, which I might have considered, even taking a salary cut from where I was, but in order to be with Jim. I had lots of administrative experience by then. For the Ambassador, the paid staff does these jobs.

Living in Spaso House – seeking privacy in a house that was used not only for the Ambassador's events, but for other events all day and evening long, meetings, groups, meals – like a conference hotel--meant retreating to the second floor suite of rooms, bedrooms and sitting room. Unfortunately, connecting the rooms was a wide-open "mezzanine," a balcony opened to the first floor, a public hall … so being dressed was required all the time! During the day, not a problem, but for breakfast… well… it's nice to have a private cup of coffee or juice without being ready to greet the world.

In Spaso House, the other major activity was (and is) the annual Fourth of July reception for 2,000 – 2,500 guests. Shaking each hand on the way in and out. It was an interesting group, including Russians in all fields, people in the arts, education, music, and of course people in government. With time, people were more open and there were fewer government hacks and flacks. Then you had the people from all of the other Embassies. So you had people from European, African, Asian and South American countries. And you had the Americans from the Embassy.

Planning took months. In January, the staff ordered from the States the red, white, and blue crepe paper and banners and flags and balloons…They decorated for days so that the room was absolutely filled. I have photographs to prove this. What I recall most, though, was one of the Fourths – can't remember what year – in which the outdoor temperature was well into the 90s, the humidity high (you're in the middle of a big landlocked mass, perhaps like Kansas) – and these two thousand plus people all fully dressed in suits and dresses, sweat pouring down, shaking hands. There was no air conditioning – and no fans! The food was curling and wilting on the tables. I was appalled that no one ever managed to procure a single fan for those hot summer days of crowded rooms. That said – of course – I felt very proud to represent America.

One adventure as wife of the Ambassador I particularly enjoyed also helps illustrate life in Russia around 1997. One day I said to Jim, "Why don't we do something a little different. It is hot. I have been in Moscow a lot. Let's go out to the countryside. Let's go see a farm." Jim of course grew up on a farm, and also has a background in agriculture. So I thought this would be an interesting thing for him too and a nice excuse to get away. Agriculture is always such a big issue for the Russians. They have tried to return to the production levels they had prior to the 1917 Revolution. Meanwhile, population increased but grain production was stagnant or in reverse. We all know they didn't do impressive agriculture, despite the posters, movies, and exhortations. Wasn't happening on the ground. Some people said – well, it's too cold there – but have a look at Minnesota, North Dakota, and Canada. Hardly tropical lands. Canada is feeding the world grain.

So, Jim said, "Fine. This Friday we will go out to a farm." I was all ready to go at the stated time. But what Jim hadn't told me is that we were hardly going to be alone (or with only the driver.) So here was a van filled with men. "Who are these people?" I asked. Well two or three of them were Americans from the Embassy who were in the agriculture field. One from the States, there by chance. Also by chance, he was someone I knew professionally in Maryland. Then another van of men pulled up. These were Russian

officials in agricultural fields. So, two vans, no springs, lots of men. And we're headed out to the countryside. We shortly discovered we had picked up a police escort with wailing sirens. And then more of them. They accumulated like flies all around us.

I was in the front seat with the driver, trying to avoid carsickness. As always, I was taking notes (which is what allowed me later to write my book). Turns out this activity had not gone unnoticed. At lunch, one of the Russian officials toasting Jim, commented to all assembled how wonderful a wife Jim has, taking all these notes for Jim so he'd have them later. I just laughed to myself knowing the notes were for me.

And finally we arrived at the farm. We were greeted and hosted by the large, self-important farm director (where is Gogol when we need him?). He is the new entrepreneur, the man who will turn the Soviet farm to modern agriculture. He led us to the second floor to provide us background and tea. If it was in the 90s outdoors, it must have been 100 degrees in this room, sun beating down, windows closed, no fans. Drinking hot tea. All of us dripping and becoming very ruddy. And it didn't smell all that good, either. But being good sports – we smiled through the hot floodlights, the video cameras and the photographers. And I graciously accepted the bouquet of flowers. (These came in handy later when we unexpectedly stopped to visit a grave and I plucked a few to hand Jim discretely so he could place them on the grave.) I greeted everyone in usual Russian greetings. Jim participated in Russian at the meeting, impressing them, and commenting that "even the wife of… could speak Russian."

They took us on a tour of the farm – lots of acres – or hectares – it was. For the tour, the translator they provided was the farm's "manager" or "administrator" or "economist" – they called her. She was perhaps 15 years younger than I, and dressed as if for a wedding, spiked heels, crinolines, taffeta dress. As we got talking she told me that she was Jewish and soon migrating to Brooklyn where her mother and young son were already living. In Brighton Beach. She had spent her career managing this business doing the numbers I think… probably ordering products, keeping inventory, and serving as interpreter and tour guide. (And I thought of my great-grandfather, manager of a large estate in the Pale.)

We saw the cattle, about which Jim could ask the right sort of questions about their feed, production levels (not a fraction of ours), and so forth. Driving around it struck me – even as a NYC girl – that there wasn't much hope for the grain or any crops. Looked like empty ground. And lots of men just sitting around. There had been a drought, but still. But the director was proud as a peacock. I was feeling less like Rebecca at Sunnybrook Farm as the day wore on. But I did enjoy seeing the fine day care center and the little garden cultivated with little tools by little people. The kids themselves were then napping on little cots, oblivious to our group passing through – and impressive for kids of some five years old and below. The women who ran the center had to bake and sell goods to help raise the money needed to keep the center running. But if there was one thing in Russia that always impressed me – that I loved to see – it was their day care and nursery centers. And the great women who staffed them, doing their jobs with all their heart.

Q: Girls with the big bows?

COLLINS: Oh, yes, the girls wore their big white organdy bows that no one in America has worn since 1923. Our own day care centers do not always have great napping equipment, often little floor mats, but these had not only little cots but also pillows and blankets. By that time I had given up on the quiet day at the farm with a picnic for two on the banks of the river. It was about 1:30. Even in that heat, I was thinking about lunch. We were then led into a building that served as their community or social hall. On the table, which had been laid some hours earlier, were platters and platters of smoked fishes, appetizers, and pickled things. Unfortunately, not only had they been left sitting in the heat and wilting, but they were uncovered, and the resting places for hungry flies. Dozens or hundreds of them. Indoors, it felt like over 100 degrees (no open windows or fans), everything was drooping and dripping and curling up at the ends.

And everyone was waiting for me to start. So I was thinking Public Health 101 and reached for pickles and bread. Then came hot soup – which tasted fine even if we didn't need more heat then… but I ate around the fish's head floating in it. I was doing my best to be a good guest and receive the generous hospitality, which it certainly was. After the soup came – as I recall – fish, meat, potatoes, and then dessert… although sadly the chocolates were slowly sinking into their serving plate. I knew that good chocolates were dear. And of course there were bottles and bottles of vodka, wine, and sodas. Very generous feast and lovely set up. And the men (they were almost all men) were drinking and sweating and eating and sweating, very red in the face. Then I realized that I, too, was sweating, bright red, and smelled like a fish. I probably should have been drinking!

For the trip back we accumulated even more police escorts. So it was a totally memorable day. But what I was left with was the image of this "model farm," the dry empty fields, the lack of working labor, the hopelessness of producing an adequate crop – and what a long way it would be to improve productivity in Russian agriculture. I don't know – because I haven't read up on it – whether they have progressed since 1997 in their agricultural output, but I hope so.

Q: I read a book that was personally influential. I think it was called "Farm," by Tracey Kidder. Kidder talks about a farm in the Missouri lowlands and the apparatus that goes into making it function. You have a combine and somebody has to be with the combine all day during the combining season, ready to rush out and get a new part if it's needed. There are so many elements that go into feeding the agricultural process. You need a whole apparatus, a support system. It is incredible.

COLLINS: Yes. And today it is particularly huge business in the U.S. and Canada. It is industrial size. I've seen that it is computerized today, too, from testing levels of water needed for crops to other ways to test for the progress of the crops.

Q: Yes, tractors have computers too.

COLLINS: The tractors do and there is a central control room with computers that measure all kinds of things. Jim knows a lot more about farming because he grew up on a farm and has also kept up with Russian agriculture.

Q: He tells about being a pre teen driving a tractor.

COLLINS: Yes, a kid, actually. He was something like eight years old. And not just tractors but combines. He knows about hand milking and milking machines. He also knows what equipment and approaches were introduced into American agriculture at various times – and the time these things were or were not introduced into Russian agriculture. Sort of the history of agriculture. It was very intensive farming they did in Illinois. They had beautiful soil there and they were very systematic about such things as what you did in different fields at different times. Even a family farm required "systems" and discipline. Which takes us to a larger question that extends beyond farms, and that is management. A farm has to be managed. It's a business, too. Jim's grandfather also had a cattle business.

Q: They just don't do it casually and they do something else at the same time.

COLLINS: Right. You have to be serious about water, for example – and about irrigation systems that don't waste half their water shooting it out like a fountain into the air. The Israelis and others came up with the drip system, just drops of water going into the roots of each plant right at the ground. But it takes leadership and management – and investment and incentives to make it work. In general in the changing Russia what is needed is people who can conceptualize what needs to be done and make things happen, and the wherewithal to effect these things through leadership and management skills, systems and approaches. I assume these abilities have been increasing with time as new generations rise. There are also issues surrounding capital – and capital flight – and of course diversifying industry to enterprises beyond extraction industries.

Q: Obviously Russia has a big problem, although not as big a problem as China has. The demographics of Russia are bad as far as the number of people being born and the number getting old. Did you find people talking about these issues? And also how this compares to the U.S. and Europe and the way their societies function?

COLLINS: I believe that educated, well-traveled, and open-minded Russians are concerned that their society isn't functioning as well as others, is not as productive and not as good as some in re-populating itself. But I wonder how many countries do think a lot about their demographics and how to "control" these. We know what China has done about over-population. And Russian leaders have at various times offered incentives to induce people to have more children. But incentives alone probably won't do: people need the optimism about the future and the material conditions of daily life that encourages them to have children – or more than one child, anyway. I believe they still have a high rate of abortion – and always did. That doesn't help fertility even for the same person in the future. And the high level of abortion – or at least the low level of successful pregnancies – means that there are a lot of potential babies that people are

choosing not to bring into the world for what they perceive to be good reasons. Demographers say that population growth is tied to people's vision of the future and how hopeful they are about improving times. I don't know if it is true or not, but it's clear that Russians are not having a lot of kids. They are not replacing themselves. For the Slavic Russians, I should say. Muslim Russians do have more children.

Q: Were you getting any feel for the role of women in Russia today? For example one of the statistics that gets quoted was that the Soviet Union had so many women doctors. But doctors were fairly low down on the totem pole.

COLLINS: It was certainly true that the Soviets would advertise to the world how liberated their women were and used the example of doctors to support that. But it was also true that the average doctor had far less education than our doctors did and do -– more like a graduate nurse or physician's assistant – and that she did not garner major respect. The top doctors tended to be the researchers and surgeons and specialists at top hospitals – and I understood that most of them were men. There was not a lot a doctor could do in the delivery of everyday services in the absence or shortage of medicines and equipment (including antibiotics)– and sometimes even running water or sanitary conditions. Public health was also an issue. I should add that for all this advertising of how liberated women were, they did not emphasize how that also meant they were free to do "men's work" – physical labor on construction sites, laying train tracks, digging ditches. They were the low paid unskilled *physical* labor. They also worked in the fields. They did the heavy lifting.

The funny thing about the position of Russian women was that they sometimes would have preferred – as feminists opposed – being "placed on a pedestal." They didn't have that luxury, one that many American women were beginning to question as they sought full equality, not being condescended to, treated differently. Men opening doors for you, holding your coat. Chivalry. But – it seems to me – it's a hell of a lot better than being treated badly or without respect. Overall, I think many women believed that the men did not treat them very well, did not help in the home. But some of these generalizations may also be about "class" as well as other things: there were and are women and men academics, PhDs, other "white collar" professionals in whose lives things played out differently. Yet the Academies, at least in the past, had only a small percentage of women in top places, and not for lack of women PhDs. But much is shifting daily with the new economy and decline in or lack of "entitled" positions.

Q: You are speaking of the latest revolution?

COLLINS: Yes, since this recent revolution women have been able to move into leading organizations, not just serving as deputies – at a time of course that remuneration has gone down. With less ingrained institutional controls, there may be other opportunities. Different skills – like ingenuity and initiative are now finding homes. Jim became involved with a group of successful female entrepreneurs in the "new Russia." His commercial attaché, a woman, did a tremendous job helping these women create professional networks, something we've had going for several decades in this country.

Some of these women were not young, but were experienced professionals in math, science, and other fields, and had the skills to conceptualize, lead and manage. As soon as they could they went for it. The majority of women most likely had routine jobs, physical or office, and did the housework, shopping, and childrearing. Not much help from men in that – not culturally the norm for men to do "women's work."

Q: Good God.

COLLINS: And of course the women do both men's and women's work.

Q: Let's turn to the Embassy. As the Ambassador's wife did you find yourself filling the traditional role or doing it part time or what?

COLLINS: I found that it was a "damned if you do and damned if you don't" dilemma. The view seemed to be that an Ambassador's wife could be too interfering, too controlling, too bossy, too demanding, too intrusive, too participatory in her husband's work, too into derived "power" and wanting to "run things." I also heard that wives who pursued their own professional interests or detached from this role were too disinterested and selfish, too uninvolved, aloof, and uncaring, not community-spirited. Those are the extremes of course.

So I tried to imagine the ideal in being there: what could I do to contribute or make a difference ? If I were there full time, what would I add to the community? What, if anything, could I contribute to Russia – or U.S.- Russia relations – at a time like this? I reluctantly concluded that I could spend periods of time at the Embassy, participate while I was there, and of course provide Jim company, but that staying full time -- after all the years I had already spent in Russia – would not be a good choice.

Q: Well I would think at an Embassy such as Moscow's where to get outside the Embassy group you had to speak Russian, and a lot of the wives, I assume, did not… I would think that particularly junior level wives might feel left out, isolated. This is where somebody like the Ambassador's or DCM's wife can pick these people up and try to do something about that.

COLLINS: I think you're right about that need. I'm not sure I would have been the best person to do it. But I do agree that the Ambassador and his or her wife or husband ought to support the people in the community and especially the most vulnerable among them. I don't know if male spouses – husbands of female Ambassadors -- have been expected to play that role: much less seems to be expected of them.

Now I think they've professionalized some of the family issues in the Family Liaison Offices at the Embassies – one of the great reforms of this period. That office can also be a way to tap the talents of spouses who are good at family and community support, including those trained in social work and related fields. Of course whenever I have been living or staying at a consulate or embassy I did always come to know the people there and go to family events, picnics, holiday parties, and such. I found in Jordan, in a small

post, that many of the wives were very unhappy indeed, and wished I would stay longer – but I knew that joining the unhappy group and trying to improve the morale was beyond my own abilities. It was a place with very limited outlets for creative energy. That said, you're right that many people – especially wives of male employees in early posts-- were unhappy, bored, isolated, lonely, and/or homesick. They don't always have the language; the Embassy employee works 24/7, and "dependent/spouses" are not in an environment in which a person can necessarily feel in control of her life. I have listened, but I have always felt helpless in being able to solve anything. Very little opportunity to have a voice as an Embassy spouse.

That said – we should not underestimate the number of spouses who have done a terrific job overseas and enjoyed living their lives abroad. Many have found interesting things to do; some worked with the FLO office in organizing outings, exploring new places as a group. And I hope by now they are not wasting the talents of qualified spouses to use as professionals at the Embassy to deal with marriage, alcohol, teenage, and other issues American families have abroad so that these families have access to equivalent services they would if they were at home. Because a lonely, left-alone wife in Amman or Moscow could hardly say – OK, I'll just go out to Tyson's Corner for a few hours...shop, get some pizza, go to a movie.

Q: That is where my wife is right now.

COLLINS: Very timely! And yesterday I had the urge for art, drove down to the National Gallery West building, and saw not only a current exhibit, but also the 17th century galleries, Dutch and Flemish paintings. Ten rooms. I loved it. This would have been impossible in Amman or Izmir, and harder to do in Moscow than here. Of course there is amazing fine art in Moscow, but access can be daunting. The queues, systems of acquiring tickets, taking the Metro or being stuck in traffic, make a spontaneous visit either difficult or less pleasurable. And for many wives overseas, such an excursion alone downtown can be a challenge. Especially – in the old days – as some babushka would likely be screaming at you about something you have or have not done but you're not sure exactly what she's saying which makes her even more angry and red in the face and screaming even more. Even with language ability, you come home drained.

Q: During the period you were there as the Ambassador's wife, was the equivalent of the KGB or the security service causing problems for the families there, the wives or children?

COLLINS : During the earlier period, of course, we were all so vulnerable to be set up. Entrapped. Especially when we were there as students. And certainly surveillance was rampant. And anything the KGB could collect for blackmail they sought. We were so young when we were tripped up in 1966, as described earlier. But we had been smart enough, young as we were at 23 and 26, to have agreed that nothing the Soviets could try to use against us was worse than being blackmailed itself; so no matter how bad a thing they might claim to either of us about the other, we would not allow it to be used against us with the other one. Of course for all the years we lived there , the KGB was on our tail.

When they wanted to do surveillance they could choose whether to be conspicuous or not. I understand that surveillance and information gathering has not ended, but do not know whether they still employ entrapment. They probably kept an eye on Jim when he was Ambassador in part to see that he was not the victim of some ordinary street crime – which would be an embarrassment. So although he had no assigned security, and ran around alone in the Metro and on streets and at markets, he may have been shadowed.

Q: This is not a discrete question, but were there a lot of marital problems during the time you were there, with either husbands or wives going off on their own, finding other people – at a level it caused problems.

COLLINS : I wasn't close enough to the gossip when I was there as Ambassador's wife (who wants to talk to *her*?), but knew that Jim did have to deal with family issues when they became problematic– or when he learned about them. He was responsible by law for dealing even with most personal issues such as spousal or child abuse, alcohol or drug addiction, or other harmful behaviors. Some of those people were sent home. But for other transgressions, I expect that people everywhere when they are bored, unhappy, and lonely, and there's not a lot of joy, fun, or romance in the air, find other outlets.

Overall, the Moscow Embassy was not great for marriages, as we've discussed. While many survived, and some may have strengthened, many didn't make it. In fact even in our student years there, married graduate students often ended up unmarried ones.

Q: When you were there was there terrorism directed either at Americans or at the Russians?

COLLINS : I didn't much think about terrorism while we were there in the later 90's into 2000 because the timing was fortuitous for us, anyway. That is, by 9/11 we were no longer there. Jim had retired just weeks earlier. And the Chechen and other incidents, I believe, came later. I can't say what the Russians themselves focused on or feared during that period, but Jim probably knows what their concerns were. I know one of their long-term worries had been (and likely still is) their growing Muslim populations within Russia and on its borders. They may also be concerned with the pressure of Chinese population on their long border with China. And of course the Chechens with their willingness to commit violent acts.

Q: The theater.

COLLINS : The theater and also a school filled with children. The Russians have so many things to think about today. Some of the large issues from their perspective – beside security threats - are demographic questions, demography as tied to economic development. Declining population; low birthrate; low life expectancy; little to no immigration. How do you sustain an economy? Add to that other economic woes surrounding industry: how do you develop businesses beyond extraction industries? And the development of an economic infrastructure, legal and economic systems, contract

enforcement, integrity of the legal process, to create a framework to provide confidence for investors. And we have discussed the challenges of inadequate agricultural output.

Q: Well, when I think about it, I can't think of a single thing outside of those nested dolls that I would want to buy from Russia. I realize there are things like fighter aircraft.

COLLINS : Yes, they are successful in producing heavy metal objects. I'm not sure whether they do more finished products than parts, but we know they can compete in the field of heavy metal. The other area in which they can be competitive is "human capital," as they say: real talent in mathematics, computer sciences, engineering and other fields. They have brainpower for today's knowledge-based world.. This is where the U.S. is falling behind, landing something like 23rd among the world's nations in math related fields. Whether they are making the best use of the talent they have – and taking advantage of a highly literate population and workforce overall-- is another question.

Q: You mention computer programmers. You hire them and they are an asset to whoever hires them. And a net loss to the place they come from.

COLLINS : "Brain drain" is always an issue in a country that cannot absorb its own educated and professional labor. With our more global "marketplace" today, brainpower becomes a more fluid commodity, crossing borders. But in this global market they also have to compete with others, such as India.

Q: Did you learn from the American community that is trying to do business there?

COLLINS : There is a lot of such business going on there. Thousands of American companies are doing business there. There is an American Chamber of Commerce whose annual Fourth of July parties had expanded to fill an entire park. And beyond the American companies are – of course – huge multinational corporations, like GE. We were there when the first American companies were just starting up. One of the first, McDonalds. Now I understand that Moscow contains a number of McDonald's most profitable restaurants in the world (outside the U.S.). And similarly for Pepsi Cola, for whom Russia is its biggest market (also outside the U.S.). These are nontrivial.

Q: McDonalds buys all of its stuff mostly from where?

COLLINS : They had to develop their own vertical industries there, their own farms (yes, Old McDonald's farms). They needed the right types of lettuce, the right size potatoes for long fries, the beef cattle for hamburgers, the right wheat for buns. For new industries starting up there, though, it's not so easy. Jim was involved with a couple of large efforts to grow chickens and to develop modern dairy farming. Venture capital was hard to obtain for all kinds of reasons. So, foreign investment, Russian investment, entrepreneurship, manufacturing, business-based agriculture, all are significant needs. And legal and financial infrastructure.

Jim continues to travel to Russia every couple of months to keep up with these developments. He also co-chairs the U.S.-Russia Foundation that supports entrepreneurship in Russia. He tends to be more of an optimist about the place than I am. He sees hope particularly in the young generations of people arising since 1991. I feel less optimistic because of my sense of their history, governance, demographics, and economics. I should add that the latent and blatant anti-Semitism in Russia – sometimes disguised as scapegoating and jailing oligarchs – is unlikely to improve the future of the country. Most countries have not made great strides after Jews were expelled or choose to migrate. And only time will tell what kind of governance is ahead there, with increasing authoritarian control. Cracking down on free thinking and views different from your own, your opposition, will never improve an economy or the quality of life, never help a country innovate or advance.

Q: Well let's move to you. You were doing things at the Embassy, coming and going. What else were you doing – or looking at doing?

COLLINS: Starting when Jim left for Russia as Ambassador in 1997, I was interviewing for other Executive Director positions to follow the two I had held. I was also drawn to project work, to research, writing, analysis, and evaluation. I was soon reviewing proposals in international higher education for the U.S. Department of Education (their division called the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education – that is, colleges and universities). I also did a report for the American Council on Education, the association of university and college presidents. I did another for a consortium for North American exchange programs. Then I had a set of projects – consulting and evaluating – including one for community colleges in California. Most intriguing, I was invited to perform an administrative review of American University, Central Asia.

I also served on the board of IREX – international research and exchanges; and later went on the boards of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, the Literacy Council, and then the Writer's Center – mainly in succession. And I've stayed connected with professional groups and meetings in the humanities, and in international and higher education. And, as I noted earlier, I researched and wrote of the entry, "The Humanities," for the Encyclopedia of American Cultural & Intellectual History. (Reference at end of document).

But most interesting and challenging: I decided to use my letters and notes collected over four decades to write a book on my observing Russia over this long period. Through Dark Days and White Nights: Four Decades Observing a Changing Russia. I wanted to provide a long-term perspective, a documentary rather than a snapshot, of change over time. Focusing my mind back to Moscow in the 1960s, then the 1970s and on - was intense and exhilarating. I felt compelled to recreate it as it looked, felt, and smelled at the time. And to bear witness. From the responses – over 120 unsolicited responses – I can see that it struck a chord, resonated with a lot of people. My first draft turned out to feel too academic, analytic, and not sufficiently compelling. So I had to re-write it with a new voice, a narrative based in anecdotes, and lots of visual sense – of sights, sounds, and scents. Three colleagues – whom I acknowledge in the book – were very generous in

reading and making suggestions. And Jim contributed the introduction and conclusion, and edited the work. The emerging text became far more lively and compelling. It came out in 2008 and was followed by about 40 book talks I gave, also a surprise. Some I did jointly with Jim.

Q: How old are you now?

COLLINS : I just turned 70. I had the most marvelous 70th birthday parties. My kids totally surprised me with a family gathering at a resort hotel: I had no inkling I'd see them and the grandchildren (thought I'd be with Jim only). There were successive parties, one set by long-term friends, a weekend for all of us at Anna Maria Island in Florida. Then some other dinners with friends that lasted into March from my January birthday. It was amazing: I had never had any big birthday fuss before – at least not since my Sweet Sixteen. And I never thought I could feel this good about turning a decade. The biggest treat at this point is seeing our grandchildren and adult children, seeing friends, and traveling to California three times a year to enjoy the sunshine, open space, and Pacific views. I feel very lucky.

As for looking back on my days in Russia over four decades, one other thing I've touched in our discussions, but can elaborate differently is: that when I look back at all the years living at intervals in Russia, each time I went back I was a different person because I was in a different place in my own life. So not only did Russia change over four decades, but so did I. First, in 1965-1966, a graduate student; then in the 1970s, a young mother of young children; later, a middle-aged women with grown children, anticipating grandchildren. So each time I viewed Russia I did so through a different lens. And that, of course, affected what I saw and reported, what seemed important to me at that time. For example, when the upheaval occurred in the 1990s, I felt for the middle-aged people who lost their bearings, their career, their place in the world, things I would not have noticed at 23.

When you're young there is so much you haven't experienced. So your perspective is more limited. Of course our mistake as older people can be to look only at the older people in Russia and overlook the changes in the emerging generations, those who shape the future rather than mourn the past. Sadly, there were one or two generations sacrificed to radical change. And there are today one or two generations who can remember no other world, to whom "Soviet Union" means nothing. So history isn't only about the past, it's about each of our lives as we travel through time.

Q: It brings up a very important point, which is that when you were there as the Ambassador's wife things had changed a lot since earlier times for U.S. Russia relations, too. We all grew up with the Soviet Union as the enemy. Did you feel the Soviets then or the Russians now as being a potential enemy?

COLLINS : The first time we went there in 1965 what shocked me was how ineffectual they appeared, how not powerful they seemed, and how poor and backward the country was. I had not expected that, such a broken down, dreary, run down place… I knew that

behind this daily sight lay a humungous military force and investment in weaponry, armies, and gear. Their GNP showed up in boots and bullets.

But I never had faith that outside the military edifice they were going to get their act together for daily living during my lifetime. I did recognized they could be a military threat. Yet being young and perhaps innocent, I personally never imagined they were going to attack us. Seemed too dangerous and reciprocation was always a possibility. I just thought it appalling that they had this incredibly closed society and were so suspicious of outside influence. But I figured that was their problem, not ours. I also didn't believe American Marxists to be a significant threat.

As students, when we lacked diplomatic immunity, we had reason to be frightened and vulnerable, knowing we were subject to arbitrary forces or being framed and arrested by the KGB. That was a reality. And it came close to realizing itself. That was terrifying. But I never confused that fear with thinking that the United States as a whole was at risk . I had no inside intelligence on this of course.

Q: You got the impression.

COLLINS : Yes, I felt that both sides just had too much at stake. This was just too risky a business to play around with; it was a balance of terror—who wants to tip it to see what happens? The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 came closest. We were already in graduate school then, and old enough to fear that this could have major repercussions. But you know that you personally cannot do a lot about it. And you asked about Russia today. I don't see it as a threat to the U.S., no. Other countries and radical groups might be, but that would be the subject of another discussion.

What is odd today is that people think: O.K., now the Soviet Union is dead and dissolved and the country could be wide open, democratic, and capitalistic – so why can't they be more like us? This is a different concern from that during the Cold War. It's more about – what can we do to change them? Well – I personally don't think that's our job, but theirs. Who they become will arise out of their own past, their culture, their hopes for the future, the governance they choose. This doesn't mean it's not irritating to see them reverting to authoritarian tactics and bad behavior. But they're not us. Their culture doesn't derive from English Common Law, the French Revolution, the Renaissance, or the Enlightenment, or the Protestant Reformation. They didn't read Locke, Montesquieu, and John Stuart Mill. One would like to see a land of open and accepting minds, of tolerance, free speech, real democracy, true elections, human rights… because that seems morally and ethically the right thing (and some might say, the most effective). But we also don't want them – or other countries – telling us what to do about our own breaches in electoral processes, equal pay for equal work for women, voting rights, high imprisonment rates for blacks, balancing our budget, or other issues.

Recently, Jim and I drafted a letter to the editor of the New York Review. They had discussed two books about the KGB, April 5, 2012. One is the "Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing book, and the other is the

State Committee on National Emergencies. Valintin Vadanegov. We responded to the review by writing, among other things, "As witnesses to the upheaval of '91 …we once again recall the limits of viewing that period through the American lens." Because when Americans saw the revolution ending the Soviet system they thought it would end the command economy and dissolve the old Russia with it. A lot of Americans thought this is the beginning of Democracy and Capitalism. But looking through the American lens we forget what is Russian about Russia and what is inherited from the past. One element inherited from the past, so central to thinking about Russia, is its inertia. It is slow to change. Knowing that has to affect the way you consider the possibilities for progress (or what we consider progress). Two decades later this inertia is still part of what Russia is about. So we have to keep in mind that Russia will not just emerge without a past. It comes out of its own past, and the inertia is part of its M.O. That doesn't mean that we should avoid working with them because they have not turned out according to our plan. We do have to consider how their actions can affect us.

Q: But not necessarily to think about how do you get them from here to there.

COLLINS : Right. And how you are going to transform them into a Jeffersonian democracy.

Q: We have failed again and again when we try to do that. But in a way, our emphasis on human rights and openness and other things, have affected things. We have made some strides. Perhaps it's not us but human nature that is driving these changes in other countries.

COLLINS : A good point. "Modeling good values," as people sometimes say. And because it is the right thing to do. I do believe that models and good example do mean a lot – especially today with such quick and broad communications in place. I sometimes think there is a human urge toward greater freedom and respect; but then I read Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor." Yet it is true that even under the Soviets, Russians knew there were alternative ways of living. Now that people can travel – and view Internet – they can see alternative ways of living. Human rights. Due process of law. And they see another person being jailed arbitrarily, perhaps for being a political threat; or another, dead, for reporting the truth. So as a human being, you hope they'll have respect for human dignity and human life. And you want to impose these values on the world – on the Arab countries in revolt, on Russia -- as if they can just emerge from their respective pasts and become just who you imagine they should be. Not so likely.

Q: Well this is a problem when you do diplomacy and try to explain it to others, to explain that other countries really are different from ours. We have to explain this to our masters, the political leaders and to the public.

COLLINS : Absolutely, and that comes back to the need in America for civics education, public education about the world, about relations with other countries, about the U.S. and its place in the world today. American diplomacy is a part of that larger context, and what I think of a need for international or global literacy. We seem to be raising a whole

generation or more of people who are not necessarily gaining an awareness of their global context. (I'm not talking here about those who willfully refuse to recognize a larger world- or dare I say a round one.) This impulse to expand the bandwidth of people's awareness of our place in the world drew me to my positions as Executive Director of NAFSA and of the Maryland Humanities Council.

Q: This oral history program is about that, too.

COLLINS : Yes, it certainly is.

Q: We have made tremendous strides in getting the information and developing it. But the question is how to present it and make it most useful. We need a data miner, someone who can take the materials and present it, let's say at the high school level.

COLLINS : It may be there are ways to turn it into material for a public TV, a PBS segment or series. There are Independent Lens and the History Channel. Or perhaps in some way in new media, on the Internet, like YouTube or other approaches. Or perhaps there's a TED presenter who can do it: I saw brilliant retired diplomat from England do a wonderful short talk on our global context. So there's education of the public and also of high school and college students.

Another large question for today is: how should we be conducting diplomacy in the world we live in today? Are the old means and methods adequate to it? Just having officers and their families shipped and settled abroad to sit at a post for two to four years and report back? And if the goal is to mix with and come to know the population, that's increasingly less possible with Embassy-As- Massive-Fortification model, barricaded in ways that isolate from that very population. With today's transportation and communication, are there ways to have people do more TDY, temporary assignments, that might be more effective? That might also allow officers broader perspective as they maintain their American ties. You could also then better address dual career couple issues and save a great deal of money by not shipping household goods, creating schools abroad or paying for boarding school, renting housing abroad (sometimes without favorable rates), building PXs, medical and hospital provision, and other infrastructure. Such an approach might attract a different cadre of people, since the life is more like that of some corporate executives and professionals in other fields.

I'm not suggesting that this is the only solution, only that the 21st century may call for new, more open ways to think about conducting diplomacy that differ from the 18th and 19th century models. There is still a major role for face to face meetings and coming to know people in person to build trust, but to maintain relationships and discussion, new means have arisen: Internet and email, cell phones and Blackberries, teleconferencing in video and Internet technologies, Skype and FaceTime. Most organizations take advantage of these technologies in conducting business. And most also count on jetting back and forth with periods abroad.

Q: Remind me the name of your book and how it's available.

COLLINS : I brought a copy of it to show you. It's now available in electronic forms, too, from Amazon, Barnes and Noble and other places for all devices, iPads and Kindles and Nooks. It's called: Through Dark Days and White Nights: Four Decades Observing a Changing Russia. [Reference at end of document.] I was fortunate to get good endorsements by Strobe Talbot and Marvin Kalb who both read the manuscript before it was printed. And of course it's available in hard copy from Amazon or public and university libraries. It covers some of the ground we have been talking about.

Q: It will take a little while before this transcript is available to you, and then you will have the chance to work on it, to clean it up. I hope you will.

COLLINS : Oh yes I will.

Q: Because it is important and we will put it on the web through the Library of Congress web site. It's called Frontline Diplomacy on that web site.

COLLINS : Thank you. I very much appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this project and record. It makes me realize that although I may not have been a traditional "Foreign Service Wife," I was nonetheless the wife of a Foreign Service Officer. And Jim was O.K. with that; and I was O.K. with that. An unintended consequence of Jim's career. And somehow we've managed to arrive at our 50th anniversary in May [2013].

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End of interview