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

NICHOLAS KUCHOVA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spain GE, Mario Armero
Program in South Africa

Savannah, Georgia—Commercial Officer 2006–2008
Governor Ervin, foreign investment
Export Assistance Centers
Gulfstream, financial advisor

Panama City, Panama—Commercial Officer 2008–2009
Panama Canal Expansion Project
Colon Free Zone
Hosted programs, business ethics
Working to compete with Chinese investments
U.S. investments, Caterpillar
Venezuelan financial troubles
Prevalence of violent robberies
Peace Corp, stopping harmful agricultural methods

Helsinki, Finland—Commercial Officer 2009–2013
Ambassador Bruce Oreck, tax and energy lawyer
Responsible for post in Estonia, Norway, and Tallinn
Energy Conservation
Ambassador Berry White
Bain and Company, Norwegian investments
The League of Green Embassies, Chief of Mission Residencies
Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
Smart Cities
Russia, US, and Finland joint weather research station
Incorporated Sweden, Denmark, the UK, Ireland, and Latvia
Senior Commercial Officer, Carmine D'Aloisio
Conference of Parties in Copenhagen, Denmark
Program with 3M and IBM
Finnair Airline
Finland remodeling of university system
American Chamber of Commerce in Finland
China's extensive investments

Stockholm, Sweden—Commercial Officer 2013–2017
Swedish car manufacturing
The EU and intellectual property rights

The Safe Harbor program on data security
Program on big data with AT&T and Ericsson
EU investment in nanotechnology
DCM Bob Gilchrest
Intellectual property, issues with copyright
Briefed a congressional delegation about IPR and China
BREXIT and the EU

Retirement 2017

INTERVIEW

Q: We're beginning our interview with Nicholas Kuchova. Nicholas, where and when were you born?

KUCHOVA: I was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1952. My mom and dad were both schoolteachers in that area.

Q: What was Atlantic City like in 1952?

KUCHOVA: Far different than it is today! I guess it was on its decline from being a major resort destination. With the advent of air travel, it suffered. The city went into a steep and long decline, which is something that my wife and I ended up being very involved in in terms of trying to rejuvenate the city later in our lives. But it was a pleasant place to live. My father was a public-school teacher in Atlantic City for nearly 40 years, so we were active in that community. And, my mom was a teacher on the mainland side, not on the island, and so we were very active civically.

Q: How did your parents meet?

KUCHOVA: My father returned from the Second World War. He was a first-generation American, and he had wanted to be an engineer but they couldn't afford engineering school. All they could afford was the teachers' college, so he became a teacher. When he came back from Europe, he returned to campus at what was then called Trenton State College. Because of the years he was away, he met my mom who was an underclassman. That's how they met.

Q: Have you done any ancestry investigation to learn where your forebears come from?

KUCHOVA: To a really limited degree. My father's side is very easy. They emigrated from Albania. They were minority Christians, and they left Albania at the decline of the Ottoman Empire. They were seeking to live a more peaceful life. I think they had two or three options in terms of getting passage on a vessel. Their first choice was the United

States and I think the second choice was Argentina. They just wanted something in the Americas for a fresh start and they were lucky to get to Ellis Island where the customs officials promptly changed the spelling on the name to match the phonetics. They lived a long and happy life.

Q: Excellent. All right.

KUCHOVA: My mother's side is different. My mother's side is I think from a very promiscuous family, so there are all kinds of [genetic] input. I've often wanted to do the ancestry with the DNA and I've been reluctant only because all of the laboratories that do the genetic work are in China.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, all of them, so the Chinese have probably the best genetic database in the entire world.

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: Particularly later in my career, when I was following Chinese mischief in terms of commercial espionage and theft of intellectual property (IP), it became very apparent that the motives might not be all benign.

Q: Yeah, sure.

KUCHOVA: So, I haven't done it. If I found a laboratory that would do the tracing in the United States, I would love to do it.

Q: I understand; I didn't realize that it was all done in China. Now, brothers and sisters.

KUCHOVA: I have one brother and he's five years younger than me. He's a great guy. He started a business during the Great Recession when the company he worked for folded. He and another fellow began--it's a millwork business--they assemble windows, interior and exterior doors and provide a range of millwork products made for residential and commercial construction. He basically beat all of the odds and, as a matter of fact, he just sold his business literally a month or two before Covid struck the United States.

Q: Incredible. Wow.

KUCHOVA: Yes, we're so thankful and grateful because, of course, his retirement was wrapped up in the sale of the business that he drove all those years. That was like, phew!

Q: Yeah incredible. Let's begin following you then. In Atlantic City at the time, were you going to public schools?

KUCHOVA: Yes, I went to public schools because both my parents were public school teachers and they said that if they didn't send their kids to public schools, what kind of message would that send to the community? So, I did.

We lived on the mainland side, not in the city, so I grew up in a kind of a suburban atmosphere. My first school had three rooms; I remember. It's now long gone and there are houses on that land. Actually, my very first taste of anything overseas happened in that school. I had a teacher who—I don't know how many summers—but she traveled Europe and took tons of photo slides. On half days, if we were going to leave school at 1 o'clock, they would crowd the three classrooms of kids into the big maintenance room with all the mops and the brooms and that, and this teacher would show her slides during the last hour.

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: I remember that 1 o'clock would come and everybody would leave and I'd say, "Let me see them again."

Q: Yeah, I totally understand; sure.

KUCHOVA: That was a game changer for me. I was in 3rd, 4th grade; I didn't know what was beyond the horizon, but whatever it was, I wanted to see it.

Q: Yeah. At this point you're still pretty young, but were you also involved in any other extracurricular activities, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, band, that sort of thing?

KUCHOVA: Scouting, which was another touchstone for me. My scoutmaster was a ham radio operator. I wasn't as much interested in ham radio, but I had heard about shortwave radio, and he loaned me this—I don't know what it was—big metal army-surplus receiver that I had in my bedroom. I used to spend hours at night tuning into different stations, and writing down what I got. I basically traveled the world on shortwave radio. That was another kind of lingering flame to see more, experience more. His name was Tom Edwards. I'm sure he's long gone, but a great guy, and his kindness to me really set the stage, along with that one teacher, in terms of looking outward.

Q: It's amazing how people today pretty much don't even know what ham radios were or how much you could contact the wider world with them!

KUCHOVA: Yeah. It's pretty awesome.

Q: I was a Boy Scout briefly. Of course, you have to learn radio, Morse code. A fellow who lived across the street from my family had a ham radio and I went over there and he showed me the basics, and said, "You know, I can get King Hussein of Jordan on my ham radio."

KUCHOVA: Yeah, wow!

Q: You know for a 9- 10-year-old kid, that's incredible!

KUCHOVA: Yes, it's incredible!

Q: All right. So, you've had these first initial exposures to the wider world. As you get into high school, do your activities also extend further?

KUCHOVA: For a while I was involved in music. I was a drummer, and I was with a group. They were considerably older than I was, and even as a 13 or 14-year-old, we actually played some bar gigs. My parents let me do it, which my wife always thinks is simply amazing that my folks let me do that. But they'd actually take me to the gig and then pick me up. Then that musical career stopped short because these older guys—I had no idea what they were doing—they ended up getting busted. So that was the end of it. So that was fine. But I enjoyed the drumming; that was fun.

Q: Was there no high school band or something you could just transfer to?

KUCHOVA: No, in high school I was interested in—we grew up with a lot of waterways nearby, so I was interested in boating. I had a boat as a kid and I actually had a boat when my wife today and I dated in high school. So, we used to date on our boat. That was fun. Today we live in Fort Lauderdale and we see boats go by that are simply incredible. I'm still thinking about my 13-foot Boston Whaler. It was just little and humble.

Q: So, you learned basic marine skills; you know how to handle yourself in a boat?

KUCHOVA: Yes.

Q: That's fantastic. I mean, that's…

KUCHOVA: Yes, and it was fun to explore. Obviously even before I could drive, we could go great distances on the boat, see other communities, go out on the ocean, and then in different inlets. That was fun and rewarding, if you did it right.

Q: Absolutely. Now what was high school like? Was it large, small, very diverse?

KUCHOVA: It was a regional high school for three little communities. I'll back up. When I was in 8th grade, I was on the student council. We actually had a student council exchange with one of the nearby communities, and I went to that community and my counterpart came to my school for the day. In that home room, I saw a really tall girl, and I was always a short boy. I was always one of the shortest in school. I was infatuated, and then I got to meet up with her again in regional high school. It took me from freshmen, sophomore and junior year until we were seniors at the end before I got a date! But that persistence paid off because we've been married for 47 years! And that persistence to make the sale made me a very good commercial officer!

Q: Ah! In high school aside from the student government, were there other things that captured your attention, news, reading, or other activities?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, in many ways current events were always of interest to me and local community affairs were interesting to me. My mom and dad were very active politically. My dad ended up being mayor of the little town where I grew up, so we were always involved. It was a little town, but there was a park and we were active in terms of doing work at the park. So being involved in the city or the community has always been a part of what we've done.

Q: Which leads me to the question, the years are getting into the '60s now and the counterculture is growing. Did that affect you?

KUCHOVA: I would probably say no, not too much other than the music. The music is great. But no, I never really was infatuated with the counterculture beyond the music. Probably in some cases I felt a cultural divide. Probably not the most mature reaction but in some ways, I had a resentment towards some of the counterculture things. They basically contrasted with things that were part of who I think I was. But certainly nothing overly dramatic.

Q: Was religion or church a major part of your life?

KUCHOVA: That's a hard question to answer. We went to church, not every Sunday, but we went to church. I used to love going to special services with my grandparents on my dad's side. They were Eastern Orthodox and I simply enjoyed the almost mystery of the service with the incense and the Gregorian chants. I was raised as a Catholic. Back then the language of the Mass went to English, but the Eastern Orthodox Church said, "No, we're not doing that." From a historical point of view, I found the ceremony far more intriguing. I enjoyed that, but I can't say that I was overly involved in religious affairs.

Q: Did your family travel while you were in elementary or high school?

KUCHOVA: We did a lot of road trips. My brother and I probably had one of the greatest and easiest childhoods that one could imagine; loving and supportive parents. They were both teachers so they had time off when we had time off. We did a lot of road trips, simple things, touring battlefields of the Civil War. That was great. We took trips to Florida. One Christmas, we also went to Jamaica for three weeks. That was spectacular. That was a little flame of influence for me. In fact, while in Jamaica I got my Christmas present there and I got to buy a Zenith transoceanic shortwave receiver. I had it my entire life until I joined the foreign service, and then in terms of purging weight when we packed up to move, we ended up giving it to somebody who was fanatic in terms of collecting old radio. He was just beside himself!

So, those were the types of trips. I never got to Europe as a kid. There were always these exchange programs, and I never asked because I also realized the financial burden. Now

my brother, of course, did ask, and he got to go to Europe. It just struck me because he had no interest in travel. I thought, "Wait a minute, this isn't fair!" But it worked out.

Q: While you were in high school, did you work part time?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, I did. I actually worked. I did a lot of different things in high school. I cut lawns in the neighborhood. Then once I could drive, I actually got a job with—back then there was a hamburger chain called Burger Chef, I think it was.

Q: Yeah.

KUCHOVA: I worked for them for a while. I cleaned pools, did all kinds of things.

Q: The beginning of the growth of Atlantic City as a new kind of gambling center, were you there long enough to see that?

KUCHOVA: We were very involved in that. Robbin, my wife, and I were both on the Speaker's Bureau to change the constitution in the state of New Jersey. Atlantic City continued to slide and employment was seasonal. That has an effect on households and has an effect on education; it has an effect just on somebody's outlook on life. It was a very dismal place. Whatever people tried didn't work. Just to the west of Atlantic City, the FAA has a huge research center. We used to call it NAFEC, [National Aviation Facilities Experimental Center] but they now have a new name for it. It's probably the most sophisticated runway and landing system in the entire world, because they constantly innovate and experiment. The community, the overall region, has failed to capitalize on using that as an economic touchstone in terms of the opportunity to bring investment and people in, and that's unfortunate.

We got involved in the speaker's bureau to basically attract gaming, to legalize gaming. There were two referendums. The first one failed, and we tried again, and the second one passed. But gaming was only supposed to be part of the economic solution. They were supposed to then turn around and make the investment in terms of using the airport as an attraction for people that are in the general aviation business. You know, come here because the feds are doing their experimental work. Come here and put your software development in the area. Come here, do this, do that. But in some way, I jokingly say that it must be part of the portable water delivery system in New Jersey. They took the easiest way out, and it was like, "well gee, the casino gaming is booming, so why do we need to do more?" And they didn't, and of course now you see the evolution of the business, how other states have allowed casino gaming, and it basically has eroded Atlantic City's position. The state basically kept pretty high standards. You couldn't have a casino unless you had a certain amount of public space, or room. We got nowhere.

We had actually suggested that the Atlantic City annex cities that are on the mainland side, just in—Atlantic City was basically the designation for casino gaming. Atlantic City has the water, with the intercoastal on the inside and the ocean on the outside, so there's no additional land. So, if you want to compete with other places, you need more land. So,

we had suggested, annex other cities, and just make greater Atlantic City, and then you put in the country clubs and all the resorts and you attract more people. But that didn't go anywhere because at the time things were still going okay. It's kind of like being on the Titanic and as long as they're serving you drinks, there's no problem. Yeah, it's heartbreaking. We haven't been back in years and years, so I have no idea but it's a lost opportunity.

Q: I'm from New Jersey as well, just about 50 miles north in Long Branch. It didn't go down quite as badly as Atlantic City did, but the various economic drivers in the baby boom era did go away, and for a little while things looked pretty bleak. It's slowly coming back, but that whole New Jersey beach corridor suffered a great deal in the same way.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, it's just like companies, you always have to keep reinventing yourself. The moment you have success, okay, take about 10 seconds and congratulate yourself, and then listen carefully for the footsteps that are coming up behind you.

Q: Exactly.

KUCHOVA: It's no time to be timid.

Q: Since both of your parents were teachers, I imagine there was talk in your house as you were getting to the end of high school about college.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, yeah! It's funny. When I was in high school there was one thing I wanted to do, and it was only one thing, I wanted to be in the U.S. Merchant Marine!

Q: Ah.

KUCHOVA: Because that for me was where all these different strings got tied together. So, I ended up with a vice presidential nomination to King's Point from Vice President Hubert Humphrey. I was really pleased. I thought, "This is great!" But I failed my final physical because to be a deck officer back then you had to have 20/20 vision, uncorrected. Well, I wore glasses. I wear contacts today. So, I was absolutely crushed. It's like, holy mackerel! Now what? So, I went to school the first year to a liberal arts school. You know, you take the classes and I just couldn't find what I wanted. Then I met somebody who had graduated and they graduated from their business studies program and I said, "This is great! What are you doing?" He was working for some company doing either garage doors or signing, and I thought, "I don't want to invest my time in school and end up doing garage doors or signing." Not that that's not a great thing to do. I'll die. So, I actually took a little bit of time and I worked as a surveyor for what would have been a full semester. That was a great thing because we actually were doing a project on the beach, extruding lines for a jetty. It was winter, and no matter how warm I dressed, it wasn't warm enough. I realized, wait a minute, let me rethink this education thing.

I went back to school and at that time I got married, very young, at twenty-one. I finished school while being married, and I finished school also being a stockbroker while going to class. Back then I was the only kid that showed up for class with a jacket and a tie. Nobody else was dressed anything like me. So, I was focused on that, and I was focused really on getting through school.

Q: Which school was it, because to be a stock broker you need to be near some kind of financial center?

KUCHOVA: Well, back then it was a company called Newberg and Associates and then a company called Advest bought them. It was basically a retail stock brokerage, but you had the tickers and then the whole bit was great. So, I finished school doing that, but at that point all I wanted to do was finish school with a business degree and then find out what I wanted to do. During that time, I got more interested in politics and I ended up getting elected as the county—well, you remember, Jersey would call them, "the Board of Chosen Freeholders".

Q: Right.

KUCHOVA: First people would joke and call them, "freeloader". Now I understand from the news they've changed the term "freeholder" to "county supervisor" because back then in colonial days freeholder meant you own the land. Apparently, in a little overly politically correct way they've abandoned the historical handle for supervisor. I miss the other because it shows the roots of the 13 colonies, you know, and history is history.

Q: Yeah, I agree.

KUCHOVA: I did that and I really liked the public service part and I liked doing things. I did not like the political back and forth. The one thing that I helped to get started in Atlantic County was the recycling program.

Q: Interesting.

KUCHOVA: Which, fast forward by years and years, it ended up constantly winning national awards on the efficiency and effectiveness of the recycling program. It's funny, my dad ended up being on the board of directors for that authority, which I thought was kind of cool. He did that for about a few years.

Q: Can you take a second and describe what recycling was at that time? In other words, what were you able to do with solid waste?

KUCHOVA: Well, you know southern New Jersey felt it more critically because they were the target for larger metropolitan areas to basically dump their trash. You had the beginnings of people becoming very aware of contaminants leaching into groundwater, and then of course the groundwater affecting the health of people. So, the recycling was how do you turn around and look at municipalities and change the way that they collect

solid waste? Part of it is education, not only for the worker, but for the consumer, the resident, the taxpayer. So, we basically came up with a plan and—it's funny because the guy who we hired as the intern to help pull all this stuff together ended up eventually being the executive director. He's done an outstanding job, and I give him great credit because as a young person he knew exactly what he wanted to do. He was very positive, and he ended up doing it all and achieving his life goal, which is great.

The point was working with the cities to get the residents to separate newspapers, glass, plastics, and cans, and that started. Then there's the investment of buying the different receptacles for every household and the county, and then the educational programs; to take your newspapers and put it there, and this in there. And that worked. Eventually as things got more sophisticated in the collection you could do single stream where you could put all your recyclables into one container and that got separated later and it reduced contaminants in the recycling bin. So that really worked.

Atlantic County did a great job. They were one of the first to take the plastic bottles and to sell those to innovative fabric makers who take the plastic bottle apart and make polyester yarn. It's really awesome when you see how you can reuse these materials. As a matter of fact, there used to be—I don't know if it was a print commercial or a TV commercial, it showed a little aluminum can in front of a big stadium and the aluminum can says, "I'm coming back as a stadium." It was aimed at people to make the connection intellectually that this can that I'm holding actually has a value and has a use. We always argue that every day should be Earth Day. You want to encourage people to—I hate the euphemism— "do the right thing," but do things right; be a steward for where you are.

Q: Was it ever considered to have people do what they used to do, which was return glass bottles for a deposit fee?

KUCHOVA: I think for the longest time that continued with stores. I don't know now if they do that anymore, I don't think so. I know the disruption of the recycling trade, particularly our disruption with China, has basically stopped the recyclable glass market, which is a real sham. Because you can't hide from it and it's not sexy and it's not glamorous, but we've got a continuing problem with solid waste. Europe does a great job. The Nordics do a great job. They basically burn their trash to the point that they're constantly looking for other people's trash to power their power systems. They burn at such a high temperature that they don't have contaminants.

Q: To give you just a quick idea, when I was in Hungary, I sent someone on an International Visitor Program who was a regional solid-waste disposal expert. When I visited his site he said, "All this paper is going to Germany because they burn it in their huge industrial whatever's. We get a small fee for it, but we get it out of Hungary."

KUCHOVA: Yeah, I think it's a great idea. IVPs are amazing tools. Good for you!

Q: So back to your story. You became the freeholder, or supervisor, in Atlantic County. How long is a term of office?

KUCHOVA: We did something interesting. We used to have a strong freeholder government where freeholders—it's part-time for most people—somebody would be in charge of public works, somebody would be in charge of this, somebody would be in charge of that. We actually changed that. We decide to change government to have a county executive-style government and have the freeholders to be in a sense, the legislature. And, to have an elected official as the county executive with an executive branch of the county government. We went through nearly a year of interviewing every single county department and function. Then we had two consultants, they were really smart guys, professors at Stockton College in government affairs. We went through and interviewed. How would this work? How would that work? We basically restructured the entire county government.

One thing stands out. There was a young guy who ran the shade tree commission who came in for his interview and told us how we should eliminate what he does, where the function should be, and what the savings would be. That was pretty impressive. That was a great lesson for me. He ended up being either the number 1 or number 2 in a reconstituted department for services, and we followed his advice. Basically, we changed the way the county did business, and it worked out pretty well.

We were also fortunate because the very first year, the executive was from one party and the freeholders were from another. So, there's that creative difference. I think in the long run that was very beneficial because, unlike today, you had to come together to find a solution because these were issues you couldn't kick down the lane. You have to handle it now, so let's come up with a solution. That was a very, very interesting experience.

The board of freeholders, three people ran for three-year terms, three for two, and three for one, and I had a one-year term. I was elected as the youngest—I think I still hold the title—the youngest elected freeholder in the state of New Jersey. I was just 21 when elected. But I did my term and then moved on. At that time Robbin and I realized economically there wasn't a future for us in the region where we grew up. So, we left.

Q: One last question about your position, the freeholder job. The county is also the responsible level for welfare services, or at least a number of welfare services. Do you recall what that was like when you were in office? In other words, was the county satisfied that those who actually needed the support were getting it and those who did need it were not unnecessarily on the rolls?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, it's always been a challenge. Two things come to mind. The federal government came out with a program called SIDA or CIDA—I can't really remember what the acronym stood for—but it was supposed to be an umbrella to direct federal funds through the state to the county to deliver social services. There was that. Then in the cities there was always a problem. My father during summers got involved in running summer camps for kids from the urban area. I remember he used to argue that while it's really great for these kids to see the lake and some wildlife and get out, he would rather spend the money other ways. Some of the kids needed dental work; some of them needed

eyeglasses; some of them didn't have enough nutrition at home. You know, rather than take them out for two weeks to some camp, let's take care of their needs. But that never went anywhere, and that was a frustration for him during his tenure of doing that. I remember that well. And there was always a problem—of course, when I was a freeholder, it was just as the gaming was beginning, and things were extremely dire. I do believe that a lot of people fell between the cracks in terms of services. It was really a dismal time.

Q: Yeah, I recall the same thing. So, you and your wife decide this is really not for you. What is going through your mind as to where you're going to go or do next?

KUCHOVA: Two things happened. One, I became increasingly unsatisfied with the political bickering. Then interestingly, the opposition party approached me about running for state senate, which I thought was kind of interesting. I thought, "this isn't for me," and so we ended up going to work for a guy who had run unsuccessfully for the board of chosen freeholders and who was an art dealer and entrepreneur---someone who was a character's character! His name was Reese Pally. He had a gallery on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, a gallery in San Francisco, and one in Palm Beach. He was this most flamboyant, bigger-than-life character. He approached us and said, "Look, I've got a problem in San Francisco. Would you go out to San Francisco and move my gallery and reorganize it for me, hire people and yada, yada, yada? We thought, "Well, that sounds pretty good." So, we went to work for Reese and his gallery. We went to San Francisco and did everything he wanted us to do, move the gallery, hired people, got them all setup. Then he said, "I'm going to have a new gallery in Palm Beach, Florida. Would you go to Palm Beach and set that up for me?" "Well, that sounds pretty good!" So, we went and did that.

Q: What years were these?

KUCHOVA: Oh my gosh. Yeah, my wife is right at my side. Late '70s. Yeah.

Q: Okay.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, it had to be late '70s because in '76 the referendum passed, Resorts International opened up, and then we decided, "Let's go back and be part of what we helped to get started. Let's put our energy into this." So, we came back and we both got corporate jobs. My wife worked for one of the cable TV service providers and I went to work for a company called U.S. Home. At the time they were the largest home builder in the United States. The division I worked for was in the lumber and millwork business and that's where you'll see the connection for my brother who stayed in that business because I ended up hiring him when he finished school.

So, I was working for U.S. Home and Robbin was doing the cable business, and then she got approached by somebody who wanted to set up a bus business. Back then they were bringing patrons into the casino by bus. It's kind of like being a bounty hunter, because the casino paid a head fee for everybody who walked into the door. So, when Robbin first

came home and said, “I want to start a bus business, in my mind I thought she said, “I’m going to be selling buses.” For a couple seconds, I saw in my mind’s eye this big lot with big buses and Robbin walking around and saying, “Here’s a great bus.” That wasn’t what she meant. So, she set up these bus lines bringing in patrons for the casinos, and it was really successful. Then she got approached by a group of investors who said, “We want to take what the buses do and go out the next 200 miles. We’ve got to do it by air. So, will you create a marketing plan for us?”

Robbin was as busy as can be, so I told her, “This would be great; it would be fun. I’ll help you with the marketing plan,” because I was still working. So, we write this marketing plan, give it to the investors, and they were going to buy these airplanes from Israel Aircraft Industries [IAI]-- a great little airplane. At the end of this negotiation, the deal falls apart, the IAI president basically said, “Wow, now what do we do?” Almost jokingly we said, “If you spot the airplanes, we’ll get you the contracts.” IAI said, “Okay!”

We started this charter airline running just beyond where the buses could comfortably run. We had these Israeli-made airplanes called Aravas. The Aravas are actually in a movie called *Under Fire* because Israel made them to be what we would use a helicopter for. It’s a 20-passenger, great little airplane; tough as nails. We ran that for two and a half years, and we competed with all kinds of people. We were never the cheapest option. We were always more expensive, but we spent time, money, and energy to make the air travel interesting and fun. We had parties on board the airplanes, and we treated the patrons great. So, when the patron arrived at the casino on our airplane, they were happy and ready to go.

Of course, the casino looks at patrons from a mathematical perspective. They have a drop, x number of people through the door, here’s what my drop is going to be. And, if I have a happy customer, my drop increases. If I have an unhappy customer they’re going to be upset and they’re going to leave my premises and go someplace else. So, we delivered happy customers. So, guys were competing with us with cheaper airplanes. De Havilland made a Twin Otter, and it’s a great little airplane. It’s narrow and it’s tight. We had two and two bench seating, so it was very roomy, a little over two meters in standing headroom. It looked like a football with a wing. We were very successful—we started with one-year contracts and then after a while they moved it to six months. The casinos wanted to go to six-month contracts. We could do that. Then they wanted quarterly contracts. That was a little bit more troubling but we could do that. Then they wanted to go month to month and we said, “We’re done.” We folded up and then that began a period of entrepreneurial activities for us.

Q: Interesting. So, this new period is sort of the beginning of the ‘80s?

KUCHOVA: Yeah. So, I did some work with a guy who was a lawyer in Washington, DC who had a trade business on the side. With him, we built houses in Japan, which was fascinating.

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: My time with U.S. Home was very helpful. We worked with Japanese architects who wanted to sell "American House," which was unique. We would take their plans and panelize them, like an erector set, load the container with instructions that had everything to make the house other than the foundation. When the containers arrived in Japan, the customer could utilize the just-in-time system that the Japanese love. They would get the first container open and put the parts up; the second container arrived, open it, put the parts, there you go. So, we did that.

We did some work for Anheuser-Busch getting beer into South America. We exported groceries into South America. I did aquaculture in Turkey where by a fluke of nature you can find the same blue crab that exists along our East Coast, the scientific name is *Callinectes sapidus,* which means 'beautiful swimmer'. It exists near the seaport of Adana which is near the Syrian border. It likely got there through water ballast back in the days when vessels would bring water ballast on. Now you can't do that. Likely some ship was in the Chesapeake, took on water ballast, there was the larvae from the blue crab, it had survived the transit, it arrived at Adana, they discharged it into the water, salinity and temperature were perfect, the larvae thrived. Of course, Muslims don't eat shellfish!

Q: Yeah, of course! (laughter)

KUCHOVA: The shellfish resource grew and grew and grew to the point that it became a nuisance for the coastal small fishermen. The crabs would get into their nets and ruin their nets. There was one article that actually proudly showed some Turkish fishermen who had brought tons of blue crab up onto the beach, rode over it with tractors, put diesel fuel on the crabs and burned them!

Q: (gasp)

KUCHOVA: Yeah. Back then jumbo lump was selling in supermarkets at $24 per lb.

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: Yeah. So, it was like, all right, what do you do? So, we put together a venture and we did a technology transfer to teach the Turkish fishermen how to fish for blue crab. I didn't want to leave anything to chance, so I actually sent an old crab pot that I got out of Hatteras. You know, that area. I purchased the same kind of plastic-coated wire that crabbers use to make their traps—I didn't want to do *anything* different than the U.S. fishermen did. I shipped the wire to Turkey via KLM. We made a contract with a vocational high school in Turkey to make these traps. They made them perfectly. We had 3,000 traps. We taught the fishermen how to fish for blue crab. We found the guy at the University of North Carolina who was the godfather of pasteurized crab meat. He was a professor. We brought him over to show the people how do you ensure that the meat is good? How do you pasteurize this? We brought a guy, like you know from TV shows--if

you're a farmer and you had a problem on your farm you call the county agricultural agent. Well, there is a similar service for fishermen. It's called Sea Grant. I found one guy in the United States on the East Coast who was the expert in blue crab fisheries, and brought him over to teach the fishermen. We basically set up a crab fishery, and that was great.

Q: Did all of these foreign ventures also bring you to the foreign sites, or did you…?

KUCHOVA: Oh yeah! I spent at one time six months solid in Turkey.

ROBBIN: And there were a lot of sheep jokes.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, Robbin will say there were a lot of sheep jokes that she had to put up with! So, for the six months I spoke very little English. Of course, my Turkish wasn't terrific at all. I remember once coming out of one of the sites on the Mediterranean coast and one of the airports that Turkey had built and there was a commuter airline going to Istanbul. I was one of three passengers, and there was a guy with a Yankees cap sitting next to his wife! I was dying to speak English so I started talking to them. Wow, he spoke English, this is great! So, we conversed the whole way over. He asked what I'm doing and I told him and I asked what he's doing and he goes, "Well, I'm kind of retired and we're traveling. I still do a little conversing and he says you know, "Pleased to meet you. My name is Allen Funt," from Candid Camera.

Q: (laughter)

KUCHOVA: Yeah, I met him. We traveled to Istanbul and said goodbye at the airport. But that was a lot of fun. Later on, I was intrigued when sea scallops became really expensive. In Baja, California and the Mexican Pacific Coast there's a scallop that's very similar to our bay scallops. We did a deal with a Mexican Federal Marine Research Laboratory in La Paz where they were taking the scallops into a lab setting and using salinity and temperature causing the animal to spawn, collecting the larvae, growing the larvae to the point past a predator's easy access, and then—from my time in Japan, I had been infatuated the way the Japanese grew scallops, because when you fly into a Japanese harbor and you look down, you see all these wooden rafts. They have these lines that extend down and there's baskets. I thought, "Wow, this is amazing!" So, when I went to Mexico, I was going to do these rafts and the lines and the baskets, and the Mexican biologist said, "Are you crazy?" He goes, "Dump them in the water! They don't swim far. Why would you spend all of this time and money and effort to put these floats up and then have to haul it? Just dump them in the water. Come back in six months and harvest them." I'm like, "Okay. Yeah, simple is better." So that's what happened.

Each one of these things led me one step closer, and then before I got to the foreign service, I had answered an ad for Peace Corps. Back then it would be the associate country director for Mongolia. I thought, "Wow, this would be great!" Yeah, what was over the next hill, what was around the corner? I went for my interview in Washington. It was really great. I did not get the job, but they were infatuated because somebody there

was aware of the Turkish crab project. They thought that was something that they could put their teeth into in terms of starting a cottage industry in a sense that it could grow and provide employment, stability and so on. And that got me step by step closer.

After a while Robbin and I got tired of making payroll for people, always being the one bringing the bread home for everyone to feed. So, you know what, let's do something else! We sold some businesses that we could sell, and what we couldn't sell we just stopped doing. Robbin went to work for a healthcare system, we wanted 9 to 5 jobs with no responsibility! Then I thought I'd join the family profession and become a teacher. I did it for a few years; Not for me! I was really unhappy and I kept looking for something else.

There was an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* for Foreign Service, but it was one of those generic ones that had Agriculture, Commerce, and State; everybody in it. So, I wrote away, and this is really before electronic media--I got an answer. Then I did a test and then I got invited to go for my assessment in Washington.

Q: This was the oral assessment?

KUCHOVA: This is the oral! First, I'm really excited, and then it dawns on me, "Man, I have like a snowball's chance in hell of making this!" Because I didn't go to university and study international affairs, and yada, yada. I'd been in an embassy once in Japan asking for help and yada, yada.

I wasn't going to go, and Robbin said to me, "You're nuts if you don't go. It's like the Olympics. You get to walk into the stadium and get to experience it, so you know what? You don't get a medal. You don't compete. But you've got to go. So, go." Her simple advice changed everything for me. I went with the clear intention of enjoying every minute of the assessment and not a single expectation for making it. That was perfect. The role play was fun. There was the inbox exercise kind of deal—I don't know if you had the same one.

Q: Yes.

KUCHOVA: You're an NGO and you take over yada, yada. Well man, I had lived my professional life exactly that way and so it was easy! So okay, fine. Then there was the role play. We had to deliver a démarche, and the démarche I had was to tell a country that their tuna was being embargoed because their catch method had a high incident of dolphin kill. A couple of the people when they delivered it, I heard, were really apologetic, like "Well, I'm really sorry but this is what they wanted me to say, and…" Man, I delivered my lines. And then I paused, and I said, "However, the United States has some superb dolphin exclusion techniques that would allow your fleet to continue to hunt for tuna and meet the international standards to exclude the tuna, and to stop the tuna kill. Well, they didn't anticipate that, and I was lucky because I'd just done two commercial fishery projects, so I knew some of these things.

Then there's the exercise simulation among country team and you're advocating or trading something. I think I got bringing water to a village. How can you lose? I mean, come on! I won my point and then worked with others to get their projects across. I had a great time. I was using humor the whole bit. One was an incubator for chickens, and I talked about an educational program, and I'm having a great time getting into this. Anyway, long story short, there were six of us that were invited to this commerce assessment, and the six of us were sitting around this table at the end of the day. An assessment administrator would come in and call out a name and that person left with the commerce person. They took people out individually; one at a time. Then there were three of us sitting there! This woman, Alice Davenport—who's now passed away—she had been our deputy assistant secretary. She came in and she said, "This is very rare to have three, but the three of you were very impressive; you go on to the next level!" Well, I was absolutely floored! I thought, "This is really cool!" I wasn't really prepared for success! And, that started it.

Now, I'll back up a minute to when we were building homes in Japan. Back then, most of the Japanese trading companies, such as Marubeni and Mitsubishi, owned all the plywood manufacturing in the United States. I mean, Japan was buying everything. So, when we were doing one or two homes, the Japanese customs, well, they could care less. They just cleared our containers and they went. We got one for eight or nine homes—that was a lot of containers—and they froze our containers at the port because our plywood didn't have the JIS [Japan Institute Standards] stamp on them.

I'm like, "Come on! You own the mills!" So, I went to U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. First time I've ever been to a U.S. embassy. I Arrived. Back then you could actually tell the nice guys at the front gate, "Look, I'm a business guy. I'm having a problem," and they would just send you in! So, I walked up and I explained to the reception area what I needed. They said, "You need to talk to the commercial service." So, they call up and then the person says, "Look, they're really busy. There's a big Boeing deal and they're really too busy to talk to you."

Okay, so we go back to our hotel, the Kayu Kaikan. I'll never forget it. It's just outside one of the entrances to the Palace. We had three U.S. builders with us to teach the Japanese how to use our methodology, and these guys are beef eaters. So, they're going out. This is Tokyo in the '80s. They're going for a big breakfast. Cha-ching. They're going out to lunch. Cha-ching! They're going out to dinner and drinking. Cha-ching. We're paying for everything. They're having a ball. Just like three, four, five days and we're just hemorrhaging money.

I go back to the embassy the next day and they tell me the same thing. I said, "Look, I can't leave here without help. Either that or I'm going to be destitute. Somebody's got to help me." The commercial officer was really incensed—and this is a very key part—the officer was really incensed that I would insist on speaking to him. So, they send down the best thing they could have done, a foreign service national, because in my agency that's the magic. That's the magic. They sent down this young guy and he listens to my problem. And right then and there he says, "Let's go."

We leave and we jump in a taxi. We make two visits to two different ministries. I have no idea what's going on. I'm just following this guy. We go back to the embassy and he says, "Okay your containers will be released tomorrow at 8 o'clock in the morning." I'm stunned! Stunned! I'm usually not at a loss for words, and I thank him profusely and I say, "Tell me, what is it that you do?" He goes, "Well, we help U.S. businesses succeed." I thought, "That is the coolest thing I've ever heard!" Well, that was the seed. That was the seed.

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: That's what got me through all the frustrating times. I never forgot that young fellow's simple driving message. I always remembered the lesson this guy taught me. For all of my 20 years, I never forgot what it was like to be in another country when things weren't going well and you need help.

Now, the fun part about the officer who wouldn't see me—eventually when I get the commercial service job offer and I'm in my first day at FSI [Foreign Service Institute], --they come to Turkish language class, and tell me, "Nick, Nick, you got to come with us. You've got to be sworn in." "Okay." Because we don't do the A-100.

Q: Aaah! Right! Yes!

KUCHOVA: Commercial service, in their infinite wisdom they will train you on the job. That means basically to throw somebody in the deep end. So, immediately I go and I call Robbin. We were staying at Oakwood Apartments in Falls Church. I said, "Meet me at Commerce, they're going to swear me in." So, we brought her grand mom's Bible and we go and I get sworn in. So, while we're waiting for the swearing in process, they parked me in a guy's office. We're trading travel stories, right? Where have you been—what do you do--this and that, and Japan, yeah Japan! As I'm talking about this, I notice his face start to get a beautiful dark cherry or crimson glow.

Q: Uh-oh.

KUCHOVA: He was the guy. He was the guy. We ended up being friends. Every couple of months, a group of us from Commerce will do a zoom luncheon and he's on the call. He's a wonderful guy, but I caught him at the wrong time and I've never let him forget it!

Q: (Laughing.) Beautiful! Alright what year is this when you finally do enter?

KUCHOVA: 1997, was it? It might be 1997.

Q: Okay. 1997.

ROBBIN: Yeah.

KUCHOVA: I wish it was 1978. Yeah, ’97--‘98. Right. Because my first post was Turkey and I got 11 months of Turkish, which was fun, and then off to Turkey. That was great because my very first boss ended up being my very last boss.

Q: One thing before we go off to Turkey. By the end of your Turkish language training, did you feel reasonably confident you could do your job in Turkish or with as much Turkish as you needed?

KUCHOVA: Probably the honest answer is “No.” They were shooting for a 2/2 [score]. Turks are immeasurably polite when you try to use their language, and they’ll just compliment you to pieces for the most rudimentary use. But to conduct the level that I needed to work, I’m far from proficient. The one good thing about studying, which stood out from all the other languages, I basically learned the Turkish language at FSI with my State Department colleagues. So, when we arrived at Post, there was basically zero baloney between agencies. And that is a stark contrast to my other experiences in some ways; some of the pettiness gets in the way of the mission. But I arrived with—I haven’t talked to him in years—an economic officer, Laird Trebor, who, if there’s any justice in the world, should be an ambassador. Brilliant, hardworking guy. I came in as a 03 mid-level, and I think he might have been a 03, but he earned it a longer way than I did. So, from my tenure with him, he was a partner and a colleague; a help; never a competitor.

All the people I learned Turkish with--we came over as a team. When FSI taught me Spanish, they didn’t do that. Spanish was Spanish. And I often thought, and I tried to make my view known, that you’re missing the opportunity to knit human relationships. And human relationships spell the difference between somebody just sitting at a desk or somebody performing as a member of a team. I think they missed the boat, but for Turkish, they did a great job of building a team. Go on to the country, and deliver excellence. Yeah, that was fun. I enjoyed it.

Q: Since you are about to begin your first tour, would you like to continue or would you like to break here and we’ll pick up at a subsequent tour? It’s entirely up to you.

KUCHOVA: I’m fine. Yeah.

Q: Then let me ask you. You arrived in Turkey in 1998. You’re assigned to Istanbul?

KUCHOVA: Ankara.

Q: Okay, you’re assigned to Ankara and are you the director of the section? Where do you fall?

KUCHOVA: I’m the deputy. There was, again, a brilliant officer. His name is John Breidenstine. He’s still in the foreign service. He’s in Thailand right now. He was a great guy and he was my first boss. I think that was his second time out as a senior commercial

officer. He's a younger guy than me. Of course, when you join at 45 everybody's almost younger!

Q: Yeah, mid-career.

KUCHOVA: But he was a great boss and he taught me the ropes. Yeah, because for training at commerce they would literally walk me down corridors. You've been in the commerce building?

Q: Oh yeah.

KUCHOVA: My wife often comments it's kind of like the hamster wheels, the people walking the endless corridors.

ROBBIN: They need to put in the wheels.

KUCHOVA: There are people that—I don't know if they probably retired, but they're still walking the halls, or probably cannot find their office. But they would walk me down a hallway and there'd be a door. They wouldn't even go in. They'd say, "This is where your so and so reports go. Okay?" Then, "This is where so and so goes." I had no idea what they were talking about. Shame on them! So, when I got to post, it was John that basically said, "Okay, here's what this means." He took the time to teach me the ropes, the whole bit. I have a great deal of respect for him. I worked well with him, and Turkey was just a blast! I would never have said it aloud, but I would have paid to do the job.

Q: Wow.

KUCHOVA: I had a great ambassador. Mark (Robert) Parris was his name. He was my first ambassador. He was an old Russian hand. He had set up the meeting with Reagan and Brezhnev. Or, no…

Q: Gorbachev?

KUCHOVA: Gorbachev! Yeah, thank you—Duh. Senior moment—Mark Parris was great and he also had this wonderful positive spirit. When I arrived, there was no division among Ag, Commerce, State. I was literally there for a matter of weeks and he said, "Okay, you're going to be my site officer for a trip to so and so." Holy Mackerel! He just threw you in the deep end! Mark and his wife were wonderful. He basically said, "Look, I got my lines to deliver and here's what we're going to do. You're going to help me out." And then afterwards, "You guys can do whatever you want. Nobody's got to babysit us. We're fine."

I thought they were all going to be like Mark Parris. Nah, he was a fabulous guy. He ended up being our climbing partner because we did a lot of backcountry climbing in Turkey. We climbed with Mark and his wife and a couple of others. Our RSO [Regional Security Officer] at the time is a good friend to this day. So, we did backcountry stuff all

over. So, I would be his site officer if we were going to go climbing because no one else wanted to do it. I said "Yeah, I'll do this!" That would be the site officer for him to climb Mount Ararat. Yeah. We were going to climb Ararat. So, we got preliminary permits. I got the guides. I got mules to carry stuff up. We had to rent some things. We did the pre-meetings, and then the night before we were going to leave, one of his security groups in two Suburbans headed out with all the climbing gear and the morning we were going to leave, Parris gets a call from the prime minister's office. They pulled the permit. Mark said, "Wait a minute! You just let the German ambassador climb!" They said, "Yeah, it's the German ambassador." He said, "We can't afford to have an American ambassador killed climbing a mountain in Turkey! He said, "Well, I want to climb Ararat." And they said, "The day you're no longer ambassador, I'll hand you your permit, which they did. And so, we were gone, but Parris got to climb Ararat. I didn't get to climb it with him, but we did everything to set it up, which was just a blast. It was a lot of fun.

Q: It is said that there are things on Ararat that make it a location that the Turks are very sensitive about having people climb; secret things. Did you run into that problem?

KUCHOVA: No, and we spent time in that region. I got to see Ararat when I was in Armenia, from the opposite side, which was very interesting. We also visited the ancient capital of Ani, which is right there. Of course, that's the bridge that Marco Polo crossed when coming back from China along the Silk Road. The Turkish military has quite a presence there. But back then a lot of it was also being driven by the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party], even though it was in decline. That was right before (Abdullah) Öcalan was captured in Kenya in the Greek ambassador's car, which was an embarrassment to Athens.

I've been to the base of the mountain and never encountered anything—Mark did climb it after all. There's been a lot of people out there, so I don't know about secrets. But I love conspiracy theories for entertainment! I don't know.

Q: The only reason I ask is because I served in Armenia and you can see Ararat on a clear day. Lots of people said, "The Turks never let people climb Ararat because they've got some kind of receptors up there, a secret base of some kind. I didn't know if it was true or not, but they seemed to believe it.

KUCHOVA: I saw no evidence of it. I do know that that region has been used by many people to keep an ear on others, but I don't know anything specific. When we've done travel out there—we were fortunate because the RSO was our buddy and we'd travel with him. But I do remember one of the pieces of advice that he had was—the Turkish military I think today has changed unfortunately with Erdogan, but the Turkish military then was extremely professional. You had people who were lifers and they took great care of them. Their general staff and their officer corps were exceptional people, well educated, multiple degrees, multiple languages, and even their NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] corps was incredible. You might have a master sergeant with an international degree from different countries in Europe or even the United States. The lesson we learned, if you're

ever out east, particularly at night, and you came across the checkpoints, and any of a group of teenagers with M-16s pointing at your window of the car, look for the leader with the blue embroidered square on his collar, because he's a lifer, regular army, usually a sergeant and above. He would have English. Because at that point when somebody's pointing a gun any Turkish [you may know] kind of leaves you quickly! But he would have English or other languages and he's the cool head among others.

When we were there, Turkey was a fabulous experience for us, both professionally and also from a personal point of view. Professionally, one of my memories that stands out would be when the Koç family was going to joint venture with Ford to manufacture the transit van in Turkey. The settlement was going to be at one of the Koç houses on the Bosporus in Istanbul. Rahmi (Mustafa) Koç, who was patriarch at the time, everything was theatrics with them. He was late, so the Ford executive vice president for European operations is waiting on the dais with his group. He's got this beautiful leather notebook and inside is their $500 million electronic transfer to be put into the deal. Rahmi Koç theatrically makes the late appearance as though he's just coming from another meeting, walks up and then I'm sure does not have his cashier's check book. So, what does he do? He reaches into his pocket and he pulls out a personal check. Again, it's all theatrics. He writes $500 million on his personal account and puts it in to start the company. I thought, "That's pretty awesome!"

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: So, you got a $1 billion start and one guy reached into his pocket to do the $500 million. I got to see things like that. My first project was the vessel tracking system along the Bosporus. That was fascinating. Lockheed Martin won the contract to improve the maritime traffic along the Bosporus. We did really great things. Very good things.

Back then, Germany basically allowed companies to pay extraordinary fees to foreign government officials. Before they changed their law, a German company had made a contribution to a Turkish vice minister who started to cloud the deal. So, the embassy was very active in terms of making sure that Lockheed actually got the contract that they won fair and square. The embassy team worked seamlessly to deliver the type of advocacy that we needed to deliver. In my experience, when embassies aren't working and realizing they are the same team, there are delays and sometimes those delays are costly. But yeah, Turkey was great, a very good experience.

Q: This is your first tour in the Foreign Commercial Service. How long was it supposed to be?

KUCHOVA: It was supposed to be two years, but after the second week we started advocating for an extension.

Q: Ah-ah!

KUCHOVA: We got three years in Turkey. If I could have gotten a fourth, we would have gladly stayed for a fourth. We enjoyed it. I worked with people—one of the ladies in my office—her father was a vice minister in Atatürk's first cabinet.

Q: Interesting. Wow.

KUCHOVA: I got to listen to stories. We were there for the 75th anniversary of the Turkish Republic, which was an exciting time to be there. I got to listen to Mural Hanim's stories about her father and (Mustafa Kemal) Atatürk. Atatürk, I think, was Islam-lite. He very much enjoyed raki, the liquor. In his house, which was outside the city and called the Pink House--where he would live and have his ministers and key vice ministers often come up for dinner. They would eat and drink and talk all night. Then he would send them to work and he'd go to sleep! Mural Hanim would tell us stories as a little girl, her mom would send her to the Pink House to walk her father home in the morning because he'd been drinking raki all night. So, he would come home, get cleaned up, and go to work.

Then another friend, who's still a friend, actually. I'd met him in the crab project when I was in Turkey for the first time. His grandfather was one of Atatürk's aides in the war. When they were in Gallipoli, Atatürk called for our friend Suha's grandfather, and told him, "You're leaving the field of battle and you're going to go to Germany and study agricultural engineering. Suha's grandfather was defiant, "I'm a warrior. I want to fight." And Atatürk told him, "We have won the war. We now must win the peace. And, we have to build the country. So, you go become an agricultural engineer and come back and help build." So, Suha's grandfather is credited with actually bringing Egyptian cotton to Turkey and then working to make the different strands for the very famous Turkish. Suha's surname became Tarman--bestowed by Atatürk. Atatürk was granting surnames because of course the tradition was that there were no surnames.

Q: Ah, yes!

KUCHOVA: He became Tarman, which means "grower" or "farmer." Yeah, it's simply fascinating stuff. So here Robbin and I are, just two average middle-class people from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, in Turkey experiencing these things. And, I'm getting paid for it!

Q: Yeah, I get it. And you have all the background of creating businesses, closing businesses, kind of recognizing where opportunities are.

KUCHOVA: The business part for me was easy and I loved it. I would basically be able to listen to somebody's problem and give them suggestions or counsel them and it wasn't my money. So not being my money takes the pressure off to be a little bit more creative, but I was always very aware of what it was like to be far from home and to have a serious business challenge. So, I got a good reputation for having really good solutions and good connections. I think commercial officers tend to overlook this. For us, the magic of being successful in commercial diplomacy is your relationship with your foreign service

nationals, who know the business community to an intimacy that an officer, whether it's two, three, or four years, will never reach the linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. I'm always going to be an outsider, but the FSNs [Foreign Service National] I worked with are not. When you have the right relationship and you make them part of the solution, you bring magic back to the company. You help them to be successful.

Successful in some cases is realizing that's not the market for them. Sometimes you say, "This is not for you. This is for you and this is how I think you should do it." That was a lesson I learned. I think sometimes some of the officers overlook it. There are no supermen or women that have all the answers. You've got to be collaborative, and I think that is only increased with today's complexity.

Q: Since this is the late '90s, did the advent of cell phones, internet make a difference in how you did your job?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, in one way. I think I got my very first cell phone when I was in Turkey. And our email actually got a big shot in the arm because it was really crude and rudimentary up to that point. We made a huge investment, because we have sometimes really good, enlightened leadership. Did I mention that sometimes we have really good leadership?!

Q: Yeah, well of course!

KUCHOVA: And other times we don't. But at that time, we had somebody who was making the right kind of investments that had flexibility and the ability to build upon it. So, our technology infrastructure rapidly improved.

Part of my education, too—Not only was Ambassador Parris instrumental in throwing me into the deep end; you know, John Breidenstine quickly sent me—we had partnership posts. Yerevan was one; Tbilisi was another; and Tashkent was another. So, I got sent there and that was fun. Again, I could be really helpful on the business side, but I was still a neophyte on the internal workings of Commercial Service. But I got to see those marketplaces from the inside out. I particularly remember arriving in Tashkent and thinking that for all intents and purposes I could be on the dark side of the moon. I had never felt so far from home. I was fascinated. I actually got to climb and do some backcountry stuff in Uzbekistan that was fabulous.

That was actually the first time I heard the word Taliban. There's the Ferghana Valley. It was well known for silk makers. As a matter of fact, I bought several silk scarves for my wife because the silk was absolutely gorgeous! They had just started to sell their silks into the fashion houses in Paris and to New York. Then the Taliban had moved in and basically stopped it rather brutally. Once we were hiking way outside of Tashkent, farther to the east, and an Uzbek army patrol came upon us and they said we had to leave. Of course, I didn't understand. It's a Turkic language, but there's enough of a difference, and it was at a speed that was way past what I could get. The Uzbeks I was with explained,

"We have to leave because on the other side of those hills is an encampment of Taliban." And I thought—

Q: Wow!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, so that was my first exposure. That was in '99, maybe 2000. So, it was quite an experience.

But we got to see things from a business point of view and also from a personal point of view. I've always been a history buff. To stand in Ephesus…incredible! We went to Mary's House up in the hills and we traveled to a lot of the Hellenistic and Roman ruins. We found a wonderful little peninsula that we fell in love with called Kaleüçağız, the harbor of three mouths. You can walk a rocky pathway from the tiny village to our "hotel" at the end of the peninsula, or the best way to get there was by boat. We parked our car next to a sarcophagus, which was the size of the car! The guy comes around the point in a little motorboat and we put our kayaks and stuff on and off we went. Very simple accommodations. Magnificent little village on terracing up the hill. I found out later that Rahmi Koç had a summer house there. If you walked up to the top of the hill there was—the same guy that had half a billion-dollar personal check—this very simple looking Turkish farmhouse, whitewashed with a wooden roof. Only on subsequent trips do we realize that the back of the house was very different from the front of the house. It went down with multiple levels, tennis court, pool, the stables, the whole bit. But in the front part it looked like this simple little place. So, we got to see wonderful things.

My wife was very involved with other spouses, male and female, in terms of delivering books to the villages. We were really deep into the culture and into reaching out. We got very much into the backcountry and off roading or overlanding with our RSO buddy, to the point that since then we've only owned Land Rovers. We would do these fantastic trips through Turkey and not really to tourist areas. We got to see things that most people never ever would get to see: the tea gardens along the Black Sea; mile after mile of unpaved roads and villages high in the mountains that when the snows come, are snowed in until spring. It was just seeing the land, the people and culture up close.

We got interesting lessons in how, at that time, the Turkish military was the great equalizer, because there was compulsory service. For the U.S., public education used to be the great equalizer. One can argue today whether that remains true. But the Turkish military used their army, their land force, to basically break down the barriers. You'd have the sons of wealthy people and the sons of sheepherder's side by side in breaking down the barriers.

At Embassy Ankara, we had an American who had left the U.S. military and had a special job at the embassy where he worked with Turkish authorities, but he had attended the Turkish military academy and he told a story that was fantastic. I don't know how it's changed with the present government, but every morning when the cadets would line up for roll call. They'd call the cadet numbers and the last number called was Atatürk's

number, and in unison the cadet corps said, "Present." This would occur every day. He said the hair on the back of your neck stood out because of Atatürk's presence.

And I think what you see in Turkey today—there's a British guy who's written a lot about Turkey. He's really considered the authority, and I can't think of his name. It might be a senior moment. The last article I read of his he talked about the Islamist government as being the result of the pendulum's swing. Atatürk went so far, now you got the pendulum swinging back. I keep waiting for the first evidence of the pendulum starting to swing back more towards the center, and I don't see it yet. They purged the military of the secular officers. People that I worked with are either dead, in prison, or left Turkey for their own safety. That's unfortunate, really unfortunate.

Q: You mentioned that from Ankara you also traveled to Tashkent and Armenia. I worked in Armenia from 1999 to 2001. I'm just curious, did you undertake any activities?

KUCHOVA: I can't think of the name of the woman who was the DCM who had been a stockbroker.

Q: It would have been Pat Harris.

KUCHOVA: Okay. The DCR was charming. Yeah, I was there a couple of times. We could have crossed paths.

Q: I was just curious if you worked on any projects there?

KUCHOVA: I was there for a meeting of regional chambers of commerce. I did more work in Tbilisi with some U.S. companies that were doing some work on telecom with the government. In Tashkent a lot of it was trying to help U.S. companies untangle themselves from their Uzbek business and depart because you just could not win. So, they were looking for ways of leaving. It's funny because I often wonder if USIS [United States Information Service] had had more horsepower and more support, how would the CIS have changed? In some ways I think we left the field before it was done. I don't think we did enough to build a civil society.

Q: Oh, I see.

KUCHOVA: In some cases, I believe we left others to fill that void. I think USIS, lovingly called "Useless", but USIS would have been—if their mission had received the type of support that it should have received—there's that powerful public diplomacy tool--it's really hard to quantify but you can really see it when it's not there.

Q: Right.

KUCHOVA: Actually, it's funny, in Panama I met a Russian woman who went to law school in the United States and she ended up living with an ex-KGB boyfriend in Panama. Once over coffee she told me how the West lost Russia. She said, "You left too

soon. You left a vacuum. Nature abhors a vacuum and it was filled by the wrong kind of people." That conversation really to this day haunts me. What could have been done better? Anyway, that was my experience.

Q: While you were in Turkey, were there large trade shows that you got involved in?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, there were some, and of course part of the Commercial Service heritage is for large trade shows. But in Turkey you were way more successful in making a change for U.S. companies by being more strategic. Eventually we ended up utilizing thought leadership strategies. But at the time we were looking [at] how do you put companies, for example, in the telecommunications sector would be a great one, or in healthcare technologies--how do you put them in the right arena for them not to simply knock on one door to make a sale, but how do you get to the executives who are making decisions about what is my system or network look like five, ten, fifteen years down the line? So, it's basically going after—well you get to a trade show and it's kind of retail. How do you get in front of the thinking process to get your technologies into the planning? Because by the time you have a trade show the engineers and the product planners know what the system is going to look like. The hospital system says, "We're going to go with this German equipment because we've done this research over the last three years." I want the U.S. companies in the conversation four years prior, to influence that purchase decision.

In many ways, what you're probably used to from public diplomacy--if you do commercial diplomacy the right way--it's very similar. You've got to get in front of the thought process to have your idea and your approach part of the consideration so that as the project, program, or business matures, the seeds that you planted are part of the product that they want to sell or to reap. That was the beginning of a change for us, because Turkey was easier to get in front of projects.

Q: What about the influence of Turkish interests in joining the EU or the changes that were going on while you were there with regard to the EU? Did that have any major…

KUCHOVA: Yeah, that's a really interesting point. President Clinton worked very hard to make Turkey's accession successful. And, when it was very apparent it wasn't going to be successful, there was a notable change in the business climate in Turkey.

Senator Lugar was one of my very first exposures to a CODEL [Congressional Delegation]. It was in the summer so I became his site officer for the business community. He arrived, and I thought all CODELs were like this. Boy, was I surprised, but that's another whole story. He arrived with one aide. One aide! He arrived commercial and he took a taxi from the airport. He basically told Ambassador Mark Parris, "No, no I'm great. I'm taxiing in. No problem. See you in the morning." He wanted no reception and from me, what he wanted was, "I want a business lunch," which he didn't convey to me directly. His people had conveyed his wishes to me, "We want a business lunch. They wanted four or five Turks, they had to be Turkish citizens, and they had to speak English because he wanted to hear the reaction, not through a translator.

They can't work for a U.S. company. Lugar preferred Turkish companies or non-U.S. multinationals." He wanted to have a long leisurely lunch and ask them about their view towards the EU.

Lugar arrived—again, this is the first time I've met him—we have the lunch, and these guys arrived—they're all men—and the conversation goes on and I was impressed by Lugar's questioning, and I was impressed by his follow-up questioning. Clearly, he listened to what they said, and I was also impressed that while he was talking with his one aide, who was taking shorthand notes, Lugar had nothing, no pen or pencil, in front of him. In the conversation, what was very apparent was that a couple of them were the sons of the founder of the company. Others were employees of multinationals. Where the older chief executive officer had been counting on being in the EU [European Union], these guys realized it's not going to happen. Their reactions were—"you know what? I'm a little pissed but it's okay because I still can sell my products and move my products duty free. You know what? I don't need the EU." You could see the resentment building.

I think in many ways it also bothers me that Turkey was one of the original investors in the ECC [European Economic Community]. They put in their equal share of money. I think if the EU had basically said, "Okay Turkey, here's the 1, 2, 3 or whatever points, and you've got to meet them," I think at the time Turkey would meet them. When they kept moving the goal line, it changed and also gave rise to the Islamist party. Of course, we were complicit because the United States and the EU basically told the secular parties in Turkey, which were a mess because they're all cult parties around one personality; they basically said, "You guys need to give a voice to the Islamist party." Of course, their reaction was, "Are you crazy? They don't want a Western-oriented democracy." Through this disconnect, I watched the rise of the Islamist party.

Turkish politics is like a ping pong game. The ball rapidly goes from one side of the net to the other. (Sound of a ping pong ball going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.) When we were doing backcountry trips, and every place we would travel right before one of the elections, every man, woman, and child would give us this. They held their hands, let me get in front of the camera, like this, and that was the sign for the Gray Wolves, which was a rightwing nationalist party. So, I'd be back in country team and I would say, "This is what we're seeing in the countryside." And, I had a couple political guys say, "Nah, you're the commercial guy. They don't stand a chance." But they won. They won because people were dissatisfied with the previous government.

The Islamist party can be—humorously—similar to the worst of U.S. Chicago politics. As an example, uneducated people moving from the country into the city are greeted and welcomed by the Islamist party. "You need a place to live? You can move into one of our apartment buildings and we're going to give you subsidized rent. Your kids are going to go to our daycare. Oh, your wife needs a job? We can do this. You need a job? Oh, we need some people in the municipality to do this." It was womb to tomb. "We only ask one thing of you. You need to vote."

You could see this increasing divide. We were there during the earthquake, and it was very apparent the cultural divide between rural and city. As companies started to send executives to respond to the emergency, IBM set up a series of these databases to collect names of survivors to connect families again. Somebody could walk into an emergency center and say, "My surname is this, and my family lived in so and so and it's gone!" It's in the Bosporus! It's gone. IBM set up this whole system to put names in and to match. "Oh, your family's okay. They're over here." Or, "We don't have any information yet."

There was a Turkish woman running it, and she was brilliant. They wanted to send her across the Bosporus to the Asia side where there was damage. She got to the Asia side and the men wouldn't talk to her.

Q: Wow.

KUCHOVA: It's like, Wow! You could see the beginning cultural change that empowered the Islamist movement in Turkey, unfortunately.

Q: Now the other thing that the Turks were doing since the fall of the Soviet Union was investing and trying to open more business in Central Asia. Did you observe that? Was that in any way part of what you were doing?

KUCHOVA: We were very interested in what the Turkish businesses were doing, and they were very successful. The larger companies were very, very successful. We watched that, and for a while we actually thought, "Could we piggy back on the success of the Turkish companies moving into the CIS for U.S. companies who were part of the supply chain?" In some cases, we were, but the Turks also saw this as an opportunity to grow their own internal capacity—I get that, and they did a pretty good job with it. They were very successful. I'm trying to think of the name—Migros Grocery Stores—where we shopped. I was stunned when on my first visit to Tashkent to see a Migros. Wow, this is amazing! Really amazing. Yeah, they did a good job. I mean they're really great traders. That whole region, everyone's like, "Let's make a deal. We'll do this, and you can do that, and let's do this together." It was fascinating to watch.

Q: The last I have is, from the point of view of the embassy, from an overall strategic view, were there concerns the embassy had about the general direction of Turkey's commercial activities? It could be Blue Stream, could be connections with Russia, or connections with China, you know this sort of thing.

KUCHOVA: When I left and when I was there, I think in many ways from a commercial point of view, it was a great era. U.S. companies were doing very well in civilian markets and in military markets as well. From military, a lot of electronics, air-- they were building the F-16 that had been a technology transfer. There were Turkish businesses building—I can't think of the name now—it was building an armored personnel carrier. That was originally a U.S. investment and the Turks had bought them out. For the Turkish business it was very much a golden era. For U.S. businesses--we were doing rather well. Even down to consumer products, we were doing well.

Blue Stream, as a matter of fact the gentleman I mentioned, Laird Treiber, was very involved in the pipeline to bring the oil out to Ceyhan. He was very involved in that and I think he did a fabulous job in terms of marshaling all the things that he was asked to deliver. We were very much in favor of that because that would have given some economic independence to the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]. It would have been good for Turkey. For us it was win-win. Part of it also goes back to FSI [Foreign Service Institute] that there was always a careful, measured view of what was the embassy's goals. In some ways it was like a mosaic. There was a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and you didn't want to overdo it. No one stopped us on commercial advocacy, but there were probably certain times where it would have been good for a non-U.S. business to have won something or done something. But no one stopped us.

Q: Now, typically you in the Foreign Commercial Service don't get involved with issues related to export controls or strategic controls of…

KUCHOVA: We do on optics.

Q: Ah, is that so? That's interesting.

KUCHOVA: Actually, they should redo that whole thing, but that's another whole story. We do like thermal imagery because there's a commercial application. For example, they'll use thermal imagery to find electrical leaks in a building or a system, so companies that are involved in that will buy that technology. We would actually do the visit to the purchaser and the interview, and we found things that were really wrong. In one case one of our foreign service nationals called on a business. It was buying thermal imagery that advertised itself for big industrial uses like in the HVAC, huge power plants. She arrived and it was in an apartment, and that set off the first warning bell. The two men she interviewed said, "Yeah," and then said, "Nah, this and that—they were all over the board." So, she departed and then we basically--we made our report. They never went through with the sale. We turned it over to others, and by the time they did anything, the people in the apartment were gone.

Likely, some group was looking for thermal imagery that should never have thermal imagery. They basically knew enough to game the system, but we caught onto them. The joke was, we do the non-lethal stuff. But a lot of it goes back to the commercial application.

Q: Okay. So that's pretty much the only case that stood out in your mind, because sometimes this can become a major bilateral issue.

KUCHOVA: It can, and during my time it never did and it basically was handled. We made our report back to our headquarters. Our headquarters then relayed it. We even got our RSO shop involved, because what we found was that when it didn't feel right. The day we gave our report back to our headquarters—probably even before—our RSO and

I—I don't remember now, but I probably told econ as well, because we were in my mind seamless.

There were other places I served where they wouldn't even want to hear about something like this, because they viewed us, and sometimes my colleagues viewed them, as competitors. If there was ever one thing that someone could do to improve the efficacy of foreign service, it would be to squash whatever remnants of internal competition---remind everyone that when you're at post, everybody's wearing the same jersey.

Q: I agree. Now, I'm finished with the questions that I have for you. But if you have other recollections or anecdotes that you want to share, there's time.

KUCHOVA: You know, there's one that stands out to me. I didn't do this trip, but John Breidenstine, my first boss, went with Mark Parris on a trip that, some of it was commercial, but a lot of it was from public affairs; a lot of it was exploring religious tolerance. They visited a monastery in the far east of Turkey where the monks still speak Aramaic. It just fascinates me. In the monastery, there was a U.S. guy and he had been a merchant mariner. He left the ship somewhere in Europe, searching for something, didn't know what. Whatever it was, he ended up at the gates of this monastery in the far east of Turkey and had been there for 40 years! When he was speaking to Mark Parris and John Breidenstine, it was some of the first English he had spoken in decades. I remember that story because there's a really good book by William Dalrymple called *From the Holy Mountain*. I don't know if you've ever read it.

Q: No.

KUCHOVA: Dalrymple is a Brit and he writes about a trip that he makes from Jerusalem to Istanbul that mirrors a trip that two monks made at the fall of Constantinople, from Jerusalem to then Constantinople. Along the way he stops at these different monasteries, many of which still are in existence, which just excites me!

Then the other one, too, which has a religious connotation because I guess the archeological aspect fascinates me. When we were in what would have been ancient Antioch, we came across a small Christian church. The patriarch of the church came out and spoke to us and he said, "We have been here since Peter arrived and drew a line in the sand." He showed us where there was a rock face that was where some of the first Christian masses were celebrated. That was fascinating. Then when I also reflect back on Dalrymple's book, Christianity has waned so far in Turkey.

On a more recent trip we spent a Thanksgiving with Ambassador Bruce Oreck who was my boss in Helsinki. He's become a good friend. We spent Thanksgiving in Istanbul, and we went to the marketplace.

Q: The souk?

ROBBIN: The bazaar.

KUCHOVA: The bazaar. Robbin wanted to replace a wedding ring that she lost, and we ended up finding what we were looking for, plus we ended up finding one of the very few Turkish Christians who was a merchant in the bazaar. This merchant was extremely excited because we were in Istanbul when the Pope was visiting and we found his enthusiasm very moving. I found that entire experience fascinating. I think in some ways—in Turkey, now the Blue Mosque is no longer a museum. Imagine! It's been converted to a working Jameh, a mosque. It's so fascinating to see Turkey move further away from its secular foundations. Too bad. Friends of ours who are Turks—we don't like to mention this in email or WhatsApp with them because we assume that certain messages are surveilled—they're very much secularists. But you see the country continuing to move in a way—I'm not a Turk—but I would like them to not to move in the direction they're moving. But anyway, that's not for us.

First of all, when we arrived, you arrive on the airplane in the morning and I'm looking out the window as we descend into Ankara and everything was brown.

Q: Ah yes, of course, because they burn brown coal.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, just brown, brown, brown. We were there a whole year before we ever saw a whole lot of green.

But one last thing is the day we left post, which was odd. My first post into the unknown--and it was an all-new experience--even PCSing [Permanent Change of Station] out was a new experience. We're at the airport early in the morning for our departure and my boss, John Breidenstine, showed up, which was totally unexpected, to thank us and to wish us a good trip and to say that our paths will cross again. And they did!

Q: Interesting. So, this is a good place to break. All right. What I'll do now is pause the recording
We're resuming our interview with Nicholas Kuchova as he begins a new tour. Nicholas, which tour and year is this?

KUCHOVA: This would be—check to make sure I get that right—beginning January 2002 through May 2006. That would be my second tour, because I had spent time at FSI then learning Spanish.

Q: Okay, great. So now you arrive in mid-year; well Spring, or late Winter.

KUCHOVA: Yeah. It was interesting, because you go from the first tour where everything is a blur, and everything is new and you become like a semi-seasoned old hand on your second tour. It was very interesting because when we arrived at the airport in Madrid no one picked us up.

Q: One second. When you arrived you were with your wife and did you have kids at this point?

KUCHOVA: No, it's just the two of us. We arrived and there was nobody there.

Q: Yeah, that's never a good sign.

KUCHOVA: Never a good sign, which was very different from our arrival in Turkey. I've got to tell you just this one aside, because I'm jumping back to Turkey for a minute. We're on the airplane and we arrive in Ankara, the Atatürk Airport. I looked by the side of the airplane and there is a military band and a red carpet rolling out to the airplane. My first thought is, "Oh my gosh! I hope in the world this has nothing to do with me! How can it possibly?" To my great relief there was some dignitary up in business class, and I did everything but kiss the ground when I arrived.

Q: I can easily understand.

KUCHOVA: I contrast that with when we arrive in Madrid and there's nobody. Nobody! So, we make our way from the airport to a temporary hotel, and we got met at the hotel, which was nice. They had something going on, so it was fine. We settled into our hotel because the house where we were going to be placed wasn't ready. Normally they would look at a couple with no children and want to put you in an apartment. We always insisted on a house because we've got bicycles and kayaks. So, please don't put us in an apartment because we want to go do things. The house wasn't ready and off we went to a hotel. That was very interesting. At least we had the instructions of where to go for the hotel, and so it began.

When I arrived, I was still [ranked] 03 and I was going to be the deputy. It's a pretty active section in Madrid. At the time there were two offices, one in Madrid and one in Barcelona.

Q: In Madrid, is the Commercial Office co-located with the embassy or were you in a separate building?

KUCHOVA: We had a spectacular office offsite. Because we'd visit with clients, with business people, we had this spectacular office with floor to ceiling glass. It was really quite the thing; almost show-biz looking. That all changed after the Madrid bombings, and the landlord wanted us out. They didn't want anything to do with the American embassy because they didn't want a big bull's eye on their property. But for a period of time, we were like in show biz. It was spectacular!

Spain was a really good tour. Because it was a golden period again for U.S. companies, companies did exceptionally well at the time that Spain was very active in the mobile industry. There's a huge mobile industry exhibition that happens every year in Spain, so U.S. companies were there providing all kinds of interesting things. So, it was a great time to be there.

We were very much at a crossroads. We had Secretary Powell multiple times on his way into the Middle East, and that was exciting. He's actually my favorite secretary. He wasn't even my secretary, but once you're at post, he's yours. He was engaging. He would do "meet and greets" and one time all the families were there and he spent time saying what he was going to do and why he was in Madrid. He was meeting with Prime Minister (Mariano) Rajoy (Brey) on his way forward. Anyway, a little baby was crying, so Powell walked over without saying a word, lifted the baby from the mom's arms, held the baby in his arms with the kind of parental expertise—little pat to the butt—the baby stopped crying, and he handed the baby back. He never missed a beat; it was just seamless!

Then the other thing he did which was really cool, in my office there is a foreign service national, Carlos, who was a huge fan of Secretary Powell's and had all his books. The DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] at the time had worked for Powell. The DCM was Bob Manzanares, I don't know if you know him from your travels?

Q: No, but go right ahead.

KUCHOVA: Great guy. So, Carlos had asked Bob when the secretary was in, could he get the secretary to sign his book? We get a call and it's Bob's OMS [Office Management Specialist], and she says, "Hey, can you send Carlos over to the front office?" Carlos goes over and it's just Bob, the DCM, and Secretary Powell. The secretary stands up, shakes his hand, and says to Carlos, "Look, I understand you're a big fan of one of my books. You wanted me to sign it. I never sign paperback books." He pauses, reaches into his briefcase, pulls out a hardcover copy—I don't know if it was the same book, or not—signs it, and gives it to Carlos. Carlos, who was this wonderful, gregarious, never-at-a-loss-for-words guy, was speechless, simply speechless.

Q: That's an amazing thing.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, and Powell was so gracious with him. We had to basically back Carlos out of the office because he's just stammering and at a loss for words. That was typical of his interaction, and it was just gracious; it was classy. I remember once Powell had talked about how when he was with DOD [Department of Defense], he would send men and women out into places that were dangerous, but they were armed. When he was secretary of state, he found himself sending out men and women and their families into dangerous places, and they were unarmed. You had this distinct feeling that he really had your back; he really cared; he really understood. He was an exceptional leader.

Q: Yeah. There are so many wonderful stories about him as secretary. I don't mean to take up your air time. I sat in on a few meetings with him when he was chairman of the joint chiefs and same thing. He ran a meeting beautifully; everything came out the way he wanted it to, and you still left feeling good.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, he was really a leader.

My time in Madrid was great. From a business point of view, we were very active. Commercial service is either in financial, feast, or famine stages; there's no middle ground. Either we have more than adequate funding and there's this silly rush to burn it, or inadequate, and we were inadequate at the time. I mean we ended up closing our Barcelona office—our Barcelona post as one should say—which from a strategic perspective was a colossal mistake, a real shortcoming. [It was] short-term thinking because Catalonia is in many ways the business engine for Spain. So, we did that—tried to find coverage. We had good cooperation from—I think there was one econ officer sitting in Barcelona, and they tried very hard, but it's not the same thing. If you're not in the business community talking to the businesses, the chambers, and all the actors and the players, you're just not a player. So, it was a big commercial service mistake.

Q: As deputy, since we're just starting your tour, did you work on an understanding with your boss about which sectors or particular areas you were going to cover?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, actually there was kind of a distinct difference, and some of it is cultural. In Turkey, one would give an assignment and then the foreign service nationals would dutifully follow through. In Spain, you know Western Europe, it's a little bit different. We had foreign service nationals who were specifically covering a basket of sectors, and hopefully they were related. But we did something a little bit different, which ended up being quite significant for me later on in my career. We looked at the sectors and where we saw intersections—I don't want to say forced—we basically empowered the foreign service nationals to work together collaboratively, which was a very powerful outcome from our clients' perspective. It created confusion entirely from Washington's point of view because of metrics. I forget who the famous guy who said, "Success has many fathers, and failure is a bastard." But we had a distinct change in processes. I basically oversaw all of the FSNs. I actually did it a lot. It was a great learning experience. I had the admin and the finance for the two offices and then overseeing the Foreign Service Nationals and their interactions with clients. I would kind of jump from thing to thing, and to another topic. That was an interesting learning experience because bad metrics drives bad behavior. When you have metrics—I don't want to say anything ill against someone who's an insurance salesperson, but you know, "What did you sell today? What did you sell today?" It became ingrained in me because remember I came to this as a mid-level. I came from a business point of view, and I came to this from a client perspective where I actually used the services. I looked at it like, "What can we really do to improve or to help a company in need?" I was really anxious to break down those barriers where somebody says, "Gee, I just handle telecom. I don't do networking." Well, you know what? Yeah, you do. The guy or the lady in the office next to you who's doing networking, the two of you need to work together because you've got client universes that interact. The smarter you are about that interaction, the better service you can give the client.

That was the first vestige of what eventually became a regionalization across Europe. It really started in Spain for me and I had a supportive boss who encouraged this. Then from a country point of view, what we found again was bad metrics drives bad behavior.

We would find where they would evaluate an office in a country silo. For some things that makes perfect sense, but it does not make sense for business. I'm a competitive person. Let's say a company has a product that they're actually shipping, not an intellectual product, but some kind of a product and they're shipping in containers. So unchecked, we would have—Commercial Service Spain would be competing to provide that company's solution. "We're going to help you import that stuff into Europe through Spain," The Netherlands would say. Well, the Netherlands would do it, and everybody wanted a piece of it. If you stop and look, we were actually competing against ourselves to the detriment of the U.S. company. If you look at regionalization more closely, regionalization should be the goal--somebody comes to a foreign service national trade specialist sitting in Madrid and they say, "I've got these products and we're using it in blah blah, and it comes in 40-foot containers." The first thing you should think of is the intermodal connections There isn't a port in Spain that makes sense. Why don't we look at Rotterdam? Why don't we look at Hamburg? Why don't we look where you've got a large port with the intermodal infrastructure to efficiently move product?

But going back to the bad metrics drives bad behavior: if you did that in the old metrics and you helped the company, which is what you're supposed to do, and they end up coming in through the Netherlands, you've got nothing. You're not even, "Hey, thanks" You got nothing in the metric. We worked very hard to change that. And that was very hard to do because the people that looked at the metrics, when it's a credit and a debit, it's really easy. Well, it's not really easy, because if I'm doing artificial intelligence, I can come in and I can help a network overcome a network challenge. And the AI basically is going to help reroute this in the blink of an eye, faster than a human can do it. Maybe the place to come in might be—Spain made sense because of the strengths in telecom, or perhaps the Nordics, because of their strong strengths in networking.

So, that was the first enjoyable set of combat initiatives that I had with headquarters, kind of pushing back and challenging them. We need to look at this differently. We need to be smarter, and the answer was, "We've always done it this way."

Well, that's not a really good answer because business is a lot more complex than, "Where did you do the business?" And the other thing is, the metrics that were in play and I think have actually come back through the current (Trump) regime The metrics that are in play basically overlooked the fact that U.S. companies don't come to Europe and say, "I want to do business in Spain, I want to do business in Germany, I want to do business in France." They want to do business in the EU because they can move their material, their people, and their money in a borderless way. We should be doing more things to give them a wider market, because actually the market size is larger than ours, if you play the game right.

That was the first vestige, and that actually was also the opportunity that started to germinate where we looked at what ended up being—when I got to the end of my career—these thought-leadership engagements. Like in Smart Cities, or Smart Ports, how do you pull together the clusters of the decision-makers to be in front of the planning, to

be the germ of the plan, rather than the add-on or catch-up at the end where everything is thought through? Spain was a real learning ground for me.

Q: I've interviewed a number of FCS [Foreign Commercial Service] officers. Each one is a bit different, in part because of what's available to sell or what kind of deals you can help broker, depending on the country. Where were the successes that you found and how did you find them?

KUCHOVA: First of all, we do pretty well in a lot of consumer products. We do pretty good, and a lot of those are with the pretty large companies. They don't really need us too much. Apple's a great one, thank you very much; Google, thank you very much. We helped Google a lot later on with privacy issues, but at the time you didn't need to do anything with them. Where the opportunities really were and they were starting to shape up really was beyond the product and more. Where is the United States really super competitive? It is in areas of AI; we actually have a lead; we've come close to squandering it. We've got to lead in AI and that is a tremendous competitive step for us globally. We had a lot of successes with that and in telecom and in networking, in smart manufacturing, you know, processes. In some cases, you don't end up delivering a series of 40-foot containers. You have ended up delivering a process, a software process. That was really fascinating.

We also did rather well with the Spanish military at the time. Back then, that was (Mariano) Rajoy and that lasted right up until the bombings in Madrid on the train because the bombings were quite strategic. The election was on a weekend and the bombings happened right before the election. It basically turned the population away and so Rajoy's conservatives lost; the liberals came in (José Luis Rodríguez) Zapatero came in, and there was then a distinct change in the business climate, because we were the villain.

Q: Now take a moment to describe that situation. I think a lot of people forget that tragedy in Spain, because so many people refocused on Afghanistan and other places.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, Spain was very active in terms of the coalition, and then with the change in government it went the other way. But from a personal point of view, I tended to go to the office very early, and we had two wonderful security guards at our office. In terms of football/soccer, one was a Madrid fan and one was a Barcelona fan, so that if there was ever a game, under their uniforms they had their team's jersey. The three of us had coffee every single morning. And that fateful morning, because the bombings were early in the morning with the trains coming in early, on their radios we got the first indication that something happened. They were getting things over their security company's radio. And so, the first we heard of it that a bomb went off at Atocha train station in Madrid. We knew which of our employees were commuting in, and a lot of them came by train, so we touched base with Post 1, told them what we were doing, and they were also getting information.

Then we turned around and we telephoned anybody that we thought was commuting. The message was really easy, “If you’re on a train or a bus, get off at the next stop. Then call”. The startled replies were, “Well, why get off? I gotta move”. We got a couple people off of buses. Coincidentally, there was an American guy married to a Spanish woman. He was retired from the air force and his Spanish wife had followed him all over the world for his air force career. When they retired, she said, “I want to go home”. So, they went to Spain. He was actually working in our post office, and he used to ride the one train that got hit. That morning, their high school-aged son was late. Because he used to drop his kid off and then go park and then go in on the train. The son was late so he had to drive his son to school. He’s cursing the whole way, “You lazy; you got to get up; you got to do this, you got to do that”. So, he misses the train. Now, he can’t say whether he would have been in the car or whatever, but he would have been—that was his train coming in. I forget which community it was, but that would have been his train. So, he drives to work and he arrives and he’s having his coffee, because coffee’s very important in Spain, and all of a sudden this happens. Man, it hit him like a ton of bricks. We were very lucky; we did not lose anybody, but it was pretty significant.

Of course, politically, Spain turned on a dime, and where we were the good guys, we became the bad guys. Our landlord wanted us out; they wanted to break the lease. People that had rented houses to the embassy-- they didn’t want to rent houses to the embassy. They didn’t want to be a target because if you go back in the beginning stages with Al Qaeda, part of their statement was to reclaim the lands of Islam, and well that includes Andalusia. The Spaniards were really shaken by this. Their response to this catastrophic hit was basically to capitulate. They went the other way. It was quite something.

It changed our relationships with the military. It changed our relationships with a lot of the mid-size businesses; not the larger businesses because they look further down the line. But it was profound, it was really profound.

Our section, we then were in kind of an emergency, hunker-down perspective. All the officers had gotten rid of the CD [Corps Diplomatic] plates, and went for plates that were civilian looking. Some people had to change their housing. We lost our offices. I spent weeks and weeks hunting around for an office. Ended up going with office space in a really large international bank because they’re used to being disliked. Who doesn’t hate a banker? So, we moved there—we had to move—and it was just a mess. It was quite disruptive, and it changed the commercial environment quite a bit.

Q: How far along in your stay there were the bombings?

KUCHOVA: I’ve got to look; I have a problem with dates. It was March 11. I’d have to actually google it. I could google it in two seconds. I have the right day, which will help somebody.

Q: The only reason I’m asking is because once this sort of watershed occurs, I’m quite curious about how in terms of examples or specifics, your consular—

KUCHOVA: 2004.

Q: 2004, so it's later in your time there?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, I had a little bit more than half. It had a profound [impact] I think on every section because there was a lot of paranoia. Remember a couple of the planning meetings for September 11 occurred in Spain. You know…

Q: Wow, I'd forgotten!

KUCHOVA: Yeah. Then Spain got defensive in one way and in the other way paranoid because with the EU is the movement of people. You knew that sometimes the authorities didn't really know who was there, and that was a problem. I'm sure for a couple of offices and agencies this was driving them crazy. Who's in town? Who's in Spain? Yeah, it was tough.

I think from a business perspective, we recovered. I think smaller U.S. companies probably were impacted more because there were smaller transactions, shorter term relationships, but the bigger companies…Then a lot of the really big ones that had offices there, like IBM had a huge office there, a lot of research, big investment. McKenzie's got an office. I mean all the really big guys had a lot of research there. We also have a huge NASA presence in Spain.

Q: I did not know that.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, which is fascinating. Outside of Madrid there's a huge complex with huge antennas like the kind you would use for radio astronomy. It's one of the control centers for manned space flights where they actually hand over control, when the spacecraft is orbiting. I think that facility is also active for deep space unmanned missions as well. That was incredible. We had a NASA rep there. He was so bright it was frightening. So those relationships didn't get hit. It was more the superficial relationships that got hit. Relationships that were deeper took a hit but they weren't heavily damaged. But it was quite an event.

Up to that point our ambassador was very—he's an interesting character. He was a billionaire [and] one of the early signers to Bill Gates' pledge to give away his money. When he went to school before becoming an ambassador, nobody told him that he couldn't bring a car, so he bought the biggest Mercedes Benz that money can buy and he had it delivered. The RSO went nuts. The ambassador's name was George Argyros, a self-made billionaire. You've got to give him credit. He began by bagging groceries, and now, I don't know if he's still around or not, but he ended up being the single largest landowner in Orange County, California. He had large rental apartment complexes and he was one of the huge players of these big mega malls across the United States.

Anyway, he came to post, took no salary. He drove the GSO [General Service Officer] guys crazy because the residence was an old former USIS library made into a residence.

The electrical system was really inadequate, so the fuses would pop, and this would pop. He didn't like the ceilings and the bathrooms, the pipes used to clog. He was also in construction. He built malls and apartments. Remember--the single largest landowner and rental complex owner in California, at least at the time. So, he brought over his construction engineers and the GSO people went nuts. "You can't do this! It belongs to the people!" His answer was, "Listen, do you think I'm taking the improvements when I leave? They stay! I'm paying for it!" He had them redo the entire electrical system, replumb the residence. He brought in all these designers, very tastefully done. He paid for all of his representation. He took no money.

Once there was a luncheon with Fulbright. He listened and he was very moved and he called his assistant—he brought his own assistant—he got his checkbook and he wrote a $50,000 check and he gave it to the public affairs counselor. They said, "Do you want to do a press release? Argyros said, "No, no! You guys are doing great work here! I don't want any publicity."

We'd be at country team and we'd say, "We're going to be in Seville next month and we're meeting with the chamber, and there's the company we're going to meet with--a big Spanish company called Abengoa, which is in alternative energy. We're meeting with their principals." And Argyros goes, "I would love to go!" "Well sir, if you go it changes everything…then we've got to call the governor, the mayor." "Well, we could take my airplane." "Okay, you can go!"

So, he would, and he would pay for everything. We would go to the airport, get on his Gulfstream, and take off. He'd get up and walk around and ask each of the foreign service nationals, "Would you like a Coke, some peanuts, what can I get you?" We arrived. At times we would be in the hotel that we could afford, and he was at some 4- or 5-star. "Why are you guys over there?" "This hotel is for us," (we'd say)! "Come on over here! I'm not going to go there for dinner. You guys are coming with me." He was very generous, very giving.

He was a McDonald's fan, so before and after a trip he would often stop at McDonald's. He never did the drive through because of all the cars in his entourage, so he would walk in. He would have all of his guys on one side. And when it got too confusing who was a customer and who was his team, he would just tell them, "I got everybody," and he paid for it. Just as generous as anyone could ever be. Great guy.

Argyros was great, he was smart. We had daily press meeting that the public affairs counselor set up. Every morning the section heads would come together and we would talk about things in the news from our section's perspective. The PA guy—I can't remember his name, but he was brilliant—he was very inclusive and wanted every section there. And, he wanted— "don't share stuff that's in the Spanish newspaper because the ambassador is already getting that. Give me something relevant but not in the daily press brief. And, if you don't have anything that's really interesting, don't feel obligated". And for our section, I felt a lot of pressure because if I talked about companies, IBM's doing this, or so and so's doing that, and there is this investment here--

Argyros knew all of the CEOs. He was on the board for a lot of companies. Oh, he'd say, "Oh, Paul's doing that? That's interesting! Let me give him a call."

Then the last George Argyros story. He brought his airplane crew, his two pilots, and he brought a young lady as his assistant. And they all called him George. They'd worked for him for years. The more formal State people said, "You've got to call him ambassador!" And they go, "I've worked for the guy for 15 years! It's George!" So, the last day when Argyros left, a few of us went to the airport with him. His pilot-- they finally got him to call him ambassador, and the last day he left we drove to the airport. The Gulfstream was ready, it was all looking great. We drive up, and the pilot comes off and he goes, "Where to, George?" Transitioned! And Argyros just said, "Bobby, take me home," and off they went. It was quite a time with him.

Argyros' replacement wasn't as outgoing or as inclusive and it had a change. During Argyros' time, which was great for us, he was very inclusive in terms of guest lists. We actually got to experiment with him. If he had somebody visiting him who was well-known, he would actually say, "Look I got so and so coming. We're going to go fishing, or whatever, do you want to do a coffee with him or her?" So, we'd have all these business executives and we'd go to our appropriate contacts and say, "Hey, how would you like to have coffee with the CEO of Cisco, or whatever." And they'd say, "Yeah, that'd be great!" Argyros used his contacts and pushed them out to every section. So, from that point of view, he was really a special guy.

My wife reminds me when we first arrived at post, the "meet and greet" to meet the ambassador. The people that were right before us on the agenda were Tom Cruise and Penelope Cruz because they were an item then. So, on the agenda it was Cruise and Cruz and then next it was Kuchova and Kuchova! Hardly the same level of excitement! Argyros knew Tom Cruise. Argyros knew all these people and he was never hesitant to leverage his relationships. We took a series of really high-end Spanish executives to San Francisco for meetings about investing in the United States, and this was before the advent of SelectUSA—promoting inward investment. California suffered from really high energy costs and the Spanish had deeply invested in alternative energy. They were really great with wind and solar. So, we took the whole group of them to San Francisco and we arranged a series of meetings with the most senior leadership in California, plus power companies, some municipalities, and some state agencies. Schwarzenegger was still governor. So, we had all these meetings about these Spanish companies investing in California. "Hey California you could use their energy!" So, it was natural; it was a win-win. Bring the money home and bring some new technology back to the States.

We were in San Francisco. We would have these dinners, and the dinners might end at 10 o'clock, kind of early by Spanish standards. We would go back to the hotel [and] George Argyros would go to the airport, get on his Gulfstream, and fly to Orange County so he could sleep in his own bed! I mean, that ain't cheap. In the morning he would get up, have breakfast—because he has staff, breakfast was ready—go to the airplane, change while he's on the airplane because the airplane was immense, arrive back in San Francisco, and be there in time for an 8:30–9 o'clock meeting.

Q: Incredible.

KUCHOVA: To him the airplane was like a magic carpet. “Let’s do this. Let’s do that.” He was very generous that way.

But that was a golden time to be there. We had an awful lot going on. And then these big Spanish construction companies had billions of Euros. The reason they had all this money is when they went from the Peseta to the Euro, all of the black-economy money that was under the mattresses, the Spanish government said, “Okay you’ve got 18 months, no questions asked, to take your Pesetas that you’ve never claimed because you’ve never paid taxes, and to get Euros.

Everybody went into real estate. The Spanish construction companies—ACS was one and then the group that eventually won in Panama, Sacyr, was another one. In the United States--I actually see some of their investments in South Florida. These guys were, you know--lots of money, lots of investment. A lot of them were willing to make investments in California on high-speed trains. It was just an amazing opportunity to talk to these people!

Now a lot of it has gone away. Rajoy, the prime minister for about half of the time that I was there, had been the minister of finance previously. The joke was that when he went to Brussels, Rajoy would wear his oldest suit. It was shiny, to look like, wow that’s like 25 years old, all the fabric is shiny. Spain had so much money that they were doing stuff—this was with the development cohesive funds from the EU to bring the developing countries up to a standard. Spain had so much money they were doing stuff in cities like tearing up sidewalks and putting in pavers, putting in shade trees. Now the money was intended for infrastructure, not for that. But they had a colossal amount of money.

Now if you fast forward, they actually had a problem where they lost track of where their money went. I mean, they’d build airports that were never used. They’d build bridges. They built this, they built that. They went crazy. But while we were there of course, it was gold time for the United States.

Q: Fantastic. Wow.

KUCHOVA: It was quite a fantastic tour.

Q: Did you find that you were using your Spanish or that you used it more and more as you went along, or were things done with English?

KUCHOVA: More things were done with English. The big Spanish companies with which we did an awful lot of work, where I spent most of my time, they basically used English in their normal course of business because they were all over the world and English became the language of business. They were very sophisticated companies and

they drew executives from across all of Europe. The guy that ran GE [General Electric Plastics] in Spain—Mario Armero was his name—for a while he was the contender to be the new CEO for GE in the United States. Actually, GE may have fared better with Armero; brilliant guy and he was a joy to watch. He was also in the AmCham, [American Chamber of Commerce]. So, it was interesting to watch an American Chamber of Commerce with that level of horsepower where you had globally-oriented executives.

There were a lot of Spanish executives who weren't even Spanish nationals. Spanish companies were very sophisticated and Spain had an approach they called, "Triangulation". They wanted to help European companies reach the United States and they basically looked at it because of their historical ties to the Americas. They would actually look at European companies and say, "Let us help you sell in the Americas. We're going to start in Argentina and then we're going to get to the United States. But let me show you what we're doing." They had a very sophisticated strategy in place, and that strategy surfaced again when I was in Panama, but on a different note. It was very interesting.

Q: While you were there did the other embassy offices interact with you in any significant way? Were they also a source of suggestion for, "Oh you know, we heard this company was looking and you might want to get in touch with them," or something like that?

KUCHOVA: The one answer is yes. The econ counselor at the time—Whitney Baird, was her name—I ended up seeing her again in London. She was brilliant and inclusive and fun. She used to have some of her meetings, and she'd be knitting! She was a young mom. But she would be knitting and listening, never missing a beat. She had a couple of statements I shamelessly stole from her. One of them was, "I'm used to not being the smartest person in the room." She was very inclusive, and I say that because she said when she did a lot of her earlier tours in Africa, and sometimes the rougher the embassy, the tighter the community. So, she made it a point to be inclusive with Commercial Service. She never looked at us as a competitor. She was an ally and we were a tool for her. But she was wonderful to work with; simply brilliant. When she PCS'd there was a little bit of a change and it was more competitive, which was a shame.

I happened to be a practical jokester, and so in their offices—I think it was the 3rd floor in the chancery. I'd come off the elevator and I'd put my phone against the concrete wall and the newer econ counselor's office was on the other side. In our office we had a way of dialing multiple numbers, so we would call everybody's cell phone that was against the wall. So, they'd vibrate and buzz, and it drove her crazy! She never could figure out who was behind it! She eventually became an ambassador in—I won't say which of the Baltics—when I was there as a regional officer, and applied for country clearance. I got denied! (laughter)

Q: (laughter)

KUCHOVA: Eventually, I was allowed to come. But she was very brilliant. I think she had two tours as ambassador, very brilliant. Not as warm and engaging as others, but

certainly she brought a lot to the table, and she did very well. I don't know if she's still around or not. But yeah, she eventually got me!

Q: You mentioned the bombing and obviously that changed everything. Did the U.S. engagement in Iraq change things?

KUCHOVA: Up to that point, Spain was very much an active ally with their military. As a matter of fact, I remember once that the Defense Attaché Office had hosted a group of Spanish business people. When you're going to do something, you reach out. Who do you want invited, and you send them the names and the why. In some cases, it's a reward and in other cases it's an incentive. I remember the one guy that I knew pretty well at the Defense Attaché Office who said because there was a carrier in the Mediterranean, they took these guys out to the carrier. He was telling me the story that some three- and four-star Spanish flag officers were on board and he heard one of them say, "Boy, did we choose right," meaning, when you see the sophistication and might of our forces--it's really impressive. When we put on a military event and you see the technology and the capability and the quality of the leadership, it's quite awe inspiring.

It changed after that. I'm not sure how the Spanish Ministry of Defense—I don't know if they reshuffled people with the Zapatero administration. I really don't know, and if I did know, I have forgotten. But it was a distinct change from the top, a chilliness, because in one way from Zapatero's perspective we were the catalyst for that attack. Had Spain not been allied with the United States in this "misadventure" in Iraq, this would never have happened. And that was the company line for the Zapatero's crew.

Q: But I meant more commercially to the extent that you could measure it.

KUCHOVA: Well, there was definitely a fall-off. I don't really remember the numbers, but I remember there was a distinct difference. It affected more small companies. I think most people—unless clued into this topic—a small company in the United States is up to 800 people. So, people think, "Oh they deal with small companies." You think of a few guys starting a company and they're selling hand-carved mahogany doors. No! That's not it at all. It's up to 800 people. So, you have a whole lot of startups. You have a whole lot of innovative companies or people that are doing something on a supply chain or on some kind of a project adding regular magic because they're smaller, they're nimbler. That's a small business. I think people misunderstand that.

Q: Your personal life, or your life outside the embassy, were there any other important things? Did you manage to network with people who then were valuable for you later?

KUCHOVA: You know, it's funny. Doing this as a second career, we never spent an iota of attention about, "Oh, this would be good for a career," or whatever. It was: go to work, work hard, make a difference, go and play, play hard, have some fun. We knew a lot of people and some are very dear friends. But we would do things, we were constantly on the move. We made a concerted effort to avoid a lot of the embassy socialization. When in Turkey, we were able to do both because again, I do agree that a tougher environment

brings people together. Spain, Western Europe, you can do anything you want. It's kind of like working for a big multinational. Nobody needs to hold your hand. We had some social engagement with the embassy but most of our time was out of it. Every weekend we explored the Iberian Peninsula. We were constantly in motion. We got to the point after a year or so that some of the Spaniards in my office would say, "Look, I'm going to take a vacation. I used to go to so and so. What do you think about this?". And we'd give them advice on their country! "Ah, this is a great city." We saw everything! We were all over the place.

ROBBIN: We had castle weekends and…

KUCHOVA: Yeah, Robbin's beside me and she reminds me. On a weekend you'd get up Saturday morning early and have breakfast and say, "You want a castle weekend, or do you want a windmill weekend?" And we'd say, "Let's go look for some windmills!" I remember once we were out in this one town and they used these windmills for advertisements that you would see on television or in magazines. Even today there's a great car commercial with these windmills as backdrops. It shows a car driving up to these windmills. You can't tell whether it's in Greece or Spain, but it was Spain. There was a woman who was in charge of the windmill restoration, and she took us on a tour of this windmill and she made it come alive. She said, "This was like the 747 of its day. It had a crew of three, and you have to think they basically flew the windmill, because they could move the blades, and this is how it worked." We just walked away mesmerized with this tour and her passionate portrayal.

We were all over the place. My wife, Robbin, ended up walking a good bit of the Camino. I would love to have gone, but I was working. So, she went and walked it and that was an adventure of a lifetime. Then one of the guys who became a really good friend—because we're both Land Rover fanatics—he was the number two guy in Land Rover Spain. One of his clients set up this unbelievable tour in a national park. He got special permission to do it. Once a year you drive the roads in this national park in the High Aragon. You kind of go from Spain to France and then into Spain and then into France on these high, high mountain passes. There are some villages up there that are snowed in for the winter! And this guy was a backcountry fanatic.

We paid our own way, obviously, but he wouldn't take anything for his planning. He basically said, "Okay, we're going to meet here the first day and then we're going to go here. Then we're going to have breakfast at this place and lunch here and dinner there." So, we had this spectacular tour, and then after the tour broke up, Robbin and I drove up through the High Aragon up into the Basque country, and then eventually home.

But we explored every inch of the Iberian Peninsula. One time early in our tour, we were going to drive to Extremadura, the autonomous region of Spain, on the frontier with Portugal. It's where a lot of the conquistadors came from. We were going to go there and Robbin saw a road sign, "Portugal, 120 km," so she said, "Let's go to Portugal for lunch!" And so, we laughed, and we still laugh about it, because growing up in southern New Jersey, just a normal middle-class kid, to think that I'm in my own car, I'm in Spain,

and there's a sign for Portugal and I'm going to drive myself into Portugal and have lunch! This is pretty cool!

Robbin reminds me, a lot of the people we worked with would do stuff like that. Madrid's a great jumping off point. I'm going to go see Berlin. I'm going to go see this; I'm going to go see that. We consciously decided, let's really dive deep where we are. Let's learn about Spain, Portugal, and we did. I had some great trips. We would have a conference someplace in Europe and that gave us the opportunity to see more beyond Spain and Portugal.

Then I got tapped to be on a review board to go down to South Africa to review our program in South Africa. I was one of four officers, and I thought, "This is great." My wife is a photographer of some note, and she was going to do this exhibition the following week or whatever. I came home and I said, "Hey Robbin, we're going to go to South Africa!" She said, "Well, I got this showing." I said, "Well, you've got a choice! You can either come with me to South Africa or you can do the showing." So, the next day in the embassy, because that's where the exhibition was going to be, I saw all these little signs about her program, "Postponed—going to Africa!"

Then we went to South Africa. Robbin got to see more than I did, except after work. I got to see another operation and do a management review by asking questions and learning their approaches. I got to ask, "What are you doing? How are you doing it? How's this working? Who are you engaging?" That was an amazing experience because I got to go out—we were in Sandton where the consulate is--and we divided up and two people went to Durban and I was one of two to go to Cape Town. What a lucky coin flip, because Durban and Cape Town are two distinct experiences. Cape Town was magnificent. I got to meet with the black chambers of commerce, and the white chambers of commerce, and then one medical company that did medical devices and supplies across all of South Africa and beyond. They basically supported public and private hospitals across the entire country and a few neighboring countries. And these guys were brilliant. Two young guys, one was black, one was white. Very smart. They knew who to send into which place. We were sitting in their office and they were having problems sourcing things because in South Africa not enough American companies had a direct presence and a lot of the products got there through a distributor, or sub-distributor.

I tend to be hands-on; I tend to be, "Well, let's do it right now." I remember sitting in Cape Town with the two principals and suggesting that they attend Medica. Medica is this really large medical show in Germany. It's global, extremely well attended by manufacturers and suppliers--it's a huge exhibition. The two fellows hadn't registered. In fact, they were unfamiliar with the event. So, while we were sitting in their office I called, I think, our office in Germany and I got them registered on the spot, and then gave them the phone and they ended up with business appointments to address their company's needs.

So, the person in our Berlin office was actually making appointments for them to meet with U.S. companies. Now fast forward, they actually went to Medica and they did

business where we actually connected them with the U.S. companies and it worked out great. But these guys were so smart because they knew how to play the system. Just like the business chambers, where some of the chambers were all black or all white, and they were competing. Then a couple of the business chambers evolved into integrated boards of directors and they were the smart ones. You could see the potential for South Africa. I think they lost a little bit of the magic, but you could see where it could evolve and the great promise that could be ahead of them.

We did those kinds of trips. We were in Athens a couple times; France a couple times. So, we got to see more of Europe that way. But our private time was spent diving deep into Spain and into the whole Iberian Peninsula.

Right before the end of the tour, the last couple of months—we had our favorite place in Spain in Andalusia. Andalusia drives me crazy a little bit because it's very socialist. And I find socialism—I lived in the Nordics, so there's socialism and then there's socialism. Andalusia is kind of a lazy socialism; not at all like Norway or Sweden or Finland, or the Nordics. We found this wonderful little town, not fancy. It's called, "Caños de Meca". It's right down just to the west of Gibraltar. We used to go there, probably, at least once a quarter. We'd take our bicycles and our kayaks. We loved the place. You could see Africa at night across the strait and all the ships transiting. It's amazing.

But the town itself is not fancy. It's surrounded by a national park so it never could grow, and the houses were mostly modest—ah they're okay. We found this wonderful lovely little hotel—I don't know, 10,12, 15 rooms, perhaps. There was a place for us to keep our bikes and our kayaks. The very last time we were there, burning some leave time—two weeks before beginning the PCS process—we wanted to paddle and bike the area one more time. We wanted to say thank you and goodbye to these people who had become friends. I mean, over four years, we were there constantly, so we knew them and the whole bit. So, the car's packed, the kayaks are on the roof, the bicycles are on the rack, and I'm in the car, I've got the maps out, I'm ready to go and I'm waiting for Robbin to come out, [but] she's not coming out. I'm waiting and she's not coming out. So finally, I'm angry, I'm thinking, "Come on, we've got to go! We've got a long drive!"

I turn the car off, lock it and I walk into the hotel room, and Robbin is doubled over and she is in pain, and gray in her face. What she ended up having was an aortic dissection—type A—in her aortic stem. She could have died on the spot. I'm like, "Holy mackerel!" There were no phones in the room, so I ran to the front office. We call the ambulance, and the ambulance is in a little town over this hill in the town of Barbate, which is a little fishing village. It is a little town but it's big compared to where we are! So, they're sending an ambulance and Robbin is struggling—she's braver and smarter, more courageous than I would be.

This is Good Friday in a Catholic country, so everything is closed. Driving on Good Friday-- there'd be no traffic. Everything is closed, and because it's Good Friday, they even closed down all the medevac helicopters. Everybody's got the day off because it's Good Friday. So, this little ambulance comes over. There's a young lady who's a doctor

and you know, national health system. It's her first— here's your first assignment, and you're going to be in Barbate, this little fishing village at the bottom of Andalusia. So, we went to the clinic. The clinic is used to take care of fishermen who got an injury on the boat, or whatever. They're working hard to stabilize Robbin. They instantly called a regional hospital up the road about an hour and they're saying "I got this case," yada yada-yada.

I also think being with an embassy saved Robbin's life. And, the mobile phone saved her life because as soon as this happened, I'm dialing Post One and speaking with the embassy doctor who's a great guy, Jose Paralba, who's still there. Paralba is a navy doctor and also has a private practice, but man, this guy is great. He's at his ancestral home in the north of Spain when I reach Post One. The marine was fantastic and patched me through to Dr. Paralba. So, I'm in the ambulance. I hand the phone to the doctor and so she's talking to Dr. Paralba, which instantly kind of raises the level of care. We get to the clinic, they're working hard to get Robbin stabilized, and she's much braver than I am. We get her stabilized and they say, "Look, this is way past what we can do here. Still don't know what it is. We have an ambulance coming in from Puerto Real"—that was the regional hospital. So, we get in the ambulance and we race out of there. From Barbate down this road that goes down the coast to Puerto Real. The hospital there found a cardiologist; he had been on the beach so he comes in. He's got flip flops on, the long coat, bare legs because he's still wearing a bathing suit. He's got a bathing suit on, so he looked like a flasher! He's doing this sonogram and the whole bit, and I'm numb with concern and fear. Robbin's still got her wits, but she's in a lot of pain. As I mentioned before, Robin's a photographer. So, we're in this doctor's office in the hospital and she's looking at his photographs on the wall, and she's saying to me, "That's a good photo! That's got the rule of three. Look at the leading lines on that one." She is in dire trouble, but she's critiquing this guy's photos!

The doctor turns to me and he says, "This is serious. She has an aneurysm." And, I'm just at sensory overload. And he goes, "It comes down to this. If we stay, we could make her comfortable but she'll die. If she moves, there's a really good chance she won't survive, but you've got a chance. What do you want to do?"

"Let's go!" They had already called for an ambulance from Cadiz, which by a stroke of providence is the national heart training institute for the National Health Center. That's where all their heart surgeons go to get trained. So, they have an ambulance with a cardiologist and two nurses on board racing another hour from Cadiz to Puerto Real.

We start for Cadiz. I'm still in a pair of shorts and a tee shirt. I have my wallet and my mobile phone. That's it. Everything we own is in the car back in Caños de Meca. The boats are on top of the car. The bikes are on the back of the car. I think I had enough sense to leave them the key in case they had to move the car. But that's it.

So, we're racing along the coastal road. We get to the hospital in Cadiz and they're basically stabilizing Robbin. They want to give her something for the pain but it's a delicate balance, because if you do too much, you're going to lose her. But you have to

treat her pain. And they keep her alive. We arrive at this big hospital. And this guy, they called him "The Professor," he was the professor for heart surgeons. He was a young guy, shoulder-length black hair, and a beard. He really looked like Jesus Christ! He walked over and he looks.

Now we are in the heart of Andalusia, and these guys are all a bit anti-United States. So, they look at me like I'm a piece of dog meat. But they look at Robbin lovingly and compassionately. The professor turned around and explained to me what it is, what he has to do, and he has to do surgery right now if it's okay. Otherwise, she won't make it! He said, "Here's the situation. Surgery's going to be many hours and then we probably have 70, 80, 90 hours to wait to see what the results are going to be. [I said'] "Go for it."

In the meantime, I got him on the phone with Dr. Paralba and the whole bit, which was also very helpful. So, they start the surgery. Post One had reached out to my boss, my SCO [Senior Commercial Officer]. The embassy now knows. One of the nurses from the health unit-- her husband at the time was an airline pilot. Since all the flights are booked and because her husband was an airline pilot, she gets a jump seat on an airplane that arrives in Cadiz. So, she arrives. She spends time with me. She gave me a little bit of money. Then she went home and another nurse came down to be a liaison. And she gave me some money. Then my SCO sent down Angela Turrin, our admin. person, who I owe a debt that I can never repay. Angela stayed with us and she helped us with the liaison.

I knew it was really bad. I had no idea when you have these aneurysms that the fear is it cuts the blood off to another organ and then you die. John Ritter died from this. So, when Robbin had the aneurysm, it incredibly missed severing anything. The doctors would stick the bottom of her foot to see if there was a physical reaction, because they were looking for permanent damage, and I didn't quite get it at the time.

The hospital had me stay with Robbin in the ICU. I received special permission. She was still intubated. They wanted me to tell her that she was okay, that she was going to be fine. I did this over and over for hour after hour, and I knew she was going to be okay, but she was still groggy. She finally opened her eyes and she basically put her hand up over my lips to indicate, "Shut up!" I got "shut up," if you will. But Robbin had received the message that she was ok. So now we're there, and Robbin had great treatment. We're in this big public hospital in the ICU. Then after a while, because she was doing really well, they moved her to a normal ward, and the care was fabulous. When people say socialized medicine—let me tell you, the dearest person in my life survived because of socialized medicine. It's not the bogeyman that people want to portray. That's just not accurate.

Then they moved Robbin to a heart ward. There are little funny threads in the story because one of the drives we used to take from Caños de Meca along the coast--we went by farms where they were raising fighting bulls. Robbin looks at everything very visual, as though she was composing a photograph. So, we would often stop and she would take pictures. Sometimes the farmers would see us and we would wave and they would wave back. These drives were usually at dusk because of the sweet light. It was just magical in

Spain. So, there is a woman in the hospital bed next to her; her family comes in and they're looking at Robbin.

ROBBIN: And I look a mess!

KUCHOVA: And, she looks a mess. Someone in the family says, "That's the lady that takes the pictures." Robbin's roommate was the farmer's wife!

In Spain, families would bring in their own TVs into the hospital rooms, so the rooms were loud. The families were all over. There was no such thing as two guests; there were like 30 people in the room, and they would bring in meals. Robbin didn't like the hospital food, so I would go down to this Italian restaurant and bring food back to her. But this family had recognized Robbin, which was unbelievable.

I don't know if you're a spiritual person or not, but I will tell you what happened. I would basically spend most of the night there with Robbin and then I would go back to this hotel room I had and I would shower and change and I would come back. I would nap in the chair, but I would be with her in case she needed anything. On two or three occasions, I'd come back and Robbin said to me, "You just missed Dr. Guido." Now, Guido is not a typical Spanish name. But the embassy nurse who flew down to help us, her Spanish husband's name was Giovanni. So, in my mind I'm reconciling this, "Oh, another Italian family." When they came, they kept some of the culture, they named the kids after the grandfather, whatever. So, it didn't really phase me. Every morning, the doctor in charge of the ICU would give the report on how your loved one was doing. So, I, in my best Castilian, I would thank them, and then once I said, "I want to thank you and your team, and especially Dr. Guido."

The doctor looks at me, now in perfect English—they'd never speak English to me—he says, "I don't have a Guido. I've got a Guillermo." And he goes through the whole list of doctors, and he goes, "All of their portraits are on the wall. Any of them?" Well, Robbin described Guido rather well, he had glasses, receding hairline, and the Spanish docs wear white coats and they have their first name in red on their lapel, like Rudy, Bob, Steve, whatever. Kind of like what you might have seen at an old-time gas station. Robbin described him the same way every time. Robbin had added that on his lab coat, there's all of the ink marks where he put his pen away without closing or capping the pen. So, I describe this to the chief doctor and he says, "I don't have anybody like that."

Now Robbin relayed to me multiple times, she would tell Dr. Guido, "Dr. Guido, I'm feeling really good. You should go home. Go see your family." And, Guido would say to her, "Robbin, I'm here to take care of you. I'm fine. I'll go home later." Guido eventually tells Robbin, "You're going to be here for 11 days and then you're going to go home. You don't need rehab; you're going to be fine." Every doctor, including our embassy doctor, said "You're going to be in the hospital for two weeks—14 days—and then you're going to two weeks for rehab. Every doctor. Every day. Every day. On the 11th day she's discharged, no rehab therapy.

Q: That's wild.

KUCHOVA: Astounding.

ROBBIN: But the wild thing is that it was Good Friday 2006. I made it to three medical centers, it was a 12-hour period that I should have died, and the surgery took nine hours. That was Good Friday, and I opened my eyes on Easter. It was just unbelievable.

KUCHOVA: Stunning set of circumstances.

ROBBIN: And my recuperation was an international move.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, then we PCSed.

ROBBIN: That was my recuperation. And no home to go to, just a hotel until we found a place.

KUCHOVA: Then if you fast forward, Carlos, whom I talked about earlier--we went back for Carlos' wedding. Also, the guy I talked about who was the Land Rover executive. So, we went back to Madrid, which was fun to see friends again. Because if you have good FSNs, and I'm so lucky, in each of my posts I did, but they're like family; you love them. So, we're staying at the Ritz, which for me was great because Hemingway hung out there; and all this history. After the wedding we were going to rent a car for a few days. Instead, Jose Felix from Jaguar Land Rover says, "Don't rent a car. Take one of the press cars!" "Nah, I can't do that. I've got a rental car reserved." He said, "Just don't…It's a press car!" He said, "It's mine to give you." So, okay! So, he gives us this top-of-the-line Jaguar sedan to go. We retraced some of our favorite trips for a few days, and we went back to Caños de Meca. We went to Barbate, to the clinic. We wanted to thank them for saving Robbin. We got to the clinic. There was nobody there that was there when all this happened, because all those docs and nurses that were there had moved onto other assignments. We didn't stop at Puerto Real, but we went to Cadiz. In Cadiz there was one surgeon who remembered Robbin. We went back and we wanted to thank them. "Thank you! Look, she's still here and doing great. You guys did a great job!"

It was so gratifying to go back and to show them their handiwork. But we have no sentiments like, "Oh I almost died; I don't want to go back." We'd go back tomorrow. It was lovely. In many ways the horror of that and the joy of that encapsulated our Spain experience.

Q: That is a fantastic way to close on your tour there. That's really an amazing story.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, we're very grateful. There's not a day goes by that we don't really reflect on that and all the things we've done since because it literally could have happened differently.

ROBBIN: If we had made it on the highway, I'd be…

KUCHOVA: Yeah, Robbin says if we'd made it on the highway and she had the aneurysm, I don't know if we'd had the same ending. The very day before this all happened and at that very time, we were offshore on our kayaks. Remember, we had just finished our departure medicals the week before.

Q: Incredible.

KUCHOVA: Not a sign of a problem. The other lesson that we try to remember, and sometimes it's not as easy, is take the time to enjoy every day of life because it is a precious gift. But that was it.

Let me see if I have anything on my notes that I wanted to leave as well.

Q: Sure.

KUCHOVA: I actually got smart and made some notes this time.

Q: Great.

KUCHOVA: One thing I will mention because it's kind of interesting. I think in the United States we still see vestiges from our own civil war. I think the root of some injustice still goes back to a period in our history. You can't change history but you can learn from it. We were in Spain at an interesting time because their civil war was far more recent and our landlord actually represented that for us. He was this little Catalan gentleman who had moved from Catalonia to Madrid to do business. He was very successful. The house the embassy had rented for us had been his weekend house. As Madrid grew it was now a suburban area, but used to be more rural. He had this house that he and his wife had built. It had a lovely garden. When we rented the house, it came with a gardener. And, that wasn't for our convenience. That was because he loved the plants so much, he wanted to be sure nobody hurt them! The gardener came with the place. But we got to know the landlord a little bit, and he kind of suffered some prejudice and some real impediments because he was a Catalan in Madrid. When you look, particularly at the rise of Catalonia seeking its independence; you know, Galicia is talking about its independence. When modern Spain was knitted together and they gave these autonomous regions a certain degree of freedom, it really has become a problem, because they have not united Spain. It's very dangerous and you can really start to see this. We were back in Catalonia and—I don't know where that was—we saw that the independence movement was still very much alive and I think it does not bode well for Spain. Spain needs an opportunity to be united, and they have to find someone who can unite them and move away from some of the promises that the autonomous regions have given them that are actually detrimental to a thriving democracy.

Anyway, the dignified gentleman, who always wore his Catalan beret, passed away after our second year there. He was in his 90s. He would shuffle down the street to our place,

not to say hello to us, but basically to look at his garden and perhaps be sure that nobody messed it up, or maybe just to reminisce about the joy that it brought him.

The other memory I have is how democracies, even the ones that are perceived to be strong, have these continuing challenges and you need to confront them. You need to work on it, you need to find a solution. But that's it!

Q: All right. So, I'll pause the recording here.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Nicholas Kuchova as he completes his tour in Spain and starts his new tour. Nicholas, what year is this?

KUCHOVA: I leave Spain and I am obligated to do a domestic tour, as we call it. Normally that's twenty-four months, two years. It's like, a little bit more than a misdemeanor for me! I had been putting this off and putting this off. So, this was May 2006 when we finally departed; we were "wheels up" out of Madrid. My agency wanted to send me to a large EAC like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. We're not really big city people, so we looked at a couple of different options. We thought about going someplace where we probably would never live, but we would love to experience it. We thought for a while about Alaska, which would have been cool, but there wasn't an opening, but there turned out to be an opening in Savannah, Georgia.

Q: Ah, ok!

KUCHOVA: Savannah was a single-person office, which was great because I was not thrilled about the assignment. Just to put it into context, this is after Robbin is one in a thousand that survives an aortic dissection. We depart Spain and we arrive. Of course, when you come to post overseas there's someone to meet you and help you with a place to live, there's a housing assignment, and the whole bit. When you come back for a domestic tour, "Hey, welcome home, bud!"

We had to find a place to live and we had to do all of this stuff while she was still recuperating from this tremendous event that she went through. We arrive in Savannah and it's absolutely a charming, wonderful city. It's vibrant, and it's a big little town or a small city, however you want to refer to it. From a living point of view, it was sheer joy. From a work point of view, it was far from it. But the city was just charming. There's an active port and that was fun to get involved in that.

There was this former Marine whose name was Page Siplon who was on a governor's committee. The governor at the time actually was (George Ervin) "Sonny" Perdue (III) who was apparently a veterinarian by profession and went into politics, and then he eventually ended up in the Trump administration. But as governor he was pretty effective, and he started these different "incubator" initiatives. He realized that Georgia could be very competitive to attract foreign investment if they did things that were smart. He started this logistics consulting group that the government funded, and Page Siplon ran it. Page apparently had done logistics in the military, in the Marine Corps. This guy was a

master! So, they were working on expanding the intermodal connections in Savannah. They were working on expanding the port. They were aware of the impending Panama Canal expansion so they were looking to how could they get post Panamax vessels up the Savannah River, all kinds of really cool things.

I was active with Page. The governor also did other cool things where he basically re-missioned the state's community colleges based on if you had a foreign—particularly a European—investor. He was infatuated with the German apprentice system. If a potential investor came, he said. "We're going to manufacture this product, and we're thinking of doing it in Georgia." He would basically put this whole work study group together and said, "we'll pay for the apprentice, we'll pay for this, we'll pay for that." They were very active with the feds in terms of trying to increase immigration for skilled welders, which is a real shortcoming in the United States. Nobody wants to be a welder, so they were out looking for welders. "Come move to America and become a welder."

Perdue was active and he also did one thing that I thought was pretty innovative. He was flying from Atlanta to Savannah to make a speech for some organization at the convention center and he was with his department of agriculture secretary. He asked the secretary while on the helicopter, "What do we do to all that stumpage?" You know Georgia's big on forests, tree farms. Stumpage is what's left after they harvest the tree. And the secretary said, "I don't know. I'll look into it." Well on the flight back Perdue asked him, "Where are we?" He didn't want to give the agriculture secretary more than the time of a 60-minute speech. Then the governor started a program where he asked the state universities to do research on cellulose. How can you crack cellulose and look for uses—is there a biofuel opportunity? Is there something for pharmaceuticals? How do you use what's in the forest floor? It's no longer waste, and we've got tons of it. What do we do with it?

He was a real driver. And that was an interesting thing to watch, and a little surprising in some ways, and in other ways not. But the state economic development system was really in tune with how do I make investment easy? How do I get work force training? How do I do this, how do I do that? Also, the same universities and community college programs were helpful for the foreign executive because they moved here to get the view from the U.S. side. Here's how we do things. This is how this works. So, it was pretty smart.

Q: Let me ask you one question, because these are all really interesting things. You're in Savannah. How did you get laced up with the governor's office? You mentioned Page, but you didn't quite explain how that all came about.

KUCHOVA: Our Export Assistance Centers, or EACs, are in regional networks, and the regional network hub was in Atlanta. A very talented guy was in charge of it and his name was Tom Strauss. Normally when the foreign service officers go to the EACs, there's never a great fit because the people that work there year-round see a two-year assignment as the officer disrupting their business relationships, because you're going to work with a group of companies or a sector. So, it's never a really great fit. Tom Strauss basically wanted to use the officers—you know, what do you do best? And that's

networking. What do you do best? That's basically looking at how you make these connections with these nodes of activity overseas. Tom was really very helpful and a godsend as far as I was concerned, to make it all work. He was very willing to share. I love what we do, so I was always looking for ways of doing more of it, and so it was just a natural fit to ask a question or to walk into an office and say, "Hi, I'm with the Commercial Service and I'm in Savannah and I understand you're doing," blah, blah, blah. "Is there a way we can work together? Is there a way I can help you with your goals?" And that's how that happened.

Savannah was a delightful place to do that in many respects. I have to say candidly, I affirmatively disliked the work in the EAC, because it was basically trying to prime a pump. It also goes back to my ongoing frustration with the [notion] bad metrics drives bad behavior. If you stop and you take a step back—it's true today, we have some 30-35 million companies in the United States. Now of course that also includes two guys cutting lawns, trimming hedges, and painting fences. But less than 1 percent of all the companies in the United States export; less than 1 percent. So, when you look at the companies that are successful overseas, they're giants, but less than 1 percent. And, of the 1 percent that export, slightly more than half export to one market.

So, one guy makes something, either a tangible product or he's got a service, and he's selling in Mexico or Canada. He's an exporter; he's done. So, the idea would be, if you can get that company just to look at one more market. If you're selling in Canada what about the U.K.? What about other Commonwealth countries? Or if you're selling in Mexico, what about Colombia? You would have a profound effect.

The metrics were well intentioned, but the metrics basically would be a numbers game. How many people did you talk to? How many people did you provide a service to? There's no strategic thought in terms of how do you ally these companies and even go after the guys who are exporting to one market? How do you sit and talk with them, either individually or collectively, and say, "Look if you're successful in this market, you would be very successful in this market as well. And, don't look at the globe regionally. Look at the globe from a business sector point of view."

For example, if you have a telecom service and you're really, really successful in Thailand because of the nature of their telecom system, well, we think by looking at this that you could be very successful in wherever, say, South Africa, because you know there's a similarity in the maturity of the telecom system or whatever. We never get over that hump to think and act strategically. We're always chasing this metric where somebody then wants to say at the end of the year, "We engaged with X number of companies and the exports that we enabled would generate this much money." Important as it is, we constantly miss this next step of how do you make U.S. businesses smarter? How do you connect them in a smarter way to be successful globally? Just by going after the people with one market, and you get them to a second market, you would have a profound effect on what business is going to be.

So that's what I tried to do for my tour in Savannah. I only lasted—(laughter.) I didn't last long. I'll get to that in a minute.

Let's go back to Savannah itself. What a delightful place to do business. The office I had was a dingy back office in a small NGO that deals with startups and under-resourced companies. Lovely wonderful people doing great and important work, but none of their clients were export-ready. Now, Commercial Service would want to know how many of those companies did you counsel? Again, that's bad metrics driving bad behavior. None of those companies should have been exporting. I used to hold most of my meetings in a coffeehouse on one of the historic squares! (Savannah itself is a movie set; there's so many movies that have been shot there.) I'd park my car, go in and check my emails, and I'd have a series of meetings that I would schedule. I would walk over just a couple blocks to one of these absolutely magnificent historic squares with a couple of nice coffee shops, get a table, and have one meeting. These guys would leave. I'd get another coffee, have another meeting, and leave. It was a great place, a fun place to do business.

From a personal point of view, after I got past the point of being a fish out of water, Robbin and I had a wonderful time there. There's a historic theater called the Lucas Theater that's been restored, so we learned about that and we volunteered as ushers. It was a great way to meet people, because you're engaging people, and you get to see the show as well. We saw some fabulous shows. Actually, there's one that stands out to this day. It was a modern Flamenco group from Spain. We didn't see anything as good when we lived in Spain! We saw all kinds of shows, which were wonderful, but we specialized only in the balcony. We only would do the balcony. It was small, it was intimate, and after a while you got to know some of the people. It was great fun. Kevin Spacey was the big patriarch of the theater and had donated a lot of money.

ROBBIN: Before he got into trouble.

KUCHOVA: He was quite the force behind the theater. We did that and we explored coastal Georgia. Georgia was fascinating because it's one of the only states on the East Coast that has an undeveloped coastline. What we learned was during the early part of the 19th Century a lot of the very wealthy people, particularly from the industrial part of the United States, the upper Midwest, bought up the islands along the coast. So, they owned most of the coastline. They built these incredible vacation homes. So, you only have a few towns on the 100 miles of Georgia coastline; at the north end, Tybee Island, and the Brunswick area at the southern end. The rest is undeveloped. Today it's nature conservancy, state parks, and federal reserves. It's an absolutely unspoiled East Coast ecosystem that was fun to explore!

Down at the Georgia-Florida border there was an old plantation. It was called Wormsloe, a very odd name to us, and the British--during colonial times granted that to a planter. It was a fortified plantation because it actually marked the line between Spanish Florida and English Georgia. They were like the canary in the mineshaft. If we didn't hear from Wormsloe that meant the Spanish were moving up. So, we got to explore that area. We were there one time when there was a re-enactment of a battle. I think it was called the

Massacre of Bloody Creek. Historically, they think three people were killed, but the Massacre of Bloody Creek sounds much more dramatic. That was near this plantation.

We really made the most of our time in Savannah. I would go to work—oh that was the one funny thing, when we came back to the States, they explained to me that fed workers have an alternative work schedule. I was, "Oh, I'm interested in this." They said, "If you work 10 hours a day, you can work five days one week and four the next." Well, for me ten hours a day was a light day overseas! I was like, "Are you kidding me? This is great!" So, we had three-day weekends every other week, and we used that to go out and explore and see things.

We had a great living space. We rented a house on an island that's just a little south of Savannah in a gated community, a really good place where it was fun to live. It was a charming little cottage, and everything was great about it except I hated going to work!

But I had interesting clients. I had Gulfstream as a client. Gulfstream would come to us because if they had an inquiry from somebody about one of their multi, multi, multi-million-dollar planes, they wanted to have some background on the company that was expressing an interest.

Q: Is Gulfstream headquartered in Georgia?

KUCHOVA: Yeah, in Savannah. Coincidentally—jumping back to our Madrid experience—when Ambassador Argyros first showed up he had a jet that he would fly back and forth, but he told his pilot, "I need a different airplane, because when we leave Madrid, we have to stop and take on fuel either in Greenland, Nova Scotia, or Maine depending on the weather. I don't want to stop; I want to go all the way home, so get me another airplane." So, after six to seven months, he ended up buying a Gulfstream. You know, and they're literally a fortune!

He had told me the story about when he went to see his airplane. Gulfstream has a special hotel for the people who are buying an airplane. So, they come in and it's just the best, a 5-star kind of a deal. Then his pilot also told me where he stays when he would go get checked for the airplane and go through the training to be type rated. And, he told me how nice that was. And the owner's accommodations made the pilot's accommodations look like a tent, as you could imagine.

Gulfstream was really a big player in the area. Also, it was another indication of bad metrics, bad decisions. When Gulfstream makes an airplane, you have all of these OEM suppliers, wiring harnesses and actuators, and all these different things. Yet they're not counted as the exporter, it's only Gulfstream.

The same way when people complain about the EXIM bank is the bank of Boeing, and "Hey, you're helping Boeing they don't need the help." Take a step back. There are thousands of companies in the supply chain who would not be an exporter if it was not included in that product, which is why—jump forward—Airbus put a procurement office

in the United States to source parts for Airbus. In many cases, depending on the type of aircraft, there's almost equal U.S. content. So, it's almost hard to do advocacy. You can actually have situations where an Airbus product might have more U.S. content than a particular Boeing product. It gets very confusing. Of course, then it makes it very hard for policy makers because it's very easy to say, "We're going to advocate for the U.S. company or U.S. content." Well, now you jump into it you find yourself advocating for a non-U.S. company instead but their products have more U.S. content than the U.S. companies. So, who do you advocate for?

Q: Yeah, I see. The airline industry's probably not the only one in which that's true; probably many others.

KUCHOVA: Oh yeah, very much. I'm not a complainer. I'm a jokester and I'm a practical joker, but I think what happened for me is I ended up looking at an email announcement that there was an urgent vacancy in Panama. I knew the guy who was there and I called him and he said, "Look, Panama's great," but he wanted to move to the Dominican Republic because he would get more money for being in the DR and he had kids in college. So, I looked at it as, oh I can eject out of here. He couldn't complete his PCS from Panama City to the DR until there was somebody on the hook to come to Panama, because that was just at the beginning of ginning up the Panama Canal Expansion Program, where companies were actually starting to get serious about it.

So, this good guy, Bob Jones was his name, moved on to the DR and I got the assignment for Panama. I think in a lot of respects, a lot of my domestic colleagues were probably thrilled that I was leaving! I was very respectful and all that, but they knew I wasn't happy in that role. So off we went for Panama.

Q: A last quick question before you leave Georgia for Panama. Was the U.S. education sector at all of interest to you in promoting exports?

KUCHOVA: Yes.

Q: I'm asking because in Georgia in particular there's so many educational institutions and I think also educational companies that make products. You know, boxes for teachers or curricula or even foreign language things, so that's why I'm curious.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, very much so. [As a] matter of fact, the one good example was a college called SCAD, Savannah College of Arts and Design, that has a wonderful history. Several decades ago, Savannah was dying, like so many metropolitan areas. Big industry, which was never huge, had left. The paper industry was in a funk. It was a dying, decaying, dangerous city and the political leadership was at a complete loss of what to do. And two couples—"foreigners," because they weren't from Savannah, but they were somewhere in the United States. I don't know where they were from. Two couples came to the city council and said they wanted the city to give them one of the historic buildings that the city owned. If they would grant them that building, they were going to start the Savannah College of Art and Design. The story reminds me of the musical The Music

Man where it was originally going to be a scam. The way I understood the story was that the mayor and the council people were pretty convinced they were going to get cheated somehow. “I don’t see how. It just doesn’t make sense. How is this going to work?” Nevertheless, the city granted the building allowing the deal to go forward—perhaps they thought, “what do we have to lose.”

Well, go forward, Savannah College of Art and Design [SCAD] ends up being one of the largest property owners in Savannah. It’s got a couple of campuses overseas. It is extremely hard to get into, and they’ve got programs on architectural restoration, a lot of it is U.S. centric. They even have in their curriculum a millwork program where they can actually duplicate 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th century millwork. They have one on packaging and papercraft. It is an amazing success.

So, this great success has now become a problem for Savannah because of course the college doesn’t pay real estate tax. They took the one building they owned, which I think was an armory at one time, and they restored it. It’s magnificent. They have bought up other buildings over time so now a huge core of the downtown is their campus. They’re not paying taxes! It’s funny, everything has its advantage and its disadvantage.

But SCAD has been eminently successful and it’s also funny because when we lived in Panama, a guy whose grandfather was one of the founders of the republic—interesting fellow. One of his kids wanted to go to SCAD and we connected them with SCAD and their child eventually attended. SCAD, I think it’s a terrible acronym, but they had a tremendous overseas following with students. Robbin and I would walk the city sometimes when there were some displays, particularly the packaging display. And, what these kids came up with was just inspirational, really creative!

So, SCAD, very successful, and of course you know the Georgia colleges are very well known, Georgia Tech and all of them. We did more work with SCAD and a lot of it was done when SCAD was looking to do a campus overseas. I think they had one in Europe, and they’ve got one in Asia, but they also have a tremendous number of international students. Of course, the international students pay the full fare. The college is very expensive. Of the founders, I think there’s only one remaining involved, but it is quite a success story.

Q: Because Savannah’s also so photogenic, were there movie opportunities, or was that principally just U.S. filmmakers going there for the B-roll or whatever?

KUCHOVA: Georgia had at the time—I don’t know since we left—but Georgia had a very, very vibrant division in Atlanta that would give all kinds of incentives for the creative side and they had attracted a lot. There were some investments. Then Tyler—What’s Tyler’s last name, guy in Atlanta who bought an old…

ROBBIN: Perry.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, Tyler Perry. Tyler Perry took advantage of this and he bought multiple acres in Atlanta. He bought some kind of—I don't know if it was a military base or some kind of a facility—and he's got a huge operation there, absolutely huge. I mean tens of acres. There's quite a bit of investment in movie making and it's a fascinating area. They did really well. The labor was inexpensive compared to California. They have a wide variety of location opportunities, mountain, seashore, it could look like a jungle or a northern forest, whatever you want. They did a very good job in terms of attracting and giving the kind of grants to make it worthwhile.

There was a lot of production you'd see in Savannah. They did a marvelous job on the city in terms of restoring it. It still has a crime problem, a lot of it is drug related, which I guess is the bane of so much of the Western world. But that was an issue. It's one of the reasons we lived in a gated community.

ROBBIN: (Inaudible.)

KUCHOVA: Yeah, that's the other thing. Johnny Mercer, the famous songwriter, Savannah was his birthplace. Remember the song, *Moon River*? There's a line in Moon River "Wider than a mile, I'll cross you in style." When I would drive home or to work every day, I actually crossed Moon River. Anytime we left the island, we'd cross Moon River. And, there's poetic license because the part I crossed was maybe…

ROBBIN: A creek.

KUCHOVA: At best. Maybe it widens out someplace else, but it wasn't all that big. But you know the arts really have a home in Savannah. It's a very dramatic place. There's a lot of music, there's movies. A guy wrote a crime story, which I forget the story. What was it? *The Garden of Good and Evil.*

Q: Yeah, In the Garden of Good and Evil, right.

KUCHOVA: That was set in Savannah. People would actually come to Savannah looking for the sites that were in the book. *Forrest Gump* was filmed in Savannah for a lot of it. So, it's just a remarkable place. We thoroughly enjoyed it. We never thought we would enjoy it as much as we did. When we left, we had mixed feelings from a personal point of view but total glee from a professional perspective.

Q: When did you leave?

KUCHOVA: I left in January 2008.

Q: So almost two years.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, a little bit less. I joke with my domestic colleagues that I was being released early for good behavior! They agreed on the released early, they were less willing to agree on the good behavior!

Q: Okay! So now you go to Panama City. How is the FCS set up there?

KUCHOVA: When I arrived, we had already moved to a brand-new embassy because the old embassy was downtown, a beautiful location. Now we were outside of the city, really, more or less in the old Zone Area. Again, new construction was being driven by some of the violence in the attacks on embassies in other places, and so we're in this vast compound with the fences and the whole bit. It's one of the new embassy designs that are scalable. I think of World War II, the liberty ships, which was basically the same ship and you could make it anywhere. So, it was basically the same design. You could either shrink it or enlarge it into a very large embassy. The building was beautiful.

So, we arrived. Housing is a problem, which turns out to be in our benefit. The CS staff there is wonderful. I was lucky at every single place. These people were fabulous, hardworking, smart, connected, fun, and inspiring. They were just wonderful, equal co-contributors to our success. I arrived from an embassy where I had a very good experience in relationships. I had a very good relationship with my econ and political colleagues in Panama as well. Very seamless, and I enjoyed that very much.

The issues were great. My main marching orders were about the Panama Canal Expansion Project, which was like, "Wow, this is so exciting!" I'd never seen the canal before. So, we arrive and you've got this canal and this fascinating history, and so this is just really exciting for us.

However, there's no house for us so they put us in a hotel on the Pacific side of the canal entry and we are smack on the canal. We really would have been happy with half of the space they gave us. They gave us two suites that were connected on the top floor. We'd have been thrilled with one, but we got two! And we have this view, walk out to the windows and there's the Panama Canal entry. And if you look out to the west to our left there's all these ships awaiting their transit, and you see these ships entering or leaving the canal. Our first impression was the canal was a lot narrower than we thought it would be. At low tide you can see the mud flats on either side of the canal. That was a surprise. It was all so very interesting.

I go to the embassy and I'm getting settled, and they're trying to find a house for us, because you know you're in a hotel and it's not as convenient as having a home. Love my staff, love my colleagues. I have a great ambassador. Actually, I had two great ambassadors. One was Bob Eaton who had been in Turkey and he left right before we arrived, but we had mutual friends. He was there only a year or maybe a little bit less and then Barbara Stephenson who then went to be president of AFSA [American Foreign Service Association]. She was probably one of the best I ever worked for. She was very smart and a lot of fun. She had a unique management style, and she basically said at country team she wanted people to give her, give me your best thoughts, your best ideas. She didn't care if it's out of the box. Stephenson wanted the best that you can think of. If we can reach consensus, terrific. If not, she would make the final decision, and the

decision she made, well, we all own it. But you've got a voice in this. But in the end, we own it.

Stephenson was deadly serious about getting everyone's best thoughts and she also warned against gratuitous rear end kissing participation and said that the first person that gave her, "Well, ambassador, that's just a brilliant idea, I'm going to ask you to leave!" There was a meeting and somebody said something like that, and she told them to leave. She threw them out of the meeting. That's not what she wanted. She wanted our very best creative discourse. Stephenson wanted different ideas because there were complex issues.

You know we faced the Panama Canal expansion project, which was huge on the embassy's goals to have the United States win. We didn't end up winning the award, but it was a huge effort. We had issues with smugglers and illicit cargos and illegal business and the Colon Free Trade Zone. People have their own perspective, so if you were a DEA or a law enforcement guy, basically you're a hammer, and so if you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. You need to approach this more systematically.

The business interests in Panama were simply fascinating. And also, the political environment in Panama was fascinating. It reminded me more of Turkish politics. It was more cult oriented. But it was bruising politics, very, very vigorous. There was still a huge resentment in terms of people who had been Noriega fans, which came down to be not so much a Noriega fan but rather anti-U.S. Then there were people who were still lamenting the United States' departure. It was a fascinating place to be. U.S. firms did very well in Panama, both from a consumer point of view and also infrastructure. Caterpillar had a…

Q: Just a quick question. At this point it's 2006, right?

KUCHOVA: I was there from January 2008 to October 2009.

Q: The reason I'm pausing you is, is Panama's currency still the U.S. dollar?

KUCHOVA: Yeah. They have some coinage but the quarters look identical, and I'm sure if you look at some of the coins that circulate in the States there's probably some Panamanian quarters there just incorporated. Yeah.

The United States has an interesting role there. We lived in the former Canal Zone. We lived in an area that used to be where the FAA controllers lived. Cardenas was the name of the neighborhood. That was back in the day when they would hand international flights off to regional control centers in different locations around the world. So, there were FAA controllers that lived there that would take flights departing from the United States heading south or whatever. We lived in an old FAA neighborhood, and all the houses had this Zonian look to it. We were in the hotel for a very long time. So, we finally got a house, which was not easy, in the neighborhood we wanted, which was nice. Out the back of our house we could actually see the very top of the embassy. The embassy was over a hill. Now if they would have allowed me, I could literally walk out

my front door, go up a small hill into the embassy through a back gate. Walking, I could have been at the embassy in five minutes. Instead, I had to drive out of the valley along the canal, up through another road, so it would be like a 20-minute drive. It just was amazing.

Jumping back to the issues, one of the big things we had was, I'm sure you've heard of it, the Colon Free Zone, which is simply spectacular. The Colon Free Zone got its start at the end of World War II when the U.S. navy had a big facility there. The navy wanted to get rid of it so they basically gave it to the city of Colon. Colon is not in the top in terms of attractive places to live, so the city of Colon said, "What do we do with this?" So, the navy said, "Um, not really sure but there's this economist we've hired and he's going to give you some ideas." They actually hired some fellow who told them, "Why don't you start a free zone?" I'm sure somebody has his name. It's grown to where the turnover of the Colon Free Zone actually exceeds the GDP of the country. It's unbelievable. The Colon Free Zone used to be like the wild west. There are probably still parts of it that are like the wild west. There's a huge Jewish population, and when many people arrived from Europe after the Second World War, the people that were already there helped the newcomers get started, in some cases even helped finance their own competition.

The free zone grew and in the beginning the margins were really thick, because it was basically a trader mentality. Over the years the margins had shrunk and these companies are masters of logistics, and they basically are the marketplace for Mexico, Central America and South America all the way to Patagonia. Scores of merchants and stores and chains go to the free zone to buy tires, tools, clothing, furniture--everything. These companies then ship merchandise to the buyers, and so now the margins are in some cases single digit. Where it was originally an uneducated entrepreneur whose sons and daughters took over who maybe had a university degree, now the grandkids and great grandkids have master's degrees in business from the best universities around the world. They are masters of the trade.

It's very global. They are amazing companies, and the good ones are very active in terms of cleaning up those that are doing illegal business. They don't want them there, and so they'll be very helpful and cooperative in terms of giving you a hint or whatever. So, when you would get people interested in law enforcement or tracking illicit business--if you go in and you kick a door in or figuratively, and you start talking to them in an accusatory way, you're not going to get much. If you start engaging with these people in terms of business and business ethics, they are very cooperative.

Commerce did a program and we hosted it in Panama that was based on business ethics. The spark for this unique program was Alysia Wilson from Commerce's Western Hemisphere office. Alysia was amazing and a delight to work with. Tragically, she passed away from cancer not too long after that program leaving two children and her husband—that was a real loss. We actually had chambers and business groups from Central and South America come in, including a group from Ciudad del Este, the tri-border area at the frontiers of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. Hamas has legal operations there that basically generate revenue for illicit use. We actually had a group

from there. Interestingly, most of the attendees were women that came from these chambers. They were fearless in terms of shining a light on illegal activities. Absolutely fearless, and bless them.

So, the Colon Free Zone--I have nothing but good things to say. They do a marvelous job. They're very anxious to herd out those who are doing illegal things, because they want to be successful, and they want to be successful long term. So that was a fascinating thing to see.

It was also the first time where I really got to see firsthand the rise of China's influence to an alarming degree. All of the ports in Panama, save one, are run by the Chinese. That's a staggering thing to say. All of the ports are owned by China. There's only one port in Colon that is actually a Panamanian – U.S. joint venture. All the rest are Chinese.

Q: The ports that you're talking about now, did the Chinese actually upgrade them?

KUCHOVA: Oh yeah, because they have the money. And, they also have the ability or the willingness to look at things on a longer-term basis than other entities would look at business plans. One can argue philosophically, but they would basically come in and invest. You know, the port business is tough. Back up, when Panama took over the canal, that was a very emotional thing for a lot of Americans; we were giving up the canal. I'll be one of the first to say I was not happy with giving up the canal. And, after working and living there, the Panamanians have done a better job with the canal than we did. They have nearly doubled the vessel throughput.

We looked at the canal as a utility, moving a vessel from one side to the other. That's how we looked at it. We wanted to break even. Panama looked at it as its lifeblood. This is a resource. How do we make this an economic engine? Panama then asked, "How do we get to value added? Instead of the vessel just transiting Pacific to Atlantic or Atlantic to Pacific, what can we do to add value?" Of course, the Colon Free Zone was part of it, and that was kind of zooming up. They said, "Wow this is really good. What can we do along those lines?" So, the ports basically then began very sophisticated operations where they would unload a ship—lot of them on the Pacific side—break down the containers for distribution for smaller vessels going up the Pacific side, south and north, or putting in the containers with the re-sorted merchandise on the Panama Canal train, and going to the Atlantic, reloading on the Atlantic and then smaller ships going north and going south through the Caribbean basin.

They've looked at everything they can possibly do—they are not interested in just being a trans-shipment site. Instead, they asked, "what can we do to open the box and generate work, activity, money?"

Q: When you arrived the widening was going on, was that also Chinese financed?

KUCHOVA: No, the widening had not started. It started once I arrived and they had an initial application. Companies had to apply, which is very key. You could not have any

sovereign financing. The reason they had no sovereign financing was to eliminate all the Chinese companies. So that was part of it. They did that in a very subtle but very effective way.

Q: Well, it's not only the Chinese that would have sovereign financing, the Emirates, even Norway would have potentially investment opportunities. But anyway, go ahead.

KUCHOVA: The stipulation was to basically not have China own the canal. They already knew it was a delicate balance with China owning all of the ports on the Pacific side. There's sensitivity there. So, they opened up the competition. They hired a U.S. engineering company to manage the bid process, and they did a great job. They absolutely did great work.

They basically broke the project down and they were looking at each of the bids and helping with what the scope of work would be. The entire project was initiated to accommodate the post Panamax vessels that were too wide to fit into the existing locks—not the canal but the locks. The existing locks limited the vessel size. There are some wonderful historical photographs of the big battleships just making it through like 6, 7, 8, 12 inches on each side. So, the post Panamax vessels—imagine, they have 12,000-14,000 containers. These are huge vessels. The canal authority wanted to double the throughput, particularly they wanted to make it for the post Panamax vessels to transit. The U.S. engineering company was handling the scope of work and the bids. In the end, it came down to a Spanish consortium run by Sacyr, which the Zapatero family in Spain— (Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero) was the prime minister, had some connection. And, Bechtel along with a few Japanese construction companies.

Q: Because they're granting, I assume, pieces of the expansion to different companies, are they careful to ensure the companies are going to be integrated so you don't end up with what used to happen long ago, different train track gages with different signals…

KUCHOVA: In this case, the competition was for a sole winner to do the work, which would be dredging a new canal parallel, where necessary, to the existing canal, and then new sets of locks. It really came down to Bechtel and Sacyr. In the end Sacyr won, which was in one way good for them. In another way, we did find out that they actually did use sovereign financing—they cheated. They used the Spanish import-export bank to bolster some of their financial statements. I actually got that information from a Panamanian government official who was not happy with the outcome, and he knew that was done. So, we démarched several European governments. We knew who did it, but we démarched several because if we went to the one place it was obvious somebody told us. We had an answer back and Spain said, "Yeah, we did." We could have pushed it. I would like to have pushed it but in the end in terms of overall relationships the USG seemingly said, "Okay. It is what it is."

So Sacyr won. Sacyr then did the construction. They drastically underbid the project with the philosophy of change orders.

Q: Oh, you'll need to give a brief explanation of change orders.

KUCHOVA: A change order would be where we bid this amount of work; we're going to do one through ten items on this scope of work. Our bid was for $15 million. We're only up to [item] six and $15 million is not enough. It's actually $30 million so we need another $15 million. If you don't give us that $15 million, we've got to stop here.

So that's how they did it, which was disappointing, but in one way I think there was an attitude in Panama that if they gave it to a non-U.S. company it underscored their independence. If they gave it to a U.S. company, well, everybody expected that. So, I get it. I was bitterly disappointed in the outcome, but it is what it is. I can't change it. But it was the political times in Panama and nationalism was running hot—Buy Panamanian—or whatever. It was a stunning disappointment.

But the rest of the work that we did was great. I was very active in the chamber, and the chamber was interesting. There were a couple of notable U.S. investments that were fascinating. One of them was Caterpillar. Caterpillar used to have a training center just south of Miami, because their biggest client for their big D-9 bulldozers is in Colombia because of the mining. They have a school for both operators and technicians, but they kept having these problems. They couldn't get visas for their mining customer's employees. This was a time when getting visas was really hard and of course some guy's name is Jose Lopez, and there's a million of them! So, Caterpillar finally said, "I'm going to move my training center someplace else because I can't get my clients in." I think nobody took them seriously but they moved to Panama. They put a training center in there. It was like a top-notch university campus. They also put in a technical center. Unfortunately, all this could have been—should have been in the U.S.

It was one of my very first opportunities to see the application of AI in an industrial setting. They would have sensors on the Caterpillar tractors and bulldozers and they would upload information at night to a Caterpillar cloud, and so some technician the next morning sitting somewhere in the Caterpillar world—it could be anywhere—would look at the bulldozers that belonged to this mining company in Colombia and say, "Hey, equipment #151, the engine's running hot, so let's send them an email." They'd send the customer an email and say, "Take 151 offline. You've got a potential engine problem there." So, they'd take it offline.

They also—I don't know the frequency—it reminded me of when you go to the lab to give blood and you get back the blood chemistry—they would actually do these fluid checks of the equipment and then they would upload that and somebody would say, "Hey there's traces of metal" or whatever. They were controlling this out of Panama. The other part, they would then send an email, a text, or whatever and say, "You've got to fix this. This is what you need to look for." I thought that was great because what it did for the client--was basically to get them in front of a breakdown because now they could use the machine, then at the end of the shift they could actually fix that machine before it broke down and it was ready the next day as opposed to the machine breaking during a shift.

Now you don't need a replacement, and you haven't wasted time. That was fascinating to see firsthand. You read about it and all but I saw it firsthand.

The other part that amazed me is Caterpillar was actively looking for talent. We got to know a guy who was retired from the U.S. army who had actually been stationed in Panama, and he worked for Caterpillar to set up their training center.

We met a couple of these young Caterpillar executives in training. There was a young lady from the Ukraine who was doing a tour—just like an embassy tour—in the HR department for Caterpillar, which they also located to Panama because they had problems with visas. So, if you worked for Caterpillar anywhere in the world and you had a question about your health insurance or whatever, you called this number. It rang in Panama City and somebody answered the phone for a Caterpillar employee and worked with them wherever in the world. She was doing a tour in their HR department. She had just finished one in a different department, and they were moving her around. She was going to go to finance next somewhere in the United States. I thought, "Wow, what an investment!

So, the Caterpillar executives, particularly the young ones, said, "yeah if you scratch us, we bleed yellow!" which is the color of the machines! It was very impressive. It was a womb-to-tomb kind of thing. They were very loyal to the company and the company was very loyal to them. That was quite something to see.

It was another opportunity to see the positive impact of U.S. business culture influencing local business culture. Caterpillar's success in Panama was noticed by Panamanian companies. What was Caterpillar doing right? It was its investment in people! Caterpillar's opportunities were based on merit, they didn't really care if a relative was in the management hierarchy. It was all about the skill sets you can bring to the table. So that was great.

Caterpillar was a wonderful member of the chamber of commerce and it was a great opportunity to talk about the U.S. approach to business. We probably don't get the credit we deserve, but it was another great opportunity to shine a light on the U.S. business approach.

The other thing I got to see was Venezuela in its downward spiral. Even when we were there, we would see Venezuelan business people make their way to Panama City with an empty suitcase and buy things to take home. It got much worse after we left, but even then, there were people that we got to know who would buy baby formula, Pampers, or medicines that you can easily get at CVS or Walgreens-like pharmacies that you couldn't get in Venezuela. And you think, this used to be one of the bread baskets for Latin America, and now there is a starving population. Sadly, we got to see that firsthand.

Q: With Venezuela just a quick background question, aside from the mismanagement that comes from one-man rule, was it also the fact that world oil prices were going down and Venezuela simply did not have the kind of money it formerly had?

KUCHOVA: I'm sure the decline of petroleum prices was a contributor to their challenges, but I think more than that it was the disruption of business and supply chain and taking away the confidence that a consumer would have that a product would be available. Then it changes the consumer's habits more towards either survival, hoarding, theft, or finding alternative solutions. It really got ugly. A friend of mine was in Venezuela at the time, and I would meet him at different conferences and the stories I would hear from him were incredible. If he would fly home and if he couldn't clear the airport before it was dark, he'd actually sleep at the airport because the embassy would say, "Do not travel at night." It was just a mess. He eventually had his family leave. He did very well. He did a lot of reporting on the impact on businesses and he received a lot of credit for his reporting. It was fascinating to read what he was writing because he was right there watching those companies have the life choked right out of them.

Q: One last general question. You talked about the success of Caterpillar's corporate culture. Since you were in both the private and the government sectors over several years, you will remember various times when the U.S. corporate culture came under question as Japan began its relative rise in terms of the U.S. economy, as China began its relative rise against the U.S. economy, and their methods. Did the U.S. corporate culture really change and adapt some of those things? It's hard for somebody from outside of the corporate world to know to what extent this was just worry warts or the extent to which we actually saw something valuable and adopted these Asian practices?

KUCHOVA: Interesting. Of course, Japan was so heavily influenced by Deming's work, who obviously was an American, but they took his ideas to heart. There was a book called *Head-to-Head*. It's an older book written by Lester Thoreau who at the time was the dean of the MIT Sloan School of Business. I read that a couple of times and he contrasted Japan's *keiretsu* system with the EU's managed competition and the U.S. system. It's interesting. As I read the book, I kind of was the cheerleader for each. I'd been in Japan working in the private sector and of course the *keiretsu* system dominated and I thought this was great! You're going to do your supply chain with companies that are affiliated with your house. Now the problem with the Japanese system was the *keiretsu* system allowed them to hide bad debt. They could actually move bad debt from entity to entity to entity so it never really showed. Well, it eventually showed, and it was catastrophic.

Then if you look at Europe with managed competition, again, I thought "oh that sounds really great!" It is and it isn't. The really large European companies do really well. Small companies have a really hard time because they can't get the exposure that they need, and can't *really* break through the mezzanine level. So, there's attributes of it that make perfect sense. Lester Thoreau's finding was that the U.S. system with all its warts, scar tissue and all, was actually more effective. I agree. But there are certain lessons you could take from the *keiretsu* or the European model to make ours better. I think we have transitioned out of the thinking that labor was solely a line-item expense. I think successful companies have transitioned to labor and talent are assets. We also have the ability to drop people easier than you can in Japan or Europe.

I think from a cultural perspective where we lack practical solutions is if an industry declines, I don't think government is as nimble as it should be to provide training for the workers who are moving out of one particular skill set and help them transition to another. It reminds me—and it's something that we actually talked about when we were in the Nordics—prior to the Civil War one of the largest employers in the United States was the whaling industry. It was not only the mariners harvesting the whale oil but it was all the supply companies and the whole support system. If you looked at it and if you had today's politicians back then, they'd say, "We've got to preserve the whaling industry! Look at all the jobs! The rather emotional concern for the whales aside for a moment. Look at all the jobs we are going to lose! Evolution from one solution or technology to another can be painful but it is essential. Fortunately, federal intervention didn't happen, whaling went away and new energy sources were developed. We are likely in another transition right now concerning energy. But long story, I think we have matured where smart companies consider labor and talent an asset, not an expense. I think you see more companies competing for talent.

Q: I don't mean to go off too far into this rabbit hole, but as important as it is to have a robust retraining system, when the United States first began losing manufacturing, steel and so on in the '70s, it wasn't simply that the workers were made redundant and put out on the economy to find their own way, it was that their local way of life was also gone and they disliked that as much as losing the job. So as important as retraining or offering them retraining is, they didn't want to move to other locations where they might have been able to get reasonably similar jobs. They were angry that the entire way of life they had had vanished.

KUCHOVA: I agree and I understand. I don't know what the answer really is. Part of it in my humble opinion, underscores a shortcoming we have as a society in terms of education and opportunity to make a nimbler workforce. That would have been helpful, but yeah, if you worked in High Point, North Carolina in the furniture manufacturing business. And, your grandfathers and fathers worked there, and now you personally have diminished opportunities in that declining industry you are very likely tempted to say, "I've always lived in blah, blah, blah North Carolina and I don't want to move to Ohio and start over!" If it is you or someone that you know, it's catastrophic! I think no matter how you do it, when there's a disruption in an industry, there's always going to be a casualty and pain. I'm sure there's a better way to say it, but I think there's going to be a colossal amount of pain. I don't know the best answer. I'm very relieved that I'm not responsible for one. It is terrible, I agree with you.

Q: Okay, I mention that only because in the 30 years I was in the Foreign Service and watched some of this happen not only in the United States but elsewhere, the argument was typically on an economic footing where what is most efficient, "Why aren't these workers agreeing to be efficient?" By moving or by adopting an entirely different set of skills that they don't like! They don't want to make something different!

KUCHOVA: Actually, the better response would be before, perhaps simultaneously as you address the economy, if you could address the social upheaval, to mitigate the disruption and to provide some degree of stability, the economic transition would likely be more effective.

Q: Not to take you out of Panama too long.

KUCHOVA: No. Again, we were very involved in things. The canal was a big part of our lives. We kayaked in the canal. We biked along the canal. We kayaked in the canal until Jim Bayuk, the regional medical officer, who was a great guy—he and his wife were birders—and Robbin and I were putting our kayaks in at a boat ramp on the canal. The next day I saw Jim at work and he said, "Ah, looked like fun! But don't those crocodiles make you nervous?" (Laughter.) And I thought, "Ahh, which crocodiles?" He said, "There's some in there like, 8, 10, 12 feet! Oh! Right where you launched!" So that made us think, and then we started to put the boats in the Pacific [instead].

But we never saw one while we were kayaking. But it was still fun. We would kayak up along the boats. You'd have boats that were hanging on their anchor along the side and we'd go right along these huge ships. It was an awesome experience.

There are a couple other things, which were kind of fun, to share with you.

Q: Just one second. I'm interested in all that but I had interrupted you while you were talking about the completion of the bidding on the widening of the canal. I don't want to miss anything that you intended to add to that part.

KUCHOVA: Yeah. Sacyr won. They wanted to be done by 2014 and they were a little bit late. They wanted it to be complete on the canal's centennial and it didn't work, but they finished for all intents and purposes everything. I hear they did a fine job. The canal itself is fine although they took a huge hit with the global economy when China was down.

But the Panama Canal management is extremely sophisticated. They have a vessel tracking system that is probably best in class. For example, if we have a vessel transiting the Pacific and they're going to go through the canal, the Panama Canal will be communicating with them giving the captain best speed, because you don't want to arrive and then drop an anchor and wait. You want to arrive when your number's up, take on a pilot and keep moving because it's expensive to transit. They have a very sophisticated system and I think it's probably tied in with Inmarsat where they will be communicating with the vessel giving them best speed, best arrival time. Of course, the ship owners like that feature because there's a certain speed that they want their vessels to travel, which is more economical so they're burning less bunker fuel.

The canal also every day auctions off a transit, like a ticket, and so when we were living there, I think it was Paul Allen from Microsoft, who passed away in 2018. His huge mega yacht, Octopus, paid some $300,000 to jump the line. Really fascinating.

Panama does a great job with the canal. Their procurement is good. In many ways they run like a well-oiled U.S. multinational. They also have a womb-to-tomb kind of a loyalty with their employees. Our across the street neighbor was an interesting character. She was an engineer but she took a job driving what they call "mules," which are those little electric locomotives that pull the ships along through the locks. They're called mules, going back to the day when they actually used mules to do this. She did that because she didn't want to work in an office any more.

Another guy on our street was a captain of a tug boat for the canal authority. There were a couple guys who were pilots for the canal. It's quite an operation, and they should be very proud of themselves for what they've achieved.

Q: One last technical question about the widening. Did the United States have a military interest in the widening? In other words, were we also relying on that widening to be able to move some of our larger ships back and forth?

KUCHOVA: I'm sure, but not that I had any degree or any direct involvement with. We would have a lot of navy traffic that would transit, including submarines, which was interesting. There was basically a news blackout when a submarine would be transiting, because they didn't want to call any attention to it. In some cases, it was kind of silly because the news blackout made you think, "Oh, what's going on?" If they just didn't mention it there would have been less attention.

Trying to think what else we did. The canal though has these interesting pieces. The French, of course, Ferdinand de Lesseps started it, and went bust. Near where we lived, overgrown by the jungle, was an old French cemetery with hundreds if not thousands of French graves. When we lived there, there was a French chamber of commerce that was just beginning efforts to hack the jungle back and restore the cemetery.

Then of course the other great story was that when the French were building the canal and somebody got malaria and went to the hospital, that pretty much it was a death sentence. The French made the hospitals attractive and featured lots of potted plants to sooth the patients. Unfortunately, those ceramic pots for the foliage pooled water that enabled mosquitoes to breed. French patients died by the thousands. The United States spent nothing on plants and flowers for the hospital to be cost effective and in the end U.S. hospitals had a better survival rate.

Q: Incredible!

KUCHOVA: They eventually put it together. And it's like, "Ahh! It's the mosquito!" It's fascinating. But the French hospital apparently got raves about how beautiful it was. There were flowers and trees on all the hallways and in your room. You had this beautiful flowering tree. And, they killed you! But it was fascinating.

It's also interesting where the United States gets credit for the locks. Actually, it was an idea from a group of young French engineers who suggested it and the senior leadership

basically laughed them out of the room saying, “No, we’re going sea level to sea level. Are you crazy?” There was a conference that was held in Paris to get the funding and de Lesseps made a presentation and the option for locks wasn’t on the conference agenda. That’s how little de Lesseps thought of this alternative. Of course, when the United States did take over, it was, “Locks are a great idea! Let’s do these locks.” Whose idea was that? It was French. It was their idea; we just happened to use it.

Then along the canal there’s a couple of interesting things. There’s this huge crane. I think they call it Hercules. That was part of the war reparations from Nazi Germany. It was a crane that was in the Hamburg Harbor that was used when they were making U-boats. It is immense! They still use this immense floating crane. So that’s there.

The Panama Canal railroad is fascinating. When we were there, there was an American who was in charge of it. Wonderful guy. His dad was a Foreign Service Officer, his mom was Panamanian. And so, he lived all over and he came back to live in Panama. That was home for him. He was in the shipping business and the guy who was running the railroad and owned it kept inviting him for lunch, talking about the railroad. After the second lunch, he said to the railroad owner, “This is fascinating, but why are you telling me this?” And the railroad owner tells him, “Oh, I want you to be the general manager!” He said I don’t know anything about railroads. He said, but you know about the containers. That’s our business. The railroad side is easy; it’s the containers. So, this young fellow ends up running the railroad and he did a great job.

He did a couple cool things. They bought a couple of those old observation cars from U.S. railroads and restored them. We did a couple of embassy events on those cars, a lot of trade missions. We’d have companies come down and we wanted the visiting executives to see and understand the opportunities and to do business. We wanted to show them the root system of something, not just the leaves at the end. So, we would do these events and you’d take the train out at night and they would stop near Lake Gatun in the middle of the canal and everybody would get off the train. It is as dark as anything; there are no lights. You have the jungle sounds around you and you walk out and see the brilliant stars above. It was quite an interesting place to do business.

Robbin and I explored the country. Because we’re Land Rover people, we did a crossing from the Pacific to the Atlantic, over the continental divide. That was great fun.

We went kayaking up what’s called the Blue Peninsula. While we were there, something very interesting happened. We brought the kayaks back onto the beach after a good paddle and we’re sitting on the beach next to our boats enjoying a cold beer. We watched this brightly colored pickup truck drive up along the beach and then turn around and point its bed toward the sea. Then a moment later this huge yacht comes around the point and comes in and they drop an anchor and they put a Zodiac in the water and they start loading these big bales the size of an ice chest--they were wrapped in black plastic--into the Zodiac. They make a couple of trips back and forth. Robbin and I are like, “Wow this is really kind of interesting!” So, Robbin gets up and she’s a photographer, so she’s taking pictures, there are pelicans feeding in the water so she is capturing their antics and

she snaps the boat as well. It turns out the boat belonged to one of the former presidents. Panama has a law that former presidents are immune from any type of civil prosecution. They did two or three trips and they loaded the back of this pickup truck with these bales and the truck drove away.

I took the photographs to show colleagues at the DEA office when I returned to work. I can't give you his exact quote, but he's like, "Holy mackerel! (It wasn't that word he used!) Do you know who that is?" "Yeah, I do." And he goes, "What was she doing, riding the Zodiac? Oh my god! What do I do with this?" I don't know." It was fascinating to watch his reaction.

Then (Manuel Antonio) Noriega's brother was in the tuna business. On the Pacific side of Panama City there are all these state-of-the-art tuna seiners sitting at anchor. They were always there. There was this tuna plant that was always busy but the fishing fleet was always at anchor and the plant was always busy. It's like, "What are they doing?... Okay maybe you don't really want to know." But that was part of it.

The countryside was like living in a Gauguin painting. Paul Gauguin actually had been a worker when the French were there. He was on his way to Tahiti, ran out of money, stopped to work on the canal for a while, and painted and drank—and whatever else he did. Driving to and from work into our valley it was literally driving into one of his paintings. It was just this magnificent location. A friend of ours who was the PA counselor was driving his kids home and it was up a hill then down, and at the top of the hill right near the guard booths he watched a jaguar across the street. I'm not talking about the sports car! I mean a real jaguar crossed right in front of him. Because we were living on the edge of the jungle, we had to buy a product at the Panamanian equivalent of Lowe's or that kind of a store every couple of months. We bought a product called *Snake Be Gone*. You opened this container and you put the contents around the perimeter of your house to discourage snakes from coming toward the house. I'm not a snake fan so that was not really a great thing for me.

There was a lot of violence. There were a lot of robberies. There were these kidnappings of convenience where somebody would kidnap and use your cellphone to call. They'll release you if you give them money. We had an embassy family approached by a group of guys with automatic weapons on the Atlantic side. There were robberies and at least one shootout at the grocery store that we frequented. The robberies happened with such frequency--the first couple times the robbers would come in and say, "Everybody get on the floor." Towards the end, people just continued to check out during a robbery. I thought that was pretty bizarre!

Living there was very interesting. Panamanians are very lovely, gregarious, warm-hearted people. There were some peculiarities at the time. There were these old school buses, where U.S. school buses go to die, Diablo Rojos [Red Devils]. They don't have an established route; they drive to where there's people. So, they would race—there's two of them and there's people at the next point, they would actually race down the street to get

there first. There were some horrendous accidents. There were deaths. It was after we left that they finally outlawed the Diablo Rojos and they were taken off the streets.

Then, during economic hard times, the people would steal manhole covers to sell for scrap iron. Our DCM's wife was driving at night and the front of her car went into an open manhole and tore the wheel right off the car.

Q: Oh yeah.

KUCHOVA: That was it. It took the axle right off.

You know, we're fond of the place. It sounds terrible. The other one was the house we had in the neighborhood that we liked, we had a couple of problems. One of them was when it rained, and there's a significant rainy season. It would leak and it reminded me of the movie *Das Boot* when a submarine was attacked by depth chargers and you have water coming in. Robbin would have these buckets throughout the house or she covered furniture with plastic. So, the lovely GSO guys would say, "Oh yeah, it's really bad. You know what, we really can't do much until the dry season. And then we can fix the leak." Okay, I get it. Then in the dry season they would say, "Is it leaking?" "Well, there's no rain!" "Well, it must be okay then." "Wait a minute!"

Then there was one other funny story. In the U.S., if you went to Home Depot or Lowe's and you bought paint and something's wrong with it, you take it back and they give you your money back. The returned paint has to be incinerated, which is expensive because it's a hazardous waste. The companies either incinerate it or they export it. Where much of this paint ends up is actually a company in Panama. I think it's called American Color. They basically buy this returned paint. It's cheaper to export it than it is to incinerate it. Incineration is expensive! Sending it to another country (is cheaper.) So, this company takes all the paint and they basically just pour it into a vat. Purple, white, yellow, green, it doesn't matter, and then they can it. Our house needed paint—this was after the leaks—So the embassy goes to where it can save money? American Color! They buy this paint, and they paint the inside of our house.

ROBBIN: It was the outside.

KUCHOVA: Was it the outside? So, they paint it and Robbin and I come back from this great kayaking trip and we're fastidious on our equipment on washing the paddles and everything. I'm in the garage and it starts one of these tropical downpours. I step in and am having a beer as we're doing this. I look at the wall and the paint is coming off the wall in a roll; like that kind of curtain that rolls. They call it a Roman shade or whatever. The water is between the concrete and the paint, and the paint doesn't break. I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh! It's worse than ever!" So, I go in—In the meantime Robbin had been in one of the bathrooms and above the mirror it's the same thing. She's thinking to herself, "I'm not going to tell him because he'll go nuts." I'm thinking, "I'm going to tell her, 'Robbin, you should see this. The paint's coming off the wall again.'" So, I get in and I tell her and she says, "I wasn't going to tell you, but come look at this. We were being

driven nuts with the house. So finally, this is just too much. I loved my work, I love everything, and just about that time I get an email saying that there's going to be an opening in Finland.

So, I throw my hat in the ring, I get that assignment and we leave Panama. It was bittersweet because I loved working for Barbara Stephenson. I loved my team, and I loved my colleagues. It was a good community. Education was inexpensive for Panamanians but they still paid for their books. So, we would actually have these happy hours and we were very instrumental in doing something like putting an extra jar on the bar and asking people. We'd raise a couple hundred bucks and give it to the Foreign Service National fund. They would use it to help the children of Foreign Service Nationals to buy books, or whatever, for school, because the tuition was nothing. So, you had a profound opportunity to make a difference. We got active with the Peace Corps. That was a little frustrating because they basically will give ideas but then they want the local people to do it. Sometimes you need a little more than a good idea.

I think I told you about the pig biowaste digestion. That's where we did it, in Panama. Did I tell you the story?

Q: No, I don't think you did tell me!

KUCHOVA: Okay. The Panama Canal Authority was very concerned about the indigenous people hacking the forest in the mountains by all the tributaries that come down to the Chagres River that powers the canal. They didn't want this runoff to get in because then you have to dredge the canal and the whole bit. They were looking for ways—So they asked the Peace Corps, what can you do to help us stop people from doing this type of agriculture? They were doing all kinds of good-hearted, well-intentioned programs, and they came across one that was a pig-waste biodigester. There was a company in Colombia that made these big industrial bags into which you put pig waste. That's the hardest part of all! Kind of like being a congressman! Then they harvest the methane gas. There's a little pipe that comes from this bag off the house into the house and you cook with methane gas. So, if you go to one of these little villages and you find the alpha family who's willing to take a risk and say, "Can we put in a pig waste bio digester so you can cook?" "Yeah, great idea!" If the alpha family does it, all the other families say, "I want what they have!" Not only do you create this solution to prevent runoff and the canal being adversely affected, you've actually produced some kind of an economic activity.

So, a company goes into the pig waste digester business. We did that and it was a couple hundred bucks. They were like, "We could go for a grant. We could go for this; we could go for that." I think we just paid for it ourself. "Here's the money. Just do it." The Peace Corps director—lovely guy—was really angry because he said, "We don't do that kind of direct action. They have to have the solution." I accepted his anger and I sat with him and I said, "I get it. I get everything, but if this one family does it this helps you." In the end he said, "Yeah, you're really right." And we came to an agreement. So, we just did that.

We also had wonderful interns in our office. One was a young lady from an indigenous community. First in her family to get a university education. She actually rode a bus every day, probably two hours each way. Every day, she'd come to work; it was the same dress that she wore, but it was neat, clean, and scrubbed. She was just a beautiful hard-working person. When she graduated from our intern program, the office—a small office—we all chipped in and the two ladies in the office took her shopping. She got a business wardrobe. They found her an apartment, and she got a job. I think it might have been one of the cruise companies, being a liaison because the cruise companies come through there. Of course, she was multilingual, Spanish and English and then her indigenous language. She was helping on tours and on problems.

That was when Robbin and I left, so the books for the kids, the pig biowaste digester, and this young lady's start; they're like the highlights for us. Maybe if we'd won the canal [expansion] it would have been my highlight, but we didn't win the canal. But these were our highlights.

Then I had a guy who was our driver. He was not well educated, but a smart man, and his son was studying logistics in the university. And you stop for a minute and you go—Here's this guy, his nickname was Chin, so Chin's driving me, our driver for our section, and here's his son going to university. He's going to get a BS, a degree in business in logistics. You think of the leap. Chin didn't have a high school education. You know, 6th, 7th, 8th grade maybe. And here's the son in university, he's going to be a logistics manager at one of these ports opening up, perhaps a Chinese one. Okay, I'll take it. You look at that leap. What a great thing to see! It was those kinds of lessons that we walked away with that were the most powerful and the most meaningful that we had.

Q: It sounds like a great way to sum up this tour, so we will stop here. It's 2009 now?

KUCHOVA: It is October 2009. There are two things I do want to mention. I had never in my life seen a fire start on its own; spontaneous combustion. I got to see that in Panama in the dry season. I thought that was fascinating. There were frequent fires in the dry season. We were out once at a friend's place and we got a call, "You need to go home right away. There's a fire behind your house!" They weren't kidding.

Q: [It was] huge!

KUCHOVA: It was a big brush fire, so when we got there the fire sounded like a train. And then from all the smoke—the houses in the Zone all had semi-open gables on the roof. The gable ends--they were all open or louvers--so during the fire season, all this ash would end up being pulled into the house and would sit on top of the ceilings. So, we learned pretty early that if someone came to do work in the house, "Please don't move the ceiling tiles," because if you move the ceiling tiles, you'd have this avalanche of ash that would rain down into the house. It was just part of local living.

Q: What about _____

KUCHOVA: That kind of sums up our experience. But again, great people, great issues to work on, and we left. In some ways life could have gone longer there, but as fate determined it, leaving early put us in a situation where we got to enjoy eight years in the Nordics, which we'll get to next time. It presented an opportunity for me to actually do more than just talk about "bad metrics, bad behavior," but actually do something about it from a regional perspective.

Q: Interesting. Great. So, I'm going to pause the recording.

Q: Okay, today is October 20, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Nicholas Kuchova as he begins his tour in Finland and for the recording, you're there again on…

KUCHOVA: October 2009 through August 2013.

Q: The floor is yours.

KUCHOVA: All right. I arrived at post alone because Robbin, my soulmate, my best friend and wife, had been diagnosed with breast cancer when we were between posts. In one way it was a blessing that we departed Panama early because they were able to detect the cancer early and treat it. And, my agency was very good to me. They let me delay my departure for a little bit and then I had to go to work and Robbin stayed for some additional treatment. So, I arrived alone in Finland. We joked we went from subtropic to subarctic, which was tremendous fun and I arrived just before the first snows. The first snows that come in Finland are a magical time. People think of the beautiful Nordic summer but actually the Nordics are their most beautiful during the winter.

Q: Why is that?

KUCHOVA: Oh, the countryside takes on this storybook look to it. The houses out in the country are generally red and white, like red wood siding with white trim, or yellow with white trim. And the white birch trees remind me, as a kid I remember seeing the movie Dr. Zhivago and there's this scene when Zhivago leaves a train and he walks through a white birch forest. That imagery stuck with me. Of course, David Lean's films also influenced Spielberg but of course he went on and made money out of it. [I] walked away with the imagery implanted on my brain. The Finnish countryside was spectacular.

We learned that there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing. And, the other lesson was you never let the amount of sunlight or lack of sunlight determine what your activities are going to be because the winters are dark. Nevertheless, I arrived just before the first snows.

Probably my favorite quarters anywhere was just outside of Helsinki in the little town of Kauniainen, which was a Swedish-speaking enclave inside a larger municipality. Swedish is also an official language of Finland. It goes back to the days of colonialism. I remember one morning waking up and looking out the bedroom window and there was a

dusting of snow on a pine tree that was right in front of the window. It was like one of these lovely Japanese woodblock prints. It was mesmerizing.

In my mind I recorded that image, and I could not wait for Robbin to arrive and to join me, as she did some weeks later. By the time she arrived, Finland was covered with snow. The wonderful folks in RSO [regional security office] got me clearance to meet Robbin at the baggage claim area just after she cleared the frontier. Usually you must wait outside, but they helped me out so I got to meet her just as she came off and cleared customs. We still talk about it because she arrived, I guess it was late November, and she never saw the ground until April! It was one of their heavy, proper winters, which was great, it was spectacular.

The living arrangements were great. I was close to the embassy. It was a very safe place to live. I was never brought up where there was a lot of snow that impacted driving, so the very first year it was a bit nerve wracking; you're a little anxious in terms of driving. But by the second year we were used to it and one day Robbin said, "Let's go take some photographs in Naantali," which is on the west coast of Finland, some two hours away. So, in the middle of a snowstorm, we just got in the car and went, because by then we were acclimated. It was just no problem. We're good to go!

But anyway, work was great. I ended up working for a charismatic and bigger than life ambassador, Bruce Oreck, the son of David Oreck of vacuum cleaner fame!

Q: Oh, for heaven's sake, yeah!

KUCHOVA: Bruce was a lawyer by profession, a tax and energy lawyer, whose clients were the big, big petroleum companies. He did tax work for them; he was fascinating. He had started giving some suggestions to the Obama campaign about energy because he really knew his stuff. Then after the election, he was invited to the inaugural and thrilled to death. He went home to Boulder, Colorado and then got a call. They said, "Come to work. Where would you like to be ambassador?" His first choice was Finland because of their energy policies.

Long story short, he ended up buying an apartment and still has a place in Helsinki. He's doing some development in Helsinki. He fell in love with the country and the people and so he stayed. He splits his time between Finland, Cabo San Lucas and the U.S.

I'm going to show you a picture. I don't know if you can actually see it. Let me get it towards the camera.

Q: Yes.

KUCHOVA: That's Bruce. If they were going to do a movie about—Who's the big actor?

Q: Bruce Willis?

KUCHOVA: There's an actor who's all muscles. I think he's a Pacific islander. Yep, it is Dwayne Johnson, the Rock; he's very famous.

Q: Oh yeah, okay!

KUCHOVA: Well, Bruce could play his father. He works out every day. I mean he's a real character. And you know he…

Q: Just one second. I have to turn off the oven. Sorry. Okay.

KUCHOVA: You're back. Bruce has this infectious sense of curiosity; nothing is impossible. He was a complete shock for the Foreign Service Nationals, and I think for 90 percent of the officers, because [he had a] very unorthodox approach to management. He would walk the compound frequently and pop in an office and see what was going on. As I mentioned, he was an expert in energy and like so many of [President] Obama's first tour's ambassadors, he came with a sense of mission.

As a matter of fact, when I think back of all my years, the Obama first term ambassadors that I worked with across Europe were phenomenal. They talked to each other. They collaborated. They traded ideas. They seemed to really have a collegial relationship. And, they weren't competitive. If one of them had a great idea, they were trading it back and forth, a concept which actually ends up surfacing later on as we do regionalization in our agency. But Bruce was this bigger-than-life guy. We hit it off. I liked his style. He—very much like Ambassador Stephenson—got it.

The fact that if you had a compelling commercial or trade message where you could engage not only the government, but the business leaders, which influenced the government, you could capitalize on shared common values, shared common interests. By having that relationship, it opened the door for more profound conversations on other issues. You just didn't come in cold. You already had a relationship about this subject or that topic. So, Bruce, much like Stephenson, understood that business was a driver and a door opener and a way of communicating. If all else failed, it was a way of reminding the host government that we share a lot of these similar interests, so let's go back and take stock of those and see how we can work together.

Q: Okay, before you go much further, I just want to ask what were your responsibilities in Finland, and did you have regional responsibilities?

KUCHOVA: I did. I arrived with minor regional responsibilities. I was resident in Helsinki, but I was responsible for our posts in Estonia, in Tallinn, and in Norway. If you look at the map, the Estonia connection is easy to connect. There are linguistic, historical, and business relationships that bind. The Norwegian oversight is puzzling and that is only because they were dividing things up and that was open at the time, long before I arrived, and they just threw it in with no real thought of where's the calibration here? Where's the relationship? Again, very stovepipe kind of thinking, but that was fine—play the cards that were dealt.

I spent a lot of time in Tallinn. I went over very often. The front office in Tallinn was great to work with. We had a great State Department FSN who handled commercial problems and opportunities in Estonia and she was wonderful to work with. Interestingly she was a lifelong resident, so she lived for a while under the Soviet occupation. She knew several of the cosmonauts. I had the feeling that in her youth she was a wild child. She was a lot of fun and she loved Estonia's free market life. Her mother lamented the day that the Soviets left because life got harder in many ways. Like you had to pay real rent, and you actually had to have a job! The other system was like, here's your check, and this is what you do. So, her mom was not happy, but she was happy with it.

Then I spent time in Oslo, which was fascinating because in Oslo they're the leaders in offshore petroleum exploitation. I learned a whole lot there. They learned their skills from the United States and offshore from our Gulf of Mexico, but the Norwegians then took everything they learned from the United States, and they geometrically improved technology further. Today Norway is the world's masters of deep-sea exploration and exploitation to such an extent that they've been hired by the Brazilian government to help them develop the offshore there. Fascinatingly the Kingdom of Norway and NASA have a partnership because both of them work in environments that are hostile to human life. They share all kinds of research and all kinds of projects on robotics and artificial intelligence, because where Norwegians are looking at operating at tremendous depths under the sea, of course, NASAs looking at space. It's fascinating to watch.

Not to get ahead of myself, in Norway we did a lot of things around energy conservation. Barry White was the ambassador and we had a dinner at Barry's residence, which used to belong to Nobel. It was a dinner for Bain and Company. Bain and Company sent their senior leaders over and they wanted to talk to senior government and private-sector leadership in Norway. Obviously, the subtle reason is that Bain was looking for opportunity, either a consulting or investment or whatever. It's basically all set up around a conversation over a dinner, and one of the guests was the gentleman who was in charge of the ethics committee for Norway's sovereign investment fund, which is likely the largest in the world. This gentleman is responsible for their business ethics and what they are going to invest in. He told the most disarming story ever. He went to elementary school, high school, and university with the king. He knew him from school age, and not always did he call him your highness. Sometimes it was Harold when they were very young.

This gentleman was a very successful businessman and one day his office gets a call, and the call basically is, "Can you come see the king?" And of course, it's not like, "Hey is Tuesday good for you?" It's like, "the king would like to see you now!" So, this fellow goes and the king basically says, "We've hit oil! There's lots of money going to come to the kingdom, but the moment we start, it's a resource that depletes. So, my anxiety is over, what do we do next? What will Norway look like particularly after the oil is gone?" This is before they even started drilling. "How do we prepare for the future?" Likely it's a future the king knew he would never see. So, he tells his lifelong friend they're going to do this because the people own the oil. The international companies will make

investment, but the kingdom is making money on all the resources that are being extracted.

So, he tells his lifelong friend, "We must be careful how we invest. We must make sure we can provide for our children, our children's children, and I want you to help me set up this investment fund," because the guy was in finance. So of course, this gentleman tells him—I'm sure politely— "Look, I've got a business to run and a family to raise." And the king's answer is, "Well the kingdom's going to buy your business so you don't need any money, and I need you to do this." Of course, the right answer is, "Yes, your highness, I'll do this." But this guy spent his entire life—really since the late '60s, early '70s basically growing and nurturing this sovereign wealth fund, which now, as they say, is the biggest in the world.

The king basically wanted to avoid what he saw in Sweden and what he saw in Finland with the populations moving south. There are still vibrant cities in the north of Sweden and Finland but most of the activity tends to be in the southern part of those countries. Norway, even up near Tromsø and Alta, these cities above the Arctic Circle, are vibrant, exciting cities with universities and world-class hospitals, libraries, and cultural activities. The population has not moved south.

Q: That's lovely.

KUCHOVA: They've had tremendous investment, a lot of it medical research, cancer research. They've done an absolutely superb job. And so, I thought how privileged I am to be sitting in this dinner listening and getting a firsthand view of how Norway put together its strategy of what Norway will look like. That was exciting. So anyway, that was part of my regional activity.

But before we get there, a few things happened that helped to push the regional. I guess it was during Bush 43, Ambassador [Michael M.] Wood to Stockholm was a real aggressive business guy, fantastic entrepreneur, very interested in energy and environmental issues. Oftentimes I think Republican administrations don't get any credit for doing that. Wood started a program in Stockholm called "The Next Big Thing." He also created an organ called the League of Green Embassies. The League of Green Embassies was originally focused on the GSO and the Management conversation at embassies about—some embassy said, "We just put a new chiller in and we're using less kilowatt hours and this is better, we can make…." He wanted the Management, the GSO guys to trade information for what's the best way to optimize energy, you know, "I'm relighting my embassy with LEDs," whatever.

Wood obviously moves on and then [Matthew] Barzun comes in with Oreck and others with Obama. Barzun eventually went to London, and Barzun's interest was different than Wood's, but Barzun knew that Oreck loved the energy conversation. So, he says to Bruce, "Why don't you take over the League of Green Embassies?" You don't have to finish the sentence for Bruce; Bruce gets it. He's always 10 moves down the chessboard. Helsinki takes over the League of Green Embassies and Bruce changes its focus from

introspective—a Management and GSO conversation—he wants to include other embassies, other governments, and companies on the energy question. Energy efficiencies, how do we achieve them? How do you squeeze more out of a kilowatt? That was right up his alley. [The reason] why he wanted to be in Finland is their sense of the energy efficiencies and conservation.

The League of Green Embassies starts, and he basically says, "Here's what we want to do and how we are going to do it. For me this is like the most fun in the world. This is a blank piece of paper. How do you want to do this? I started recruiting and socializing this with Commercial Service posts across Europe, because the companies that are playing in this space are not in silos; they're playing across all of Europe. Probably for the majority of posts, they all got it. My agency got it. Then we started looking at how do we do things differently? The League of Green Embassies decided we're going to go make energy improvements in different CMRs [Chief of Mission Residences] across Europe. We're going to relight them with LED lighting. We're going to use nanotechnology on the windows to reduce solar heat gain, which reduces the amount of electricity to power air conditioning. Even in the Nordics you use air conditioning, let alone the southern part of Europe.

Most of Europe uses radiators, so we got a company from the Netherlands that made dumb radiators into smart radiators. If you were in a bedroom and you opened the window, the radiator turned off. When you close the window, it turned on. It wasn't going to heat the outdoors. We worked then with Johnson Controls. How do you control all the different systems in a building to have them talk to each other most efficiently; when to turn something on and when to turn it off. How do you take advantage of the different electrical rates, day vs night?

Then we decided, let's go put these things into place. Let's go redo it. The first CMR we did was Brussels. We basically relit the entire CMR. We put in smart radiators, we did the 3M window film, we did Johnson Controls, and we had a dashboard that basically showed the energy consumption plummet. And of course, commensurately the costs went down.

We then ended up doing a whole series of CMRs and I wrote them down to make sure I don't miss any of these. We did a whole series of them. Where did I write it? We did Rome, Warsaw, Sofia, the Hague, Brussels—as I mentioned—Berlin, Helsinki, Stockholm, and Paris. In Paris, interestingly enough we got the State Department's permission to do the window film on the windows because of course that's a palace. You don't touch anything. But one of the benefits of the 3M window film was it reduced the solar damage to all of the artwork and all of the carpeting. So, art historians loved the idea because now you just preserved these treasures a little bit longer. We moved across Europe. We actually had one newspaper article that said that the League of Green Embassies moved across Europe faster than Patton did in World War II! We got a big kick out of that! That was great for the U.S. companies and an awful lot of fun.

It reflected Oreck's management style. Whether it's good or bad, he had a couple people that he didn't think were working really hard so he encouraged them to curtail, convincing them that their mighty talents might be far better used elsewhere. He wished them all the luck in the world, because he didn't like the games. Because he came from the private sector, he despised any sense of internal competition. If all of you guys in my country team are not playing with the same jersey, with the same idea of making that goal, you're not helping me. And if you're not helping me, I really don't want you here.

He just had this fun sense of doing stuff. Like he would—my whole career I would go to work really early. I oftentimes would be in my office by 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning and he'd [already] be there. I often would leave for home around 6:30 or 7 at night, and he'd [still] be there! It was all, "What about this? What about that? How about if we did this? How about that?" I loved it. I never felt overburdened or like I was being hemmed in or whatever. He just opened the constant doors.

Then Bruce took the League of Green Embassies a step further to address glaring deficiencies in Embassy Helsinki—I don't know if you've ever been there.

Q: No.

KUCHOVA: It was an aging plant and the State Department OBO [Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations] realized that the place needed refreshing. The first plans about the need to refresh this embassy were dated 1952. That was my birth year, so that's how I remember it. That's when they said, "We need to spend some money here." Well, they never did. They never did until one day maybe a year into my tour on the annex—I worked in the annex, what an inspiring place to work—a window from a 4th floor dormer fell off the building and it fell near the entry of the annex where consular was located and there had been a young Finnish mom exiting. She was pregnant and had a toddler in hand. It didn't hit her. It landed maybe 10-12 feet away, but it scared the living hell out of her.

Oreck found out within seconds; they were still sweeping the glass up. He closed the building and then cabled back [to Washington] saying, "Closing the annex. It's not safe." He had been arguing about this, and they kept telling him, "We're going to do something." A lot of this is really kind of funny. He gets on the phone with management and OBO and he explains it to them and they say, "This is a serious situation. We're going to send over a survey team. We're going to take a look at that building and see what we can do. Then we'll see how we can correct this." Of course, his answer is, "When?" They said, "We'll have them over next year." "Stop!" So, Oreck tells them, "No, that's not acceptable. You need to do something now." This guy's bigger than life.

So, Oreck's on the phone with the director of OBO and says, "It's just not acceptable." They say, "Let's see what we can do. Let's have another conference," like the next day or whatever. He says, "Okay, great! We'll do it at your morning…." He hangs up. They think it's going to be a telephone conference. He tells his OMS, "Get me on a flight!" So, Oreck flies to Washington and of course they're astounded because at 10 o'clock for the

meeting he's sitting in the office. Not on the phone. He's a big guy; muscles. The word NO is not in his vocabulary.

So, they start dancing with him and he said, "This is just unacceptable. It's a safety hazard." Actually, one day he and the RSO [Regional Security Officer] were in the annex, the one way in and out of the building, and with the fire department's permission they pulled the fire alarm. They had a stopwatch and after a certain amount of time—I forget what it was—people coming out saying, "You're dead, you're dead, you're dead, you're dead." They said basically there's no way out and the smoke would build up and people would drop from smoke inhalation.

So, Oreck goes back to Washington. They have another meeting. Then the State Department OBO thinks, all right, this guy is like the terminator; you can't stop him! They said to him, "Well, Ambassador, you get one or two flights a year for consults." His answer was, "You don't think I flew here on your dime, do you?" And OBO knew it was over!

So, Oreck honchos this plan and within 18 months of that, we got construction. He takes the annex and because it actually has some history to it including some World War II battle damage, he preserves the outer walls and everything inside is a new building. We had organic LED lighting. We had district heating and district cooling. We had the leading edge. We were the first. You know what LEED is, the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED platinum? [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design].

Q: Yeah, yeah, uh huh.

KUCHOVA: LEED Platinum is the highest. We were the first embassy of any nation anywhere in the world to be a LEED Platinum embassy. Oreck decided that the annex is not an inspiring name for a place to work. But what about the Innovation Center? I think we were also the first embassy to have wireless in our conference rooms. It's an unclassified building, so when we would have guests, or we would have business visitors, they had access to their laptops. Since they couldn't bring materials in, they could get access to things on the cloud for a presentation. We had companies wanting to be part of this, but we couldn't take a donation. So yeah, "We'll buy your LED or organic LED lighting and we'll give you ten bucks for it. Oreck is a lawyer. He got it through and so we had the coolest stuff. That propelled us even further into this energy conservation that supported LEED green embassies.

Then we took it a step further and we started an effort called Smart Cities. Europe gets the credit for Smart Cities. They get the credit for taking a more aggressive role. I give them all the credit in the world for it. But when you dive in deeper, a significant amount of the technology that enables a smart city is from the U.S. Yes, some of it's the hardware, but a lot of it is big data, artificial intelligence, all kinds of really cool things that enable a city to be smart and to be integrated with its traffic, police, fire, public safety, public transportation and sanitation. Signage, and some things miraculous and some things rather mundane. So, everything we were doing in Helsinki was amplified

across Europe on this energy conservation, smart cities conservation, and the League of Green Embassies.

We'll jump now to the CMRs we did. I'll use Rome as an example. I think the CMR in Rome is called Villa Taverna. It's this historical, I mean it's like a movie set kind of place. It's hard to believe that anybody would have the privilege of living there. We redid that from stem to stern on energy and then we had all kinds of business and energy journalists from across Europe come in to look at the installations and talk to the companies that did it. None of it was this overt, "Act now! $9.99 [and] we'll throw in the Ginsu knives." This was all higher-end conversation about how do you comply with the EU's directive on energy conservation? We can do it this way. How do you do this? We could do it that way. The companies loved it because they were given a place to speak, a platform, or a podium that didn't make them look like they were doing a sales call. They were educating people. The journalists that we invited were basically reporting this as news. I had the added pleasure of working with my CS Europe boss Carmine D'Aloisio, which made the experience all the better. So, the companies were—There's an old Zero Mostel movie *The Producers*…

Q: Oh yes, and later on Broadway.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, so Oreck and I had a good relationship. He is still a good buddy. We used to paraphrase that, "We got a hit!" Oreck gets invited; he keynotes a lot on energy issues. He still talks around the world today on energy and he gets paid to do it. But when he was ambassador obviously, he wasn't being paid. We were once in Brussels on an EU program on energy conservation. It was global and Bruce was one of the keynoters. Right after it, somebody walks up to me and the guy says, "We would like to hear the ambassador's conversation about energy for this cabinet-level committee at the EU." I said, "I'm sure the ambassador would love to do that. When?" He replied, "As soon as he's off the stage!" So literally Bruce comes off the stage—I called him Jefe [boss]—I say, "Jefe, we've got another gig." So, we leave and we go over to one of the EU offices and he basically gives the same presentation to a group of very senior EU officials about energy conservation. He is infectious on his delivery. You know, Oreck just is inspiring. Those were the kinds of things that we did.

He keynoted several U.S. Green Building Conferences [USGBC]. There was one in Toronto, one in Chicago, and one in San Francisco that I went to with Oreck. Then the founder of USGBC—Rick Fedrizzi—he then went on to found the World Green Building Council to try to pull these green building councils together, including the British [who] have one called BREEAM [Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method]. It's basically the same orientation and he wanted the BREEAM standards and the USGBC standards to be merged, because he said that there's certain marketplaces around the world that they're not going to go with USGBC or maybe not with BREEAM. But if you could look at a combination of the two, you will achieve what we want to achieve.

While we were there, in addition to doing this stuff across all of Europe with the smart cities and the League, Finland itself was an exciting place to do business. People might think of it as this backwater, and maybe it is, but it's my favorite backwater if it is! Modern Finland is a miracle. It basically ascended to where it is today at the collapse of the Soviet empire. Up to that time they were reeling under the shadow of the Russians, and they still are in some ways. But they had this precarious dance between the Russians and the West. When you look at where their businesses are today, most, I bet you 90 percent of the businesses in Finland operate in English. Finnish businesses are at the vanguard on a lot of issues. Of course, you've heard of Nokia.

Q: Oh yeah! In fact, I was waiting for when you were going to get to the telecommunication sector, but go ahead.

KUCHOVA: Nokia used to be a company that made snow tires and boots; industrial products. And one of the family members, back in the day when cell phones were first started, said, "Why don't we make the cases for the cell phones? Because we're good at plastics and rubber. They had this conversation at one of their houses and they decided, "No, let's actually make a phone!" And so, they made a phone and of course they did really well for a really long period of time. Their downfall is typically Finnish, which I'll describe in a minute, but Nokia started to fail when Motorola made the flip phone. If you ask Nokia, Nokia was run by engineers, and they said the candy bar phone is better. It's less fragile. It's more durable. It has more power, blah, blah, blah. All those are true, but the consumer wanted a flip phone. The Finnish engineers could not see the world through the consumer's point of view. They were going to see the world through an engineer's point of view. So of course, they stumbled. Finland, a socialist country, basically allowed Nokia to tumble. However, much like IBM, Nokia reinvented itself into a global technology solutions provider. Nokia today owns Bell Labs. Most people don't realize that.

Q: I didn't know that. Interesting.

KUCHOVA: Nokia is still strong in telecommunications as well as in high-tech consulting. There's another two or three companies in Finland that are at the absolute epitome. Wartsila is an engine company, and they have developed very efficient power plants for ocean going vessels. They're also at the vanguard of electrifying ocean-going vessels. Wartsila is one of the best engineering companies for maritime propulsion. And the list goes on and on. It's a small country in terms of population, but it was exciting.

We had great success with our companies in Finland. Obviously, the Apples and the big ones really don't need much assistance, but we did a lot with fashion, with hardware, and with materials. And, we had an awful lot with data, big data. Finland basically took a page out of Ireland's book. When Ireland started doing the data centers, they were venting their exhaust heat from the data center just to the air. The Finns decided that that was a waste because again they look at the world differently. Other than some peat, they have no real (natural) energy products of their own. Everything is imported. So, they looked at data centers and saw a way to harvest the waste heat from the servers, and to

sell the heat to district heating companies that provided heat for cities. They took the product that was a waste and made it a revenue stream. It was fascinating.

Q: In terms of other sectors, I had the impression that one of the areas Finland was able to cash in on was logistics into Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

KUCHOVA: There's a couple of cute stories about that. One of them was that Russia, the United States, and Finland decided to do a joint venture for a weather research station that was going to be above Murmansk. Everybody was sending equipment in. The Finns sent their equipment; across the border it went. Our equipment got stuck at the border between Finland and Russia. Couldn't get through. Nothing was happening. Whatever we tried, it was not going anywhere. So, after a couple of months the Finns quietly came to the United States and said, "We can help you. If you just give us whatever it is that we need, we'll get it released." They went and 72 hours later it was released. No payoffs involved; they just know how to manage the bear. They've lived with the bear, with the claws of the bear, the influence and the scent of the bear for their whole lives. They have the longest frontier with Russia of any country in Europe. And they're very independent. The Finns were the only army to ever stop the Red Army in conflict. And they paid a tremendous price. They lost a big chunk of their country, Karelia, which was where most of their folklore came from.

I'll fast forward to something that happened in Sweden, but this is indicative. When we were in Sweden, there were these incursions by what was believed to be Russian submarines in the islands, the archipelago of Finland and Sweden. The Swedes vigorously protested. They brought in the Russian ambassador in Stockholm and protested, and their ambassador went to the Ministry of Defense in Moscow and protested. The Finns had a different reaction. A son of a friend of ours was doing his compulsory military service in the navy, so it's first hand. Our friend who lived right near the base gets a voicemail on his iPhone from his son, "Dad, I probably will be late for dinner tonight. We're going to go out and attack a Russian submarine. Talk to you later."

The Finns put some depth charges onto a coastal patrol vessel, went out where they thought the submarine was, and they dropped depth charges. Just would not accept it. There was no protest. You're in our waters and we're going to attack you. That's how they are. They are tough. The word in Finnish is *sisu* meaning guts. They are very feisty. They judiciously will guard their borders. They are very proud of their independence and they will fight tooth and nail to protect it. That was a great example of it.

The other thing we did a lot with was raw materials into Finland. We did a lot with pharmaceuticals in Finland. A lot of the big U.S. pharmaceutical companies have large investments in Finland, and Sweden as well. Norway, too, to a lesser degree. They do a lot of clinical trials, a lot of it is because of the homogenous population. It's so easy to find a control group. Now immigration is changing that somewhat, but still far more homogenous than most other parts of Europe.

We went through a government change in Finland where—normally they're center, center left—they went with more of a rightish government for a while. He lasted I think one term, and they went back to a more center-left approach. Finland is interesting too because they actually experimented with universal income. You would think if any country could do this, it would be Finland. And, it did not work! Because if you look—there's a great book out called *Rise of the Robots*. I forget the author's name. But the more we got into big data and AI, the more you could see the coming societal upheaval that is around the corner. People have become accustomed to robots assembling an automobile and these assembly lines with the robots picking up a frame and welding it, and I get all of that. In many plants, instead of all these workers, you see people sitting in front of a computer monitoring the robots, or in some cases a worker is reduced to bringing in the inventory for the robot to work.

Finland realized, "You know we've really got to do something!" So, they experimented with universal income, and they say they failed dismally, which I found fascinating. Because I really did think if anybody could do it, it would be them. They're paying attention to what the future looks like. They also—to a lesser degree than Norway—have been trying to discourage the migration south by making investments in the northern cities. There's one, Oulu, up on the Bay of Bothnia, which is a high-tech city. They've attracted all kinds of international investment. They're giving incentives for people to locate there. They have a national policy on wireless. Their wireless makes our wireless system look like a telegraph from the 18th century. Their wireless is fantastic. Their upload and download speeds, just on a handheld device, beats anything you can find in the United States.

We were there actually when the government was looking for electronic medical records solutions—and U.S. companies were really good at this. I don't know who actually won, but two U.S. companies had bid to design and install a national medical records system for the country. We were very active in that and one of the U.S. firms won. Part of their bid criterion was Finland wanted an EMT to be able to open somebody's medical record to see if there were underlying conditions. They wanted the record to open in something like ten seconds. They also wanted this anywhere in their territory, which was a tremendous challenge because yes, it's easy to do in a city, or it's easy to do around the city now, but you get into the north of the country, how do you do this? They were looking at satellite. They were looking at all kinds of things, but they wanted the EMT to be able to look at somebody's records and see if this person is allergic to so and so. Or, if this person has this disease, or this condition. There was a tremendous investment there.

Also, their medical system was interesting because it was national but they also had private practitioners. [It was] kind of like Spain in a way, that the government wanted the competition between the public and the private sectors to keep prices competitive, but also to make sure that people had quicker access to the system. They didn't want a wait period. They didn't want somebody subjected to allocations. They wanted to avoid, "hey, I've got two hips surgery slots. Let me know, let's take the next two people in the line. Okay, now everybody else for a hip, next month give us a call." The Finns wanted

flexibility so they did a good job with that. As a matter of fact, Robbin and I loved her oncologist in Finland. We thought he was great, world class.

So, they did a lot of things right. I think similar to Sweden. When U.S. progressives think of a socialist country, they use the Nordics as an example, and a progressive will say, "Well this has got to be heaven!" Or you talk to somebody who's a conservative, "This has got to be hell!" The reality is somewhere in the middle. The countries enjoy a very high degree of education so they have a very highly educated workforce. When they're doing assembly work, they actually have workers who are capable of doing statistical analysis. Workers who are capable of actually interfacing with either engineering or management about, "Here's a process I think you need to change." Companies are very flat in terms of management. In Spain, if you wanted to reach a managing director you probably had to have several steps. If you're in the phone book and you're in Finland, Sweden, or Norway there's the number of the managing director. And if you called the phone he or she likely will answer. It's very flat. I found it a fascinating place to do business!

Then, there was the opportunity to go other places, the Estonia experience was terrific. Estonia was leading in eGovernment. One of my favorite stories is there is a company that actually had--if you wanted a building permit--if you lived in an apartment house in the city it's not applicable. But if you lived in a house and you said, "I would like to make my garage or my tool shed bigger." Previously, you'd have to go to city hall and get a permit and go through this whole process. Well, in Estonia you basically go online with your local municipal building department and you waited in line like this sort of a call and the person pops up and you tell them, "Here's my address, this is this, this is that, and I want to make my tool shed bigger." The screen would populate with the plot plan of your property. So, between me and the building official, I mark on our shared screen where I want to put the addition to make it bigger. The building official might say, "You're too close to the boundary there. If we move it over here, would this be okay?" "Yeah, that works for me." Click. Done! You've got your building permit. Then, on a future satellite photo the building official looks and compares the planned addition. Did you build it where you said you were going to build it? If you build it where you said, we're finished. Now if there's electrical or something they'd come out and look, but if it's just the shell, you're done!

I thought, if you could do that in the United States, think about all the builders that spend hours if not days waiting for a permit, waiting in line, sending their prints in. Imagine if they could do it online! They could do it from another jobsite, in preparation. It would give us more productivity time. But of course, our system is different. It wouldn't work. The Estonians had been voting electronically for a very long time. They have tremendous investment in terms of meetings, which are virtual as well as physical. Skype, everybody knows Skype. The Swedes are quick to say it's a Swedish invention. It was Swedish money but it was crafted in Estonia.

It's also interesting in Estonia where you get two or three young people together and they've got a business writing code. They start in kindergarten with teaching code and the

whole bit. They realized, “We’ve got no natural resources. We don’t even have much land. The only thing we have is a smart population.” So, there’s this investment in education, there’s this investment in technology. There’s this overarching push to, “How do we do it better? How do we do it quicker? How do we do it differently? How do we do it where we can then sell our process to someone else?” It’s very entrepreneurial.

I met a lot of fascinating people there. One guy’s name was Dylan and he had been a protester as a high school student when the Soviets were there. He got arrested, and after being arrested multiple times, he was sent to a prison in Siberia at age 16, 17, or 18. He tells the story that when they arrived in Siberia, it was not yet winter and the camp where they were had no fence. He and his two buddies that were arrested with him decide to leave. Now of course, where are you going to go? But youth know no limits, so they walk out of the camp and about two or three months later he arrives back in Tallinn and knocks on the door of his family’s apartment. Of course, they think they’re seeing a ghost. They never thought they’d see him again.

It was right about then that the Russians leave, and Estonia regains its independence. So, Dylan was an interesting guy. He was one of the leading voices of eGovernment. Democracy to him was really important; your voice in government was important; participation was important. You could see that there was an anti-authority streak in him. I think that was what was left over from the thumb of the Soviets on his life.

He told an interesting story where when the Soviet Union collapsed the Russians made a deal with the Estonian government to keep a military base or two open for a set period of time. At the end of this lease, the Russians were going to leave and the rumor started in Tallinn, and I guess the surrounding smaller communities, that the Russians were not going to leave; that they were in fact going to seize the TV tower on the hill over the city instead. Estonia was going to be theirs again. He tells the story where families left the city in buses, on bicycles, cars, motorcycles, motorboats, whatever, and they go to the drive way that leads up to where the antenna and the TV station was and they all stood there. Grandparents with grandkids, just people, no sticks, no stones, no signs; they just stood in the road blocking the road. As he tells the story, he’s probably overly dramatic; that the convoys coming up along the sea and they stop at the bottom of this road that comes up the hill where they’re all standing. Now they could have stopped to look at a map, light a cigarette, whatever. Of course, the people are now preparing for maybe they’re going to attack us. But they don’t, and the Russians leave. Then the people broke into the Estonian national anthem that had been illegal for 70 years!

So, there were stories like that. Russia’s continuing bad behavior in the region when I was there was evident. Russia was endowing cultural clubs and newspapers and theatrical presentations. It wasn’t to keep culture alive; it was to incite division inside of Estonia between the Russian-speaking minority and the Estonian-speaking majority. The Russian minority still saw themselves as Estonians but the Russians were looking to fan the flames of dissent. I guess not unlike what the Russians did here in 2016 and have been trying to do ever since.

The other story that I remember—because I spent a lot of time there—There was a young business guy who I liked a lot. He was young, charismatic, and fascinating, and I loved listening to what he was doing. And, he told a story once. It made me think of those public service announcements [PSA] that we have on our televisions. The PSA might say, "If you live in a house, you and your family need to have a plan if there's a fire, on how to get out of the house, and where do you meet, so people don't go back into a fire needlessly. In the Midwest where there's the tornados, have a plan. If something happens and a tornado hits and you can't get home, meet mom and dad at the school or library or city hall or wherever.

Well, this was 2014 and this guy's telling me a story how he and his wife had told their elementary school age kids, "If the Russian tanks cross the frontier, meet mom and dad here. And if we're not here we're going to be here—two places. I'm thinking, this is 2014 and he's talking about like the blitzkrieg into Poland in 1939! He's talking about Russian tanks rolling over the border. That's how real the Estonians felt the Russian aggression. They lived with a sense of tremendous anxiety. This is why they became such good NATO members, because they looked at NATO as their salvation. It's fascinating. How many other countries felt the Russian threat? There was Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

If you went back where the U.S. embassy is in Helsinki, two or three doors away from us towards the city was the Estonian embassy. During the Soviet occupation the Soviets used it for something else. Then after the fall of the Soviet empire, Finland took the building back from the Russians and presented it to the Estonians. And they presented the flag that came down on the day that the Soviets basically annexed Estonia, which I thought was fascinating. Of course, the national flag changed, but it was their old flag that the Finns had kept someplace. It was fascinating. The Finns doing that, it was their very clever way of sticking a finger in the Russians' eye without being overly provocative.

The Russian embassy in Helsinki is huge! It still has the hammer and sickle over the door. Bruce and I used to joke that they're hedging their bets, just in case this doesn't work out. They didn't change it, and they're very insular. Their diplomats don't interact with the population. They live, they work, they shop, all on their compound. They were building this huge apartment compound and a Russian worker fell and was killed in the fall. Their response was they put him into a car and drove him to the border. They wouldn't even let the Finns attend to the emergency, even though the guy was killed in the accident.

The other parts that were interesting is there's a harbor near the Russian border called Kotka. That is where the logistics for items going into Russia was really big. There were a few characters that were out of a B-grade movie. And there were also some truly fascinating and clever people there. A lot of liquids were going in and out. Kotka specializes in liquid cargos. There was a woman who ran the port. Look, I was greatly inspired by Bruce Oreck, and one of Oreck's statements was, "If the facts don't fit, change the story." I remember listening to this lovely woman! She would go to these

port authority conferences around the world and she described it that every port got a few minutes to go up to the podium. You had this PowerPoint behind you and you drone off how many hectares you had, how much water there was, how wide your channel was, how many tugboats, and yada, yada, yada, this many square meters of great storage. She said nobody listens to me! And, she said, as a matter of fact nobody listens to anybody because they're all in the audience talking and joking and kibitzing and drinking coffee or whatever. NOBODY listens!

I forgot her name, but I said, "Tell a different story." When I left, I didn't know but she gave that a lot of thought. So, she goes to the next conference. I have no idea where it was, but it was somewhere in Asia. She begins her talk by saying that the port of Kotka is pleased to announce its exclusive distributor alliance with Santa Claus! And, she said, the room went quiet because now the background changed and she's talking about how they have an exclusive agreement with Santa Claus for the delivery of gifts around the world through the port of Kotka, and she goes on and on and on. She never talked about the port. She never talked about the storage. She never talked about their areas of expertise. She finishes; she walks off the stage; and she said she was besieged by all these ports, "Hey that was funny! What do you guys do?" They ended up with additional business! I thought, "All right, this works!" It was that the Finns can carry that kind of thing off with a straight face.

Of all the places I worked—I would never say it to hurt any Foreign Service National because I love them all. Robbin and I often talk about them. We still talk to several of them. I love them all, and I love them dearly, and I would defend them to my last breath. But I never felt more at home than in Finland.

Yeah, Robbin prompts me that their relationship with nature is quite something. They have a national policy that they want all of the fresh water drinkable. They have water like Saudi Arabia's got oil. They want all the water to be drinkable, meaning if you're driving through the countryside and all of a sudden, you're thirsty, they want you to be able to safely stop your car, walk to that lake beside the car, and drink from it. That's their policy! They practice Earth Day every day! It's rare to see littering. People pick it up.

It's also one of the most honest places I've ever worked. Once when we were there, there was a robbery of a jewelry store. Of course, the Finns immediately said it had to be a foreigner, because in their minds, there are no dishonest Finns. Well, there are, and on the TV news for two or three days they had the same story. I'm not a U.S. football fan but you know how there's a play and they'll stop the play and somebody draws an arrow here, "Well if the guy did this, the guy did that…" Well, they did that on the TV news; it was almost the entire news. Here's where the robbery was and here's where we think the car went. Now if they went this way they could have driven to so and so. If they went this way, they could have driven there. It was news!

There was one murder while we were there. Down here in south Florida, we don't go a day without a couple of shootings, either in Miami or someplace else. It just breaks your heart. The Finns have a sense of reverence for the land and a sense of cooperation with

their fellow citizens. Where Robbin and I lived, there was a lake and we often used to walk around it. Whether it was snow or summer, it didn't matter. Once, somebody left gloves and a pair of Nordic hiking sticks on the trail. They were stuck in the snow on the side of the trail because somebody walked away for whatever reason, and they were there for a couple of days until whoever lost it realized it. "Oh my gosh, I forgot my gloves and poles!" They would walk the route, "There they are!" That was remarkable.

We locked our house, but most people we knew didn't even lock their homes. There really wasn't much theft. I was remarking one time with a lovely lady who's a dear friend of ours, Mia Maki, who still works for the embassy. We were in a taxi on the way to a meeting and I was talking about how nice it was, as we were passing by the train station in the center of the city, that there were hundreds of bicycles parked along the train station. Ninety-nine percent of them are not locked. They're just sitting there. I said, "Mia, how lovely to live in a place where you can park your bicycle and come back and it's still there!" She said, "Oh Nick, you are so wrong! I had a bicycle stolen there when I was a student at university." I said, "Really!" She goes, "Yes, I left my bicycle. I went home for the summer, and [when] I came back in the Fall it was gone!"

Now to Mia, this was like the Brinks robbery. I thought they probably thought that the bicycle was abandoned! "You were gone for two or three months." "Oh no, they stole it!" That was kind of the way they approached things.

We fell in love with the country and the people, and we fell in love with exploring the countryside. A lot of the Finnish mythology inspired Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. There is a national epic poem called the Kalevala, which I've tried to read several times and I have a hard time with it. And they celebrate—I think actually that Icelandic people are more known for believing in trolls and spirits in the woods, but the Finns, maybe they're a close second. It is as though they believe that nature is alive, similar to some U.S. Indians in some ways. And, there's actually some similarities between the Finnish culture and Asian cultures.

We spent a lot of time exploring. We did one epic trip of which I have the photographs; my favorite photograph of any photograph in the world. We decided to drive to the northernmost place you can drive in Europe. It's called Nordkapp [North Cape]. Nordkapp has fascinated me for as long as I can remember. I even remembered during World War II, there was a massive naval battle off Nordkapp in December which was cloaked in winter darkness. This is when the United States and the Allied convoys were trying to bring material into Murmansk. It kept the Red Army alive. The Nazis had two huge battleships that would come out of the Norwegian fjords with their long-range guns and just obliterate those convoys. I think it was the Scharnhorst. There was a big battle off Nordkapp in December and the German vessel was sunk and there were something like 2,000 souls on board and only two or three survived. It was a massive loss of life. Nordkapp has always fascinated me.

So, we carved out this wonderful trip. Part of it was influenced by a group of Italian motorcyclists who every year ride from Rome to Nordkapp, which is a tremendous

distance. We drove from our home just outside of Helsinki and took the overnight train to a town called Rovaniemi, which is at the Arctic Circle. Rovaniemi is actually the home of Santa Claus. They have a North Pole village there. Then we drove for eight or nine hours to get to the bottom of one of the fjords. Then the next day another eight or nine hours to get to Nordkapp.

Getting to Nordkapp was like summiting a mountain. You get there and it's this glorious yet totally austere place. It's open like six weeks of the year, because then it's snowed in. On the roads you've got to avoid reindeer, elk, and sheep sleeping on the roads. You've got to be very vigilant. The countryside above Rovaniemi--after you cross the Arctic Circle--changes. After a while the trees thin out to small brush and then the brush thins out to just nothing, just rocks and hills and mountains.

We would drive along and we got to the fjords where we crossed the frontier from Finland into Norway and there is this little tiny town and we overnighted there. That was suggested by the Italian motorcyclists. On the drive, you go by these solitary houses on the side of the fjord, and they've got a fishing boat tied up by the house. Then you drive for another hour and you've seen nothing! It's one road. Robbin and I would talk to each other and say, "Where do they go grocery shopping?" Where do they get their fuel? Where's my doctor?" I mean, there was *nothing!*

We eventually reach Nordkapp and walk the area, spend time in the visitors' center and then reluctantly we get back in the car because it's magical to stand at the top of Europe! There is no place more northerly than this that you can drive to. There's an incredible seven-kilometer tunnel connecting Honningsvåg and Nordkapp. Then it was onward to Alta, which is the self-described Norwegian headquarters for the aurora borealis. It's supposed to be the best place to see it. And then to Tromsø. That was where famed Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen launched his expeditions. And, this was before I spent more time in Norway; we got to see the benefits of Norway's investments in these far north cities, because they were surprisingly vibrant. Now of course, we were there in August yet we wore vests because it was chilly. The mountains still had snow on the peaks. For the Norwegians it was summer, "Let's go to the beach." The water would kill me. The cities themselves were delightful. Tromsø calls itself "the Paris of the north!" A lot of literary license in that! It was charming. So, it was historical and very charming, but not in any way the Paris of the north!

We had these epic opportunities to explore Finland in particular but pretty much the Nordic region.

By the end of my time in Helsinki, my regional responsibilities expanded greatly because what we did with the League of Green Embassies shook my agency. What we did with Smart Cities shook my agency. The senior commercial officers in Europe realized there's real opportunity here to change how we do business with U.S. companies. There's a major opportunity to change what we do to effectively reshape the marketplace. We're no longer going to be responsive. We can actually be proactive and shape what a commercial

environment should look like, where opportunities will be, and how these opportunities will manifest themselves.

I went from having just Estonia, Norway, and Finland and I picked up Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, the UK, Iceland, and Latvia. Now for the first time we looked at—some people said, "If you're doing the Baltics why don't you do all three Baltics?" "Aah, because the Baltics aren't homogenous! Lithuania sees itself in the orbit of Poland. Its shared border, not language, but shared customs, shared business investments. So, to pull Lithuania away to be a Baltic, you're only satisfying the spirit of the British cartographers of old, like redrawing the map of the Middle East after World War I. You're ignoring ground truth. For the first time ever, Commercial Service looked deeply at Europe as one marketplace, which basically helped to create Commercial Service Europe.

Now, in all fairness, our headquarters leadership had no idea what we were doing. We gambled and we basically forced this down their throat. We went so far that they begrudgingly had to say "Okay, we'll give this a try." So instead of having a senior commercial officer for each country, we had one senior commercial officer for Europe. Our first one was Carmine D'Aloisio who was in Rome. And, Carmine was the perfect choice to be the first SCO for Europe; he had the intellect, the chops and our collective trust to do it and make it happen.

Q: Ah, I actually interviewed him quite a while ago.

KUCHOVA: Carmine is a great guy. He's a thinker's thinker. We often jokingly told him that he'd make a great state econ officer. He's a very brilliant thinker and a wonderful guy. So, we had one senior commercial officer for Europe; that was his title. Then we came up with seven regionals, so my portfolio grew. And everybody else's grew. I jokingly called it, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!" I used to tell him how spooky it would be to think of Carmine dressed in a gown and he didn't know what to make of it! Carmine has a good sense of humor, but he didn't know if I gone too far or what. Then people would say, "What dwarf are you?" And I would always say, "I'm Dopey." The other six are all handsome and brilliant! I did it as a joke because I realized that for us to change the management structure and culture, we had to earn the loyalty of Foreign Service Nationals who used to look at their country SCO [senior commercial officer] as their boss. We were changing the dynamics. Well, that's easier to do in the northern part of Europe; more difficult to do in the southern part. Because the cultural context of hierarchical—the northern countries and people are more even in terms of incomes and opportunities—there are flatter organizational structures. You don't have this layered management structure. When you get more into southern Europe--Spain and Portugal--it's a big deal to be the managing director.

So, we wanted to find a way where we could break through the impediments blocking greater communication and likely better ideas. We thought if somebody had a problem or a challenge and felt that no one would listen to them, that they may feel comfortable saying, "I'm going to talk to my dwarf." I wanted a way that made people smile and that made it informal and comfortable in terms of an easy way to reach out to solve a problem

or to initiate a constructive idea. So, we reinforced the country SCO as their direct supervisor, but we had the countries in those spheres work together.

My biggest challenge in the Nordics wasn't all that big, but my biggest challenge was to get them to cooperate to a higher level than they had in the past. They always were cooperative, but I needed them to think, if somebody was sitting in Helsinki and the opportunity really made more sense for execution in Denmark, pick up the phone and talk to somebody in Denmark and work this together with the client. So that was easy. I got the Nordics to agree, we can be competitive on ice hockey, everything else we're one. For the longest time I actually used the word CS [Commercial Service] Nordics, instead of Finland, Sweden, Norway, or Denmark. I did that and we would have weekly meetings and constantly drive it home. In my weekly meetings—they were all virtual—I would make sure I'd have somebody else from another Nordic office lead it. Not me; somebody's got to lead it. I also wanted different people to lead it, not the same person. So that was an easy fit.

It became more difficult with Ireland and the UK, because they didn't want to be subservient. It took me a while to instill in them they were not subservient. We're basically talking about how we've changed the way we're using information and talents to exploit the marketplace. Then they got it, and it was very effective, particularly because London was a large office with a lot more resources. A lot of project management would come out of London because they had the resources that other offices didn't have.

In the Nordics, we had two posts that were being managed by Foreign Service Nationals, who we got classified as, it might be 10s or 11s, which was hard because (state) HR did not want to do it. They said "You're competing with the Foreign Service Nationals of other agencies so it took us a long time. Norway got reclassified really quick; Denmark was harder. It took a long time to convince them that we had—we call them "head of section"—entrusted to them the very same responsibilities that we did with an officer. We eventually won. We got both of the lead FSNs promoted. Then I made sure they were involved in leading different things across the Nordics, then leading things across the UK and Ireland.

Traditionally the senior commercial officers used to visit the partnership posts. We don't have a CS person in Reykjavik, it's a State Department person. It was the same in Latvia and Estonia. Traditionally the officers used that as an excuse to travel. I like to see things as much as anybody else. But I—that makes no sense for the longevity of this effort. I then appointed Oslo to be the liaison for Reykjavik—shared history, shared language, yada, yada, the whole bit. Before they had been doing more with Copenhagen, but it made more sense for Oslo and Reykjavik to work more closely. Then I had somebody else in the Helsinki office do Estonia, and I picked somebody in Stockholm to liaison with Riga. Not that there was a shared value there, basically I had to look at this equitably. Because I was residing in Helsinki, I didn't want to have somebody else in Helsinki do that. Otherwise, you're undermining the whole idea that we're one unit; how do we look at this differently? So, I had somebody in Stockholm do it.

Those were the golden moments of Commercial Service Europe. Our agency often suffers because our director general is usually [a] political [appointee]. Each one basically discards the work—good, bad, or indifferent—of his or her predecessor. "I'm going to recreate the world in my image," you know. And, we then count on—usually the deputy is a career officer and the deputy is the one that tries to save the things that worked. But this was our highlight. We were really, really, accomplished a lot. When you looked at Commercial Service posts around the world, Europe was a killer because we were no longer this little mosaic of marketplaces. We had created a unified view of Europe as a marketplace. A unified view of, how do you enter? How do you do business? Where does it make sense from a tax perspective because there are some different incentives.? We were simply "kicking butt."

We were very active with the Conference of Parties, (COP15) in Copenhagen. That was really fantastic. We were very involved with the EU on a number of incentives, programs, regimes, and standards around Europe. It was just the best of the best! We talked to Oreck about a week ago. And, he said, "It was Camelot! It worked!" We made it where everybody felt like they had pulled on the oar. No one person ran the race alone. Yeah, we did feel invincible. There wasn't anything we couldn't do. The little Nordic countries were hot! When we looked at the metrics, we were at the top because these people were motivated. They were inspired.

The one thing I had learned—going back—I think my agency is very different than State. You're at your best if you can turn loose the creativity of your Foreign Service Nationals who are experts in particular sectors and support them, work with them, and guide them. But don't make the decisions for them, because they know more about the nuances of the marketplace than an officer will know in a tour. And that really took off.

We had very important alliances with Deloitte and others because they looked at what we were doing and they actually gave us advice on how they ran their global partnerships. "Here's how we do it," they'd say. "We have a telecoms team and we're going to be doing something in Singapore, but the guy or the gal who's the best in the business lives in Sao Paulo. That's a different partnership so there's a different revenue stream." They were amazingly open with us. We turned around and made that work in a government setting.

We also then changed the way we reviewed the Foreign Service Nationals. No longer was the SCO or head of section, the reviewer, the regional person actually got a voice in the process, and we watched what they did. So, from a professional point of view, it was absolutely the best!

In Helsinki, maybe the first year, I was in the old building. Then, because the embassy was under construction, for 18 months we rented space from the British embassy across the street because they had downsized after the EU. They had a whole annex open. They were killer offices. They were great! They overlooked the harbor and it was gorgeous! I thought, it's not going to be bad to work out of the British embassy. For the Brits it was 9

to 5. It opens at 9 and closes at 5. Man, I was 7 to 7. Okay, I figured that I'll work this out.

However, Bruce had gone to the GSO and told me, "No, I've got a place for you. I don't want you off the property!" So, we got stuck for 18 months in a series of little, tiny offices over the garage! They were tiny! They were claustrophobic and the view was of the construction site! But I've got to tell you, it was the best. I literally would have to throw some of these people out when I went to leave, because they were changing the world. Oreck used to say, "Do you want to live in someone else's creation, or do you want to shape your own future?" He did it with such conviction, I mean whether you were in HR or you were doing invoices in finance and GSO, everybody had this attitude, "I'm shaping my future. I'm paying invoices or I'm moving HR documents through." Whatever they did they saw [it as], "I am contributing to this exciting mission." That's what a great leader can do.

So, we were in these little junky offices. They were cold [in winter] and in the summer they were hot. Bruce would come in constantly. He'd come up the stairs with his big French Poodle Deckard. He'd come in and we would sit and talk. How about this? How about that? Hey, let's call so and so; let's do this; let's do that.

After the 18 months were up, for a shorter period of time, I had a nice office in the Innovation Center; Bruce had wanted to give us the second or the third floor, which was all glass on the new building, facing the harbor. But he came to me, and he said, "I can't do that. If I do that it's going to appear that I'm playing favorites." I get it and completely understood. So, I had a different view. I had the view of the city. Not bad, still great. Fantastic. The offices were incredibly nice. We actually got the same furniture that Embassy London was going to get. We got to be the testers for what was to be the new Embassy London, which was the new sustainable embassy, yada, yada. We got all of that.

I understood it and I'm fine with what he did, and for the remainder of the tour I had these great offices with these great conference rooms. We could have people come in. and we had a wonderful multipurpose room that had the latest in projectors, the latest audio-visual computers. We had a couple of printers that would work on somebody's cell phone—wirelessly. So, you had a guest coming in and they had to change their airline ticket. They got it on their phone. Well, print it right here. And they could print it.

3M loved what we were doing. Bruce, me, [and] a couple guys were at 3M's innovation center in Minneapolis once. We admired this unbelievable huge round LED light fixture. It was like 12 feet in diameter. Bruce said, "Man, that is so cool," because it could change the color and pattern of the lights. Bruce loved it so 3M offered to gift us a clone but Oreck worked out a purchase. We hung that in the Sorenson Room, which was the ground level of the Innovation Center. The room was all glass overlooking the harbor. At first, the only colors that we could work were blue and white, which happened to be the colors of Finland. In the winter, because we had lots of night sky, the Finns would walk by the embassy and look up on the hill and they see this white and blue moving around and they thought, "Wow, that's for us because we're Finns! That's really cool!" It was only blue

and white because we didn't know how to change the programming on it! We didn't know how to do that yet.

Then we did a program for IBM who was a partner in our construction. IBM was talking about big data, Watson. IBM was making offers to governments about, "What can Watson do for you?" kind of a conversation. Finland basically was looking at Watson for their energy conversation. We did a thought leadership program about Watson with the Finnish government. The 3M light was still blue and white, so the IBM guys thought, "Blue and white; those are our colors! How nice! What an extra touch!" But the Finnish government officials thought, "Blue and white, our national colors! What a nice touch!" Then about a week later, we learned how to program this device, so now we had red, white, and blue. That was up in time for Fourth of July, which we do in June because in July every Finn goes to their cottage for July.

Then we bid a fantastic deal involving Finnair, which is an amazing airline. Finnair wanted to get out of the maintenance business. They no longer wanted to do their own maintenance. They wanted to subcontract everything. They were going to sell their maintenance division. There were two U.S. companies bidding for it and we actively counseled both. The company that won is based in Ft. Lauderdale, GA Telesis. They're one of the leaders in maintaining jet engines. Because engines have a life and you [must] take it apart. It's very exact work, and it's very expensive. So, you're an airline, you take an engine off your starboard wing and we're going to rent you an engine. It's powered by the hour and we're going to take your engine to the facility and we're going to remake it and remanufacture it. Then we're going to come back, take off our rental engine and put your new fully maintained engine on, and you're good to go.

We're talking big money here. So, GA Telesis buys the Finnair facility. Their customers include all of the Russian civilian airlines, because the Russian civilian airlines do not trust the Russian FBOs [fixed base operators] to fix the airplanes. Their concern, I don't know, (perhaps) too much vodka at the job site or whatever. They don't want a Russian fixing their airplanes; they want somebody else. They like what the Finns do and they also like what the Americans do. So, a Finnish-American operation in Helsinki to redo jet engines is a great idea. It is a terrific advantage for the Russian airlines because they don't have to fly to Helsinki to have the engine taken off, they can truck it over from St. Petersburg or even Moscow.

So, we host this contract settlement. The biggest Russian airline CEO flies in and the U.S. company rented an island restaurant right in the middle of the Helsinki harbor for after the settlement. We signed the deal in the Sorenson Room while the LED lights were red, white, and blue. So, the Russians felt, "Oh, our national colors! How very thoughtful!" And of course, the Americans thought, "Oh our national colors! How very thoughtful!" The innovation center is like a movie set in terms—it's not ostentatious; it's not overly glamorous. It is sleek, clean, and very functional. There's no fat on it, but everything works. Everything is the leading edge. Organic LED lighting that the government paid—I think we paid $100 for it because we can't take it for free. Leading

edge LED lighting, leading edge everything. So, you walk in, and it showcases American technology and American solutions to the energy conversation.

So, then we go to this island for dinner after the settlement. Bruce went, I went—go over to the island by launch from the embassy. We cross the harbor and get off at this restaurant that's only been open for 10 or 12 weeks, the more the temperate period. It's this lavish dinner, vodka flowing like water. It's like, "I'll have one." These guys are slamming back the vodkas. And after a long time, they get really open in how the U.S. executive and the Russian executive met. And it's pretty funny, because previously the guy heading the U.S. engine company had been in the airplane finance business. This Russian airline had leased some of his airplanes but wasn't paying, so he's chasing them for the money. Finally, he finds out that one of the airplanes that's overdue was going to be arriving in Paris. You know you can track the registration number. In the United States it's called an "N" number. Each country has a beginning number for their registration. So, he's tracking the numbers and he realizes the airplane's going to be in Paris. They wait and wait and wait until the airplane has just about arrived, and through law enforcement and court action, they basically, as they called it, "arrested the airplane," where they can seize the airplane. But before he does it, he telephones the Russian CEO. The Russian CEO goes nuts, "I'm going to kill you!" Not a good conversation.

Fast forward to the Paris air show. The two of them walk into each other at the Paris air show and the Russian is really mad at this guy and he said, "Come with me!" As they get in the car and the U.S. guy's wife is convinced, he's dead and she's never going to see her husband again. The Russian basically tells him the idea, "Look, I get it, business is business." Then he paid up everything. They laughed and they had drinks, the whole bit. He lays out where he would like for all of his airplanes to go to be repaired. It can't be Russia. Also, during this dinner, the Russian tells the story where Putin forced him to have an airplane and a crew ready at all times for the [Orthodox] patriarch of Moscow, who basically declared that, "Putin is a gift from God for Russia." So, there's an airplane that this guy has to pay for and a crew that just sits 24 hours a day in case the patriarch decides he wants to fly someplace.

Then we found out how he got his airline licenses. The Russian's mom had been Boris…

Q: Yeltsin?

KUCHOVA: …Yeltsin's secretary! As Yeltsin is leaving, he says to her, "You have been a loyal wonderful ally to me. How can I thank you?" Instead of saying, "Aw, it's nothing," she says, "It's my pleasure, how about two airline certificates?" "Sure!" He reaches in the drawer, pulls them out, signs them, hands her two airline certificates. So, the family sells one to finance the other! And that's how they got into business. I thought, "Man, talk about the wild west; this is the wild east!"

That was some of the business that was flowing through Finland. If you told somebody this, they'd think that you're giving them a story. It was fascinating. Every day there was

something that was happening that was unique, that was different. We're in little, modest Finland, and watching this unfold was magical.

There were several revolutions happening at the same time. One of them was that the Finns were trying to remodel their university system to take the best of what the Finnish system had and combine it with the best of what the United States had. Also, they were very influenced by some of the Indian engineering schools. There is great engineering in India. In the Indian engineering schools one of the things that was involved was actually metal shops and wood shops where you have a project. The professor basically said, "Yeah, I read your paper, but I want you to make it! Show me your new modem." Show me your new whatever it happens to be. So, the kids would actually make it—produce their product.

There were a couple of U.S. guys who were doing business in the Nordics who had started innovation centers. That had moved from California. One guy married a Finnish woman and he started this series of innovation centers. He had some in Russia as well. They were big boosters of this change in the universities. There was one that was called the Innovation Garage, which was actually part of Aalto University. We were very active with them. Bruce would often go over and listen to the pitches by the students. A lot of the students were from the Nordics. A lot of them were European, but there were a lot of Russians, too. It was amazing to listen to them, because Russia has tremendous science, tremendous mathematicians, tremendous technical capability, but no commercialization, no real logistics, no real business mobilization. They were still transporting oil in rail cars. They had no innovation from a business perspective or a delivery system!

I remember in one pitch there was a young Russian fellow who invented or perfected a microscope that enabled nanotechnology manufacturing. These companies actually came to these innovation pitch sessions. I remember afterwards they were so impressed. I don't remember whether it was 3M or which U.S. company, but they were so impressed. They basically said to this kid, "Listen, when are you finished your engineering school?" "I finish next year." "Okay, we'd like you to come work with us. We want you to finish; we want you to have your degree." We were very instrumental in those conversations. Then you think about the brain drain. Those Russian students were never going home. They were never going to go home, because they had no opportunity. They looked at Finland, the Nordics, or Europe as the land of opportunity where they would have a shot to do something.

Europe is not as friendly for startups as the United States. If you look at the European VC [venture capital] and private equity landscape and environment, it's not at all like the United States. If you're in the United States, VC or private equity group, you have your portfolio on your Rolodex—there's an old word! Somebody needs an engineer, a patent attorney or a tax attorney. You've got somebody you can call and hook them up because you want them to be successful. You want them to be a megastar because you're going to make more money.

The European model is far less robust. You need a patent attorney? Go ahead, here's your money. In some cases, the government will give you grant money, which is not the same. It takes more than money. It's the mentoring, nurturing and coaching. The United States still excels at that.

So, these U.S. entrepreneurs based in Finland wanted to bring the best of those systems into Finland. They were getting to the point of being very successful, where they were bringing that extra ad hoc help to the startup community. That was fascinating to watch.

You would see where Helsinki would be a stop-off on global VC (venture capital) and private equity tours. Years ago in Finland, they started something called Slush. Slush is basically influenced by what the weather is like traditionally in November, wet, rainy, and slushy. Slush was an entrepreneurial startup, an innovation gathering, a meet-up. It was really successful. The very first year they had some 400 companies. Then they had 4,000. They did a couple of Slush editions in California. Then they did a couple in other places, Tokyo as an example. They now have thousands of companies. It's almost too big to be successful. They helped launch Angry Birds—Remember the game Angry Birds?

Q: Yeah, that's famous for Finland.

KUCHOVA: Yeah. The guy that started that—I forget his name now, nice guy—we used him a lot as a speaker with PA because kids in school were very interested. "I want to be an entrepreneur and start something like Angry Birds!" We would send Peter—I can't think of his last name now— we would send him out and we'd do coffees or talks or whatever and he'd basically say, "Angry Birds was my 56th try," because we wanted to tell the story of sustainability in terms of spirit. Success didn't happen overnight. Maybe once in a great while, but you have to sustain your efforts. In some cases, those conversations helped us give opportunity to U.S. VCs and investors. Peter's conversations were great. "Yeah, my 56th try! It worked out pretty well, mind you, but I failed 55 times before that-- crashed and burned."

So, you would see how the U.S. entrepreneurial influence was reshaping Finland, and the Nordics in general. People talk about the Nordics as people who are shy and not as outgoing. The Nordic joke would be that a Finnish introvert looks at his shoes when he talks to you, and a Danish introvert looks at your shoes when he talks to you!

But in so many ways, it's not true at all. The kids today have grown up with global influences. Those stereotypes have vanished in most ways other than humor. And, those little countries are forces to be reckoned with. I did a video—I don't know if I sent it to you or not—I did a video interview about the Nordics and I basically compared the Nordics to Canada in terms of population and GDP. The little Nordics came close to outperforming Canada, our biggest trading partner in combined GDP. They're really doing something right. Of course, they're very lucky because the populations being small, programs are scalable. There's been generations of investment in good, sound education, so you already have a learned workforce to deploy. But if you have something and something fails, you can scale it up or you can scale it down very quickly. In the

United States it's like trying to steer a supertanker. You could turn the wheel and turn the wheel and it takes forever to see the bow slightly change its course.

Again, I go back. Finland was where the stars aligned; it was perfect. It was a wonderful career; a wonderful tour. I would never say to any of my colleagues "the best," but it was the best, both professional and personal. Robbin and I had great times there. At our little home in Kauniainen, a little village in the midst of Espoo, right next to us was a rock hill and one night for New Year's, we went out on top of this snow-covered rock hill. We took a bottle of Spanish cava (champagne) with us and we stuck it in the snow. We're watching the sky light up with fireworks, and it was lovely! Then we went to pour the cava—frozen solid! I mean it was cold. Then it was cute to see new American families coming with kids. The kids would say, "What about snow days?" There are no snow days! For little kids at school, they stop outside recess when it's like -20^{C}!

Right behind where we lived—It was my favorite house, too—there was a young Finnish couple. They were very nice, and they had a baby. We learned firsthand how the Finns climatize their babies. Now this is a newborn. I'd be at work and Robbin would look out the window and the baby is in the stroller and covered with blankets, down comforters, and the whole bit, but the baby is outside under an eave in the snow! You know, it's snowing outside, it's cold, -20, -30, and the baby's out there for hours! For hours all bundled up as warm as a bug in a rug. If you did that in the States, the division of youth services or whatever would be there and you'd be arrested for child endangerment! But that's what the Finns did. We watched them. Once we were doing a drive in the country, the Finns do the sauna and then they jump into the frozen water. So, we were driving down a country lane and there was a guy just sauntering along in the snow in sandals, a towel around his waist, and that was it! [He was going] from his sauna and crossing the street to go to the hole in the ice at the lake!

Another time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had Winter Day. They do it every couple of years. So, we got invited to Winters Day for New Diplomats. It was tremendous. We arrive and they have all these people from all the different embassies. It was great fun! They had sports, and they had world-class teachers so they could teach you how to [ice] skate, or how to Nordic ski. So, I improved my skills in Nordic skiing there. "Here's what you do and here's how you do it." They even had ice swimming. At first, I thought they were kidding. They were not kidding! They had cut holes in the ice and people were jumping in. There's no way I could do that. There's just no way. They are hardy people!

Oreck was great fun. Oreck would do a Christmas card and because he's a bodybuilder, his first Christmas card shows him in his suit except the right sleeve of his suit is open and he's got muscles! It's his real muscle! Well, Public Affairs at post were used to him and they're okay. Public Affairs back in DC went nuts! "Oh my God, did you see this guy! Oh decorum, blah blah blah." So, they really pushed back. The next year his Christmas card was—"I got in so much trouble last year showing some skin. This year I'm fully clothed." It shows Oreck, dressed in a business suit and tie, sitting in the hot sauna dripping wet and on either side of him were two naked, overweight Finnish guys.

Nothing shows, but it's very obvious that they're naked but totally covered. I'll try to show you. I don't know if you can see that at all.

Q: Yeah, I can!

KUCHOVA: It's funny because, fast forward when I got to Sweden. One of the guys in Public Affairs had been in DC and they go, "Oh you worked for Oreck! Oh, he was killing us!" I said, "You just had to know him." Oreck had some great things. Oreck as a little boy had a hearing problem, so he went to school for the deaf. So, he was very cued in to people with hearing issues or disabilities. He's a remarkable man. He was walking once and a woman came up to him with an obvious speech impediment. She was deaf. He graciously engaged with her and never once moved back. He was just full of compassion and respect, and you would watch him do this sort of thing time and time again.

He was offered security but in Finland you really don't need it. He privately used to say some of his colleagues loved the show of security. They felt important. Bruce would drive himself places on his own time. But he geared up and did what he had to do as an ambassador. He would be approached by people on the street and asked questions, and he would engage. He was immensely popular with the Finnish people. He was on a lot of their news shows, a lot of their commentary shows. He was fun.

He had meetings with the national oil company in Finland called Neste. I always think of the Nestea the drink. They have the majority of the petroleum stations. They basically import the petroleum and refine it, the whole bit. Oreck talked to them and he gave them the idea that "You have so much water. Why aren't you exporting your water? You are experts in pipelines, in tanks, in pumps, in transporting liquid. Why don't you look at this differently?" He got them to start to look, and I think they've actually exported some water into the Middle East! Getting paid for the water! It is Finland's abundant resource. We have in the States the "land of a thousand lakes." Man, there's a thousand lakes just within 200 km of Helsinki! Then you go north and it is lake after lake after river after lake after lake. It's simply incredible!

So, Bruce was very engaged in talking to the Finnish private sector and giving them ideas about how you come to the States. And, this was before Obama stood up the "Invest in America" programs. Oreck was always a step ahead of everyone. Bruce was very close with the Finnish ambassador in the United States. They talked frequently. How do we do this and that? He was really the culmination of aspirations for me. He had the best of what Barbara Stephenson had. Of course, Barbara's role in Panama was drastically different. Panama was not a developing country, but a country with challenges. Finland had no challenges. Finland's a first world leader in technology and in some cases their technology outpaces ours. Bruce was the perfect man for that job. He ended up actually being the longest serving Obama ambassador—six years.

Q: Wow! That is remarkable.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, six years. We had Vice President Biden visit post. We had Secretary Clinton visit post. All of it was on energy, because of what they were doing on energy and renewables. We did a couple of really cool things. There was an inventor in the United States that made a vertical wind turbine. I think we mentioned it before, but this is where we used it. We worked out a deal with him for him to place the vertical turbines on the CMR and monitor them through the cloud, and basically do a test, "Will these things survive an Arctic winter?" They did!

We were constantly looking for ways to engage with the private sector in a way that was meaningful. How does the embassy help you tell your story more effectively? How do we use the embassy, frankly, as a platform to subtly show the flag to give you an edge in your negotiations? For that, Oreck was the perfect partner. He understood the commercial and trade conversations. He grew up in a business family. He used to say that around the dinner table sometimes some U.S. families--including the one I grew up in, and it convinced me I must have been adopted! My family would talk baseball, football and basketball! I was never a fan of organized sports. Oreck said growing up, his family would talk about business. Who did what? That company did so and so. Because his grandfather had been the CEO of RCA, he grew up with a group of doers.

His father, David Oreck, was eminently successful. I got to meet him on two occasions. I think he's still alive, as matter of fact, and he's got to be close to 100. Oreck senior, during World War II was an aviator. I think he was in a B29. His father was extremely successful and one of the things he started collecting was World War II airplanes. Like I might collect a tee shirt or a hat, but he collected World War II airplanes. There was a World War II airplane that was called a Brewster Buffalo. It was a single-engine fighter that was not effective in the Pacific; not particularly effective in the European campaign, but the Finns used it with great success in their battles. So, the United States gave several Brewster Buffalos to Finland. In Finland none of them existed to illustrate their history. So, Bruce got his dad to donate a Brewster Buffalo to Finland to be placed in a museum.

He was a very generous man. He would do stuff to help somebody else. He didn't make a big deal about it. He has a sense of humor, but he was always the first there. We used to joke because I used to wear my hair real short like a crew cut, buzz cut. He used to joke with me because he has no hair. He goes, "I don't get it. Because everybody with hair—It was the style perhaps—everybody's got a buzz cut. I've got nothing. If I was you, I would grow this down to my butt!" So, I started growing my hair, and then we would do these again.

I was always respectful, called him "Ambassador," the whole bit, and I respect him, I love him to death. We would go someplace, and we would joke, he would call me his hairdresser! Then I used to joke back, "Look at all the money he saved not buying shampoo!" He was like a comedian. He would have this whole shtick that he would deliver, that he is the master of his fate, he is the ambassador, what he says goes. If he says, "Jump," people say, "How High? How long do I stay up?" He would go on…Then I would say, "Mr. Ambassador it's time to go." He would say, "Okay," and he would leave

And he was that way with—even the President of Finland Sauli Niinistö became a good friend of his. They were really good friends and they would have conversations. And, I think Niinistö would oftentimes talk to Bruce on the side, "What do you think of this, or that?"

Bruce was this great imparter of ideas and inspiration, and a great connector. Somebody would say something, and he'd think, "Yeah, I know somebody that does that." And, Oreck would end up connecting them. It was that generosity of spirit and generosity of his talents that still inspires me today. We spent Thanksgiving with him in Istanbul because that's one of his favorite cities in the world. We met him there. Then that morning we're going to go walk the city. He's in his room and he's really late, so he finally comes out. You remember this show Seinfeld? When Kramer would open the door and walk in? Well, he finally opens the door of his hotel room and he said, "I can't find my other sneaker. I think somebody stole it!" "Bruce, we're in the Four Seasons. Nobody stole your sneaker." So, I walk into the room, and we can't find the other sneaker. So finally, it's under the chair. How it got there we'll never know.

It was this kind of quirky approach to life. Even if the glass is not half full, he'll find the glass. He is just this—there was this one movie, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* from the Titanic. [He was] kind of like that. I don't care what obstacle you throw at me; we're going to find a way to do this. It even goes back to when he was negotiating with OBO about the building. He basically said, "Whenever they give me a "no," that just means I asked the wrong way! I've asked the wrong question because I got a "No." He says, "There's no way we can't do this!

He also joked once that he thought the new embassy buildings cost too much money and he said, "You know, I could have hired Wall Street lawyers, paid them their full hourly rate and got this done cheaper." But he goes, "You know what, I got it." He left that place far, far better than when he arrived, because when he arrived even the sanitation plumbing had collapsed in the CMR. He got that fixed. It collapsed in the annex. He got that fixed too. All the things that were deferred that were not glamorous, but you've got to do--he made them all happen.

His great success and his spirit enabled mine. He's very kind and he basically said that he owed much of his success to me. I think he's being very kind. I owe my success to him, his spirit, his openness, his support. Commercial Services Europe, I think, got its biggest boost by our Nordic success, what they saw us do with the League of Green Embassies and the pan-Europe energy opportunities and with Smart Cities influenced the creation of Commercial Service Europe.

Then regionally Carmine, when I was first doing all this stuff with Oreck—Carmine called me, because he was my SCO Europe boss, and he said, "Nick, you're out of your lane, my friend." He said, "Why are you doing something in the Netherlands or Germany or…you're out of your lane!" Then I would lay this out that it wasn't my lane or your lane, it was our lane and I was just contributing to our collective effort and he'd go,

"Okay, I get what you're saying." That was great because Carmine was an institutional guy. He had been a DAS. He had been deputy director general; he had been all these things. Carmine is a thinker's thinker—smart, focused, a highly successful leader--and you needed somebody of Carmine's rank and stature to validate what we were doing. And, Carmine came around and said, "Yeah, I get it."

Carmine was in Rome and we did the program in Rome. He was in seventh heaven because the other thing that Oreck did wherever we were and the press wanted to interview who was in charge of the League of Green Embassies, Oreck always had the ambassador do it. He never would talk to the press because he said the nanosecond, he did that, it's over. If you went and did something in Rome or you did something in Brussels, that's the host ambassador who speaks. That ambassador talks about the League of Green Embassies, he talks about Smart Cities, and he talks about this because this is his mission, his country. So, with that approach, if we in the Nordics, those ambassadors were the center of the discussion. In Poland, that ambassador. That works! That was a formula for great success.

Q: I wish I had questions!

KUCHOVA: I think about that tour to this day, and I think how fortunate because really everything we touched turned to gold. I'm not going to say there weren't problems, obviously, but everything we touched turned to gold. In so many ways the successes came from Oreck's absolute mandate that, "Thou shalt play nicely together."

The RSO (Helsinki), Joe Castro, was not a fan of the wireless stacks in the annex. He wanted the DS technical guys, which used to be run by Wayne Ashbury, a friend of ours from Turkey, he wanted validation from them. Well, we got that because you don't want to do anything that's going to create a problem. Then when things were so hard to get visitors in, because it was hard to get into an embassy. I think back to when I had the problem in the private sector in Japan and I walked to the American embassy, cleared the gate, walked to the chancery, talked to the receptionist and spoke to somebody. You can't do that today! If we were going to have a business guest, I'd have to tell Joe Castro (RSO) in advance that I'm going to have folks from IBM, or executives from Finnair, or these guys from Wartsila, or visitors from Deloitte, or these guys from wherever! They're going to come in and they're going to have a laptop. We're going to have a meeting in the third-floor conference center and this is what it's going to be about. Joe would do whatever it was he needed to do to be satisfied. He would then let the gate know that when these guests arrived and after inspecting their laptop, the guests could bring their laptops with them, which allowed us to use their materials for our meetings.

Now when Joe rotated out, the next guy? No, he wouldn't do it. Other than that, everybody played well. If we found anything that was interesting, we gave it to public affairs, or econ, or political, and they did the same. Our country teams were more like a partner's meeting on topics. It wasn't so much somebody saying, "We're going to be doing blah, blah, blah." It was about a topic and then everybody was feeding off of this and everybody had something to do to advance the topic. Oreck made sure that if

something worked out, everybody felt like they had a piece of it. That was his genius. He was incorrigible. He was unstoppable; really like a terminator. There's that one terminator movie where all that's left is the hand and the hand is advancing on its own. Yeah, that's kind of like Oreck. You can shoot him; you can hit him with an axe; you can bury him in concrete. It didn't matter, he was going to get this done one way or another. And, if he said he had your back, he had your back. There was just no mistake about it.

The only unfortunate thing about it was it should have been my last post because I could have left with a sense of euphoria and accomplishment. But you know, I wouldn't change anything because of what we got done. I'm getting ahead of myself in many ways, but I now know from colleagues who are still working that they dismantled much of what we'd done. I remember one of the conversations I had had with Commercial Service Europe was, "If we fail, it will take a generation for us to once again earn the trust of the Foreign Service Nationals that work for us. Because we have enabled them, we have empowered them, we have guided them, we have let them be a co-architect of where we want to be, what our goals are. Now when we take that away, we've lost them. In many ways you now see a lot of them, they're either just doing their time, doing their minimums, the whole bit. That's heartbreaking. That to me is bad political leadership. A lack of vision, and from the Commercial Service side, a lack of a coherent sustainable game plan. Yeah, and that's the heartbreak.

But the rest of it. I'm trying to think if there's anything else that I missed. I love the smaller posts. I really tried to stay with smaller posts because that's where you really get to know the players. Oh, that was the other thing!

When we were there, we basically retooled the American Chamber of Commerce in Finland. AmCham had been a social club, and we had brand new leadership. The new chair was a TV journalist who had reported from the United States. There had been a CEOs' club where they were like the top hundred companies in Finland—U.S. and Finnish. That group was interested in the transatlantic conversation, so we basically redesigned AmCham to go back to supporting the transatlantic-business and investment conversation. We merged the CEOs group organization with AmCham and it became AmCham Finland. For the longest time, during my entire tenure there and some years afterward, it was the number one AmCham in Europe. It was where everyone went to look for ideas and innovation. They were fantastic.

They coined the word "AmChampions," which I thought was clever! They were pioneers on social media. On Friday they would have a teaser about some kind of a point that they were going to bring up on Monday. It might be legislative, it might be something on taxes, it might be something on investment, it might be something on innovation, whatever. They had this sustained 52-weeks-a-year conversation that they put out that sparked all kinds of conversation on social media. That was simply brilliant, and we were co architects in that. We were non-voting members, but we partnered with them very actively. They were really great, and all that stuff aligned just perfectly. That's it!

Q: I guess with the change in the AmCham, are there any examples of something that AmCham did that you want to cite as an example of what a reformed, more exciting AmCham can do. Because everybody has experienced the time servers.

KUCHOVA: Yes, where the AmCham excelled was basically in finding challenges either in regulations or legislation. It might be taxation, or it might be on ownership or transfers. Then making that an excitable topic where they would use those teasers, say I teasing something on a Friday and then all the next week talk about this topic. Taking advantage of the topical venue, executives would opine on their views. Then, maybe quarterly, they would collect some of these ideas and they would actually meet with the government and say, "Here's what the members of our chamber, and other chambers—the Irish-Finnish Chamber, the British-Finnish Chamber—here's some of the things that they brought up that are detriments to doing business in Finland, or Finnish businesses doing successful business in their countries. I think you should take a look at this, Mr. Minister." AmCham Finland was an expert at this.

When basket pricing, reference pricing at pharmaceuticals started to be a problem on availability for some of the innovative drugs, they basically created a conversation across the populace that, "Hey let's take a look at this. Maybe this reference pricing is not the best way to do it. How do we do it differently? How do you get the Ministry of Health to talk to the Ministry of Finance, because they each have a lane in this? The Ministry of Health wants to make these pharmaceuticals more readily available. The Ministry of Finance doesn't want to pay for them! So how do you do this? Well, maybe you change the reference pricing."

IP became an important thing that we worked on. I had my first real look at China's significant influence in Panama. I also saw the same growing influence in Finland, so just one example which is incredible. Not a lot of U.S. companies would travel on a trade mission to Finland. I didn't like doing them because they were generally a waste. I think most trade missions are a waste. Coming over for something very specific is different, but just a trade mission to come over is a waste of money. The last one that happened, before I arrived in Finland--four U.S. companies came. China did a trade mission; they brought 400 companies! Because they paid for it. You know, different system. They paid for it.

You could see China's investment into Finland because China saw Finland as a gateway into the rest of Europe. For example, the Japanese airline ANA decided to have direct flights from Tokyo to Helsinki and then use Helsinki as a hub. If the average person looks at that and the map in their mind's eyes—we default to a Mercator map that's horizontal. But if you look at a globe and you go to the top of the world and you look at Helsinki and then you look at Tokyo, they're close! Just over the pole! So, Finnair's marketing plan was Asia. I'm going to China; I'm going to Japan—I'm going to Asia to do business. So, Finnair was doing well by making big money connecting to Asia. China was very involved in looking at investing in Finnish companies. "Give me a minority position." Very judiciously investing to gain a toehold.

There was an American who started a series of incubators across Finland and one or more in Russia. And, again, I cannot remember his name. He was providing that level of service and mentoring to the Finnish – Nordic startups that resembled what U.S. VCs were doing. I think—perhaps that the Chinese took a page out of his book by becoming involved in the incubators and innovation centers— going after startups. China wanted to connect them with the incubators and innovation centers in China. Why? Because they're looking to suck out the best of Nordic innovation. China could be aggressive in finding a Finnish start up and saying, "We'll give you an office in Shanghai; two years free! We'll pay for everything!" They were pulling in valuable IP. In some cases, the Nordics—this is maybe over simplification and a generalization, which is always dangerous—Finns are straightforward people. If they say they're going to do something they're doing to do it. So, if the Chinese say, "I'm not going to steal your IP, I'm not going to steal your IP, why would I do that? I'm doing business with you." The Finns accepted that statement—again, generalizations are dangerous. However, I do think I could have sold the Brooklyn Bridge on a few occasions.

So that was the other thing. China was very active again, and we were not overly successful in getting the attention of headquarters about China's role. I actually don't think State fully got it either, because we did that in coordination with the State econ guys because we basically worked so closely. If one of us started a sentence the other one could finish it. I can't think of Rodney's last name—another senior moment--but if Rodney talked to somebody and said, "I'll have Nick call you tomorrow," I would do it. "Nick, call this…." "Sure, I got it. What do you want me to do?" And he'd be the same way. I don't think we were successful in talking about China's growing influence in the Nordics. We didn't get anybody to pay attention. My agency's metrics—again, bad metrics drive bad behavior—that was like, "Well we're not really asking or looking for this." And, it was like, "Wait a minute, the ship we're on has got a leak. Let me tell you, there's water leaking into the ship." "We didn't ask you to tell us that." "Well, I think it's important that you know there's a leak in the ship!"

So that was the beginning, the warning bells. That light on the instrument panel that's blinking. That was where we had to do more work.

We've probably overshot our time, I'm sorry.

Q: Oh no, no! Absolutely fascinating and that's why I didn't have any questions because you covered what I would have wanted to ask.

KUCHOVA: Have you visited the Nordics?

Q: No, not yet. Well, just a few days in Stockholm.

KUCHOVA: Oh yeah, that's a beautiful city.

Q: Oh yeah, no question.

KUCHOVA: Stockholm and Copenhagen. Of course, these two imperial cities and you can see this grand European influence. But Helsinki and Oslo are more similar, because before oil Norway was poor. They were fishermen and potato farmers. Before the Soviets collapsed, Finland was struggling. So those two cities are very similar. Of all the capitals, I think that Helsinki is the edgier one; very edgy. Of course, you've got three constitutional monarchies and one republic. Then you have three languages closely allied. If you speak one you speak the others. Finnish is off the books. If you talk about the Nordics, you talk about the four. If you talk about Scandinavia, you talk about the three.

Q: Interesting. I had never thought of it that way.

KUCHOVA: The Finns think of themselves as the stepchild in the Nordics. In some cases—probably vanishing—but still there's an inferiority complex. "We're just the simple Finns." Of course, Norway basically is the lion that roars because of the money and the energy. Stockholm sees itself as the capital of the Nordics. In some degrees yes, and in some ways no. And Copenhagen thinks of itself more as continental Europe, but they share an awful lot of similarities.

The other thing, too, when you look at the front offices involved, Barry White in Norway was tremendous. Barzun in Stockholm was tremendous. The ambassador—I won't mention her name—that was in Copenhagen when we first started the regionalization, was not helpful. She would not talk to an FSN if there was an officer nearby, regardless of section. Even if our FSN was standing right next to her, she would turn to the officer and say, "Tell Bjarke I would like to do this at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning." The guy's right there and she would make the officer tell Bjarke, who's right there; three of them together. "Bjarke, the ambassador wants this at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning." Bjarke would have the answer to the officer who would tell the ambassador. That's silly. Somebody needed medication.

The guy that followed her—Rufus Gifford had a TV show called *The American Ambassador*. He was fabulous; a great guy! He got it! It was night and day. So, we got Bjarke off of suicide watch and we got him back to where he needed to be.

Begrudgingly when 2013 came by, I had to move on to my last post. But anyway, with that, that's my Finland story!

Q: Okay, that's fantastic! So, we will pause the recording here then.

Q: Okay, today is October 22, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Nicholas Kuchova. Nicholas has just completed his tour in Finland, and how does it come about where you go next?

KUCHOVA: Well, my agency—actually for years and years—we bid for jobs based on rank and rating where you are in your class. I was, I think, a 01. The job in Stockholm at the time was an OC [counselor] job, and I bid for it. Again, I had been very active. This is September 2013 through August 2017. I was extremely active on this regionalism, if not

a very early catalyst. My tour ends in Helsinki, and I very much wanted to stay in the region for a couple of reasons. First, I loved the work, I loved the place. It was great.

I was one of several bidders for Stockholm. Several of them were at rank. It was really going to be something. Because we can go on a database, you don't see who the bidder is, but you can see 2 bidders at rank and 1 bidder is a stoop, and there's several at a 01-bidding the job. That was my #1 choice, and in the end almost miraculously all the other bidders went away and I ended up getting a back-to-back tour for Commercial Service in the same region, side by side. It is very rare. It happens in our Asian posts because of language oftentimes, particularly in China. And it happens in the Western Hemisphere just because you're in Chile now you're going to be in Peru or wherever. So, it does happen. But in Europe it's very, very rare. So, I end up getting the assignment and of course we're pleased! Because going back to coming in as a second career and as a mid-level officer, my one objective was never to serve in Washington and to basically pick places that were interesting, both professionally and personally. We had stuck to this. We used to jokingly say we would only bid countries if there was an Eyewitness tour book! It didn't work because while there was in Spain and Turkey, there wasn't an Eyewitness tour book for Finland, and Finland was great!

I end up getting the assignment and we packed out of Helsinki and did home leave. We did the minimum leave time, did some consultations, because I couldn't wait to get back "home!" Couldn't wait to get back to work. I also knew the clock was ticking. Every minute away from post is a minute that I'll never have again in doing what I love to do.

So, we arrive in Stockholm. My office was great at helping us get a house. Because, unless you have children, they usually want to put you in an apartment downtown. We've got our mountain bicycles and our kayaks. Even though Robbin and I--we were early to mid-sixties when we arrived, we're active. We don't want to be in an apartment. We've got toys! We've got things! We end up on this charming little island called Lidingö. It's one of 14 islands that make up Stockholm as a metropolitan area. We have this nice house. Surprisingly no fireplace. How can you build a house in the Nordics and not have a fireplace? But that's only a very minor distraction. From an architectural perspective, we've got this great home. From our second floor we can see the ship channel and all the vessels coming in and out of Stockholm.

Q: One question about your fireplace. You didn't have a fireplace, but did you have one of those big old ceramic heaters?

KUCHOVA: Not in this; this was a new house. The older houses had those. Anyway, from our second floor, a room that we called "the lookout," we could see the vessels and the ferry boats transiting the channel leading to Stockholm. It's interesting because during the summer months prior to Covid when cruising was a big industry, a lot of the same cruise ships that we saw there go right by our house here in Fort Lauderdale-- because we live right on the harbor's entrance. So, looking out from our condominium, we overlook the harbor and the ocean and the inlet. So, we can see a lot of the same ships, which is really kind of a treat.

Lidingö itself was fascinating. In the olden days, there were many apple orchards, so our whole side of the island was littered with apple trees that were no longer in production except if somebody had bought the land and put up a house, they might have decided to tend the apple trees. So, there were apple trees all over the place. It's an interesting area because it's very green. The island itself was a blast to live on. Not only did we see the big ships go by, but the Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians use ferry boats, little intercity ferry boats like we use buses. We would see them go by constantly. Right where we lived, some weekends we never even left our island! There were places to bicycle; absolutely wonderful bicycle trails. There were places to kayak where we could put our boats in and go paddle. There were great restaurants. There was a fascinating restaurant we fell in love with. It was being run by a group of Coptic Egyptians who had fled Egypt. Somebody in one of the families had bought this restaurant so the receptionist, the cook, the wait staff, everybody right down to the dishwasher, were all Coptic Egyptians.

There was another little restaurant on our island—a very interesting guy. I think he was half Korean and half Swedish. He had this little restaurant, and these little places were just charming. So, on our own island we had this self-contained magical universe!

I was going to get to later, but I'll mention now. Robbin and I fell in love with these little ferry boats and there was a couple of them that were well over 100 years old, and they were steam. So, in the United States we're very quick to—oh well, that's an old piece of equipment, let's get rid of it. You don't have that mentality in most of Europe. You certainly don't have that in the Nordics. So, it was an old wooden boat and because the Baltic is cold water, they don't have the same damage to the wood hulls from worms and other seaborn diseases that would affect the wood. So, the wood lasts forever.

There is this 110-year-old ferry boat called the Norrskär. We used to have during the season-- from spring, summer, and early fall, every Friday night we had date night. I'd come home from work. I'd pick Robbin up, we would drive down to this one restaurant I mentioned with the Egyptians, we'd have a glass of wine, and await the arrival of the Norrskär. The Norrskär would arrive. Now originally it was dinner on board. Now I'm not saying it's a 5-star Michelin treat. Very adequate, very nice, but not the greatest. However, you're sitting inside this lovely boat, and the interior is all polished wood and brass. It's maintained like a yacht. You feel the rumble of the steam engine and there's the steam horn as you come into these different ports. So, it was this wonderful 2-2 ½ hour--I don't know maybe a little bit more—hour ride.

We would get on at this one ferry stop, have our dinner, have our wine, and ride. Now originally, they used to have two seatings for dinner. But for us, things were different because of Robbin. She knows the crew, oh that's so and so the captain, and so and so is a crew member. She gets to know the crew. On date night, our table was always the same table. It was forward–towards the bow--in the dining room. Our wine would be waiting. We would talk to everybody. Robbin would go up on the bridge, talk to the captain, go down to the engine room, look at the steam engine—the big pistons or whatever, and

there's guys squirting oil into it. It was just magical! We did that pretty much every Friday night in season! And, you just ride from island to island.

Every self-respecting Nordic person has a summer cottage. Some of them are grand; some of them are very modest. So, on a Friday night we would see people leaving the city going out to their island and to their cottage. They would have food and their dogs and flowers. In the spring when they were setting up, people would come on with these big hand trucks with a new refrigerator or air conditioner, or plants, or something, or wood to make a fence. We simply fell in love with this way of life! And, then the same ferry boats would deliver mail and packages.

They were like Amazon deliveries in the States, they'd offload the boxes and they'd put them in these big mail bins, and they would toot the horn so the people on the island would know, Oh the ferry boat's here and my package has arrived! And they'd depart for the next island.

We got to see the rhythm of the islands from the delivery of the newspaper, delivery of packages, and people fixing up their houses. Then in the late fall, people bringing stuff back home. That was one of our great enjoyments. Then we found a few islands that we would take the ferry and rent a bicycle and bike through it. Some of the island people were fascinating, because they didn't identify as mainland Swedes. They were islanders! I think some of them in days of old might have been smugglers. So, when the equivalent of the coast guard would go by, the guys operating the ferry boats would look at them a bit suspiciously. But it was simply a magical place to live! Our living accommodations and the things we did just on our own island were terrific.

Then the work part, as I get into that, even my drive to work from my little island of Lidingö, I would drive across the island across the bridge and then a back road to where the embassy was located. The embassy was in a very green section of the city. It was like driving through a park, literally, whatever time of year it was. One spring, the king's sheep were working in the park clearing the underbrush. There's a sign that basically says, "These are the King's sheep. They're working." There's the guy out there, and the sheep dogs herding them, and the sheep were doing all the heavy work. That was kind of cool to see.

As I mentioned before, all the Nordics are interesting, but Sweden I think has this mantle where U.S. progressives say, "It's heaven on earth," and the conservatives are going to say, "It's hell on earth." I think Swedish people, whether the government or private sector, are quick to tell you it's somewhere in the middle! One of the interesting stories I like to contrast this with is during a period when our General Motors was failing. So free market United States, what do we do? We rescue General Motors! Volvo, equally important to Sweden, was failing. What did socialist Sweden do? They let it fail! They didn't bail it out. Now Geely [Zhejiang Geely Holding], the Chinese company that purchased Volvo, made promises to the Swedish government, "We'll never move the R&D from Sweden. We'll keep most of the manufacturing here," yada, yada. Well, they've broken all those promises. But that's another whole story.

But when you think of socialist Sweden allowing Volvo to fail--they allowed Saab, which was a great car company to fail—remember when Ford divested itself of its holdings—they had Lamborghini, they had Volvo, they had Saab, they had Land Rover, they had all these things, and Ford ran into trouble in the United States, divested itself, dumps their global holdings. Saab went out of business. Saab completely vanished off the face of the earth. Yet capitalist free-market United States, "No, we're going to rescue GM. We're going to put government money into this." Socialist Sweden says, "we'll never put government funds into a company like that. It's up to them. If they fail, they fail." I found that dichotomy simply fascinating.

Again, that went a long way to give China a significant opportunity at the core of Swedish manufacturing, which is a problem. If you contrast that with when Ford sold Land Rover, they had two suitors. One was Indian Tata, a huge conglomerate, and the other was Geely. The British government basically pointed the sale away from China because they did not want China with that type of a toehold on their economy. So, Tata ended up buying Land Rover, and they've done well with it.

That was part of the backdrop that I found fascinating when people would say, socialist, socialist, free market, free market, because you could never find a freer market-oriented group than the people in the Nordics, or the Swedes. They are very free market oriented; just a different approach. They used to call it "the third rail." There were some books written about capitalism was one way, communism was another, and they talk about a third way. I don't think this brand of "socialism" is easily transferable elsewhere.

That kind of set up a little bit of where I was from a work perspective. Regionalism was booming for us. I still had nine countries, the UK, Ireland, Iceland, the four Nordics, Estonia, and Latvia. Commercial Service Europe was at its zenith. We originally had the seven regional senior commercial offices, well, we reduced that to four. I was still one of four. When we reduced it from seven to four, that's when I picked up the UK and Ireland. In some ways it's kind of like a Peter Sellers movie, *The Mouse that Roared*. You had the little Nordics basically picking up UK, the big engine. But it fit because we weren't talking about this strict management of the post. It was just correlation and coordination between the programs and the opportunities, and making sure that information was being disseminated and shared and that people were working together. It wasn't like we were cracking the whip and telling UK or Ireland what to do. It was just like, "Here's the topics we're working on. Here's what we can use from you, here's where we can use your leadership. What do you think about this?" Very collaborative.

So, we're booming. This is exciting and I'm doing a lot of traveling. My travel drawer at home—Robbin is very organized, more organized than me. Before a trip, I used to go down and convert some money for different currencies, because I had Swedish kroner, Norwegian kroner, Danish kroner, Euros for Finland and for the Baltics and Ireland, and English pounds for the UK. So, my travel drawer--I felt like I was an extra in the *Bourne Identity* or something with all these different currencies. I'd go out the door with all that I needed to have a successful trip.

From a work point of view, we were hitting on all cylinders. Thought leadership has become the mantra for many posts. The idea is to move away from this transactional, "did you help the company to sell their brushes or their insurance or their financial program or whatever it is?" We're moving into this arena about bringing together large market influencers to basically make sure that the infrastructure of the market was conducive to U.S. participation. We spent a lot of time in the EU and a lot of it was around IPR [intellectual property rights]. This was at a time when there was a program on data privacy called Safe Harbor. Safe Harbor was overturned because of a data privacy activist in the Netherlands who went to the equivalent of a superior court or a supreme court in the EU and they basically overturned Safe Harbor citing inadequacies in privacy protections.

Well, that was a real problem. It doesn't sound like much, but that meant that European or U.S. companies with operations on the other side of the Atlantic could no longer transmit payroll information, HR information as an example. They were limited in what they could do in terms of data privacy. So, it's hard. Ericsson had thousands of workers in the United States. They could no longer do anything with their workers in terms of pay or communicate in certain ways, so it was a huge problem. We spent a lot of time in Brussels trying to work on that. We eventually came up with a solution, but that was a real disruption.

Q: I want to ask one question before you go on about the market. You talked about the market structure to an extent in Sweden, how it's like a third way. I imagine the other Nordics are similar in different levels. Critics of the Swedish system, what you might call socialism, often say that it squelches innovation; that there isn't risk capital to finance a small new company. A small new company breaking into a market or people just in general are not encouraged to be inventors or do business startups because of the heavy tax system and just the nature of the way things operate there. I wanted to get your thoughts on that.

KUCHOVA: First of all, our previous conversations, if you go back to Lester Thurow's book, "*Head to Head*," there is nothing more efficient than our economic system with its scar tissue, warts, pimples, and all. It's very effective. It's also very painful. Managed competition does not really work. But I also go back to just when I said at the beginning, remember socialist Sweden allowed Volvo to fail. It refused to put in government funds. Refused.

There are tremendous programs to encourage innovation and entrepreneurism, but their approach is very different. The government will give grants and they're generous on the grants. Part of the problem is, these are small population centers. They don't really have the depth. They also don't have the depth of capital that you'd find in the United States either. But they are very much encouraging to entrepreneurs and startups. There are lingering sociological conditions. One of them is the fact that failure in the United States is kind of accepted, and in some cases it's kind of a badge of honor. You know, "I had x number of tries and I finally made it." Which is why I'll go back to what we did with

Peter from Angry Birds in Finland. We would often have him at certain embassy programs—the embassy was very active in helping the Nordic governments create an atmosphere of innovation. One of Peter's talking points would be, "This was my 56th try." The eyes of the audience, of all these young entrepreneurs, would pop open like, "Wow, 56 tries!" I thought he just sat down, wrote the code, and was an instant multi-millionaire. No, he failed 55 times!

I worked with a lot of the NGOs and business groups that were encouraging startups and entrepreneurs. The government will be very generous. We don't have any programs like this where you can go to the government and say, "I've got an idea and I want to do this, this, and that. I have an idea for electronic medical records, or I've got this app or whatever." You can find grants, but where they come up short is, they don't have the depth of the private equity of the VCs that can coach and backstop the entrepreneur. So, where they try to make up for this is their innovation centers and their incubators. They try to be very social, where each helps the other one overcome a problem. Like, "Oh, so and so ran into a problem with this," whether it's an engineering problem or a patent problem or a copyright problem. "Let's go get him involved and he can give you some coaching." Whereas in the United States you talk to your VC or private equity guy. And, they have an expert for you. It's different. But yeah, going back to Finland--Slush, one of the largest, far more attendees than anything that's ever happened in the States--you know I think I went back in some notes, I looked--the last Slush that I knew of had 20,000 participants!

Q: Okay, that gets your attention!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, that gets your attention. And it pulls in basically northern Europe and Asia because of Finland's connection to Asia. A lot of Chinese companies have come over, and for them it's like the Serengeti, prey and predator! And so, it's really grown. They do a lot. And no matter what system you have, nothing is perfect. Their system works for them and one of the reasons it does work is a smaller population, highly educated workforce, and that program or a solution or a correction is scalable quickly. We don't have that.

It's also interesting if you look at Israel. Israel is very generous with startups. And, they have tremendous programs to encourage entrepreneurs. You also talk to some of these companies when they reach the mezzanine level, they look to open an office either in Europe or the United States. Because they'll joke that you know Israel, "the birth of the innovation, the death of the enterprise!" Europe in some ways--one of the shortfalls is it's harder for a small company to succeed, but there are efforts to change this. It is harder to find capital than in the United States, but U.S. capital goes there looking for innovation. So, it's like that movie with the baseball field, The Field of Dreams, if you have innovation, you will see investors come look at your product, which is why we used to do all these pitch events. People in the embassy would be in the audience and critique and try to help them. No system's perfect, but they do a fine job on grooming this. They have an entrepreneurial class.

Now jumping slightly, there are cultural nuances that are fascinating. I once did remarks in Riga. Riga wanted to model itself more like what Tallinn had done with innovation. But, with a little bit of humor and a little bit of a generalization, but with some truth as well. If you go to Estonia and you have two young people together. They are in business, they're writing code, they're in e-government, they're in e-commerce. "What can I do for you?"

If you go to Riga in Latvia, you have very talented workers and they say, "I would like you to hire me. What will you pay me?" Admittedly, a little bit of a joke. Riga was interesting because they're small and I met one of the ministers who probably was in her late 20s. I just found that fascinating; she was trying to overcome this entrepreneurial impediment and very much committed to a cultural change. But the bottom line is most of the young people in Latvia were looking for a job. Estonia had a dynamic startup scene and I found that fascinating. And the border--if you drive from Estonia into Latvia it takes you a long time to realize--if you don't look at the signs that you've left one country and you're in another country. But there was a cultural difference. The whole region though is very innovative. Because if you really look at what they've done on their aggregate of their GDP it is stunning. It really is stunning what they've accomplished. And most of them are smaller companies. I mean we are talking about a small company in the States we're talking about something less than 800 employees. For most Nordic and Baltic companies, that's big. But of course, there is a huge difference in size and populations.

Q: Now the only other follow-up question, and I'll let you then get back to your story. Are startups or entrepreneurs in that region also thinking if I'm going to scale up, I've got to find a market in the UK or Germany or maybe as far as the United States?

KUCHOVA: Yes. Almost, unless you are a contractor, plumber or a neighborhood business, if you have almost any kind of business that you need any kind of scale, you're an exporter. Because you just don't have the population to support your business, which is why if you go back to the United States, less than 1 percent of American companies export. And, I don't know exactly today what the percentage is, but most Nordic, most northern European companies, are deeply involved in export, and it has only blossomed with the EU. With the movement of goods and people, it's only blossomed. And so yeah, if you have any kind of a business, your first inclination is, "I'm exporting." In my marketplace you're not just doing business in Sweden, you're doing business across the Nordics. You're doing business in Germany; doing business in Poland. You're in the UK and they all look to come to the United States. I mean jumping back even to Finland, Bruce Oreck and I used to spend time with—I mean it wasn't my job, but we wanted Finnish companies to be successful in the States. We wanted their investment. So, even before SelectUSA we, on an ad hoc basis, would talk and counsel local companies about investing into the United States.

There was one company in Finland that made cereal, a porridge kind of a thing. They were very proud because their process used very little water, because again, they're very judicious in the use of resources. So, they had this great cereal, very popular across

Finland for sure, but across the Nordics. They wanted to go to the United States and so they hired some company to help them. They came up with an "American" sounding cereal name. So, Bruce and I told this company, "We don't think you should do that. We think you should come up with a Nordic name, and on the box there ought to be this real handsome, beautiful, outdoorsy Nordic couple—you know, this image of health and the great outdoors with the blue sky and this whole bit." They spent a fortune trying to make themselves look like a C. W. Post sort of a cereal. Like what are you thinking? Tell your own story! And, this is all romance, this is marketing! Porridge is porridge. What's unique about theirs? Anyway, they thanked us. They were very polite, but they were convinced their way was better. It didn't work, it failed. Think about it, Häagen-Dazs with its Euro-sounding name, the premium ice cream, is made in New Jersey.

Q: For a while it was owned by Campbells!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, I mean, the name means nothing. They came up with it. But as long as the produce meets health standards and is tasty, you can compete. But all of it is romance. All of it is a story, hey, seduce me with your story. Most of the companies, midsize and larger, do extremely well. Wartsila and Ericsson are great examples. Ericsson parallels our Hewlett Packard in a way, or Apple, born in a garage, you know, basically then grown well. Ericsson did great until they got screwed by Huawei. Ericsson was a global player. I'll mention that later. There are lots of remarkable companies across the Nordics.

Q: So now back to Commercial—

KUCHOVA: Back to Commercial Service Europe. Again, we were in overdrive. We are cruising. We are absolutely cruising. Thought leadership shaping the marketplace has become the mantra and you even see that across pretty much all of Europe, even if you're in our Commercial Service Spain office. People were now comfortable with the practice and more interested in talking about what the marketplace infrastructure needs to look like for U.S. companies to be successful. You know, IPR is a huge issue. Data privacy is a huge issue. Because again, we're in these beginning stages of AI, augmented reality, Watson and big data and data centers. It's been around for years and years, but it's now bubbled up to the front burner for governments. How do I compete, where's my magic? What are the crown jewels of my country? How do I compete globally?

Q: Again, here I'd like to ask a systemic question. Businesses that were exporting or businesses that had international sales and connections began at some point to become solution companies. In other words, they would divest themselves of lateral companies and purchase instead vertical control of let's say an entire medical treatment like breast cancer prevention awareness and treatment. So, they would purchase what you would need, or they would become expert in how you could introduce that in a particular country or area. Was that also going on at this point when you were there?

KUCHOVA: Yes, it was.

Q: Because—Tell me if I'm wrong--this seems to me like a major change for corporations.

KUCHOVA: Very much so, and it kind of reminds me of the IBM story where IBM basically loses their way and comes close to collapse, and then reinvents itself as a company providing solutions. We don't really make anything but we're integrating these different things. By the way—remember—Nokia in Finland did the same thing—reinvented itself and flourished. So, for larger companies, yes, that was the way.

Now I'll also back up for a moment. I mean we also had tremendous success for companies that did things like cosmetics, including targeting minority markets. And so, you had more immigrants going into the Nordics, not everybody is blond and fair skinned. Now it's more racially diverse. So, there's a tremendous opportunity, a lot of U.S. minority companies, who had makeup or hair products or whatever for a minority market, they now had a whole new marketplace for them. Now, they could probably do better just controlling the market in New York as opposed to selling in Sweden, Norway, or Finland but nevertheless it was a new market for them for export. So, we spent time with those guys, because I don't want to in any way paint a picture that we weren't paying attention to some of those smaller niche-oriented companies.

But when you look at this, the marketplace fundamentally changed. Companies were also looking to do things, like they would say, "I do this well, but I don't necessarily do that really well. How do we do this other thing together using your talent and our talent?" There was a lot of that and that was the topic of a lot of conversations that were in Brussels. A lot of that was on data privacy. How do these companies then communicate and share information legally on a project that does not break some of the more onerous data rules or data privacy rules that Europe has over the United States? They're a little bit more restrictive than the United States has been.

We did a wonderful program on big data with AT&T and Ericsson with Volvo on AI, 5G, and autonomous vehicles. 5G originally, and of course if you look at television today with the commercials, all these T-Mobile and AT&T are talking about 5G and they talk about improved cellular service but 5G's original intention was machine-to-machine, or Internet of Things communication. That was basically because it's a shorter bandwidth than 4G. It was really intended for Internet of Things communication, and in fact along the roadway. And then, companies like Scania Trucks in Sweden, were a big user of 5G services from A&T and others because Scania wanted real-time information from the trucks to identify and prevent breakdowns, share vehicle performance information to improve fleet efficiencies and so on.

For example, wherever you were in the world, if you were driving a Scania tractor and were climbing up a hill or descending a hill, the black box on board your truck was basically recording the temperature, the road conditions, the rpms to give the maximum fuel and sending that to the cloud. That information would be available to any other truck using the Scania system and if they were on a hill or a temperature or a condition similar, the computer on board their truck would give the driver the optimum conditions for fuel

efficiency, 5th gear or 7th gear or whatever it happens to be. There was an awful lot of that where the companies were working hand in glove. There would be a firewall because they also competed in other instances, but they were partners in other applications. Ericsson was a huge player. AT&T--their head of their European operation was based in London, and we did several programs with Ericsson, Scania, Volvo, and others about autonomous vehicles. We also realized that the United States is one of the leading talents in big data and analytics, artificial intelligence and augmented reality. We did programs with them on how we can solve problems using this, but we also realized that 5G international standards are competitive. We wanted the United States and Europe to work together to come up with a 5G standard that would become global. Because China has one, China basically wants the world to use its standard.

Q: This famous Huawei—

KUCHOVA: Yes, Huawei. You'll hear a lot more of Huawei. We did a series of these public discussions across Sweden with a guy who was considered the dean of 5G standards. He's based in the United States, but he lives in Chile. This brainiac guy, you know, he was just eccentric and wonderful and lovely and fun. We did a series of things with different AmChams and in some cases governments where he would be a speaker and all these companies in this space whether there was a manufacturer or in the IT business or whatever, they would come and listen and ask questions. We did it like a seminar; we didn't want to do it like a sales pitch. And in a couple of places, we did it with Public Affairs, which was fun. Because yeah, you've got a great speaker. We'll get journalists—and PA was usually fun to work with.

Q: I'll tell you just one quick thing about that integration between public diplomacy and FCS. I begged FCS at the post where I was the PAO to use my social media, use my ability to create podcasts, to create short films and so on, and they never did!

KUCHOVA: Mark, I would have traded body parts to be at your post because you would have been my best friend.

Q: I mean I had excess capacity for something that the embassy wanted, not for somebody's pet project, but if FCS and the ambassador were behind it, I had excess capacity and my FSNs were running all the technical things like that. They liked the variety.

KUCHOVA: I mean you go back to Public Affairs--I go back to the days of USIS, lovingly called, "Useless." But they were the epitome; they were the top FSNs at a post. They were, and we hired some—particularly when USIS went away—because we gave them a similar sense of autonomy and freedom and creativity. But they were the best of the best—smart, focused. You couldn't ask for better people. No, we did a lot with PA in most of my posts, not so much Sweden which I'll get to later, but we did an awful lot with PA because they would bring—we'd go in and say, "We've got this idea, we got this guy coming in. Here's the books he's written. Here's where he's been on television, he's been interviewed in Europe and in Asia, yada, yada." And they would say, "Oh we can

put together interviews and do this. We love this! And back when data privacy was an issue and the failure of Safe Harbor, what do we do next? And yeah, it was great. They were just simply wonderful.

So anyway, we're going back, big data, data centers were huge. We're working with Google and Apple on data centers. The Nordics were the great places to put the data centers for the most part because they are cost effective. All the governments kind of got it, because the data center itself doesn't employ that many people. Most of the people were security. But around the data center are all these companies that it attracts that are just simply fantastic. You know, they'll customize somebody's data. They'll work with you to customize your records, your data. You know, "hey, I've got all these records in here and I want to do this, this, and that with it." And, these specialty companies will customize or manage the data or whatever you want. And those companies were simply amazing. We got great cooperation from the governments in terms of Google or Apple and all these other data centers.

And then China started to move in, because the Chinese would basically say, "It's only money. We'll do this." This is slightly off topic, but the EU has this huge investment at the University of Lund focused on nanotechnology. It's supposed to be the most sophisticated nanotechnology visualization that there is. EU money goes into it, and it is huge. The activities are to boost nanotechnology manufacturing. The Chinese came to the university, and they said, "We love the work that you're doing. We think it is leading edge. Matter of fact, we would like in some way to contribute to the fine scientific leadership that you're exhibiting. Would it be helpful if we donated to you a data center? We'll build it, we'll staff it, we'll put our servers in, and all this capacity is yours." Because they're huge users of data. And, of course, at first the Swedes are like, "This is great," because this is millions and millions of dollars as a gift. Here it is. And so, we had the unenviable job to try to quietly tell the Swedes, "You will lose your data. This is not a gift, boys and girls."

And it was hard—and kind of going down my list—but I had a conversation once with one of the vice ministers in the Swedish government about Chinese influence. The root of the conversation was about the University of Lund and this nanotechnology investment. My point was that innovation and technology are the crown jewels for Sweden's businesses. He agreed. "Yeah, absolutely. It's our nimbleness. We've got great technology, we've got great innovation, we've got great companies, we're first to market, we're nimble in changes." "I agree completely." I said to him, "You're getting basically held up like you're a convenience store in a bad neighborhood by some guy with a revolver." Not surprisingly, he agreed and said, "But you know what? We have a Chinese investment in—and he named a town—we just got 60 jobs in a manufacturing plant from this Chinese investment." And my point to him was, "60 jobs versus the crown jewels!" But he was a politician, and 60 jobs was something beneficial in this little city. People would vote for him.

But wait a minute! You're missing the forest for the trees! That conversation about nanotechnology and Lund came at the same time that Ericsson began to have its problems with Huawei.

Q: Let me just ask here, in the background, you are talking exclusively about the commercial aspects and IP and all that. At the same time, were other offices in the embassy also kind of going to the Swedish government and saying, "We're a little uneasy about these investments China's making, and it may at some point create a security issue for us."

KUCHOVA: You know that's possible. It might be further ahead on my notes, but of all the embassies I worked in my 20 years, the hardest, most frustrating environment, and most nonproductive, was Embassy Stockholm. I had the least productive relationships with econ or political or PA. The front office, for whatever reason, basically fostered internal competition. So, it's very possible that the law enforcement or at the level of the intelligence agencies might have shared that. I'm sure they had because they're very smart people. But what should have been a country team priority—a whole-of-government effort--was never ever put together into a coherent message. How unfortunate because that is just the sort of message that we could have delivered to certain levels of the Swedish government, and certainly to the private sector, the engine of the economy. My econ colleagues could have been effective at different levels of the Swedish government. Political as well but we never had a coherent program. The only productive time I had at Embassy Stockholm—getting things done-- was when Bob Gilchrist was the DCM. I knew Bob; he had been the DCM in Tallin when I was in Helsinki for most of my tour, and I got to work with Bob again in Stockholm. He was great, and he was constantly trying to undo this internal competition that seemingly had festered for years.

Q: I'll just mention that as early as when he was political counselor in Romania when I worked with him, he was also very much in that mold. He's a real star.

KUCHOVA: He is a real star. He was great to work with. He got it; he understood the frustration. But after he left his replacement was openly hostile to me and we never had a relationship. The earlier ambassadors I worked for, --hey, I got ruined by Parris, Stephenson and Oreck, because they basically said to their country team participants, when we had a discussion, "You give me your best idea. I may not agree, but I want to hear what you think. Give me rationale, not just that you don't like something. But you give me something and it gets considered." I thought that's the way it was everywhere. I tried that once in a meeting with the first ambassador I worked with in Stockholm—I won't mention names—and he blew up. He said, "I'm the ambassador. Who do you think you are? When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it! Okay?" Thank God I was doing regional work. For most of my time in Stockholm, I sent my deputy, Kevin Chambers, to country team because it was openly hostile. Kevin is a great guy, collaborative, team oriented and very smart. He would go to country team, and he'd come back depressed about the lost opportunities. I'd cheer him up because it was just constantly unproductive—my FSN colleagues from econ and political were just across the hall and

they were openly competitive with their CS FSN colleagues. They would do stuff and not tell us, and then I found in some cases when I first got there, that our team was not sharing with them what we were doing. I said, "This has got to stop." As an optimist I kept saying, "If you keep doing the right thing, eventually you'll bring them around." It did not work for me in Stockholm. For my entire time at Embassy Stockholm, it did not work and that was hugely disappointing.

When Bob Gilchrest was the DCM, he had one of the nicest residences [DCR] right in the city center. It was very expensive, and he wanted people to use it for appropriate activities. So, we used it frequently for these thought-leadership coffees. As an example, we worked with the woman who ran the Swedish space agency, who was cooperating with the Mojave Space Center and we hosted a series of meetings over coffee with a range of public and private sector leaders to advocate for a change in Swedish law that was beneficial for commercial space flights—it had to do with liabilities. We had the energetic participation of the CEO of the Mojave Space Center, which was the private center where they launched the Space X and other ventures. And, this guy had been a naval aviator, he had been a test pilot. I mean he was like out of the book *The Right Stuff*. Fascinating guy, and he had great stories because they would have meetings and Elon Musk would come in and Richard Branson would come in. They'd all fly in on their Gulfstreams and they'd have meetings. And they talked in terms of units being like a million. That was a unit. They would be talking about, "Oh yeah, we got this guy doing a special kind of adhesive to bond carbon fiber, you know, sections for aircraft or spacecraft. And this special adhesive utilizes benefits from nanotechnology." And oh, I love that idea, and these guys looking for money around the meeting. So, Branson would go, "Let's throw in three units." And, "Okay, I'll throw in three." And then Musk, "I'll throw in three." And then the guy from Tata was there— I forget his name— "Yeah, I'll throw in three." So, by the end of the meeting, they had like 10-12-15 million dollars! They're putting into this start up because they're going to be able to use it on their investments.

So anyway, the Mojave executive came over several times because we wanted the Swedish government to change their law to limit liability for a death in its commercial space accident. So, if you go back to when, I guess it was Branson's SpaceShipTwo that crashed, do you remember? It accidentally deployed control surfaces and spun out of control. One of the pilots ejected and lived. I don't know how badly he was hurt. The other pilot died in the accident. There were no lawsuits because in the United States, basically the companies and the employees agreed that space flight is inherently dangerous. This is a dangerous business. If there's an accident, you can't sue. And, everybody signed off on it. No lawsuits.

We wanted Sweden to change their law on liability because what all these U.S. companies wanted was an emergency landing facility in Sweden. If there was an emergency while in flight or orbit and they had to come down and land, they wanted a degree of protection from liabilities. Without that change, Sweden was not an option. We were not successful in promoting the dialogue with the Swedish government to consider this topic. There's even a Swedish astronaut and I forget his name, very interesting guy,

he'd been on the international space station. We had him there, we did all kinds of programs, we talked to the government, and they were unwilling to change the liability laws. So, it did not work. However, to my point, Bob Gilchrest allowed and encouraged the DCR to be used for these sorts of embassy activities.

When Bob left, the new DCM that came in, whom he—I don't know, in some previous life I wronged him deeply--he would not let anybody use the DCR. And, he said because he had books, he didn't want anybody to steal the books!

Q: Whaaat?

KUCHOVA: Yeah. I'm kind of thinking that the guests that we're inviting, I don't think they would pilfer somebody's residence. But with Bob, Bob would pop in and it was great because we'd be doing this coffee or whatever and then Bob would come in and we'd say, "Here's our DCM, Bob Gilcrest." And Bob would then say, "Oh I'm delighted that you're here. I know from Nick that you're talking about blah, blah, this is great. How can we help you?" Then he would say, "Nick, when this is done, I want to know everything that's going on and how I can help you. Don't forget!" He'd give me marching orders. So, all the attendees knew this was an important discussion—Bob made them feel welcome, vital and important in any solution. Hey, this conversation was important to our front office. Yeah, Bob was perfect. But that all ended with his departure.

We loved the fact that Sweden and Denmark--at the very bottom they basically merged. A lot of people that worked in Copenhagen lived in Sweden for lower taxes, if you can imagine.

Q: Because by now the bridge exists.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, the bridge exists. They commute by train and bus or they drive. And there is, I think it's called Medical Valley. There are huge pharmaceutical investments, most of them on the Danish side. Some on the Swedish side, but most of them are on the Denmark side. So, we had worked out this very cool program where the U.S. ambassador to Stockholm and the U.S. ambassador to Copenhagen (Rufus Gifford) were going to meet in Copenhagen, tour the Medical Valley facilities with a group of U.S. companies, and talk about what was going on and how they could be part of this and where the opportunities were. We had this whole thing set up. We were going to do a photo op with both ambassadors on the middle of the bridge linking Sweden and Denmark.

I couldn't get cooperation from PA in Stockholm, but PA in Copenhagen was great. They arranged the photo op in the middle of the bridge. They got the police departments to cooperate. "Yeah, we're going to close the bridge. We're going to put the U.S. ambassadors there; we'll do anything you ask. The Danish police will do this, we'll move them, the whole bit." AmCham in Copenhagen was going to do this big dinner and host a working session bringing together U.S. and local companies. We had this whole thing worked out to give U.S. companies a deep look into the highly innovative pharmaceutical

scene. And, don't forget that the U.S. companies bring great talents to this space—there are significant opportunities for American firms.

The day before the event, the U.S. ambassador canceled. I went to see her. I said there's got to be a mistake. You know we've got this all set up and you agreed to participate. And, she said, "Well are you going to be there?" I said, "No, I'm going to be in Brussels, but you're going to have the deputy and you're going to have our head of section in Copenhagen and everything is arranged. There's five people from my agency that are going to be there." And her point was, "Well if you're not going to be there, it can't be important. If it's not important I'm not going to go." And, she canceled.

So, we advised Ambassador Rufus Gifford in Copenhagen, who had a TV show on Netflix about the daily life of the U.S. ambassador. He was great. I apologized, and I was mortified, and he said, "I get it. You don't need to worry…I'll do this." And, he did it. And, he did it with such grace. He did it with such style. You never knew there was an interruption. But it really caused a problem. And, so later I asked the DCM that followed Bob Gilchrist–and who shall rename nameless, "What happened?" The DCM said, "I just didn't think it was important." That was his answer. Didn't want to discuss it or whatever. I simply replied, "Okay," but that was our relationship highpoint. Embassy Stockholm was a disappointment in terms of any sort of functioning whole-of-government and I blame it on the complete lack of leadership.

We then started to do more programs regionally outside of Sweden because it was openly hostile within Embassy Stockholm. You know there's no way for me to say it nicely or with any degree of sophistication. It broke my heart. Because Turkey, Spain, Finland, [and] Panama, they were all markedly different. And, I get what should have been the best of the best and it's openly hostile. For my first ambassador in Stockholm--he had a much younger wife, and she actually had a business helping Swedish businesses avoid mistakes and to sell in the U.S. My agency's mission is to advance U.S. exports and promote foreign investment into the United States so there is a little difference between the USG mission and the personal business interests. I brought that up during a meeting with the front office but that topic didn't go over well. So, the internal working environment was just terrible from that point of view. Oh, how I wish Parris, Stephenson or Oreck had been in Sweden—we would have rocked.

You know, I loved my work, I loved our mission, the work itself was the driver. I just kind of removed myself from some of the conversations within the embassy. Privately, the guy who was the PA chief agreed with me. The guy who was the political chief agreed. The econ guys, not so much. They didn't agree. They liked it the way it was. They really saw us as a competitor. And because of this silly internal competition that was allowed to flourish, we were just kind of going in circles. It was embarrassing. It was simply embarrassing. But we just did the best with what we had.

You know, we spent a lot of time on our craft. You know we go back to what you had talked about earlier, we spent a lot of time with U.S. private equity and VCs. There's actually a formula for this sort of investment—and in some cases they were looking for

Nordic money to invest in the States. So, for that money to be invested in the States there's a mathematical formula, every x amount of investment dollars created like 30 or 35 jobs, or one of these kinds of formulas, which is fine. Because trade is two-way, we would turn around and ask the visiting CV and private equity folks to go talk to this innovation center, and they would go do it, which was great. They would walk in, and they'd talk to the young entrepreneurs and they would listen to some pitches or whatever. So, we used the private equity and VC folks both ways.

We got an awful lot done, but we could have gotten so much more done if we approached this as a country team. Again, it's still to this day it really bothers me, you know. I guess everybody likes to be successful and I was totally unsuccessful in getting that to work inside Embassy Stockholm.

The overarching problem we had in Sweden was intellectual property. And one of the pressing challenges was that the copyright regimes in Sweden were very lax. There's also a strange cultural kind of a trait, which is hard to describe. As an example, if you dropped your wallet with money in Stockholm, the average Swede would pick it up and chase you down the street to give it to you with all the money. If you produced copyrighted material and you invested millions, say you're going to make a movie, the average Swede wouldn't think twice about taking your movie and looking at it illegally and not paying for it because if it's on the internet it must be free.

However, there is no free lunch. So, where that manifested itself was in the tremendously lackadaisical attitude toward IP in general primarily with copyrighted materials. For example, Disney content was constantly getting ripped off. There's very little movie or television production done in Sweden because you can't finance it because the people who finance it can't get their money out. Before the content is ready to be marketed and able to generate revenue, it's already on Swedish internet sites. We were very successful in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark in increasing the approach toward copyright. And, where it manifested itself in Sweden was primarily concerning copyright issues. We worked with the guy who was one of the founders of Abba, Bjorn. Because as wealthy as he is, he realized how much money he has lost in Sweden with people using his music. As a prolific composer, he was very involved in conversations about IPR and theft. We had people from the States and people from the EU to talk about this, talk about public service announcements and trying to equate illegally downloading content as theft! But for the average Swede, that just culturally didn't compute. So, we worked with Bjorn, and it was kind of funny to work with him. And, then to think of him in terms of the flashy jumpsuits in his days with Abba. He had a house along one of our favorite bicycle paths. So, we would ride by and Robbin and I would often remark, here's a very wealthy guy in any marketplace. And, the house was big, but it wasn't one of these soulless McMansion sorts of things. It was very nice; it was right on the water. Beautiful, but it wasn't like well here's some skadjillionaire rockstar kind of a thing. It was kind of refreshing.

The impact of IPR theft really manifested itself with Ericsson for us. If you flew in and out of Stockholm's Arlanda airport you had to transit the arrival terminal. After you get your luggage and you cleared customs, there was an L-shaped corridor going out to the

main lobby and Ericsson—because they're the home-grown champions—had this mural on both sides. It was all in blues and greens and soft, soothing colors. It talked about Ericsson connecting the worlds of medicine, academia, industry, communications, autonomous vehicles, and shipping, because Ericsson and AT&T did Maersk, the big Danish container-ship company. They put LANS on each of the ships—AT&T was a big architect of this— where each of the containers communicates with the ship and the Maersk control center just outside of Copenhagen. But as you walked down this hallway, there were all these images that conveyed Ericsson's global leadership in this space. All very impressive.

The former chairman of Ericsson was this great guy, Hans Vestberg, and I used to ask him about IPR in China. And, he, in a bit of a condescending tone, would say to me, "Nick, we don't have a confrontational relationship with China. We've been there for over 100 years. These people are our partners." Now if you fast forward, they were doing business with Huawei. Huawei took every piece of valuable technology Ericsson had, and they made it theirs! If you then walked through the Arlanda arrival terminal—I don't know about today, but when we left in 2017 that same mural existed, but it's no longer in blues and greens. It was in reds and ochers and oranges, harsh colors, and where it used to say Ericsson, it now said Huawei. Ericsson laid off thousands of employees, including thousands in the United States, because Ericsson was the backbone for T-Mobile and for Sprint. They were the backbone. Thousands of people were impacted. It's funny because Robbin's sister lives in Annapolis and one of her neighbors had worked for Ericsson. He lost his job. I mean these things that happened where an executive makes a decision, you know, and he doesn't protect the crown jewels of the company, and there are consequences. So, there are people all around the world that lost their great paying jobs because of theft. That was a real problem.

And so, a big investor in Ericsson was the Wallenberg family, you know of Raoul Wallenberg's heroics in the Second World War. That's a very interesting family. They made their money based on a relative who left Sweden as an immigrant and went to California for the gold rush. He did not find gold, but on his way out went to the "Borders" bookstore of its day, I guess it would be the Barnes and Noble of its day, and bought a book, the equivalent of "Banking for Dummies." But back then I'm sure it wasn't banking for dummies, but How to Start a Bank, or whatever. So, he returns to Sweden with basically the book and a suitcase. The family says this is a great idea. Let's start a bank. And of course, the Wallenberg's were very successful and so they are like merchant princes across Europe. Investing in a wide range of companies.

The Wallenberg family took a huge hit with Ericsson because they were significant shareholders. When we started to try to build a consensus from the private sector, the Wallenberg family, I went to see them, and so (chuckles) we had a really—

Jumping down the list, my very last official act was I briefed a CODEL [Congressional Delegation] coming in about IPR and China. And, the stars aligned because there was a brand-new econ chief who had just arrived and I had continued to try to play nice with econ. So, perhaps the new econ chief came from an embassy where it was normal to

collaborate or maybe he hadn't yet drunk the Kool Aid. I explained to him what I wanted to do, and he said, "That's a great idea. How can I help you?" How refreshing. He didn't view us as his competitor. It turns out the CODEL was late because of something on the airplane. The whole morning schedule was gone. Now with the previous econ leadership, they'd just basically would have thrown our briefing to the side, but the new chief said, "When I look at what these guys want to do, your message is the more important one, so we're giving you the afternoon. I had to question whether I was still in Sweden, because this is not the kind of cooperation that I got used to for my four years. So, the CODEL arrived and I had taken a different tack regarding the briefing. I brought in the CEO for Disney for the Nordics. I brought in the head of global government relations for Ericsson, and I brought in the CEO of a half-U.S. half-Swedish company that basically did the investigation about IPR theft and published the first white papers tracking the hackers back to China, to a street address, to an exact floor, and had the timelines. These guys were brilliant.

I did the welcoming and then turned it over to them. The Dane who's the CEO for Disney talked about the damage to his company and what's going on and how it's happening. The guy from Ericsson presented the damage to his company because the Wallenberg's told him to speak the truth, tell what happened. The cybersecurity expert spoke about China's actions. The CODEL briefing went extremely well and we got lots of positive feedback from the CODEL members as well as the companies that participated. It was gratifying to end with that high note as we had been talking about this vital topic for my entire four years in Stockholm. Now I don't know what they ever did with our materials, but shortly after I left the government is when you started to see the U.S. government—and I don't know what all the reasons were; but begin to take a harsher line on China's IPR theft. I have no idea if we actually contributed to that or if it would have happened on its own, but for the first time, we started to have more people in congress talk about China and IPR theft and the sanctity of IP. That was gratifying.

That was an issue. The IPR issues drove us to basically--like what we did in Finland--retool AmCham. We wanted to take AmCham from being a social club to becoming an activist organization, and IPR and taxation were the two driving issues. So, we basically retooled the AmCham to become something far better. We took pages out of what worked well in Finland and AmCham Sweden zoomed. We hired a new managing director who was this wonderful and very smart guy, Peter Dahlen, who's an American married to a Swedish woman. Peter had been Biden's IPR lawyer on the Hill. Peter was brilliant, focused, a great communicator and a superbly nice guy.

Q: Interesting!

KUCHOVA: Yeah. So, Peter got IPR. He got it. When we would have these sessions—and the 3M Nordic CEO was a member—we had a high-powered board. I mean super-smart, connected people. And, we got the public and government's attention. Slowly Sweden started to change, and they did change the copyright laws to make it better.

Q: While you were there!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, just as I was leaving. It took a long time, because it also affected them in the pharmaceutical industry. The country was doing well on global clinical trials and the innovative companies, not just U.S., but global innovative drug companies said, "If you can't give me better protection on my research, I'm not going to do it in Sweden." Then you got different players, but private and public started to add pressure to the government and they did change the law.

Q: Because you know, if you could put that in an evaluation, you know, that for four years you were there and you had x number of people come and you reached x number of influencers and lo and behold, the end of the four years you got some legislation changed, wow! I mean—

KUCHOVA: You know, it was my last post, and I didn't do an evaluation when I left.

Q: Yeah, I understand.

KUCHOVA; I just didn't bother. And part of it was I just didn't want to do business with my front office.

Q: Ah, okay.

KUCHOVA: I just didn't want to do it. Now my boss who sat in Brussels begged me to do one, because he said, "Look, you're leaving, but this is probably worth a cash award."

Q: You see where my mind is going. Yeah.

KUCHOVA: Yeah. After four years of fighting with the front office, I really did not even want to interface with them for an ambassador's review statement. It just wasn't worth it to me. I left with a tremendous sense of pride in what we did; a tremendous sense of satisfaction; a tremendous sense of both loyalty and affection for the people with whom I worked, yet a sense of profound disappointment in the environment in which I had to work and what I was subjected to. That just killed me.

But in addition to China's misbehaving, you know we still had Russia. And I go back to the story I told you last time about the submarine, so the Russians were really nudging the neighborhood. The Swedes were very afraid that Russia would look at the Island of Gotland like it was an aircraft carrier for them, a stationary aircraft carrier. And then a bizarre thing happened where a Chinese company—Sweden had basically underfunded their military and they closed their military operation on Gotland because peace and love and everything's fine. And, then they were confronted with Russia's behavior and thought, "Holy Mackerel, we've got to do something here!" They were going to invest and retool in Gotland. Then a Chinese company came to them and in an unsolicited offer the Chinese company [said], "Look. We love Sweden, and we would like to rebuild your military base on Gotland for we'll pay for everything because we just think you guys are

wonderful!" And there was a group of Swedes in the government who thought, "This is great, it will save us millions of Kroner!" Eventually people said, "Wait a minute! Are you kidding me?" And, they didn't accept the Chinese offer, but they did move the military back to Gotland. There was a period they were really very concerned. There were over flights by Russian airplanes. Swedes would go up. The Russians really wouldn't leave until the Finnish airplanes arrived and then they would divert because they weren't too afraid of the Swedes. The Swedish chief of defense made a public statement that if Russia attacked, they could hold out for 12 hours. There was that in the news. It's interesting because the Finnish chief of defense said, "We can hold out indefinitely."

Q: Wow, interesting.

KUCHOVA: Yeah, very interesting. There was that bad behavior. We were very cognizant of all the talk about Russia's attempts to influence the election. I don't know where it started, but one of our offices found this great big picture of Putin in a suit and on his lapel there's that little patriotic lapel pin that said, "I voted."

Q: Ha ha. Beautiful!

KUCHOVA: It circulated like gallows humor. At least we got a laugh out of it. You know, I was also there during BREXIT. I must tell you; I was shocked when the vote went through. I thought okay yeah it would be close, but this is a smart society. They're not going to do this. When Brexit passed it was stunning. It was like watching a train wreck in slow motion. It gave rise to other countries thinking about, "Oh you know, maybe we should leave. Maybe this is costing us too much." Sweden and the UK cooperated in Brussels because socialist Sweden and free-market Britain would basically push back on some of the EU regulations to protect their own interests when they thought that the EU had gone too far! Sweden must have thought, "Holy mackerel, if the UK leaves, we're kind of alone."

In Brussels, we hired a fellow who had been a lawyer for the EU, and he had written a book about the inner workings of the EU called The Labyrinth. We had him talking to different business groups across all of Europe because we wanted to promote European business groups to talk with their governments about some of the regulations. We wanted to promote private–public sector dialogues along the lines of, "Let's look at some of these regulations." Because some of them were ridiculous. And, the lawyer gave a humorous example of how a lot of EU regulations appear. He described, imagine, you've got three European regulators, civil servants, they're at lunch at a café in Brussels. On the table, there is oil and vinegar for your salad. One person says to the others, "Well, I wonder how often they clean this." The others say, "Well, I don't know." They go back to the office and the guy who wondered basically writes up a regulation saying that all restaurants shall steam clean the cruets for oil and vinegar once a day using blah-blah-blah procedure. They put that draft into the hopper, and it goes out and a lot of times something like that has a chance of being voted on without deliberation. Our

reaction was, “No, you’ve got to be kidding.” And the lawyer said, “Look, I spent 30 years here and this is how it works.”

We basically were having these conversations about regulations—hey, I love what they’ve done on environmental topics. I love what they’ve done. But, some of it is at the exclusion of smaller businesses that can’t afford to do some of these things and that’s why the silly oil and vinegar cruet story has meaning. There are certain things that small businesses cannot afford to do. You’ve got to take a step back and say, “Wait a minute. This has nothing to do with health, safety, the environment, or whatever. This is just ridiculous!” So, Sweden was panicked because of the UK’s departure. Within countries such as Spain, there were discussions as to whether they were well served as members of the EU. The little countries, like the Baltics, didn't want to pull apart of the EU because the EU for them—forget the business, forget the onerous regulations—it’s their security. It’s their survival. If the EU goes away, they’ll be gobbled up by bigger fish. It was an unusual time.

Suddenly, all the Brits that we were cooperating with in Brussels were gone! Because you know, we’ve changed the rules! It was a stunning event. People that I worked with--they were going to go back to the UK and I think the passage surprised some of the government officials. The UK was confronted with new challenges. They had to think, “Well, holy mackerel! How do we reconstitute all of what we had disassembled over these decades?” It was sad for me because if you look at the EU, it was a colossal success. Other than the Balkans, which are unique, 70 years of prosperity; 70 years of progress! When I look back to what the great statesmen did--Bretton Woods and leading to the IMF and their vision of a future where these visionary American statesmen basically said, “There will be a day when other countries will eclipse our leadership, our innovation. And, on that day, what do you want the world to look like? Perhaps some of those noble aspirations were manifested in the EU.

I’m not naïve and think it’s perfect. Britain came close to basically dissolving that whole marketplace, and that to me was disappointing and frightening at the same time. Having been in Brussels when that happened was a unique experience. There was a lot of panic. I just have no idea what’s going to happen with a lot of businesses. It has become far more challenging. I would love to be back in some of those conversations to get a feel for it, but it is a stunning problem. I wish that the different forces within Europe could have come for a different arrangement to prevent Britain's departure. Of course, Norway’s not a member because Norway doesn’t—

They want to pay for it, but they use all the EU’s standards and regulations and regimes. But you know, Sweden kept its kroner, Denmark kept its kroner, much like the Brits kept their pounds, so there was a way, but they just got fatigued with the fights with bureaucracy. It’s a shame that they didn’t keep at it longer for some type of middle ground, some type of compromise on regulations. I think that would have been pretty good.

A couple of things that stand out to me too is when our second ambassador came, I was the second or third highest ranked officer, because I surprisingly got promoted to the senior foreign service. Complete surprise but very nice. I was very gratified and that was a huge achievement. I wish my mom and dad had still been around to have seen that. That would have been nice. But I got to participate in the credentialing of the new ambassador, so I got to ride to the palace in a horse drawn carriage. We had to wear morning suits. We were supposed to wear these ridiculous top hats. However, one of the other officers' heads was too big. And, the suits, you rent the suits. They were like 50, 60, 70 years old and I guess there was no top hat big enough. So, if everybody can't wear a top hat, nobody wears a top hat. So, I was really dying to wear the top hat because I felt like I could have been an extra in Young Frankenstein!

So, the group of us went to see the king and we shared a couple words with him. Well, I made it to the palace but walked away with the feeling, "what a boring life that would be, to be a king!" You know, thank God for being a commoner and living in anonymity. But the palace was fascinating to see from that perspective, so that part was good.

Other parts that stand out. Sweden has part of the Nobel prize to give. The peace prize of course happens in Oslo, but the science, economics and literature prizes happen in Stockholm. I got to escort on two occasions, the U.S. recipients, and that was interesting. Because they arrived with their families and their grandkids and they were all interesting people. One of them had done work on DNA sequencing for a biotech pharma type of approach. I asked him what he did, and he explained it. And, I wanted to make sure I had the face of appreciation for the complexity. When he was done, I had no idea what he had said! Not a clue! He was a charming person and you could see the intensity in his eyes.

It reminds me of a story—I'm going to jump back to Finland. Finland has an award called the Millennium Prize and it's for science. They present the winner with a million euros, and it's every like two years. One year there was a U.S. recipient, and he was half-U.S., half-British, born in the UK but grew up in the United States. He was a brainiac, and he basically came up with a way of mimicking photosynthesis to produce electricity.

Q: Incredible.

KUCHOVA: His solution was sort of like a coating on a wall surface or a roofing surface that could take sunlight in and turn it into electrical energy. He began thinking about this when he was a child when his mom explained how plants do photosynthesis. So, from being 8 or 9 years old to I guess he was in his 60s, this was his driving force. He arrived and he was on stage in Helsinki. I know we're jumping back, and I apologize. He was at the Finlandia Hall to receive the accolades and the prize. He wore sneakers with no socks, a pair of jeans, but a dress shirt not tucked into the jeans and a tuxedo jacket with a boutonniere. And he wore glasses. So, he walked out, and he began to thank everyone, and all of a sudden, he stopped and he reached into his coat, and he pulled out a little 3"x5" index card and a pen and he just started writing. Now couple moments went by, and he was still writing. There was complete silence in the hall. So finally—he had two

graduate students with him—they walked out on the stage, and they guided him by the elbow, and they just took him offstage—he never finished his remarks, and now there was a reception occurring. This gentleman is off to the side of the stage and he was just madly writing, and he pulled another card and continued to write. When the Finlandia Hall affair ended, there was a dinner back at the CMR, and he explained to Bruce Oreck, "I had this great idea. At my age when I get them, I write them down. I don't wait." So, he literally stopped getting a million-euro prize to write down this idea. Now that was way more informal than the Nobel Prize. The Nobel programs were very formal. I did not get to go to the prize award ceremony. I only attended the reception at the CMR. That was great fun, you know, to be in the audience to listen to some of these men and women who were at the top of their disciplines talking about their work. We also got a couple of them to do videos. We did the videos of the good cooperation with PA to be used for the Innovation Centers conversations. It was meaningful to hear somebody say, "Yeah, I've been working on this chemical process for 30 years before finding true success." These successes were not quick. We fed the videos to the library for the people running the Innovation Centers so if somebody's discouraged because it's their third attempt to do something and it didn't work right away, well, look at this video and listen to the message. This woman worked for 30 years before she got the process right.

So, all these things fit together and almost all our topics came back to intellectual property. Even the opportunities because again it was big data, AI, augmented reality, and analytics. We did a lot with IBM across all of Europe on Watson. We basically did these thought leadership events in several CMRs. I remembered when I worked in Spain and how successful Spain was in attracting EU development cohesive funds. When Prime Minister [Mariano] Rajoy was finance minister and he would go to Brussels, he would wear—I think I mentioned this—his oldest suit, so he would look dignified, but kind of shop worn. And, Spain came back with billions of euros to the point that after the roads and the airports and the seaports and the dams and the electrical plants and all of this, they were down to putting in pavers on streets and shade trees. They had gotten so much money!

Well, Spain also had so much money they lost track of where the EU and development cohesive funds were. They received—for example, maybe ten million for an expansion on a port, but what Spain did was then they sold the port as a concession. So, they used the ten million to do something else, sold the port as a concession to have the private investor do the investment and they lost track. So, they wanted Watson to help them untangle their finances because they were confused.

Warsaw wanted Watson to help them with their Ministry of Health. Norway was interested in energy equations. So, we had IBM executives all over Europe having these fascinating conversations over dinner at CMRs or DCRs--talking to either ministers or people of influence inside the government. How does Watson do this? What does it mean? How do I do this? Again, it wasn't this overt commercialization, "Oh, sign here for Watson, and if you act now, we'll throw in this tee shirt and the Ginsu knives." It was all about "How can AI help you untangle your problem, or give you the data points that you need as a government official to make a coherent decision." And, in defense of why

did you do this? Well, we did this because of this analysis. It was interesting that each of the governments had a different application for Watson. That was a whole lot of fun!

The woman running the Watson program was in the States, and she was from a healthcare background, so a lot of the conversations were on health care. All of Europe was struggling with health care issues, costs of pharmaceuticals, costs for the overall healthcare systems, how do you retool your health care delivery system to meet your aging population or whatever? And they all looked at data analytics as giving them a waypoint; giving them a series of solutions for them to consider from a policy point of view. So, it was incredibly fascinating. Sometimes they would include some of the guys who did some of the programming for Watson. That was unique.

So, at the time the United States—most of this was during Obama's last couple of years—we were respected, we were appreciated, the quality of our data product and our view was considered mainstream or trustworthy. This was simply a golden time for us. It was great fun in Sweden's marketplace and across my northern region and across all of Europe--this was eminently satisfying. It helped me to overcome my frustration with the poor leadership in Embassy Stockholm. Then, from a personal point of view there's no place better to enjoy summer than the Nordics.

Q: Of course. And the White Nights.

KUCHOVA: There's no place better. In the winter, as long as you have snow, there's no better place to spend the winter. So, Robbin and I basically—I'd work long hours during the week, but I really wanted my weekends free—our weekends were getting out and exploring nature and all the things that we could possibly see. We were extremely cognizant of the fact that this was it. The carriage turns into a pumpkin at the end of this tour; there ain't no more.

Q: Although you do get promoted, which means you could have—Oh no, it's age! You hit the age. Okay.

KUCHOVA: I aged out. I did try saying there was a math error. But I wasn't successful with that argument.

But you know we found wonderful places to bicycle, wonderful places to kayak. Actually, a couple of times we'd take our kayaks right into Stockholm. I would park where I parked if I was going to work. There was a park right there and we would put our boats in right there and paddle through Stockholm! We would have lunch at this cute little café that was downtown, and our boats were right there in front of the cafe in downtown in Stockholm! There were a lot of great places to bicycle to see things. We biked through the city.

There was a Brit who worked for the RSO office, and he had been married a few times to different Swedish women. He was single when I knew him. He knew we liked road trips. One day he came into my office and he had a little map. He called it a circumnavigation

and he kindly drew out this wonderful route. And, he said, "Look, this will take you three hours and you hit all these islands, and you come right back; it's a big circle. Robbin and I did that drive fairly frequently. Whether it was summer, spring, fall, or winter, didn't matter. If we didn't have a lot of hours to go someplace further, we would do this circumnavigation. You drive to an island, and you get on a ferry boat to the next island and then another ferryboat, the next island and around and around and around. There's a charming little city called Vaxholm where we would end up having dinner or lunch.

Our time together in Sweden was great. And again, I worked with wonderful people. I still consider them friends. We are in close contact with Maria Fidentzi who did all our finance because when we were doing regionalism, we also did something very different and consolidated our regional budgets and finance services. The funds no longer came to the individual posts. They came to Stockholm as a Nordic fund. I didn't want to call it Stockholm funds because if you call it Stockholm funds and you're sitting in Helsinki, Copenhagen, or Oslo, it's, "Wait a minute, I'm part of this team!" So, we called it Nordic funds and we made headquarters change the nomenclature to match this because words are important. You know, you've got to walk the talk and talk the talk. So, Maria, who's Greek but living in Stockholm, managed all the funds and served all the Nordic offices. We changed Maria's job because in addition to this she would once a quarter get on an airplane and be in either London, Dublin, Oslo, or Helsinki or whatever, meeting with the staff looking at what their financial needs were. Helping with whether it was a voucher or a program because we also had trust funds for programs we did for companies, paid services. So, there was a lot of work involved in managing the regional budgets. Maria did a brilliant job! We would be able to endow these different projects using the trust funds. Maria was constantly on the move, so it changed her job from just a narrow view of the world to one where she was deeply involved in the regional activities. We also got Maria to help other posts, particularly with the southern European posts. Maria could help answer their questions about how to do regional finance. Plus, how to do it in a way that does not disenfranchise some of the smaller posts where they already feel like they're a stepchild. How do you make sure that they feel like they're not vital? Well, we would tell them that we're going to remove this budget burden from you. We're not taking something from you; we're giving you more time to excel at the mission.

We had some ambassadors, particularly in Obama's second term--we had some ambassadors who didn't have the same enthusiasm for regional approaches that the first tour did. They looked at it as, "I don't have an officer and I have a Foreign Service National who's running my office. I'm being cheated! I want my full complement. Or, if you took the money away from my office that means you're taking something from me." So, I would go there and usually speak with the DCM and sometimes the ambassador and explain to them, "We're giving you more. We've taken nothing from you. In fact, what we've given you is your finger on the trigger for conversation across all of Europe where appropriate." They would generally say, "Oh! I like that!" And so, it was the same kind of change in terms of culture, not only for my agency but for what we were doing across all of Europe.

Q: And by the way, the same thing was happening with the State Department in terms of financial services. They were being regionalized as well.

KUCHOVA: I believe that we started it.

Q: Oh, that's interesting. I didn't know that.

KUCHOVA: We were doing that, and it worked pretty well. Maybe State started somewhere else, but in Europe we started first out of Helsinki. Because I spent a lot of time in Frankfurt with State HR. We wanted to reclassify and they basically would say, "Your person doing finance in a post this size can't be more than a 7" or whatever it happened to be, I forget. So, we'd have to explain, "Well no, if they're doing this, this, and this." And they'd go, "Ah." It depends on who the classifier was. If a classifier took the time to think of it intellectually about what they were doing, they'd get it. If it was, "No, no, no this is what it says and I'm not doing anything different," you lose the argument until somebody changes and then you'd go back and try to do it again.

Q: Okay, today is December 11, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Nicholas Kuchova for parting thoughts and stories that he had not included initially.

KUCHOVA: Okay. As I mentioned, most of my memories are about the people that I worked with and lived with and shared good and bad times with. Later in my career, there were some policy things that I was pleased to be a part of, but most of my recollections and most of my fond memories really focus on the people. There's a couple that come to mind, and I get better with this interview process as time goes on.

In Turkey, there were a couple of things that are worth sharing that I found very meaningful and one of them was—I had mentioned when we first talked about Turkey—I got thrown into being the control officer very quickly on a trip that Ambassador Mark Parris made and we went to a town on the Aegean coast called Çeşme. While there I learned a wonderful story.

During the summer months Turkey and the Greek islands suffer from these brush and forest fires. And despite the animosity that one characterizes between the two countries, they're very cooperative. There were a series of fires on a Greek island and the Turkish firemen went over on boats to help their Greek colleagues fight the fires. There was at the time the mayor of Çeşme who was really a character, a real politicians' politician, he went over by boat to talk to his Greek mayor counterpart. And he told the guy—because back in the Ottoman Empire it was all one—he reminded him that these beautiful mosques on the island have fallen into disrepair. In Turkish they're called *Jami's.* So, the Turkish mayor of Çeşme offered, "How about if we restore these mosques to their glory and we'll come over and we'll worship on our sabbath and then our people will then enjoy a meal in your restaurants in your city. We'll pay for all the restoration."

So, the Greek mayor was interested, and then the Turkish mayor, realizing he had kind of hooked a little bit of a fish here said, "There's some beautiful churches outside of Çeşme.

How about if we paid to restore those to their glory and you come on Sundays and worship? And then you enjoy our restaurants!" And with that the Greek mayor basically said, "Well, I'll accept you restoring the mosques on our island at your expense, but I must ask Athens whether we can do that in Turkey." And so, the Turkish mayor basically said, "I'm not asking Ankara. Don't you ask Athens. Let's you and me, right here and now, change the world. Let's do it."

The Greek mayor didn't do it, but they did cooperate on fires and other things. But I thought that was rather fascinating. It reminded me of the time, and I did mention when Robbin and I escorted members of the Turkish General Staff to the Paris air show, that all of them spoke fluent Greek, every single one of them. When they couldn't get to a Turkish restaurant, their next choice was a Greek restaurant. They talked with the Greek owner for a long time and all in Greek. I thought that was rather fascinating.

The other thing that comes to mind is, when we were there, the BBC was doing a series of documentaries as only they can do well. One of them was about the obsidian trade during the Neolithic period. We knew where they were going to film and there was one weekend that a group of us basically went out to these ruins at Çatal Hüyük where they had filmed. Of course, the obsidian trade covered much of the Mediterranean and a lot of the Aegean and the vitality of that trade surprised historians. It was a lot more robust than was originally thought. Another thing was to stand at a site that around 7,000 BC that there was a thriving community basically producing and trading these obsidian implements was quite remarkable!

The other is in terms of people that you meet along the way. The senior FSN investigator for the RSO (Regional Security Office), his first name was Celalettin, or Celal fondly. He had been their retired sergeant major of the Turkish Land Forces and of course in the Turkish military the land forces are the big player. Celal grew up on the Aegean coast and his father was a shepherd. Celalettin was a very bright student and had won a seat at the officers' academy for the military. His father actually kept him for one more season with the herds. By that time Celalettin no longer met the age requirement for the officers' academy. Because Turks are very regimental. There's just no—there's this line, there's a rule, so you're six months over the line, you can't go to the officers' school. So, they offered him the NCO school and he graduated number 1 in his class and ended up going on to be the sergeant major of the Turkish Land Forces, a big job. When he retired the person who was the chief of the Turkish General Staff, his name was Çevik Bir, and he was a 4-star. So General Bier came to Celalettin's retirement and in his remarks, he basically said that he had known Celalettin his whole [career] because they were basically the same age and their careers had paralleled and they served together often times and Jalal ended up on the General Staff and serving the generals. One of Bir's remarks was that he was very envious of Celalettin's professional career. Bir, the number 1 guy in Turkish land forces basically said, unlike him when he thinks about his own career, he looks at Celalettin and he thinks of all the things that Celalettin got done. Bir said, perhaps with a degree of tongue-in-cheek, that he couldn't with any certainty claim that he had the same degree of influence! I thought that was kind of a remarkable statement for the 4-star of the Turkish Land Forces to gift this wonderful man Celalettin.

The other thing I'd thought about is, how the embassy in Ankara was remarkable in terms of a sense of community that gave you the comradery and friendships that you would like and the social life that you would like, but also the freedom to go your own way—it was a wonderful mix. Frankly the best mix of any of the embassies that we served in, and that is something that just sticks with me.

Also, I would get some degree of frequency a call from the Turkish General Staff about things that they wanted from U.S. companies. I remember once, which was really kind of funny and I won't mention the names in the U.S. companies, but I got a call from the office of a 2-star, and they wanted to talk to this one U.S. company about some equipment that would help them on communications, particularly monitoring communications. So, they asked me to call this company. I told them, "Well, you know the U.S. guy, the V.P. Turkish Ops who lived in Turkey, you know him well. Why don't you call him?" He said, "No, I want you to call him." "Yes, sir.," and I called that company. The U.S. executive was very officious and said, "You know, they know me well. If it's serious they'll call me. I don't need a commercial officer to tell me to call my customers."

Okay. So, I reported this back to the 2-star staffer and he laughed and he said, "Okay, and he wanted me to call the second U.S. company and it was a well-known company but not the biggest one in the defense trade in Turkey at the time. I got a hold of their country director who happened to have been playing golf in Antalya at the time, and I explained to him over the mobile phone that general so-and-so wanted to talk to him right away about a topic. So, the country director says, "Can you give me a minute?" "Of course!" And I hear muffled conversation and he says, "Okay, I'll be there in three hours." I called back this general's staffer and I told him that so and so was coming in three hours. The country director from company 2 who was a retired U.S. Army colonel now working in the private sector. Less than three hours later he apparently did show up at the TGS in Ankara and he had his golf clothes on. He changed his golf shoes to his civilian shoes, and he had his meeting!

Afterwards he and I shared a conversation. He said, "Thank you for calling me." He said, "This is what I do. When these guys say jump my answer is how high and how long do I stay up?" He ended up renting an air taxi and he flew from Antalya to Ankara, had a car waiting and went right to the TGS. He was there within three hours of the call! They ended up with this agreement. He told me, "The lesson in life is you call me anytime." Just because he answered the phone and he said, "Yes, I'll be there," they ended up with this contract, which was rather remarkable!

Then my last memory of Turkey is—I had mentioned before—that I had the privilege of visiting our partner posts on several occasions. One of them—my first trip to Tashkent—was remarkable because it was the furthest I had ever felt from home. It was way out there. I arrived and our commercial service driver picked me up and we were driving in from the airport. It was a bright, clear winter day, but it was a warm winter day, and you know Tashkent is kind of surrounded by mountains, and there was a guy in the street

looking to sell his Russian Army great coat for food. He offered it to the driver of the car I was in and the driver declined. As we drove away, I asked our driver—I forget his name—but I asked our driver, "What did he want?" "He said that he was hungry, and he was going to sell his winter coat." I said, "But it's January; it's cold!" The driver told me, "Well, today he's hungry and it's warm. Tomorrow he'll worry about being cold." That was a lesson that kind of seared into my heart, and I thought, in terms of the lottery of life, what a blessing to have been born in the United States with all the opportunities and the comfort and the security. I thought about this man who is homeless in Tashkent in the winter, willing to trade his coat for food one day. How desperate he must have felt, and how hungry he must have felt. From a societal perspective, how limited perhaps his options were for assistance. That happened a long time ago, yet to me it is as though it happened yesterday. It was quite remarkable.

Then it also circles back to the relationships that you share at an embassy, because in 2013 when we were in Finland, a suicide bomber triggered himself inside the one of the entrance gates at Embassy Ankara. The bomber was in the consular line, so you get screened, you make it up through the line, and you go into what the RSOs called a "kill zone" between the two locked doors. You're in there with a guard, and then after they check the final papers, then you're permitted onto the compound. It's like an air lock you know; you're contained. Something must have triggered the guard's suspicion, and he locked the doors and must have said something or approached, and the suicide bomber triggered the bomb. The blast instantly killed the bomber and this brave, selfless guard. It wounded, I think, two or three other guards inside the guardhouse.

Then within just hours there was a series of emails going out all over to every post around the world for anybody who had served in Turkey. I remember the guard well. He used to have a little side business. If you came to post and you had a SUV or a 4 X 4, before you left, he was always looking to buy it to trade it. He had this little used car business. He was a very sociable, very lovely man. I found it quite remarkable that literally within a few days there were several hundred—I forget the amount—but several hundred thousand U.S. dollars collected just by Foreign Service Officers around the world who had been in Turkey and who maybe knew him and maybe didn't know him, but who had served in Turkey in some capacity. That money was then forwarded and sent to his family in addition to anything the U.S. government did. I thought that was remarkable, that sense of community that transcended whether you're an FSO or an FSN really had meaning. I found that to be a warm feeling that my colleagues around the world would care that much about the people that we worked with, even if you moved on, you still left a little part of yourself in that post or with those people.

So that's the things that I had wanted to mention about Turkey. Spain I probably overlooked a couple of things and one of them that is very meaningful to me personally and to my wife as well was the Camino de Santiago, the old pilgrim's trail, which started in Germany and ended up in Santiago de Compostela. That was remarkable. Robbin got to walk that for I think 300 km.

Q: A quick question. How long within Spain is the pilgrimage route?

KUCHOVA: Oh my gosh. Well, there's several different routes but it basically enters from France and goes across the northern coast and then down into Santiago, so it's I don't know for sure, but it's long. Robbin walked …

ROBBIN: I walked exactly what I needed to get my pilgrim certificate!

KUCHOVA: Yeah, she and a group of ladies—they were all from different countries—they found out where you had to start to get your pilgrim certificate, so they started there and they walked. It was spring but, in her walk, she had snow, sleet, rain, everything. It was remarkable. I would love to have done that with her, but I couldn't get away from work, so Robbin did it. She found some great places and she's a photographer, and so she has some great shots. We had both been in Santiago, you know I was there on work, and she was there on the pilgrimage. One time we went back and we kind of retraced her steps by automobile, and one of the favorite little towns we had was called O Cebreiro. It's a Celtic village town in the mountains, and as you approach it, they have bagpipes because it had been Celtic. It looks like it should be in the UK way up north somewhere, and it was wonderful. The first time we were there together, it was foggy, and so there's a carpark outside this little village with its slate roofs or thatched roofs. We're walking from the carpark up towards the village and you can hear the bagpipe through the mists, and I thought of that old musical Brigadoon! I thought, this is incredible! You're in this little village and it is just captivating. It was a remarkable place to be. We had a great time there. It's little; it's tiny. You can explore the entire village, including the church in 35 minutes. We did that and then we followed the road all the way to Santiago, kind of in a serendipitous sort of way. Stopped at a couple of places for some photographs and to explore some of the old churches where the knights used to base themselves to protect the pilgrims walking along the way. So that was really magical.

And, then the other experience that I enjoyed in Spain was that I ended up on stage with King Juan Carlos. Purely accidentally, because we're Land Rover fans and Land Rover was introducing a new model in Europe, but they had a big unveiling in Madrid. A friend of ours was the No. 2 or No. 3 guy in Land Rover Spain and he invited me to go along. After the press event and the photographs, he said, "Okay now you can go up on stage and look at the car." I thought, this is great! So, I'm in one door looking and I look up and there's this distinguished looking gentleman on the other side. We started talking about the car, what a great car and the whole bit. It only dawned on me afterwards, because behind him was his security, that it was the King! We had this conversation, you know, not long, maybe two minutes at most, but it was kind of remarkable that we were on stage together. I don't know if anybody got a picture or not, but we're both just talking about this crazy Land Rover model, you know, "It's a great car." and "Oh yeah, I love these things!" Now the difference is if we get one, we have to buy it. If he got one, they gave it to him! That's the advantage of being king!

Q: But he wasn't wearing any little insignia or—

KUCHOVA: If he did, I missed it completely! But he might have. We ran into him again when one of the interns in our office knew that we loved to sail. He very casually mentioned that his father was going to be in the Balearic Islands, and "would we like to go sailing and sail around Majorca?" "Sure! It would be great! That would be fun!" We flew from Madrid to Majorca, and we arrive and the instructions were, take a taxi to this marina and the boat will be at the end of the dock. And, you can't miss it because it's got the tallest mast there. We arrive, and we walk out the dock and you cannot miss it. There, with the tallest mast, was this huge, beautiful boat. Our intern's dad had been a turnaround artist and had purchased companies and turned them around and sold them and was doing rather well or had done rather well. Had a big dream of sailing around the world so he bought this beautiful boat that was made in Italy. After he started sailing, he decided that sailing around the world was really hard work and it could be a little fraught with danger. So, he decided a better alternative would be to spend the rest of his sailing career just sailing around the Mediterranean. That's more than enough to keep somebody entertained. He was gracious, and so we had a wonderful weekend sailing around the Balearics. It was just a blast! The boat behaved beautifully, and it was fun to do, and it was like no fuss, no muss.

The guy was charming. He couldn't stop working and so what he had started doing was managing portfolios for a group of wealthy people, and to me, he was extremely wealthy, but wealthier people focusing on energy stocks. One of the things he had on the boat was a satellite link so he could look at the news and when he would be at a marina, he would use their Wi-Fi to download stuff that he couldn't easily get off his satellite link. He would pull into a marina and then he'd be busy for a couple of hours. He'd be on his laptop and his mobile phone doing things for his management business, and we thought that was really kind of interesting. I think if I had that boat, I wouldn't be looking to manage anybody else's money, but it was a good experience that we had.

The other one I look back on fondly was when we were in Panama. We had a chance to drive on the Pan American Highway. As a kid I had been a shortwave radio fan and I remember vividly once on a BBC newscast that a group of engineers and surveyors had been attacked in Brazil by a remote tribe in the Amazon as they were cutting survey lines through the jungle for the Pan American Highway. I remember that story because, you know, sitting in southern New Jersey and hearing this on a shortwave radio was such a remote occurrence from anything in my normal life, that the news story stuck with me. So, here we were, driving along on the famed Pan American Highway albeit in Panama and I was instantly transported back to my childhood bedroom listening to that BBC news report.

I think in many ways that covers the stories that I had wanted to share with you. But to talk a little bit more about what the future would be, particularly the commercial service specifically and perhaps more generally the Foreign Service.

I find the state of the current Foreign Service very distressing, and I think the outgoing administration has not done much to be helpful. I've got high hopes for the Biden administration to basically return diplomacy to where it should be. I mean we had, I had a

friend of mine who was a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) in Commerce and one of our operations areas and he ended up leaving because he could no longer work with the Trump administration. Things that they had wanted to do--he said he was going to either spend more time with a lawyer on how to extricate himself from some of these issues, or capitulate. In the end, he resigned, and that was a terrible shame for us.

I know a lot of my colleagues had left because of the atmosphere in the Foreign Service, which is unfortunate, as I think it leaves a hole. The Biden administration has an opportunity to take a more serious look at what commercial diplomacy should be. Hopefully they're going to be open to metrics that reflect the 21st Century and where commercial diplomacy can be effective and what can it do, and how should it be done? And, to move away from some of the transactional things that basically drive the kind of behavior that really does not advance U.S. commercial interests or U.S. economic security.

In general, the Trump administration has been very damaging. It was also very damaging even in terms of AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] as the Foreign Service came in the crosshairs of the Trump administration and I think it caused divisions. I have tremendous respect for Ambassador Barbara Stephenson. I worked for her in Panama, and I find her to be brilliant and a wonderful and highly trusted leader, but during her tenure Commercial Service was kind of left to fend for itself. I think the attitude might have been triage, to save as many as she could. But once you start giving up pieces of your organization, it's hard to put it back together. I think per capita the highest percentage of membership in AFSA is from Commercial Service. We're small, but I think the interests and the future of Commercial Service was put aside for more attention for the larger State stakeholders in AFSA. I think that was a mistake. Hopefully Eric Rubin is going to be able to make some corrections on that, but that's a problem.

I'd like to see the Foreign Service be a little bit less internally competitive. We've had that conversation. Internal competition impedes the mission--everybody's wearing the same jersey. We might have gone to different universities, but everybody's got the same jersey on, and it should be one team that's fielded. Of course, that kind of starts at the top. What a chief of mission is willing to accept or to foster. I've got hopes on that.

There's a couple of my colleagues who have retired that were active in the Biden campaign and a couple of them I understand have been writing some policy papers. I'm hopeful that a couple of them end up with a position and hopefully they can be put into the commercial diplomacy arena where they can bring their experience and a more enlightened mission statement to bear.

If you look at the work that an embassy does, it's an amazing array of things, but I think the economic security and U.S. commercial interests are something that should be really at a priority because of the jobs that it creates at home, the opportunities that it creates. It really defines what the future is going to look like. Those are my thoughts.

Q: That's great; that's fine. I have two questions. Should the Foreign Commercial Service be larger? Should there be more representation overseas, bearing in mind what current market situations are and so on?

KUCHOVA: Interesting question because during my service period we've always had a shortage of officers, so we were taking a very strategic view of where do you put your officer resources and how do you best invest and fund the Foreign Service National resources? Specifically in the Nordics, we had Denmark and Norway that had Foreign Service National 11's as leaders and they were head of section for us. In Ireland, we did the same thing. Now—and I look at this two ways--if I was still in the service and if I was at a certain grade the idea of serving in Ireland or Denmark or Norway for me would be wow, what a great place to live and to work and to contribute! Fantastic! But if you also look at it, where do you get your best investment for your resources? I firmly believe that our Foreign Service National leaders were the right choice for those smaller posts. I think the officers are better spent in developing countries. I think we're way behind in Africa. If you look at what China's invested in Africa, it is staggering. I don't know how you catch up unless China stumbles like Japan stumbled with its economics. But I don't know how you catch up.

I think there's no one answer that fits all situations. You've got to look at it in a very strategic way and where you can best use Foreign Service National leadership because they live in the market. They have the contacts an officer will never have because they've spent up to 30 or 40 years living in that marketplace doing things that are involved in the business. You have somebody that shows up for 3- or 4-year tour, they might be good but they're never going to have that depth. Instead, leverage the experience, focus it.

We could use more officers in the Americas, in Africa and in Asia, but I think it's like, analyze the market. Where can you best spend your resources? Even in Europe there are challenges with getting the most bang for the buck. There are cultural nuances, which highly influence business success. Egalitarian northern Europe is different than southern Europe. There's a hierarchy and I think I mentioned in a previous conversation that if you're in Finland, Sweden, Norway or Denmark and you look in the phonebook and here's the number for the managing director of this big company and you dial the number, chances are that person's going to pick up the phone. If you go to do the same thing in Rome, you're going to end up with the assistant to the assistant to get to the secretary to get to the chief of staff to get to the managing director. I mean it's so different. You've got to know your marketplace and put your assets and resources where you can use them best.

Q: Would there be any value in considering periodic use of State Department, let's say economic officers as temporary, you know, as one-time commercial officers where there's a sudden need and you can't get anybody else quickly?

KUCHOVA: Well first, I love that idea. But there should be opportunities in State for a commercial officer to go do a tour in an economic section. Because I think those investments can pay huge dividends. I'll come back to a specific answer that I think

proves that point. But in our partnership posts where we would have—for example, Estonia and Latvia—even though I was either resident in Helsinki or Stockholm and I would work with the state Foreign Service National assigned commercial work either in Riga or Tallinn and their economic officer, real collaboration with the econ officer was hit and miss. Sometimes they had a real interest in it, and they loved it, and other times they didn't want to be bothered. It's like beneath them or whatever.

There was one young econ officer in Tallinn who was fabulous! He ended up creating some relationships with some of the startup organizations and the incubators that were brilliant! And, he was a blast to work with. You know he always had great ideas and he's like, "Hey can you give me resources for such and such, how about this? What about that?" He was delightful to work with.

I had other posts where I literally couldn't get the officer on the phone or to answer an email. It was hit and miss. When I look at every post that I went to, you know maybe your first post is always your special one, I don't know maybe it's true. But I ended up spending eleven months learning Turkish with everybody that was going to Turkey. When we arrived, we were one team. We knew each other. We went to school together. We had some lunches together, and in some cases, we had dinners together. When we arrived, we were unified. "How can I help you?" There were no divisions. When I learned Spanish, I was spread among everybody who was going to go to any Spanish-speaking country. There was nothing specific to Spain except once a week or once every two weeks, something about it, but there was no attempt at FSI to bring together people that were going to go to Embassy Madrid or Consulate General Barcelona. I think in some ways when you start to trade between Commerce or State, you start to break down these barriers that are artificial yet exist that can impede the magic that should happen at post. Parris got it. Stephenson got it. Oreck got it. So, I love the idea of an econ officer coming in to step in and I worked with some stupendous econ officers who did a fabulous job. They also brought their own perspective from being a reporter in economics, and so when they left, they made the section better. I'm a big fan of that. But remember, it should be a two-way relationship or set of opportunities.

Q: Another personnel-management question is, do you also think that the Foreign Commercial Officers benefit from let's say a one-year detail at a major corporation or at one of the IFIs, the international financial institutions?

KUCHOVA: Yes, absolutely. Another great one that we had an officer go to was NAM, [National Association of Manufacturers], which was like the hub for all these manufacturing associations. We stopped that frankly because they ran out of money to billet an officer. Stupid! You know, we were either feast or famine. We either had so much money that you had to pressure to burn it. Or, we didn't have enough money.

I'll give you one example of not enough money. This makes me laugh. I should be a stand-up comedian because people think it would be fiction. We had Western Hemisphere officers come to Florida to meet with export assistance centers, the DEC [District Export Council], and all kinds of companies. There were going to be two meetings, one in

Orlando and then part two was going to be in Miami. They didn't have enough money to move us from Orlando to Miami. So, one of our creative people in the Western Hemisphere Office in Washington came up with a solution. They found a time-share company who was willing to pay for the bus if they could put time-share sales people on the bus to pitch timeshares to the officers riding from Orlando to Miami! Now first of all, I admire the creativity to do that, but when you have a government organization that you're going to move your officers from Orlando to Miami and you're going to have a time-share guy come on board to give a pitch—we got instructions that said, "Please look interested in the pitch, but you don't have to buy anything!" I thought, this is ridiculous! This is asinine! Doesn't anybody else see the humor in this? It was crazy!

I use that as an example, because in some ways Commercial Service suffers from being overly politicized. Because one of the great treats, one of the great cookies for any political person are all of our export assistance centers across the United States, which are the pulpits that allows the politicals to beat their chest in these communities about what they're doing and how they're helping Joe Blow and Molly Smith and their company to sell candles in Thailand or whatever it happens to be. It's the wrong message. But they cannot resist using that domestic network as a way of promoting their political agenda. We really should be completely apolitical. We should say, "Here's our mission. Our mission is very noble, and it basically is to advance and protect U.S. commercial interests and U.S. economic security. And, part of it is oriented to small and medium size enterprises." Now in the United States a small enterprise is anything up to 800 employees, which is an awful lot of high-tech companies and innovative companies. We've got some politicals who have interpreted that to mean if IBM walks in the door and they have a problem in Bulgaria, we're not going to help them because they're not an SME. Well, that's ridiculous! Or Boeing needs something we're not going to help them, which is equally ridiculous. Frankly, depending on the circumstances, you might also want to help Airbus in certain circumstances because Airbus has almost the same amount of U.S. content in their airplanes as Boeing. We just are not using the resources the right way. It has become far too easy for commercial diplomacy to be used for a political speech than to actually do the noble things to advance U.S. commercial interests.

I think a lot is going to depend on Biden's selection for the chief of Commerce and then what happens in terms of the appointments under him or her. What are they going to look like and how are they going to use Commercial Service? There's a disconnect between our domestic network and our overseas network. The domestic network had a lot of smart people doing really great work, and in some ways—I'll give you an example. Years ago, I was in Spain. I was the most junior member of a committee of officers and domestic leadership brought to Washington to look at the future of Commercial Service. We had people like Chuck Ford, who went on to be an ambassador; Carmine D'Aloisio, Tom Moore and others, brilliant; wonderfully talented officers. We came up with some great ideas, some of which eventually, more than a decade later, ended up being Commercial Service Europe, which we had talked about, where you basically looked at a marketplace differently and focused your resources differently. We presented a wonderful report truly focused on commercial diplomacy for the 21st century to the leadership at the time. The director general—for Bush 43--basically took this report and just cast it aside—she

completely missed the opportunity to move the agency in a positive and constructive direction.

I'll give you another example. We had a lady that was in our San Diego export assistance center. I call them EACs. And, she worked with QUALCOMM about an issue QUALCOMM had in China regarding packaging. She did fabulous work. She was working with QUALCOMM, the Chinese government, our embassy and our consulates and our offices and she solved this huge problem. She--obviously she didn't do the whole lift--but she was the orchestra leader and making sure everyone was working along the same lines. Brilliant, wonderful person. When we were having this debate in Washington about the future of Commercial Service, I used her in terms of metrics because our domestic offices only got metrics when there was a sale. The example highlighting her tremendous commercial diplomacy achievement centered around her work for well over a year and how her achievement deserved recognition in terms of metrics. My domestic colleagues resisted and truly believed that there was no achievement until there was a sale. I remember one of the domestic leaders said, "Oh well, she will get the credit when QUALCOMM sells one of the packages." He was willing to look at the work she did with and equate this with when somebody walked into the equivalent of a Best Buy in Australia and buys this modem or whatever it happened to be, packaged, that that was her credit. Say the guy spent $30 on this electronic item. That doesn't come anywhere close to the value of the work that this woman did to solve QUALCOMM's problems and open the global market in China. That is the kind of issue that still has never been fully reconciled in Commercial Service. It's a little bit schizophrenic. What are we today?

There's also too much of a tendency to, "Well you know the last administration did *this*, so we're going to do *that*." And, that's not contributing to improving an organization—making it better, smarter, nimbler and more focused. Nor does it allow you to learn from mistakes as well as successes. Our institutional memory lives, thrives and functions with our officers and Foreign Service National corps that are overseas and understand what the job should be, and does it, and sometimes does it under difficult circumstances where our leadership in Washington doesn't quite get it. Maybe I've gone off the deep end on this.

Q: No, no.

KUCHOVA: First, I'm 99 percent impressed with Foreign Service Nationals and literally at a post it really was the Commercial Service and the Public Affairs FSNs that stand out as these super bright, super motivated people who are capable of doing wonderful things. And, in spite of mediocre leadership at times, that has always impressed me. One of the things I used to take back to Washington was that in Commercial Service we had somebody to represent officers' interests in our Washington headquarters, but we had no one to represent our Foreign Service Nationals' interests in our headquarters. I thought we should because in a sense for our business, they were a vital driver. That was where the rubber hit the road for us.

Q: Is there a value in having some kind of access to retirees? I mean there are always WAE opportunities, but I get the impression that with WAE, unless you know someone who still at a relatively high level in the bureaucracy, you're not going to be considered whether or not your talent merits subsequent use in perhaps a difficult country that's coming back after a civil war, whatever it might be. I don't know if that use is as efficient or as effective as it might be.

KUCHOVA: On paper we have a WAE equivalent, but there's no money, so they don't do it. Matter of fact, they basically stood the program up finally a year or two before I retired and I was probably one of the very first to basically email in, "Please sign me up, I would love to do this." I've never received anything back. If you don't know somebody, you won't hear anything. My understanding is that there's just no funds for it.

About every four to six weeks, I now join retired colleagues for a virtual lunch on Zoom and it's been fun. And we just talked about WAE and one of our officers who's a Commercial Officer, Keith Curtis—his wife was somewhere in management in State. And so, he has been out on a couple of WAEs for State to do things. But I have no contacts in State to do anything like that, and I don't think I would add any value. But for Commercial Service? I likely could contribute.

It's not like I'm looking for value in my old age or something, but I wish they'd try to tap the experience of some of the retired officers, because I think they could learn something. Because none of us have a dog in the fight other than we fervently believe in the mission! Really, we're committed. I think they could get a group of people to take a look at something. Or, you know, we would do these management program reviews (MPRs). I did one in South Africa. They could likely get a group of retired officers to either do an MPR or to review an MPR. I think if you're just going to review it, and you could do it from the comfort of your home, they would probably get a good population that would say, "I'll do it for free! I'll do it because I want you to succeed! I'll do it because I believe in the mission." But, no, there isn't that.

We had a political appointee, Adam Wilczewski, who came in at a mid-level in Commercial Service and he did a great job and he got promoted. He caught some heat from the politicals because he was very critical of any political appointee who wasn't working hard. This was during the Obama administration. If you weren't at work, not like putting in 60+ hours, but if you weren't at work really giving it your full measure and all your brain power and all that you have in your heart, then you're not doing your job. That's not why you should be here. I think he caught some heat because, "Hey, you're not being nice to this person and their father or mother or uncle is the chairman of such and such or whatever." He didn't care. He basically said, "We've got an opportunity here. Let's change the world." A group of us just signed a letter for him that he has submitted to the Biden transition team supporting a candidacy for him at Commerce somewhere. I'm hopeful he gets it. Hard working and very smart guy. Great ethical, moral compass. Believes in the mission. Good business experience.

Which brings me back to your question about after NAM. For a while we had officers at FedEx and UPS, which was good. But we really should have had them at places like eBay and Amazon to talk about how you basically learn from what they're doing to then convey those opportunities to U.S. companies to basically get into their supply chain or into their retail chain, since they represent so many different sellers.

So going back to your other question, I guess I'm being very asymmetrical here. Yeah, we should take full advantage of having officers in different entities that are force multipliers. We had a wonderful civil service guy working with private equity and venture capital groups. There were some folks in Commerce leadership that didn't like the effort and relationships and said, "No, it's just super rich people who are investing." Well, it's not, and there's an economic formula that for every dollar that goes into a VC or a private equity fund, there's this tabulation that happens in the local economy. It's not about buying another Bentley; it's about economic growth. The guy was doing brilliant work attracting foreign investment into U.S. funds, which was great. That's like a reverse export, bringing money in to invest in U.S. companies. That's a good thing. They gave him such a hard time he eventually left, and he ended up going to run the public affairs for the private equity management association. Commerce missed the boat on that.

There's an association of medical records, medical information management systems. We should have an officer in that because what country in the world is not wrestling with electronic medical records. Why shouldn't we be using that association to amplify the story about U.S. leadership in that vital sector? After a tour doing that, you end up with an officer with deep knowledge and who can be very effective in overseas markets to promote U.S. innovation and leadership. That would be a very strategic approach for Commerce to turn around and say, "Look, here's how we're going to do this. We're going to go back and put people in NA. We're going to put people in this and that industry group or association. We're putting officers in the Healthcare Information Management Systems Society. We're putting an officer into the U.S. Chamber. We're putting an officer into Google and so on." We're doing this to deepen our officers' skill sets and to deliver back to U.S. businesses a level of knowledge and global contacts that are unparalleled." We should have officers literally visiting U.S. trade associations to be assured that we are promoting U.S. interests and doing all that we can to level the playing field. Easy start, bring in two, three, four, five officers from around the world and go visit each of the trade associations that are housed in the Greater Washington area. Go see the street lighting association, the building fire sprinkler association, the different energy efficiency players. If you go see them, you end up with a relationship and the express opportunity to help U.S. companies to find the right overseas opportunities and to be successful. But we don't do any of those things. If I could be king for a day, I would do that.

Q: It all makes perfect sense, but for whatever reason it doesn't happen. Yeah, I understand.

KUCHOVA: That part is heartbreaking, but resoundingly overall it was the thrill of a lifetime and humbling to be part of something bigger than myself—to work with very talented people committed to positive outcome. It was the highlight of my working life.

Q: All right. Well, that exhausts my questions. It's been a great pleasure and honor to talk to you and I'm glad you agreed to share your oral history with us. I'm going to put the recording now on pause.

End of interview