

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

**LLOYD W. NEIGHBORS**

*Interviewed by: David Reuther*  
*Initial interview date: February 6, 2013*  
*Copyright 2021 ADST*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Background	
Born Marshal, Texas	1945
Famous people from Marshall	
Father's, Mother's background	
The Song "Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dully"	
Racism in Marshall libraries	
Pasadena College	1963
Junior Year at University of Hawaii East-West Center	1965
Indiana University, BA	1967
Starts doctoral studies at Indiana University	1967
Foreign Service exam (twice)	1973
Joined the Foreign Service as a USIA Officer	June 1975
USIA training, A-100 class	
FSI Taichung, Refresher Chinese	
American Embassy Taipei	1976-1977
An LBJ story	
Kaohsiung USIS office, American Center Director	1977-1979
Two American Centers (Kaohsiung, Tainan)	
Sole American officer in southern Taiwan	
John Emmerson visits	
Cross cultural understandings	
Normalization of relations with Beijing	
Deputy Secretary Christopher's trip to Taipei	
20 years later Jimmy Carter comes to Taipei	
Importance of Foreign Service Nationals	
Washington, FSI Croatian Language	1979-1980
Exposure to Yugoslavian politics through language	

Zagreb, American Center Director U.S Mission in Yugoslavia Visit of BPAO Ray Benson Programming in Zagreb International Visitors Program Croatian opera “Winds of War” filming Ambassadors in Belgrade New Administration, Charles Wick Director of USIA Changing USIA to USICA New Consul General and “The Caine Mutiny”	1980-1983
Consulate Shanghai, Branch Public Affairs Officer Programming when America is new to China International Visitor grantees Stories of the Cultural Revolution Story about the Chinese Exclusion Act Speakers Program, Fulbright Music as the entre President Reagan visits Shanghai Picture of Ambassador Hummel Tess Johnson former DOS secretary who stayed Traveling issues USS Reeves stops in Qingdao Secretary Schultz visits Shanghai	1983-1987
Washington, USIA Program Bureau, Office Director Family’s adjustment to USA Recruiting for Speakers’ Bureau Conservative’s blacklist USIA structure	1987-1989
TDY to Beijing Supporting President Bush trip to China Fang Lizhi’s dinner invitation	January 1989
Washington, FSI Cantonese Language	1989
Consulate General Hong Kong, Public Affairs Officer Budget cuts, program changes Fate of the American Center library Emergence of Hong Kong American Center Hong Kong response to Tiananmen Square Handling journalists Handling Vietnamese boat people issue	1989-1993

Visits of U.S. Navy Preparing for an American election Impact of new administration	
Washington, FSI Portuguese Language	1993
Embassy Brazil, Deputy Public Affairs Officer Training in contracts and grants Brazilian inflation Handling budget cuts, humanly Vice President Gore visits Brazil Brazilian media, Soviet rumor milling Relations with USIA Washington Hillary Clinton visits Salvador de Bahia	1993-1996
AIT Taiwan, Public Affairs Officer Policy toward Taiwan The James Wood imbroglio Observations on President Lee Teng-hui USIA staffing in Taipei Story about a Rockefeller in Beijing Taiwan opening up politically The Taiwan media Taiwan presidential election Oberdorfer interviews Chen Shui-bian Defending the budget Writing a comprehensive program plan Reaction to bombing Chinese Embassy in Belgrade Arrival of cable television Area Director Frank Scotten visits USIA achievement awards	1997-1999
USIA Washington, Community of Democracies Initiative USIA evaporating Managing and building CDI Role of Mort Halperin	1999-2000
Embassy Beijing, Chief of Press and Culture Hosting an election center for Gore vs Bush election Handling the EP-3 incident Public Diplomacy Game Plan for China Ambassador Randt arrives at post Impact of State absorption of USIA at post Observations on DCM Mike Marine Impact of USIA reorganization on relations with Washington CCTV cuts Secretary Powell's interview	2000-2003

Despite 9/11, exchange programs in China continue	
Organizing presidential visit to APEC in Shanghai	
Advertising changes Chinese media	
Ability to place material about U.S. increases	
Fighting over the Human Rights Report	
Music undermines Chinese university restrictions	
Chinese view of invasion of Iraq	
Presentation to Chinese Academy of Social Science	
Washington, International Information Programs (IIP), How to evaluation program effectiveness	
Washington IIP, Office of Strategic Communications	2004-2005
Drafting a five-year action plan	
Coordinating with the military on public affairs	
Embassies now need Washington concurrence on op-ed pieces	
Explaining the Foreign Service rank-in-person when working with the military	
Retirement	2005
Private employment Anteon Corporation	
Manage and edit two news websites for DoD	
Vietnam, TDY to support APEC Summit in Hanoi	October 2006
Handling the press during a presidential visit	
Chris Hill and the press	
Bush at the church	
State Department, other temporary duty assignments	
Explaining WAE (when actually employed) regulations	
Embassy Yangon, Acting PAO	July 2007
Burmese history as experienced by USIA employee Than Lwin	
Importance of the American Center	
Stories of Ne Win	
Embassy grants for civil society projects	
Monks join the street protesters	
Educational exchange programs	
State Department, East Asia and Pacific Bureau	
Office of Public Diplomacy	2008
Consequences of the USIA reorganization	
Embassy Amman, Acting PAO	July 2009
Preparing for an inspection	
Book project celebrating 60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral relations	
Embassy Tunis, Cultural Affairs Officer	May 2010

Preparing the annual international book fair Negative impact of USIA's loss of American Centers Fussy American speaker replaced	
Embassy Hanoi, Secretary Clinton's Visit Secretary Clinton attends ASEAN Regional Forum Organizing seminar on the effects of Agent Orange Visit of USS John McCain to Da Nang	July 2010   August 2010
State Department, Asia Pacific Public Affairs Personnel officer Problems in New Zealand	October 2010
Embassy Riyadh, PAO Ambassador Smith reverses Department unaccompanied post policy Public affairs outreach in a closed society American music Language accomplished female officer succeeds	Sept 2011
Embassy Beijing, Senior Cultural Affairs Officer Secretary Clinton's. meetings Comparison with earlier events Advantage in enlisting Eligible Family Members Coordinating with former Chinese counterparts Funding public diplomacy Evolution of the American Center How China and diplomatic access have changed	April 2012
State Department, Western Hemisphere Affairs Deputy Director Press Office Summarizing the overseas press for Front Office Preparing guidance for Department spokesperson	2013
Looking Back The Human Rights Report and China How the USIA function has changed	

## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 2013. This is an interview for the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Trainings Oral History Program. We're talking to Lloyd Neighbors this morning. I'm David Reuther. Lloyd, let's start with where you were born and what was your family background?*

NEIGHBORS: I was born in Marshall, Texas, in 1945, November, in the tiny gap between the greatest generation and the baby-boom generation, which started in '46. Marshall is a small town in East Texas, not far from the Louisiana line. It's the home of Bill Moyers, or as he is known there, Billy Don Moyers, and the home of James Farmer, the founder of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). The folk singer Lead Belly was from around there, as was the former heavyweight champion of the world, George Foreman. My aunt Sue used to see him at the local Piggly Wiggly (a grocery store chain).

Although I was born in Marshall, my father was in the military, in the Air Force. I spent a lot of time traveling around. I lived in 14 different states, plus the District of Columbia, and from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade attended 12 different schools. Moving around as an Air Force brat got me used to the idea that after three or four years in one place, I needed a change of scenery, a new slant on reality.

*Q: If your father was in the Air Force, were most of his tours in the continental U.S.?*

NEIGHBORS: Most of them in the U.S., although I did spend 1954 through 1956 in Okinawa. My dad was stationed at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa. I don't know if that's what got me interested in the Far East. We lived mostly on an American base and did not, unfortunately, have lots of contact with Okinawans. But the experience probably did stimulate my interest in the Far East, which is where I spent most of my Foreign Service career.

*Q: Growing up on a military base, what was the educational system like?*

NEIGHBORS: I attended Department of Defense schools. The first year in Okinawa we lived off base because military housing wasn't available. We lived at the top of a hill in a place called Awase Meadows. A drastically steep gravel road led up to the house, and we were directly exposed to the elements – meaning typhoons. Typhoon Grace, with gusts up to 145 mph passed directly over the island in August 1954, and during the height of the storm we were without electricity with an inch of water in our living room. At night with the windows shuttered, we were safe, but the house was pitch black and the wind was howling. I foolishly feared the darkness more than the wind.

I took the school bus everyday to Sukiran Army Base. The second year in Okinawa, 1955, we moved to Kadena Air Base, and I went to school there. It was like going to school in the U.S. The teachers were all American elementary school teachers. I went to fourth and fifth grade there.

*Q: Now, in the States where was your father stationed – what bases?*

NEIGHBORS: He was at Sandia Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was just a baby then. And then we were twice in Montgomery, Alabama, once when I was a baby and the other when I was in third grade. We were in Clarksville, Tennessee, Dayton, Ohio at Wright Patterson AFB, and then in Washington, D.C. My dad was at the Pentagon for

four years. And then he was at NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) at Colorado Springs, which is where I graduated from high school.

*Q: What was your father's MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)?*

NEIGHBORS: My father was not a pilot. He joined the army during World War II and was in the Signal Corps. He spent most of the war at radar sites in Panama. There was a fear that the Canal might be attacked, so we had bases there. He told me about going up river in a canoe to deliver pay to GIs manning radar sites back in the jungle. After the war my father got out of the military briefly, and then rejoined. But this time he went into the Air Force and attended Officers Candidate School. Unfortunately, he was six months too old to qualify for pilot training. So his specialty was what they called special weapons, that is, nuclear weapons – the care and feeding of them (*laughs*). He supervised teams that traveled around the U.S. inspecting bases to make sure the weapons were being handled correctly.

*Q: What is your father's background?*

NEIGHBORS: The Neighbors family originally came from Normandy, France. They were Huguenots who fled persecution as heretics in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. They went first to Ireland and then moved on to the New World and Pennsylvania. On the way they changed their surname. Their original name was Voisin, a not-rare surname in parts of France, I'm told. Once in America they translated the name to Neighbors.

Around 1750 Abraham Neighbors shows up on a land deed in Loudon County, Virginia. Then around 1800, the Neighbors pick up stakes and move through the Cumberland Gap and settle in a place now called Mountain City, Tennessee, not far from the North Carolina border. One of my great-great-great-great grandfathers, Ebenezer Fairchild, helped found the Dutchman Creek Baptist Church in nearby Davie County, North Carolina. As clerk of the church, he registered the baptisms of George, Jonathan, and Edward Boone – three of Daniel Boone's brothers.

The infamous Tom Dula (or as he is known in song, Tom Dooley) was also from around that region. He murdered his lover, Laura Foster, was arrested and hanged for the crime. Another of my distant relatives – according to legend – visited Tom Dula while he was in jail and heard him singing a ballad about his awful crime. She remembered the song and taught it to her family, including to her son – and my fourth cousin – Frank Proffitt. Years later when the Library of Congress was recording folk music all over the U.S., Frank sang "Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley," for them. The Kingston Trio heard the recording, did its own version, which became a smash hit in the 1960s. After some courtroom antics, the Kingston Trio acknowledged Frank's right to the song and paid him and his family a good amount of money over the years.

Around 1910, after almost 100 years in eastern Tennessee, the Neighbors family pulled up roots and moved to western Oklahoma, and that's where my father comes in.

My father, Lloyd Neighbors, Sr., grew up on a farm in Western Oklahoma where Woody Guthrie says you can see further and see less than any place in the world, where the wind is a way of life. The closest town was Granite, Oklahoma, with a population of a thousand people. Now my wife Mary is from Hong Kong. We met when I was an exchange student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1970. We married in Hong Kong in 1973 and shortly thereafter came to the U.S., going almost directly to a family reunion in Granite. Mary spoke excellent English, but Okie was a foreign tongue. She had no idea what these strange people – my relatives -- were saying (*laughs*). And remember, Granite was a town of a thousand people. Mary's apartment building where she lived in Hong Kong had a larger population. We both liked to walk a lot. It's about two miles from my uncle's farm into town. One time Mary and I were walking back from town, and every farmer on the road stopped to offer us a lift. They figured something was wrong. They'd never seen anybody walking before. Nobody's crazy enough in Oklahoma to walk in the summer when it's 104 degrees, but we were doing it. Mary even chopped cotton that summer, while six-months pregnant.

*Q: Oh goodness. Now this is Ken Burns' Dust Bowl Oklahoma (Burns is an American director and producer of documentary films, one of which was "Dust Bowl," 2012).*

NEIGHBORS: Well, yes, it was. My father grew up in the 1930s in Oklahoma. Had nine brothers and sisters and amazingly enough, out of those nine, six graduated from college. And at that time, you know, they had about a nickel a week from their parents to live on (*laughs*). It was difficult, but they managed to do it. Surprisingly, the richest sibling in the Neighbors family was the brother who didn't go to college. He was registered to attend, but World War II came along and he joined the Coast Guard. After the war he came back to Granite, Oklahoma, and returned to farming. He started out with almost nothing, but wound up very wealthy. He was a shrewd businessman.

In 1942 a lead story from the Granite newspaper said, "Tom Burr Neighbors used to have four strong boys to help with plowing and boll pulling. But that was before the shooting started." The article went on to tell how the four Neighbors boys – including my father -- had joined the military, two in the Navy, one in the Army, and the other in the Coast Guard.

*Q: And what's your mother's background?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, my mother, Bobbie Merrill, grew up in a small town in East Texas -- Marshall, Texas. Merrill, like Neighbors, is also a comparatively rare family name. Our first ancestor in the New World, one of five Merrill brothers, arrived from France in 1629.

My mother's father was a conductor on the Texas and Pacific Railroad, the T&P. Used to run through East Texas and into Louisiana. He was a devout union man. The Union of Railroad Workers was quite effective in preserving jobs and getting better salaries/working conditions for its members.



*Q: Actually, I forgot to ask you. You're one of how many children?*

NEIGHBORS: One of one.

*Q: Did both your parents go to college?*

NEIGHBORS: My father and my mother both had college degrees – unusual for the time. My mother graduated from high school when she was 16. Her family didn't have the money to send her to college, so she worked for four years at Kresge's, the local five-and-dime. Eventually she went to Bethany Nazarene College in Oklahoma City, graduating from there with a degree in education in 1938, I believe. After that she got a job teaching elementary school in Enid, Oklahoma, and that's where she met my father, who was teaching math and coaching basketball at the local high school.

*Q: But you did your high school in Colorado. How did that happen?*

NEIGHBORS: I did, yes. I graduated from Wasson High School, Colorado Springs, in 1963. But I took a winding path to get there. I did my freshman year at Lee High School in Springfield, Virginia, when my Dad was at the Pentagon. And then for one year, 1960-61, attended John Marshall High School in San Antonio. My Dad was assigned to Medina Base in San Antonio, a facility that handled nuclear weapons. A year later, in 1961, we moved to Colorado Springs. I was happy finally to have two years in one place, especially my last two years in high school. That was nice.

*Q: I note that your high school spans the election of 1960 and the coming of the Kennedy administration.*

NEIGHBORS: I was not actively involved in any campaigning. I was aware though. When I was in Colorado Springs, as a senior in high school, I went to a speech by President Kennedy at the Air Force Academy – a thrilling experience. The 1960 election was the last time I ever rooted for a Republican presidential candidate. I was sort of for Richard Nixon. I didn't vote then -- wasn't eligible. But Kennedy's speech at the Air Force Academy inspired me and dramatically changed the way I felt about him and about the Democratic Party.

*Q: Now, you've done all this traveling, you've been overseas. What are your interests in high school?*

NEIGHBORS: I played baseball all my years in high school. It was a challenge to try out for a new team in a new school almost every year. Made for a lot of tension, but I was a good player – mostly second base and third base. When I was a junior and senior, our team -- the Wasson High School Thunderbirds -- was second in state both years. Meaning, we lost the state baseball championship game twice in a row. My senior year I was the starting second baseman. I was not the star of the team, but a steady player. I batted .396 and provided good defense – except for the championship game. I made a crucial throwing error that cost us two runs. We lost 8-4. Sometimes I still wake up at

night and think, “Why did I make that bad throw? We could have won that game!” And that was 50 years ago.

*Q: How about classes, teachers, or maybe books that you were reading at the time that you now see as particularly stimulating?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, as a graduation requirement at Wasson High School, you had to do a research paper and give a senior speech on a selected topic in American history. But in 1962/63 Wasson offered Advanced Placement American History for the first time, and they decided that the students in our AP class didn’t have to give the senior speech. Instead, we had to participate in debate club. And we were a debate team that traveled around. Five girls and one guy – me. I think we were all National Merit Scholarship Finalists -- good debaters. We went to a major competition in Denver. My partner, Kay Horowitz, and I participated in five debates that weekend. But after each debate the judges did not tell you who won. I thought we hadn’t done very well, but then we came to the last contest, and the judges said, “OK, this is the final. You won your first five debates. Now you’re competing for the championship.” We lost that debate, but because of our earlier high scores, we tied for first place. It was fun.

The AP American history course was fascinating. Our teacher, Dr. Dobson, was a formal person who always wore a sport coat and a bowtie, an elderly man, balding, owlsh glasses, a stern taskmaster. He was the sort of teacher we didn’t want to disappoint. He looked crushed when we didn’t do as well as he thought we should. He was a harsh critic, but his criticism was designed to make us do better, not to make us mad or discourage us. This was the first time that I ever had a teacher who discussed American history from various points of view, showing the many different interpretations of why, for instance, we fought the Civil War, or what caused the Revolutionary War. This was enlightening to me, because I had gone to school in Texas and Virginia, where American history was the history of Virginia or the history of Texas. And this was so much better done.

*Q: At the time that you're in high school and the Kennedy years, one of the social trends in the United States at that time was civil rights, for example James Meredith enters Ole Miss. How was that seen in Colorado?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, in Colorado you didn’t see much of the protests. Colorado Springs, in particular, was a white-bread world. But, in my hometown of Marshall, Texas, where I had relatives, the protest was significant. Part of the lunch counter sit-ins occurred in Marshall. Marshall was a city of 29,000 people and about half of the population was black. Jefferson, Texas, only 16 miles away, was the last provisional capital of the Confederacy. When I was a child visiting Marshall from the North, I remember being shocked to see that stores had separate water fountains for blacks and whites, separate toilets, too. Some of the lunch counter sit-ins that spread through the South took place in Marshall. My Aunt Helen was a registered nurse who basically forced the local hospital -- Kahn Memorial Hospital -- to allow blacks to be treated in the emergency ward. She was an emergency center nurse for many, many years. She enjoyed doing that and found it fulfilling. When she first started working there the hospital wouldn’t treat black

emergency patients. But my aunt insisted that they do so. When Helen died in 1960, and her funeral was held in Marshall, a lot of blacks attended, not something that usually happened there.

Marshall was a fascinating little town that seems to have produced more than its share of prominent figures. In addition to Bill Moyers and George Foreman, I also recall a well-known writer named Joseph Goulden who has published maybe 10 or 11 books. He wrote a history of the Korean War, a biography of George Meany, a history of the AT&T company. He also produced a best seller called The Death Merchant, about Edwin Wilson, an ex-CIA agent who illegally sold weapons in the Middle East and in Africa. Joe Goulden was a writer on The Philadelphia Inquirer for many years. He lives here in Washington now and is actually a distant relative of mine through marriage. (My Aunt Helen, the nurse, was his aunt, on her husband's side of the family.)

A number of years ago Bill Moyers did a program on NPR (National Public Radio) called "Marshall, Texas, Marshall Texas," a history of the city. He repeated the name twice in the title because there were de facto two towns in Marshall, one black and one white. For the program he interviewed Joe Goulden, an old friend of his from school days in Marshall. In the interview Bill Moyers was talking about the teachers in the high schools and grade schools of Marshall. And in those days, if you wanted to be a teacher you just about had to agree not to get married. So you had Miss Maude and Miss Lizzie, and they were all called Miss, by their first name, which was very, very Southern. But Bill Moyers was asking Joe Golden about one of his teachers, Miss Bessie Bryant, who was an English teacher – super strict and demanding. And in this regard Bill Moyers asked Joe, "When you started writing at The Philadelphia Inquirer were you ever afraid of your editors?"

Joe answered, "After having Miss Bessie Bryant as an English teacher, I wasn't afraid of anybody (*laughs*)."

Joe talked a lot in this interview about being educated in Marshall, how he had some really fine teachers. He added, however, that the place where he did most of his reading was at Wiley College. Wiley College, which was a black school, had the best library in Marshall. Why was that true? When steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie was giving out money all around the U.S. for libraries, he said, "If I give my library to you, you have to agree that anyone can come there to read."

Well, the other libraries in Marshall wouldn't allow blacks. Wiley College would. So Wiley had the best library in Marshall, and Joe Goulden went there often, reading lots of books, helping him gain the broad knowledge a great journalist needs.

Wiley College became famous in recent years because Denzel Washington made a movie, "The Great Debate," which was set in Marshall in the 1930s. The movie was based on a true story about a debate club at Wiley. James Farmer, the founder of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), attended Wiley and was a member of the debate club. At one point

Farmer and his cohorts challenged Harvard and defeated them in a debate. And Denzel made a movie of it. And that's from Marshall, too.

*Q: From high school in Colorado in 1963, you started university at Indiana.*

NEIGHBORS: Actually, I didn't. It's much more complicated than that. I can never just go to one school. I grew up as a Nazarene, sort of an adjunct to the Methodist Church. The theology is Wesleyan Methodist. But the Nazarenes thought the Methodists weren't strict enough. So, I went to a Nazarene Church when I was growing up, and my first two years, 1963-65, I went to a Nazarene school called Pasadena College in Pasadena, California.

And I had a baseball scholarship, so I played baseball. I was a good high school baseball player, but not so much at the college level. "I may have been small, but I was slow." We played ball at an old White Sox minor league stadium, in the shadow of the Rose Bowl. Unfortunately, I came to the school a decade or so too early. In recent years the college moved to Point Loma, just outside La Jolla, with a campus and ballpark overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Pasadena College was a mediocre school, but I did have some terrific professors there, particularly in writing. But -- it's...well, it's complicated -- I went to Pasadena for two years, and the school was OK, and I had a scholarship, so it didn't cost my parents any money and that was nice. But by the spring of 1965 I was getting bored. Then one day a friend of mine showed me an ad in our school newspaper. The University of Hawaii East-West Center (founded by the U.S. government in 1960) had just established a Junior Year Program (JYP) and was recruiting students to study either Japanese or Chinese at the University of Hawaii for one year, all expenses paid. I thought, well, I'd been in Japan before and liked it there. Maybe it would be fun to study Chinese or Japanese. And I would get all expenses paid to go to the University of Hawaii -- what's not to like about that?

I applied for the East-West Center scholarship, was accepted, and went to the University of Hawaii in the summer of 1965. The experience changed my life. There were 30 of us in the Junior Year Program, 15 studying Japanese, and 15 Chinese. We had to be from schools that did not offer Japanese or Chinese studies. So I went to Honolulu in the summer of 1965, where for the first three months we studied intensive Chinese six hours a day, sort of like at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). During the regular school year we took our normal course load, which included six hours a week of Chinese. That included an hour of Chinese on Saturday mornings.

After one year at the University of Hawaii, the JYP sent ten of us to Tunghai University in Taichung, central Taiwan. In those days very few Chinese students at Tunghai took summer courses. We were basically there by ourselves. But our supervisor, Professor Chang Han-shu, was also a member of the Legislative Yuan, the Congress. And that was an influential position, a position that helped him open doors for our small study group.

So in the summer of 1966 we went to Taiwan, and Professor Chang arranged for us every morning to listen to lectures on Chinese culture and history and economics -- all given by different professors speaking in Chinese. With only one year of intensive Chinese under our caps, we were challenged by the curriculum -- particularly by the puzzling regional accents of our speakers, who came from all over greater China. Despite -- or perhaps because of -- the intellectual strain, the experience could hardly have been better. After long mornings in the classroom, in the afternoon we had field trips. Professor Chang took us out to different places in Taichung and elsewhere around the island -- to government offices, universities, Rotary Club meetings, and scenic venues around the island. I can still sing the Rotary Club song in Chinese. As a finale to the summer, we did an around-the-island trip for about 10 days. The third day of our sojourn, when we were staying in a rural, Japanese-style hotel, I got food poisoning. Spent half the night in the outhouse (literally) and the other half in the hospital.

*Q: Now, in Tunghai were you living in dorms?*

NEIGHBORS: We were living in a dorm in Tunghai. Nowadays summer school may be a big thing at the university. But back in those days few people attended summer school. But we had our own cook at the dorm, and so we had tasty meals and did a lot of traveling on the weekend. It was a wonderful experience. Taiwan in those days was nothing like it is now. It was THE Republic of China, the legitimate government of all China, preparing at any moment to spring back to the mainland and resume its rightful role. No local citizen dared breathe a word about Taiwan independence for fear of being sent to prison for a good long time. I saw propaganda posters all over the place saying "Recover the Mainland," "Never Forget the Homeland." Even the toilet paper wrappers carried the slogan "Guangfu Dalu," which translates as "Glorious Restoration of the Mainland." And so it was a very different place from what it is now -- a lot more primitive economically. But I just thought it was fabulous. We had a great chance to learn more Chinese and make Chinese friends.

*Q: I'm looking at your CV. How in the world did you get from the East-West Center into Indiana University?*

NEIGHBORS: When I was in Hawaii that year, the head of the Chinese language and literature program at Indiana University came through Honolulu and gave a lecture. His name was Liu Wu-chi, a well-known scholar, who had just published in English a history of Chinese literature. At that time they used the old Romanization system. Now it would be written Liu Wuji. Professor Liu was the perfect Chinese gentleman scholar. His father was Liu Yazi, which means Liu, the "son of Asia." Liu Yazi was one of Mao Zedong's poetry teachers.

As I said, Professor Liu Wu-chi came through Hawaii, met me and said, "If you'd like to do graduate work in Chinese," which by that time I'd decided I wanted to do, "why don't you come to Indiana your last year and graduate from there, and then go to graduate school? We have a great program in Chinese literature." At that time I was dating a girl in the Junior Year Program who was going back to Indiana to school, so I thought that it

sounded like a good opportunity to study and to follow her. We broke up as soon as we got to Indiana, but any rate, that's how small decisions transform your life.

*Q: Absolutely. But you had Japanese experience. You've been in Okinawa; you've been exposed to that language, some of that culture. Why the drift into Chinese?*

NEIGHBORS: Who knows? It was like when I applied for this course at the East-West Center, I flipped a coin and said would I like to do Chinese or Japanese? And the coin came up China. At that time Chinese seemed more fascinating. It was the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and that was mysterious. Americans weren't allowed to go to China. It was taboo, and perhaps that's what made it attractive. Truthfully speaking, it was almost arbitrary (*laughs*) why I decided to do Chinese.

I didn't have any real knowledge of Japanese. My parents and I lived on Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, isolated from the local population. Many years later my daughter Ruth was in high school in Arlington, Virginia, and she played the role of Lotus Blossom in "The Tea House of the August Moon," which is a great story about public diplomacy and its troubles in Okinawa right after World War II. Ruth's dialogue was entirely in Japanese. We had a Japanese friend who recorded all the dialogue for her, so Ruth just memorized it by sound. She did a remarkable job considering she didn't understand a word of Japanese.

The director of the play also wanted Ruth to sing a Japanese song to add some color to her performance. And the amazing thing was, although I learned almost no Japanese in Okinawa, I had learned a number of Japanese songs. One in particular was a simple children's song, "Haru Ga Kita," "Springtime Is Coming." And so from 30 or 40 years before, I dredged up this song from the darkness and taught it to her, and she sang it in the play.

*Q: Now, at this time in your education, things Vietnam are coming to people's attention and things Asia get a little more high profile, if you will. Was that part of the milieu that you were experiencing?*

NEIGHBORS: It was. When I was a senior at Indiana, in the winter of 1968, I was chosen to represent Indiana University at a conference on Vietnam at West Point. Walt Rostow from the National Security Council was there, and his wife Elspeth Rostow, an economics professor from the University of Texas, spoke as well. They were defending our position in Vietnam. In the earlier days of the war I wasn't quite sure where I stood. It was a fascinating, fascinating conference, and I learned a lot about what government leaders thought they were doing in Vietnam. For the first time I also got to hear opponents of the war, who had been invited to the podium as well.

As for me, I was in jeopardy of being drafted at any moment. I had a student deferment until 1968-69. At that time Congress instituted the draft lottery, and I had a low lottery number, 70 something. I was doomed. My draft board in Colorado Springs asked me to go in and get my physical. Much to my surprise, I failed the physical. I had been treated



for a minor ailment for several years. Never thought that would get me out of the draft, but it did. So when the Draft Board said, “You’re not eligible, sorry,” I wasn’t sorry at all.

Around that time I became interested in protesting the Vietnam War, although I was never an activist. But, I did attend some of the protests on Indiana University campus. We protested the shooting of students at Kent State (May 4, 1970) after the bombing of Cambodia. This was just sort of a last-minute thing-- it wasn’t organized, but a lot of students got out and protested and yelled a lot of things. At that time at Indiana University there were two fires in our main library. Investigators thought there might be a connection with protests against the Vietnam War. And for years, the IU library fires were included in FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) reports about damage done by Vietnam War protests. In fact, an arsonist, who had been an employee in the stacks at the library, was the guilty party. He was arrested and convicted of setting the fires. He was not a protestor, just a pyromaniac. But these millions of dollars of damage caused by the fires were still included as part of the damage done by student protests.

Speaking of protests, at one point I also went off on a weekend to the protest made famous in Norman Mailer’s Armies of the Night. That’s the protest where we tried to “levitate” the Pentagon with our moral outrage. (*laughs*)

Not far from here at FSI, we walked across the Memorial Bridge from the Lincoln Memorial and went over to the Pentagon. I came from Indiana on an overnight bus with some friends, and we went to the protest, and that night I remember going to see a documentary movie about Joan Baez and Bob Dylan (*laughs*). The protest was exhilarating and a little scary-- I stood way back in the crowd. I was not interested in getting my head beaten in or anything like that. But it was for the most part an orderly demonstration. I remember talking about this protest when I had my security interview for the Foreign Service. The FBI investigator didn’t seem to think this was unusual for applicants my age. He seemed to be more surprised when I told him I had never smoked marijuana – I was a real square.

*Q: Now, Indiana actually has a very good reputation for its language programs.*

NEIGHBORS: It does. At that time, in the late 1960s, it was famous for its Russian program, a program funded by the National Defense Education Act monies. It was part of Defense Department funding. And in the 1960s IU had one of the only programs in the country that taught Mongolian and Tibetan.

Indiana was famous for language studies. A brother of the Dalai Lama taught Tibetan at IU for many years. Another famous scholar in Uralic-Altaic languages, Denis Sinor, was there at the time as well. Indiana had a great Chinese language program, particularly in Chinese literature. Some of my fellow graduate students became distinguished scholars. Bill Nienhauser went on to be professor and Head of the Chinese Language and Literature Department at the University of Wisconsin, and another friend, Charles Hartman, has been at SUNY (State University of New York) Albany teaching Chinese for

many years. Howard Goldblatt has become the world's most prolific translator of modern Chinese fiction into English. So IU had a great, a great program.

At that time, I was planning to be a professor myself. I thought I would like to teach. I had a Danforth Foundation Fellowship, which funded four years to any graduate school, everything paid, including spending money. This was a great opportunity and it wasn't costing my parents anything. So why not?

After doing graduate school, I wound up getting married and having a child and deciding that I didn't want to teach. I have one of those so-called ABD's, "all-but-dissertation," doctorates. I remember an old New Yorker cartoon that shows a tombstone carved with the words, "Here lies James Smith, loving father, devoted husband, PhD candidate."

Maybe I'll put that on my tombstone. Though I didn't get a PhD at IU, I did get a thorough introduction to Chinese history, culture, and society. I did classical Chinese literature. I wrote a first draft of my PhD thesis and then I just gave up. I wrote my thesis about Pu Songling, a 17<sup>th</sup> century short-story writer. His bizarre tales have been used as plots for movies and dance. All Chinese know at least a few of his famous stories.

Now FSI is very thorough in the way it prepares officers to use language in the workplace. They do a good job teaching Chinese. But even two years of intensive Chinese at FSI can't give a student the rich literary, cultural and historical background that I gained as a graduate student at IU. This background was a great help to me when I became a Foreign Service officer and began working in China.

Not only did IU give me this intellectual foundation in Chinese studies, it also provided me with the chance to go to Hong Kong for three years, from 1970-73. You see, Indiana had an exchange program with the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which is the final school that I attended (count them, 16 schools from K through grad school).

*Q: Now, can we say that during the academic year you were then on campus, what did you do in the summers after you started a graduate program in Indiana?*

NEIGHBORS: I went to summer school at IU two years, and one summer at the University of Michigan. Oh, yeah, one summer – 1968, right after graduation, I went to Europe. My Wanderjahre (year of wandering) reduced to a couple of months. But basically I stayed at Indiana.

*Q: While you are at IU, the whole Vietnam thing is coming to head, Tet in January 1968; that's why you went to Washington for the anti-Vietnam War demonstration?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that was why. I might have to go and fight in a war that made no sense, a war I did not believe in. That focused my attention. This is probably why we don't have anti-war protests today. With a professional military there's no danger of being drafted. That makes a huge difference in student attitudes. Yes, I was quite interested in the Vietnam issue. Even after I was no longer threatened with the draft -- because I failed



the physical -- I still was quite interested in what was going on and equally so in the Cultural Revolution, which was going on in China at that time and was an horrific experience for most of the people in China.

*Q: I have a whole canvas of Mao buttons from that period (laughs). So Indiana then had a connection with the Chinese University of Hong Kong?*

NEIGHBORS: Right, they had a program there, a one-year exchange program where the grantee would study Chinese on the one hand and also teach English.

*Q: And you go out to Hong Kong in September 1970? How did one get out to Hong Kong in those days?*

NEIGHBORS: Had to fly to California, wait ten days for my visa to come through, and then fly to Honolulu. After an 18-hour layover, it was off to Guam a two-hour refueling stop. (laughs) Eventually I made it to Hong Kong, arriving at the tail end of a typhoon.

*Q: So you were in Hong Kong for a year?*

NEIGHBORS: As it turned out, I was there longer than that. I was on the Indiana fellowship for a year, and also teaching English halftime at Chinese University. I enjoyed the work and the university atmosphere. More important, I met my future wife Mary Lok in October 1970. That's the real reason I wanted to stay on. So I taught fulltime as a tutor in English for two more years. I was in Hong Kong from 1970 -1973.

*Q: Now, in that time things in China begin to change. The U.S. ping-pong team goes to China in March of 1971. Nixon goes to Beijing in February of 1972. That obviously must have reverberated in Hong Kong.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, it did. Originally I went to Hong Kong to study Chinese and continue research for my PhD at Indiana. Before I went to Hong Kong, I knew that most people there spoke Cantonese. But, I figured there had to be a lot of people who spoke Mandarin as well, and that I would have many opportunities to speak Mandarin. I was wrong. I discovered that three people in Hong Kong spoke Mandarin and the rest, Cantonese. So after I got there, I learned Cantonese. In English we usually refer to Cantonese as a dialect. It's not. It's a Chinese language – at least as different from Mandarin as English is from German.

At that time I met my future wife. She was a sociology student at Chinese University. Her English was excellent, but it seemed like a good idea for me to learn Cantonese, her mother tongue. So I did. My spoken Mandarin did not improve while I was in Hong Kong, but my reading skills did because I did a lot of research in classical texts.

It was an interesting time to be in Hong Kong. A number of my friends went on the first trip to mainland China taken by the Committee for Concerned Asian Scholars. I also knew people at the University Services Center (the USC), a premier institution that

provided facilities for foreigners to do research on China. The USC was collocated with the Chinese University, New Asia College. A lot of eminent scholars-to-be did their PhD research there. David Shambaugh and Mike Lampton (now at George Washington University and Johns Hopkins respectively) were at the USC when I was in Hong Kong.

*Q: In this same 1972 time frame, Japan and the United States negotiate the reversion of Okinawa. Did that come to your attention in Hong Kong?*

NEIGHBORS: Not, not really. The main problem that stoked student demonstrations: what a surprise -- the ownership of Diaoyutai Islands or the Senkakus, as they're called in Japan. Enraged students were out on the streets protesting the Japanese occupation of the islands. Now it's 2013 and nothing has changed. Chinese students still hate the Japanese, and the Chinese government insists Diaoyutai is an inalienable part of China -- and has been so time immemorial.

*Q: What was it like living in Hong Kong in those days?*

NEIGHBORS: Wonderful. It was a great opportunity to really live in a Chinese society. And of course my wife, Mary Lok, is Chinese. We met in October 1970 and got married in April 1973. During my three years in Hong Kong I spent most of my time with her and her friends, so my Cantonese improved a lot.

In 1970 Hong Kong was much less modern than it is now. There were no rail or car tunnels between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. The only way to get across was by ferry. During my first year in Hong Kong that wasn't much of a problem. I was at United College, which is part of the Chinese University. And United College was on Bonham Road, about halfway up the mountain on Hong Kong Island. I shared an apartment, which was a 10-minute walk from the college -- a perfect commute. But in my third year, United College moved out to the New Territories, which was 15 miles from where I lived. I had such a nice deal on the apartment, however, that I didn't want to move. I only taught four days a week. So I decided to stay put on Hong Kong Island. That meant four days a week I got up, took a bus to Central District, walked to the Star Ferry, took the ferry to the Kowloon side, and then ran for the train. Today trains to the New Territories leave every five minutes, but in those dark days -- only one train every hour. It was a difficult, albeit entertaining commute, particularly during Chinese New Year time when everyone was trying to go back to their families in China. At times I saw frantic travelers climbing out the window of the train, because they couldn't get to the door.

So, yes, Hong Kong was much less international in those days than it is now. But I found it compelling. You had a lot of people there engaged in China watching. This was the height of the Cultural Revolution, and China was off-limits to scholars and diplomats, so much of research on China was done from Hong Kong. Many refugees were coming out from China, and they were being interviewed for information about the mainland. Most of these immigrants did speak Mandarin. That was the one way to practice Chinese, with people who had come from China.

*Q: Did you sign up for that or just show up from time to time?*

NEIGHBORS: It was not formal, just casual.

*Q: While you were there in Hong Kong, since you're there so long, did you bump into people from the consul general?*

NEIGHBORS: I did not. Only when I took the Foreign Service Exam did I meet people from the consulate. It's funny, because when I went into Chinese studies, I had no plan to be a Foreign Service Officer. I became one by accident. I wanted to be a professor, teach Chinese literature at a university.

But after three years at CUHK I decided that while teaching was OK, it might not be the right career path for me. Then one day a friend of mine told me that he was going to take the Foreign Service Exam, trying to get into the United States Information Agency. I asked him what that was, and he told me. And I said, "Wow, that sounds right up my alley." And so I registered for the written exam in the winter of 1973. I remember the person who proctored my exam was Barbara Bodine, who later became ambassador in the Middle East somewhere.

Recently I was looking through old letters from my mother, who passed away in 2012. In Oct 1971 she wrote, "I dreamed you wrote to Nixon, and he gave you a job in the State Department." This was two years before it ever occurred to me to take the Foreign Service exam. She knew me better than I knew myself.

During my time in Hong Kong I did meet officers from British Council, and that got me interested in similar things to what USIS (United States Information Service) was doing. One of my colleagues at the Chinese University was Helen Bridges, an English teacher. Her husband was the Director of British Council in Hong Kong, which had a huge operation there.

*Q: Now, you're declaring yourself for USIA (United States Information Agency) at the time of taking the test?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I did.

*Q: Was this the same test that State Department took?*

NEIGHBORS: At that time the written test was basically the same, but if I remember right, there was a final section of the test that differed according to what cone or specialty you were applying for: political, economic, management, consular, or public affairs.

If you passed the written exam, then several months later you did the oral exam, and that was nothing like today. My oral exam was a basic interview that lasted for one-hour. And I, like many of my colleagues, failed the oral exam my first time. I was crushed, but my interviewers were very considerate. They gave me an evaluation afterward and said, "You

didn't pass because when we asked you questions about American culture and the arts today, you responded poorly. If you would concentrate on building knowledge in those areas, you might have a chance." Well, I'd been out of the U.S. for three years and in those days we didn't have Internet, so I knew little about contemporary American culture.

As I said, I passed the written test the first time, when I took it in Hong Kong. Then when I came back to the U.S. from Hong Kong in 1973, newly married, and with my wife expecting, I took the oral test in D.C. And that's the one I failed. Following that I went off to Dallas, Texas, with my tail between my legs for about a year and worked over at the Sherman Williams paint store (*laughs*). Yes, I did, that's what I did. And I spent a year mixing painting, cutting curtain rods, and diligently reading the arts pages of The New York Times. I also did a lot of other reading on political science and American history.

*Q: At the time what did you think of the examination process?*

NEIGHBORS: The old way was much more of a crapshoot. A one-hour interview and it's over. I think the method the Board of Examiners (BEX) uses today is fairer and much more scientific than the old way. In the old days if you didn't hit it off right away with the interviewers, it was difficult to rescue the situation. I actually got good vibes from my first oral, but I just didn't answer the questions well enough. The interviewers gave me valuable pointers, and I took them to heart. A year later, in 1974, I took the written exam again. I mysteriously took an afternoon off from the paint store to do the test. I passed and then came back for a second try at the oral – this time in Austin, Texas. Another heart-wrenching interview, and then I heard the words that changed my life: "You passed and congratulations on paying attention to our critique last year. A lot of people don't."

*Q: So when did you finally pass?*

NEIGHBORS: I passed in the summer of 1974. We were in Dallas for a year and decided to move to New York City. We had some good friends there. And on the way from Dallas to New York City, we stopped in Austin, Texas, and I took the oral exam. Austin is not in a direct line from Dallas to NYC, but that's where they were giving the oral exam that year.

So that's where I took the exam and they told me that I passed. We went to live in Brooklyn for one year, 1974-1975. 1974 was the year that Stephen Solarz was first elected as the U.S. Congressman from Brooklyn. USIA gave me good assurances that I would eventually be given a job. But because of my background living all over the world, my security clearance might take a long time to process, particularly since I had been living in Hong Kong for three years, with a wife born in mainland China. So when we moved to Brooklyn, Mary, my wife worked in a public clinic as a social worker on Mulberry Street in Chinatown for a year. I stayed home and took care of our daughter, Ruth, who was nine-months old at the time. I also studied Chinese and worked on my IU thesis, just in case the Foreign Service job didn't work out.

The day I was scheduled to do my FBI security background interview, at the last minute the babysitter called and said she couldn't make it. So I took my 11-month-old daughter to the interview with the FBI. She was a very good baby. She sat on my lap and I did the interview.

*Q: So when did you actually start with USIA?*

NEIGHBORS: I was notified in the spring of 1975 and was asked to report for a course, a class, A-100 and USIA training, in June of 1975.

*Q: Now, at this time were -- did the A-100 class include State FSO's (Foreign Service Officers) and USIA FSO's?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it was basically divided. We had about six weeks or so of USIA-specific training, and then we were put into an A-100 course.

*Q: What was the USIA training like when you first came on board?*

NEIGHBORS: One of the vital things we learned was how to thread an open-reel videotape machine, a contraption no longer in use by the time I got into the field. *(laughs)*

Carol Ludwig, a mid-level, USIA officer, supervised and organized our training. Her husband was Warren Obluck. They both did several tours at USIS Tokyo. I mentioned earlier the Junior Year Program (JYP) at the University of Hawaii, the East-West Center (EWC) where I began to study Chinese. Well, the JYP only lasted three years, during which they trained about 90 students. And then the Center gave up on the program – a big mistake in my estimation. As chance would have it, Carol Ludwig, my training officer at USIA, also participated in the JYP. And so did Donna Oglesby, who later on rose to the position Counselor to the Agency, the highest career position in old USIA. Carol and Donna were a year after me in Hawaii. There were one or two USIA officers who did this program. So out of 90 junior-year students at the EWC, you had at least four or five who rose to significant levels within USIA.

*Q: What else did the USIA training cover?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we practiced public speaking. The trainers filmed our short speeches, played them back and then critiqued us. We also were introduced to the American Speakers Program, the International Visitors Program. The course was designed to get us up to speed on the general things we would be doing in the field. Sally Grooms, who later became ambassador somewhere in Latin America, explained what it meant to be an American Center Director in Columbia. I was stunned. I mean, how could she possibly do *so* many things? Later, after I saw how American centers worked, I realized, yes, she probably was doing all those things *(laughs)*. She sounded incredibly dynamic, an intimidating role model.

*Q: Where did the USIA training take place?*

NEIGHBORS: At an iconic address: 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, where USIA headquarters used to be. Before it sank between the bureaucratic waters, USIA moved to SA-44, just across the street from Voice of America, two blocks from the Air and Space Museum. In Chinese the number four is an unlucky number. Pronounced *si*, it is a homophone for death. So I always refer to SA-44 as the Double-Death Building, an appropriate site for a dying agency.

*Q: So then after that you are brought together with the A-100 class, which was the general training program for both the State Department and USIA Foreign Service officers. Do you recall who was in your class?*

NEIGHBORS: You know, I don't remember many of the State officers. We public affairs officers were snobbish and stuck to ourselves. Wait, I do remember that Jeff Bader was a classmate. [Ed: Bader was a member of the 119<sup>th</sup> A-100 class which was sworn in June 27, 1975.] He later went on to fame as my boss at the Consulate General in Hong Kong and then as Director of the National Security Council for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He also served as the China negotiator for the US Trade Representative's Office and was ambassador to Namibia.

*Q: What value was the A-100 course?*

NEIGHBORS: I found the whole thing fascinating because I had not intended to be a diplomat. And so the notion of how embassies worked and what people were doing there, this was quite valuable to me. It turned out that in the old USIA system of training, we did not usually do rotations through the other sections of the embassy. During my first assignment in Taiwan, I didn't get much of an introduction to what other sections did. So for that reason the lessons learned in A-100 were valuable to me.

*Q: And out of A-100, how was the assignment process run?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, USIA was doing the assignments, and we were a small class, 16 new officers, so HR (Human Resources) gave us much individual attention. I wanted to use my Chinese. The powers-that-be gave me an assignment to Taiwan. How could I not be pleased? I think most of the people in my class got pretty much what they wanted. All except for Joe Stigen-Strabhaar, who was Mormon, and didn't want to go to Rio. It would be too much fun for him.

*Q: So, they had 16 slots and you just said, "I'm really interested in China and," --*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that's basically it – not like now. It wasn't such an open system where they published what assignments were available. It was, "We want you to go here and you'd be good for this, and so this is where we're going to send you." It was not an open system in those days.



*Q: So the first thing you did then after the A-100 training was to go to Taichung for language training, right?*

NEIGHBORS: I went to Taichung in the fall of 1975. I had studied Chinese at university, but I hadn't spoken Mandarin in many years because I got absorbed into Cantonese. So I went to Taichung for five months, instead of the normal two-year training program. I can't remember what my language score was -- I think like a three, three plus, or something like that, after five months. After that I went to my first assignment, which was in Taipei where we had our embassy, the U.S. embassy to the Republic of China.

*Q: You've been studying Chinese for some time. How did you rate in the back of your mind the FSI training at Taichung?*

NEIGHBORS: I thought it was good. I did most of my work with one other student who became a friend of mine, Steve Vance. Later on he and I served together in Shanghai. He and I were about the same level, and worked well together. Study materials were difficult to come by back in those ancient days. Everything had to be mimeographed, an arcane procedure the youth of today know little of. So I would say that the materials were not as good as they are now. But still, I enjoyed it. And as you know, language study at the FSI level is an obsessive-compulsive experience (*laughs*). At first you're enthusiastic, but then you get anxiety attacks when you haven't studied an extra two or three hours at night to prepare for the six hours of class the next day.

*Q: Now, you're unusually talented in Chinese. You have this five months exposure and you're out. So you weren't there for a full nine months.*

NEIGHBORS: No. No, I was there five months only.

*Q: It should be noted that Taichung is the second year of FSI's Chinese program. Did the assignment people expect you to get a 3/3 in five months, or were they prepared to send you to Taipei no matter what your score.*

NEIGHBORS: No, they figured I would make it. I tested a 2 (speaking), 2+ (reading) when I entered USIA, and that was after being away from Chinese for almost two years.

*Q: I imagine your reading would have been reasonably good.*

NEIGHBORS: My reading was pretty good in literary and cultural topics, but the FSI test emphasized a lot of political science stuff, which I hadn't been reading. I probably didn't score as high as I should have on the reading, but, yeah, they figured I could do it, and I did. I didn't have much of a problem.

*Q: So, you're the junior USIS (United State Information Service) officer in Taipei.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I took over the position in February 1976. Assistant Information Officer was the official title. And it was a great assignment for a fledgling USIS officer. I

did not do a rotation through other sections of the embassy, not even Consular. I started off with a regular job. I was the editor of *Student Review Magazine*, *Xuesheng yingwen zazhi*. This was a bilingual magazine, English and Chinese. It basically took articles from USIA-produced, English language publications and translated them into Chinese, adding pictures as well. We also hired local stringers to write articles for us. Distinguished *Newsweek Magazine* Asia correspondent, Melinda Liu, got a boost from us at the beginning of her career. She wrote for us on several occasions.

I remember my first major assignment as a junior officer. I got to accompany the Alwin Nikolais dancers as they traveled around Taiwan performing. What an experience to go backstage with all the dancers. We hired a photographer, an American photographer, Robin Moyer, to do a layout for us of photographs of the Alwin Nikolais dancers. Later on Moyer became a well-known photojournalist, working, I believe, for Black Star. He won a number of awards for his publication of the photographs of the notorious Shatila Camp massacre in Lebanon.

*Q: Now, the USIS setup in Taipei, how many people? Who's the boss?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we had a public affairs officer (PAO), deputy public affairs officer (DPAO), and cultural affairs officer (CAO), plus I think maybe one or two ACAO's, assistant cultural affairs officers, a press/information officer (IO), and an assistant press officer, or Assistant Information Officer (AIO), using the term of art. The DPAO served as management or executive officer for our operation. Our headquarters was in an old Japanese-era building (from the early 1930s), an excellent facility in a perfect location. We had an extensive American library. It was next door to Taiwan's premier high school, Jianguo Zhongxue. Most of the high school students used to come to our library to read and study and to relish the only air conditioning in the area. Even today, any time you meet a prominent Taiwan leader who grew up in Taipei and was a top student, he probably went to Jianguo. He (Jianguo was boys-only in those days) grew up using our USIS library and later on became a minister or an ambassador somewhere. Through our library we had phenomenal access to the rising leadership of the country, including future President "James" Ma Yingjiu. We provided facilities for study and information about America that weren't available elsewhere in Taiwan.

*Q: How about the mentoring situation? Were you just pointed, this is your room and here's your portfolio and good luck, or what?*

NEIGHBORS: Actually, we didn't get rotation through the other embassy sections, but I did a number of important assignments for the Cultural Section. The cultural affairs officer (CAO) was Neal Donnelly, a unique individual, Irish-American to the core, with a love for warm beer (Ed: Donnelly has an interview on file with ADST). He had been the branch public affairs officer (BPAO) in Kaohsiung for five years and learned to speak Taiwanese and had this incredible collection of Chinese ethnic gods and stories about the underworld. Neal's collection was so good that he displayed them at a prominent Washington Museum, the Sackler Gallery.



Neal took an interest in making sure I got experience outside the Information Section. One of my early assignments for him was to attend a student retreat outside of Taipei at the Shimen Shuiku (Shihmen Reservoir). Neal and I, along with several other local embassy employees, went out to Shimen with prominent young students that we had selected as up-and-comers. We got them together for a weekend conference to talk about political themes and international issues. I got to be the rapporteur, to take notes and then write our cable about the event back to Washington. And that was one of the first major writing assignments I had. I enjoyed the weekend very much. Neal was good to me.

The PAO at that time was Robert Clark, Bob Clark, who was an interesting old fellow, at least he seemed old at the time. He was probably in his early sixties. Bob had caused quite a stir in Taiwan society. Several years before I met him, his first wife, by whom he had five or six children, died. She had a severe asthma attack and passed away. After a year or two Bob started courting a beautiful young television executive named Zheng Sumei. He wound up marrying her. And there was probably 25 years difference in their ages. But he married her anyway. It wasn't a scandal really, but people liked to wag their tongues about Bob and his child bride (even though Ms. Zheng was in her mid-30s by that time and certainly not a child bride.) (*laughs*). Bob had a daughter by her as well.

Bob Clark passed away many years ago, but he came to my mind again just two years ago when I did a brief TDY (temporary duty) assignment as PAO in Wellington, New Zealand. I was helping to arrange for a visit by Secretary of State Clinton. When I arrived in Wellington, I went in to meet the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM).

"Hi, I'm Bob Clark," he said.

*Q: Junior?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, he was indeed the son of my first PAO. It was nice to meet him and reminisce about his Dad. Bob Clark the elder was a great raconteur. He told a wonderful story, about when he met LBJ. The story was particularly fun for me, coming as I did from East Texas. Lady Bird Johnson was from Karnack, which is about 15 miles from my hometown, Marshall.

But to get on with the story. Bob Clark was in Thailand, and LBJ was making a whirlwind trip around the world. I'm not sure whether he was vice president or president at the time. But (*laughs*), before the meeting with the king of Thailand, LBJ got a briefing from embassy staff. Bob Clark was there. Don't know if he was the briefer or if it was someone else. At any rate LBJ was told, "Mr. President, you have to remember that the king has a glass eye. He does not like to pose for photographs. And since he's the king, you're not allowed to touch him. You mustn't do that." You can imagine what happened with all this telling LBJ what he could and could not do.

In the event, LBJ strides into the room with the king standing there. He goes over, puts his arm around the surprised king and says, "Come on over here, King. We're gonna take a *pitchur*." Anyway, that was LBJ. (*laughter*)

That fits with a few other stories I've heard. LBJ was just telling everyone: "I am not going to pay any mind to your briefing. And it's not because I'm dumb, it's just because I want to do this."

*Q: Now, you've listed six, seven people associated with the USIA program there in Taipei. So it sounds like it's a fairly extensive program you're picking up on, high school kids, college kids.*

NEIGHBORS: It was, yes.

*Q: What was the mission statement for USIA and USIS Taipei at this period? This was 1975-1976, the end of the Ford administration now. So we're just three years away from normalization.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. But during that whole period of secret negotiations with the PRC, USIA was completely out of the loop. And after Kissinger left office in 1977, even the State Department was kept in the dark. In fact, the whole mission in Taiwan was pretty much left out of things, even at the ambassadorial level, I believe. When we finally normalized in January 1979, I was in Kaohsiung serving as Branch Public Affairs Officer (BPAO), so I was even further out of orbit. The normalization announcement was a bolt of the blue. But I'll talk about that later when we cover my assignment to Kaohsiung.

*Q: Let's look at the larger embassy. USIA officers and facilities are actually a different site from the embassy itself.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that's correct.

*Q: But would you have had any interaction with Ambassador Unger or the DCM (deputy chief of mission)?*

NEIGHBORS: I didn't very much. Bob Clark, the PAO, had regular meetings with the ambassador, as did the Press Officer. My only minor contact with the Front Office was through the Deputy Chief of Mission, Paul Popple. I got crosswise with him on a key issue, an issue I unfortunately had no knowledge about. One of my tasks, as AIO, assistant information officer, was to help edit our weekly media report. This report summarized the most important media articles, mostly from newspapers, but sometimes from magazines and TV. FSNs (Foreign Service National employees) translated the articles into English and summarized them for me. I edited their work and chose what articles to include in the embassy weekly report to Washington.

At one point, this was in 1976, an article appeared citing a "nuclear inspection team" coming from the United States -- from the U.S. government. I naively put this phrase, "nuclear inspection team," into our report. Paul Popple was just *furious* that I, or the political officer who's supposed to clear my work, had allowed this phrase to be used. Unknown to me, the embassy was trying to downplay the nuclear issue. Of course, at the

time we (and we that excluded me) were worried that Taiwan might be trying to develop a nuclear weapon. But I had no knowledge of this. So Paul Popple blew up. He wasn't going to fire me, but he suggested that I not do the weekly report anymore, and that the IO (information officer), Bill Rydell, take over the task. So Bill took over for about a month and let me go back to doing it after the storm blew over. But basically I was just translating what it said in the Chinese paper, "government nuclear inspection team." But Paul did not want it said in English. So we changed it to "nuclear team." I'm not sure why that was any better.

*Q: Now, in -- you arrived at post in February 1976. And in 1977 you get to move down to the consulate in Kaohsiung. How did that change occur? Did you know about that assignment when you first arrived there?*

NEIGHBORS: No, I didn't. I knew that my training course was going to be one year. That was in the plan. I was going to go to the language school for five months and then do one year training as the AIO Taipei. Then I was going to have a follow-on assignment. But, HR hadn't made the assignment yet. There was a possibility of my staying in Taipei. But Bob Clark decided after I worked in Taipei a while that I would be good for the Kaohsiung BPAO position. At that time Kaohsiung was not a consulate. It was only a USIS operation. As a first assignment for a junior officer this was an ideal. I was the only American official, aside from a few military personnel, in Southern Taiwan. I was the director of two American Centers, one in Kaohsiung and one in Tainan. I had like 20 FSNs working for me my first assignment. And I was by myself. And we had no email and, of course, no computers. There wasn't even a telex or cable service. If Taipei wanted to tell me something, they either called or sent me a letter.

Since I was the only officer in Southern Taiwan, I had responsibility for consular, political, commercial and economic issues, though I focused mostly on press and culture and education – the USIS staples.

Soon after arriving in Kaohsiung, I discovered something about the way Chinese society functions. Often it's not important who you are, but what your title is. In Kaohsiung I was the Meiguo Xinwenchu Chuzhang, the director of USIS. Now within the Chinese system a director is a fairly high rank, and I was treated as such, despite being a diplomatic neophyte. From the protocol point of view I had access to high-ranking officials in Southern Taiwan. I could see the mayor of Tainan. I regularly played golf with the prominent son of the mayor of Kaohsiung. It was great to be the only official American presence in the area.

*Q: Now, the Kuomintang political party has its own public affairs department that controls the press and the movies. Was our effort ever creating any problems for them? Is there any feedback?*

NEIGHBORS: Down in Kaohsiung where I was, we did not have much to do with the press. I called on editors, invited journalists to representational events. But I simply

didn't have much time to work on article placement in local papers and journals. Besides, there wasn't much news about America that local papers would find of interest.

I do remember one occasion where we did draw the interest of both the media and the Chinese intelligence services. Our State Department China desk officer at that time was Harvey Feldman (Ed: Feldman has an interview on file with ADST). He was a fascinating character, a brilliant analyst, but a fussbudget all the same. Preparing for a Feldman visit was an adventure. Arrangements were never quite what he expected. The hotel room was too small, the pillow not fluffy enough. Things like that.

But, Harvey was very knowledgeable about China. I remember him coming down to southern Taiwan – in 1978, I believe – to call on professors at the Nanjing Theological Seminary, the center of a semi-clandestine effort to declare Taiwan independence. Harvey wanted to make sure that his visit to the Seminary was publicized, that he was seen making his calls. And indeed we were seen by a host of plainclothes policemen who followed us around all day. Harvey's visit in effect said to the ROC (Republic of China) Government, "We are watching how you treat peaceful dissidents. The rights of these professors must be protected."

John Thomson was my predecessor as BPAO Kaohsiung. Once he and I had dinner with a General Chang, commander-in-chief of the Garrison Command for Southern Taiwan. At the time Taiwan was still under martial law, so the Garrison Command had immense power. General Chang was like an old Hollywood movie villain (*laughs*). John told me, "The general probably carries around a pocket full of fingernails (*laughs*)." With this image in mind, I watched as the general sat there creepily smoking, holding his cigarette between his thumb and middle finger, palm facing up. He was a menacing figure, as were most of his cohorts.

Even during my short, two-year assignment in Kaohsiung, 1977-1979, things were beginning to change. For the first time, Dangwai, "outside the party," candidates were allowed to run for public office. When the central government began to allow local elections, it did not permit any political party to compete with the Kuomintang (KMT). Candidates could, however, declare themselves "unaffiliated," no longer members of the KMT. In this way they could take part in electoral affairs. The Mayor of Tainan at that time, Su Nan-cheng was elected in this manner. He ran for office as a Dangwai candidate. I met him often when I traveled to Tainan on business.

I also had some dealings with Wang Yu-Yun, the new mayor of Kaohsiung. Mayor Wang was the wealthy owner of a ship-breaking company. They took these old ships from around the world, broke them up, sold all the scrap and made millions. The first time I met him was not long after I arrived in Kaohsiung. A typhoon changed course and unexpectedly slammed into southern Taiwan. Caused lots of damage. Tore shingles off our roof at home. Two inches of rain in the dining room. We lost electricity for about 10 days, just when we were scheduled to have our first big representational party. For the event we had purchased lots and lots of meat and other perishables. They all spoiled in the heat.

In addition to taking care of our personal problems, I had some official duties in the wake of the typhoon. That's when I met the Mayor of Kaohsiung for the first time. I was deputized by the embassy to express U.S. condolences and indicate we were ready to offer relief assistance if needed. By that time my Chinese was reasonably good - but not good enough to choose the right words to express condolences. My chief FSN afterwards told me that I had used the word *tungxin*, which in usual circumstances means sympathy or sympathetic. But in this context, it implied, "We pity you." You were supposed to *express* your condolences, *weiwen*. In the event, Mayor Wang probably figured, "Well, this is a foreign devil, so the fact that he can speak Chinese at all is OK. We'll forgive him." But I had used the wrong words. I was happy to have an FSN willing to point out my mistakes.

*Q: Now, how would you describe the mission statement for Kaohsiung? What were you doing? What kinds of duties did you have?*

NEIGHBORS: Basically it was similar to the things we were doing in Taipei. We had two American centers, one in Tainan and the other in Kaohsiung. We had an active American Speakers Program. For instance, one of the best American Speakers who came to Kaohsiung was a retired diplomat, John Emmerson, who had served for the most part in Japan and in China. He came to the American Center in Kaohsiung and talked about his experiences working as a translator in Yan'an where he interrogated Japanese prisoners of war. There he met Mao Zedong and other communist leaders. This was an unprecedented event for our contacts in Kaohsiung. They wanted to meet this fellow who had seen the monster (*laughs*), Mao Zedong, in the flesh. This was a step forward in our relations in that we were able to invite someone to talk about World War II in China.

Unlike in the case of John Service, John Emmerson's career was not destroyed by his work in Yan'an, but it was made much more difficult because of his work with the communists. The powerful China Lobby included him as one of the American diplomats who helped lose China. His "guilt" was seen as less damaging since he was actually a Japanese expert. He was not forced to resign from the Foreign Service, but for many years he was not allowed to serve in Japan. Eventually, the Department "rehabilitated" Emmerson and appointed him DCM in Tokyo under Ambassador Edwin Reischauer.

The American Centers in Kaohsiung and Tainan also regularly hosted exhibits of American art. On one occasion we opened an exhibit by Helen Frankenthaler, one of the great abstract artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through USIA in Washington we brought 20 of her representative paintings. And we showed them in Kaohsiung. It was a wonderful experience to do this.

In addition to exhibiting American art at our center, we also had a program to allow local Chinese artists to use our exhibit facilities when they weren't being used for our regular programs. Neal Donnelly had pioneered this innovative use of space when he was BPAO in Kaohsiung in the early 1970s. And he did this in the face of strong opposition from Taipei. Then Taipei PAO Bob Nichols insisted that the USIS mission was to promote

American culture and art not Chinese. But Neal refused to give up the idea. He felt that local art exhibits showed our American Centers to be dynamic places. These exhibits attracted new audiences who then could be depended on to enthusiastically support our other programs.

So thanks to Neal, we continued this support for local artists. On one occasion we sponsored an exhibit for Huang Guangnan, a rising young artist who many years later became director of the Taipei Museum of Art and who has continued to be an important contact of the AIT Cultural Section.

Taiwanese businessmen, particular those in the south with less exposure to the West, wanted to learn about social usage in the U.S., how they should relate to American businessmen, how our customs and behavior differ from those in China and Taiwan. On several occasions I spoke on these issues at the Rotary Club or the Lions Club, as well as at the American Chamber of Commerce.

I remember one particular incident where the differences between the American and the Taiwanese sense of justice came into dramatic conflict. A member of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kaohsiung had a traffic accident, killing a 76-year-old man. The victim was the patriarch of his family, with sons and daughters and many grandchildren. How did the accident happen? One night this businessman, Mr. X, was driving along at normal speed, and an old man suddenly jumped out in front of his car. No time to stop. The follow-up investigation showed no indication of speeding, no reckless driving. From an American point of view, the pedestrian was at fault. Mr. X owed no compensation to the family of the victim.

Chinese society takes a different, perhaps more humane, position on such a case. They say, "A man died – the most important man in the family, the patriarch. Compensation is due. It doesn't matter whose fault it was."

Our American businessman, Mr. X, had insurance, but not enough to meet the demands of the family. He refused to pay, and that caused consternation among our friends in Kaohsiung. He sought legal advice, but the local lawyers did not tell him what he wanted to hear. They said,

"If you pay compensation to the family, the judge will find you not guilty of reckless driving. If you refuse to pay, you will be found guilty."

Mr. X still refused to pay. The family of the victim decided to call his bluff. They brought the patriarch's coffin to Mr. X's office and left it there. Mr. X saw the light. He hired a mediator who recommended the amount of compensation. Mr. X paid, the legal suit was dismissed, and everyone was happy. Well, perhaps not Mr. X. His wallet was much thinner. But on the bright side, he no longer had a corpse in the corridor.

*Q: In addition to your press and cultural activities, were you ever asked to help out other sections of the embassy?*



NEIGHBORS: Yes, all the time. And sometimes it got me in trouble with my USIS bosses in Taipei. The fall of 1978, working closely with my chief assistant, John Chang, I spent much time and effort organizing a series of trade promotions in southern Taiwan for the embassy commercial section. Commerce was delighted with our work. I even got a personal letter of commendation from Assistant Secretary of Commerce. I was thrilled, expecting to receive high praise from the PAO and DPAO. Got a scolding instead. They thought I was spending far too much time on non-USIS activities. I wrote a heated letter to them, defending my efforts in sincere, but overwrought language. In the end we worked out our differences. I did get praise for the extra work in my annual Efficiency Report, but not without a dig at my “over-reaction.”

*Q: One of the key events that took place on your watch was the “normalization” of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, which of course meant the breaking of relations with Taiwan, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that took place in December 1978.

*Q: What’s your reflection on that event?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, December 1978 I was still in Kaohsiung. My wife had just had our second child. Mark was born on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1978, so he was just two-weeks-old when we heard about the momentous event to come.

USIS Kaohsiung had no classified system of communications. We had no unclassified system except for the telephone and snail mail. One day in the middle of December I got a call from George Beasley, who was the deputy public affairs officer (DPAO) in Taipei. He said, “Lloyd, in about an hour, please turn on Voice of America. You will hear an announcement that will be of interest to you.” With that he hung up. So, I tuned into VOA, and heard the historic announcement. On January 1, 1979, the United States was going to break relations with Taiwan, the Republic of China, and establish relations with the People’s Republic of China. And so that’s how I heard about this incredible event. The news just came out of the blue.

USIS Taipei wanted to make sure I was kept in the loop about what was going to happen. So, they invited me to come up to Taipei. They also wanted my assistance in dealing with the press for the arrival of Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher (Ed: December 27-28, 1978). Christopher was coming to tell President Chiang Ching-kuo what we were going to do to him and his country, and how we were going to do it.

I left my wife and two kids (Mark, the youngest, was just three-weeks old) back in Kaohsiung and went up to Taipei and got a briefing on what was probably going to happen. Our embassy welcoming crew went out to the airport to meet Mr. Christopher. We arrived about an hour before Christopher’s plane landed at the old Songshan Airport, which is in northeast Taipei. As we drove into the airport, the atmosphere was ominous

*(laughs)*. Thousands of students lined the narrow entrance road. At this stage the students weren't yelling, but they did look sullen and ready to erupt. My stomach started to churn.

We arrived at the terminal. Christopher and his delegation deplaned, and we climbed into the motorcade. Our Regional Security Officer suggested that the motorcade leave the airport via a back road. But Taiwan security vetoed that suggestion. "The way you came in will be fine," they said. "Everything is under control." Unfortunately, they were wrong. Or maybe they were just lying.

*Q: Now, Fred Chien, the foreign minister, met Christopher at the airport.*

NEIGHBORS: That's correct, yes. I had forgotten that.

*Q: And Fred went out the backdoor.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, he knew, and as I said, our security person, John McPoland, suggested that we go out the back way, too. The Chinese authorities had other plans in store for us *(laughs)*. And so we went out the front. I was in an unmarked car in the back of the motorcade. There were probably five cars in the motorcade. I was riding with a friend, Pat Corcoran. Pat was ACAO (assistant cultural affairs officer) in Taipei. He and I were in the same USIA class. Pat's a New Yorker, one of the funniest people I know, a good person to have with you in a crisis. And so Pat and I were in this car together and we came out of the airport and there were *thousands* of students lining the way. By this time it was clear this was a set-up. Porta-Potties were spread out along the way. Behind the rows of students we could see the organizers, older men with suits and close-cropped hair – KMT youth leaders and plain-clothes policemen. And so our cars inched their way into the mob and then stopped. Enraged students were screaming at us, "Down with the Americans," and "Kill the Americans," and "Why are you betraying us?" and they were throwing things at us. I couldn't tell what they were throwing, but all sorts of garbage – eggs and such. They broke the windows in Christopher's car, and I think were poking him. I was terrified.

Our driver kept yelling out the window, saying, "We're from the press! We're from the press! Don't harm us!" American journalists were out on the street filming and they seemed to be completely safe. Everyone's wrath focused on the motorcade. Then somebody climbed onto the roof of our car and started to jump up and down. The roof began to sag.

Pat Corcoran looked at me and said, "I'm glad I have my clean underwear on so my mother won't be embarrassed when they bring my body back home."

We laughed, hoping we both weren't about to die. We were in this demonstration for 45 minutes or so and even Pat's jokes couldn't make me forget what was going on outside the car. In the late 1960s, when I was in graduate school, I saw a Steve McQueen/Candice Bergman movie called "The Sand Pebbles." There's a scene in which a Chinese traitor/collaborator gets swarmed by a mob and torn apart *(laughs)*! And that scene kept



flashing before my eyes as our car sat immobilized. Finally, finally after about 45 minutes, police arrived and were able to move people away from the cars. We escaped. Christopher went directly to the Grand Hotel. Pat and I stopped at the U.S. military base there in North Taipei. We pulled through the gate and a Chinese military officer approached. He looked at our car, which was heavily damaged. “What’s happened,” he asked.

I said, “We were mobbed by the students.”

And he said, “Well, where were the police?”

“They weren’t there.”

“That’s *impossible*.” But of course it was possible.

Later on Pat and I went up to the Grand Hotel. We were on the outside of the negotiations, of course, but we were there in the control room and heard what was going on. My favorite moment was when the control room was on a conference call to Washington with Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP). We were explaining to Holbrooke what had happened. As you know, Holbrooke was a master of self-dramatization (*laughs*).

After hearing our story, Holbrooke said, “Oh, yes, I remember from my last trip to Taipei when the journalists mobbed me and my wife. I understand how you feel.” He did not understand. I was at both events. The “mobbing of his wife” – that happened when Holbrooke came to Taipei accompanying a delegation of eight congressmen. Despite our advice to the contrary Holbrooke insisted that he would give no arrival statement at the airport. And so as he was walking off the plane, the journalists (maybe 10 or 15 of them) were out on the tarmac. They ran up and tried to get Holbrooke to say something. In doing so, they accidentally pushed his new bride. Became a big, big issue (*laughs*). At any rate, Holbrooke thought that there was comparability between our demonstration and what happened to him. There wasn’t.

*Q: So you’ve gone through the demonstration, you’re part of the control room then at the hotel. What shift did you have? How was it organized?*

NEIGHBORS: Pat and I just showed up because we didn’t know where else to go. We didn’t really have an assignment. We had been in the ill-fated motorcade and just wanted to go somewhere safe. So we were there and we were just watching things going on. PAO Neil Donnelly was there, too. The section chiefs of course were there: the political officer, the econ officer, defense attaché, and the RSO, John McPoland. Bill Brown was the DCM by that point, so he was in charge. He would eventually be the one who took over when Ambassador Leonard Unger left on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Q: Let’s see. Were you there then for the entire Christopher visit?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, in fact I have a photo of Pat Corcoran and me with Christopher. The second day our assignment was to make sure that Warren Christopher got from the elevator at the Grand Hotel into the meeting he was having with Fred Chin without being interfered with by the press (*laughs*). Now before he joined the Foreign Service, Pat Corcoran had been a voluntary usher at the Metropolitan Opera. So he (*laughs*) showed me how to extend my arms as I walked rapidly so that it signaled people out of the way while still being polite. The photo shows Pat and me escorting Warren Christopher with our arms held out from our sides, striding purposefully. Christopher managed to get into the meeting without injury (*laughs*). That was our Rosencrantz and Guildenstern moment, serving “to swell a progress.” (*laughs*).

I wasn’t in Taipei long. Went back to Kaohsiung after two days because my wife was there by herself with the kids, and the situation there was not stable. The day after Christopher’s arrival, the landlord of the USIS library building in Kaohsiung, a Chinese owner, pasted up a sign on the front of the library, reading, “This building is owned by a patriotic Chinese. Do not damage it. If you want to protest against the U.S., go to Lloyd Neighbors’ house at 100 Hsintien Road” (*laughs*). Fortunately, by this time the message had gotten through from the leadership in Taipei that “OK, we’ve made our point. We should not give the Americans any more trouble.” The police took down the sign right away.

*Q: So the Carter administration made its announcement (December 15), the Christopher party came out, and the demonstration took place. Did you get any sense from any Chinese sources, you know, that the Chinese government had set this up? Did they admit as much?*

NEIGHBORS: I don’t know if anyone ever said that directly to me, but it just seemed fairly clear. I didn’t hear anyone loudly saying, “Oh, no, this absolutely couldn’t be true.”

*Q: When you returned to Kaohsiung and you were talking to people down there, particularly those that might have been Dangwai activists -- did they have any particular reaction?*

NEIGHBORS: The interesting part of this whole experience was that except for being in that demonstration and except for the landlord who put up the sign, I had no bad experiences when I was in southern Taiwan. People were still gracious, and no one personally said anything bad to me. Many of our contacts were upset, naturally. I suspect, however, that some of the Dangwai and the Taiwan Independence activists weren’t that unhappy about the U.S. decision to begin with. But I never heard anyone say that either.

Once I got back to Kaohsiung, things were not really normal, but as I said, I didn’t really have any negative experiences in dealing with our contacts. My position in Kaohsiung did, however, become unsettled from a bureaucratic point of view. The role of director of the American center in Kaohsiung became part of the negotiations over how the U.S. would set up the American Institute in Taiwan as an unofficial substitute for the embassy. About every two weeks or so I’d get called up and told, “Come to Taipei right away. We

have to talk to you about something.” And I’d go up there and they’d say, “Well, in our negotiations with the Taiwanese, we say we’re starting to withdraw people right away, and you’re going to be one of the ones who’s going to be withdrawn. We just wanted you to know that.” And then the Taiwans would back down a little bit, and I wouldn’t have to leave. And in the end I wound up departing in April, which was somewhat earlier, about a month or two earlier than I would have normally left. But after two or three months they replaced me. Pat Corcoran took my place.

*Q: Once normalization was accomplished on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1979, as you say, there was a lot of uncertainty as to the status of everybody stationed in Taiwan. And I think in fact a group came out from personnel and tried to explain to you all what your options were. Did you want to stay under the new AIT (American Institute in Taiwan) or terminate early?*

NEIGHBORS: That was one of the reasons why I was called to Taipei, because HR couldn’t discuss this issue over the phone. Finally I was told that I should leave two months early because our negotiators needed to make a point: “If you (the Taiwans) don’t agree with our plans for AIT, we’ll just pull our people out.” So, I left. But by this time we had already been changed over to the AIT financial system. We had to write a letter saying we were resigning from the Foreign Service and were reemployed with the American Institute in Taiwan. This changed the way we were paid. And that meant problems. I discovered after I had been on home leave for two months, they had changed the way I was being paid by not paying me.

I learned this when I was in Oklahoma visiting my parents. I got a notice from the bank that a check had bounced (*laughs*). In those days you couldn’t check your balance easily, and I just assumed I was continuing to get paid. But, I had missed like three or four pay periods. In those days of post-graduate school penury, I had a little extra money in the bank (*laughs*), but not enough to go for two months without a salary. That got corrected eventually. Those kinds of things happen.

The whole incident with Warren Christopher actually has an interesting follow-up to it. Twenty years later, in 1998, I was in Taipei again serving as PAO at AIT Taipei. Jimmy Carter, by this time long retired, came to Taiwan. It was his only visit there. He was helping build a house for Habitat for Humanities in the Philippines. He also wanted to come to Taipei and give a talk about philanthropy. He believes that as a country gets wealthier, the poor left behind must be taken care of. He thought Taiwan should be doing more to participate in philanthropic activities. Though he wanted to talk about charity, Carter knew that despite the passing years he was still a *bête noire* to the majority of Taiwan citizens. If he gave a press conference, someone was sure to ask, “Why did you betray us in 1979?”

So President Carter came, along with Rosalynn and one of his sons, as well as a small group of participants in the Habitat for Humanities event. Five or six of us from AIT got to have breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Carter, and I got to tell him the story about what happened when Warren Christopher came and how I got surrounded by those screaming

students. When I finished telling him the story, he waved over to Rosalynn and said, “Rosalynn! Come over here. This man was in the greeting committee for Warren Christopher.”

In 2009, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of normalization, I wrote a short article in the Journal of Modern China on what had happened in Taiwan. I titled it, “The Greeting Committee for Warren Christopher.”

President Carter was remarkable. He was giving a press conference during his brief stay in Taipei, so we prepped him for it. He remembered everything we told him, getting his answers – even on complicated military issues -- exactly right. He acknowledged that people in Taiwan still held a grudge against him. Despite that, he said that his decision to recognize the PRC had been the right thing to do. It had secured peace in the region for the last 30 years. And Taiwan had benefited greatly from this. Despite not being recognized officially, Taiwan’s democracy had developed substantially and the island had become a thriving entity, with a real role in East Asia. President Carter made a forceful case. Not everybody was convinced, but his speech and press conference were a great way to summarize the American experience with normalization.

*Q: So your departure from Kaohsiung was part of the negotiations.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, I think I left only a couple of months before my scheduled departure.

*Q: Now, USIS, like the embassy – as you said -- uses a lot of locally hired people to help out. That I assume helps your connections with the community there. They’re knowledgeable, college-educated.*

NEIGHBORS: To do my job in Kaohsiung and Tainan would have been impossible without the local employees. I was one person and I had 20 FSNs working for me. They ran two American Center libraries and provided me with an introduction to the leaders of southern Taiwan. They were the memory for the organization. I leaned on them. Remember, I was still a callow youth, little experience. Couldn’t possibly have done the job without them. Of course, if you have 20 FSNs, Foreign Service Nationals, a few of them may not be great, they may have stayed on longer than they should have (*laughs*). But, the majority of them were very capable and good people who worked hard. I’m sure there were local employees who spied on us, both in Taipei and Kaohsiung, even though Taiwan was a close ally of ours. At least one of our FSNs in Taipei had a nervous breakdown because he was under pressure from the intelligence services in Taiwan to provide them with information about our activities.

*Q: Now, you’re a one-man post down there. Do you get to pick the kinds of programs that are coming in? You talked about the Frankenthaler paintings and what not.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, most of the programs came through Taipei. But they were pretty good about offering cultural programs to us, keeping in mind our limited ability to be

able to handle large events. Some were too big to do. But yes, dance troupes came south. We had exhibitions, concerts, speakers.

When I think of American artists performing in Kaohsiung, I remember best of all Eudice Shapiro. In 1978 she was in her early sixties, a silver-haired dynamo. She had been a child prodigy. Started to play the violin at the age of five, performed regularly with symphony orchestras at the age of 12. She attended the Curtis Institute, studying violin with the renowned teacher, Efrem Zimbalist. She was a close friend of Igor Stravinsky, and served as concertmaster of the Paramount Studios Orchestra in the 1940s, the only woman to hold such a position.

Well, the notion that such an artist would tour for USIA was remarkable. Payments were minimal, but the prestige of these tours was significant. So she accepted and wound up playing to delighted students and faculty at the Pingtung Normal College in rural Taiwan. She was a real trouper, playing in a vast, echoing gymnasium, covered in sweat on a humid summer night. And she played her Guarnerius violin, even in those days probably worth \$300,000. (Years before she owned and played a Stradivarius. One night she heard the Guarnerius and traded her Strad for it on the spot.) Where else could I get an experience like that? How could you ask for a better job than being a Foreign Service officer?

*Q: Lloyd, we had just finished up your assignment in Kaohsiung in the year 1979 in which diplomatic relations had changed and everybody in Taiwan was in suddenly an uncertain situation. How did you go about getting your next assignment in Zagreb? And since it's on the other side of the world, what made you think of that?*

NEIGHBORS: That assignment was made before we had any inkling about normalization. My assignment in Kaohsiung was for two years. So I was due to come out of there in the summer of 1979. I wound up leaving a couple of months early because Washington decided they were going to downsize the new American Institute in Taiwan.

As for the new assignment, I had decided long before I joined the Foreign Service, that Yugoslavia sounded like a fascinating place. In particular, I wanted to visit Dubrovnik. Besides, one of my USIA junior officer classmates, Dave Hamill, had served in Zagreb. He enjoyed his assignment there and told me so. That's why I applied for the position of American Center director.

*Q: Now, the first stop on your assignment to Zagreb was at FSI in Serbo-Croatian language studies. And you start in about September 1979. You've had all this Chinese. Was making this transition to the Serbo-Croatian hard? Interesting?*

NEIGHBORS: I love studying languages. And one of the strange things about Chinese -- perhaps because it is not an Indo-European language -- is that it never has interfered with any of my other languages. That's not the case, for example, with my Portuguese and Serbo-Croatian. Although these two languages are not closely connected with each other, they mingle and mangle in my mind. I remember years after I'd been to Croatia and then

to Brazil, and I hadn't spoken either language for a long time, and someone asked me if I spoke Portuguese. I tried to dredge up a response. Now a sentence in Brazilian Portuguese has a distinctive lilt to it, an unmistakable shape and intonation. I replied to the question with a perfect Brazilian intonation, "Vec dugo nissam govorio." The intonation was spot on, but, unfortunately, the words were all Serbo-Croatian. They meant, "I haven't spoken it (Portuguese) for a long time." (*laughs*). That kind of thing happened all the time with these two languages. But because Chinese is a tonal language and it's completely different from Indo-European languages or romance languages, Germanic languages, it never interferes in my mind. Chinese words don't pop up all of a sudden when I try to speak another foreign tongue -- perhaps because my Chinese is much more deeply imbedded than the other two languages.

*Q: Was there any difference in the way that the staff at FSI taught Serbo-Croatian from the way you had been exposed to Chinese?*

NEIGHBORS: The Chinese I did at FSI in Taichung was only for five months, and I was already at an advanced level. We just took texts and read them and talked. I had one other person in my class. We did a lot of role playing and answering questions and talking to each other. So that experience was different from studying Serbo-Croatian from the beginning.

In the fall of 1979 when I began to study Serbo-Croatian at FSI, I learned some eternal truths about Yugoslav politics. I was assigned to Croatia, but many of my other colleagues were going to Serbia. I had teachers in the morning who were Croatian and then teachers in the afternoon who were Serbian. One of them, Otac Milošević, or Father Milošević, was an orthodox Serbian priest. I learned easily from both Croatian and Serbian teachers, because the languages are basically the same. There are a few grammatical and vocabulary differences. But Croats and Serbs insist that they are speaking completely different languages (*laughs*). Father Milošević would claim not to understand some of the Croatian words that we used in his class. He had to know (*laughs*) what they meant. But he wouldn't, wouldn't understand them (*laughs*). It was a good lesson in what Yugoslavia was all about.

From this early experience at FSI, I also learned something about the changing ways of the Foreign Service in dealing with officers with foreign spouses. One of my teachers at FSI was a Mrs. Hanrahan, a Serb. I've forgotten her maiden name. She taught at FSI for many years, and her husband had at one time been a Foreign Service Officer. But when he decided to marry Mrs. Hanrahan, he had to resign from the Foreign Service because his spouse-to-be was from a communist country -- a no-no in the 1960s.

When I joined USIA in 1975, I could not serve overseas until my wife became a U.S. citizen. She was born in Canton, China, but moved to Hong Kong at an early age -- about 7 months. She could have become a Hong Kong citizen, but she decided not to take that offer -- she was not a fan of the British colonial system.



As a result Mary traveled on a certificate of identity, which is issued by the United Nations for stateless persons. She came to the U.S. as my wife on an immigrant visa. By 1975 she hadn't lived in the United States long enough to be a citizen under normal circumstances. But, before we went to Taiwan, INS gave her expedited treatment, and she was sworn in as a citizen in 1975. Judge Gerhard Gesell of Watergate fame presided at the swearing-in ceremony here in Washington. He himself had been an immigrant, a naturalized citizen from Sweden. He was delighted to preside over such a ceremony.

By the time I got to Yugoslavia in the early 1980s, which is going ahead in our tale, the system had changed again. The second ambassador I served under there was David Anderson. His wife was a German citizen and had not relinquished her German citizenship. Yet he was allowed to serve in Belgrade. So even in a short time the rules had changed quite a bit for Foreign Service officers. Of course, Ambassador Anderson's wife was a West German citizen, which probably made it easier for State Department Security than if she had been from a communist country.

*Q: You were saying the Serbo-Croatian classes were larger than the short Chinese class you'd had at Taichung. How many people? Were they all Foreign Service?*

NEIGHBORS: They were all Foreign Service. My class was not too big. There were four of us who were assigned to Croatia, including my boss-to-be, Mike Nugent. Our class was reasonably small. We had about four, five different teachers, which exposed us to different accents, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, and some varieties of that.

*Q: Were the wives given an opportunity to pick up some language?*

NEIGHBORS: They weren't given an opportunity to take the whole class, but my wife did get some basic lessons -- a few hours a week. They had to learn to be able to do shopping and say a few things. But it wasn't adequate, particularly since there were not many English speakers in Zagreb at that time (*laughs*).

*Q: Now, while you're in language training, President Tito died on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1980. Did that ripple through the language lessons and people talk about that and what might be coming out of that?*

NEIGHBORS: It was indeed a big event. Tito had been gravely ill for a long time, had been going and having special sheep-gland injections and treatments from Swiss doctors (*laughs*). But sheep glands can only do so much. He died just before we finished with FSI. And that was the beginning of the end for Yugoslavia.

According to legend, the only two people who ever admitted to being Yugoslav were Tito and one of his most severe critics, Milovan Djilas. Certainly, the three years I was in-country, I never met a Yugoslav. They were Croatian or Serbian or Herzegovinian. The divisions were there all the time. Only Tito's charisma kept things together -- along with a judiciously used iron fist. Tito didn't compare to those masters of mayhem, cruelty, and deceit, Mao and Stalin, but he could be severe on occasion.

*Q: What did you think of the Serbo-Croatian language training and the way they conducted it? Was it sufficient for what you were about to experience?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it was adequate. As always happens in these cases, some teachers were better than others. One of our teachers, I don't even remember his name now, seemed convinced that no foreigner could ever really learn Serbo-Croatian. So he spent most of his time telling you about Serbia in English. Frustrating. I didn't like it. But that happens. And then you have other teachers who were outstanding. Mrs. Hanrahan was probably the best, although I didn't have her as often as I would have liked.

*Q: Now, you took up your assignment to Zagreb in August 1980. It's a consulate. How did you pick Zagreb? Was it on a list? How were they doing assignments those days?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, in those days they didn't have a public list that was broadcast for everyone to see, at least as far as I remember. But USIA was a fairly small organization. You worked with your career consular to see what possible posts were open. My friend Dave Hamill had gone to Zagreb, and told me it was an excellent assignment. I knew I would spend a lot of my career in China, but wanted to broaden my experience and go somewhere else that would be interesting. And as it turned out, though it was a fairly quiet post, Zagreb was the most fascinating place we lived at in the Foreign Service. Not always easy, but it was a special place.

*Q: Let's get into that. How many consulates were in Yugoslavia at the time that you were there?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, you had the embassy in Belgrade, the capital. You had a USIS office in Ljubljana in Slovenia. Then you had a Consulate General in Zagreb in Croatia. And you had USIS Titograd, which is now called Podgorica, and finally, USIS Skopje, in Macedonia. If I remember right, Ambassador Eagleburger won the hearts of Yugoslavs during his earlier assignment as political officer in Belgrade. In the aftermath of a tremendous earthquake in Skopje, Macedonia, he helped organize the American relief efforts. Earned the sobriquet, Lawrence of Macedonia.

*Q: Just to orient us. The USIS program in Yugoslavia starts at the embassy. Who was the PAO?*

NEIGHBORS: Ray Benson, along with some eight or nine other American officers (Ed: Benson has been interviewed by ADST).

*Q: And then there's officers at the consulates.*

NEIGHBORS: Actually Ljubljana, Skopje, and Titograd were not consulates. They were USIS branch public affairs officers, one-person posts. USIS Zagreb was a two-person press and cultural operation, part of the consulate general. We had a BPAO, Mike Nugent, and then me, Assistant BPAO, aka American center director. Being an American center



director was an anomalous position; that is, the Yugoslavs decided that center directors were journalists, and therefore could not enter the country on a diplomatic visa or diplomatic passport. So although I carried a diplomatic passport, I came into Yugoslavia on my red official passport with an official visa. My family and I were not treated as diplomats.

*Q: Would that compromise your diplomatic protection?*

NEIGHBORS: That was a question we frequently thought -- no worried -- about (*laughs*). It might have caused problems in Yugoslavia. And it did have repercussions (*laughs*) once when I took my family, including my mother and father, on a trip to Hungary. At that time the public affairs officer in Budapest was George Forner. My wife Mary and I had visited Budapest once before and stayed with the Forners in the gorgeous PAO house. But when we came this time we had a lot more people so there wasn't enough room chez Forner. But there was an apartment in the American embassy, an apartment where Cardinal Mindszenty, the Hungarian dissident, had been cloistered for many years to protect him from arrest.

And so they had an apartment in the embassy, and we were allowed to stay there for several nights. We had a great time in Budapest. But on the eve of our departure, I was reading The Herald Tribune, which was several days old by then. Just by chance I looked at this letter to the editor. The letter was written by an American who recently visited Hungary with his wife and son, staying at the home of relatives. Unfortunately, he didn't know that all overnight visitors to Hungary had to register with the police. So, this guy hadn't registered. Now he's on the train to get out of the country and with his four-month-old baby and his wife. They had to get back to Vienna to catch a charter flight to the U.S. At the border the police take him off the train and say, "You didn't register and you're in violation of our law and you have to go back to the place where you stayed and pay a fine and register and then you can leave the country." So, the guy misses his charter flight -- it was, of course, a non-refundable ticket.

Anyway, I just happened to read this letter. And suddenly it dawned on me. No one had registered our stay at the embassy.

That was late Saturday night and so Sunday morning I got up and I called the duty officer at the embassy, who was not helpful. He said I could go to the tobacconist's shop and ask for a form to fill out so I could register. He obviously wasn't going to help me get the form, so I asked him, "Well, since no one really speaks English and I don't speak Hungarian, can you at least tell me what the name of the form is in Hungarian?" And he wouldn't do that.

He said, "It's Sunday morning. I'm busy. Resting." Or something like that. Anyway, I then called up George Forner, the PAO, who immediately came down and helped us out -- cancelled a Sunday golf game to do so. We had to pay fines for all of the adults. The children were considered innocent of this crime (*laughs*). So we managed to register. But we certainly would have been kicked off the train and sent back to Budapest if I had not

accidentally read The Herald Tribune letter. The embassy hadn't told me about this requirement. They probably thought we were traveling on diplomatic passports, and thus didn't need to do so.

*Q: Let's talk about the USIA program in Yugoslavia. What kind of instruction or atmospherics did Ray Benson, the PAO, give you when you arrived? I assume you arrived in Belgrade first to get briefed.*

NEIGHBORS: Actually I didn't (*laughs*). In August 1980 my family and I went directly to Zagreb and quickly learned a valuable lesson about life in the Foreign Service. This was our third post, if you include my junior officer training assignment. My future boss, Mike Nugent, had studied Croatian with me in Washington, but he wasn't coming for another couple of weeks. Mike's predecessor, Jan Zehner, insisted that we had to have a one-week overlap to go over program details. To do this, I had to get to Zagreb 10 days earlier than I had planned. That meant curtailing home leave. But I figured, well, I need to learn something from this fellow, so I'll get there early.

As requested, I arrived in Zagreb on what turned out to be a very long weekend. We arrived on a Friday. The consulate was of course, closed on Saturday-Sunday, and Monday turned out to be a national holiday. So what about my colleague, Jan Zehner -- the fellow I was going to share valuable time with and learn about USIS Zagreb? Well, he met us at the airport and told me he was going off to the Dalmatian Coast on a weeklong holiday. That's why he needed me there to mind the shop while he was gone. So Jan bolted the scene. The consulate driver took us to a grocery store and then dropped us off at our apartment. And that was all the welcome we got (*laughs*) until Tuesday when I went to work.

*Q: How does one get from Washington to Zagreb?*

NEIGHBORS: We stopped in Paris for a couple of days. I remember that well.

*Q: So when did you finally see Ray? Because I would assume as the PAO in charge of the whole program, he would kind of be giving you your charge and tell you what he was looking for.*

NEIGHBORS: I finally met Ray Benson several weeks later, not long after Mike Nugent, the new BPAO, arrived. Ray came to Croatia with Walter Roberts, one of the founders of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Quite an iconic figure. He and Ray and I went to a conference in Karlovac on the history of Yugoslavia during and after World War II. I had a chance to talk to Ray then and find out what he was interested in. And Ray Benson, as you know, was a fascinating figure. He had served at least three times in Yugoslavia, including as BPAO Zagreb. He knew Zagreb well, particularly older, well-established leaders at the universities. He had also served in Belgrade on an earlier assignment and then come back as PAO.

Now, Ray was Russian by birth. He and his parents had immigrated to the U.S. in the 1920s, I think. After the communists gained power there, the father, who had been a communist activist, decided to go back. And so Ray and his mother and the father went back to mother Russia. You know the story better than I because you've read all of Ray's ADST oral history interviews, but I'll tell you what I remember. The family went back together, but Ray's mother couldn't stand it (*laughs*). Life was wretched. The father on the other hand decided to stay because he had an opportunity to rise as an official. And so Ray and his mother once again went back to the USA. Ray, as far as I know, never saw his father again.

I presume when Ray joined USIA, he tested as a near-native speaker of Russian, but I don't know that for certain. Despite this, for many years he could never be assigned to Russia as a diplomat because his father was an influential Soviet official. He was eventually allowed to go as PAO to Moscow once he got proof that his father had passed away.

Ray had a formidable intellect, was a forceful figure. I admired him, enjoyed working for him from a distance. Up close might have been a different experience. He could be quite acerbic if you made mistakes. Which happened sometimes. But he was an excellent boss. Had a profound understanding of what was going on in Yugoslavia.

*Q: Now, what kind of programs would USIA have in a place like Yugoslavia?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we had an American Center located right in the middle of the city, next door to the consulate general. The center faced a beautiful park, Zrinjevac, and occupied the ground floor on a street corner, with two sets of huge picture-windows running at right angles to one another. We filled the windows with exhibits all the time, using topical posters sent from our USIA Vienna publishing house every month. Anybody that walked by could see them. We had an excellent library as well.

I mentioned earlier that I came to Zagreb on an official visa, not a diplomatic visa. The American Center was considered to be a propaganda arm of the U.S. government, thus it functioned as a "press" operation. The American Center and our consulate general were in the same building, but we were not allowed to consider the Center as part of our diplomatic operation. We had to seal up the inside doors between the library and the rest of the consulate. We did have a secret door between the two operations down in the bowels of the basement, but even that was locked most of the time.

This arrangement caused quite a stir just before I arrived. At that time the PAO in Belgrade was Terry Catherman, a distinguished officer with lots of experience in Eastern Europe. Terry was a formal man, prone, I'm told, to semi-towering rages. He was visiting Zagreb to attend a major reception at the American Center. He needed to make some long distance telephone calls before he came to the reception. So he went up to the BPAO's office. To get there he had to go outside the American center, walk around the corner, and go in through the main door of the consulate. He went upstairs to the USIS office, and was absorbed in his calls, not realizing that when 6:00 p.m. came, the doors would be

locked, and they could not be opened from the inside without a key, and there was no one at the front door. We had no Marine guards. There was no one else in the building.

After a while the mercurial Terry Catherman came down the stairs and discovered he was locked into the building. He desperately kept calling the American Center. The janitorial staff in the library would answer the phone, listen for a moment, and then hang up, saying, "There's some crazy guy talking about being locked in the building or some such thing. I don't know what he's talking about."

This story was especially delicious to me. That's because the USIS officer in charge that day was Jan Zehner, the fellow who made me curtail my home leave so he could go off to Dalmatia. Jan knew Terry had gone up to make the calls, but he forgot about it, didn't realize that Terry hadn't come down for the first part of the party (*laughs*). And so Terry was calling and calling and nobody answered. And then finally the branch PAO slapped his forehead, "Oh, no! Terry's next door." Someone went and rescued him. But he had been locked in a long time. That was just one occasion when the strange relationship between the consulate and the non-official American center wreaked havoc.

One of our most effective public diplomacy tools in Yugoslavia was the promotion of English teaching. Over the years, English teaching went in and out of popularity with the USIA public diplomacy poobahs back in Washington. But I always loved it. We had an active program throughout Yugoslavia. We didn't just teach English. We did outreach work. We provided speakers in the field who would come to Yugoslavia and offer expert training to teachers of English. The Croats, knowing they spoke a language of little use in the wide world, wanted their young people to learn English. As a result they had many outstanding training programs for teachers of English throughout the country. Our activities fit well into that training mode.

Our success was due in great part to the extraordinary work of one Belgrade FSN, Gordana Krstic. She was a local employee, but in truth more than filled the role of an American officer, acting as chief of our English teaching program throughout the country. Gordana cut a flamboyant figure. At times living in Yugoslavia, I felt there must be a law that required everyone to smoke. Gordana did her utmost to fulfill the strictures of that law. When I went on trips with her, we'd travel around Croatia, attending all these different conferences, bringing along guest speakers with us. And Gordana had to smoke continuously, and she had to have a coffee every hour. So we'd stop and have a little kava with cigarettes, and she'd be gesticulating and talking dramatically, straight out of a Bette Davis film. She was just dynamite. Recruited wonderful speakers.

And it's my belief that through the teaching of English you teach American culture and values, and it's sort of a Trojan horse to sneak in all of these other sensitive issues that we want to talk about. If, as a U.S. diplomat, I wanted to go out to school to talk about democracy and human rights, I couldn't get permission. But, if we programmed someone to talk about American history through English language teaching, that would be okay.

Gordana Krstic, as I said, was a fascinating individual. After I left Croatia, she decided in her spare time to write a novel based on her mother's life growing up in the Jewish ghetto in Sarajevo. Her mother was a native speaker of Ladino, an archaic form of Spanish that the Sephardic Jews brought with them when they were expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gordana wrote a novel about her mother's life growing up in Sarajevo ghetto, and it became a bestseller. She was already well known throughout Yugoslavia because of her itinerant life as a promoter of English teaching. But, after publication of this novel, she became famous.

*Q: Now, the Speakers Program that we're talking about, these are people coming out of the States that are being offered to the post and the post says yes, we'll take one of these and one of those and so forth?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it's not quite done that way now. But back in the day with USIA, we had to write a Country Plan every year, a detailed plan based on themes that had been sent out from Washington. We would say this is how we're going to cover these themes and we're going to do it through, for example, International Visitors grants in these areas: journalism and government, and business. And we're going to have a certain number of speakers that we want Washington to recruit for us. They should be in these fields, and this is what we want. We would send in our requests via the Country Plan at the beginning of the year saying we wanted, for example, nine speakers in these various fields, and the P Bureau, Program Bureau, would recruit for us. They usually would try to get the speakers to go to several countries per trip. That saved money.

So our American speakers would come to Yugoslavia for one or two weeks, traveling to the different posts. Every year we had particular success with specialists in English language teaching. Gordana Krstic, our FSN whiz, arranged for these specialists to attend regional conferences as the keynote speakers.

Now when you think of English language teachers and writers, maybe you think BORING. But in fact, these ELT (English Language Teaching) specialists have discovered that in order to get students interested, they have to be dynamic. In general I discovered them to be much better than our "serious" academic scholars, who wrote very good papers but didn't know how to give a speech. I remember one of our speakers, Jean Bodman, who talked about her own two books written for English-learning immigrants living in New York City. The first book she titled No Hot Water Tonight and the second, No Cold Water, Either. They contained dialogues, vignettes about life in New York City as an immigrant. And in one vignette you have a policeman knocking on your door asking about your neighbor, and then in another one your apartment has no hot water, so how do you ask for help. The dialogues were clever and funny, as was Jean Bodman herself. Speakers like this made a great impression on our audiences.

I discovered another important thing about Yugoslavia, something that is not true in most parts of the world anymore. The Yugoslavs were really big on poetry contests and poetry readings. They have an important oral tradition -- particularly the Serbs -- of storytelling through Homeric-style epic poems. And so we had a lot of interesting poets coming

through as part of the American Speaker Program. One of these was Robert Hass, who later on became poet laureate of the United States. He was a brilliant speaker. I particularly loved the title of one of his poems: “Of the Afterlife, the Indians of Northern California Knew but Little.”

Hass told us the story behind this title. It seems he was reading an anthropological journal about California (*laughs*) and saw that strange phrase. He thought, “That’s really weird. I have to use it.” So he wrote a poem based on that title.

Haas also talked at length about another of his poems that dealt with the Vietnam War. The poem tells the story of when Hubert Humphrey as Vice President came to visit his alma mater, the University of Minnesota where Robert Hass was teaching. Now this was a time when many of the people meeting the Vice President on campus were heatedly opposed to the Vietnam War. So Humphrey comes to this meeting, and he’s a congenial sort, always willing to talk to his opponents. He’s enjoying himself, until he goes up to shake this one professor’s hand, and the professor turns his back on Humphrey, refuses to shake his hand. And Humphrey starts to cry (*laughs*). Yes. And Hass wrote a poem about this experience. Of course, down deep, the poem was about the Vietnam War and what we thought about it – an extraordinary work being read by an extraordinary poet. Where else but as a PD (Public Diplomacy) officer could I have had such experiences, met such amazing talents.

*Q: So now, in Zagreb, what’s the full umbrella of USIA programs and the audiences that are being exposed to our exhortations?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we did a lot with the universities there, in particular Zagreb University, which was the preeminent university in Croatia. We dealt for the most part with the English department, also the political science faculty. We would bring speakers there and meet with them frequently and seek their recommendations of young scholars who might go to the United States on International Visitors grants.

We also dealt frequently with the government. We provided them with information about U.S. policy. In those days we received a compilation of news from USIA through the so-called Wireless File. It was sent by radio, that is, by wireless. We would select key articles about U.S. policy, make copies and send them out to contacts that we wanted to influence. I remember at one point talking to a key contact, a professor, and he said, “You know what I find compelling about the way that your American Center works? The information -- sometimes it disagrees with your government position. And because of that, I read everything you send me.” He was a specialist in Law of the Sea, which is one of those extremely important, albeit boring, topics. William Safire used to call them MEGO topics, meaning “My Eyes Glaze Over (*laughs*).”

*Q: Did you try and get the local faculty to come to the Center for lectures?*



NEIGHBORS: Usually we would do lectures at the university. We also organized conferences and lectures at the two prominent language-teaching centers. We participated in regional ELT conferences, as I indicated earlier.

From the beginning in Zagreb I decided to continue my own efforts as a speaker on American history, culture, and literature. As Gordana Krstic explained to me, English teachers attending regional conferences were not simply looking for advice on teaching. They wanted enrichment materials about American culture. So I worked up a series of lectures on contemporary American fiction. These lectures, delivered to an audience of 100 teachers, covered such writers as Saul Bellow, Walker Percy, Bernard Malamud and others.

During my three years in Zagreb, I also had several opportunities to deliver my patented speech on the history of American folk music. A journalist who worked at Radio Zagreb heard the lecture and asked if I would be willing to participate in a series of English-language on-air chats devoted to American music: jazz, rock-and-roll, folk. I agreed to do it. We did four one-hour programs on American music. Then we branched out, taping two more programs on American history, and an additional two on the differences between British and American English. Though these programs were all in English, I also did one live interview in Croatian, discussing the activities of the American Center. I became a minor radio celebrity in Zagreb – quite a feat in a country where the government still controlled all radio broadcasts and rarely welcomed U.S. government interlocutors.

*Q: Now, Zagreb's a fairly important post. Did the Germans, French, British have similar posts in town, or were you the only game in town?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, there were others: British Council, French, Alliance Française, the Goethe Institute. All were reasonably active. The North Koreans even had a mission there. Of course, they were not funded. They sold drugs to make money in order to survive. At least that's the story. They didn't speak any language but Korean, so who knows why they were there (*laughs*).

*Q: You spoke about the International Visitor Program. Could you describe that -- how it's run and the categories?*

NEIGHBORS: Sure. The International Visitors Program (IVP) is the best thing that old USIA ever did. That's still true for the modern State Department. ECA, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, runs the program now. The theory behind the program is this: if young foreign leaders have a chance to go to the United States, even for a short time, and be exposed to American culture and people, they will be more sympathetic to us. Even if they won't always agree with our policies in the future, they may be predisposed to listen to our arguments. So, basically what we try to do is to pick upcoming younger individuals, generally below the age of 40, sometimes a little older. For the most part we pick those who have never been to the United States. Back in the

1980s grantees would visit the U.S. for a month. Now I think the program's been reduced to three weeks.

The USG funds the IVP, but does not implement the program. Instead we give grants to various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Meridian House in Washington, for instance. And these private NGOs then do the programming. They have experience. They've organized these visits thousands and thousands of times. They know just who to call to set up programs for dynamic young visitors from all over the world.

The main role for the embassy is to select the grantees. At the beginning of the year Washington establishes its focus for the program: economics, international relations, and journalism, English teaching, academia, creative writing, and so forth. The embassy and the consulates then nominate candidates for each grant, writing up short descriptions, making the case for their selections. Then the DCM --with USIS organizational support -- chairs a selection committee meeting in Belgrade where the spoils are divided. In this meeting we try to distribute the grants fairly among posts. In those years mission Yugoslavia had about 45-50 grants each year, a big number for a small country.

After a grantee is approved in Washington, the nominating officer tells him/her the news and explains how the program works. During the one-month you can go to maybe six American cities. The only requirement is that you start your visit in Washington D.C. But then we can pick other cities that cater to your interests. And you will be received in these countries by a nationwide organization -- a group of volunteers. The International Visitors Program has volunteers all over the U.S. who enjoy meeting foreign visitors and enjoy programming them and showing them what's going on. If you're a journalist, you may go to a newspaper in Minneapolis that is noted for doing investigative journalism. And they'll explain to you what investigative reporting is all about. I remember -- skipping ahead to my next assignment in Hong Kong --we had a grantee who was doing investigative journalism in Hong Kong. He explained to the editor of *The Minneapolis Star*, "My boss in Hong Kong might give me six hours to do an investigative report. *The Minneapolis Star* was shocked, saying, "Well, we assign people to do six-month investigations. "Oh no, we don't have that much time in Hong Kong."

*Q: Would these programs be individual, or would that individual join a group of journalists?*

NEIGHBORS: There are two different kinds of programs. We have group projects and individual grants. Some cater just to an individual. Nowadays fewer and fewer are done that way because it's much cheaper to do group projects. There are also two kinds of group programs. One is single country. For instance, you may have a group of educational reformers in China at the university level that come from 10 different provinces or cities in China. They will go together as a group. The advantage of that is they all speak Chinese and they have simultaneous interpreters traveling with them at all times. The other group projects are multinational. And for those, we require that the travelers speak English well, well enough to participate in programs conducted entirely in

English. This type of program gives grantees the chance to learn something about the U.S., but also to meet people from other countries.

*Q: While you were assigned to Croatia, did anybody come back from one of these programs and say, "Wow, I was very impressed"?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, one of my favorite IV grantees was a fellow named Drazen Vrdoljak, a prominent radio announcer and critic. He hosted programs on music and wrote several highly popular books on the history of rock music and rock-and-roll. I nominated him for the grant and he was selected. Drazen was a remarkable fellow, an excellent writer with a captivating radio personality. He went on the grant, traveled all over the U.S., and came back with like 300 vinyl albums – LP records-- all gifts from his IVP hosts. I think his favorite place was Houston, where he met country-western singer Mickey Gilley and visited Gilley's Club. Now Gilley's Club was an iconic watering hole during the 1980s. It was the site of the film Urban Cowboy, with John Travolta and Debra Winger trying to ride a mechanical bull.

As a result of his visit to the U.S., Drazen got the idea that he was going to found a bluegrass band, or country-western band when he came back. And that's just what he did. He called it the Plava Trava Zaborava, which I would translate as "Bluegrass Oblivion." They became famous in Zagreb! I remember going to one of their concerts in the old town in Zagreb. The halls were packed -- *SRO*. You could hardly move in there. And everybody was smoking of course. And since it was winter, you're not allowed to open a window.

Every country has its own notions of what are the major causes of ailments. The French of course think that all troubles stem from the liver. The Croats have this incredible fear of drafts, "propuh" they call it. Open a window in winter, and you'll die. At one time I was traveling on a bus in the middle of the summer near Dubrovnik and it was about 95 degrees inside this bus. And there's this little old lady sitting with a big long black robe on and a headscarf, and I tried to open the window -- there were people throwing up it was so hot. I tried to open up the window. And this lady said, "Propuh! I'll die!" (*laughs*). And so we couldn't open the window.

So back to Blue Grass. We had this concert going on, and it's just so hot and so packed, but it was a great concert. Plava Trava made a record as a country-western band. It was pretty cool actually. That was one of the grantees we invited.

We had another journalist, Hido Bishchevic, a Muslim journalist. In my report to Washington I wrote this about him:

"Imagine, if you will, a blue-eyed Yugoslav Muslim agnostic. Put him in a black, Southern Baptist Sunday school in Nashville, Tennessee. Ask him to read the scripture lesson for the day. That's the sort of experience that made Hido Bishchevic's IV trip to the States more than just a series of professional meetings. As Bishchevic himself put it, 'The organization of the program was brilliant. Everything was just as I wanted it.'"

As part of our plan, Bishchevic went to the U.S. to see how other religions, not only Islam, but how other religions worked in the U.S. He had the chance to interview Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco and discuss U.S. policy toward the Middle East. While attending a conference in San Francisco he also had serendipitous meetings with the Crown Prince of Jordan (now King Abdullah) and with CIA Director William Casey. As a result of the trip did a series of entertaining articles for *Vjesnik* magazine, a popular weekly, on American popular culture and on local elections. All in all, a highly successful program.

*Q: Now, staying in Zagreb for a while, you're attached to the consulate. So who's the consul general and how did the diplomatic side of the post function?*

NEIGHBORS: The consul general (CG) was Olaf Grobel, who had a good deal of experience in Eastern Europe. I forget where else he had served, but I think he had been in Yugoslavia before and spoke good Croatian. Also Polish. Fairly formal, aloof kind of person, but a decent sort. He did a nice job there. As American Center director I was divorced from the political machinations of the front office. I would invite the CG for activities at the Center, and he might speak there sometimes, but basically we didn't do much with him. Mike Nugent, the BPAO, dealt with Grobel more than I did.

*Q: Now, this, as we said, this was a time that Tito had died and the atmospherics in Yugoslavia were changing a little bit. Did that seem to impact your programs? I mean in terms of access or people's willingness to be IV (International Visitor) grantees?*

NEIGHBORS: Actually, we had a fairly good relationship with the Croatian authorities, and if you compare it, say, with other places I've worked, we didn't have too many problems. Unlike in China, we had ready access to cultural and educational organizations – no trouble getting permission for contacts to go on IV trips.

Some of the atmospherics, however -- you could notice the changes. Certainly, I didn't foresee the dramatic rift that split the country in the late 1980s, but from the very beginning I could see the mounting ethnic tensions. As I said earlier, only Tito and Djilas admitted to being Yugoslavian. Everybody else was a Croat or a Macedonian or a Serb.

My wife and I discovered in Zagreb the pleasures of grand opera. Zagreb is a lovely, mid-sized town, with a strong Viennese influence. In those days it was a lot grimmer than Vienna, but it had some beautiful, Austro-Hungarian-style buildings, and the opera house was a gem. You could go there and see an opera for five dollars. The venue did not attract giant stars, but some very good international singers would perform. On one occasion we saw a performance of La Bohème in which the leads sang in Italian. But the chorus sang in Croatian.

Croatia's most famous opera was called Nikola Šubić Zrinski, the eponymous tale of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Croatian hero. I'm trying to remember who wrote it. Oh, yes, the composer was named Lisinski. He flourished in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The opera is Verdi-esque in

style and in the way it uses the theme of nationalism. *Zrinski* had been banned from the Croatian theater after Yugoslavia became a country, because its hero was a Croatian-Hungarian *ban*, like a duke or something – a nobleman.

Ban Zrinski became famous for defending Hungary and Croatia against the Ottomans, who came very close to taking over Vienna. He fought an epic battle against the Ottomans at the town of Szeged, which is now in Hungary. In the course of the battle, several thousand Croats under Ban Zrinski were defeated and all killed. But they held off the Ottomans long enough for Vienna to prepare its defenses. This heroic defeat kept the Ottomans from moving out of Serbia and taking over Croatia and Hungary and Vienna. And so Zrinski was a Hungarian and a Croatian hero.

As so often is the case in the Balkans, the heroes aren't those who win, but those who lose heroically. The Serbs, for instance, commemorate the battle of Kosovo Polje, the Field of Kosovo, where they were ignominiously defeated (*laughs*) by the Ottomans in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

So the composer Lisinski wrote this tragic opera about the heroic sacrifice of the Croatian warriors. – Lisinski seems to forget the Hungarian role in all this. In the opera's climactic scene the Croatian warriors come on stage waving a giant, red-and-white checkered Croatian flag, which had been banned in Yugoslavia during Tito's time. And the actors wave the flag wildly, and everybody in the audience jumps up like they're singing the Hallelujah Chorus. The final scene is thrilling. Maybe not great opera, but it's pretty good, and it does have echoes of Verdi.

For years Zrinski had been banned from the Yugoslav stage. But now here it was at the Zagreb opera house, and Mary and I were there, cheering along with the enthusiastic crowds. Everybody was *so* excited, jumping up and down and yelling, and the actors were waving this big Croatian flag. So you could see right there, change was coming. Croatian nationalism had reared its head.

*Q: One of the programs in USIA's quiver is the Fulbright. How did it work in Croatia?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it was part of our public diplomacy array of weapons. I don't remember how many American Fulbrighters we had each year, but we did have a few professors teaching at local universities. I always remember one of my favorite scholars was a fellow teaching law at the University of Zagreb. While on the Fulbright Program, he became close friends with a local Croat. And one day after they'd been friends for six months or so, this friend came to the Fulbrighter and said, "You should be careful what you're saying on the telephone. I think your phone has been tapped."

"How do you know that?" he asked.

And the friend said, "Well, you see, I -- maybe I shouldn't tell you this -- but my mother works for the intelligence services and she's a linguist actually, and one of her jobs is to listen to tapes of secretly recorded telephone conversations. And sometimes in order for

me to practice my English, she brings the tapes home and lets me listen. And I was listening and I suddenly heard your voice! So you should be careful.”

Despite these minor annoyances, the Fulbright program was an excellent opportunity for a two-way exchange of scholars between the U.S. and Yugoslavia.

*Q: Well, that was my point. It's for scholars, right? And U.S. scholars coming in and local scholars going to the U.S.?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, right, right. It depends on the country, but usually you have a bi-national commission. Scholars and officials from both countries are on the Fulbright Board, which was based in Belgrade. The embassy and consulates have input into board decisions, but board members make the final decisions on how grants are allocated. For the U.S., usually the CAO sits on that board and has a good deal of influence. But once again, the board must be sensitive to the wishes of both countries. In some places, we don't have a bi-national commission, like China. But in Belgrade we did.

*Q: Now, you're saying in Zagreb there are two USIS officers, right, yourself, the American center director, and then the BPAO who was Mike Nugent? What were Mike's responsibilities, besides being your boss?*

NEIGHBORS: My responsibilities revolved around the American Center, so we were doing outreach programs and things like that. Mike dealt more with the press and our own superiors within the consulate general. So he was the director of all programs.

*Q: What would be the kind of interactions with the press that a place like Zagreb would have?*

NEIGHBORS: It was relatively limited. I did a daily media reaction report that kept Belgrade and Washington up-to-date on what was going on in the Croatian news. We didn't organize that many interviews, maybe every once in a while. But mainly we just kept in touch with important journalists, made friends with them. Then if some sensitive news issue did come up, we might be able to give them some information or refer them to people at the embassy who had a better answer. But all in all Zagreb was a quiet post.

*Q: Now, you were in Zagreb for about a three-year tour. Was that two years and then extended, or was it three years to begin with?*

NEIGHBORS: Three years to begin with.

*Q: Now, Zagreb is close to the coast. Were there any naval visits, that sort of thing that you would have covered?*

NEIGHBORS: No. I did not. I've done a number of those in China, Hong Kong, and Vietnam, but not in Croatia.



One of the best things about our stay in Zagreb -- which had nothing to do with my job -- was where we lived. I just can't do this interview without talking about that. For about 25 years the American consulate had rented an apartment in a building in the oldest part of Zagreb, a section called Gornji Grad, the upper town. It was located one block from an iconic church, St. Mark's. In tourist pictures of Zagreb you always see this church. It's the one with the Croatian flag -- the red and white checkerboard -- done on the roof in mosaic tiles -- the only place in those days that allowed the flag to be displayed. After all, the church was 500 years old, and even the Yugoslav government wasn't going to rip off the roof tiles to make a point about a flag.

We lived in a 200-year-old, four-story apartment building just off St. Mark's Square, on a tiny street called Mletacka Ulica or "Venice Street." There were two enormous wooden doors in the front, opening onto a courtyard. To enter our apartment, you walked across the covered courtyard, went up to the second floor and then knocked on the only door at that level. This was the main door to our apartment, once again a double door. And you looked in and there was a giant staircase, maybe 15-feet wide, leading up 12 steps to a landing. Then making a 90-degree turn to the left, you walked up 12 more steps and finally reached the living room. The stairwell was lined with beautiful, dark wood. The living room had 12-foot ceilings and giant Austro-Hungarian-style porcelain heating stoves. The dining room featured a 16-foot vaulted ceiling with a skylight, and recessed sculpture nooks all around the walls.

We soon discovered that when you looked out the window you could see the courtyard in the center of our building. More important, the courtyard was part of the Ivan Meštrović sculpture garden and the Meštrović Atelier. In the summer the gallery hosted concerts in that courtyard. We could just open our windows and listen. Ivan Meštrović was 20<sup>th</sup> century Croatia's most famous artist, a wonderful sculptor with a checkered political career. He was an ardent Croatian nationalist, a famous Catholic. Did many sculptures with Christian themes.

So we lived in the building that used to be Meštrović's home. Our 4<sup>th</sup> floor apartment was just one section of his enormous home. One day after we'd been living there a couple of years, we heard a knock at our door and there was a woman standing there, maybe 55 years old or so. And she said, "I am the daughter of Ivan Meštrović. When I was young, I lived across the courtyard from this apartment in the same big building. But I never was allowed to come over here because -- as we discovered later -- this was where my father kept his second wife (*laughs*) and family. I wanted to see what it looked like. I live in New York but am back for a short visit."

*Q: Oh, my goodness.*

NEIGHBORS: And so we showed her through the apartment and she was very happy to have seen it. Meštrović, during World War II, had some connections with the Ustaša, the fascists, who were in charge of Croatia. But at one point he was arrested by them and kept in jail for two or three months. Supposedly he made a deal to work for them and the Italians. So he was released and later on became a figure not very popular in post-war

Yugoslavia. He eventually immigrated to the U.S. where he died in or near to South Bend, Indiana, I believe. Notre Dame has a giant statue of Jesus created by Meštrović. And if you go to Chicago, one of the bridges in the center of town is “guarded” by two of his sculptures, giant statues of American Indians.

Meštrović was an excellent artist, but a strange political personality. He was protected by Cardinal Stepinac, the leading religious figure in Croatia during WWII. After the war Stepinac was also questioned by the Yugoslav government for his alliance or semi-alliance with the Ustaša.

As you can imagine, it was a treat everyday to live in the Meštrović house, in the most famous part of Zagreb. Mletacka Street, where we lived, was also where an American crew filmed part of the television spectacular, *Winds of War*, based on the Herman Wouk novel of the same name. One day I was coming home from work, walking up from the consulate and the street looked like it had been bombed out – broken doors and windows, semi-burning cars along the way. I wasn’t too surprised, because I knew *Winds of War* film crews were working that day.

The building diagonally across the street from us, which was an old mansion, had been converted for the film into the U.S. embassy in Warsaw at the start of World War II. Topol from “Fiddler on the Roof,” he was in this film. He was trying to drive an old 1940’s vintage car with a stick shift, and he didn’t know how to do that. So the car was lurching up the street, making it difficult to get the scene right.

Even better than Topol, Ali MacGraw – of Love Story fame -- came over to our apartment because it started to rain and she needed to dry off. She came up to our house, and we have a picture of her holding our son Mark. That was exciting.

My parents were visiting at the time and decided to work as extras in the film. One afternoon they went out to an old railroad station in Karlovac, which is about 30 miles from Zagreb. And they didn’t come back until eight in the morning. Mary and I were kind of worried (*laughs*), a reversal of roles from prom night in 1963. What had happened? Well, they got to Karlovac, and the director kept them all night. I think for one thing, this was supposed to be foreigners fleeing from Poland in the face of the war, desperately trying to get on a train. And the director wanted everybody to look exhausted, so he kept the cast and the extras on set all night long.

My dad said there was one extra, an American businessman, who commented wryly at four o’clock in the morning, “The next time I do a film it’s going to be a pornographic film so I can lie down.” (*laughs*)

Four, five years later, I was in China working on a visit by Vice President Bush to Guangzhou. It was a Sunday, and we weren’t doing anything and I was in the hotel, so I turned on the TV. And there’s my dad standing behind Ali MacGraw in line with the Nazi immigration official quizzing her. My dad was there on screen for three or four minutes, wearing a vintage, wide-lapelled suit and a dapper fedora. So that was kind of nice.

*Q: (laughs)* So how would you describe living in Zagreb during this time?

NEIGHBORS: We loved it. Croatia is a fascinating place. The history is so complicated and people are so hospitable – if you're not Serbian *(laughs)*. If you're Serbian, they spit on the ground and look really angry. This was an unfortunate reality. But for us as a family, we were treated wonderfully. We had a lot of good friends there. We were invited out to many events.

One thing you have to learn about being in Croatia, and I think Serbia may be similar, is that if you don't argue back, people don't respect you. They love to argue and they love to have philosophical debates. My first week at the consulate, I went upstairs to meet Josipa, the FSN in charge of administrative matters. She was super competent. Had been there for years. I went to ask her a question. I'd been looking around my apartment and didn't see any vacuum cleaner. Now remember, this is the first time I ever met Josipa. Never been introduced to her before.

"I didn't see the vacuum cleaner for my apartment," I said.

She replied, "We don't have vacuum cleaners here."

"Oh, well in Taiwan where I came from all the officers' houses had vacuum cleaners."

"For Christ sake's, this is Yugoslavia, not Taiwan!" *(laughs)*.

And that was the way the Croats talked -- very brusque. But when you get used to that, it can be kind of fun. You can be angry and argue and they don't hold it against you. They think, oh well, that's good. He's got a mind of his own and can forcefully debate thorny topics.

I remember one time going to the League of Communist Youth and speaking about how and why Ronald Reagan had been elected President of the United States. This was right after the election and I was supposed to explain what was going on. I got bombarded with rough questions, but I stood my ground. And it WAS fun. The young communists argued with me and I argued back. And we had a good time.

*Q: How about the relationship between the post and the embassy? Did you -- I mean you're the second officer in a small consulate. But did you have a chance to run into Ambassador Eagleburger or anyone else in the embassy.*

NEIGHBORS: I did. Actually, I did meet Eagleburger on several occasions. I went to a couple of country team meetings when I was up in Belgrade for our branch PAO meetings. I found Eagleburger to be a compelling figure. I think everybody really liked him and, more important, respected him. He was no nonsense. Often when you attend country team meetings in other countries, officers will drone on forever about the "bauxite report" and all the details about the AWIG meeting at the FCAZZZ. So

everybody's sort of dozing off. But with Eagleburger that never happened. It was, "You!" and he'd point his finger at you, "What's happening with...?" And you knew you'd have to summarize the issue quickly, be succinct and know what you were talking about. Then he'd point at the next in line and say, "Now, you!" But Eagleburger didn't do this in a threatening manner. He was the figure of authority and he didn't want to waste time and you better know what you were going to say. He was a great ambassador.

His successor was David Anderson. The first time I met him, he came down on a visit to Zagreb. I forget what we were doing, but we were riding together, driving up to Gornji Grad, the upper town, near where I lived. Suddenly, the ambassador looks up and says,

"Why, that woman over there has on the Anderson tartan."

And I looked and I said, "Oh, that's my wife. She knew you were coming and that's what she wore to honor you." It was indeed my wife, but she was wearing the Anderson tartan by pure coincidence.

*Q: As you said, there's a change in administration, and the Reagan administration comes in after the elections of November 1980. Charles Wick becomes director of USIA in June of '81. Does that immediately filter down to your level?*

NEIGHBORS: It does, yes. Charles Wick was a character, (*laughs*) dynamic and eccentric. But I would say overall he had a positive effect on USIA. He certainly had the ear of President Reagan. They were close personal friends.

Some of his projects made a big splash worldwide, but we couldn't do much with them in Croatia. For instance, one of the most famous things he did was to make this television documentary called "Let Poland Be Poland," with Kirk Douglas as the narrator. It was a plea for more freedom in Central Europe. We couldn't use it, though, because the Yugoslav government was not going to allow us to show it in any way, shape or form. According to Yugoslav law, our programs could not criticize a third country.

On the other hand, we were able to show sensitive movies at my home in Zagreb. For instance, we screened a Polish film by Andrzej Wajda called "Man of Steel," which dramatized the Solidarity union movement and a strike at the shipyards in Gdansk. We were able to show that at a private showing in my house, and got good, interesting guests to come and had a quite fascinating discussion about it afterwards.

Charles Wick did make a visit to Zagreb and Belgrade while I was there. I got to see him in person and learn that when he flew he had to be on the non-sunny side of the plane. You had to figure that out, which way he would be flying and where the sun would be. He had a lot of other personal requirements. We were going to have to deal with him for a whole day with lots of appointments, but as it happened, he was supposed to present a letter to the leadership in Belgrade from President Reagan. But, the leadership refused to receive it. So Wick flew down to Zagreb, letter still in hand. But while he was in the air, the Yugoslavs changed their mind and said, "OK, if he'll come back, we'll receive the

letter.” So we entertained his wife, Mary Jane Wick, for a day and went around and did some interesting cultural activities. Wick did make it back in time for dinner chez Neighbors that evening where he and Mrs. Wick met a charming group of professors and journalists.

Our apartment was perfect for small dinners and even concerts on occasion. Before coming to Yugoslavia, we had purchased for our children a Yamaha upright, which of course was not a grand piano, but one of the best for its size and price. We wanted a good player to test it out, but never imagined we would get one of the world’s most renowned pianists. And that was due to the long cultural reach of PAO Ray Benson. Over his extended career Benson became friends with a wide range of American artists. That included Leo Smit, a prominent pianist and composer, close friend of Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland. Benson invited Smit to come to Yugoslavia on a USIA grant, and he accepted.

Smit had just performed at the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday gala for Aaron Copland at Lincoln Center in New York. Then he came to our house and gave a concert on our little upright piano, and the people next door, because it was after 8:00 at night, pounded on the walls while he was playing (*laughs*). Despite that, it was a wonderful night of entertainment.

In addition to these USIA-sponsored artists, I always tried throughout my career to make use of talent within the American diplomatic community. One of my colleagues at FSI was Ruth Kurzbauer. She and I studied Serbo-Croatian together in Washington, and then she went to Belgrade and I to Zagreb. (Years later we were in China together.)

Before joining the Foreign Service, Ruth had been a concert pianist, a child prodigy --played with the Cleveland Symphony when she was 16-years-old. She studied music at the Curtis Institute, planning to be a concert pianist. Then one day she woke up and said to herself, “I don’t want to spend my whole life alone, practicing the piano.” So she decided to do her other things, and gave up the piano – at least as a profession.

Ruth’s sister, Heather was also a musician. She played violin for the Dutch Symphony in Amsterdam. I learned that she was visiting Ruth in Belgrade, so I invited them to come to Zagreb and stay with us. I also asked if they’d be willing to put on a small concert, informal, at our home. Ruth had not been practicing much, but she’s a wonderful musician and was willing to give it a try. So they prepared a concert for violin and piano, and we invited like 25 people from the music world in Zagreb. The sisters Kurzbauer gave this super concert in our gorgeous apartment.

One of our guests was a British Consul official, also an amateur blues singer. We also invited a Croatian-American from California who had his own jazz band there. He was a drummer. After the official concert was over, everyone decided it was too early to go home. So we had a session of improv singing and playing. The jazz drummer got out our pots and pans, the Brit sang, and Ruth and Heather played along on the piano and violin. Heather had at one time been asked to play on tour with the Eagles. But her parents found out who the Eagles were and nixed that (*laughs*). And Ruth, she’s just a superb pianist

with a fine ear. As the improvisation began, we did discover a sociological phenomenon about Ruth, something quite fascinating. She could play almost any song. If she heard you sing it, she could play it. So the improv group was going to do the Beatles' song "Michelle." Ruth said that she'd never heard that song before (*laughs*) – here in Zagreb we had the only person in the world who didn't know "Michelle." But once the group sang it for her, she played along, no problem.

*Q: You were saying that Ruth's sister came as a tourist. Was tourism picking up on the Dalmatia Coast at that time?*

NEIGHBORS: At that time a majority of the tourists were German. That's still true, I believe. But Croatia was becoming more popular. The Dalmatian Coast is the most beautiful place on earth. We've been back there four or five times since our assignment in Zagreb. We go on vacation. The island of Hvar is like the perfumed isles, covered with rosemary and lavender.

USIS Zagreb had a (*laughs*), a talented local employee, Višnja Horvatic. Višnja means sour cherry, which describes (*laughs*) her very well. At one point Višnja told me a story about a week she spent on the Dalmatian Coast. Everyday she would march down to the beach and sit at the same place to read her books and then go in the water. And everyday there was the same German couple sitting right near her. They didn't know Višnja spoke German fluently. The couple did seem to be enjoying themselves, but they kept complaining about the Croats this and the Croats that and the Croats terrible and isn't this dirty and da, da, da, da, da and they went on and on and on and on. Finally on the day that Višnja was set to leave, she got up and went over to the couple and said in very good German, "Excuse me, could I tell you a story?"

They looked surprised and said, "Sure."

"I'm standing on the border, the Croatian border," she said, "and suddenly I am attacked by a Soviet soldier and a German one. Which one do I kill first?"

And they said, "We don't know."

"Well, the Soviet, of course. Business before pleasure." With that, she turned around and walked away (*laughs*).

There you have the Croatian sense of humor (*laughs*).

*Q: There's something I don't understand. Earlier, in 1977, there'd been a name change with USIA becoming USICA, the U.S. International Communications Agency. Then in August 1982, Reagan signed an authorization changing the name back to USIA. What was that all about?*

NEIGHBORS: The first change happened when I was in Taiwan, and it did have some impact on us there. As I understand it, when the Fulbright program was set up in the late



1940s, Senator Fulbright did not want his eponymous program to be part of a propaganda agency. And that's how he viewed USIA – as a propaganda agency. So he insisted that control of certain exchange programs, like the Fulbright, stay within the State Department. Thus for years you had USIA in Washington supervising our international information activities. But to run our exchange programs, we had the Cultural Bureau, located within State Department bureaucracy, but basically run by USIA officers seconded to the Department.

This charade in Washington satisfied Senator Fulbright. But the truth was, USIS (United States Information Service, the overseas component of USIA) administered all these programs abroad with our embassies and consulates. Only in Washington did the Cultural Bureau belong to State. So in 1977 in order to rationalize the system and bring back authority for exchange programs to USIA, President Carter and the Congress agreed to a name change. That's how USIA became USICA, the United States International Communications Agency.

This name change had important ramifications for Kaohsiung -- and in Taipei when I was there. USIS was an extremely well-known name. And in Chinese it could be shortened to *Meixinchu* – easy to say and hard to forget. But the new name was difficult to translate and impossible to abbreviate. It did not roll trippingly off the tongue. I suggested that we just change the name in English and pretend to Washington that we changed it in Chinese, but that didn't go over too well.

Then in 1981, when Reagan took over, I think everyone realized USICA was not a good name, so they went back to the original. By that time Congress had forgotten why the name had been changed in the first place, so no one objected to a return to a trusted and tried brand name, USIA. I think Charles Wick pushed this through. And he was right to do so. The old name was much better.

*Q: At the time I was in the NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) Bureau. And I remember that the bureau fought ferociously against this change because in Arabic, as you just said in Chinese, to render it, you had to use the word for agency that was more often used in reference to spying.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: And the bureau resisted as hard as it could, and lost. I remember now, they had the senior Arab linguist from the embassy in Cairo come to Washington to point out that you cannot render this new name in Arabic without creating this supposition.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. That reminds me of something that happened later in my career when I was assigned to Brazil. It didn't have anything to do with this name change that we're talking about, but in Portuguese, the word “informação,” information, implies intelligence. So when we had to translate U.S. Information Service, we had to use the word “divulgação,” which is divulgence or something like that (*laughs*) instead, because you couldn't say informação.

*Q: Your boss in Zagreb changed probably the summer of 1982 to Don Donchi, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: What was he like to work with as the CG (consul general)?*

NEIGHBORS: *(laughs)* He was an interesting character. I think he came from New York or New Jersey and was maybe 5 foot 4 and had a Napoleon complex. He was rude. Smoked a big stogie during class at FSI. When his classmates complained about the cigar, he said, "If you don't like it, go to a different class." He used that same tone with everyone, including the Yugoslavs, whom he referred to as "the Jugs."

Not my favorite person, but I probably shouldn't go into long stories about him.

*Q: Well, you know, personality makes a difference in how a team works. And we're talking about a fairly small team. Can't be more than five, six Americans in Zagreb, can there?*

NEIGHBORS: Maybe ten officers. It's true. Our team did not work as well after that. Let me give you a minor example of the way things went under the new CG. We had a new consular officer, a young junior officer who went off to the Dalmatian Coast on an official trip for about a week. And when he left, he made a big mistake. We had a spare room in the consulate where everybody, including the consul general, came to make coffee and tea. The consul general had his special teddy-bear mug that his son had given him. Well, our unfortunate visa officer unwittingly used the teddy-bear mug and then left it in his office, which he locked when he left for the coast. So we had this enormous investigation throughout the entire building about who had stolen the teddy-bear mug. And as chance would have it, we were hosting our monthly film showing in the American center, and the film in question was The Caine Mutiny. "Where are my strawberries!" And that's an inkling of what life was like under our new leadership *(laughs)!*

*Q: Captain Queeg.*

NEIGHBORS: Precisely. We all got through that pretty much unscathed. But he was not the best consul general.

*Q: Now, how would you rate the USIA program in Yugoslavia at this time? Ray Benson is heading it. He's been there before, should be in pretty solid shape.*

NEIGHBORS: Well, I think Ray ran a very good shop. USIS Belgrade was protective of me in many ways. On several occasions I was on the outs with Donchi. He made some demands I just didn't like, and I refused to go along. And Belgrade stood up for me very directly and made a difference.

*Q: As your tour in Zagreb comes to an end how did you go about snagging your next assignment in the summer transfer of 1983 to Shanghai?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, I had wanted to go back to China, and particularly to Mainland China. I had never been there, not even for a short visit. To get a job in China, you had to think well ahead. Assignments to China were made about 2-1/2 years ahead of time. That lead-time would enable an officer with no Chinese to take the two-year FSI language course before arriving at post. In 1981 I saw there was an opening for a BPAO in Shanghai starting the summer of 1983. I bid on it and immediately received a reply from my career development officer.

She said, "Thank you for your bid on BPAO Shanghai. You would be a wonderful candidate. But you've been abroad too long. We think you have to come back for an assignment in Washington."

I was of course disappointed. But two weeks later a cable came with the words, "Congratulations on your assignment as BPAO Shanghai."

I don't know what went on back in Washington, but obviously someone decided that I'd be the right choice for that assignment.

*Q: Now, in 1983, what's Shanghai like when you arrived? The consulate had only recently been established, correct?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, in 1980 the doors opened, I believe. The first consul general was Don Anderson. He later became my boss as consul general in Hong Kong. But yes, in 1983 it was a fairly new mission. Shanghai was nothing like you see today. When we arrive at the Shanghai Airport, we go through immigration, and then trudge over to retrieve our baggage, which was piled in the middle of a huge, 10-foot heap -- all the suitcases from our plane just dumped in the middle of the room. I search through the heap for some time, and finally find our suitcases. We, my wife and my two kids, then exit the terminal into the parking lot where we're met by a consulate car and driver. And we start driving back through the streets of Shanghai, which are incredibly dark. We notice that our car doesn't have its lights on. Other cars don't either, except every once in a while when the drivers flash them at you.

Our driver tells us, "Chinese law says that you can't have your lights on at night, because it might blind the other drivers." I suspect this law was written when Chinese cars didn't have low beams and so the lights would dazzle oncoming drivers. So we're weaving through these dark, dreary streets. No lights or anything. Shadowy figures walking halfway in the street, thrown into illumination when our driver flashes his lights.

Finally, we arrive at the Park Hotel, which was not too far from the famous waterfront, the Bund. Back in the 1930s and 1940s the Park had been a spiffy place, with a beautiful bar and restaurant. But it hadn't been painted or repaired for many moons.

So there we were, along with a lot of mice. The local staff, who were nice enough, helped us deal with the mice by giving us Elephant Glue Paper, which was effective. The Ritz, it wasn't. But we were in China – at last. And I was excited.

After the introduction to the Park Hotel, we then learned about daily life on the streets of Shanghai. I had never been to a place that was so crowded -- just unbelievable masses of humanity.

*Q: But you've had a Hong Kong experience.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. But Hong Kong's nothing like Shanghai was in the early 1980s. First of all, Shanghai has about twice as many people as Hong Kong, and it's a very small area. In those days, there was one main shopping street, Nanjing Road. Almost all of the good stores were there. So anyone needing to do serious shopping had to come to that part of the city. For example, the Number One Department Store on Nanjing Road hosted on Sundays over 300,000 customers (*laughs*) –just for that one store. Regular days they only had 100,000.

Just after my arrival I went to an event down near the Bund, a dinner. Afterwards I came out of the restaurant. As it happened, Shanghai was having a parade in honor of the Asian games. The parade had just ended. And my colleague and I, a local employee, Wu Gonggan, came out of the restaurant. We went out to the main street and saw hordes of people dispersing after the parade. So we got onto a side street and could not move for 10 minutes. Gridlock, with people, not cars. I was frightened. Just too many people. And in those days the people, the Chinese, were pretty curious about foreigners. They hadn't seen too many of us. They would stare at me in amazement. I remember one time I wanted to use a public phone. I got out my address book. As I was looking at it, I suddenly realized that a crowd of young men was milling around, looking over my shoulder to see what I had written in my little black book (*laughs*).

*Q: Now in Zagreb you were the junior of two. Describe your position in Shanghai.*

NEIGHBORS: Well, in Shanghai I was the BPAO. I was the only American USIS employee there. I was the head of the press and cultural operation. It was a small consulate. I don't remember how many officers, maybe 15 to 20 at that time.

*Q: So it wasn't that much larger than Zagreb.*

NEIGHBORS: Not too much. Maybe twice as many people I guess. The consul general was Thomas Stan Brooks, who was always known as Stan to his friends. An outstanding consul general, I thought. I enjoyed working with him. He was a mountain man from Wyoming and had these western, straight-shooting virtues, a man of few words but well chosen. Recently I heard a wonderful story about Stan and his father. Stan became a great success in the Foreign Service, rising to minister counselor and serving with distinction in key positions all over East Asia. Despite that, his father always believed his son should

have stayed in Wyoming (*laughs*). He shouldn't have gone gallivanting around in all those foreign countries, wearing a top hat and striped pants.

As he used to say, "I'm a nitpicker. I discovered if you have too many of these nits rolling around, they get in your way." He was a meticulous proofreader, a stickler for getting things right. He was always cautious, but willing to try new programs if you had a good argument for them. He gained the loyalty of his consulate colleagues and inspired respect within the diplomatic community in Shanghai.

*Q: Now, in contrast to a mature USIS program in Zagreb, China, Shanghai is fairly new. So what was your program like in Shanghai?*

NEIGHBORS: Of course one of the major differences in Shanghai was that we did not have a lending library, did not have an American center. The Chinese government would not allow that. We didn't have a library, but we did have an FSN with some ability to answer reference questions and provide selected articles to key contacts.

As was true in Yugoslavia, our best public diplomacy tool program was the International Visitors (IV) program. I believe it had an even more dramatic impact in China than in Yugoslavia. Most of our Croatian contacts were quite sophisticated. They had traveled to the U.S. or to other European cities.

This was not true in Shanghai. At that time nobody had been out of the country – except for perhaps a study program in Novosibirsk or Tirana. Few of our contacts spoke English, so I did most of my business in Chinese. (When I went back to Beijing in the year 2000, the language situation had changed dramatically. I did maybe half of my meetings in English because my contacts' English was excellent. After all, they'd done graduate work at MIT and Harvard, and their English was certainly as good and probably better than my Chinese.)

The IV program presented some challenges in the early 1980s. When we first set up the program in Shanghai, the older party leaders in all the different organizations resented the fact that we wanted to invite younger people to participate. They insisted that they had to be allowed to go first. And so at first we sent a number of IV grantees who were probably 60 or 70-years-old, which is completely against the theory and purpose of the program. Also when we sent higher-ranking members of the Communist Party, they demanded VIP (very important person) treatment. But that's not the way the IV program is supposed to work. Basically a grantee is given money for incidentals and takes care of expenses himself. Well, these older cadres weren't having that. They expected an aide to come with them, carry money for them, make all arrangements. After all, in China that's the way things worked.

The IV program wasn't built to provide that kind of service. So there was a lot of tension in how the program worked. When I arrived in Shanghai in 1983, the program had been in operation for a couple years. We were beginning to get the idea across that we wanted nominees under the age of 40, 50 max. We wanted grantees who were going to be future

leaders. As you know, every organization in China has a unit called the *waiban* or Foreign Affairs Office (FAO). These are the barbarian handlers. They help manage any activity that involves foreigners. This practice is not new to China. The Qing Dynasty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the *Zongli Yamen*, an organ of the central government that controlled all dealings between China and the outside world. Chinese governments just don't want their citizens to be polluted by these terrible gringos.

As a result of this policy, we had to deal with an FAO of some sort every time we went to a university or a think tank or a media outlet. Often we would want to nominate people for IV's whom the FAO just didn't like or couldn't approve of for political reasons. So when I was in Shanghai, I worked out an agreement -- a bargain with the devil in some ways. I suggested to the Shanghai FAO that I would let them choose half of our IV grantees, if they would help me approve the other half that we had chosen. I added, "But we won't approve your grantees unless they meet the following criteria: they have to be under a certain age, they have to be potential leaders in their fields, and da, da, da." To my surprise and pleasure, I discovered that the nominees recommended by the FAO were often better than the ones we picked. This was because the FAO had a much wider base to choose from. They really knew who was going to be important. We got some outstanding nominees through the FAO.

The FAO nominated one fellow, Gong Xueping, who went on to become a deputy party secretary in Shanghai, an extremely powerful position. He was instrumental in raising money for the incredible new Shanghai Museum and the avant-garde cultural center. We also gave IV grants to two young museum curators who eventually were instrumental in making the Shanghai Museum a world-class facility.

When we selected Mr. Gong, he was director of the Shanghai Broadcast Bureau and clearly a rising star. He was delighted to accept the IV grant and travel to the U.S. I recognized his importance to our program and wanted to make sure his trip was something special. Chinese really appreciate the personal touch, so I made sure his one-month stay in the U.S. included a trip to my parents' home in Oklahoma City. My parents not only hosted Mr. Gong, they also drove him to my uncle's home in the tiny farming town of Granite, Oklahoma. Mr. Gong got to spend the night with an American farm family. He got to drive a combine and see how they raised alfalfa and all that. Gong was thrilled by this. He especially appreciated the fact that I, as the person who nominated him for the grant, was establishing a personal relationship with him through my family. He thought this was fantastic. A number of years later when my parents visited us in Shanghai, Mr. Gong invited them to a dinner. It was some sort of New Year's celebration, a banquet with performing groups. And Jiang Zemin, the Mayor of Shanghai (later to become President of the PRC), was there at this celebration, and my parents were Mr. Gong's guests of honor.

Years later in 2000 when I went back as PAO Beijing on a short visit to Shanghai, I discovered that the consulate rarely could meet high-level Communist Party leaders. They could meet with the mayor, but not the party secretary. But when I went to visit



from Beijing, Mr. Gong, by then a deputy party secretary of the Shanghai city government, invited me and my wife to a private dinner party. Our CG was amazed.

And so that was kind of nice to see direct evidence of how IV programs can have long-term effects. I could relate scores of similar stories, but my favorite one is this:

Back in the old days we used to invite promising young writers to the Iowa Writers Workshop, a great program established in the 1950s by the poet Paul Engle and his wife, Nieh Hualing, who was Chinese – from Taiwan, I believe. This type of grant lasted longer than the standard IV -- maybe two or three months. So we invited a number of prominent women writers from Shanghai to participate in this program. And in search of nominees we came into contact with a large number of young fiction writers.

In 1984 a writer's delegation from the U.S. came to Shanghai. The delegation included Toni Morrison, Gary Snyder, William Least Heat-Moon, Maxi Hong Kingston, William Gass, and Allen Ginsberg, among others. At one point I found myself at a lunch sitting between Allen Ginsberg and the only woman journalist on the front lines in the Korean War. And I was interpreting for them, trying to explain to the Chinese journalist that Ginsberg had been a conscientious objector during the Korean War (*laughs*). They were like people from two different planets. Despite his image as a wild man, Allen Ginsberg was charming. I liked him. He was later invited back to teach for two weeks at the prestigious Fudan University. I don't know if the English Department there knew who they were getting, but Ginsberg did seem to have a good stint as a lecturer at Fudan.

At any rate, this group of wonderful writers came to town, and my office was asked to support their program. One of our close contacts, Cheng Naishan, had already distinguished herself as a writer adept in evoking the spirit of Shanghai. We were, in fact, planning to invite her on an IV grant. Well, the Shanghai Writers Association organized a roundtable discussion with our American delegation. As part of the discussion Cheng Naishan read a brief article she had written for a local newspaper. My wife and I helped her translate the article into English. She could read English reasonably well, but she couldn't manage the translation herself. So we helped her.

Cheng's story was a simple vignette about life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. This was the first time that Chinese were allowed to write openly about the Cultural Revolution and about what had happened to them during that period. Cheng described how she had grown up in an attractive apartment building in the center of Shanghai. Her grandfather at that time lived in Hong Kong and was a banker. Cheng's family paid a high price for this connection with the evils of capitalism. One evening the Red Guard came into their apartment building and destroyed everything in it, kicked Cheng and her family out into the streets.

All of this was devastating, of course. But Cheng was most upset that these young hoodlums had destroyed her prized picture of Gregory Peck (*laughs*), on whom she had a tremendous schoolgirl crush. She hadn't seen many movies, but she did know Gregory Peck and she loved Gregory Peck. Now it so happened that the leader of our writers'

delegation was a dean at UCLA. He knew Gregory Peck. Gregory Peck was a friend. When the dean went back to Los Angeles he wrote a letter to Peck and said, "This writer in China wrote a beautiful story about you." Peck was moved. He wrote Cheng a long letter and sent her a picture. This was all very nice and Cheng was thrilled. But the story gets better. A year later USIA selected Cheng for our International Visitor program. She went to the U.S. and near the end of her trip she got a call from Gregory Peck's social secretary. Could she possibly come to Los Angeles for tea with Mr. Peck? Of course.

*Q: But that underscores how important the IV program was to modify people's filters and impressions of the U.S.*

NEIGHBORS: Cheng went on her IV program with another woman writer, novelist Wang Xiaoying. The two of them had a great time. My parents hosted them as well in Oklahoma City. Showed them a great time. So when my parents visited Shanghai a second time, Wang Xiaoying, whose father was a renowned poet, invited us to her home for dinner. This was one of the very few times we were invited to someone's home in Shanghai. Chinese got in trouble for inviting diplomats or foreigners to their home. But in this case Wang and Cheng could say, "Look, when we were on this official trip that was approved by the FAO of the Shanghai government, we were hosted by this family. They're coming here now, so we have an obligation to return their hospitality." The Chinese government saw the logic and said yes. So our writer friends were able to host us for dinner in their home without getting in trouble.

*Q: So it gives you new entre and trains the Chinese to expect this increasing amount of contact.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: Now, Shanghai is the center of some very fine universities.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Fudan University is probably the best.

*Q: Fudan you mentioned. There's also Jiaotong University, Shanghai International Studies University, and others. But anyway, did you have programs to work with these institutions?*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, we worked with them very closely. I was reasonably well acquainted with the president of Fudan, Xie Xide, a prominent physicist who was a leader in the development of semi-conductors. At that time she was in her mid-sixties or maybe even 70 and not in great health, but a brilliant woman. She had studied in the U.S., but her husband did his research work in Great Britain, where he was one of the first developers of synthetic insulin. This was in the 1950s, and Madame Xie had some problems with the U.S. government because of her leftist political inclinations. She decided it was her patriotic duty to go back to China and "serve the people," to use the favorite mainland phrase of the day.

Xie wanted to return to China, but U.S. authorities had other ideas. This was the height of the McCarthy era, and Xie was studying in a highly sensitive field. In the end she told immigration she was not going to China but to England, where her husband was working. And she was allowed to do that. But she only stayed in England briefly before she and husband returned to China.

Xie loyally volunteered to serve China, and China made her pay dearly for that loyalty. She and her husband suffered tremendously during the Cultural Revolution, chiefly because of their connections with the West. Ironically those scientists who stayed abroad fared far better. After the Cultural Revolution these latecomers returned to China and were treated like royalty. This caused ill feelings between those who stayed and suffered and those who lived abroad and flourished.

*Q: Yes. Since you're on the cultural and artistic side of this, you would probably be exposed to a number of Cultural Revolution stories.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, yes.

*Q: And Shanghai itself, which was Madame Mao's stomping grounds. It was pretty gruesome, wasn't it?*

NEIGHBORS: So many awful stories, but fascinating how people were able to survive and rebuild their lives afterwards. One of the most interesting tales I heard in connection with one of our American Speaker programs. In 1984 we requested a speaker from Washington to talk about sociology and, in particular, immigration. We got Professor Peter Rose from Smith College. He turned out to be an outstanding speaker, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. He was especially interested in immigration issues, problems of ethnicity. His wife had been a survivor of the Nazis in Holland -- hidden for years by a Gentile family.

After Professor Rose's first lecture, I mentioned to him that the consulate was trying to restore the American citizenship of a woman named Muriel Hoopes. I had met her at a consulate reception some months before. At the time Ms. Hoopes was in her mid-seventies, maybe even 80. I was interested in getting to know more about her life, so she suggested I come over to her apartment for a chat.

I ask Peter Rose if he'd like to come with me to see Ms. Hoopes, and he of course agrees at once. And so we go over to where she lives, and she's in this old apartment building. It's the middle of the winter and the Shanghai government in those days does not permit the heating of homes -- even though it sometimes snows. (Once at the Shanghai Music Conservatory I saw a glass of water that had been left in a practice room overnight. It had turned to ice.) So we, Peter Rose and I, enter the building and climb the dark stairs to Ms. Hoopes' walk-up apartment. She greets us at the door. The place is freezing. It's got maybe a 15-watt bulb dangling from a wire -- a spartan one-room "efficiency" with toilet down the hall and a tiny kitchen space.

We take our seats, exchange a few pleasantries and then ask Ms. Hoopes for her story. And this is what she tells us:

In the 1920s she was living in New York City, studying to be a nurse. One day on the subway she accidentally stepped on this fellow's toe. She said she was sorry. Then she looked up at the man and asked if he were Japanese. He sort of jerked back and looked offended and said, "No, I am Chinese. Don't you know anything about the Treaty of Versailles and the 21 Demands of the Japanese?"

*Q: Yes, the Japanese, World War I.*

NEIGHBORS: The Japanese, both before and after World War I, demanded major territorial and economic concessions from the Chinese government. Clearly this gentleman on the subway was offended that Ms. Hoopes mistook him for a Japanese. When she said she knew nothing of the 21 Demands, he said, "Well, if you'll come and have lunch with me tomorrow, I'll tell you about them." And she did.

Ms. Hoopes went on this first date and talked to him – his name was Tu. She felt like he was an interesting fellow. He was studying engineering in New York City, I think at NYU (New York University). And so they started dating, realized they were in love and decided to get married once Tu finished his degree. In the late 1920s she was ready to go to China with her new husband. They packed up and traveled to San Francisco ready to take ship for Shanghai.

Prior to boarding the ship, Ms. Hoopes walked up to the immigration counter and handed her new passport to the official. He took a quick look at her passport and then at her husband's.

"Young lady," he said, "this is your judgment day. By marrying a Chinese, you have committed an expatriating act. You are no longer an American citizen. You won't be using this passport anymore."

*Q: The Chinese Exclusion Act?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1880s and the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. This made it illegal for an American citizen to marry a Chinese. Needless to say, this was a great shock to the newlyweds. But they didn't let it stop them. They went to the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, and Ms. Hoopes got a Chinese travel document and she went to Shanghai and never came back to the U.S. until she was more than 80 years old.

After Ms. Hoopes arrived in Shanghai, her husband worked for the YMCA (Youth Men's Christian Association), whose headquarters in Shanghai was right next door to the Park Hotel, where we stayed when we first arrived. Ms. Hoopes worked for Hujiang College, which I believe was founded by Baptist missionaries. She taught there and raised a

family. But then during the Cultural Revolution she was put under house arrest because she was a foreigner. Because her husband was married to a foreigner, he was arrested and put in prison. He died there. But Ms. Hoopes survived, along with her children.

Years later, in 1981, I believe, Ms. Hoopes came to the newly opened American consulate, and asked if she could get her passport back – and her American citizenship as well. Eventually she got both. She then returned to the U.S. for the first time in 60 years. Unfortunately, she passed away not long after she came back. She was almost 90 by that time. Her children actually made reasonably successful lives in China after the Cultural Revolution. I know that one of her daughters, Nina Tu, studied medicine and became a doctor. She, too, managed to immigrate to the U.S. and lives somewhere near Washington, DC. She was able to immigrate after her mother came here.

So that's the tale Peter Rose and I heard one wintry night in Shanghai, as we sat shivering but entranced by this remarkable woman.

*Q: Lloyd, could you describe for us what the U.S. consulate general in Shanghai was like when you arrived there in the summer of 1983? The mission in Shanghai is not that old – was set up just a couple of years earlier. So what did it look like? How many people were there?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, the consulate opened in 1980 with Don Anderson in charge. He later became my boss in Hong Kong. His successor, Thomas Stan Brooks, who always goes by the name Stan, arrived the same time I did – maybe a few weeks earlier.

Our deputy in Shanghai at that time was Kent Wiedemann, who went on to a distinguished career, including being ambassador in Cambodia. Shanghai was a small consulate at the time, probably 10 to 15 officers and maybe 40 or 50 FSNs. Fairly small. We were located in the old French quarter of the city, in an old mansion owned by the Rong family, remarkably successful Chinese industrialists during the heyday of Shanghainese capitalism in the 1920s and 1930s. The Rongs also owned the French consulate general right across the street from us.

*Q: What was the mission of the consulate in Shanghai?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, in 1983 Shanghai was the richest city in China, surpassing even Beijing. Much of the industrial infrastructure had been built during the period of the KMT (Kuomintang), with some dating even from Qing Dynasty times in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the depredations of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai still stood as the main driving force of the national economy. The central government taxed the city heavily, and used 90% of that revenue to fund economic projects in the rest of the country. So most of the money that would have been used to reconstruct or to repair Shanghai's infrastructure was sent to other places. The Shanghai government resented this, but couldn't do much about it.

*Q: In fact, Shanghai had such an evil pre-war reputation, I'm under the impression that the Chinese central leadership penalized them in one sense.*

NEIGHBORS: That's true, yes. Shanghai was seen as the center for all the evils of capitalism: prostitution, extortion, murder, you name it. These rackets had been controlled during the Republican period by the notorious Green Gang, with Du Yuesheng, as the don. Du enabled Chiang Kai-shek to take control of Shanghai in the 1920s by murdering the communist activists in the city. And so Du, who ran murder incorporated and the drug dealing and the prostitution rackets in Shanghai, was also an undercover ally of Chiang Kai-shek. He became an incredibly wealthy figure, gave to charities, was honored by foreign businessmen.

When my family and I first got to Shanghai, we lived (after the Park Hotel) in the Dong Hu Bingguan, the East Lake Guesthouse. This place had belonged to Du Yuesheng back in the 1920s and 1930s. A beautiful, big house, it had been converted into an inn. We stayed there for two months while our apartment was being painted – yes, believe it or not, it took more than two months for our fearless Chinese workers to paint a three-bedroom apartment.

One of our neighbors at the guesthouse was a fellow named Ed Shaughnessy, who was in Shanghai on a Fulbright scholarship for the summer. Ed later became one of the world's leading experts on the bronze inscriptions from early China, Zhou dynasty. He was doing graduate work at the University of Chicago and later became a distinguished professor there. Ed was a fascinating character, with quite brilliant Chinese. He went around the city dressed in his Indiana Jones costume with a leather jacket and a rakish fedora. He did research at the Shanghai Museum for three months. Now the Shanghai Museum was/is a major center for bronze scholarship in China. I remember that when Ed left, he wrote a detailed report to the head of the museum about what he had learned, and he did the report all in Chinese. Which was quite impressive at that time. We may have a few more Americans these days who can write sophisticated reports in Chinese. But back in those days, Ed Shaughnessy was special.

*Q: For the USIA program that you were in charge of, what was your staff like?*

NEIGHBORS: I had a staff of six FSNs: office manager, audio-visual specialist, press assistant, cultural affairs specialist, driver, and chief assistant. My chief assistant, the head of the press and cultural Foreign Service Nationals, was a fellow named Wu Gonggan, in his 30s, a brilliant guy whom I liked and respected. Wu graduated from the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute (now known as the Shanghai International Studies University). He spoke outstanding English. As with so many of the people who worked for us at the consulate, Wu had gone through some traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution.

Wu grew up in Shanghai. When he was 16 or 17 years old, the Cultural Revolution grew to full force. To show his patriotism, Wu volunteered to go to the countryside to serve the people. They sent him to Heilongjiang, in the bone-chilling north bordering Siberia. At



that time Wu was a confirmed city boy, had never been out of Shanghai in his life, or maybe just to the suburbs or something like that. So he gets on this train and they go for several days up into the far north and they come to the end of the line -- the last train station. Then they're ordered off the train. They get out and transfer to another narrow-gauge railroad that runs another 30 miles into the hinterland. And they're still not there -- wherever there is. Finally they get into trucks, he and some other kids from Shanghai. They reach a clearing in the forest, a deserted area.

"Listen up," says the man in charge, the party leader. "Winter's coming soon. If you expect to survive, you need to build shelter. It's going to be colder than you can possibly believe."

And so Wu stayed in Heilongjiang for six or seven years. Thought he would never come back to Shanghai. Learned lots of valuable lessons about living in the country. He knew how to castrate pigs, for instance (*laughs*). Offered to teach me how. I passed. Wu told me that as a child growing up in Shanghai he had chilblains every winter. The skin on his hands would be relentlessly cold, eventually peeling off. Why was it so cold? In those days Shanghai residents were not allowed to heat their homes. The central government had decided: you live south of the Yangtze River, therefore you don't have heat in your homes. Shanghai's not incredibly cold, but it's like Richmond, Virginia maybe. It does snow on occasion. So it gets very cold in the houses. As a kid, Wu's little body just couldn't take this miserable cold. His body rebelled and he got chilblains.

If it was this bad in Shanghai, it must have been far worse in the far north, where the temperature falls to 40 degrees below zero. No, Wu said. In Heilongjiang his chilblains were cured. It may have been polar outside, but inside they had heat. Wu bade farewell to this strange ailment, and it never came back, even when he returned to Shanghai.

Anyway, after about six or seven years in the north, Wu came back and was able to pass the entrance university exams, attend the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute, and graduate with a degree in English.

The consulate was fortunate to have Wu as an employee. He was a brilliant manipulator of the Chinese system. He didn't do anything against the rules, but knew how to use the rules to our advantage. He knew how the various universities worked and how to cultivate cultural organizations and the press. I wouldn't do anything without getting his advice. I'm sure he was required to report what I was doing to intelligence officials, but that didn't bother me. All our staff at the consulate had to do that, I presumed. But Wu was just a very sensible person who told me when I was making mistakes and suggested how I might get the FAO to approve our proposals. He's the one, for instance, who negotiated the deal with the FAO on our International Visitor program. This enabled us to dramatically increase the quality of our grants. I had some other very good employees in the Press and Cultural Section, but Wu Gongzhan was the best.

*Q: How did this agreement with the FAO work with regard to the IV program?*

NEIGHBORS: I may have mentioned this before, but Wu suggested that we should work closely on the IV program with the Shanghai FAO and other provincial FAOs. We should request their help in finding top-notch nominees for the IV grants. I was skeptical. I didn't want to turn control over this very valuable program to the Chinese. On the other hand, we American officers were limited in the people we could meet, and we didn't know who was going to be prominent and who would have successful careers. The FAOs, on the other hand, could predict that better than we could. So, with Wu Gongzhan's help, we made an agreement that we would pick half of our grantees and the FAOs would choose the rest. In the end I believe the FAOs were more successful at this task than we were.

*Q: Now you were the single USIA American officer?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Only one. Our Press and Cultural offices were out in the barn behind the main building. I'm not kidding. There was an old building back in the consulate garden that probably used to be the stables or perhaps a garage. Anyway, we were back in that office. Actually it was nice to have our own domain. We had our own unit there and we were a pretty close-knit group because of that. Originally most of my staff was back in the stables, while my office was an elegant, wood-paneled room in the main building. Then I went on home leave, and when I came back, I'd been moved. And somebody else got the front building office. But that was OK. It was much better to be together with my staff than to have a fancy office.

*Q: Now, the U.S. is new to China and China's new to the U.S. So what was, if you will, the emphasis of the USIA programs?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we used many of the same programs that USIA had perfected over the years – the American Speaker Program, for example. We brought speakers who were specialists in economics and political science, culture and literature. We also started to develop our Fulbright Exchange program, which eventually became of great value to the Chinese. In 1948 the world's first Fulbright scholars came from China. That program was directed by Wilma Fairbank, wife of the great Harvard sinologist, John Fairbank. So the Chinese were delighted that after a 30-year hiatus, we were bringing this program back to its roots.

The Fulbright program enabled us to send worthy Chinese scholars to the U.S. and place them in prominent universities. We also brought scholars from the United States, and they were able to live at Chinese universities and deal directly with the students. There were many problems with this, of course. The U.S. provided the funding for most of the Fulbright exchanges, but the Chinese universities had to provide housing and facilitative assistance for the professors who were going to live in China. And that's where difficulties arose. Because in those days facilities at Chinese universities were, let us say, primitive. Even though the Fulbrighters were set to have an adventure, they hadn't expected it to be such a low-rent version. *(laughs)*

Early in my career I decided to make use of my skill as a public speaker in order to get access to organizations and be able to talk about issues that the U.S. wanted to present to our so-called target audiences. Now this worked in Taiwan and Croatia -- but not so much in China. Chinese organizations were paranoid about student contact with American diplomats. So to be allowed on campus as a speaker, I had to pick topics that at least seemed innocuous. Only that way could the university barbarian handlers approve my lectures.

Previously in Taiwan and in Yugoslavia – much less sensitive environments -- I spoke to students and teachers about American history as seen through folk music, popular music, and jazz. These lectures proved to be an even better fit for Mainland China. When I told Chinese university officials that I wanted to talk to students about American folk music, they would think, “That’s a safe topic. I won’t get in trouble for approving that. So, OK.”

In early 1984 I was invited by Nanjing University, the English Department, to give a lecture on American folk music. You might ask, why had I decided that music would be a good way to introduce topics of American history to Chinese students. Well, experience has taught me the following: if I want to make a case for American society and values, I can’t expect to influence people by logic alone. Blunt facts don’t change minds, even if the facts are true. I also needed to be careful about being overly critical of China. So I decided to use an indirect approach when I spoke about American society, politics, and democracy.

I believe that one of the most persuasive ways to sidle into a political critique is to use music. With music you’re not appealing to a rational explanation of a situation. You’re working on the emotions. If, for example, I tell you: “Here are the five objective, scientific reasons why you should think that America is a good place and that spinach is good for you.” You’re not going to say, “Aha, I see the light.” It doesn’t work that way. On the other hand, you can approach the truth through music, which arouses people’s feelings, and can often be a more persuasive way to lead into difficult issues.

Why did I decide to talk about American folk music rather than some other genre? Well, first of all, American folk music is influenced by two main traditions: the black music of Africa and the European music brought mostly from Scotland and England. This gave me the opportunity to talk race issues. Much of American folk music has its roots in gospel and religious music. So this allowed me to explain how religion has profoundly affected American society, history, culture. Later on in my lecture I turned to the role of protest songs. I talked about the labor movement of the 1930s and the Civil Rights Movement – Martin Luther King. So I presented myself as talking about American folk music, but I was really addressing all the key issues of democratization and race issues -- so this was a nice and sneaky way to be able to talk about the weighted topics that USIS was supposed to deal with. But I did it in a way that didn’t seem threatening – at least until it was too late to stop me.

That was the theory. Now to see how this operated in practice. As mentioned earlier, I was invited to come up to Nanjing University in early 1984 for a lecture on American

music. I was excited to have this opportunity. I worked hard in preparing to give the lecture in Chinese. The students I was speaking to -- all of them had studied English. Their spoken English wasn't too good, but they could read English reasonably well. To illustrate my lecture I was going to play recordings of 12 folk songs. I printed out the lyrics of all the songs in English, so the students would be able read along as they listened. I had been told there would be 100 students attending the lecture. So I thought, "I should prepare 150 lyric sheets. That way I'll be sure to have enough, and I can always use the leftovers for future lectures."

So I arrive at Nanjing University and the students are all atwitter, because they've heard about the lecture. I arrive in the room -- the auditorium -- where the event is taking place. The room is packed -- at least 300 students there (*laughs*).

In those days -- not like it is now -- students rarely had the chance to meet a foreigner, let alone ask him questions. It was politically difficult for them to do this. And then in Nanjing there just weren't that many foreigners. In this case they had the opportunity not only to meet an American diplomat but to hear him talk about American popular music as well. This was a big deal. That's why 300 people showed up. So I'm trying to figure out what to do, since I don't have enough handouts. I've got it. I make the announcement, "I've made some lyric sheets for you so that you can understand the songs. But unfortunately, I don't have enough copies for everyone. So would you please share the lyrics with the person sitting next to you."

Immediately I received my first lesson in the economics of scarcity. Originally I had two students stationed in front to hand out my precious lyric sheets. When I said, "Would you please share -- I don't have enough," everyone in the audience leaped to their feet and charged to the front of the room. The lyrics went flying up in the air and someone knocked over the microphone and broke it (*laughs*).

*Q: Oh, no.*

NEIGHBORS: At first I was shocked but then I thought, "Wow, this is like Mick Jagger. They're dying to hear what I have to say. So I went ahead and gave the lecture and the audience was enthusiastic, obviously."

The story doesn't end there, however. Some 20 years later, I was in Beijing at the ambassador's residence for dinner. We had invited important writers, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs to meet the ambassador. So I'm at this dinner and this young man comes up to me and says,

"You probably don't remember me, but I was in the audience at Nanjing University when you gave your lecture on American folk music. In fact, I was the student who organized the event, and I got in trouble for it when school authorities discovered what you were talking about." Then he added, "But it was worth it. The lecture was great, and I didn't get in real bad trouble. They did scold me for inviting you to the university."

Clearly if I upset the university FAO, I was doing the right thing.

*Q: And this also illustrates during this early period just how sensitive the Chinese were about our relationship. They weren't quite sure what to do with us.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, very much so.

*Q: The Fulbright program, in its early stages when you arrived, how did you handle the issue of the living conditions for the Americans coming in?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, this was one of the areas in which Wu Gonggan, my chief assistant, excelled. He knew the go-to people at the universities and was able to talk to them. He would tee up the issue, and then I'd have a go at it. A one-two punch, so to speak. We had difficulties that were partially because of fussy Fulbrighters, but there were also times when living conditions were not appropriate. In those cases we had to go out to the school and talk to the FAO and say, "Look, we can't continue to send a Fulbrighter to your school if you're going to treat them this way. You have to give them better facilities." One time we had a professor assigned to Fudan University from the University of Texas. He was a well-known journalism professor. Had written an important textbook in the field. Well, he got on the bad side of Fudan University because students would come to his apartment to talk about issues. The FAO didn't like that, and they got even madder when they heard that female students also came calling. The Fulbrighter was careful to make sure there were always groups of students involved, but that didn't stop the gossip. So these disagreements continued for several months.

In the end Wu Gonggan helped engineer a solution. We transferred the professor to the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute (SFLI). He had been a guest lecturer there and the students and faculty liked him very much. Moreover, SFLI had a more flexible FAO. They had been dealing with foreign teachers for a longer period. Wu Gongzhan also had been a student and administrative assistant at SFLI and knew the right buttons to push. Thanks to his efforts, the transfer worked. The professor changed schools and was happy and Fudan was happy to get rid of somebody they didn't like (*laughs*).

*Q: You have these contacts with the academic institutions in town. What other kinds of exchanges are you engaged in?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, as I mentioned before, we tried through our International Visitors program to pick people from universities and from political organizations. Another program that's similar to International Visitors is called the Humphrey Fellows. Basically it's a longer exchange program than the IV – lasts for a full year. The Humphrey takes people who are mid-career and brings them to the United States for one year. They are sent to a specific university where they study together on a selected topic along with fellows from other countries. They actually do classroom study for about half a year and then they intern for organizations in their field.

I remember one particular Humphrey grantee who was an official from the chemical industries. He worked for a government agency that managed the chemical industry, which was a state-run operation. This was a case in which we worked together with the Shanghai FAO to find a candidate. They saw their choice as a man on the rise. They promised he would do well. And so we sent him to the U.S. I can't remember what university he went to. From the beginning we had some concern that his English was not quite up to par. To remedy this problem, Humphrey organized for him an intensive month-long English course when he first arrived in the U.S.

And so our grantee was in the U.S. for a year, and when he came back something quite strange took place. I received a letter from the Humphrey program saying, "Mr. Zhang," -- I can't remember his name, but I'll call him that -- "was a very willing worker. He was congenial. But we think he did not get enough out of his program because of his poor English." The letter went on reluctantly to suggest that the program was perhaps a failure.

Now here's where the fascinating part comes in. Wu Gongzhan and I called on Mr. Zhang to ask him about the program. Well, he was just incredibly enthusiastic about it. It was, he said, transformational for him. When he got back to China, the Chemical Bureau sent him all around the country to give lectures about his experience in the United States and he got a major promotion. Based on this interview, I wrote a cable to Washington about Mr. Zhang's program. I entitled it "The Rashomon Effect." I'm sure you've seen the old Japanese film, "Rashomon," where you have the story of a murder told from four different perspectives. Which one is true? In Mr. Zhang's case, we decided his version was the one we wanted to believe. So we considered the program to be a success despite Washington's legitimate concerns.

The real problem was this. Back in the early 1980s there just weren't enough good English speakers to participate in all our programs. Today that problem doesn't exist. Now the level of English in China has improved by light years. It's just very different from those olden days.

*Q: At the time you were there was there any new or particular emphasis on English language training in the academic institutions?*

NEIGHBORS: There was. Part of the Fulbright mission was to train English language teachers. We also brought a lot of American Speakers over to lecture in this area, and we provided subscriptions to "English Teaching Forum," a USIA publication. So, yeah, we were quite interested in that, although we simply did not have the money to launch large-scale programs. We couldn't match Alliance Française or the Goethe Institute or the British Council in their teaching of language. We didn't have the money to do it. More important, the Chinese government would never, never have approved.

*Q: So in Shanghai there's no American Center, American library?*

NEIGHBORS: No, there was not. We had a person in the press and cultural section trained as a librarian. She could do research for organizations that requested assistance.



We sent out mailers of key articles about U.S. policy and U.S. society and culture. We also distributed Jiaoliu (Exchange) magazine, which was edited and published out of Hong Kong, but done for Mainland China. Basically, Jiaoliu took articles about America and translated them into Chinese. It was printed at the USIA publishing house in Manila and distributed free of charge throughout China. Circulation was small, sent to our key contacts throughout the country.

*Q: Now, how about support from USIA Washington? Isn't Charles Wick the head of USIA? Did he have any particular positive attitude toward expanding in China?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I think he wanted to do more in China. The biggest problem was Chinese government opposition to new programs. Wick, for example, was big on television and radio placement of USIA products. But we couldn't do that in China. They didn't want our stuff. We did, however, have a film showing program at the American consulate in Shanghai. We would invite select audiences, maybe 50 people, to come to a showing of a popular American film. They weren't the latest films. We couldn't get the rights to those. But we did show classic films and they were quite popular. This was something that Wick had emphasized and we were able to do.

Film showings, cultural performances, and lectures were very important to the consulate. If we wanted to meet a new contact at a university, for example, we couldn't just casually drop in to see him. We had to have a reason, and the person who was going to receive us had to explain the reason to his bosses and to the FAO – all in all, a difficult prospect.

But if we had an officially sanctioned event, like a film showing or a lecture, then our Chinese contacts could more easily get permission to come to the consulate and talk. They had a good excuse. In this way our press and cultural activities helped other officers within the consulate to meet new and informative contacts.

In those days when we hosted a reception at the consulate general, we carefully watched how our guests arrived. Usually, the Chinese would wait outside the front gate until all the invitees had assembled. Then they would walk into the reception in perfect protocol order.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: And sometimes it was funny. Sometimes you would have people coming in as the head of their delegation who on paper did not look like they were the VIPs in that organization. But somehow they were the first ones to walk in. And so you knew they had some other organizational identity you weren't quite aware of.

*Q: Lots of uses of soft power. I'm almost wanting to ask, would that mean that you almost had better contacts within the Shanghai area than say the political reporter, Doug McNeil?*

NEIGHBORS: That was probably true, because the Chinese weren't as suspicious of us, the press and culture gurus. In those days if you had contact with people in society, it was going to be known to the secret police.

I can give you one good example of how this worked. My wife and I became close friends with an elderly Shanghainese couple: Professor S.T. Phen and his wife Dora Chen. S.T. had been the last acting president of St. John's University, one of Shanghai's preeminent universities during the 1930s and 1940s, founded in 1879 by Anglican missionaries. S.T. was educated at Oxford and his wife Dora came from Tianjin and had gone to an English-language high school with the American novelist John Hershey, who had been the son of an American missionary.

Dora and S.T. were the only Chinese friends whom my wife and I visited regularly in their home. S.T. used to hold court there. He taught classical Chinese lessons to Americans who came calling. He and Dora had an amazing range of foreign contacts.

S.T. was in his eighties at that time. During the Cultural Revolution he had been in prison for seven years. His crime? He studied at Oxford. Obviously he was a counter-revolutionary. S.T. said he had been in prison seven years, but he felt like it was only four, because every night when he went to sleep in prison, he had beautiful dreams (*laughs*).

So Mary and I used to visit S.T. and Dora a couple of times a month. S.T. told me that one time after I left his house, some police or Secret Service people came and said, "Don't you know that Mr. Neighbors is an American spy and he's trying to get state secrets from you?"

S.T. looked the man in the eye and said, "If Mr. Neighbors thinks I have any state secrets, he's a fool." (*laughs*)

At the beginning of World War II Dora Chen attended Smith College in Massachusetts, but after only two years at the school, her mother made her come back to China, so she didn't graduate. While we were in Shanghai – 1983-1987 -- Smith College developed a scholarship program to allow women who had discontinued their education -- which was a common phenomenon back in the 1940s -- to come back and graduate from Smith. So Dora Chan got a scholarship and went to Smith as a 70-year-old junior. And she graduated in two years.

S.T. and Dora made an exceptional couple, but we met lots of other people like them. In fact, almost any time that we met a prominent older official from Shanghai who spoke incredibly good English, we would say, "I bet you went to St. John's University," and it was nearly always true. One of the former Chinese ambassadors to Washington, Zhu Qizhen, graduated from St. John's University. He had been one of S.T. Phen's students. The ambassador told me that S.T. was seen as one of the only members of the university leadership that the radical students could talk to. S.T. often was the go-between between

the administration and the radical students. Zhu Qizhen admired him a lot. S.T. of course paid for his good works by going to prison for seven years.

*Q: You were saying you had a press person. Did American journalists -- foreign journalists who were coming to town, did they go to you or did they go to Stan?*

NEIGHBORS: Usually they would talk to Stan. They would first call me, and I'd help organize their meetings with Stan. There weren't many foreign journalists around at the time. And our work with the local press was severely limited. Not much of what we could say or do would get covered, particularly on pressing issues. We would do our best to inform local media as to U. S. policy, but our statements would rarely see the light of day. On occasions we would get placement in magazines and journals of some general articles about American society or culture or even economics. But our traditional USIS work with the press was limited.

We did have some success, however, in getting to know journalists and editors. We sent some of the more prominent journalists on International Visitor grants or on Edward R. Murrow awards to spend a year studying at Harvard. But it was more getting to know the journalists and talking to them on background, or just enabling them to understand what the U.S. position was. We knew that they probably weren't going to write about our views, but at least we could help educate them about where we stood on particular issues.

*Q: Now, Premier Zhao Ziyang visits the United States officially between January 7 and 16 in '84. I would assume our press is covering this and this might have given you a little extra entre?*

NEIGHBORS: A little bit, but not much. Most of the coverage was done in Beijing with the press office there. But, if I'm recalling this correctly, the Zhao Ziyang visit paved the way for President Reagan's visit in the spring of 1984, which was simply a tidal wave that inundated the consulate. We basically did nothing for six months, except prepare for the Reagan visit.

*Q: Well, let's cover that. The visit was April 26<sup>th</sup> to May 1, 1984 and the president traveled to Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai. And since it's a presidential visit, the Secretary of State also comes along.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, yes, George Shultz.

*Q: What was Shanghai's role?*

NEIGHBORS: Ah, well. President Reagan and the Secretary were in Shanghai for less than 24 hours. But the planning for the trip took six months of intense effort -- like the allied landing at Normandy.

Mike Deaver was Reagan's public affairs Svengali. He plotted out in great detail how the trip to China was going to look in the United States, how the story would run in the

papers and on television, and how the White House could get the best propaganda bang for the buck.

In the fall of 1983 Deaver came to China with an advance team of 16 White House specialists. The delegation went first to Beijing, then to Xian and Guilin, scouting out possible sites for the visit. Finally, they came to Shanghai. And remember, this was six months before the visit. From the beginning we made the rounds of all the possible sites, walking through possible scenarios. We knew that the president wanted to make a speech at a university. He also wanted to show support for American business, in particular for joint ventures with Chinese firms, which were becoming popular at the time. Deaver also wanted to have some other event that might look good on camera.

So we started visiting all these possible sites and talking to the FAOs and to the Chinese officials who would be involved in making the visit a success.

Three months after this scouting trip, Deaver came back again with an advance team of 30-some people. By this time, the schedule was beginning to fall into place. We were getting more and more into the details of the trip. Then three weeks before the visit, the onslaught began. About 140 Secret Service agents and WHCA (White House Communications Agency) comco specialists arrived. And they were accompanied by the so-called press advance – two media campaign specialists and two administrative wizards who handled the hotel, baggage, travel arrangements for the horde of journalists traveling with the president.

In doing a POTUS (President of the United States) visit to Beijing, the White House could call on an embassy staff of maybe 120 American officers and 200 locals. They had a lot of foot soldiers to throw into battle.

The situation in Shanghai was different. Shanghai was a tiny post, 10 or 12 officers and 35 FSNs. And to handle the White House press there was just me and my six FSNs. As it turned out, press events were going to be the heart of the Reagan visit to Shanghai. Reagan had started out -- as so many presidents do during election campaigns -- saying he was going to be tough on China. He would give more prominence to Taiwan, give them a better shake and all that. Of course, once Reagan took office, he realized that, well, it might not be a good idea to make any dramatic changes.

Having reversed field on China, Reagan needed to convince the American public that his change of tone after the election was a reasonable decision. So his visit was a huge event for him as a conservative president. The Chinese also wanted the Americans to acknowledge once again the promises of the Shanghai Communiqué. Both sides needed to make a big splash.

This meant that over 300 journalists were coming with Reagan to China. The normal contingent for a presidential visit is about 130 to 150. But we had 300. And the Shanghai government had no idea how to deal with such a mob. And to tell the truth, I didn't either. But, I would soon learn – good and hard.

First of all, the Shanghai government just couldn't grasp the notion that the media and the U.S. government are not the same thing. So we've got 300, yes 300, journalists coming in on a charter flight. And before that, all these advance press types are coming in (print media, television and radio crews) and they want to rent trucks and equipment and hotel rooms and all this. And the Shanghai government won't approve any of these rentals unless I say OK. This means I'm getting all these requests to do all these approvals, and I keep telling the FAO, "I don't have to approve these requests. These journalists have nothing to do with the U.S. government. They represent private organizations.

"Yes, we realize that. But can ABC rent this truck?"

"Okay, okay. I give up. Sure, give ABC whatever they want."

The most important event for Reagan in Shanghai was his speech to students at Fudan University. His first day schedule looked like this: airport arrival ceremony, visit to a U.S.-China joint-venture factory, speech at Fudan University, banquet hosted by the president for Shanghai leaders. Early the next morning he would go to a commune and look at farmers and visit their house and then proceed to Air Force One.

This was a complicated schedule for such a short visit. We've got to make sure the press – both U.S. and Chinese -- can efficiently cover each event. Now doing a presidential visit in Tokyo or London or Paris, it's difficult, very complicated. But these embassies are old hands at high-level visits. They've seen the president scores of times, they know what the White House requires, and they have all the necessary equipment on hand.

In Shanghai, no one on the press side had any idea what was going on. I'd never done one of these visits. I soon discovered, oh, every place the president comes, we have to have press risers so that the cameramen can be high enough to get a shot. In most countries nowadays risers are available for hire. You pay the money and a company installs them for you. Doesn't work that way in Shanghai. No, we have to hire carpenters to build the risers for every event and a podium for a potential press conference. The press conference venue of course has to have a blue-drape backdrop. So we hire a seamstress to make this gigantic blue drape. The site for the press conference is an old auditorium at the Jin Jiang Hotel with a podium about 100-feet wide. We have this enormous curtain hanging all across the back.

As part of the visit preparations, WHCA has to double the number of telephone lines to the Jin Jiang Hotel, where the president is staying. They also have to install telephone lines at the airport, the factory, Fudan University, the banquet hall, and the commune. These lines are of course for the presidential party, but additional lines are added so the press can file stories.

All this activity was fascinating to me, also terrifying. You must remember, we had no cell phones at that time. Once the visit is underway, the only people who can communicate with each other are the White House Advance people who have

walkie-talkies. The rest of us are incommunicado. At the consulate we do have Wang computers and an Apple IIe. We used Apple to keep all the hotel reservations for 300 journalists and a thousand other people. I think there were a thousand people coming in with Reagan that day, and they brought in all the office equipment for the White House Press Office. It was quite an operation.

Prior to the visit, our most important focus is on the speech at Fudan University. Reagan is going to visit a classroom and then give a speech in the auditorium. Who's going to be in the audience? Well, the Chinese naturally want to get as many of their students and faculty into the event as possible, while the White House insists on a large number of seats for the presidential party. Meanwhile, the TV networks are saying, "We have to have this huge platform for the cameras right in the middle of the auditorium. If the 'throw' for the camera is too long, we won't have a good shot of the president. We must move the platform closer to the front."

The FAO guy, Lu Yimin, who's negotiating all these details says, "Oh, well, if the platform has to be moved forward, then we won't have enough seats in the auditorium. Some of our American friends won't have a place to sit." Suddenly the White House decides that camera doesn't need to be so close.

*Q: Now, the Secret Service on the White House side, they're pretty demanding from time to time. Did they ruffle any Chinese feathers?*

NEIGHBORS: Naturally feathers were ruffled. One purpose of a presidential visit is to gain good will through highest-level public programs and behind-the-scenes exchanges on important issues. But as far as the day-to-day business of dealing with the Foreign Ministry and the local FAOs is concerned, a presidential visit can damage your relationships for many months to come. And that's because we have to make so many ridiculous requests, ridiculous at least from the point of view of the host country.

At the time of the Reagan visit, the Chinese hadn't had much experience with events on this scale, particularly events that would attract frenzied media attention. Despite this lack of experience with the press, the Chinese were past masters at being hospitable. They knew how to organize programs and didn't appreciate criticism of their efforts.

White House officials, under Mr. Deaver's public-affairs direction, knew exactly what they wanted. All too often that was not what the Chinese wanted. Result: a lot of gnashing of teeth and screaming.

One of the problems we had in Shanghai was acquiring enough hotel rooms to accommodate 300 White House journalists. There weren't enough to go around. Some of the press would have to share hotel rooms. This was an important development, so I sent this information in a cable back to the White House.

Well, on the day of the visit, the press planes arrived and complete chaos ensued. And the White House Advance Mark Weinberg was screaming at me because he had just



discovered that the journalists had to share rooms, and the journalists were really mad. And so Weinberg was screaming at me. And I basically told him, "I sent you a cable about it. If you don't read your in-box, it's your fault."

To take the 300 journalists into town, we had 16 buses waiting on the tarmac. Most of the journalists would go directly to the Jin Jiang Hotel and the Press Filing Center. A small contingent, however, were scheduled to cover Reagan's first event at the joint-venture factory. Unfortunately, Chinese security had made the travel much more difficult by deciding the American press charter plane with 300 press aboard could not fly from Beijing to Shanghai. The Chinese said, "You do not have permission to fly this charter plane from Beijing to Shanghai. You have to take a Chinese carrier." So they split up the 300 traveling press into three different planes.

We had it arranged so that the group covering the factory visit would fly on the first plane. Then of course we got word that the first plane had broken down and would be late (*laughs*). And so the planes arrived and no one knew where they're going. And so we've got these 16 buses and no one knows quite what to do. I'm just running around like crazy and this Mark Weinberg fellow is screaming at me for doubling up the press accommodations. Finally it hits me. Getting the press onto the correct buses was not my job. Someone else had that assignment. I was supposed to get on my bus and get the reporters into the hotel. So that's the big lesson I learned. If you are not assigned to do something, you can't worry about it. Each team member has to do his own part, and things will work out -- maybe. (*laughs*)

*Q: Certainly would put quite a bit of stress on the staffing. Did Beijing send you any help?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. They did. Probably five days in advance, a handful of USIS officers came from Beijing to help out, though by that time we had most things set up. One of the most important decisions I made prior to the visit was to rent the main hotel auditorium five days ahead of time. That cost a lot more money. But, unlike embassy Beijing, I didn't have enough people to set up a Press Filing Center in a single day. So I recruited some Fulbright scholars to help and my wife was helping, as was all of our FSN staff. We worked closely with the hotel staff and the American media crews to set up a place for the pencil press to file stories and for TV and radio to do their broadcasts. We also supervised a crew of carpenters who were building the press risers and speaker platform.

On the eve of D Day, my wife Mary suddenly realized we were one table short in the Filing Center. Didn't have enough space for an extra radio team that was coming in. She pulled aside the hotel staff and asked for an extra table. They scratched their heads for a moment and then led her to a back room where sat a big beautiful table. They started pulling it out into the corridor. But then one of them yelled, "Wait! You have to be very careful with that table! You have to cover it! That was where Nixon signed the Shanghai Communiqué!" I don't know if the story was true, but they thought it was.

In those days, 1984, journalists filed stories by phone. They called them in. And of course in order to make these calls, you had to have an operator. So we had to set up like 10 operators around the Filing Center. When the journalists were ready to file, they would go up to one of the operators and pay them for the telephone call. And then – after five minutes or so, they would be connected. They’d read the story to another reporter or stenographer on the line in the States. It was all very complicated.

*Q: Complicated and antiquated, too.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, it was. The Reagan visit was the first time I ever saw a fax machine. The White House brought one. It didn’t look anything like fax machines look now. But it was amazing to me. I didn’t know you could do that. The White House was sending faxes, while we at State and USIA were writing letters with quill and ink (*laughs*).

*Q: And at this time in Beijing, who is the senior USIS officer in Beijing, the PAO?*

NEIGHBORS: Lynn Noah. He arrived in China the summer of 1983, same as I did.

*Q: And in Shanghai there’s just you, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: And one in Guangzhou?*

NEIGHBORS: Right, Carl Chan was the PAO in Guangzhou. Carl grew up in Hong Kong, graduated from Hong Kong Baptist University, and then went to journalism school in North Dakota because he was told the weather was good there (*laugh*). He married an American girl, became an American citizen, and eventually passed the Foreign Service Exam. Became a Foreign Service officer. He was a native speaker of Cantonese. When the BPAOs attended our annual public affairs meeting in Beijing, Carl and I would walk around Beijing. He’d start speaking Chinese to some people on the streets, and I’d have to translate for him. He had this incredible Cantonese accent -- he’d never studied Mandarin. He just sort of picked it up on the run. No one could understand him. He was, however, an exceptionally intelligent officer, very good at public diplomacy work.

At this time USIS also had an officer at our ConGen in Shenyang, Bill Crowell. Bill was also an excellent officer, a China scholar who had a PhD in Chinese history from the University of Washington.

*Q: And what was Noah like to work for and with?*

NEIGHBORS: I liked Lynn Noah a lot. He was a knowledgeable, experienced officer. Had served in Taiwan early in his career. Also in Moscow, where he learned the curious ways of a communist bureaucracy. Knew what he was doing, was extremely thoughtful. He was old lady-ish sometimes in his manner -- very fussy. He worried a lot about managing people and making sure they were doing things right. We had worked together

for about a year before the Reagan visit. I knew how much Lynn -- not over-managed -- but how much he wanted to make sure things were on track. So I was delighted that during the run-up to the Reagan visit, Lynn rarely called me. First of first of all he was crazy busy in Beijing. But I think he had also decided that I knew what I was doing (*laughs*) and that he didn't need to direct his attention there.

*Q: Now, much of the program suggestions and resources, public speakers, whatnot, would be on a list coming out from Washington, correct? So China would pick from that list?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, basically that's right. In those days the press and cultural sections at all embassies wrote detailed country plans every year. These plans clearly stated our themes and goals for the coming year. They spelled out in great detail the individual programs we would carry out in order to achieve our public diplomacy goals. For example, here are the 40 important programs we will implement. To do this we need such-and-such a speaker in December and a performing group in April and so on. And believe it or not, Washington referred to these reports throughout the year. (Nowadays, you write the country program plan and then everybody forgets about it until the next year, when you have to prove how you've achieved your goals). But with old USIA, if you didn't write the request into your plan, you weren't going to get a speaker or you weren't going to get these extra resources for libraries. And so you had to have a plan and describe why you were doing this and under what part of the worldwide USIA program, under what theme you were doing this, and what was the purpose of it. If you made a good case, then Washington would say, yes, OK. Your plan sounds good, so you will get the speaker for this activity and an exhibit for that activity. The system worked pretty well. Beijing wrote the plan, but during our public affairs branch PAO meetings in Beijing, we had a lot of input as to what we needed as well.

*Q: How often would those meetings be?*

NEIGHBORS: They were usually just once a year, although they could be twice a year, depending on circumstances.

*Q: You'd been stationed in Zagreb. Tokyo USIS has been there since the end of the war, Manila's been there for years. But in China you're a new program, you're really trying to carve out your space. That must have been challenging just to get the attention and the resources to do that.*

NEIGHBORS: True. Nowadays, China is seen as the big gorilla. It gets more money than it even asks for, which is very different from the old days. Back in those days, yeah, it was hard to scrounge money for new programs. We had to make a strong case for funds, and Lynn Noah was very good at that. He had a lot of contacts back in Washington and was able to get us enough money to carry out the programs listed in our country plan. In many ways the problem was inadequate staff, not a lack of money.

*Q: Now, the ambassador at that time was Art Hummel who's a China scholar, associated with China for a long time. What was it like working for him, or did you even have a sense of his style?*

NEIGHBORS: I admired Art Hummel tremendously. He had an incredible career. Started out as a USIA officer.

*Q: Really?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, at one point he served as PAO Rangoon. He later on went on to become ambassador there. Not sure how he shifted from press and culture to ambassador, but clearly he was good at it. He continued his career as ambassador in Ethiopia, Pakistan and then in China. A perfect person to be our envoy in China. His father, Arthur Hummel, Sr., was a missionary and renowned scholar in the field of Chinese history. He partially wrote and edited Eminent Qing Biographies, a classic text, a huge compendium of short essays describing the lives of the major figures of the Qing Dynasty.

Arthur Jr., the ambassador, grew up in northern China. He once told me he couldn't feel satisfied with a meal unless he finished it off with a mantou, the traditional steamed bread of Shanxi.

During World War II, Hummel was interned in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, I think in Shandong or somewhere up in Northeast China. He was in the same camp as Eric Liddell, a leading figure in the movie "Chariots of Fire." Liddell was the so-called Flying Scotsman who refused to run at the Olympics on Sunday because it was against his religion. After the Olympics Liddell became a missionary to China, was eventually placed in a Japanese internment camp where he died.

Obviously, Hummel did not die in the camp. On the contrary, he escaped and joined a KMT guerilla group fighting against the Japanese.

I found Hummel to be a thoughtful individual. His wife, Betty-Lou Hummel, was an equally amazing figure. I see her every once in a while at old China-hand parties and she always knows who I am. Now I served in Shanghai while she was in Beijing, so she didn't meet me that many times. But she always remembered me, and how can you not like someone who realizes how special you are.

Years later, after Hummel had retired and I had become PAO Hong Kong, I worked with him to raise funds for the Nanjing-Hopkins Center. Hummel would travel to Asia for Johns-Hopkins University raising funds. So I got to know him a little better at that time.

Art Hummel had many fine qualities, but he was not a great public speaker. He could be pretty boring. One time he said to me, "You know, my goal in making a speech is to be as boring as possible, because that way I don't get in trouble," (*laughs*). [Ed: Ambassador Hummel's ADST interview can be found at ADST.org.]

*Q: Now, we've been talking about the academic and cultural institutions around the Shanghai area. But the Shanghai consulate's territory is larger. Did you get to go to any of the other provinces, Zhejiang, for instance?*

NEIGHBORS: We did. We went to Hangzhou in Zhejiang, went to Nanjing, and even to Hefei capital of Anhui, one of China's poorer provinces back in the 1980s. Despite this poverty, Anhui did play host to the Chinese University of Science and Technology (CUST), which had originally been in Beijing and during the Cultural Revolution was moved to Anhui. I talked to some professors at that time who had made the move from Beijing. Although the move had taken place many years before, these old professors still had tears in their eyes (*laughs*) when they thought about having to come to Hefei from Beijing.

But in fact, CUST was a marvelous university. CUST Students had the highest scores in the national university entrance examination. I used to go there every once in a while. In addition to CUST we also did programs with Anhui University, CUST's slightly shabby cousin. I knew one of the American teachers at Anhui University. She was Sister Maureen Corr, a Maryknoll Sister I worked closely with in Kaohsiung. Not long after I left Kaohsiung, Maureen and several other colleagues got kicked out (*laughs*) of Taiwan for too much contact with the independence movement. Maureen still loved working in a Chinese environment, so she came to China and taught at the Anhui University for a number of years – naturally she worked in China in mufti, not as a nun.

*Q: Now, is it fairly easy to get around in terms of transportation and in terms of getting Chinese permission to move around the country?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, if we were going to do programs in certain cities, we had to get permission from the FAOs. And they usually were fairly good about helping arrange our travel. I sometimes would travel with Stan Brooks to visit the provinces. The Shanghai consular district included Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui provinces. Traveling with the CG gave me more *entre* to see important educational, cultural, and media contacts. I was unlikely to be refused a meeting with the president of a university if the consul general were along.

I remember one time when we went on a trip to Suzhou and along the Grand Canal, Stan revealed his humble roots as a Wyoming mountain man. We were traveling together with our wives, and were offered a place to stay in a government guest house outside Suzhou. By the standards of Jiangsu province in those days, the guesthouse was nice -- probably a two-star hotel in the United States. But Stan didn't want to have a fuss made over him, and so he rejected staying in this guesthouse. Instead we stayed in some really awful hotel, which had 20-watt bulbs in the ceiling and atrocious food (*laughs*).

There were a lot of restaurants then that went by the old Cultural Revolution notion that if the food were good, it meant you weren't revolutionary enough. "Throw a little more sand and grit into my rice. That'll help me serve the people better." Right after the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, there were only 200 restaurants in the whole city, a city

with a population of 12 million people. Now there seems to be 200 restaurants every square block or something like that.

*Q: Now, as you were traveling around would you drive or take trains or what?*

NEIGHBORS: Took the train, and then the local FAO would arrange local transportation with a driver – naturally we were charged for that. There were restrictions on foreigners driving outside the city of Shanghai at that time. When I was in Shanghai from 1983 to 1987, I didn't own a car. We couldn't drive anywhere, so it didn't make much sense to spend the money to buy one. Anyway, you could get taxis with relative ease – not hail them on the street but pick one up at a local hotel that catered to foreigners.

*Q: Now, as you said, Shanghai's a pretty crowded city. How was it like to get around?*

NEIGHBORS: It was difficult. Of course, for work related programs, the Public Affairs Section (PAS) had a car and driver. There weren't many private cars so the traffic wasn't outrageous like it is now. There were some times when the streets were jammed, but not too bad. One of the worst traffic jams occurred during President Reagan's visit to Shanghai. The presidential motorcade had to go from an American factory on one side of the city to Fudan University, which was way over on the other side. Of course, the police blocked traffic. So during the entire five-mile ride, there were millions of people lining the way on both sides of the streets waving at the motorcade. The White House thought all these people had turned out to greet President Reagan, and probably some of them had. But most of the people were there simply because the police had stopped all pedestrians from crossing the streets for half-an-hour or so. People just piled up on top of each other (*laughs*). Most of them would have been out on the streets with or without a presidential visit.

*Q: (laughs) The American press covered the Reagan visit. Did you have to deal with them or were they sort of managed by the White House?*

NEIGHBORS: The White House manages the traveling press. The key press advance for this event was Mark Hatfield, Jr., the son of Oregon senator Mark Hatfield, Sr. Our Mark Hatfield was only 23 or 24 years-old at the time of visit. He had dropped out of school to serve on the Reagan presidential campaign in 1980. He had worked on countless press events during the campaign, so despite being a callow youth, he had great experience in this one, highly specialized, incredibly intense field of endeavor – the care and feeding of the spoiled, arrogant, demanding, but also highly competent White House press corps.

I was fascinated to see how Hatfield was able to assert his authority with the Chinese, because the Chinese are much more likely to give respect to someone if they're older. And here was this kid wearing cowboy boots and putting his feet up on the table and stuff like that (*laughs*), so at first our Chinese colleagues were aghast. But I think in the end they recognized that Mark could speak for the White House with authority on press issues and that he had a lot of experience and knew how things worked.



He knew the White House press. What he didn't know was China and Shanghai and how to work with local authorities to meet White House demands. That was my job and the job of my assistant Wu Gongzhan. In those days the level of English in Shanghai was generally poor, even in the FAO. So Wu Gongzhan and I had to do a lot of the interpreting for the White House on the press side, both linguistically and culturally.

*Q: Now, on the Shanghai environment, are there other consulates and other Goethe Institute sort of things?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, we had the French consulate right across the street from us. The Canadian consulate was not far away. I always remember the new Canadian consul general. Whenever you would introduce him as being Canadian, he would always correct you and say that he was French Canadian. This puzzled the Chinese. Afterwards they'd ask me, "Is he French? Or is he Canadian (*laughs*)?" But the CG insisted. He would not allow you to say he was simply Canadian.

*Q: Do you remember his name?*

NEIGHBORS: I can't remember now. I'm sorry about that (*laughs*), but it was very funny. That story makes me think of beguiling characters on the consular scene. We had one at the U.S. Consulate – the incomparable Tess Johnston. She was the OMS (Office Management Specialist), for Stan Brooks from 1983-1987. Tess, I believe, had worked for AID earlier and then for the State Department. She served as an OMS for John Paul Vann in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam for many years. (If you remember, John Vann was the main character in the best seller, *Bright and Shining Lie*, an award-winning book about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.)

Tess also worked in Europe for a while, but Shanghai was the place she made a second home. She was a gifted office manager. As Anglo-Indian slang has it, Tess not only had "the know-how but the do-how."

More important, Tess had this whole life outside of work, a life quite remarkable. She was a stylish writer and frequently commented about Chinese culture for the State Department newsletter and other publications. She was consumed by Shanghai history, collected all of the old telephone books from the 1920s and 1930s. A lot of Americans visiting our consulate in Shanghai were people who had grown up in Shanghai and had left 30, 40 years before and wanted to find their old homes. Using her remarkable knowledge of Shanghai history and her collection of phone books, Tess more often than not was able to help them locate the old homestead.

I remember one time a couple of rabbis came from New York and discovered that the Shanghai government was about to tear down the city's remaining synagogue. Hearing their story, Tess went into action. She helped the rabbis organize a campaign to save the stone menorahs from the synagogue and put them in a museum. Her plan worked. Later she wrote an article about the process.

After four years Tess transferred to Paris, taking her Shanghainese maid with her. Paris was fine, but couldn't match Shanghai. So Tess came back for another four-year stint in Shanghai. Tess's maid for a brief time became the star of the amah brigade, regaling her cohorts with bizarre tales of quotidian life in France.

Tess is retired now, but lives in Shanghai at least six months a year. She has made it her mission to study all the old buildings in the city. She and a close associate, the Chinese photographer Deke Erh, have produced a number of books on historical Shanghai, with Deke doing the photographs and Tess writing the history behind the buildings. In recent years she branched out, doing a book on the history and architecture of American colleges and universities throughout China. She also wrote an autobiography about her in the Foreign Service, called *Permanently Temporary: From Berlin to Shanghai in Half a Century*.

Tess was a remarkable person, full of enthusiasm for all her projects. In recent years she and Deke Erh set up the Old Shanghai Hands Reading Room down near the Bund in an historic building. The reading room is decorated with antique furniture and boasts thousands of books about historical Shanghai. People can come in and read the books and drink coffee. And if you really want a great experience in Shanghai, sign up for one of Tess's patented walking tours.

Tess remains a force of nature. She's from the South. Miss Tess, with her hair pinned up in a bun, wire-rimmed glasses, reminds me of those formidable elementary school teachers who taught my mother and my cousins and even me back in my hometown, Marshall, Texas. She still has this strong accent, a Southern accent, an accent that after all these years intrudes upon her Chinese. Her Mandarin pronunciation may not be the best, but so what. Tess forges ahead. *(laughs)*

*Q: What was it like for the families to be living in Shanghai? You started out in a hotel, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. We were in the Park Hotel for one month and then at the Donghu Guest House for two months. The contractors preparing our apartment – it took them about three months to paint a three-bedroom apartment and get it fixed up. Why did it take so long to do a simple paint job? Not sure, but I have a theory. It was summertime and our apartment had air-conditioners. The workers just liked being in a place that was cool, so they took their time. Maybe they took extra time to install listening devices. Who knows?

*Q: Was this where all the Americans were living, or were you spread out?*

NEIGHBORS: No, it wasn't. Americans lived in many scattered places, some out near the airport where there were American-style houses, which was more like living in suburban America. But we lived in the Huaihai Apartments, a 15-minute walk from the consulate. The Huaihai was an old building, built in the 1920s, I believe, and known then as the "Gascogne." It was built by the French in art-deco style – a beautiful apartment,

though a little down at the heels when we lived there. The secretary for the French consul general used to live in that building when she was a child in the 1930s. Her father had been a French businessman in Shanghai. And now she was back in the same building, but in a different country – different in that China had been transformed in the intervening years, for better or for worse.

Shanghai could be difficult in those days, the mid 1980s. In the winter there was not much fresh food to be had in the markets. If you got bananas, for example, they would be black already. And you weren't allowed to choose your veggies. The vendor would choose for you and you had to take some of the bad stuff as well as the good.

Life was especially difficult for spouses. As Americans, they aroused suspicion if they tried to have contact with the local Chinese community. And they didn't have the official, sanctioned contacts that officers had as diplomats. My wife had it a little easier because she's native Chinese. She's from Hong Kong and mother tongue is Cantonese, but she speaks Mandarin well. She sounds like she's from Taiwan, because that's where she learned to speak Chinese. (Years later when she worked as a consular associate adjudicating visas in Beijing she had a nickname on the web. Students called her Taiwan Big Mama *(laughs)*).

Because of her language fluency, Mary did have some Chinese friends and a few other acquaintances from the foreign business community. Ruth and Mark, our two kids, went to the American School located on the consulate compound. There were maybe 20 students at most. Our fourth year in Shanghai, Ruth was in seventh grade, the only student at that level. She resented that.

Life in Shanghai was not easy and getting around the country was difficult and the winters were grim -- lots of rain and dark clouds and bone-chilling cold. Shopping was difficult. As I mentioned earlier, the Number One Department Store had 300,000 customers on a Sunday – only 100,000 on a week day. And if you did crowd your way into the store, you would be greeted by the clerks... Wait I take that back. No clerk would ever greet you. Service with a snarl was the watchword. To make a purchase you had to line up to select the item. Then you would get a sales slip for the item and trudge over to wait in line for the cashier. Once you paid and got the requisite stamps and receipts, you went back and lined up to take possession of your prized purchase. We didn't do that very often. *(laughs)*.

*Q: Did the Americans have their own store in the consulate?*

NEIGHBORS: No, we did not. We were dependent on the economy. When we went to Beijing, we could buy some items from the embassy. We were in Shanghai for four years. I've been stressing the hardships, but we enjoyed it. We got to travel all over China, see lots of things.

*Q: Right. How much traveling around did you get in? If I recall, there was a time when you could buy an airline ticket to some place, but you couldn't buy a roundtrip ticket?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that's true. Once you got to your destination, the first chore was to secure a reservation for coming back. You couldn't do that by phone and the Internet didn't exist. Basically you had to ask someone at the hotel (or the FAO for an official trip) to go to the ticketing agency and beg for a seat. Hotels would do this for you, for a small fee, of course. I think the people who fetched the tickets liked things this way – they made money. Certainly paying the fee was worth it -- anything to avoid the scrum at China Airlines. But the system did add considerable tension to a trip. You never knew till the last minute if a seat would be available.

*Q: Now, this was private travel that you were able to do. Did it have the same sort of restrictions to it? Did you have to get permission to go to Xian or whatever?*

NEIGHBORS: I don't remember any restrictions. We went where airlines would take us, except for Tibet. That required permission. Oh, yes, we weren't allowed to drive outside the city. That was a major restriction. In 1986 the regulations changed slightly and official consulate vehicles were given permission to drive to Suzhou and Hangzhou. I remember driving to Hangzhou and marveling at the marijuana plants flourishing on roadside farms. The Chinese of course raised it as hemp for making cloth and rope.

*Q: How much of China did you see during this tour?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we traveled all around central China, Jiangsu and Jinjiang and Anhui. We made a particularly interesting trip in preparation for performances by the Alvin Ailey Dance Troupe. Under USIA sponsorship, the Alvin Ailey dancers were scheduled to perform in Shanghai and Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province. In those days Nanchang was even more backwaterish than it is today. Before the dancers agreed to perform there, they wanted an American official to take a look at the auditorium to see if it was OK for a performance. So my wife and kids and I took the overnight train down to Nanchang. This was in July and we soon understood why Nanchang is known as one of the five furnaces of China. We had a thermometer in our train car. Unfortunately, the thermometer was just there to taunt us -- no air conditioning on the train. The train ride was about 18 hours, overnight, and the temperature was like 39 degrees Celsius (or 104 Fahrenheit). Apparently in Nanchang the temperature never gets above 39, because if it does they have to close down the factories, and they're not going to close down the factories. In the middle of the night the temperature in the train got down to 88 degrees – not ideal sleeping weather.

*Q: Gives new meaning to climate-warming deniers.*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we finally arrived in Nanchang and found it to be an interesting city with one especially nice museum. It had a collection of the whimsical paintings of Zheng Banqiao, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century painter known as one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou. We also discovered that the city had a new cultural center built by the Railroad Bureau. It wasn't bad, much better in fact than the one where the Alvin Ailey dancers would

perform in Shanghai. The Shanghai facility was appallingly shabby -- hadn't been repaired in many years.

So based on my recommendation, the Alvin Ailey did perform in central China, including Nanchang. Their visit was a remarkable experience for me. We got to have an intimate dinner at the consulate with Mr. Ailey himself -- this was just a couple years before he died. He came in advance of his group. And so we had a nice dinner with him, the consul general's wife and my wife and a couple of other people. We got to chat with Alvin Ailey and then several days later see his dancers perform in Shanghai. They did three performances. I saw one from the balcony, one from the regular seats and one from backstage. Fabulous.

*Q: Now, you were in China from 1983 to 1987. Looking at that whole period, did you perceive that things were getting easier to accomplish? As times passed did the Chinese get used to working with us?*

NEIGHBORS: The Reagan visit to China, to Shanghai was a turning point. It confirmed that we were committed to improving our relationship with China, and that the evil President Reagan, who had conspired to restore relations with Taiwan, wasn't going to do that anymore. As a result, our relationship could continue to improve. Afterwards we did have somewhat better access to universities and to think tanks in the region.

In the fall of 1986 just before I left Shanghai, we saw another area of dramatic improvement: military exchanges. This was highlighted by a U.S. Navy visit to Qingdao, our first port call to China since 1949, when the repair ship USS Dixon sailed away in the face of approaching revolutionary troops. Three ships participated in the 1986 visit, including the USS Reeves, flagship of the Admiral James "Ace" Lyons, commander of the Seventh Fleet.

A month in advance of the visit we started our planning sessions. Lynn Noah and I took the lead on dealing with press and public affairs issues, which would be a major component of the port call. We went a month early to Qingdao to size up the situation and plan media coverage for the public events. This was in late October 1986. And according to government regulations, heat couldn't be turned on in hotels and public buildings until November 1<sup>st</sup>. And so I was there like October 25<sup>th</sup>. I slept all night in my hotel room with all my clothes on and long underwear and a stocking cap. Brrr! We came back to Qingdao in November, a month later, for the real visit. The hotels were warm. They had turned on the heat.

This visit proved to be a milestone in the improvement of our military-to-military relationship. I was excited. On the day they arrived, I was up at four in the morning taking the press out on a Chinese patrol boat to meet the three American ships and transfer the pilot who would lead them in. Now the U.S. Navy was really worried because the Chinese wouldn't give them up-dated charts to the harbor. We knew the Chinese were also dredging the harbor at the last minute and we wanted to know why and where. One of our destroyers had a radar or sonar bubble that extended well below the

keel. Even a tap against the seabed would puncture the bubble and destroy 50 million dollars worth of equipment along with the captain's career. Tension was in the air, and I was in the middle of the action, along with the press, sailing out to sea in the pitch-black early morning hours.

*Q: This was the American press?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, the American press. I was thrilled -- all these warships coming out of the mist and we're meeting them at dawn. After a couple of hours they anchored and a full day of activities began. Admiral Ace Lyons debarked and was greeted by the Chinese brass. A sedate greeting and presentation of colors had been planned. But the plans went awry. The official party was quickly surrounded by a mob of Chinese press. Then the American press, particularly the cameramen, got angry because their shots were blocked by the crowd. (And cameramen who don't get the shots lose their jobs.) Shouting and shoving ensued, but eventually the commanders stopped talking and the event came to a close.

Now it was off to a friendly basketball game between the two navies. The Chinese had said, "Just a pick-up game, it'll be casual." I remembered those words as the U.S. team drove up in a bus to the outdoor basketball court. The windows of the bus were about six-and-a-half feet above the ground. And all the Chinese players were looking directly into the windows. This so-called pick-up team was national military champion, I was told. At any rate, they were good. I think there were a few ringers on the U.S. Navy team, as well, but they couldn't match the Chinese.

Later we had a soccer match and a visit to the Qingdao breweries for all the sailors. In the afternoon, a small U.S. ensemble performed at a local school and the Chinese military orchestra and the Seventh Fleet band gave a joint concert in the evening. To wrap things up, the U.S. Navy hosted a banquet for their Chinese counterparts. This last straw that nearly broke my back, began at 12:30 in the morning, ended at about 1:30. The day of the visit had started for me at 3:00 a.m. as I groggily peeled myself out of bed. I did not sit down again until (*laughs*) 2:00 a.m. the next morning, some 23 hours later.

*Q: Now, Qingdao's in Shandong Province. Was Shandong in the Shanghai consular district?*

NEIGHBORS: No, it was not. Lynn Noah had overall charge of press activities, but he gave me responsibility for organizing the Navy's public affairs activities, that is, the basketball game, the soccer game, and the two concerts. Branch PAO Bill Crowell also came down from Shenyang to lend support. So there were basically three of us American officers, plus some of our local employees, too. Lynn had been impressed with how I handled the Reagan visit, so he called on me for this complicated event.

*Q: I have notes that a U.S. Navy ship visited Shanghai while you were stationed there.*



NEIGHBORS: There was supposed to be a visit to Shanghai, but it had to be cancelled. When planning was in the last stages, Premier Hu Yaobang said the U.S. had promised him that the visiting American warships would not be carrying nuclear weapons. Of course the U.S. never makes such a promise, even if we have no intention of carrying such weapons. A similar disagreement with New Zealand put our relations in the deep freeze for many years. Eventually the two sides worked through this problem, and the port of call was changed back to Qingdao. A Shanghai visit did not take place till after I had left China.

*Q: Now, another visit that you had at the end of your tour was Secretary Shultz in March 1987 to Beijing, Guilin, Dalian, Shanghai, Qufu.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it was his swan song basically. He was going out of office soon, and it was certainly his last trip to China, so State made a big deal of it. He and his party went to eight places in seven days, I believe. Usually a Secretary of State will have 10 to 14 traveling press with him, but this time Shultz had 65. Yes, 65 – an enormous group to be traveling with a Secretary of State.

Preparing for 135 journalists to participate in a presidential visit is intense, but you do have a lot of help from the White House in handling the details. But a Secretary of State's visit is different. There is of course an advance team from the Department, but the team is small and it relies on the embassy or consulate to do the heavy lifting. And in this case, with 65 needy journalists in tow, the lifting was heavy indeed.

In preparation for the visit we booked the Secretary's party into a brand new, joint-venture hotel. Following the USIA handbook for SecState visits, I proposed to rent an auditorium in the hotel and prepare it for a possible press conference. I kept calling State Department asking for guidance on this issue. They would say, "The Secretary is not going to do a press conference. Not gonna do one." But I went ahead and rented a room anyway. And I set it up for a press conference. So the plane lands and I go out on the tarmac to meet the press officer traveling with the Secretary. She runs toward me, frantically waving her arms, saying, "As soon as we finish the first event, the Secretary's coming back to the hotel and giving a press conference." *(laughter)*

"Yes, I assumed he would. We're ready." At this point the press filed off the plane and headed for the two press buses, and that's where I had made a big mistake. I thought, given the size of the press group that wanted to go to the first event, we just needed one bus. So we got a big bus, seating 45 people. When you're going in a motorcade, that's a big mistake, because a big bus can't keep up.

The plan is to head for first event, which is at the McDonald-Douglas joint-venture factory. McDonald-Douglas is helping the Chinese co-manufacture some parts for the MD-80 passenger plane. So I help corral the American journalists and herd them onto the bus. The Chinese are planning to give Shultz a scenic tour through the most crowded part of Shanghai on the way to the factory. Police cars and motorcycles lead the way, but unfortunately, there are no cops behind us. They're in front clearing the way, but not

behind. And we're the last vehicle in line. And somebody steps out in front of the bus, and the driver slams on the brakes, and we're done for. The motorcade is gone. What should we do now? *(laughs)*. Sylvia Rifkin, the press officer from embassy Beijing – a veteran of many high-level visits – was with me in the back of the bus. For about 30 seconds we're discussing what we're going to do. Should we try to catch up with the motorcade? Should we go back to the hotel and wait for the press conference? And so we're talking for about 30 seconds. And then the press is all, "Can't you guys ever make up your mind? Why can't you make a decision? Where are we going to go? Why is the State Department always so stupid? La di da di da." So finally we decide that we would try to rejoin the motorcade. We are so far from the press hotel that we'd have trouble getting back in time for the press conference if we weren't in the motorcade. Some of the press want to get out, catch a taxi, and go back to the hotel. And that's what they do.

By the time we get to the McDonald-Douglas site, the event is over. Surprisingly, the press is not that unhappy, though they pretend to be. Truth is, they have just finished seven days of flying all over China at a frantic pace, and this event isn't that important. We do, however, successfully rejoin the motorcade and head back to the hotel in plenty of time for the press conference.

Schultz has a few minutes prep time for the event. Meanwhile I'm frantically running around making sure everything is ready for the event. The press assembles in the auditorium and two minutes before the Secretary is slated to arrive, the cameramen plug in their equipment and the electricity goes out. *(laughs)* As good luck and foresight would have it, the manager of the hotel was worried this might happen. So he has all his electricians on call and they quickly fix the problem. Shultz answers questions and everyone is happy.

I also learned something interesting about Shultz. A friend of mine, Steve Vance, was in the Communications Section at the embassy and was tasked with setting up the secure telephone booth for the Secretary, so he could speak without being overheard by Chinese intelligence. To put together the booth, Steve and his colleagues brought several panels weighing 500 pounds apiece up to the Secretary's hotel suite. He said they were over near the window with a dolly trying to push one panel into place, and it started to fall on him, and he thought he was going to go out the window. With a burst of Spiderman strength he pushed it back in place. After a great deal of trouble they finally got the booth installed. One problem: Shultz has claustrophobia and won't close the door to the booth.

*Q: So it's a secure leaded facility.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. As you can see, the epic Shultz visit gave us many headaches. But in the end it was a great success. This visit coupled with the Qingdao port call showed that our relationship with China was steadily improving.

*Q: Altogether you were in Shanghai for four years, 1983-87. Was this a two-year and an extension? How did it turn out to be a four-year assignment?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, it was a two-year assignment. Human Resources (HR) had to assign people to China jobs about three years in advance. That way, you could still bid on the job even if you had no Chinese. You could go to FSI for two years and then take up your position in China.

*Q: Right, because of the language float.*

NEIGHBORS: So I arrived in Shanghai the summer of 1983. After two or three weeks HR said, "How do like your new job? Do you want to extend? You can extend for two years. If you don't want to, we're going to assign it to someone else." And so based on my three-weeks experience, I decided to extend. And we made it four years. Probably for my family, and even for me, maybe three years might have been better. Got particularly old for my daughter who was the only child in her seventh grade class the last year (*laughs*). Shanghai American school has become a huge school now, but in those days I think you had 20, 25 students at most from K (kindergarten) through 7.

*Q: And not just American students, but other diplomatic missions now attend.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, there were some other diplomatic kids there, children of businessmen, too.

*Q: Since you were there four years, as you came to the end of your tour in 1987, would you say that it was easier to get access, get approvals, and get through the Chinese system?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, it was easier. Some of that was simply because I began to understand the Chinese system a little better. This is a system that depends on *guanxi*, on connections, on knowing the right person to call to work out a problem. During my four years in Shanghai I was able to cultivate a wide array of contacts. One of the best places to build these contacts was through the International Visitor program. This was particularly valuable at a time when few Chinese had ever traveled abroad. Here we were giving potential Chinese leaders an opportunity to experience the United States for a month and further their careers as well.

The IV program gave us invaluable *guanxi* that we frequently used to gain approval for our public diplomacy activities. Even using the FAO to help choose our grantees gave us leverage. After all, the FAO could brag to their nominees, "Oh, we have helped you get this valuable trip to the U.S., and therefore you owe us if we need some favors," or things like that. Now I don't mean we used our *guanxi* in an underhanded way. No, this was just how things get done in China. Know the right people, find the right access points and your life will be easier. So our programs were able to help us gain access. And because of that, we were doing better, much better at the end of the four years than we were at the start.

*Q: Now, these FAOs that you worked through, each university, each institution had one?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Any institution that might have to deal with foreigners had to have a foreign affairs office, an FAO.

*Q: How did you find their staffing? I mean were they knowledgeable about foreign affairs issues?*

NEIGHBORS: It varied wildly. Some FAO officials conspired to thwart us at every opportunity. But there were others who wanted to be a bridge not a moat. They were loyal to their own organization, but they realized the consulate offered opportunities that were helpful to both sides. Because of that, they tried to make our relationship work.

At the time the embassy and all the consulates could not directly hire local employees to work for us. Our employees were not considered to be FSNs, Foreign Service Nationals. They had to be hired by the Chinese Diplomatic Services Bureau (DSB). We weren't allowed to choose from applicants. We told DSB what kind of person we wanted and they would produce that person for us. *(laughs)* I remember one of the funnier stories about this occurred when Frank Scotton was PAO in Beijing. Public Affairs needed a new cultural affairs assistant, a local employee. And so Frank applies to the Diplomatic Services Bureau and after a long time, several months, they say, "OK, we're going to send you this guy, he's really good, he's just what you need, experienced person, da, da, da, da, da."

Well, the guy comes in for his first visit to the Press and Cultural Section and to meet Frank, the PAO. Frank looks at him and thinks, "Oh, this guy was a defense attaché in Turkey when I was PAO there," *(laughs)*.

So the new cultural specialist used to work for the military. And that was the difficulty of dealing with the DSB. We knew some of the local employees performed tasks outside their job descriptions – so to speak. Not good. But sometimes we used this phenomenon to our own advantage. If we wanted a message to get back to Chinese authorities, we would just mention it in earshot of certain local employees. The word would be passed.

*Q: You haven't served in Washington yet. How would you rate your time in Shanghai as a Foreign Service tour?*

NEIGHBORS: I enjoyed it immensely. It had so many challenges, working ab initio (from the beginning), just from the very start of this consulate and trying to build up the Press and Cultural Section. China was becoming more and more important, the largest country in the world, but still just creeping out from under the destruction wreaked by the Cultural Revolution. A real challenge, but that's what made it fun. Working in Shanghai was nothing like my experience in Croatia, which I think may be the most beautiful country in the world. Zagreb couldn't be beat from a personal point of view. I enjoyed my job as well, but it couldn't match China, where the work was much more substantial and meaningful. So, yeah, I thought my experience in Shanghai was the best.

*Q: Lloyd, you were just finishing up as PAO in Shanghai. And now you're coming back to Washington. How did the Washington job come up?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, I had been working abroad since 1975. I had had four assignments: first as a junior officer in Taipei, then as BPAO Kaohsiung, ACAO Zagreb, and finally as BPAO Shanghai. Everyone thought it was about time that I come back to the mother ship. In those days USIA didn't stress the importance of working in Washington in order to get promotions or get a good job. In that way we were different from State. A lot of people stayed abroad most of their career. I did, too. And that was part of the USIA culture. But after 12 years abroad, in the summer of 1987, it was time we came back and gave our kids a chance to see the United States and figure out what was going on there. It's funny, all my kids' moves involved stress. But, the one that inspired the most culture shock, in particular for my daughter, was coming back to Washington D.C. My daughter was 13-years-old. She found it difficult to adjust.

*Q: Was it the music or what?*

NEIGHBORS: The situation was much different from what it is today. Today with the Internet, all kids, no matter where they are in the world, hear the same songs and communicate with friends or people they know back in the States. But in those days when we were living in Shanghai, my daughter Ruth had no classmates in her seventh grade class the last year. She did have some younger friends and was reasonably happy – as happy as any teenage girl with raging hormones can be. But she knew nothing about what was going on in the United States. So when she arrived at Washington and Lee High School (W&L) in Arlington, school, classmates were curious about her life in China for three minutes. After that, they didn't want to hear about it.

At first, Ruth had no way to connect. Eventually she discovered that there were organizations of foreign affairs kids – sons and daughters of diplomats who had formed organizations back in the States. She began to join those and also got interested in soccer and drama at W&L. She acted in *The Teahouse of the August Moon* and played in the orchestra for the musical, *Brigadoon*. Unexpectedly, she began to have a good time, and we were relieved.

*Q: Your lengthy overseas assignments underscore that to understand the culture of a country you have to be there continuously or have some constant way of observing it. And of course that's what the essence of an embassy overseas is.*

NEIGHBORS: Exactly. It's very difficult to know a place unless you live there. A little easier nowadays when we have international communications, as we do. But back in those days we had (*laughs*) bupkis.

*Q: So, tell us, what office did you come back to in USIA?*

NEIGHBORS: USIA at that time had a bureau called the P Bureau, the Program Bureau. They recruited speakers, produced magazines, wrote and transmitted the Wireless File, a

daily U.S. news bulletin for use by embassies and consulates around the world. Posts used these materials to explain U.S. policy and inform audiences about American culture, society, and history. The office that I came back to was known as the Speakers Bureau. We recruited American specialists to travel abroad and lecture on such topics as American economics, government and society, and foreign policy. I was head of the foreign policy office. I had eight officers working under me recruiting speakers who could describe, explain, and sometimes defend U.S. foreign policy.

*Q: Now, I would assume that at this time the general categories and the general people are pretty well known? I guess my question is does the post decide it wants a new speaker on a new topic, or is Washington saying, "Hey, you guys need a speaker on human rights?"*

NEIGHBORS: Actually, it was an efficient system, a system that disappeared with our absorption by the State Department. Every year each post had to write a country plan. The plan was based on five or six different themes selected by Washington. These themes usually included U.S. foreign policy, human rights, democratization, U.S. society and culture, freedom of speech, and so forth. In their country plans posts would say, OK, this is what we're going to do to try to explain Washington policy and help our contacts understand U.S. society and culture -- how it works and where it's going. To do this, we need these materials from Washington. We want publications with articles like this. We would like a certain number of feature films that can be shown to select audiences. And in the case of the speakers, we need 12 speakers this year because we're having a conference on U.S. foreign policy at this time, or we're having another on democratization in the fall, or a university is having a big seminar to discuss such-and-such an issue, so we need a speaker to come to speak for that seminar. Every embassy would submit their plans. Then Washington would plug all requests for assistance into a computer and lists would come out. Thus the Speakers Bureau would have its assignment for the coming year. I would divvy up the requests for foreign policy speakers among my eight officers and they would start to recruit.

*Q: And how did the office come up with those people? I presume primarily academics?*

NEIGHBORS: A lot of academics, but also we recruited government officials, writers, businessmen, and a lot of journalists. But a majority of our speakers were indeed academics, many from Washington think tanks. Sometimes my officers would go out on recruiting missions. For example, if there were going to be a conference in Chicago of specialists on foreign policy, we would send someone there to spread the word about the American Speakers Program. When our recruiters met likely suspects, they would hand them a business card and say, "Would you be interested in going to three countries in Asia to talk about X," or, "What topics could you talk about?" "Could you talk about this specific issue of interest to Chinese scholars?" We recruited for posts all around the world, but Asia presented a particular problem because of the airfare -- very, very expensive. So we usually insisted that the speaker visit at least two or three countries for a period of ten days to two weeks total. On occasion we did single-country programs. But that was for huge countries like China or Brazil or Russia. In that case, the speaker had to



spend one to two weeks and offer programs in three or four different cities. That way we got value for the dollar.

*Q: And going to those conferences also gives you an opportunity to know who's articulate and interesting and presentable, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. That was it. The head of the Speakers Program while I was there, 1987-89, was a fellow named John Mosher, who passed away in 2012. He was a political appointee, Reagan administration -- an outstanding leader for our program. Before coming to USIA, he had already lived a remarkable life. His father, I believe, had lived in Shanghai for many years. During the Korean War Mosher served in the military spending several years in Japan. He learned Japanese, eventually married a Japanese woman, and became an expert in Japanese culture and society. He lived there post-military for a number of years. He wrote, among many other books on Japan, a sophisticated tourist guide to Kyoto. He also loved sumo wrestling. Was an acknowledged *gaijin* expert in the field.

Later Mosher moved to Austria where he ran a speakers' bureau -- a private one -- that contracted speakers from the U.S. for various high-level events around Europe. He also worked as a ski instructor in this spare time (*laughs*).

As you can see, Mosher offered the ideal resume for director of the USIA Speakers Bureau. He was a political appointee, but one who appreciated the values and talent of career government officials. He never allowed his conservative political views to warp his sense of responsibility and fairness.

Upon arrival at the Speakers Bureau, Mosher instituted a brilliant system for recruiting, programming, and evaluating our speakers. Unfortunately, that system no longer exists. He insisted that for every speaker programmed, the post had to write detailed reports. Was the speaker effective? Was he a good traveler? Did his program fulfill post goals? Were there any problems with the program? If so, who was at fault? How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?

In those days most USIA programs required follow-up reports from post. But more often than not, these reports would arrive in Washington, two people would read them, and then they would disappear from the face of the earth. That was not the case with American speaker reports. John Mosher would not allow that. He meticulously read every report that came back from post, combing it for details. And as soon as he saw a problem with a specific speaker, he shot off an urgent note to the office director. I received many such notes during my two-year stint in DC. The note might say, "Did you see this cable? What happened here? Please find out and make sure that we resolve this problem or figure out why it happened." Because of this continual, constructive feedback, our speaker program flourished. I admired John Mosher. He was a terrific boss.

As office director I read hundreds of speaker reports. I soon realized that posts had developed a special language to describe problem speakers. You didn't want to say

bluntly this guy was a disaster, an idiot; you should never program him again. Why not be completely frank? Well, through freedom-of-information (FOIA) requests, a speaker could get a copy of the report and cause all sorts of hassles for the reporting officer. So we developed new ways of describing a speaker, ways that hinted at a problem but didn't spell it all out. We might say, for example, "Post would be interested in finding other speakers who could deal with this important topic." If the speaker was good, on the other hand, we would note, "Post would be delighted to host the speaker again. The first comment basically meant, "Don't ever program this guy again."

Earlier in my career I made a mistake because I didn't know about these code phrases. We had a speaker in Taipei who had a great resume but turned out to be a terrible speaker – and he was a demanding son-of-a-gun to boot. I wrote a mediocre report on his program, but I didn't add the phrase, "Please recruit other speakers for this important topic." And 10 years later I paid the price for my oversight. I was in Shanghai and I saw this guy's bio and he sounded really good and his name didn't ring a bell. He was just as bad the second time – and more demanding.

Despite these hiccups, the speaker program worked well. By the time I arrived, Mosher's system was in place and operating smoothly. There had been, however, some problems with the Speakers Bureau early on during the Wick era. The political operatives around Charles Wick developed a speaker blacklist. That is, certain people could not be invited to go on an American Speaker Program. That list included such radicals as newsman Walter Cronkite and Senator Gary Hart -- basically anyone on the liberal side of the U.S. political spectrum, anyone who seemed to have an animus against the Reagan administration. Unfortunately for Mr. Wick, his minions put the list down in writing and distributed it to officers who recruited speakers. One of those who received a copy was Jim Kelman, who later worked for me in the foreign policy speakers' office.

Jim was outraged. He and most of his colleagues resented being told not to program certain individuals because of their political leanings. Of course, USIA was not going to send out radicals who hated the United States and were going to rail against us. We would never do that. But we did believe our speakers should represent a reasonable range of public opinion. We only asked our speakers to be clear when they were describing U.S. policy and when they were expressing their own views.

Kelman, along with several other colleagues, showed the blacklist to Peter Galbraith, a staff aide on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Galbraith was the son of economist John Kenneth Galbraith and later on became himself first ambassador to Croatia. That's how the blacklist came to light. Created quite a scandal. One Wick deputy had to fall on his sword -- Leslie Lenkowsky. He accepted blame and resigned, though he wasn't the only guilty party. In the end the forces of light prevailed. When I arrived, there was no blacklist. John Mosher made clear we were empowered to recruit speakers who represented both sides of the political debate in the U.S.

*Q: I think at the time Wick was seen as being very conservative? Did the blacklist scandal contribute to that image? Were there other factors as well?*

NEIGHBORS: Actually, I had almost no contact with the USIA front office. I was insulated in the P Bureau. John Mosher had firm control by this time and the blacklist scandal meant conservatives with USIA had to be careful about radical new directions for the agency. Though for most of my career I preferred being abroad, I did enjoy my time in the speakers' bureau. If nothing else, I felt privileged to meet a lot of bright professors and government people who would go out and speak for us.

I remember at one point Jim Kelman and I had to brief Marshall Green, former assistant secretary under Kissinger for EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs). He had also served as DCM South Korea and ambassador to Indonesia. Kelman and I needed to brief Green on his upcoming speaker trip to East Asia. He invited us to the exclusive Metropolitan Club for lunch, which was an experience in itself. Green regaled us with stories about dealing with Sukarno and Imelda Marcos (*laughs*). In the 1960s *Playboy* magazine was banned in Indonesia, so General Sukarno asked the ambassador to get a subscription for him through the APO. The best story: the one about being alone with Imelda Marcos in a Four Seasons hotel suite, with Imelda, dressed in her tiger-skin leotards, seductively asking for more money from Uncle Sam.

Green did travel for us as an American speaker. Not surprisingly, he got rave reviews.

*Q: Let me get a sense of the administrative structure. You're office director, American Speaker Program, Foreign Policy Speakers.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: Mosher's head of the P Bureau?*

NEIGHBORS: No, he was the head of the Speaker Program.

*Q: OK, he's the head of the Speaker Program. Then who's his boss?*

NEIGHBORS: Head of P Bureau was Charles Horner, who was a political appointee. He had been at a conservative think tank, Heritage Foundation, I believe. A smart guy, not a good manager. He was the husband of Constance Horner, the director of OPM (Office of Personnel Management). She was the more prominent of a semi-power couple.

*Q: And who was his boss?*

NEIGHBORS: I guess it was the deputy of USIA and Charles Wick. He was right below Wick. I believe it was Gene Kopp.

*Q: Now, there's been some fair reorganization of USIA and whatnot, but at this time, when you came on board in August 1987, where was your work office?*

NEIGHBORS: It was over near the Air and Space Museum on C Street. Yeah, we had moved over there. Originally, when I first joined the agency, HQ was at the iconic address of 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, a perfect address for USIA, whose motto was “Telling America’s Story to the World.” But that building was going to be torn down, and we needed to move. Originally Charlie Wick tried to engineer a move into a new office building, which is now the Reagan Office Building on Federal Triangle. That would have been an excellent location. But we got pushed out by USAID and other more powerful agencies. We wound up over on C Street near the Air and Space Museum. Even in 1986 our building was neither new nor nice.

*Q: Now, so you’re some distance from State. Do you have opportunities to attend inner-agency meetings or get back to State, or are you pretty much in your own world?*

NEIGHBORS: Pretty much in our own world. In those days the area directors of USIA, for the various regions – like East Asia and Pacific or Western Hemisphere Affairs -- they were protocol equivalents of assistant secretaries in the Department. USIA was much smaller than State Department, but the area directors had enormous influence. They set the budgets for all of the USIS operations around the world. The area directors and deputy directors wrote the evaluation reports for all the PAO’s in their region. Now, it was an interesting phenomenon. As a PAO abroad you often got two evaluation reports, one written by the USIA area director and deputy director back in Washington, and one by your consulate general, or the DCM and ambassador. So you had huge files.

*Q: Did sometimes those evaluation reports contradict each other?*

NEIGHBORS: I never had that happen, but I’m sure it did in some instances. But because the area director had this direct input in OERs, he had a lot of influence on what PAOs were doing and thinking. And he also controlled the budget. As a result, USIS operations were technically under the authority of the ambassador, but we did have our own funding and money. That made us more independent than we are now -- for better or for worse. This was particularly true in the case of the consulates. For example, I worked closely with our consul general Stan Brooks in Shanghai, but the PAO Lynn Noah in Beijing had much more influence on my local programs. I don’t think that’s true anymore.

*Q: Program Bureau. Now, the area directors, are they in the same bureau or are they in a different bureau?*

NEIGHBORS: No, the area directors are equivalent to Assistant Secretaries in the State Department’s regional bureaus: East Asia-Pacific Affairs, European Affairs, Western Hemisphere Affairs, African Affairs, and so forth. Those were the area directors. They were completely separate from the P Bureau or the Bureau of Exchanges and Cultural Affairs. Gods that walked the earth, so to speak – Jodie Lewinsohn, Frank Scotton, Hal Morton.

*Q: But did you have to work through the area directors then? I mean you've got a speaker on American civil war history. And that's responding to a post request.*

NEIGHBORS: Working in the P Bureau, Foreign Policy Speakers office, I coordinated closely with the USIA country desk officers. These desk officers represented their posts back in DC. Sometimes they would prompt me, saying, "Oh, you should remember that we have this speaker that we need at this time." The area director had overall authority over post programs but didn't have time to pay attention to all the details.

*Q: Now you move on in April 1989. You leave your position there in the Speaker Program, but I think you leave a little early. How did that occur? Your next assignment was language training.*

NEIGHBORS: Actually my reintroduction to things Chinese began earlier than that. The USIA powers-that-be remembered I had successfully set up and managed press-filing centers for the gargantuan Reagan visit in 1984 and the merely mammoth Shultz visit in 1986. For my sins I was asked to come to Beijing in January-February 1989 for ten days to manage the press center for the presidential visit of Bush the Elder. Bush had just been elected in November and had decided to make China the first foreign policy issue of his new presidency. Bush viewed himself as a China hand, and reasonably so. He had served as chief of the U.S. Liaison Office (our de-facto embassy before normalization) in Beijing, from 1974-1975. Given the perilous state of affairs in Gorbachev's crumbling Soviet Union, Bush wanted to ensure that the U.S.-China relationship was as free from trouble as possible.

I looked forward to the trip. It would give me a chance to work with the legendary PAO McKinney Russell, one of the USIA gods. McKinney had just taken over as PAO. He was a tall, handsome man, confident as only a Yale alumnus can be. He was a gifted linguist. Began his government career in Berlin in the 1950s interviewing Soviet defectors – in absolutely fluent Russian, of course. His first stint with USIA was in the Belgian Congo where he mastered French and met his wife, a French-speaking Tunisian. Eventually McKinney served as country PAO in Russia, West Germany, Spain, and Brazil. So he had been PAO in many of USIA's most important posts, and now wanted a new challenge. And that challenge would be China. At the age of 58 he went to FSI for two years of Chinese, the first non-European language in his linguistic quiver. For the first time in his storied language-learning career, McKinney was not the best student in the class. I'm sure that killed him. After two years of study, he came out of Taiwan as a reasonably good speaker of Chinese. But not good enough to carry out all of his business in the language – unlike his experience with Russian, German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and even Swedish.

As soon as he took the reins as PAO Beijing, McKinney fired off a series of cables to USIA outlining his unprecedented, new vision for press and cultural operations in China. To those of us who had worked in China, many of the "new" programs weren't new at all. We'd been doing them for years. But McKinney knew how to repack old

programs and gain Washington attention. This was great for the program because it got money for post --it enhanced McKinney's reputation as well.

McKinney just knew how to be a PAO. He had the knowledge, the management skills, the ambition, and the drive to carry out a complicated public diplomacy mission. He famously carried three small notebooks in his breast pocket, one for matters due today, one for the coming week, and one for long-range planning. He knew how to do everything, and was happy to teach you how to do it, too. Unfailingly courteous, he could also be demanding, peppering his staff with countless notes and requests for action – and these messages didn't let up even when he knew you were swamped with other work. McKinney loved to be the center of attention. His staff called him – behind his back of course – the Sun King. He wasn't perfect, but I did admire and respect him.

I arrived in Beijing in late January as part of the presidential advance team. I breathed in the oh-so-familiar stench of coal smoke and set to work. Doing a presidential visit reminds me of a Churchill comment. He said, "The most exhilarating feeling in the world is to be fired upon without result." The best feeling for an American diplomat is to survive a presidential visit without being fired.

After much tension and heartache and gnashing of teeth, even a little screaming, the Press Filing Center took shape. We were ready for the visit, ready for the onslaught of some 140 American journalists traveling with the president.

The second day of the visit Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater came to our center and offered a formal press briefing. After a few opening questions, someone brought up the issue of the U.S. position toward Taiwan. Fitzwater went through the regular catechism and then said,

"And that is a question to be resolved by the two countries on either side of the Taiwan Straits." TWO COUNTRIES. That was news. Immediately everyone in the audience jumped to their feet, with the Taiwan journalists particularly begging for attention. Fitzwater added a few more sentences to his comments, and then paused while one of his aides handed him a piece of paper. He unfolded the paper, read it quickly, and then turned back to the microphone.

"I want to repeat what I just said. That is a question to be resolved by the PEOPLES on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. And that's what I said the first time!"

I snorted – loudly. Fortunately, I was standing well at the back of the auditorium, so my career wasn't endangered. Truth is, this was the perfect way for Fitzwater to handle the situation. He was not resetting U.S. policy. He had misspoken. He corrected his mistake – and with a little humor.

So far everything was going smoothly. That was soon to change. The last night of the visit President Bush hosted a grand dinner for the Chinese leadership and for a large number of our own important contacts. In making up the guest list, the embassy had



included a number of well-known dissidents. That included the esteemed Chinese physicist Fang Lizhi. In their messages to Washington, the embassy noted the presence of dissidents on the guest list, and the White House seemed okay with this.

The dinner began and the guests filed in, and a good time was had by all. All, that is, except for Professor Fang Lizhi. Though he had an invitation from the President, the Chinese police would not allow him through the security cordon. Eventually he went to the home of an American friend, scholar and translator, Perry Link. Link encouraged him to go to the Sheraton Hotel and speak to the American press about the incident. And that's what he did, showing up at our press filing center around 9:00 p.m. In a twinkling the prospect for a successful visit vanished. Fang Lizhi and the treatment of Chinese dissidents became the story.

At the same time Fang Lizhi was speaking to the press at the Filing Center, NSC director Brent Scowcroft was doing an interview upstairs at the Sheraton with ABC news. He had no inkling about what was happening, so he was ambushed by ABC. He had no answer to the question about Fang Lizhi.

I had been tasked with accompanying Scowcroft back to the Diaoyutai Guesthouse after the interview. Needless to say, he was upset, though he didn't take it out on me. Long into the night the White House and the embassy worked to craft a statement that would express outrage over the incident without completely negating the positive aspects of the visit. The next day the blame game began. Post had clearly received approval from the White House to invite dissidents to the dinner. But they had not so clearly pointed out how the Chinese might react. Though the blame lay with both sides, that's not the way things work at the White House. Ambassador Winston Lord became the whipping boy. Besides, blaming Lord was the easy way out. Lord's tour of duty was over, and Bush was scheduled to appoint a new Ambassador right away.

*Q: So now you're ready to go to language training in preparation for an assignment in Hong Kong, correct?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, my eventual assignment was going to be as public affairs officer, PAO, in Hong Kong in late summer of 1989. But before going, I persuaded my bosses to let me study Cantonese at FSI. After all, for the great majority of people in Hong Kong their mother tongue is not Mandarin but Cantonese. In English we tend to refer to Cantonese as a dialect, but it's not. It's a distinct language, much further apart than, say, Spanish is from Italian. Cantonese use the same Chinese writing system, but pronounce the characters differently. When a Mandarin speaker hears Cantonese, he simply does not understand what's being said. So it's a different language. I lived in Hong Kong as a student and teacher and studied Cantonese mostly on my own. I also did a short course with the Hong Kong government, and my wife is a native speaker of Cantonese, so I had a good foundation for the language. But I hadn't spoken it regularly for a number of years. I went and studied Cantonese for three or four months at FSI before I left for Hong Kong. I managed to test at 3+ for spoken Cantonese, and 4 for written Chinese.

*Q: I think you started in about April.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: And you left in June or so. Were there any other fellow students, or you were it?*

NEIGHBORS: No, I had a colleague, Linda Donahue, who was going to be deputy chief of the Consular Section, responsible for visas. Linda was a Chinese American who had some background in Cantonese because of her family. At the start, my Cantonese was a little better than hers. We were not exactly at the same level, but it worked out fine. We had a very good teacher and I think we both learned quite a bit in that three or four months. Linda went on later on to become the Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs in Beijing. She was also chief of the Consular Section in São Paulo, Brazil, when I was assigned to Brasilia. So she had charge of two of our largest visa mills – quite a responsibility.

*Q: Now, and you would have been assigned to Hong Kong even earlier than 1989.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I was assigned almost two years before. I applied for the job not long after I got to Washington in late summer 1987. So I knew pretty early that we were going to Hong Kong.

*Q: I've lost track of Hong Kong reversion. Is that later in the 1990s?*

NEIGHBORS: It was later -- in 1997, four years after I departed for Brazil. Even as early as 1989, however, the Brits and Chinese engaged in acrimonious negotiations about the when and how of retrocession. By the time I left in 1993, some of the details were set, and Hong Kong citizens were anticipating the change, some with hope, but many more with trepidation. During my tenure – partially to prepare for retrocession -- USIS changed the way it did business in Hong Kong.

*Q: In what way?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, this was the most important thing I did in my Foreign Service career, the thing I look back on with greatest pride. It had to do both with the notion of reversion to Chinese control, and with the fact that the USIA budgets were being slashed by Congress. As a result USIA and its USIS posts abroad had to change the way we did business.

After I had been in Hong Kong for a couple of years and had some experience and cultivated key contacts in the community, we received word from Washington that USIA was deciding to cut back on its lending libraries around the world. They were just too expensive. This decision followed in the wake of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. History was at an end, so said Frank Fukuyama. The democracies had won. Why do we need a cold war propaganda machine like USIA anymore?

This attitude presented an existential challenge to USIA. We had to cut peripheral activities and prove that our other programs merited life support. I always thought libraries were one of our most effective public diplomacy tools. But they were deemed outrageously expensive and had to go. USIS posts around the world were instructed to close their lending libraries. In their place we were to set up small-scale reference centers that could provide electronic information to key contacts. These centers would be manned by trained specialists who could field questions about American policy and society.

In other words, we had to jettison our Hong Kong library. At that time we had a fine facility in the center of Central District, in a commercial building with easy access for the public. The library saw a good deal of foot traffic. It was a well run and our clients used it religiously. But in those days the rents in Hong Kong were astronomical, so we could save a fistful of money by getting out of the business.

I had my instructions from Washington. But I wasn't ready to give in completely. Was there a way to make a positive out of this big negative? How were we going to get rid of our library materials? Were we just going to give the books away haphazardly or could we think of another way? Could we enlist the private sector to take over some of our mission?

While I pondered this problem, my good friend, Glenn Shive, the director of IIE Hong Kong (Institute for International Education), was in a similar quandary. He ran an office in Hong Kong that did student advising and ran a host of American educational exchange programs. The IIE offices were in Wan Chai where rents were rising exponentially.

One day over lunch Glenn and I hit on a possible solution to our separate problems. Why not try to set up a Hong Kong-America Center, an NGO that would promote exchanges between Hong Kong and the United States, an NGO that would help Americans understand Hong Kong better and vice versa? We brainstormed about how to do this. We knew we didn't have ready money for the effort. How could we establish an NGO with minimal funding and yet make it an entity that might grow into something bigger and better?

Glenn and I hatched our plot in 1991. We decided that if we had to give away the USIS library, we should make a donation of the books to a local university. We would ask the selected university to use the books as a core American studies collection that would be part of a Hong Kong-America Center. For the first few years the U.S. would provide a director of the center through the Fulbright scholar program. As part of the new center, the selected university would also provide office space for IIE, particularly for its highly popular educational advising service.

Right at this moment, as chance would have it, James Meriwether, an American Fulbright scholar, passed through Hong Kong on a lecture tour. Meriwether had previously served as a member of the Board of Foreign Scholarship, the private group of academics that supervises the Fulbright program in Washington. Glenn and I mentioned our plans for the

Hong Kong-America Center to Professor Meriwether. He was intrigued -- more than intrigued, enthusiastic. He straightaway agreed to do what he could to promote the concept with the Fulbright powers-that-be. What's more, it turned out that Meriwether was an expert on William Faulkner and possessed one of the world's largest collections of Faulkneriana and he was willing to donate over 2000 books, pamphlets, and articles to our new Center library.

*(laughs)* So now our burgeoning plans included the USIS library, plus the Faulkner materials, plus IIE resources. We proposed the notion that the center director be a Fulbright scholar. What we needed now was a university in Hong Kong that would agree to host the new center and provide some of the funding for it. I sent a message back to Washington and said, "USIS Hong Kong, in conjunction with IIE, is thinking of setting up a private Hong Kong-America Center, beginning with a donation of USIS books."

*Q: Yes, a Washington clearance would be a necessary step*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, yes. And that proved to be a high hurdle indeed. First of all, the EAP area director, Dave Hitchcock, was skeptical [Ed: Hitchcock was interviewed by ADST in 1992 and the transcript is at [www.adst.org](http://www.adst.org)]. He didn't think we could pull the plan off without large infusions of USIA money -- and he wasn't about to approve that.

Fortunately, Hitchcock did not forbid me to work on the project. I plunged ahead. I talked to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) in Washington, saying, "We would like to issue a request-for-proposal (RFP) from the various universities in Hong Kong. This would set up a competition to see which university could offer the best plan for establishing a Hong Kong-American Center on its campus. The center would promote mutual understanding and educational exchanges between Hong Kong and the United States. Post doesn't know how to do this. Can you send us a specialist for a couple of weeks to help us meet with the various universities, explain our project concept, and draft an RFP?"

ECA responded quickly with the name of a specialist in institution building: Dr. Mary Ellen Lane, director of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).

*Q: Interesting.*

NEIGHBORS: CAORC was a consortium that included the American Academy of Rome, the American Academy of Athens, centers in Cairo, Istanbul, Dakar, Amman, and a handful of other cities. Mary Ellen was an expert in setting up international NGOs. She had mastered the arts of raising money and drafting grant proposals. So ECA sent her to us for 10 days.

Mary Ellen was a flamboyant southerner from South Carolina, of the iron magnolia variety. She knew when to lay on the charm, but also how to wield a bureaucratic knife. She studied at the Sorbonne and had a PhD in Egyptology. She lived many years in Cairo with her husband, a Brit who ran a language institute there. Some 25 years ago she

abandoned Egyptology and found her real calling: CAORC. Through her tireless fund-raising and superb management skills, Mary Ellen provides research facilities for thousands of high-ranking scholars all around the world.

Mary Ellen arrived in Hong Kong full of enthusiasm for our new project, and that enthusiasm infected her interlocutors in Hong Kong. Mary Ellen, Glenn Shive, and I made the rounds of all the universities. By that time I had developed excellent relationships with the various universities: Hong Kong University (HKU), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Baptist University, the Hong University of Science and Technology. I worked at CUHK for three years from 1970-1973. A lot of the leadership had changed since then, but from those days I knew several professors who would become key players in the founding of our center.

Ambrose King, Dean of Studies for CUHK, had been a professor when I was in Hong Kong the first time. My wife had studied sociology with him when she was going to school there. As PAO, I had close ties with Charles Kao, the Vice Chancellor of CUHK. (In the U.S. system we would call him the university president. The Chancellor of all Hong Kong universities was the Governor.) Charles Kao was a distinguished scientist. Several years ago he was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics for his work in fiber optics. He's sometimes known as "The Father of Fiber Optics" for his work at the Bell Labs. He was to become a key figure in the drama surrounding our new center.

I also had good rapport with the Vice Chancellor of Hong Kong University (HKU), Wang Gungwu. Wang was Singaporean, a widely respected scholar of Chinese history. I knew the key figures at the other universities as well. This gave Mary Ellen, Glenn, and me easy access to the people who could make decisions regarding our proposal.

So the three of us made the rounds. In addition to HKU and CUHK we also paid a call on Daniel Tse, the long-time President of Baptist University (HKBU), the largest private university in Hong Kong. HKBU had a long history in Hong Kong and a strong reputation. As it turned out, one of his Tse's vice presidents was an American who had been there for a number of years. We were talking and I heard his accent. And I said, "Are you from Texas?"

And he said, "Yes, I am."

And I said, "Well, where from?"

He said, "Well, it's a little, tiny town, you wouldn't know it."

And I said, "Well, where is that?"

And he said, "Oh, Marshall, Texas."

NEIGHBORS: Of course, we Marshallites are everywhere.

Glenn, Mary Ellen, and I threw ourselves into our presentations to the schools. In the end we received two excellent proposals, one from Baptist U and one from CUHK. After much agonizing, we picked the Chinese University of Hong Kong, probably because I knew them best and felt they could be depended on. They also offered significant space and financial support for the project, and that tipped the balance.

After we selected our host university, I made a trip back to New York and Washington, DC, to stir up interest in our efforts. I called on Stan Katz, the president of the American Council of Learned Societies, and Peggy Blumenthal, Vice President of IIE in New York. I also stopped in at our Fulbright offices in DC to make sure they were on board with selecting a Fulbright scholar as the first center director. In Hong Kong I also schmoozed with the relevant Hong Kong government officials, making sure they had no opposition to our project.

At this point we were making great progress. But Dave Hitchcock, the USIA EAP area director, remained a roadblock. His skepticism was hard to overcome. He was a strong leader, an opinionated man with a stubborn insistence on getting his way. He was, however, dedicated to the USIA cause. If we could show him how this center would strengthen USIA work in Hong Kong, he might change his mind. If he did decide to support us, we were set, because once convinced, he would never waiver. He would plow straight ahead in the face of all obstacles. The only problem: it took a lot to change Dave Hitchcock's mind.

Hitchcock always reminded me of the old Scottish prayer, which goes,

"Lord, I pray that I may always be right, for Thou knowest I am hard to turn."

So we had to figure out how to "turn" Mr. Hitchcock. First of all, we used a little trick to paint him into a corner. Henry Catto, the new Director of USIA, was passing through Hong Kong in the summer of 1992 on a tour of our Asian posts. This gave me an opportunity to get the big boss's okay on the Center concept. And I did just that. Catto's approval gave Hitchcock another shove in the right direction.

Not long after Catto's visit, Glenn and I finished working with CUHK to prepare a written agreement. This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) laid out what would be expected of the university, what IIE could offer, and what the U.S. government was on the hook for. We finished the draft and sent a copy back to Hitchcock for review.

A couple of weeks later Hitchcock left DC for his annual tour of posts in his EAP domain, including Hong Kong. At this point he was almost prepared to sign the agreement on behalf of USIA but he still had a number of questions. So Vallerie Stinson, my deputy, Hitchcock, and I sat down at the Consulate on a Saturday afternoon and for four hours went over the agreement line by line. It was essential that we reach agreement, because the signing ceremony was set for that Monday. Finally, after exhausting us with his interrogation, Hitchcock said okay. Relief at last. I called CUHK and gave them the high sign. Print the documents. The deal is on. We'll be there for the signing on Monday.



Then Sunday morning dawned and my phone rang. It was Hitchcock.

“I don’t want to do this.” He said. “This is wrong. We’ve got to change the agreement.”

The problem was his suggested changes were untenable. I knew the university would never accept them.

“I’ll come to your hotel,” I told him. We need to talk about this.”

I immediately called Vallerie Stinson, asking her to come along with me. I knew one person couldn’t outtalk Dave Hitchcock. We went at it again hammer and tongs for two more hours. Finally, grudgingly, Hitchcock said,

“Okay. I see what you’re trying to do and we’ll...we’ll do it.” The next day Hitchcock signed the agreement. To his great credit, he became an ardent proponent of the project, ensuring we could bring the Hong Kong-American Center (HKAC) to life early the next year.

Six months after that, in the spring of 1993, CUHK, IIE, and the U.S. Consulate co-hosted an elaborate opening ceremony for the Center. The president of the American Society of Learned Societies, Stan Katz, was there, as was a representative from IIE New York. U.S. Ambassador Stapleton Roy came down from Beijing to offer the keynote address. He was delighted to do so, since his father had been one of the founders of Chong Chi College, an integral part of CUHK. His presence added luster to the proceedings and demonstrated that the U.S. was determined to make this new organization a vital part of Hong Kong’s cultural scene well into the future

The proximate reason for our support of the Center was that it would provide a place for IIE to offer student advising and to house our library collection. At the same time we were wary of what would happen to U.S. public diplomacy activities after the PRC took over in 1997. We wanted to set up an independent American center, unconnected to the U.S. government and therefore arousing less suspicion on the part of Beijing. Given our experience on the mainland, we figured it would be far more difficult to get approval for such an entity after retrocession.

After the opening ceremony, the center opened for business. Its mission was to promote mutual understanding between Hong and the United States. We wanted programs focused not only on the United States, but on Hong Kong issues as well. That’s why we called it the Hong Kong – America Center, not the American Center.

Meanwhile, Fulbright professor Lee Lee, our first center director, had arrived. Lee was a professor of psychology from Cornell, a Chinese-American. She was smart, hard working. Like young Mattie Ross of the movie True Grit, “she did not varnish her opinions.” She proved to be incredibly stubborn, supremely irritating at times, unwilling

to take no for an answer. And that's just what we needed at this juncture, as we worked together to pull off a difficult, if not impossible, task.

From the outset, the HKAC faced growing pains. Despite our MOU, the university was feeling its way along, trying to figure how much it could afford to do. In the end they did provide very nice offices. Originally they wanted to cram the center into a tiny, wholly inadequate space. But Professor Lee wasn't having that. She went directly to Vice Chancellor Kao, demanding justice. And she wouldn't let go, just irritating the hell out of everyone till they gave in just to shut her up.

Brinkmanship and confrontation: this proved to be Lee's *modus operandi*. It worked. After, I believe, two years at the helm, she returned to the U.S., leaving a fully functioning, innovative new organization in her wake.

At this time, CUHK decided to fund and hire a permanent director for the HKAC. The USG would still provide a Fulbright scholar for the center each year, but this individual would serve as program coordinator rather than director. The first professional director was Jack Deeney, an American, ex-Jesuit priest who had left the priesthood in order to marry. At the time of his hiring, he was a professor at CUHK teaching American and comparative literature. He successfully ran the center for a number of years, and then was replaced by Mark Sheldon, a former director of the Yale-in-China office in Hong Kong.

The center under the leadership of these two directors had some success, but by the year 2000, the original impetus was fading away. And that's when my friend Glenn Shive reappeared.

Glenn left IIE Hong Kong in the mid-1990s, and went back to the United States, teaching in the Education department at Governor's State University in Chicago for a couple years. Then, in 2000 he came back to Hong Kong, this time as a Fulbright scholar attached to the HKAC.

*Q: (laughs) Ah, the plot thickens.*

NEIGHBORS: By the time Glenn came back in the early 2000's, the center was in trouble. It had become a drain on university resources. It owed the university money and couldn't pay it. This couldn't go on forever. And it didn't, thanks in great part to Glenn.

Now Glenn, you should know, is an operator. He has *chutzpah* by the boatload. He's incredibly inventive, creative, and works 24 hours a day. Just never quits. The CUHK leadership saw these traits during Glenn's Fulbright year. So they up and fired Mark Sheldon, replacing him with Glenn as the new director in 2001. He's been the director ever since.

Glenn revolutionized the way the center works. He managed to do programs for other universities and commercial outfits – all for a fee. He helped the U.S. embassy in Beijing organize annual Fulbright conferences – once again for a fee. After about five or six

years, HKAC was in the black, no longer bleeding university money. Because of that, the CUHK decided that it would forgive the past debt of the center and continue to give it free office space. So HKAC pays for itself now and hosts a myriad of programs focused on both the United States and Hong Kong.

In the beginning the HKAC worked out of the CUHK campus, making occasional attempts to involve other universities. Now, however, through Glenn's tireless efforts, all the universities in Hong Kong have become dues-paying members of the HKAC consortium. They get to use the HKAC facilities and coordinate with Chinese students and scholars to do programs at the center. For years Glenn has managed the Hong Kong Fulbright program for the American Consulate. The Public Affairs Office didn't have enough personnel to do so. When Glenn first arrived on the scene, Fulbright mostly sent American scholars to Hong Kong. Only a handful of Chinese scholars got Fulbright grants to go to the U.S. Through his position as the head of the Hong Kong-America Center, Glenn convinced the Hong Kong government to pay for Fulbrighters to go to the U.S., thus significantly expanding the program.

*Q: That's quite an achievement.*

NEIGHBORS: In this manner, Glenn doubled the number of Fulbright grantees going to the U.S. Then he persuaded a Chinese-American manager of DHL Hong Kong to donate two million dollars to fund another group of American Fulbrighters. The donation brought four professors a year for five years to Hong Kong to help the universities to change from a three-year British system to a four-year American system. Over the five years these professors developed a curriculum for a first year general-studies program that would be required of all students.

As you can see, Glenn is a dynamo, transforming the Hong Kong-America Center into a player on the Hong Kong educational scene. He also worked closely with local Chinese governments across the border, organizing programs that focused on developmental issues in southern China. He effectively made it not just an America center, but a Hong Kong-America Center that dealt both with Hong Kong issues and American issues.

Years later, in 2007, I did a WAE (part-time, When Actually Employed) assignment in Rangoon. Glenn came for a short visit – a vacation. But Glenn doesn't take vacations. While in country, he dreamed up an exchange scheme involving Burma, the U.S., and Hong Kong. But that story can wait till later when I talk about my experiences in Rangoon.

*Q: The Hong Kong – America Center is a great illustration of soft power and how you influence people over generations and over space.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. As I said, this is the best thing I did in my Foreign Service career -- setting this center up. The greater credit goes to the incomparable Glenn Shive. He's a phenomenon of nature. But this would not have happened if I had not been PAO in Hong Kong.

*Q: Let's go back to the start of your tour in Hong Kong. Now, when you're in language training Tiananmen Square happens in Beijing.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: You were of course very much aware of that. But when you arrived in Hong Kong, was that still reverberating?*

NEIGHBORS: It was.

*Q: In the kinds of people that you were meeting?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, there was a great outpouring of sympathy for the protesters on Tiananmen Square in Hong Kong, and there were huge demonstrations. Even now, almost a quarter century after the event, Hong Kong protesters appear on June 4, the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. The event dramatically affected the feelings and the morale of the people in Hong Kong. What were they going to do when they became part of China in 1997? What would it be like to be under the thumb of the PRC (People's Republic of China)? I think Tiananmen aroused a lot of fear among a lot of Hong Kong citizens. In general the PRC has done a fairly good job of keeping its hands off of Hong Kong, but most of my friends and people I know in Hong Kong still are not dying for the embrace of the motherland.

*Q: Now, when you arrive in Hong Kong, give us a sense of what the mission looked like. Who was the consul general?*

NEIGHBORS: The consul general was Donald Anderson, an old China hand. He was involved in the first-contact negotiations in Warsaw, when the USG and the Chinese met for secret talks. He had served in Beijing before in the Political Section, also a couple of times previously in Hong Kong. He had been the consul general in Shanghai just before I arrived in 1983. Stan Brooks took his place. Anderson was an old China hand -- very shrewd, an excellent officer, well respected in Hong Kong government and political circles.

*Q: And who was the deputy at that time?*

NEIGHBORS: While I was in Hong Kong from 1989 to 1993, there were two deputies. Dave Brown was the first. I've forgotten his middle initial, but he had served in Beijing, also in Japan a number of times. He was an outstanding boss, calm and supportive. Then Anderson left and we had a new consul general, Richard S. Williams, Dick Williams. His deputy was Jeff Bader, later U.S. Trade Representative for China, ambassador to Namibia, and National Security Advisor for Asian Affairs. We couldn't have asked for better leadership.

*Q: Now, how big is the consulate at this time? You're arriving in August of 1989.*

NEIGHBORS: 1989, right. You know, I can't remember how many officers -- I would think well over 100. If Con Gen Hong Kong were an embassy, it would have been considered a medium-sized post. Before normalization, the consulate played a major role as a site for China watching. Many of those functions moved to the Mainland after 1979. But our officers there found it difficult to get their contacts to speak freely about sensitive topics. That was not the case in Hong Kong. China experts felt less constrained and often revealed information not available anywhere else. So Hong Kong remained a large, important mission for us. Along with Jerusalem, it was the only consulate general that reported directly back to Washington. We did not send our reporting through Beijing, and that's still the case even after retrocession

*Q: I think that was the next question for me. What does a PAO do in this kind of environment? Who are your contacts?*

NEIGHBORS: First and foremost, I advised the Consul General on how to deal with the press and how to present and defend U.S. policy positions in public forums. I became one of CG Dick Williams' primary speechwriters. In 1991 he received an invitation from Columbia University to speak on the issue of U.S.-Hong Kong relations. Since 1989 and the Tiananmen Incident, no USG official had spelled out our policy toward Hong Kong in the light of retrocession. Speaking in New York City, Williams knew he would get lots of press coverage. So he decided this was the opportunity to clarify our position. I drafted the speech for him. It made a big splash. I also wrote a major speech for Williams on the importance of educational and cultural exchanges.

Three major press issues dogged us during my entire four-year assignment. Those were: 1) MFN (Most-favored Nation) trade status for the PRC, 2) the democratization of the Hong Kong government, and 3) the fate of the Vietnamese boat people -- that is, the Vietnamese refugees being held in Hong Kong detentions centers.

USIS worked a lot with the universities. We offered speakers, conferences, seminars. We sponsored cultural presentations. For example, the Paul Taylor dancers came to Hong Kong in 1989 for two performances under USIS auspices. To gain publicity we did a fascinating video press conference with the great choreographer himself, Paul Taylor. He was glowing with pride because The New Yorker had just published an essay he had written. He was doubly delighted because he had submitted the essay anonymously. The New Yorker thus published it because it was good, not because he was famous. Taylor said he was prouder of this publication than of all his choreographic awards.

Through personal contacts, I persuaded USIA Washington to sponsor a concert tour of China by husband and wife musicians David and Myriam Teie. David was a composer and cellist for many years with the National Symphony in Washington. In the mid-1990s he spent a year as principal cellist with the San Francisco Symphony. While in San Francisco the orchestra played a pop concert with Metallica, and David got to know the band members well, so well, in fact, that they asked him to write the string parts and play with them on an experimental jazz record. David's wife, Myriam, was a concert musician

from Peru, studied music at the Curtis Conservatory. In addition to concertizing, Myriam also taught piano in Arlington for many years, and that's how I got to know her and David. She taught piano to my two kids for several years in the late 1980s.

At any rate, I proposed to them a concert tour of China. They auditioned for USIA and passed the test. They did a two-week tour of China, giving concerts and offering master classes to gifted students. They ended up in Hong Kong, playing one recital at a local music venue and another at our home. Such events were great opportunities to establish relationships with the cultural and artistic leaders of Hong Kong.

USIS Hong Kong also had an American publications officer on staff, Bob Thomas. He was the editor of Jiaoliu (Exchanges) magazine, our Chinese-language monthly publication that provided entertaining information about the United States to some 30,000 contacts in China. After receiving guidance from USIS Beijing, Bob would choose appropriate articles and edit them. Then he sent the articles to Beijing for translation into standard PRC Chinese. (Our readers complained when Chinese expressions typical to Taiwan and Hong Kong crept into our translations.) Once the translations were finished, Bob did a mock up and sent it for publication at our USIA Manila Printing House.

As you can see, the job of Jiaoliu editor-in-chief was a big one. It required someone with a good deal of experience and management skill. And Bob Thomas filled the bill. He was a fascinating fellow who had years of experience as a journalist. He was a black American, grew up in Philadelphia. In addition to his skill as a writer, he also was a musician. After joining the army in the early 1950s, he served for several years as a member of an army band. He played tenor sax. On a few occasions after leaving the army, Bob sat in on jam sessions with Billie Holiday.

One day in 1990 I got a cable from USIA saying, "We have a speaker, Terry Carter, who is an expert in documentary films and television. Could you use him for a couple of days?" I showed the cable to our information officer Vallerie Stinson and to Bob Thomas – just to see if they had any ideas about how to program this speaker.

Bob looked at the cable and said, "I know this guy, Terry Carter."

Basically our potential speaker had been an actor many years before. And his path had crossed with Bob Thomas in a surprising way. Right after leaving the army in the mid-1950s, Bob worked as a copy boy at The Philadelphia Inquirer. He was black, so couldn't be a reporter, not in those days where racial discrimination still ruled, even in the North. At that time a gang war flared up in South Philly. Bob saw what was happening and made a proposal to his boss. He said, "If you let me write about this gang war, I'll go down and talk to various members of the gang and get the inside story. No one else at the paper can do that." The editor said okay and Bob made history. Wrote a prize-winning piece and secured a job as a reporter – one of the first blacks to do so at a Philly paper.



Bob's story was compelling. It drew the interest of NBC TV. From 1949-1957 NBC produced a weekly program called "Big Story." Each week it featured a docu-drama, the true story of a heroic journalist at work. And in 1957 "The Bob Thomas Story" was aired on NBC with Terry Carter playing our intrepid hero. Well-known actor Lou Gossett, Jr., also had an important role in the drama, playing a gang leader. So that's why Bob said, "I know this filmmaker," when he saw the speaker cable from Washington.

*Q: So did he come to Hong Kong?*

NEIGHBORS: Naturally we asked Carter to come to Hong Kong. Bob contacted him in advance, and he remembered Bob and "The Big Story." Amazingly, he had a video of the original film. He brought it with him and gave Bob a copy – the program was of course highly stylized, but I was impressed by what a courageous man Bob had been.

By now it may not surprise you to learn that even this story has a connection with Marshall, Texas. You see, one of Bob's friends at The Philadelphia Inquirer was Joe Goulden. You remember him, he's the guy who learned fear and good English from Marshall schoolmarm, Miss Bessie Bryant. Before he became a writer of best-selling books, Joe worked as a reporter at The Inquirer along with Bob. When Bob passed away a few years ago, Joe Goulden wrote a beautiful comment about his death, no, about his life, not his death. He told of an occasion when he and Bob had gone out covering the mayor of Philadelphia. The mayor was going to an unsettled area of the city in order to explain an extremely unpopular decision. Bob and Joe got pelted with rocks thrown at them while they were standing by the mayor – a scary experience but one that Bob handled with grace and good humor.

At any rate, Bob was the editor of *Jiaoliu* magazine. And the magazine continued to be a great success thanks to his strong leadership and editorial skills.

*Q: Now, there was a time when Hong Kong was a listening post on China for the Foreign Service. And also the journalists. But by the time you're there, have the foreign journalists more or less moved up to Beijing? On the press side of the equation, who are you dealing with?*

NEIGHBORS: Actually there were still some prominent journalists in Hong Kong. That included Newsweek magazine's correspondent, Melinda Liu, who was there part of the time when I was serving as PAO. Even when she wasn't assigned to Hong Kong, she came through fairly often and used to do interviews with people in the Defense Liaison Office. Unfortunately, the DLO didn't always tell me what they were doing. We got into some fights over that. But Melinda and I are old friends and have a good relationship. There were some other journalists I spoke to frequently. Harvey Stockwin wrote for a British newspaper and for The Times of India. He and I used to have long conversations about the presidential election, sort of background conversations to help steer him in the right direction.

In truth, I didn't have much daily contact with the press. That was the Information Officer's (IO) job. I was blessed to work with two outstanding officers in that position: 1) Dan Sreebny, who later had an exceptional career in USIA and the State Department, was one of the brightest guys I know, and 2) Valerie Steenson, also a smart experienced officer, who had spent a lot of time in China. They did more of the day-to-day work with the press.

With 1997 and retrocession soon approaching, Consul General Williams wanted USIS to do as much as possible to promote freedom of the press. In that regard Hong Kong was much freer than on the Mainland, and we wanted to help keep it that way. Unfortunately, most Hong Kong journalists were not equipped to take advantage of their freedoms. Some of them did go to journalism school, but usually after they'd been journalists for a few years, they changed jobs, worked as public relations directors in big firms where they could make more money.

For the most part we were dealing with local reporters without experience. They simply didn't know what it took to be a good journalist.

We brought out a number of speakers to talk about journalism education and training. We worked closely with the Hong Kong Journalists Association to develop training programs for promising young reporters. We often called on political, commercial, and economic officers from the consulate to explain U.S. policy. IO Valerie Steenson and I would talk about American society and culture. Then we followed up the briefings with Q&A (question and answer) sessions. Our goal was to help Hong Kong journalists understand more about U.S. policy so they might do a better job covering our issues.

*Q: Now, it's often a common thing for, say, Gil Donahue from the Political Section to go with Dick Williams to some major meeting. But did you ever go with Dick to some major meeting or major event?*

NEIGHBORS: As I explained earlier, Dick Williams included me in all discussions dealing with our approach to the press. I drafted a number of his most important speeches, including one at Columbia University that for the first time articulated U.S. policy toward Hong Kong post-Tiananmen. I worked closely with the CG, with the relevant sections chiefs, and with the EAP press office in Washington to develop public affairs guidance for such issues as MFN status for China, the Vietnamese boat people, and democratization in Hong Kong. I also regularly attended the monthly American Chamber of Commerce meetings, often briefing the attendees on important developments on the media, and on our cultural and educational programs. I was always included as one of the briefers for visiting Congressional delegations and other luminaries.

*Q: Now, over in Taiwan Lee Teng-hui is holding forth. And in May of 1991, he abolishes martial law on Taiwan. Would that have been commented on in the Hong Kong?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, the Hong Kong media, because it's much freer than on the mainland, saw what Lee Teng-hui was doing and were fascinated. In the PRC papers there was lots

of bluster, of course. President Lee knew how to get under mainland skins. And his long-term connections with Japan made things even worse.

For me, however, Taiwan was not the big press issue. That place of honor was reserved for the question of the Vietnamese boat people. These were Vietnamese who had escaped from their country via small boats and were seeking resettlement in the United States or Canada. But until their cases could be adjudicated, they were languishing in Hong Kong detention centers. Some had been there for years. By the early 1990s, it became apparent that the boat people coming through Hong Kong were no longer fleeing political oppression. They were not political refugees but economic migrants hoping to find jobs in the United States or somewhere else along the way.

At this point, the Hong Government said, “Well, if we determine that certain Vietnamese refugees are economic migrants and that they are not fleeing political oppression, then we should send them back to Vietnam.”

And the U.S. position: “No, you cannot do this. That would be terrible. They would be oppressed by the government in Vietnam.”

And the Brits would say, “Well, then you take them.”

NEIGHBORS: “If they really are refugees, we will.”

And then we’d sort of say *sub rosa*, “But you and I know they’re not really refugees.”

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: This was an issue that concerned the Consul General and me very much. Our public position was untenable – the ultimate “catch-22.” In essence our policy was this:

“The USG won’t accept the Vietnamese boat people as political refugees because they are in truth economic emigrants. But, you, the Brits, must not send them back home because the Vietnamese government is REALLY MEAN.”

Despite our misgivings, we did our best to hew to the U.S. press guidance. At the same time we were trying to nudge Washington in a different, more rational, direction on this issue. On one occasion I spoke to this policy question on left-leaning Phoenix TV, speaking in Mandarin. I still had my job afterwards, so I must have done all right.

I remember one time I did something kind of stupid – just got fed up with never getting a reasonable answer from State on the boat people question. One day USIS was hosting a telephone press conference. We did this regularly. We would invite maybe 20 journalists (both Chinese and American) to come to the consulate and we’d talk via telephone to an American official back in Washington or to some prominent scholar at a university or

think tank. On this occasion we had a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) for East Asian and Pacific Affairs on the line.

My deputy, Vallerie Steenson, was chairing the conference, and I came in a bit late. Sometimes when you have these telephone conferences -- particularly when the journalists are polite Asians -- the questioning can hit a lull. So Vallerie whispered to me, "Can you ask a question? No one's asking." So just on the foolhardy spur of the moment, I decided to ask the DAS about the boat people. After all, journalists had been bugging me for three years on this issue, and I had yet to come up with a good answer. Now I was speaking to the big boss. Certainly he could enlighten us. *(laughs)*

As an anonymous questioner I would have been safe. But, no -- I couldn't do that. Believe it or not, I identified myself.

Afterwards the USIA area director, Dave Hitchcock, called me and said, "The Deputy Assistant Secretary just reamed me out about your question. He wanted to know how a Foreign Service officer could be so stupid as to ask that question. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?"

I said, "Well, I've been asked that question for three years and no one in Washington ever gives me adequate guidance, so I thought maybe I'd find out what the real answer was." Obviously, the real answer was that we didn't have an answer.

*(laughs)* But yeah, it was a small storm. It didn't have any long-term effect on me. It was kind of funny, and it did make a point about the inadequacy of our press guidance. In the end the U.S. position did change marginally, and I believe the push by CG Dick Williams and me helped it go in the right direction.

*Q: But it is true that you had to be aware of what the mission was doing and what policy was up. As you said, the Visa Section at the Hong Kong Consul General is one of the largest. Were there any problems that came out of that that came to your attention?*

NEIGHBORS: Well there were certainly more problems with visas when I was in Mainland China and in Taiwan. But yeah, there were always complaints about the Visa Section rejecting people unfairly. But by this time, Hong Kong had become a dynamic modern city. Our refusal rate was much lower than it had been before.

We did have one fellow who worked for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Hong Kong who wound up going to jail, because after leaving Hong Kong he was selling passports to Chinese in Central America. He got a taste for the high life in Hong Kong and didn't want to give it up. At any rate, there were some public affairs issues because of that incident.

*Q: Now, the chief of the defense liaison office assigned to Hong Kong is generally a naval officer. And that's because Hong Kong hosts a lot of ship visits, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: Was that something that you watched?*

NEIGHBORS: The ship visits were exciting. And consulate public affairs played a major role in these visits, one purpose of which was to garner good publicity for the U.S. Navy. To make a good impression the Navy would organize charitable events or compete with local sports teams. Often the Seventh Fleet Band would offer public concerts. USIS sometimes would invite members of the press to visit aircraft carriers. The captain would have a reception on board and everyone got to take photos. But best of all and the most fun was: I got to take members of the press out on a U.S. Navy plane that took off from Kai Tak International Airport and landed on the USS Midway – an arrested landing and a take off by catapult.

*Q: That sounds exciting. (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: The aircraft had no windows – like a flying sarcophagus. Sixteen passengers in seats that faced the back. When we sat down, the Marine in charge told us to fasten our seatbelts as tightly as possible – one belt went around the waist and the other two straps fell across our shoulders. I pulled so tight I could hardly breathe. The Marine passed by and said, “That’s not tight enough,” and proceeded to yank the belt even tighter. Finally we took off, headed for a rendezvous with the USS Midway. At one point during the flight, just before landing on the carrier, the plane suddenly rolled 90 degrees to the right, its wings perpendicular to the ground. Then just as suddenly it righted itself and zoomed in for a landing. My inner ear went whacko. I thought it was only me ‘til I looked around and saw all of the journalists had turned green.

*Q: And those would be mostly Hong Kong journalists.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, most were Hong Kong journalists. Maybe we had a couple of Brits who had been assigned to Hong Kong for years, maybe the UPI rep, perhaps a foreign journalist or two. But mainly we concentrated on the major local dailies and television.

*Q: Now, here you are at post in 1992, November; it’s election time in America. Do you have a special program?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. This was one of USIS’ best programs. And we continue that tradition now under the State Department. In Hong Kong we worked with the American Chamber of Commerce and the American League of Women Voters to sponsor a massive election center at the Marriott Hotel. We rented the huge ballroom there and set it up with mock voting booths so that people who came to visit could participate in a straw poll. We decorated the election center with banners and streamers and buttons from both candidates and election posters. Several American experts on the election process gave short talks and answered questions. Consulate officers participated in the event, meeting new contacts and explaining the election process – most likely confusing everyone with their attempts to elucidate our inexplicable Electoral College. Of course, the focus of all

this effort fell on our invitees: leading government, business, and political leaders as well as a myriad of students. The ballroom was packed, brimming with excitement.

*Q: Was the event open to the general public, or invitation?*

NEIGHBORS: It was by official invitation, but it was a huge crowd. We didn't have enough room to open it to the general public. But we cast a wide net. Surprisingly, my best memory of this great event was of my wife. She was wearing a straw boater with a Clinton tag on it. When the networks announced that Clinton had won, she yelled and screamed with delight. And her picture appeared in The New York Times.

She has her mouth wide open, shouting gleefully. The photo was at the top of an article about how the U.S. elections were viewed around the world. And it was a picture from our American center, from our election center in Hong Kong. *(laughs)*

So that was very exciting. Yeah, these events are important. The American Chamber of Commerce supported the event. American businesses like Coca-Cola and McDonald's donated the food and drink. And USIA's Program Bureau sent out all these election materials like buttons and pamphlets and banners and that kind of stuff. So it was a huge deal. And it remains so.

*Q: Actually, being in Hong Kong with this great American academic and commercial presence, you have an AmCham (American Chamber of Commerce) and other people you can partner with and put on a pretty good show.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah.

*Q: And I would assume the July Fourth celebrations go along the same manner.*

NEIGHBORS: They work the same way, yes. We are allowed to take small donations that help fund those kinds of activities, Fourth of July celebrations and the elections. I do remember that after the 1992 elections the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong was so distraught he wound up embarrassing himself and the Chamber. In an interview with, I believe, the South China Morning Post, he made a statement saying that the world was going to come to an end because Bill Clinton had been elected.

He had to apologize later on. Major crow was eaten.

*Q: While you're in Hong Kong, there are changes at the top of USIA. Bruce Gelb becomes the director with the new Bush administration in 1989.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: And Henry Catto comes in two years later in 1991. Did those changes at the top get reflected in the daily business that you saw or in the themes?*



NEIGHBORS: You know, in a place like Hong Kong, we didn't feel the changes. Bruce Gelb was an ineffectual nebbish -- didn't have much impact on the system. I did, however, hear some strange stories about the way he managed. Henry Catto came in and I think did a good job. I met him a couple times in Hong Kong, and had a good feeling about him. He seemed to be a pragmatic fellow with a good idea of where he was going. And, most important, he blessed my Hong Kong-America Center project and pushed Dave Hitchcock to approve it. But overall I did not feel any enormous change coming on. Little did I know that under the Clinton administration -- and not too many years hence -- Al Gore would reach a bargain with Jesse Helms, trading the existence of USIA for Helms' support on, I believe, NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

*Q: Mm-hm-hm. Let's see. In 1993, the Clinton administration starts out. You're still in Hong Kong. But you have already bid on your next job.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. I had a hard time figuring out where to go next. I wanted to serve in Korea. But at that stage of my career, USIA did not want to send someone at my grade -- an FO-OC (i.e. Senior Foreign Service rank) -- to language school for two years. So Korea was out. Then I was asked if I wanted to be PAO in Manila, and that sounded good. USIS Manila was downsizing, but it was still a pretty big post.

*Q: You would have all the fun volcanoes and such.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah (*laughs*), it would've been a challenging assignment. I thought the assignment was all set, but then another candidate for the job popped up. I can't remember the guy's name, but he had been detailed from USIA to the Defense Department as the EAP press spokesman. He decided that he wanted to come back to the mother ship and do a USIA job. PAO Manila would be fine. As a result I had to find somewhere else to go. That's when I saw an open spot as DPAO (Deputy Public Affairs Officer) Brasilia. Not as good as being PAO, but it was in Brazil. And Brazil at that time was one of the largest USIS posts in the world, huge. I think it had 114 FSNs all around the country and 25 Americans -- a mega-post. So that sounded like a good job for me. And it would allow me to see how USIS works in another region of the world.

I took the offer. Not long afterwards, the new EAP area director for EAP, Jodie Lewinsohn, called me up and said, "Hey, turns out that the guy from the Defense Department has decided he wants to retire because he can get a big job in the private sector. The Manila PAO job is open again. Would you like that?" By that time my wife and I had mentally accepted the notion that Brazil was to be in our future. I had the DPAO job in hand, so I just said no to Jodie. I wanted to go to Brazil. And that's what I did.

*Q: Now, prior to that, you were lucky enough to get some language training in the spring of 1993.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: You've got Chinese. Portuguese, of course, must be incredibly easier than that (laughs).*

NEIGHBORS: Relatively speaking, yes. Unfortunately, it was one of those deals where they want you at post sooner than possible. So I left Hong Kong a little bit early, went back to Washington and did 12 weeks of Portuguese -- interrupted by a week of a course in contracts and contract law.

*Q: Why that?*

NEIGHBORS: Because as the deputy in Brazil I would have authority to write contracts and grants. I needed to know how to write them correctly since I would be the responsible officer for the grants and I didn't want to make a big mistake and have to go to jail. So halfway through my 12 weeks of Portuguese, I took the State Department/USIA grants course. That made my language learning even less effective. Twelve weeks is not enough, even though in high school I studied Spanish and had some idea of romance language grammar. That helped some. But it wasn't enough, and this language deficiency hampered me during my tour in Brazil.

I did take regular classes several hours a week during my three years in Brasilia. By the end of the tour I had a Speaking 3, Reading 3+ FSI rating. I could do day-to-day business in Portuguese but was never able to do press conferences or long speeches, as I had done in China.

*Q: As you were getting through Portuguese at FSI. Joe Duffey became the new director of USIA and you're about to go to your post in Brasilia. How did you get to post? This is the summer transfer season of 1993.*

NEIGHBORS: I left Hong Kong several months early, in April 1993. Brasilia desperately needed a DPAO. Mike Canning, the incumbent, retired earlier than expected, and USIS Brazil was a huge, complicated organization. Back in those days USIS Brasilia closely supervised the work of our branch posts in Rio, São Paulo, Recife, and Porto Alegre. I think there were 114 FSNs working for USIS and 25 American officers. It was a huge post, and the DPAO was the person who made it run on a day-to-day basis. So they needed me there soonest. That meant leaving Hong Kong a little bit earlier, a few months earlier, going back to Washington, and doing Portuguese in a crash course in about 12 weeks, three months, which is not really enough. But I had to make it work. The language class: I was the only student for five hours a day at a local language school, not FSI. There were two teachers and one student, me. Exhausting. I was just a beginner in the language, a stage where every sentence is a trial. And to be the only person to respond to a teacher's every question -- that was arduous. But in the end, I learned quite a bit, not enough to be great in Portuguese, but sufficient to get along. I wound up arriving in Brasilia early August.

*Q: Now, you're saying the USIS operation in Brazil was fairly extensive. The PAO was Carl Howard when you got there. You're the deputy. What other officers are there at the embassy?*

NEIGHBORS: At the embassy, we had a press office, headed by the Information Officer (IO) Gary McElhiney. There were maybe 10 local employees under him. Then there was the cultural affairs office, headed by CAO Dennis Shaw. He supervised three American ACAOs and a large group of FSNs. This office managed our exchanges, the Fulbright program, International Visitors, American Speakers as well as the American library and the binational center. It was a major operation. And in those days, we were much more closely linked to the branch posts in Sao Paulo, Rio, Porto Alegre, and Recife than after our amalgamation with State. Because of the size of the country operation, we also had a senior admin officer who managed our budget and human resources. My job in Brazil was to make it all work, to be Mr. Inside while PAO Carl Howard was Mr. Outside, doing public outreach, dealing with the Ambassador, thinking big thoughts. I did a lot of managing, which made the job not so much fun, but I did learn a lot about how things worked in USIA back in Washington and how to manage the chaos of a huge USIS operation. This experience helped me a great deal when I went on to serve as PAO at an even more hectic post, Beijing.

*Q: Now, does this mean that USIA had different regulations, different procedures from the State Department?*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. We had our own FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual), the manual of operations. And the rules were slightly different. We did much more contracting than State Department did, so before I went to post I had to take a course to become a contracting officer. That way I could approve and sign grants to local organizations as well as to Americans working on our projects in Brazil. We had our own fleet of cars. We managed our own budget, which came straight from Washington. The PAOs evaluation report was written by the USIA area office director back in Washington. So we were clearly a separate organization. We worked under the ambassador's authority, but we had more autonomy than we would today.

*Q: In Brasilia, were you collocated with the embassy?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, we were in the same building. But we also operated a library that was located "off-campus," so to speak. We also were intimately involved in the management of the Brasilia-American Center. This was a new experience for me. In China we did have an American center, but it faced severe restrictions from the government. But in Brazil, beginning in the 1950s, the U.S. had encouraged the development of NGOs, binational (American-Brazilian) centers that taught English, ran libraries, hosted seminars, organized cultural performances and art exhibits. There were about 60 of them operating throughout the country – some excellent, some not so much. They received some support from the U.S., in the form of grants. But basically they were self-supporting, raising their own funds from generous donors and through tuition for English teaching.

Our relationship with the American Center in Brasilia was especially close. Unlike in other locations, we not only gave them grants, we also provided an American officer to serve as the chief operating officer. This was a wonderful job for a second-or-third-tour officer. And the incumbent when I arrived, Laurie Weitzenkorn, who was superb. She loved the job -- got to be out there on her own, running the show. She supervised an English teaching program that had maybe 40, 50 teachers, a huge program, brought in lots of money. She was responsible for the budget. She was also on the Fulbright commission. She organized speaker programs at the center, seminars and conferences. So it was a unique opportunity for a younger officer to manage a huge group of people, deal with a myriad of complicated issues, and have fun to boot.

*Q: Brazil is coming off a period five years earlier of a long period of military dictatorship. Is that change making a difference to the USIA program?*

NEIGHBORS: Definitely. The move to democracy was now in train, and began to pick up speed during my tour of duty. When I first arrived in 1993, the president was Itamar Franco -- not a gifted politician, to say the least. He was a political apparatchik who became president when his predecessor resigned under duress. The most memorable moment of Franco's presidency: a Carnival photo showing the president in the embrace of a young woman wearing a tee shirt and clearly nothing else.

In the early 1990s Brazil faced severe economic challenges. When we first arrived, the inflation rate was 2,000%. This presented great hardship, particularly to the poor, who were legion. The wealthy put their money into interest-bearing bank accounts that more than matched the inflation rate. They were okay. But poor people, when they got their paychecks, they would immediately race to the giant supermarkets, like Carrefour, a French-run supermarket that had 100 check-out stands. Price checkers on roller skates patrolled the aisles. They had to change prices every day with inflation of 2,000% -- quite an operation. You would see people come in and they would spend most of their salary on food for the coming month. They didn't have access to bank accounts, so they had to spend their money quickly before it lost value. Carrefour had shopping carts with connectors so that shoppers could link them together and push several of them down the aisles.

Inflation also meant that merchants saw no profit, only loss in accepting credit cards. If a customer charged \$50 today, he could pay the debt back at the end of the month in greatly devalued currency. So basically when people went shopping -- even for minor things like a coke or even a short taxi ride, they would write a check. And everyone would accept checks. And the check would be processed within one day.

After a few months in Brazil we went on holiday to Minas Gerais, to the town Ouro Preto (Black Gold). This is a great tourist site in the middle of Brazil, a lovely place with a fascinating history, the former center of Brazil's mining industry. We stayed at a comfortable hotel, and I wrote a check to pay the bill. We drove back to Brasilia, and the very next day I got a note from the bank. Now remember, this was within 24 hours of our

leaving Ouro Preto. The note said, “We’re sorry, but you didn’t sign your check correctly.” They were right. I left out my middle initial when I signed it. I usually put it in, but for some reason I didn’t that time. So within 24 hours the bank had processed the check, even noting that the signature didn’t match the one they had on file. And this was true all over the country. Banks processed checks like lightning. It was an amazing system.

Hyperinflation also caused problems with some of the grants we gave to BNCs. As I mentioned earlier, we gave many grants. This was one of the major things that we did with our program money in Brazil. We mostly gave them to the best, the most effective of the BNCs, particularly the ones in Sao Paulo and in Rio. But every once in a while we would give some money to smaller BNC’s out in the provinces. And usually they worked out well. But I remember in one instance, in Campo Grande, we gave a small grant, maybe \$10,000, to a local BNC there. And they were supposed to carry out a particular program right away. Now in every U.S. grant document there is a phrase that says, “You are not allowed to earn money through interest or investment of this grant,” stuff like that. Well, our BNC took this stricture seriously. Unbelievably, they did not put the money into an interest-bearing account. And for some reason they weren’t able to carry out their project immediately. Decided to wait for nine months. But by then the money had lost most of its value. (laughs)

*Q: Now, these BNCS – (that’s the correct name, isn’t it)? – Does an American officer run these centers?*

NEIGHBORS: No. Only at the center in Brasilia. We had an American officer there. But the other 60 or so BNCs are NGOs and operate by their own rules. The USG does have connections with them. We provide speakers and some funding for their activities. If they want to do a particular program, we might help out. For instance, on one occasion USIS organized a conference at the Brasilia BNC on government corruption and on effective ways to combat it. We enlisted two speakers for the event, two officers from a New York City unit that fought corruption in the public school system. That may sound strange. How could there be much corruption in the public school system? Well, the annual construction budget for the school system runs to over one billion dollars. Our two speakers had originally been scholars at a university. They wrote a paper theorizing about how corruption could be stopped in large governmental organizations. The mayor of New City called them and said,

“Do you guys believe what you wrote in your paper on fighting corruption?”

“Yes, we do.”

“Well, put your money where your mouth is. Come work for me and put your plan into action.”

And that's what our speakers did, achieving a good measure of success. Their efforts were widely covered in the New York Times. That's how the USIA Speakers Bureau discovered them and recruited them for our conference in Brazil.

*Q: OK. I was wondering why would an NGO associate itself with the bi-national center, because I think most of the people reading these interviews will think like Brasilia, there's an American center and a library and what else.*

NEIGHBORS: USIS did have American centers, that is, libraries, in Brasilia, Rio and Sao Paulo. But the BNCs, bi-national centers, were NGOs. They were independent.

*Q: Most of them then were not run by an American officer, but we subsidized them, right?*

NEIGHBORS: We did give grants to some of the BNCs. But those grants amounted to a small portion of their operating budgets. Most of their money came from English language teaching. They also did contract work for the embassy as well as for Brazilian organizations. For a fee, they hosted conferences, seminars, and teacher-training programs. The BNC in Brasilia was an anomaly in that USIS provided an American officer to serve as director. That arrangement no longer exists. Under State auspices we decided to cut that position. We saved money but lost a wonderful instrument for projecting the U.S. image in a positive fashion.

*Q: On the economic side of things, I notice that the government reevaluated the currency, the Real Plan in July of 1994. Did that stabilize things a little bit?*

NEIGHBORS: Controlling inflation – a remarkable achievement by the Brazilian government, a precursor of even better things to come. The turn-around started with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who was the Minister of Finance under President Itamar Franco. Cardoso (or Fernando Enrique as he was known by all) came into office and instituted the Plano Real in 1994-1995. Cardoso had studied in the United State in connection with a Fulbright grant. If I remember correctly, Cardoso's wife was the Fulbrighter, and he came along under different academic sponsorship. But, for sure he enjoyed the experience in the United States. Spoke excellent English as a result. As an economist Cardoso had been one of the proponents of "dependency theory," the notion that Third-World nations have been held back by their economic dependency on their First World masters. Interestingly enough, he abandoned this theory after his sojourn in the U.S.

Cardoso was a talented finance minister faced with a monumental problem: rampant inflation of over 2,000% a year in 1993. Under his leadership, Brazil stood up to this problem. Cardoso articulated and implemented the Plano Real, which dropped the inflation rate within a year to something like 35%. Remarkable success.

Cardoso eventually went on to become president after Itamar Franco. He held office for two terms. He was followed by Lula – Luiz Inácio da Silva -- who also held office for two terms and performed with distinction. This was a remarkable development. Right



after the fall of the *ditadura*, the military dictatorship, Brazil suffered from the elected mis-administrations of Collor de Melo, who was impeached, and Itamar Franco, who should have stayed home. But these misbegotten offspring of a nascent democracy were followed Cardoso and Lula. Cardoso was an extremely effective president, an upper class kind of guy. Then the country chose Lula, marginally educated, a left-wing Labor activist. Many Brazilians were afraid he was going to be like Hugo Chavez or his ilk. But to everyone's surprise, Lula turned out to be a skilled politician, who tried to push forward policies that would improve life for the poor. At the same time, he knew that he had to also get along with the power nodes of the Brazilian economy.

When I studied Portuguese, I had trouble with the future subjunctive. My teacher told me,

"I have the perfect example for you. It will teach you a lot about our grammar and about country. '*Brasil é o país do futuro e sempre será.*' (Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be.)

Thanks to the amazing work of Presidents Cardoso and Lula, this cynical aphorism is no longer true. Brazil has finally begun to live up to its promise.

*Q: Talking about economics. Brasília was -- it's all carved out of the jungle, and the capital moved there in the 1960s. So what was it like living in Brasilia in this 1993 to 1996 period?*

NEIGHBORS: By then, 1993, Brasília had already improved a great deal. I find it interesting that people do refer to the new capital as being carved out of the jungle. It's sort of like carving a city out of the impenetrable jungle of Nebraska (*laughs*).

Brasília sits on the high plains of central Brazil, not in a jungle, but on a flat, red-soiled plateau dotted with twisted trees. The city has a strange, though salubrious climate. For six months of the year, it does not rain a drop. A blue dome curves over the plain. You will not see a single puff of white in the sky, not even a wispy cirrus cloud. At times the humidity drops to 10%. It's like a desert. The dryness sometimes gets to you. If you don't drink enough water, you may feel faint. One day, however, after six months of drought, you wake up and rediscover humidity. The monsoon arrives, and the rain falls – everyday at 4:00 p.m. So, you get up in the morning. You play golf. It's gorgeous weather, not a cloud in the sky. And then by noon, you say, "Oh, a cloud." By 1:00 p.m. the storm clouds gather, and at 4:00 the skies open with thunder and lightning. It rains one inch and then it stops and clears up once again. Sixty inches of rain in six months.

I liked the rainy season better than the dry season. The rain fell and the land turned green. Brasília was over 3,000 feet above sea level, located near the Tropic of Cancer. The city's far enough south so that the weather's never really cold, and it's high enough to never be hot. Our house in Brasília had no air conditioning and no heating. It needed neither. The only thing we needed was a dehumidifier in the rainy season and a humidifier in the dry (*laughs*).

*Q: As you describe it, USIS Brazil conducted a fairly large program. Does this mean that there's a fair cadre of Portuguese speaking officers that are cycling through Brazil and Portugal?*

NEIGHBORS: There are, yes – through Mozambique, Angola, and Cabo Verde as well. I would say that the level of Portuguese for our Foreign Service officers was good. Not quite as good, I suspect, as in the Spanish-speaking countries. There are more opportunities for good assignments in the Spanish-speaking countries. We did have a lot of officers, too, who would do what is called the conversion course. That is, they knew Spanish and so would go for a quick three months to convert to Portuguese. The written languages are remarkably similar. After you've studied a little Portuguese and can read magazines, you can look at Spanish magazines and read them as well. You miss some of the subtleties, of course, but you can understand a good deal.

*Q: Now, you were saying that you were the inside man at USIS Brasília, the day-to-day manager for countrywide USIS operations. Did that mean that you quite often went to the consulates general and the other posts around the country?*

NEIGHBORS: I did, yes. I supervised and wrote the evaluation reports for our branch PAO's (BPAOs) in São Paulo, Rio, Recife, and Porto Alegre. This meant I did get to travel a lot, which was the best part of my job. I enjoyed it very much. My favorite city in Brazil was São Paulo, which is this gargantuan megalopolis. I always say that São Paulo is what Los Angeles would be if only LA were big and spread out (*laughs*).

São Paulo has over 20 million people. When you're flying over the city into the airport, it's like you're flying forever. If I remember correctly, over two million Japanese-Brazilians live in São Paulo, along with the countless descendants of Lebanese, Germans, Italians, and Africans -- an amazing amalgam of ethnicity and race, like New York City, only two-and-a-half times bigger.

Fortunately, my job allowed me – no, required me -- to travel a lot. That was the only way I could effectively supervise the branch posts. And it was a lot of fun. This duty got me out of the office and let me see a good deal of the country.

Another aspect of the job, however, was not so much fun. I'm talking about major budget cuts and their effect on our staff, both local and American. In the mid-1990s USIA faced an existential problem, not in the philosophical sense, but literally. Should USIA still exist? Many private pundits and governmental gurus recommended that USIA be subsumed by the State Department. That way the government could save a lot of money. This meant we had to give up our most expensive tools of public diplomacy: our USIS libraries and our personnel.

I'd already dealt with the vanishing-library issue in Hong Kong. Now as chief operating officer for USIS Brazil, I took on a prickly personnel problem: how to fire lots of people while treating them fairly and maintaining the morale of our organization. Fortunately, at

this time USIS Brazil had an exceptional American executive officer, Renata “Ronnie” Coleshill.

Following orders from Washington, Ronnie and I worked together to cut personnel in Brazil. While I was there, we went from 114 Foreign Service National employees to 68, and 25 Americans to 15. This was a painful procedure, difficult to implement. I could not have done it without the exceptional work by Ronnie Coleshill. For her work on this issue, she won the prestigious Replogle Award, which is the State Department’s annual award for exceptional achievements in management.

Faced with these enormous cuts, Ronnie and I (under the direction of PAO Carl Howard) took a hard-eyed look at our countrywide program and our staffing needs. What did we discover? A lot of dead wood. Of course, a majority of our FSNs were excellent employees. But, we also had our share of misfits and miscreants, of those who had grown bored or tired or fed up. And under our system it was difficult – not impossible, but difficult -- to fire them even if their performances weren’t up to snuff.

So we were able to draft a plan that re-categorized positions and re-described them. We were able, for the most part, to eliminate the positions of the dreadful FSN employees. Our plan also enabled a number of employees to take early retirement. The Brazilian labor laws were remarkably favorable to our employees in this regard. Just to compare -- at this time back in Washington civil servants were taking early retirement and getting a \$25,000 bonus for it. In Brazil our senior FSN in São Paulo got a \$300,000 bonus for retiring early.

*Q: Wow.*

NEIGHBORS: Even our low-ranking AV (audio-visual) technician got a \$75,000 bonus. Now, that’s a lot of money. But in fact, it’s not quite as generous as it seems. You see, ten or 15 years previously, in the late 1970s, the Brazilian economy was flourishing, and our employees had been given the choice of staying with the U.S. pension system or opting for the Brazilian one. At the time the Brazilian plan seemed to be the better choice. So many of our FSNs changed over, much to their ultimate regret. In the early 1990s the Brazilian economy fell apart, inflation took charge. The value of a Brazilian pension? Next to nada. Under these circumstances our generous severance pay helped our employees a good deal. I believe that we handled the situation well under difficult circumstances.

In the lead up to these mass firings, we kept deliberations secret. FSNs suspected something was brewing, but no one knew for certain where the axe would fall. Now let me stress that my boss, Carl Howard, was a kind, conscientious man and fine PAO. And Ronnie Coleshill was also an outstanding officer. But for reasons not of their own making, they were out of town when we had to make the announcement that we were terminating (*laughs*) 50 people or something like that. So I was the one who had to give the bad news. That was not so much fun.

*Q: From time to time did you have the opportunity to escort a speaker or a group participating in a USIS program?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, the most interesting program during my three years in Brazil was a rare visit by a high-ranking U.S. official, Vice President Gore.

At that time government visitors followed a seemingly inviolable rule: don't stay the night in Brasília (*laughs*). Brasília was the capital, of course. But no one would want to stay there if they could be having fun in São Paulo or Rio or Salvador de Bahia or Belem or anywhere else (*laughs*). In some circles (my family, for instance) Brasília is known as the Ogallala, Nebraska of the southern hemisphere. (*laughs*) Not so exciting.

So Gore was coming to Brazil, but wisely spending only four hours in Brasília. I can't remember exactly, but I believe he was going to some big conference in Latin America and wanted to stop and see the leadership in Brasília. Often during these big-poobah visits I had been in charge of the press liaison, working with the White House or the Secretary of State's advance team. But in this case I was made the embassy control officer for Gore's main event, a town hall meeting. I was responsible not just for the press aspects of the event, but for the whole shebang.

The VP visit was going to be low key, but the White House wanted to generate some favorable publicity. They opted for a town hall meeting. Gore had done countless town halls during the presidential campaign. He was good at it, and his staff was confident he would perform well, even given the eccentricities of a foreign/Brazilian audience.

So I was put in charge of representing the embassy to the White House and of negotiating with Brazilian officials about how the town hall was going to work. First item on the agent: find a venue for the town hall. We – the White House mob and me -- went traipsing all over the city looking for an appropriate site. First we went to the traditional sort of auditorium, places like that. The White House really did not like that. Because visually, an auditorium with bank seating makes you want to go to sleep. They wanted a place that would give a feeling of being in Brazil. And they also -- I'm sure this was in their minds -- they also wanted a place where it would be nice to work for two weeks. So we found a resort, one with palm trees, swimming pools, and tennis courts, near the golf course. By standards of Brasília – which were admittedly low – this was a swell place (*laughs*). The White House decided that we were going to have the town hall meeting there.

Once this decision was made, we faced other problems. The resort did have an auditorium, but it looked just like an auditorium in Sheboygan. If this event was going to be on TV, it needed to look like Brazil. The resort also had an outdoor theater, open at the sides, but covered by a roof. Unfortunately, this looked pretty boring, too. In the end, the White House decided to hold the event outdoors, under the moon and the palm trees. Now when the advance team arrived, we were nearing the end of the dry season, glorious sunshine everyday. We told them,

“In a couple of weeks it’s going to start raining every day in the late afternoon. If you insist on having this event outdoors, we’re going to have to raise a tent, because there won’t be any tropical moon in sight. Just thunder and lightning and torrential downpours.”

But the White House advance was dying to do the town hall at the resort. The palm trees would look great, nice and Brazilian. They decided to have the event outdoors, and I was the embassy officer responsible for making it all turn out right. That entailed mastering a myriad of details: guest lists, security questions, communication problems, AV equipment, media coverage and press credentials, translators and translation booths, protocol questions, and so on and so on. To make sure all the details were indeed mastered, I asked Laurie Weitzenkorn, Director of the Binational Center, to serve as deputy site officer. I remember in Laurie’s evaluation report that year I wrote, “Laurie is an exorcist, driving out the devil that lies in the details.” She was a wonderful officer in every aspect, but she was especially good at making sure the NITS didn’t pile up and fall between the cracks. She and I worked intensely with the White House, the embassy GSO (General Services Office), the hotel, and the Brazilian government to pull the show together.

On the press side, embassy spokesman Gary McElhiney and I took the lead in negotiating with the Brazilian media. The White House was particularly keen on getting TV coverage for the town hall. But Brazilian TV had no interest in the VEEP (*laughs*). I’m sorry, but they just didn’t. Nevertheless, at White House insistence we continue to push on this issue

In the midst of all the chaos, Paulo Tarso Flecha de Lima, the Brazilian ambassador to Washington, decided to get into the act -- in a very unhelpful way. Flecha de Lima worked closely with the State Department and had the ear of the assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs and the deputy assistant secretary and others, including the NSC (National Security Council) staff. He was convinced that the town hall meeting was a terrible idea. He was afraid that the Brazilian questioners lacked sophistication, that they might ask stupid questions and embarrass Brazil, putting the vice president in a difficult position. So he was arguing back in Washington that we should cancel the event. As a result Mark Lore, the DCM (deputy chief of mission), and I got frantic calls from the National Security Council saying, “This town hall stuff better work or you guys are in trouble. Can you guarantee us that it’s going to turn out all right?”

The DCM and I talked this over, of course looping in ambassador Levitsky. Our view was this: Al Gore -- he’s done hundreds of town hall meetings. He knows how to do this! As for the Brazilian guests, USIS was in charge of getting together an appropriate audience. We were going to invite some prominent youth leaders, scholars and political people, journalists. We had assembled a great list of representative *Brasileros* and were confident they would ask good questions -- even more confident the vice president could handle anything thrown at him. In the end, the NSC accepted our guarantees -- threatening to have us drawn and quartered if anything went wrong. Thus, Flecha de Lima’s attempt to derail our event came to naught.

After all this *sturm und drang*, the event was taking shape. Usually for a vice presidential visit, we need all hands on the USIS deck to cater to the traveling White House press. But this time the VEEP was coming to Brasília – not such a big draw. We had one journalist traveling with Gore. Yes, only one. So at the resort, the site of the town hall, we set up the “UPI Memorial Press Filing Center.” That part of the visit was easy. We just had this one American and, of course, a goodly number of Brazilian journalists.

If a town hall meeting in a foreign country is going to work well, you have to have a good interpreter. In Brasília we had the best. For almost all our speaker programs we used Big John, an American who had lived in Brasília for 25 years. He was the best simultaneous interpreter I’ve ever heard. When John translated, he sounded better than the original speaker. You see, he was this giant guy with a huge head and wonderful, mellifluous voice -- sort of a Latin Morgan Freeman. In addition to sounding good, John was also meticulous about the accuracy of his translations. So we had him waiting in the wings to translate for the town hall. Mr. Gore arrives right on schedule – naturally.

*Q: What did you do then?*

NEIGHBORS: Gore comes out on the stage and sits down. WHCA (White House Communications Agency) has arranged his microphone and his earpiece. Gore needs the earpiece to hear the translation of questions from the audience. Unfortunately, the wire from the translation booth is not quite long enough. So Gore’s sitting there on his chair, looking ill-at-ease, with his neck tilted to the side because the wire’s not quite long enough, and he says something like, “I know I’m rumored to be very stiff, but surely not this bad.” And so the WHCA guys come out on stage and they rework the wire and it’s fine. Gore laughs about it all, thank goodness.

By this time the audience is getting antsy. Finally, the introductions are over and the questions are about to start. At this point we have another problem. The State Department interpreter who came with the vice president is infuriated that we have our own interpreter in place. And I understand why. That’s his job. He came on this trip to do a job, to translate. He wants to do it. He needs to do it. He will do it. In a huff, he pushes Big John out of the translation booth and starts to talk. Suddenly, he realizes that our translation booth is kind of quirky, doesn’t work like a normal one, and he can’t make it function properly. And so he tiptoes out on the stage, sits down next to Gore and starts doing whisper translations.

By this time it’s six o’clock, and as we had warned, it’s time for a storm – a big one (*laugh.*) The clouds open up and we have a torrential downpour. The tent offers some protection, but people on the edges still get wet. A flash of lightning and a prodigious roll of thunder -- the electricity goes out. I panic. Fortunately hotel technicians are on hand, Gore is calm about the delay, the rain slows to a drizzle, and the lights come back on.



During the 10-minute hiatus, we negotiated with the State interpreter. He agrees that Big John should interpret since only he knows how to use the booth. Big John steps in and everything is under control.

Finally, the town hall begins. Now USIS has this wacky AV technician, Helmut, a German-Brazilian. Helmut (or “Helmoochee” as it’s pronounced in Brazilian Portuguese) was OK at his job, a little crazy, but OK. And so I’m holding the microphone in front of our first questioner. We had two mikes, and Helmut was supposed to turn on the mike when I held it up to the questioner. I put it there and the questioner starts to speak and there’s no sound -- nothing. Gary McElhiney runs over and yells, “What are you doing, Helmut? Turn it on!”

And Helmut says, “Mr. Neighbors did not give me a signal.”

“Well, what do you think he’s doing? He put the mike in front of the guy’s face!”  
(laughs).

The program proceeds. The audience asks good questions for the most part, and Gore is great. They do ask a few silly questions, but that’s par for the course. The event goes well, and we at the embassy can go back to our lives again.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot about Brazilian television. If this event were taking place today, the situation would be different. The technology is so much easier to handle. But in those days Brazilian television just did not want to be bothered. Yielding to our anguished pleas, a local educational TV station agreed to broadcast the town hall meeting – not live, but around one o’clock in the morning. When they did air the show, it turned out that they had dubbed it into Portuguese, but they hadn’t erased the English soundtrack either. So you heard both of them together. You could hear English and Portuguese going at the same time. It was unintelligible. As you can imagine, media coverage of the event was less than optimal, disappointing. The TV station did, however, give us a copy of the tape. We sent it to a number of our Latin American posts. They erased the two audio tracks and dubbed a Spanish version. In this way we were able to get significant airtime for Gore’s town hall in Spanish speaking venues throughout the hemisphere -- but not in Brazil.

*Q: Let me ask, Brazil’s a large country and has a sense of its own destiny. How did the Brazilian media treat U.S. issues?*

NEIGHBORS: With disdain, to tell the truth. In most places around the world everyone is studying English, but not in Brazil -- at least not back in the mid-1990s. If someone spoke a second language, it was Spanish or French. As for the media in Brasília, they were rinky-dink operations -- the newspapers and TV/radio stations. USIS did provide them with information about U.S. policy, but they rarely wrote articles on the U.S. The consequential media were in São Paulo and in Rio: *Folha de São Paulo*, *Veja* magazine, and *O Globo* newspaper and television. USIS had large offices in those two cities, at least large by branch-post standards. I think we had seven American officers in São Paulo and five in Rio.

*Q: That seems large for a consulate.*

NEIGHBORS: They were just doing public affairs work. So the Press Section was bigger in Sao Paolo than it was in Brasília, and they had a lot more important work to do. But I do remember one media issue where USIS Brasília took the lead and got deeply involved. The issue also involved Spain. At that time there were stories spreading all around the world about the kidnapping of babies to use in transplant operations. These stories claimed that the U.S. was involved in this harvesting of “baby parts” for profit.

Now USIA in Washington had an officer, Todd Leventhal, whose job it was to debunk rumors or lies or propaganda about the U.S. And he did an extensive investigation of where these “baby-parts” stories came from. His evidence showed that originally the stories were part of a misinformation campaign launched by the Soviets many years before. He could quote chapter and verse showing where the stories came from and demonstrating they were untrue.

USIA had made Todd’s work available for several years on our information sites all around the world. But while I was in Brasília, a local journalist, Ana Beatriz Magno, produced a series of articles for the daily Correio Braziliense about the use of baby parts illegally. She also claimed that the U.S. was involved. Her articles attracted a great deal of attention. Indeed, the Spanish government announced that the King of Spain Prize for Journalism in the Spanish language would be given to Ms. Magno. Our embassy was appalled by the news. So we got together with Todd Leventhal and produced a long cable that we sent to our embassy in Madrid, saying, “Please present the following information to the Spanish government regarding the King of Spain Journalism Prize for this year.” The cable went on to cite Todd’s evidence that the “baby-parts” articles were rehashed rumors that had been debunked long ago. Basically Magno’s articles were the same old tales regurgitated for Brazilian audiences. In the end, we achieved a sort of semi-victory. We did prove that Magno’s articles were baseless. Unfortunately, the winners of the King of Spain Prize had already been announced, and the royal court was not going to back down -- even while privately acknowledging our message.

*Q: Was there any particular anti-American bias or whatnot to the press, or did they just not pay attention?*

NEIGHBORS: There was some anti-American bias. In the mid-1990s Raytheon Corporation was bidding on a large network of anti-aircraft detection radar nets in the Amazon. The idea was mainly to protect against incursions by drug dealers, and, I suppose, to defend the borders militarily. But Raytheon was in a big fight with a French company to see who would get the bid. We were putting out information about how the French were trying to bribe their way to the bid. There were lots of local media stories about that – many defending the French. And there were also stories in the Brazilian papers about how the U.S. wanted to take advantage of a successful Raytheon bid. According to these stories, the United States would use the Raytheon radar system to

internationalize the Amazon region to keep the Brazilians from abusing and misusing it. Ah ha, they said. “The U.S. wants to recolonize Brazil and steal our resources.”

This attitude was widespread in Brazil. It was reflected in the town hall meeting with Vice President Gore. “Why,” he was asked, “are so many Americans coming to Brazil? Are you really trying to take over the Amazon and da di da di da?”

Contrary to the fears of the Brazilian ambassador to Washington, Gore was not put off by this question. He parried it cleverly. He said, “You know, every year 480,000 Brazilians come to Disneyland (*laughs*), and we don’t worry that they’re going to invade the United States and usurp Florida.”

So, yes, we did face currents of anti-Americanism. But nothing like in Venezuela or Bolivia.

*Q: Now, as the deputy public affairs officer, basically the DCM to the USIA operation, you must have had frequent contact with the front office, such as Ambassador Melton who was there when you arrived. What was he like to work with?*

NEIGHBORS: He was a quiet fellow, a political officer who had made his career as an excellent writer and observer of political situation. I didn’t have much to do with him. He was not very outgoing -- kind of shy. I had a lot more to do with his successor, Mel Levitsky.

*Q: That’s right. Melton left in December 1993, so you only overlapped a few months.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: Levitsky comes in June of 1994. What was he like to work with?*

NEIGHBORS: Levitsky was a superb ambassador -- that was my impression. He was gruff and could be caustic at times. He had just come from INL (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement), the drugs and thugs bureau back in Washington -- no nonsense kind of guy. Looked like a bulldog -- thickset, balding, intense. He spoke good Portuguese. He had served in Brazil before and then got a refresher course prior to taking charge at the embassy. With prep time he was able to do press interviews, short press interviews in Portuguese, and he dealt with Brazilian officials in the language. He was outgoing and liked to give talks. I think he did well as ambassador -- but you didn’t want to make him mad at you (*laughs*).

*Q: Now, between the two ambassadors, Mark Lore was the DCM, and he became the chargé then for about six months. What was he like to work with?*

NEIGHBORS: He was also quite good (Lore has an oral history interview on file with ADST). He had a great deal of experience in Latin America, in Brazil as well as some other countries in Latin America before. He was also fairly unobtrusive. As deputy, I

didn't have that much everyday contact with the DCM. The PAO usually went to the country team meetings. It was only when the PAO was on leave or traveling around the country that I got involved. After Mark Lore we also had Lacy Wright as DCM. He was fresh out of Jamaica.

Lacy had an interesting background. He had been a Jesuit with a lot of experience in Vietnam. In the end he decided to leave the Jesuit order and marry. His wife was Vietnamese.

*Q: Jamaica. What was he like to work with?*

NEIGHBORS: It's interesting. Our two DCMs and our first ambassador, Ambassador Melton were all hardworking, unobtrusive sort of people, quiet, soft-spoken. I didn't have that much to do with them. Levitsky was on the other end of the Briggs-Meyers scale. He made a forceful impression wherever he went.

*Q: Now, you're saying that USIA itself was going through some stringent budgetary problems that were a part of the downsizing. Were there any program costs to that issue?*

NEIGHBORS: As I explained earlier, we made major personnel cuts throughout my three years in country. But on the program side Brazil was always able to tap a large amount of program money from Washington. For example, 1994 was, if I remember correctly, the first year that Finance Minister Cardoso brought inflation under control. And this had dramatic implications for our USIS budget. Near the end of every fiscal year, USIS Brazil made budget adjustments based on exchange-rate fluctuations. Now in 1994 inflation had fallen from 2000% to 35%, so there were huge adjustments made in our favor. I never understood how this worked from an accounting point of view. But for some reason on September 1<sup>st</sup> of 1994, USIS Brazil had \$900,000 extra program money to spend. To put this in perspective: At my previous post, Hong Kong, our program budget for the entire year amounted to \$175,000. Now I was at a post where we suddenly had a million dollar windfall. And by law we had to spend it (or at least obligate the funds) by the end of the fiscal year, Sept 30. That was quite an experience.

*Q: (laughs) Well, what did you do with this windfall?*

NEIGHBORS: Believe it or not, we were able to make reasonable use of most of the money -- mainly because we had this enormous fleet of binational centers operating effectively all around the country. They could absorb the money, even on short notice. We asked the best of the centers to send us grant proposals. What did they need? New AV equipment? English teaching materials? Would they like to host a conference on English teaching or American history or culture? The centers responded immediately with some great proposals, and thus we were able to spend our money on time and for a myriad of good causes.

*Q: I've noticed that you got an award for writing personnel evaluations on people. The award was made in the summer of 1994. So you must have had some good staff.*

NEIGHBORS: I did. I mentioned to you, Laurie Weitzenkorn, the “exorcist who drove out the devil that lies in the details.” She was the Director of the American center, just outstanding. Gary McElhiney was the press officer. Had enormous experience in Latin America. I think it was close to a five-five in Spanish. Had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia and then served in Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, and other places. This was his second tour in Brazil, so his Portuguese was also excellent. Katherine Lee was Branch PAO in Rio, and Susan Clyde held the same post in São Paulo. Writing good evaluations was easy since I had such good people to write about.

I always tried to start my evaluation reports with a good lead. I realized that members of a promotion panel have to read two or three hundred reports. If a report doesn’t catch their attention right away, they’ll probably give the rated officer low marks and spoil her chances for a promotion. So I tried to grab the panel’s attention, even using humor if it seemed appropriate.

I remember one example of a lead that I especially liked. The idea came from an Anglo-Indian newspaper. An article referred to someone who united both theory and practice in the best of ways. It said, “Mr. Subramanian, our chief technical officer, not only has the *know-how*, but the *do-how* to get the job done (*laughs*).” I couldn’t resist using this phrase to describe one of our best officers in USIS Brazil. It was both funny and effective (*laughs*).

I used to keep a so-called commonplace book – a collection of witty sayings and quotations that I thought might be useful for speeches or even for evaluation reports. I didn’t do as much speech writing in Brazil as I did in China, but I did draft occasional remarks for the Ambassador Levitsky. More frequently I drafted op-eds for the ambassador that we were able to place in leading Brazilian newspapers. The piece that garnered the most attention was titled “Annus Mirabilis,” (“Year of Wonders”), a new year’s review of the improving relationship between the United States and Brazil.

*Q: Now, you’re at post, you’re in country. What’s your relationship with USIA Washington?*

NEIGHBORS: We had frequent visits from the USIA area director and deputy area director for Western Hemisphere Affairs. Don Hamilton was the area director, a fellow Okie with a lot of experience in Latin America. And then there was the inimitable Louise Crane, the deputy director.

*Q: Yes, what was she like?*

NEIGHBORS: Louise spent an important part of her career in Washington administering the Fulbright program for Asia. She served in a number of posts in Latin America, and had two assignments in Japan, once as a junior officer in Kyoto and then finally as PAO Tokyo, the capstone of her career. But that was later. At this time, in the mid-1990s

Louise was the deputy area director. She was my go-to person in DC for dealing with workaday problems.

Louise Crane was quite a character, an imposing presence, an accomplished officer – outspoken, opinionated. She irritated a lot of people, but was a strong leader, and I enjoyed working with her. She made a powerful impression on me, so powerful that I included an anecdote about her in my frequent speeches on American education.

Here's how the story went. When Louise first joined USIA in the early 1970s, she served as branch PAO in Kyoto. Now Louise was this very – how shall I say it – very brash, noisy, six-foot-tall woman, boisterous in a way no Japanese woman could ever be. But she told me,

“You know, when I first served as branch PAO in Kyoto, I decided that Japanese society was the most exquisite, well-developed culture I had ever seen. Everything -- even down to the smallest detail -- was so lovingly taken care of, and manners were exquisite. So I thought then that if I could have had a choice, I would have chosen to be Japanese.”

Of course, Louise did not become Japanese. But she did come back years later as PAO to this country she loved. She told me,

“You know, coming back 25 years later, I have discovered that I was wrong. America really is the best place, because America is the land of the second chance. In Japan, if you don't go to college when you're 18-years-old, you can never go back and get a degree. If you don't get into the correct grade school when you're six, you're not going to be able to go to a good college and you're not going to ever get ahead. That's not true in America. You can change things.”

I loved this story. It said so much about what it means to be an American. I loved it also because Louise is the last person I would think of who would want to be Japanese. And yet she did, and quite sincerely (*laughs*).

So that was Louise Crane. She did visit Brazil but not as often as her boss, Don Hamilton. Don Hamilton was, I thought, an excellent area director. He could be irritating, particularly the first time you met him. When he visited post, Don made a point of having a one-on-one with every American officer, as well as with the senior FSNs. That wasn't too unusual, but the method of his meetings could be off-putting. As you talked, he sat with his computer in front of him, typing notes on what you were saying. It was disconcerting. But when he came back six months later, he looked at these notes and said, “You mentioned you were having trouble with this, and were we able to help you on it?” or “Have we been able to solve this question?” It turned out he wasn't taking notes to make himself feel good. He used them as an extremely effective management tool.

In addition to the Gore visit, we handled the press for a number of other high-level visits. As I said before, visits to Brasília usually were usually of the hit-and-run variety. Madeleine Albright came as the ambassador to the UN. She did have an entourage,



maybe 10 or 12 press with her. I leaped into the motorcade press van and we went roaring through the city sirens blasting. The motorcade pulls up in front of the building where her first meeting is scheduled. And everybody leaps out and runs through the main door. And then we discover it's the wrong building (*laughs*). We leap back into the cars and tear off to the next building and get out. This time it's the right place.

The Brazilians also hosted Hillary Clinton in her role as FLOTUS, first lady of the United States. Press coverage was frantic, and USIS was of course deeply involved in all the first lady's events. It was the most fun I ever had doing a high-level visit.

Why was that so? Well, first of all, FLOTUS came not to Rio or São Paulo or Brasília; she came to Salvador de Bahia -- the Northeast, the heart of Afro-Brazilian culture. The iconic Brazilian novelist, Jorge Amado, came from there. His books were set in Bahia state, the center of the sugarcane culture. And so the first lady came and she didn't go in for the usual kind of press conferences and handshakes and talking points and all that boring stuff. No, Mrs. Clinton wanted events with some pizzazz. She wanted to focus on social issues, to learn about the lives of indigent women and children of the Northeast.

In preparation for the visit, press spokesman Gary McElhiney, Recife BPAO Neil Klopfenstein, and I went to Salvador a week in advance. It took all that time to make preparations and even then things could go wrong. One reason I liked this visit so much: it gave me special insight into how the White House operates. By chance, the person in charge of the White House advance team was a childhood friend of BPAO Neil Klopfenstein. He had been working with the Clintons for many years and let us in on a lot of inside politics. This was 1995 at the height of the if-you-don't-do-what-we-want-we'll-shut-down-the-government campaign led by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Neil and I were ardent Clinton fans and we expressed concern about this issue. Neil's friend said, "Look, despite appearances, the White House believes everything is breaking our way. We have the Republicans right where we want them. We will win this confrontation. Bet on it."

And he was right.

Another perk of having an "IN" with the White House was that I got to wear one of those cool walkie-talkies -- the ones that the Secret Service wear. You fasten the device to your belt. One wire leads to the earpiece and the other wire runs under your coat sleeve with the speaker attached to your wrist. That's why you always see security agents looking intense and talking into their sleeves. Well, I was excited to do this and learn all the insider lingo. Only trouble was, the walkie-talkie was really, really heavy and almost pulled my pants down. For the first event I jumped into the press van ready for action. We arrived and the press piled out, racing to cover the FLOTUS arrival. I didn't move so quickly. My walkie-talkie had come unfastened from my belt and fallen into a crack between the seats. Because the wire ran through my coat sleeve, I couldn't detach myself. Eventually I got out, but arrived late to the photo op.

The first big event for Mrs. Clinton was a children's circus, which was held in a big tent on the beach. Basically the circus took street kids, kids who were incredibly poor, and gave them a place to stay and trained them as performers. It was a wonderful event... under the big top...on the beach. I was responsible for herding the press in and out of the event. And as always happens with these events, the press has to race to make sure they get in the motorcade. As soon as the event's over, Mrs. Clinton's not going to stand around. She's going to walk quickly to her motorcade and get in the car and leave. No waiting for stragglers. I knew we had to run out the backdoor of this tent and race around really fast or we'd be left behind.

So as soon as I arrive at the tent, I check out the rear gate, making sure we can exit unobstructed and hustle to the van. The gate is open. Everything is fine. But I'm still nervous. Ten minutes later I look back at the gate. It's closed. I run over to open it again, but it's locked. This is our only exit. If we have to go to the other exit, we're not going to make it in time for the motorcade. So I race around desperately and find the guy with the key, and he opens it up. And then about 15 minutes later, I look, and it's locked again (*laughs*). And I don't know what's going on, and I'm frantic! Finally I find the custodian with the key and make him stand there and ensure no one locks the gate again. (*laughter*)

That evening proved to be the highlight of Mrs. Clinton's visit – a concert by Olodum. Olodum was first of all a dynamic civic organization that provided social services and organized political activities for the youth of Bahia. Perhaps most important of all, Olodum taught these poor kids how to play musical instruments and to sing, transforming them into one of the most famous musical groups in the Northeast. In preparation for the Carnival celebration of 1986 in Rio, Olodum developed a new musical style known as samba-reggae. They were just fabulous – known throughout Brazil, and, in fact, throughout the world. Olodum recorded with Paul Simon on his 1990 album, The Rhythm of the Saints and on Michael Jackson's single, "They Don't Care About Us."

The founder and musical director of Olodum was Antonio Luis de Silva. He was one of our star International Visitor grantees. Our Recife BPAO Neil Klopfenstein knew him well and that made it easy for us to work with Olodum on the FLOTUS visit.

Olodum played their concert for the first lady at the Pelourinho, the "whipping post." This was the center of the old city, the marketplace of Salvador where slaves were punished and peddled. The whipping post, a memorial to the struggle against slavery, stands in the middle of a large square, surrounded by two-story, gaily colored, colonial-style commercial buildings and houses.

The most popular musicians in Bahia, Olodum, are serenading the best-known woman in the world, Hillary Clinton. As you can imagine, word of the event has spread and thousands of people are coming to join in. But they can't all come into the square. The Secret Service has it roped off. We invited about 500 people inside the ropes and the rest have to keep a distance – but even they can hear the concert. Olodum begins to play, and Mrs. Clinton is standing out on a balcony, like Juliet. No, she's waving – more like Eva

Perón (*laughs*). The music is fabulous, but also *incredibly* loud. And Mrs. Clinton is clearly taken with it.

She decides to come downstairs and plunge into the crowd. The crowd swarms around her, and the Secret Service goes crazy. At this point a heated argument breaks out. The Secret Service won't let the Brazilian press inside the ropes to cover the event. This infuriates the Brazilians, because they can see the American traveling press right next to Mrs. Clinton, snapping photos like mad. Meanwhile, I'm standing in the middle of all this, arguing with the Secret Service and the White House press office, pleading the case of the Brazilian journalists, screaming to be heard over the din of 50 drums and 20 voices.

Eventually I wear them down, the Secret Service relents, and the Brazilian press rush in. Now at this kind of event, the White House press people always fight with the Secret Service. Security wants to keep the principal in a box, away from everyone who might harm her. The press office people, on the other hand, want exposure for their boss. They want the cameramen – especially the Americans – to get their shots. So I'm pushing and shoving, trying to move people out of the way so our guys – the White House press corps -- can get up close! It was crazy -- immensely stupid and remarkably exhilarating.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: For this visit the two White House press advances were women. That was a first for me. Doing press advance work is an incredibly difficult, sometimes even nasty occupation. You're always making people do things they don't want to do, making them mad, working under excruciating pressure. These two women were superb at their jobs. I discovered, however, they weren't like their male colleagues. The men, they'd stomp their feet and pout and scream, "You must do this. We can't have that! They can't put this photographer right there, it's against the rules."

That's not the way the women worked. In the midst of a screaming crowd, one of the advance team would sort of come over to you and they'd put a hand on your shoulder and say, "You see that guy over there. Would you kill him for me?"

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: But they'd be very quiet about it.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: (*laughs*) "We can't have that Brazilian photographer standing there," she'd say. "You figure out a way to move him." And we'd do it -- anything to impress the girls.

The tension at these events – presidential or first lady visits – is palpable. You feel afraid and miserable most of the time. But then there's the excitement, and that makes

everything seem okay. It's sort of like being in battle. And in this case, Mrs. Clinton brought an important message to Brazil: the U.S. is deeply concerned with the status of women and impoverished children around the world. This indeed proved to be an issue that had great resonance for Mrs. Clinton as she went on to become Secretary of State 15 years later.

*Q: Your next assignment is back to Mother China (laughs).*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, to the renegade province – Taiwan.

*Q: Lloyd, we finished up your assignment in Brasilia. And in the summer of 1996 you come back for a Chinese refresher course, preparing for an onward assignment as PAO Taipei. Where was this refresher course?*

NEIGHBORS: It was at FSI in Washington – a standard refresher course. I'd been away from Mandarin Chinese since 1987, rarely had an opportunity to speak the language, even in Hong Kong. I always could read well. I studied classical Chinese literature at Indiana University, and that gave me a strong foundation in the written language. I had no trouble reading – albeit slowly -- newspapers, magazines, textbooks, even novels. So at FSI I concentrated on conversational Chinese, trying to regain vocabulary to deal with foreign policy, American culture, politics, and so on. I also practiced doing mock press conferences – answering prickly questions on the spot. Several hours a week I had sessions with two colleagues slated for China assignments. Their Chinese was good – not as fluent as mine was, but pretty good. For our mock press conferences, they would play malicious journalists trying to trip me up – excellent practice for me and for them.

*Q: Do you recall who was with you at that time?*

NEIGHBORS: John Chamberlain was one – an econ/labor attaché. The other name is lost in the depths of the time. I just don't remember.

*Q: Now, so you get out to post in January of 1997? As you saw it at the time, what did the assignment in Taipei seem to be about?*

NEIGHBORS: Do you know the difference between working in the PRC and working in Taiwan? In Beijing, it's one damn thing after the other. In Taiwan, it's the same damn thing over and over and over again. Taiwan has only one issue: cross-Straits relations. And that issue causes constant consternation for the leaders of government. Is the United States going to stand by its agreements with Taiwan? Will we continue to protect Taiwan from PRC intimidation? Will we betray Taiwan once again, as Jimmy Carter did in 1979?

A major part of my training at FSI was to relearn the Taiwan-policy catechism and figure out how to say it in Chinese without mistakes. As artfully stated in the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972, leaders on both sides of the Taiwan Straits believe there is only one China, and Taiwan is a part of China. The United States did not and does not dispute that belief. But we also recognize that these two entities do have separate systems of

government for the time being. The U.S. hopes and trusts that the PRC and Taiwan will eventually reach a solution to this problem. And we will accept any solution reached by peaceful negotiations and agreed to by both sides -- that is, agreed to by the peoples on both sides of the Straits. We oppose the use of force or intimidation by the PRC. That's why we continue to offer defensive weapons to the Taiwan government. We want them to be able to negotiate with the PRC without fearing for their freedom.

So that was the catechism, chapter and verse. I needed to know this, had to phrase it with precision every time I spoke to the press. The slightest deviation and the Taiwans think the sky is falling. (The phrase "Taiwans" was a State Department term of art. The word "Taiwanese" refers to the approximately 70% of the population whose ancestors came from Fujian province several hundred years ago. The neologism "Taiwans" is a useful way to refer to all Taiwan citizens, including the so-called mainlanders and the aborigines.)

*Q: That's right, because you're going to be the American spokesman in the country.*

NEIGHBORS: Well, that's not quite right. AIT already had a press officer when I arrived: Jennifer Galt. She's now risen in the world, "clothed in immense power" as the U.S. consul general Guangzhou. I was her boss at AIT, but she was the spokesperson. I lurked behind the scenes, taking the blame if anything went wrong. She and I worked together on anything she would say officially. But she was the face of AIT.

*Q: Around this time, James C. Wood was named the AIT director in Washington, D.C. Now that's an event certain to resonate over the next few months. And oddly enough, the retired career Foreign Service Officers who'd been on the board of AIT resigned in protest of his appointment. Did you understand what was going on?*

NEIGHBORS: I didn't know all the background behind the infighting. But for the first time the Department nominated an outsider for the position of Washington office director, someone outside the in-group that had run Taiwan Affairs for many years and who were experienced Foreign Service Officers and who were very good at it. The idea was to bring in someone with a fresh point of view, someone who might stir things up from the Washington side.

Mr. Wood came in with the notion that the director of AIT Washington was the boss. He would give orders to the director of AIT in Taipei, and Taipei would hop to it. He had final authority, or so he thought.

"No, you don't," said Darryl Johnson, AIT director in Taiwan (Ambassador Johnson's interview is posted at [adst.org](http://adst.org)). He (along with all previous directors) considered himself an equivalent of ambassador to Taiwan. His boss was the Assistant Secretary of State for EAP. The AIT director in Washington and his staff were supposed to help our mission in Taiwan deal with bureaucratic issues and handle Taiwanese officials there. They were certainly not in charge of our work in Taipei. Mr. Wood didn't initiate the Washington-Taipei disagreement, but his appointment brought the matter to a head.

Coming from the outside, he didn't realize how things worked in the curious AIT community. He wanted to do the job differently. Nobody else wanted that. It wasn't going to work.

*Q: Now, the Taiwan press would have picked up on this little thing, naturally. And how was it portrayed in Taiwan?*

NEIGHBORS: My memory is fuzzy, but I'm sure Mr. Wood didn't get good press in Taiwan. These journalists – both in the U.S. and in Taipei -- were hearing the story from old China hands who had worked on the scene a long time. Some people just didn't like Wood, saw him as an interloper with little knowledge of China. Eventually Wood was removed from office, but not before he raised a ruckus. He kept insisting that he was in charge. And back in Taipei Darryl Johnson was just as adamant, saying, "Well, Wood's not in charge and we can't coexist." Mr. Wood lost the argument. And this presented a prickly public affairs problem for AIT.

How so? When Wood felt himself under attack, he went to the press with accusations against AIT Taipei and Darryl Johnson. He claimed that AIT had botched its foreign policy mission and that management did not have proper control over its operating budget. These were serious accusations. As Wood vented his anger, the titillation factor rose, and the media – both in Taiwan and DC – glommed on to the story. As the accusations reached the public, Jennifer Galt and I drafted talking points for the Department of State spokesman, Richard Boucher, to defend AIT Taipei and explain the State Department position. I organized several press conferences for Director Johnson to confront the issue head on. We worked backstage with the Director to formulate answers and to develop a strategy for talking about these issues.

This went on for some time. Our public diplomacy efforts paid off. We demonstrated that accusations of malfeasance were false. The story died down, and Wood got canned. Washington appointed a new director of AIT Washington, Richard Bush, a preeminent scholar on the issue of normalization and the future of Taiwan. Bush was not a professional Foreign Service Officer, but he had dealt with the issue of Taiwan for a long time, was thoroughly versed in the topic. Equally important, Bush was a man of modest ambition and demeanor. He understood that the role of AIT Washington was to give policy advice and provide administrative services for AIT Taiwan. He did not fancy himself as the AIT overlord. He and Darryl Johnson got along very well.

I also enjoyed working with Bush. He had come to Hong Kong as a USIA-sponsored American speaker while I was there. He gave several lectures for us on the Taiwan issue, and I was impressed. On a free afternoon he took me out to a retreat, a hostel in Shatin where his family had spent time when he was a teenager. His family, father and mother, were missionaries.

*Q: Oh, I didn't know that.*



NEIGHBORS: I spent many years in Hong Kong and I didn't know about this place till Richard showed me. The hostel is located in the New Territories, on a hill just above the Shatin train station. It's a beautiful little compound, surrounded by trees, where missionaries from Taiwan could come on holiday – spend the summer. So in addition to his early life in Taiwan, Richard had also spent substantial time in Hong Kong.

*Q: Now, I mean just to illustrate the policy chain of command: you have AIT in Taipei, the director's Darryl Johnson who arrived in August 1996. You have AIT in Washington where you have Richard Bush, and Richard Bock was his deputy, I believe. And then in the State Department, the Assistant Secretary for the Asia Pacific Bureau is Winston Lord. With Tom Hubbard as his deputy. And on the desk in the department that handled Taiwan Affairs was Howard Lange.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: When you first came out -- well, you said the one issue is the repetitive one: the cross-Straits question. Let me put it this way. The atmospherics when you went out, how were they – hopeful or pessimistic?*

NEIGHBORS: When I arrived in Taipei, I learned that the president, President Lee Teng-hui, had become an issue of concern to the PRC. President Lee was the first democratically elected President of Taiwan. He was a KMT member, spoke Taiwanese as his mother tongue and Mandarin as a heavily accented third language. His English was also excellent. He did, after all, have a PhD in agricultural economics from Cornell. But he felt most comfortable reading Japanese, having grown up in Taiwan during the Japanese occupation.

The president of the Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Chang Wen-hsiung, was an old friend of mine from my Kaohsiung days. He was an advisor to Lee Teng-hui on educational matters. He told me that Lee had deputized him and several other colleagues to be on the lookout for good books in Japanese on political science and economics. He felt more comfortable reading those than works written in Chinese or English.

President Lee's policies and his background – in particular, his sympathy for the Japanese – infuriated the PRC. Lee publicly agreed that Taiwan was a part of China, but the PRC thought this was all an act. They saw him as an undercover advocate of Taiwan independence. Lee knew that the PRC despised him and cleverly used this to his political advantage in the Taiwan elections. His Taiwan supporters admired a leader who dared needle the PRC while pretending to be all politeness and smiles.

*Q: Lee Teng-hui's brother was buried in Yasukuni Shrine, the memorial to Japanese war heroes, a site that is anathema to the Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos.*

NEIGHBORS: I did not know that.

*Q: So to Beijing, Lee would appear to have far too much sympathy for the Japanese.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Taiwan society and culture is a fascinating amalgam of influences. The place is Chinese, but a Japanese overlay from the 50 years of occupation remains in place. Just look at the way the streets are laid out. Taipei is a gray, ugly city, a place of slapdash, utilitarian architecture. But it has this Japanese characteristic -- like in Tokyo -- you have these enormous streets and lots of traffic, and then you go down a small alleyway and suddenly you see an exquisite restaurant or a tiny garden, hidden gems that turn your mind from the crowds and the grimy streets of the city. In this way Taipei is a lot like a Japanese city, though not nearly as clean (*laughs*). Taipei does have more of the Chinese messiness about it. Doesn't feel so rigidly controlled as Japan.

*Q: Now, you arrive early in 1997. How many people are working for you? How big is your shop?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we had the press officer Jennifer Galt. And the cultural affairs officer, CAO, Kay Mayfield. Kay and Jennifer were brilliant officers. Kay is now Deputy Director of Career Development for State, and Jennifer is Consul General Guangzhou. We made a great team. We had a good-sized FSN or Foreign Service National employee group there. I would think probably 20 people.

*Q: Now, the way the mission worked, would there be weekly staff meetings or daily staff meetings?*

NEIGHBORS: AIT functioned as a de facto embassy, and meetings were run like in most U.S. missions around the world. We even had a quasi-DAO (Defense Attaché Office) office. To maintain the charade of unofficiality, our defense reps were retired military people. Though they did not work directly for DOD, they did advise Taiwan on military matters and weapon sales. As part of our earlier agreements with China, the U.S. promised to gradually decrease weapons sales to Taiwan -- that is, as long as the situation was stable and improving. In the 1990s we still had some doubts about PRC good will. We still sold a lot of weapons to Taiwan. We felt this was necessary to preserve the ability of Taiwan to negotiate as an equal with China. Without our backing the Taiwans could never do that.

*Q: AIT was actually a fairly small mission by Foreign Service terms. You would have had easy access to Darryl Johnson and his deputy Chris LaFleur.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. I found it remarkable that in a small Foreign Service mission we had such an exceptional group of officers. Darryl Johnson, the boss, later became the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, capping his early experience there as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s. The deputy director was Chris LaFleur, who after Taiwan served as DCM in Tokyo and then as Ambassador to Malaysia.

LaFleur's successor was Steve Young who later became consul general in Hong Kong and director of AIT Taiwan. The head of the Political Section was Jim Moriarty, who

went on to be the East Asia Chief for the National Security Council, and then our ambassador to Nepal and Bangladesh. The econ chief was his wife, Lauren Moriarty, later U.S. ambassador for APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). And the chief of the Commercial Section was Bill Zarit, or Zippy Zarit as he was known to friends. He's now the commercial counselor in Beijing and is one of the few officers in the Foreign Service to be promoted to the rank of Career Minister.

*Q: A remarkable group indeed. Did any of them speak good Chinese among the group?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Darryl Johnson spoke pretty good Chinese. Jim Moriarty and Laura Moriarty were excellent. Chris LaFleur was, too. Chris LaFleur's Japanese was even better. His wife is Japanese, the daughter of a former Prime Minister. Years after I had worked for Chris in Taiwan, I was watching the Japanese version of "Iron Chef," a cooking competition. And to my surprise I recognized one of the judges. It was Chris. The show was filmed in Japanese, and Chris was clearly speaking Japanese. But for the version I saw in the U.S., the dialogue had been dubbed into English by someone else. So you had Chris moving his mouth and seeming to say, "Oh! I think the taste of this is just *excellent*. Oh, what a superb scent!" (*laughs*). The sound seemed so funny coming out of his mouth, because it wasn't his voice (*laughs*).

AIT featured a remarkable number of senior officers – a congenial group to work with. Darryl Johnson was a masterful leader. Low key, intelligent, knowledgeable about China policy. And he knew everybody back in the department as well. We had a top-notch mission.

I had known Darryl before when he was chief of the political section in Beijing and I was PAO in Shanghai. We met several times when I visited Beijing for countrywide meetings. Once while we were reminiscing about the 1980s in China, he told me a wonderful story that involved Sharon Percy Rockefeller.

*Q: What was that all about (laughs)?*

NEIGHBORS: As the political counselor Darryl went to many official dinners and receptions. That's how business often gets done in the Foreign Service. At one of these events he met a woman, Mrs. X, who was an editor and owner of a small newspaper -- in New Mexico, if I remember correctly. She and her husband had volunteered to come to work at The People's Daily for a year editing the English-language edition. The job also involved teaching students and young reporters how to be good journalists and how the system works in the United States. Mrs. X was enjoying the experience, even though back in those days the so-called foreign experts hired by People's Daily lived in, shall we say, spartan facilities. She had a one-bedroom apartment with a little burner to cook simple meals and with those dim and grim fluorescent lights.

At the reception Johnson got to talking with Mrs. X, found her congenial and informative. Her comments about working at People's Daily fascinated him. Seizing the opportunity, Mrs. X asked Johnson for help with some of the problems she was having at

People's Daily. He was able to intercede on her behalf and most of the problems were resolved. She was grateful, and the two became casual friends.

About six months later, Sharon Percy Rockefeller -- the wife of Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia -- paid a visit to Beijing. The embassy held a small dinner for her, and Johnson was invited. Looking around the dinner table, he noticed that his friend, Mrs. X, the journalist, was an invitee as well. He was puzzled. What was this woman's connection with Sharon Percy Rockefeller? The next day he called up Mrs. X and asked,

"I don't mean to be impolite, but what is your connection to Sharon Percy Rockefeller?"

"Oh, I'm her sister-in-law," she said (*laughs*). I'm Jay Rockefeller's sister."

So Mrs. X was one of the many Rockefellers. I'm sure she was reasonably well to do (*laughs*). All the Rockefellers were, shall we say, provided for. But she liked to work and liked being a journalist. First she and her husband had gone off on an adventure to New Mexico to run a small newspaper, which she enjoyed very much. Then seeking a new challenge, she moved to Beijing, living in a tiny one-bedroom apartment. And she did it for a year, never revealing her Rockefeller connections till she was exposed by her sister-in-law.

*Q: Well, it illustrates, with China opening up, all kinds of people were able to find niches and things to do and ways to help and businesses to start.*

NEIGHBORS: Years later in Beijing I had another Rockefeller moment. Rick Johnson, an old friend from the Department of Commerce, called me up one day. Rick was a China hand. Before the Department of Commerce, he had worked for years with the Chase Manhattan Bank, a Rockefeller bastion.

Well, Rick called me up, and said,

"Lloyd, I'm hosting David Rockefeller for lunch tomorrow. He's brought his nieces and nephews and grandkids for a trip to Tibet. Would you and Mary have lunch with us?"

Leaping at the chance, Mary and I headed off to one of those Beijing hutongs, a tiny alleyway lined with traditional courtyard houses. The venue was the newly opened Li Family Restaurant -- a tiny room with one big banquet table. The feature attraction: private, home cooking. So we got to have lunch with David Rockefeller, who was in his mid-eighties at that time, but was going off to Tibet to see it because he'd never seen it before and probably wouldn't get another chance.

Those are my two connections with the Rockefellers. They didn't help me make more money though (*laughs*).

*Q: Now, let's go to some specific things that would have come to your attention. How about freedom of the press issues? The Kuomintang is a Leninist political party and they*

*completely controlled the press, at least in the early days. But about the time that you were there, it was a little freer, wasn't it.*

NEIGHBORS: Much more open than the first time I went to Taiwan as a student in 1966. Under martial law if someone even whispered the words “Taiwan independence” or criticized the KMT, he could be sent to jail for a long time. When I came back in the mid-1970s as a junior officer, the media were still controlled by the KMT. But by my third time in country – in 1997 – opposition newspapers and TV stations had begun to flourish. The opposition party, the *Minzhu Jinbu Dang*, the Democratic Progressive Party, had its own newspaper, the *Ziyou Shibao* (*Liberty Times*).

*Q: The DPP.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, the DPP or Democratic Progressive Party. The *Liberty Times* and other local papers in southern Taiwan held positions clearly in opposition to those of the KMT and of the government. None of these papers openly advocated Taiwan independence, but they were moving in that direction along with the DPP. The DPP was feeling more confident everyday.

At that time the mayor of Taipei City was Chen Shui-bian, a leading force in the DPP. At this time he was preparing a run for the presidency in 2000. He represented a powerful political movement that opposed normalization of relations with the PRC. Meanwhile, you had President Lee Teng-hui, who reveled in his talent for irritating the Chinese, but at the same time, he did talk to them, trying to reach an accommodation that would reduce tensions.

It was a lively political scene, and the media were free to talk about topics previously taboo. Even in this more open environment, few – if any – politicians and commentators advocated a declaration of independence from the mainland. Pragmatism prevailed. Most people were wise enough to realize that spouting off about independence could well provoke a war with China. This was certainly the AIT message to Taiwan authorities. Don't poke the Panda.

In April 1997 Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich came to Taipei and surprisingly reinforced our message. When AIT announced his coming visit, Taiwan was all a-twitter. The DPP in particular thought Gingrich would support them, would criticize Clinton's lean to the PRC. So Gingrich arrived and said – approximately,

“We support you economically. We will not allow the Mainland to change your situation by force. But you have to think about how to get along with them. If the PRC attacks you unprovoked, we will defend you. If you provoke them – by declaring independence, for example – you're on your own.”

Gingrich was blunt. And the Taiwans were surprised that a conservative Republican leader like Gingrich had accepted most of the U.S. talking points: we want to encourage

talks, the PRC is not allowed to use force, but Taiwan can't do something stupid. This was a blow to the DPP, who thought Gingrich would be more supportive of their cause.

*Q: Large parts of the American population on the island are business people. I know there was a very active AmCham (American Chamber of Commerce). Did you also attend the AmCham sessions?*

NEIGHBORS: I did attend. Sometimes I made presentations about our cultural and educational exchange programs. Kay Mayfield, a brilliant speechwriter, and I often drafted speeches for director Johnson, and he spoke regularly at the American Chamber of Commerce. I went to the meetings as well. The press was there, and I wrangled them. After the director's speech, as he left the room, journalists would surround him and pepper him with questions. And I'd cut them off after they'd asked the same cross-Straits question over and over again (*laughs*). So, yes, we had frequent relations with AmCham. The director wanted to make sure American business was happy and that they were getting the services from the Department of Commerce and from AIT that they needed and deserved. Of course we had Bill Zarit as the commercial director there, just a brilliant guy. He was tireless and creative in promoting American business in Taiwan.

*Q: How did the press treat AIT? Positively? Aggressively?*

NEIGHBORS: Taiwan papers weren't outrageously aggressive. They could be outrageous in the sense that if they heard a negative story about AIT or the U.S. government, they would write first before asking questions. They were afraid we would debunk the story and ruin their day (*laughs*).

How did we deal with this? We did try – with some success – short-term training for journalists, similar to what I did in Hong Kong. We brought in speakers from the American press to discuss investigative reporting and explain the code of ethics that journalists should apply to their work. One of the problems in Taiwan is that lots of people study journalism, particularly young women. But few of them stay in the profession for long. They work a few years at a newspaper for a pittance, kowtowing to tyrannical bosses. And then they discover they can make more money in public relations, working for a hotel or the AmCham or some other big company. Just as these budding scribes learn the job, they leave. And the new reporters coming on line, the inexperienced ones, continue to get the stories wrong.

Despite the low standards in Taiwan, some journalists did stand out, and we sent many of them as International Visitor grantees to the United States. That way they could meet professionals in the U.S., see how journalism works in the U.S., and get better ideas for improving the quality of their own system.

In spite of these problems, AIT had a good relationship with the media. Darryl Johnson regularly gave press conferences for the Taiwan media, interviews for Taiwan TV, and less frequently, background briefings/interviews for visiting American journalists. He was good with the press, as were other members of the team. Jim Moriarty and Lauren



Moriarty, the political and economic counselors, handled themselves with great skill. Chris LaFleur, the deputy director, didn't speak much to the press, nor did Steve Young, his successor. They were the in-house managers, the chief operating officers of AIT, with tons of stuff to do and no time for the press.

*Q: Now, while you were there, I believe there was a presidential election or maybe a Taipei election. How did that get covered?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, DPP member Chen Shui-bian had been elected mayor of Taipei in 1994, several years before I came on scene. His election was a cataclysmic event for the KMT. Cities in the south, Kaohsiung and Tainan, had yielded to the DPP several years before. But Taipei was the capital. And now a dynamic young upstart lawyer, Chen Shui-bian, had taken power by dint of a clever campaign against the old guard KMT. He railed against corruption. He attacked the KMT notion that the only language, the official language in Taiwan should be Mandarin. He frequently spoke Taiwanese on the campaign trail and urged that it be taught in the schools – something unthinkable in years past.

Most significantly, Mayor Chen appeared – albeit obliquely -- to support the notion that Taiwan should strive towards independence – not now, but down the line. This was part of the DPP party platform. The platform phrased this new policy cautiously, but the long-term intent was clear. And this policy caused heartburn for the PRC and raised general international concern when seasoned American journalist and academic Don Oberdorfer came to Taipei, interviewed Mayor Chen, and inadvertently misquoted him.

Oberdorfer had been the Washington Post East Asia correspondent for many years, a well-respected journalist and an excellent researcher. In 1997 he was a visiting scholar at SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies), Johns Hopkins University. He came to Taipei to see a range of officials, businessmen, and academics, but in particular to interview Chen Shui-bian as the leader of the DDP and perhaps as president-in-waiting.

Oberdorfer asked for assistance, so I helped arrange the interview with the Mayor Chen. I accompanied Oberdorfer to the new City Hall and introduced him to Chen. The interview, conducted through an interpreter, went well until Oberdorfer asked Chen about his position on Taiwan independence. At this point Chen's demeanor changed. He became cautious, weighing every word. As I heard him, Chen said that the DPP position cautiously advocated Taiwan independence. Then he separately stated his own position, distinguishing it from that of the DPP. He was, I thought, purposefully ambiguous about his support for Taiwan independence.

Oberdorfer was delighted with the interview. I took him back to his hotel so he could write up the piece. Several days later, on September 24, 1997, an op-ed piece by Oberdorfer appeared in the New York Times with the news that presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian advocated independence for Taiwan. My phone began to ring. The mayor's office was furious. They called Oberdorfer, too, demanding that he correct the story. Oberdorfer was equally indignant. He would never make such a mistake, he said.

He was sure of his notes. He called me up asking for confirmation of his story. “Call the press office and tell them they’re wrong.”

I couldn’t do that. No, Oberdorfer was *wrong (laughs)*. I remember listening to the interview and thinking, “The mayor’s a sly dog. He doesn’t want to get out in front on this issue. He’s thinking about his presidential prospects.”

Why did such a seasoned journalist make this major mistake? One possibility: maybe the interpreter mistranslated. I was listening to Chen’s Chinese and perhaps that colored my understanding of the English version. No, that’s unlikely. I think Oberdorfer just took bad notes. I think he knew in advance what he wanted his story to say (*laughs*), and that’s the way he heard it. Even Hall-of-Famers can make rookie mistakes.

*Q: All kinds of things can happen during a foreign-service assignment. In Taipei you had a plane crash with American victims. What’s the role of your shop in those kinds of circumstances?*

NEIGHBORS: On Feb 16, 1998, China Airlines Flight 676 from Bali crashed on approach to Chiang Kai-shek International Airport near Taipei. Two hundred three persons died, including five Americans. The death of an American citizen in an air crash is a traumatic experience for any U.S. mission, particularly for the Consular Section. Consular officers must ensure the bodies are identified correctly. This requires them to go to the crash site and spend long hours at the facility where the bodies are kept. Working with forensic specialists, they have to make sure of the identification of each American victim. Once that’s done, they have to notify the nearest of kin. Only then can names of the victims be released publicly.

This was a gut-wrenching experience for our consular officers, dealing with dead bodies and distraught relatives. After it was over, the State Department sent a psychiatrist to Taipei to consul consular officials and local employees who had to go through this ordeal.

Mark Mayfield, the head of the Consular Section was the ideal person to be in charge at this difficult time. He was an experienced officer, a master of consular regulations and procedures. More important, he had great poise under pressure. His calm, professional manner reassured distraught relatives of the victims that we are doing everything possible to identify and secure the bodies, to treat them with proper respect, and to have them repatriated as soon as possible. AIT could have messed this up and infuriated a lot of people. But we didn’t -- thanks to Mark Mayfield and his superb consular team.

*Q: You mentioned emergency plans. Are there specific responsibilities for the PAO shop?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. All U.S. missions abroad have Emergency Action Plans that spell out the duties of each section in an embassy. During an emergency Public Affairs takes control of the message released to the public. We are the voice of the embassy, or the voice of AIT. If other members of the mission get questions from the media or the public, they funnel them to the press officer who tries to formulate answers. He does this in

consultation with his colleagues at post, but more importantly he works with State Department Public Affairs in Washington to elicit press guidance.

When protests or acts of violence are directed at the mission or against American citizens, rumors are rife, the American community panics, and phone calls pour into the embassy. At this point the Public Affairs section becomes a rumor-control center. We take calls from worried Americans saying, for example, “We heard that they’re disturbing the bodies or that they can’t make identifications.” Our job is to squelch rumors before they metastasize.

*Q: There’s been a longstanding and very successful educational exchange between the United States and Taiwan. And I would assume that maintaining contact with the universities, the academics, would be a major part of your section’s responsibility.*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. My contacts in academia flourished in part because of my past experience in Taipei and Kaohsiung in the 1970s. I had met many of the university presidents back when they were lowly assistant professors. I knew them personally and this gave me ready access to the groves of academe. And I used this access to speak directly to Taiwanese students, cultivating my ability to lecture about America in Chinese.

In 1998 I lectured in Chinese at seven different universities and also at the AIT American Center. “The History of American Folk Music” was one of my favorite topics. This allowed me to talk about race and religion, civil rights, the labor movement, the Vietnam War. Through music I was able to discuss sensitive topics that needed to be understood by Chinese students and the general public as well. I also developed a new lecture, a short history of the United States as seen through popular music. I called it “America: the Dream and the Reality.” I began with Gatsby and the green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan’s boat dock. I wound the story through songs about whalers and loggers and cowboys; Railroad Bill and John Henry; Joe Hill and the copper bosses; garment workers and coal miners; Woody Guthrie, bound for glory; Judy Garland, not in Kansas anymore; and Rick and Elsa watching time go by in Casa Blanca. I closed with Martin Luther King and the partially redeemed promise of American democracy.

A PAO is supposed to defend U.S. policy and persuade audiences to agree with our views. Early on in my career I realized that rational discussion and explanations don’t often convince. You can say, “Here are five reasons why the U.S. is a great country, and here are the five things about our policy that are really cool.” So what. To change a person’s mind you have to strike an emotional note, and a good way to do that is through music. Music hits a different part of your brain, and makes you want to cry or laugh or leap into action. That’s why music has always been vital to political and social movements -- civil rights in America and the Cultural Revolution in China. That’s why I consistently used music to enliven my lectures and give them emotional heft.

I was always on the lookout for new lecture topics. One day I chanced upon a comment by historian Oscar Handlin. He said, “I once thought to write a history of American

immigrants. But then I discovered that immigrants are American history.” About the same time I saw a beautiful article on American education written for The Atlantic by James Fellows. His article talked about American education, showing how our national character shapes the way we teach our children and discussing how our immigrant history makes us so different from more traditional societies like Great Britain, Japan, and China.

Inspired by these two articles, I prepared a lecture linking the two—immigration and education. I started with Franklin Roosevelt’s iconic speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1938. The Daughters were known for being snobs. They looked down on the “unwashed” immigrants who arrived after 1776. FDR put them in their place with his opening words: “Remember, remember always that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.”

From there I discussed how the immigrant experience had shaped everything about America, how it made us the first modern nation, free from the traditions and strictures of the Old World. Immigrants were often oddballs, restless renegades who gave up their identities and came to America to recreate themselves. And this spirit of individualism had a dramatic effect on our system of education. We saw education not as the privilege of the few, but as an opportunity for the many. I wove into my lecture a description of Chinese reverence for education, a reverence blighted by a system that encourages memorization and mindless obedience. I suggested that Taiwan in some ways resembled America. Taiwan society also owes much to its immigrants – both to the Fujian farmers and fisherman who came to the island hundreds of years ago, and to the mainlanders who fled to Taiwan after 1949.

*Q: Now, did USIS at this time have a library or American Center or its own facilities in Taipei?*

NEIGHBORS: We did. As PAO, I had two offices. One was in the AIT building where I consulted with Director Johnson, and worked with the Press Office. My other office was across town, on NanHai Lu, South Sea Road, co-located with the American Center. This was a perfect location for an American Center – in the heart of the old city, right next to Chien Kuo High School, THE most famous secondary school in Taipei. That’s where I had worked as a junior officer, lo those many years ago. The building was a remnant of the Japanese colonial era, a comfortable place, though somewhat the worse for wear.

Unlike most of our public affairs operations around the world, we still had a functioning library. Since 1979 the AIT budget had been a direct Congressional appropriation and did not reflect the severe budget cuts imposed on USIA. So we had a wonderful library operating under the leadership of senior librarian, Patricia Wang. Patricia knew everything about research on American issues. She saw to it that the library offered study opportunities for nearby students and provided impressive outreach services for government officials, academics, journalists, and businessmen.

The old building at NanHai Road also housed the offices of the Fulbright Commission. The Fulbright Program in Taiwan had flourished for years under the eccentric, sly, and

ingratiating leadership of Wu Jing-jyi. Wu had a PhD in psychology from, I believe, the University of Minnesota. He was from a prominent Taiwanese family, knew everyone on the island, particularly in the arts and academia. He knew how to raise money for Fulbright and how to maneuver through regulatory minefields – both American and Taiwanese.

Under Wu Jing-jyi's leadership, the Fulbright Commission also did student advising on behalf of AIT. Enormous groups of students left Taiwan every year, traveling to the United States for study. These students needed advice on how to choose a reputable college, one that matched their needs with their pocketbooks. The American Center, through Fulbright, provided that advice.

After I had been in Taipei a few months, I realized that the public affairs section had never done a USIA-style Country Plan, a document required of all USIS operations around the world. I guess the previous PAOs figured, "AIT is part of State now. State doesn't do Country Plans. Why should we?"

In Brazil I had been responsible for writing the USIS Country Plan, I thought we needed to do the same thing in Taipei, particularly if we wanted to defend our public affairs budget. I recruited CAO Kay Mayfield into the effort, and together we drafted a statement of purpose for public affairs AIT. We set our goals, explained how we would carry them out, and requested the wherewithal to do so. In this way we were prepared when the budgetary knives came out in Washington.

I remember late on Wednesday afternoon in 1998, the day before Thanksgiving, AIT received a message, saying, "You are going to cut the AIT press and cultural budget by such-and-such an (enormous) amount."

Fortuitously, this was the interregnum between deputy directors Chris LaFleur and Steve Young. Director Johnson was also on leave, so Econ chief Lauren Moriarty was acting director, and I was acting deputy. And as the deputy, I was the budget guy. I got to draft the answer to this ill-considered demand from Washington.

Lauren and I didn't make the Thanksgiving Day COB-deadline, but a few days later we did send back a reply, which said,

"Here are some basic cuts we can make in the public affairs budget. Like hell we're going to do the rest of them."

Obviously I wasn't that blunt, but that was the tenor of our message. Our message reviewed in painstaking detail the public affairs budget, defending it line by line. Apparently someone in Washington decided AIT could no longer use money from visa fees to supplement our operating budget. Embassies were not allowed to do that. Lauren and I pointed out that AIT was not an embassy, but a private, non-profit organization. State Department spending regulations did not apply to us. Our argument was persuasive.

Washington withdrew its request for massive cuts and accepted our more modest suggestions.

*Q: Now, Taiwan students had been going to the U.S. for a long time. I would suspect that in due course the universities would be sending people out to a place like Taiwan. Didn't the president of the University of Washington come out at the time you were there. Would you be helping out with the scheduling of such visits?*

NEIGHBORS: We often did. When university delegations came, they often requested a briefing on the educational scene in Taiwan. Taiwan still maintained healthy exchange programs with many American schools, despite our increasing interest in Mainland China. Some new exchanges were just starting up. I've always thought Taiwan is a wonderful place for students to come to study Chinese. In Mainland China -- a least back in the old days -- it was much more difficult to make close friends. Chinese students would get in trouble for getting too close to an American. Taiwan is much more open.

Some people argue that the Mandarin Chinese spoken in Taiwan is not standard, but I don't think that's true anymore -- particularly in Taipei. People may have a slight Taiwan accent, but it's standard Chinese just as Tennessee English may not be the gold standard, but it's a very pleasant, respectable version of American English. I won't go so far as to say that Okie and Texas accents, where I'm from, are really that pleasant. But, still, they are legitimate versions of English. Just as is the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan.

*Q: Now, as you were saying, sometimes things that happen in the East Asian neighborhood have consequences for Taiwan. Jiang Zemin came to Washington in the fall of 1997. I would assume the Taiwan press covered that event.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh yes, the media covered the visit extensively, exhaustively, like Talmud scholars parsing every paragraph and punctuation mark to see if the U.S. position on China had changed. So yes, an event like the Jiang visit always caused fear and trembling.

*Q: It must have been a little bit harder then, as President Clinton returns President Jiang's visit, Clinton goes to the Mainland in June of 1998 and then Shanghai and articulates the Three No's. That would have got a little press in Taiwan.*

NEIGHBORS: That got enormous press. Articles and analysis focused with special intensity of Bill Clinton's iteration of the "Three No's" in comments to scholars at the Shanghai Library. The "Three No's" were:

- 1) No U.S. support for a two-Chinas policy or a one-China and one-Taiwan policy;
- 2) No support for Taiwan independence;
- 3) No support for admission of Taiwan to any international organization that requires statehood for membership.

*Q: Was this different from what any president had said before?*



NEIGHBORS: The White House claimed the statement did not represent a substantive change. It was simply a re-articulation by the president of our current policy. Some American critics, including Jim Mann of the LA Times, disagreed. They noted that this was the first time a president had directly accepted the PRC claim that Taiwan was an inviolable part of China. In the Shanghai Communiqué, for example, the U.S. “recognized” the Chinese position without necessarily agreeing to it. This was a major change, said the critics.

So in the face of all this criticism, the U.S. continued to walk a thin line between our desire for good relations with the PRC and loyalty to our old allies in Taiwan. We supported eventual cross-Strait reconciliation, but we weren’t going to force the Taiwan government to act before it was ready. At any rate, the Clinton visit did cause a lot of heartburn for us at AIT.

Strange as it may seem, I was supposed to go to Shanghai to help out with the press for the Clinton visit.

*Q: Oh, how did that happen?*

NEIGHBORS: I had experience doing the press for a number of presidential and vice-presidential visits to China. I’d done Reagan as well as two visits by Bush the Elder. And now here was a chance to see Bill Clinton in action, so I volunteered to help out in Shanghai.

I was looking forward to see presidential madness again. I thought it would be a lot of fun and a lot of anguish and in the end I’d have great stories to tell. But, right at the last minute, someone back in Washington -- I believe it was Jeff Bader on the NSC—decided that having an AIT official working on a presidential visit to China was not a good idea.

Result: I didn’t get to go. I was disappointed. There was a silver lining, however. At this time Lauren Moriarty was acting director and she asked me to be deputy director for three months. In the end that was probably more interesting than the ephemeral presidential visit.

*Q: Yes, I can see that.*

NEIGHBORS: A good friend of mine, Frank Neville -- who eventually became my press officer in Beijing -- did the Clinton visit to Xian. And from what he said and what I’ve heard from others, the Clinton Advance Team there was a nightmare. All advance teams are difficult to deal with because they’re under such pressure to perform. But the Clinton gang was even more outrageous than normal. Frank Neville is the most intense, focused person I’ve ever known, a superb officer, disciplined, efficient, never at a loss -- a fitness freak and a tough, dependable guy. Frank told me that when the Clinton visit was over, he went back to his hotel room and broke down, cried for the only time in his adult life (laughs).

He had just spent the previous 22 hours screaming at American officials and Chinese security officials and press people and fearing that the whole visit was going down in flames and he would get the blame.

*Q: Because I think that whole press plane, it was the largest U.S. delegation ever.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, a world record. Even beat the Chien Long Emperor's entourage.

*Q: Which illustrates that actually you don't have the staffing in place to handle such a visit. You have to bring in bodies from other posts and other places.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh yes. You usually bring in, just for the press stuff, probably 15, 20 people from posts around the region and from Washington. We even regularly brought in a wizard FSN from Italy to handle press motor pool requirements, a complicated, thankless, yet vital task.

*Q: Your section's reporting responsibilities, back to Washington, what are some of the standard reports that you would do.*

NEIGHBORS: We regularly did media reaction reporting

*Q: Would that be daily?*

NEIGHBORS: Some big posts do media reaction daily, but in Taiwan, not so often. After all the Taiwan media has only one issue (*laughs*). Taiwan was not usually of importance to the Bureau readership back in Washington, so we did weekly summaries rather than daily reports. We also did spot reporting on particular issues, usually following the lead of State Public Affairs. PA would send out a message saying, here's an item that we would like you to cover. If there's any reporting on this in the Taiwan press, please tell us about it. So we would do that.

One of the things that I did at AIT, in addition to reinstituting the Country Plan, was to develop an Institutional Analysis, a basic tool for implementing our public diplomacy strategy. In this analysis we – Public Affairs – first outlined the key institutions that we dealt with in the government, academia, the media, the arts and culture, and business. Then we wrote one-page notes that described AIT's *guanxi* or relationship with these individuals. How did we know them? What USG programs had they participated in? How much influence did they have within their institutions? How might we more effectively inform them about U.S. policy and influence them to support our programs?

Preparing an Institutional Analysis helped me think more clearly about our public diplomacy methods and our goals. The document also served as a corporate memory to be used by my successors.

Public Affairs regularly reported on all our public diplomacy activities: educational exchanges, speaker programs, conferences, cultural performances, the Fulbright program. We paid special attention to reporting on our International Visitors (IVs). After these visitors returned to Taiwan, we would talk to them at length about their experiences, finding out what went right and what went wrong, hoping that our reports to Washington would help improve the IV program for future grantees.

Over the years USG and AIT exchange programs have had a remarkable impact on Taiwan politics, business, education, and the arts. To prove my case, let me cite the example of iconic Taiwanese writer/choreographer, Lin Hwai-min. In 1976 I was a callow junior officer in Taipei. For my first important assignment I accompanied and assisted the Alwin Nikolais Dance Company during their one-week tour of Taiwan. Our second-day activities included a visit to the studios of the newly formed Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. In this crowded, shabby facility, we saw a marvelous dance performance. The group's three principal dancers recreated a scene from Lin Hwai-min's new work, *The White Snake*. All Chinese know the legend of the White Snake and the Green Maid. I even wrote a paper about it in grad school, so I was doubly delighted. I was sitting on the floor, ten feet from the performers – could see the beads of sweat on their upper lips. It was a marvelous performance, and it was equally thrilling to meet the creator of this dance and the founder of Cloud Gate, Lin Hwai-min.

Years later, during my second assignment in Taipei, I met Lin again, had dinner with him. We talked about Cloud Gate and Alwin Nikolais, about writing and about the state of the arts in Taiwan, and about the importance of U.S.-Taiwan exchange programs. Lin told me that these exchange programs had dramatically changed the arc of his life – not once, but three times.

How did that happen? Lin grew up in southern Taiwan, the city of Chiayi, speaking Taiwanese as his mother tongue. His parents both had earned university degrees in Tokyo. Lin had a precocious interest in the arts, particularly in dance and writing. In the early 1960s the State Department sponsored a tour of Taiwan by the José Limón Dance Company, and Lin's life changed for the first time. He fell in love with dance.

Lin had a talent for writing as well, selling his first short story at the age of 14. He soon became a regular contributor to Taiwanese literary magazines, writing short stories and a popular novel about the “lost generation” of Taiwanese youth.

In 1969 Lin earned a scholarship to study journalism at the University of Minnesota, and that's where a second U.S. government exchange program caused him to change course. USIS Taiwan offered Lin a spot at the renowned Iowa Writers Workshop, run for years by poet Paul Engle and his wife and fellow writer, Nieh Hualing. Lin took the chance and flourished in Iowa, publishing a number of distinguished works of fiction and memoirs.

While at Iowa University, Lin attended a series of lectures on modern dance by Martha Graham, THE Martha Graham. For Lin it was love at first sight. Ms. Graham must have

been impressed as well. She invited Lin to come to New York and study dance with her. Of course he accepted.

In the early 1970s Lin returned to Taiwan, launching a career of writing and teaching, nurturing the notion that one day he would found a contemporary dance troupe, a troupe that would combine Chinese stories and artistic traditions with the techniques of American modern dance.

And that's where old USIS came on the scene once again. Lin approached the embassy in Taipei and asked if it could support the launching of a new Chinese modern dance troupe. USIS said yes and gave Lin a grant. In 1973 Cloud Gate Dance Company came to life with Lin as the founder, choreographer, and artistic director.

Lin and Cloud Gate went on to fame not only in Taiwan, but on the international scene as well. 1978 saw the premiere of his masterpiece, *Legacy*, a dance history of Taiwan that brought together movements from modern dance, Chinese martial arts, Buddhist meditation, and Taiwanese aboriginal dance. This work foreshadowed the Democratic Progressive Party's search in the 1990s for a distinctive Taiwanese identity.

Given his talent and his ambition, Lin would have been successful under any circumstances. But our three USIS programs -- José Limón, the Iowa Writers Workshop, and the Cloud Gate grant -- gave him extraordinary opportunities. And Lin took advantage of these opportunities in extraordinary fashion.

*Q: This is one striking example of the dramatic effect of a USIS program. Do you think similar exchange programs have had a broader impact on the development of Taiwanese society?*

I first went to Taiwan as a student in 1966. I lived there as a diplomat from 1975–1979, and as an AIT representative from 1997–1999. Since then I've been back four or five times on brief visits, the most recent being last year. That's almost 50 years in the life of the country. The positive changes – political, social, cultural -- have been monumental. And I believe the United States through its myriad exchange programs has played a pivotal role in promoting many of these changes.

When I first came to Taiwan in 1966, Chiang Kai-shek dominated the Republic of China. His source of power was the KMT, a Leninist-style political party that still dreamed of restoring its power on the Mainland. For sheer terror the KMT in Taiwan was no match for its rivals on the Mainland, the Communist Party of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. But Chiang Kai-shek was a dictator. Anyone who openly opposed him wound up in prison. Same thing for those who advocated Taiwan independence.

This situation began to change during my second sojourn in Taiwan, during the 1970s under the leadership of Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son. Ching-kuo didn't become a democrat overnight, but he did lay the foundation for the open, democratic election of Lee Teng-hui in 1988. Lee's election was a seminal event for Taiwan

democracy, but Lee was, after all, a KMT member. The real sea change came in the presidential election of 2000, when Chen Shui-bian was elected and power transferred peacefully from the KMT to the DPP. Chen Shui-bian unfortunately turned out to be rather corrupt and after leaving office went to prison for his sins. After Chen, the KMT returned to power with the election of Ma Ying-Jeou -- once again a peaceful change of power. For all his flaws, Chen Shui-bian was no Hugo Chavez, clinging to power till he died. He left willingly, confirming the fact that Taiwan was a legitimate democracy.

How did all this come about? How and why did Taiwan become a democracy? I firmly believe that many of the leaders of Taiwan society and government learned to be democrats in the United States. The 1998 edition of Who's Who in Taiwan, had 800 entries, and 350 of them had degrees from American universities. Eighteen out of 25 cabinet members at that time had advanced degrees from American universities, including President Lee Teng-hui, who had a PhD in Agricultural Economics from Cornell. The current, President Ma Ying-Jeou, was a Harvard PhD and a devoted user of the USIS library during his high-school days.

Taiwan has become a real democracy. True, there are occasional fistfights in the legislature, but over all the system functions well. Along with political democracy Taiwan has also developed a civic spirit. The old traditional Chinese way of doing things was *menqian qing* – keep your front porch swept but public space is not your responsibility. This attitude explains why in China (and in Taiwan of not so long ago) the streets were strewn with garbage.

But in Taiwan the times have changed. When I visited Taipei last year, I couldn't find a trashcan to throw away my garbage. The city government has removed them all, and yet no one throws litter on the streets. Everyone has a little plastic bag with them and they put their garbage in the bags and wait to throw it away at strategic places around the city. Everyone recycles. They separate out the cans and the plastic, and it's amazing! Taiwan was not like this when I first went there -- in any way, shape, or form! This sense of civic pride and responsibility is a great achievement. The people of Taiwan did it themselves. But the U.S., I believe, should modestly take some credit. We did serve as a model. The hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese who studied in the U.S. couldn't help but learn about democracy and civic action and freedom of speech, and these lessons took root and flourished in Taiwan.

*Q: I've been asking about events outside of Taiwan to illustrate that your shop was not just focused on what's happening on Taiwan. Events outside of Taiwan affect your work as well. And on May 7, 1999, a U.S. warplane bombs the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. And there was a big hoo-ha in Beijing. How did the press and the public in Taiwan respond to that?*

NEIGHBORS: The reaction in Taipei was much more muted than in Beijing, where violent protesters surrounded the embassy and virtually held Ambassador Sasser hostage for several days. Nothing like that happened in Taiwan. The media covered the event, of

course, and the television footage was dramatic. But no one got stirred up about the event.

Several years later, when I was serving in Beijing, I learned a lot more about the PRC view of this incident. The U.S. position – which I believe is correct – was that the bombing was an accident. Despite our disclaimers – accompanied by mounds of evidence -- I never met a Chinese who thought the bombing was an accident. Many of them, sophisticated analysts of U.S. policy, would agree that the attack had not been ordered by the President or the Secretary of State. More likely, according to them, a rogue element within the CIA and the military was responsible. They did it to disrupt the growing ties between the U.S. and China.

Joseph Prueher was my ambassador in Beijing from 2000-2001. He had been a naval aviator, a four-star admiral, and commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific. He spoke with great authority on military matters. When I first arrived in Beijing, I helped arrange for the Ambassador to informally exchange ideas with the editorial boards of various Chinese newspapers and other media. The journalists asked all sorts of questions. But in the end they always came back to the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Prueher would answer by saying, “As a pilot I have spent most of my adult life learning how to blow things up (*laughs*).” He explained that he had been a fighter pilot for many years, had flown bombing missions. The truth is, he explained, it’s very easy to make mistakes on bombing runs. The bombing of the Chinese embassy was a catastrophic mistake, but it WAS a mistake.

Nobody believed him.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Prueher realized he was fighting a losing cause. Just imagine if the Chinese had accidentally dropped a bomb on one of our embassies, and it just happened to hit the one part of the embassy that housed intelligence officers. (The victims killed in Belgrade were Xinhua News Agency journalists, often double-hatted as intelligence officers.) We certainly wouldn’t believe the Chinese had done it by accident. (*laughs*).

*Q: You were saying this was well covered on the television. Could you describe how the television scene had changed over the years since you’ve been in Taiwan? I believe by this time they began to have cable.*

NEIGHBORS: The cable channels proliferated like the weeds in my backyard. Competition was fierce. The two main political parties had their own channels. The news shows featured different points of view, sometimes highly critical of the government. Of course the need to fill time and attract audiences meant that the news often focused on the titillating, rather than the deeply informative.

But Taiwan did have many serious journalists, and we sent a number of them to the U.S. as IV grantees. One of our grantees, Angela Yu, was a rising young star from the



Zhongguo shibao, The China Times. When she came back from her program, Angela left the newspaper and went on to be a television journalist, a newsreader, and interviewer. She did a number of successful interviews with Darryl Johnson. Later on, she went back to The China Times and was sent as a correspondent to Mainland China. So when I was in China, she was also there, and frequently shared her insights about Chinese politics and society. This once again points up the usefulness of IV grants. For the last few years Angela has been back in Taiwan, working as the PR flak for the American Chamber of Commerce. I see her each year when the AmCham comes to DC for its annual “door-knock” with Congressional leaders.

*Q: Now, about the time that you leave, or maybe shortly thereafter, Lee Teng-hui makes the statement to Deutsche Welle, German Radio, about a state-to-state relationship with the Mainland. Have you left by then? Because that was a major poke-in-the-eye to the PRC.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, Lee was saying in effect, “You, the Mainland, have to accept that Taiwan is a sovereign state, otherwise we will not negotiate with you.” This was unacceptable to the PRC. Their position: Taiwan is a part of China; it is a province. They would never negotiate as coequals.

This was once again an example of Lee Teng-hui’s ability to goad the Chinese. But he didn’t do this simply to get their goat. He had an important point to make. If Taiwan is going to reach an agreement with the PRC, it has to be able to negotiate as an equal, and that means being treated as a “state actor.”

*Q: Is there anything else important you remember about your tour?*

NEIGHBORS: While I was in Taipei, we had a visit from legendary – almost mythical -- Area Director Frank Scotton. During his long USIA career Scotton served as PAO in Ankara, Rangoon, and Beijing. But he will also be most closely associated in everyone’s mind with Vietnam, where he spent 10 years. Ten years where -- if my understanding is correct -- he openly worked on loan to the CIA, focusing on psyops and other activities I don’t quite comprehend.

Scotton used to joke that he was the only person he knew who used a job with the CIA as cover for the fact that he was a USIA employee. In the mid-1970s, after Scotton had been in Vietnam for ten years, his boss, the CIA Director asked him,

“Frank, you need to make a choice. Either transfer permanently from USIA and become a CIA employee, or return to your roots.”

Scotton chose his roots with USIA, and that’s when he began to rise through the USIA bureaucracy. Scotton was dedicated, hard working, knowledgeable about the world and foreign policy. But if given a choice, he would rather just talk about Vietnam. And he had great stories to tell.

In 1998 when Scotton came to Taipei, we hosted a small in-house dinner for him at my apartment. My son Mark, at home from university, also sat in, fascinated by Scotton's tales.

The best story? In the early part of the Vietnam War, Scotton led a small team on a mission near the Laotian border. They accidentally crossed the border – a no-no – and got into a firefight. With difficulty they managed to escape. Returning to base he began to write up an action report. He asked his commanding officer, Col X,

“We drifted into Laos, accidentally, but against orders. Should I put that in my report.”

“Yes, do it. I'll support you 100%.”

Well, the report went up the chain and the 100% support from Col. X dropped to zero.

As chance would have it, six months later Scotton was at the White House receiving a medal from President Johnson. As Scotton stood in the receiving line, Col. X approached and said,

“Frank, How are you? It was great working together in Vietnam.”

“What do you mean, ‘great working together,’ you back-stabbing son-of-a-bitch!”

Soon the reception line dispersed, and a Marine guard approached Scotton.

“Sir, please come this way. The President would like to see you.”

Scotton followed the Marine into a side room. LBJ came over, draped his arm over Scotton's shoulders, and asked,

“Now, tell me, Frank, what did that backstabbing, son-of-a-bitch do to you?”

And that was our Washington boss, the inimitable Frank Scotton.

Several months later, before I left Taipei, I got a big surprise. This was 1999. USIA was on its deathbed. But before disappearing, the Agency announced its very last, worldwide achievement awards. This included an award for the Best Public Affairs Writing and for the Linguist of the Year.

As I mentioned earlier, CAO Kay Mayfield had been a journalist in a previous life. She loved words. She had a gift for writing speeches, for channeling someone else's voice. She wrote several speeches for me that captured my voice perfectly. She also wrote speeches for Director Johnson, and his style was very different from mine. Kay's drafts fit him to a tee. In 1998 she wrote a series of clever, thoughtful policy speeches for the Director, articulating the U.S. position on cross-Straits relations, Lee Teng-hui's state-to-state statement, and military sales to Taiwan -- all kinds of prickly issues. I

thought Kay deserved recognition for her outstanding work, so I nominated her as Best Public Affairs Writer of the Year. And she won – even though she was working for a private, non-profit organization in the renegade province of Taiwan.

Kay in turn nominated me for the Linguist of the Year award, and I won. The award did not go to the officer with the best FSI score, but to the person who made best use of his foreign language skills as a public diplomacy tool. As I recounted earlier, I gave a series of 45-minute lectures in Chinese on American music, history, culture, and education. I did radio and TV interviews. I even did a one-off talk on – of all things -- barbershop quartet music. Director Johnson and three of his AIT colleagues formed a barbershop quartet singer. Kay wrote a speech for a performance in which I would explain the historical setting of barbershop singing and the director's group would sing a song. So we had live performers accompanied by my explanation of the historical background to their songs. Based on these activities I won the Linguist of the Year Award. So the two major awards, the last awards for USIA, were won by Taiwan (*laughs*). Kay and I were delighted.

*Q: Your next assignment. You come back to Washington. How did you organize it and what did this new job involve?*

NEIGHBORS: Early on I saw there was going to be an opening for PAO Beijing in the summer of 2000. Originally that would have been perfect timing. But I decided to leave Taiwan early for personal reasons. My father had passed away in 1997, and I wanted to be back in the States for a least a year to help my mom. If I wanted to be PAO Beijing, I needed a bridge assignment in DC to take me from the summer of 1999 through the summer of 2000.

By this time I had been in the Senior Foreign Service for almost seven years. My promotion window was closing. If I didn't get promoted to FE-MC, I would be cashiered, let go, fired, put out on the street. I worried about this, particularly with college tuition still to be paid. I wrote to my boss, Bill Maurer, back in Washington, lobbying for the PAO job, saying, "I think I'm the perfect candidate for PAO Beijing. Few, if any, can match my experience, language skill, and local knowledge. I can do this job well. But you should be aware. I may be kicked out of the Foreign Service for time in class."

Maurer replied, "You don't need to worry about that. I was on your promotion panel. I can't tell you that you were promoted, but I have no problem assigning you to the Beijing job."

That was certainly good news. I not only got the job in Beijing, but was also going to be promoted. At that point I began to look for a bridge assignment in Washington. At first the pickings were slim, but then I got an offer from Penn Kemble, the caretaker Director of USIA. He needed help in organizing and implementing Secretary Albright's new pet project: the Community of Democracies Initiative (CDI).

CDI was the brainchild of Mort Halperin, director of the Office of Policy Planning. Mort had been involved in foreign policy since the Kissinger days, when Kissinger wiretapped him (*laughs*) in an infamous incident. He was also a leading member of the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU. Secretary Albright would have given him a higher appointment except for one thing: there was no way/no how Halperin could get approved by a Senate with Jesse Helms in it. Instead he was appointed to one of the highest positions in State that did not require Senate approval: the Director of Policy Planning.

Albright and Halperin believed that democratic nations as a group stood unrepresented on the world scene. There was no OPEC or ASEAN or OAS to focus like a laser on the promotion of democracy. The democracies – old, new, and emerging -- needed to form a coalition, a Community of Democracies that would promote freedom of speech and the press, foster open elections, nurture civil society, and strengthen representative government. As an opening gambit, the United States, along with several like-minded nations, would convene a two-pronged conference of foreign ministers and NGO representatives. The goal of this conference: establish a new world coalition to lobby and exert influence on behalf of democratic states.

Secretary Albright put Mort Halperin in charge of CDI. It was his intellectual baby, after all. But as the Director of Policy Planning, he had no time to manage the minutia involved in producing a large-scale international conference. He delegated that responsibility to Penn Kemble.

Penn Kemble was the last deputy director of USIA working under Joe Duffey. Duffey, former president of Amherst, had been the pusillanimous Director of USIA from 1993-1999. Under his clueless leadership, USIA was absorbed by the Borg -- the State Department. Duffey left State in 1999, well before the merger, and Kemble took his place, serving as acting Director. But that job was going to disappear in 2000, and Kemble needed a place to land. And that's how he came to be the Special Representative for the Council of the Community of Democracies Initiative.

Kemble grew up politically as a labor activist. Early on he was a member of the Socialist Party of America and was active in the civil rights movement. He worked briefly for the New York Times, but quit because he refused to cross a picket line of striking typesetters. He eventually became a staff assistant and speechwriter for Senator Pat Moynihan. Kemble was a fine writer, a shrewd political analyst, and an ardent supporter of democracy movements around the world. Unfortunately, he was a lousy administrator. At USIA the Deputy Director made the trains run on time, but Kemble had no interest in that – to the great detriment of our organization.

Despite his flaws as a manager, Kemble was a fascinating fellow to work with. He had wide-reaching web of contacts in the political world and academia. He was smart and articulate, an intellectual with a compelling vision of how the world might be made safe for democracy.

Kemble had his mandate and his dramatic wood-paneled office in the 1940's wing of the Department. He still needed two factotums to handle all the work an office like his would generate. And that's where Jeff Brown and I came on the scene, two experienced USIA officers in need of one-year assignments in DC. Jeff was an outstanding officer. He went on to be the Director of the Washington Foreign Press Center, then DCM in Quito and Buenos Aires. At present he is deputy assistant secretary of state for public diplomacy in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.

As part of the CDI, Jeff and I were assigned to the Policy Planning Staff, Mort Halperin's bailiwick. We were responsible for helping organize (and partially fund) the World Forum on Democracy, the NGO share of the proposed conference. Halperin also brought two operatives, Ted Piccone and Bobby Herman, to work with him on the political side of CDI. Piccone and Herman had worked with Halperin on programs to promote democracy at the George Soros-sponsored Open Society Foundation.

Because of CDI's emphasis on human rights, freedom of speech, good governance, Jeff and I found ourselves working closely with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. And this gave us the opportunity to see the Bureau's inimitable Assistant Secretary, Harold Koh, in action. Harold had been the brilliant young Dean of the Yale Law School before Albright recruited him for the Department. Koh was one of those fellows that if you were in a meeting with him and everybody was making their points and talking away and then Harold spoke up, everyone would think, "Why couldn't I have said that?" Because you're not as smart as Harold, that's why.

It was a treat to work for Mort Halperin and Harold Koh. Previously, I had always wanted to work abroad, in the field, avoiding the DC doldrums. But this assignment allowed me for the first time to see how the big boys worked, how Halperin, Koh, and Kemble argued, wheedled, and bullied the Department into accepting the Community of Democracies Initiative – a proposal that in the beginning elicited either a yawn or a sneer from our foreign service colleagues.

Jeff Brown and I labored for one year helping to organize the Community of Democracies conference. We had no other issue, no other interests. At first when we approached our State and USIA colleagues about support for CD, we faced strong skepticism. What's the purpose of setting up a new international organization, they would ask. Every time Jeff Brown and I went on one of our propaganda patrols, people would see us coming. Their eyes would roll and they'd say, "Not CDI again. Don't you guys have something better to do?" But we wouldn't quit. We wore them down. Our most effective argument: the Secretary wants this to happen.

Halperin realized from the beginning that CD would fail if it were seen as solely an American initiative. So CD's first effort was to recruit a core group of like-minded democratic nations to act as conveners of the first conference. Our first choice was easy: Poland. Ten years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Poland was thriving, a model for other nations seeking to make the transition from authoritarian state to democracy. On other projects Secretary Albright and Halperin had worked well with Polish Foreign

Minister Bronisław Geremek. Geremek played a key role in the rise to power of Solidarity and the establishment of representative government in Poland. Albright sounded him out about CD, and from the first Geremek was enthusiastic. Soon Poland agreed to host the first CD conference in Warsaw in the summer of 2000. To fill out the roster of convening nations, we also recruited India, Mali, the Czech Republic, Chile, South Africa, and South Korea.

In addition to selecting and convening the conveners for CD, we spent a lot of time trying to articulate the rationale for CD and explain its goals. Most of this heavy lifting was done by the excellent Ted Piccone and Bobby Herman, but at least on one instance I got involved. The two of them circulated a policy statement, a one-page paper that made the case for the Community of Democracies. I saw the draft and thought, “Bobby and Ted are usually very good writers, but in this case I think I can do better.” I wrote my own version, and everybody liked it. It became our standard declaration of purpose.

*Q: Was this an organization conceived like APEC? Would it have nation states in it?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. It was vaguely supposed to end with the establishment of a new international organization – but without elaborate bureaucratic trappings. States would participate in working groups and regularly have meetings that would encourage the spread of democracy.

After two or three months of hard work, we had decided where to hold the first CD conference and who would host it. We had recruited the seven co-convening nations and held several joint meetings with their representatives. At this point we still had several vexing questions to resolve: Who should belong to a community of democracies? Who do we invite to attend the Warsaw conference? How do you define “democratic nation?” Certainly there were not 100 nations that could be labeled flourishing democracies. But maybe, with a lot of wiggle room, we could identify 100 countries *trying* to be democracies.

To help answer these questions, Halperin and Kemble recruited Freedom House to organize the World Forum on Democracy, the NGO conference that would run currently in Warsaw with CD. Freedom House produces a yearly country-by-country report on the state of democracy and press freedom. This made them the ideal organization to help us sort out the guest list for CD, to decide which countries deserved an invitation. This selection process led to a series of acrimonious debates within the State Department, the convening group, and the NGO community.

On one occasion, Penn Kemble, Jeff Brown and I went over to Freedom House to meet with the director (Adrian Karatnycky) and several of his esteemed board members. These illuminati included Max Kampelman, distinguished negotiator of the SALT treaties and Panama Canal Treaty, brilliant labor leader and lawyer and political operative. Zbigniew Brzezinski was there, too (no description needed). The point of the meeting was to get board approval for inviting to the Warsaw conference some countries whose democratic bona fides might be called into question. When we brought up the possibility of inviting



Russia (*laughs*), Zbig went berserk (*laughs*), railing against Russia like someone possessed. He was going on and on. Kemble tried to explain: certainly Russia was not a flourishing democracy, but it was doing much better than expected and maybe it needed encouragement from the other democracies. Zbig was not having any of it. And at that point Max Kampelman spoke up and I understood why he was known as a brilliant negotiator. He was quite elderly at the time, in his eighties, but still able to make the case for Russia and pacify Brzezinski in a way that was charming and efficacious. Finally, and with great reluctance, (*laughs*) Brzezinski conceded defeat.

Russia got the nod. Singapore and Malaysia did not, and therein lies another tale.

*Q: What happened?*

NEIGHBORS: Halperin, with the agreement of the CD convening nations, decided he wanted to make a point about Singapore. Singapore pretended to be a democracy, but wasn't. They held elections that only the ruling party could win. People who criticized the leader, Lee Kuan Yu and his party, wound up in jail on trumped up charges. They should not be invited to the Warsaw conference. When our draft list came out, the U.S. ambassador to Singapore, launched a heated rebuttal, asking how we could possibly exclude Singapore from the forum. We did anyway.

After the first three months Jeff Brown and I spent most of our time working with Freedom House to assemble a collection of NGO representatives for the World Forum on Democracy. In the end more than 400 delegates participated. This included, among others, Wei Jingsheng, representing China, though he no longer lived there, having fled the country after Tiananmen. We had representatives of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party, including Bi-khim Hsiao, close advisor to President Chen Shui-bian and director of international affairs for the party.

The chairperson for the board of directors of Freedom House at that time was Bette Bao Lord, whom I had known from Beijing days. Her husband, former ambassador to China, Winston Lord, came with her to the Warsaw conference, and the two of them played a key role in the proceedings. George Soros, who had a close relationship with Halperin, helped fund a portion of the conference and also participated as a representative of his Open Society Foundation.

The Peruvian delegation gave us one of the stars of the Forum, Alejandro Toledo. Toledo grew up in an impoverished Quechua Indian family. Two Peace Corps volunteers noted his talent and secured for him a scholarship to study in the United States; he did well, eventually earning a PhD in economics from Stanford. He returned to Peru and went into politics. In 2000 he became a leading opponent of the Fujimori regime, and announced his intention to run for the presidency. (He won the election in 2001, defeating former president Alan Garcia.)

On June 24, the eve of the conference, Toledo and the Peruvian delegation called Bette Bao Lord, asking for an urgent meeting with Freedom House and with the official U.S.

delegation. One of their delegation, Baruch Ivcher had been detained by Polish border police. Ivcher was a prominent Israeli journalist, a long-time resident of Lima. He had long been a thorn in the side of the Fujimori dynasty, and Fujimori was looking for revenge. So Peru put out an Interpol alert on Ivcher. He had not really committed any crime, but Interpol could not ignore an Interpol bulletin. Hearing this report, Bette Bao Lord, Freedom House, Soros, and the USG went into action and before long Ivcher was allowed in.

*Q: Now, does this organization, the Community of Democracies, continue to exist?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, it does. Since Warsaw, CD has convened six times: in Seoul, Santiago, Bamako, Lisbon, Vilnius, and most recently in Ulaanbaatar. There is now an Executive Secretariat, a Governing Council, and a Global Issues Group.

NEIGHBORS: It was a wonderful experience to work with individuals as intellectually sharp as Mort Halperin and Harold Koh. Jeff Brown and I also worked closely with all of the talented people that Halperin brought into Policy Planning. That included Jim Steinberg, who eventually became Deputy Secretary of State under Hilary Clinton. During that fascinating year, I got to meet and talk to lots of people who were really bright, insiders in the Department, leaders in the NGO world. Because Penn Kemble didn't want to go to Africa, I traveled to Botswana to participate in a conference on democracy. I went to Poland twice. I liked it so much that I later on bid on the job of PAO Poland. And that was going to be my last assignment as a Foreign Service officer. Unfortunately, I had a medical problem, and the assignment got canceled (*laughs*).

*Q: Now, your next assignment was Beijing. And like your assignment to Hong Kong, this overlaps with an American election – Gore vs. Bush -- and change in administration. The Controversy in this American election slowed down the transition planning for everyone. Did the transition to the Bush administration affect you?*

NEIGHBORS: The 2000 presidential election, well before the transition, had a dramatic effect on the Press and Cultural Section (P&C) Beijing. Per SOP, P&C took charge of setting up an enormous-election center event at the Sheraton Great Wall Hotel. We do this for all elections. But the one we did in 2000 -- I thought it was the most exciting and well planned of these events that I ever attended. The local American business community donated food and drinks for the event. The U.S. League of Women Voters, Beijing branch, helped us organize a mock poll. Our invited guests included government officials, journalists, academics and students of every stripe. We focused on the students. We wanted them to see and understand how elections work in an open society. As part of this effort, Washington sent several American speakers to China to explain our elections and predict what a new administration might portend.

Two of the American speakers held court at our Beijing election center. They stood in a quieter corner giving briefings to small groups and answering questions. We gave all our guests the opportunity to cast a secret presidential ballot and then posted a running tally of the results.

Our ambassador at the time was Joe Prueher, retired four-star admiral and former commander of U.S. Pacific forces. When we first broached the idea of hosting an election center to Prueher, he was skeptical. “Why would we want to do that?” he said.

We explained the concept to Prueher, describing how an election center would enable us to reach out to audiences far beyond our usual scope. And in the end he said, “Oh, I didn’t think of all that. Let’s do it.”

In the event Prueher came to our center and had a great time. He arrived wearing one of our patented Ask-Me-A-Question buttons. Chinese students swarmed around him, bombarding him with questions. And Prueher was delighted to answer, becoming quite animated. The students didn’t realize whom they were talking to until he mounted the stage and said a few official words of greeting.

That day, Nov. 7, 2000 (my birthday), our election center opened for business at 10:00 in the morning. We figured the results would be in by four that afternoon. Usually on Election Day it’s a major advantage to be 12 time zones ahead of DC: you don’t have to stay up all night to greet a new president. But that year was different. As the day progressed, it became clear that nothing was clear about the election. As it neared 6:00 p.m., the Hilton began to pressure us to close up shop. They had another event scheduled for the ballroom. So we bowed to reality and announced closure of the center. Rebecca MacKinnon, the CNN correspondent, was furious.

“You can’t close it down until the election results are in! How dare you do this!”

We dared.

As you recall, the U.S. then had a period of several months in which no one knew who would be our next president. P&C took advantage of this teaching moment by sending our branch PAOs out on speaking tours. I got in on the act as well. I traveled to Shenyang, and together with branch PAO Sheila Paskman gave a long talk to students at Jilin University. We explained – partially in English and partially Chinese – the election process, giving a tutorial on the Electoral College. The students wanted to know why the U.S. was having such a problem picking a president. Didn’t that mean democracy was a failure? No, it did not, I said, pointing out that the U.S. had a tested Constitutional method for working out such problems. And eventually it did so, in a completely unfair manner, thanks mostly to a laughable Supreme Court decision in favor of George W. Bush. *(laughs)*. Well, no, I didn’t say that *(laughs)*.

*Q: (laughs) Let’s start you off in Beijing. You said Ambassador Prueher is there. How’s the embassy organized and how big is your section and who’s in there with you? I mean this is going to be large like Brasilia.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, P&C Beijing in 2000 was a giant post, and now it's gotten even bigger. I was back there last year, 2012, and it has probably grown by another 50%. The new embassy was overcrowded the day it opened.

So we had a good-sized public affairs operation. My Deputy was Rich Stites, an experienced China hand with a PhD in Chinese sociology. There was press spokesman, Frank Neville, and under him three assistant press officers. Then we had cultural affairs officer, CAO Liz Kauffmann, and she supervised three assistant cultural affairs officers (ACAOs). One of the ACAOs handled the Fulbright program as well as other educational exchanges, another did the International Visitors Program, and the third was the American Center Director. The American Center was located in a commercial building away from the embassy. It had a tiny library and a space for hosting small-scale programs. The regional library officer (RLO) was assigned to Beijing, though she had responsibility for our research centers throughout northeast Asia. Of course, the backbone of our operation remained our local employees, some 40 or 50 of them at the time I was in Beijing.

*Q: Well, you had some pretty good excitement starting right off with the EP-3 incident of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001. And how did that come to your attention, and how did the embassy leap to action?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, April Fool's Day in 2001 was a Sunday, and I was on the golf course. I got a call from the embassy duty officer saying that a U.S. reconnaissance airplane, an EP-3, had made a forced landing on Hainan Island. According to reports, there had been a collision between the EP-3 and a Chinese military aircraft. The collision severely damaged the EP-3, forcing it to land at the nearest airport -- on Hainan Island -- without permission of the Chinese air traffic controllers. Our pilot had no good choice. It was either land in China or die. Unfortunately, the pilot of the Chinese interceptor, Wang Wei, died in the accident.

I knew immediately this was going to be a big deal. The ambassador called a meeting of the country team, and parsed out assignments for each section. At first we hoped the Chinese would accept that this was simply an accident and would quickly release our crew. That wasn't to be the case. President Jiang Zemin was out of the country when the incident happened. It appears that his military briefers didn't give him the whole truth about what happened. He was told -- American analysts believe -- that the American spy plane had violated Chinese air space and had flown carelessly, veering into the path of the Chinese interceptor and causing the death of its pilot. From the PLA point of view, there was no way China could repatriate the American crew and return the "spy plane" without extensive negotiations and an apology from the Americans.

In deciding how to deal with the situation, President Jiang also had to consider the intense Chinese nationalism that had been building over the years, a nationalism purposely inculcated among students by the Chinese education system. So you had all these young people who were ardent Chinese nationalists. They hated Japan; they

despised and feared American hegemonism. They wanted China to reclaim its rightful place in the world.

Spurred by slanted accounts in the Chinese media, students began to mail little packets to the Foreign Ministry filled with calcium pills. The message: you need to stiffen your backbones. Don't give in to the American imperialists.

Because of this pressure from students, Jiang felt he could not simply say, "Oh, this was an accident. You can have your crew back, and here's the plane." This was not a viable solution for him at the time. He felt like China needed to negotiate for a while, to show that it was not bowing to America.

Indeed, the Chinese did not bow. They held our crew hostage and refused to return the plane. The negotiations began, and Ambassador Prueher was named point person on our side. I remember on one occasion sitting in on a secure conference call in which Prueher discussed negotiation strategy with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Powell, and Vice President Cheney – a rather authoritative group.

The U.S. was certain of the facts of the incident. We had photographs from an earlier incident three months before. The same pilot, Wang Wei, can be seen flying dangerously close -- within 50 feet -- of one of our reconnaissance planes. How did we know it was Wang Wei? We had photographs of him holding up a cardboard sign that said, "Wangwei@yahoo.com." At that time the Department of Defense sent a warning to the Chinese saying in effect, "This is reckless flying. We are within the law, international law, to fly off the Chinese coast. If your pilots fly this close to us again, it could cause a collision, and people will die." So the Chinese Air Force – and Wang Wei in particular -- had been warned. I guess he was just fooling around and got too close, clipped the wing of the reconnaissance plane. The Chinese plane crashed, Wang died, and our EP-3 limped into the airbase on Hainan Island, barely averting another 16 fatalities.

By a stroke of fortune, the U.S. had as ambassador the perfect person to negotiate on this issue. Joe Prueher had been a four-star admiral. More important, he was a naval aviator, qualified to fly 54 different types of aircraft. Most important, he had flown intercept missions against Soviet reconnaissance planes during the cold war. If anyone understood what had happened to cause this accident, Prueher was the guy.

During the negotiations, when the Chinese would say, "Your reconnaissance plane suddenly darted into the path of our interceptor."

Prueher would laugh and say, "I'm sorry, but the physics doesn't work. Reconnaissance planes fly about 130-knots. They do not dart into anybody's path (*laughs*)."

If anybody objected, Prueher would add, "I used to be a fighter pilot, and I know the psychology. I was like that; I took risks. Wang Wei made a mistake. He did something he was warned against, and we had an accident. But, we should be clear. This was an accident. We recognize that. We wish it hadn't happened. But you need to release our

crew and our plane as soon as possible, because there's no reason to hold them. They did not commit a crime."

As the negotiations proceeded in Beijing, Ambassador Prueher sent our Defense Attaché, General Neal Sealock, down to Hainan to represent the U.S. government. Sealock was allowed to talk to the EP-3 crew, ensure they were being treated well, and provide them with additional food and clothing. From time to time Sealock would speak briefly to the press, who were swarming around the hotel where he was staying. The DOD and Beijing embassy provided him with press guidance. He stuck to simple facts about the status of the crew – left any political comments to Washington and the embassy.

In Beijing, the foreign press surrounded the embassy. They camped out outside the gates waiting for me or any other official who might speak to them. That's how I got my 15 seconds of fame. In Oklahoma my mother saw me on the nightly news (*laughs*) saying as little as possible.

State Public Affairs authorized Prueher to do some carefully calibrated interviews with American media. Frank Neville and I did the set up. John Aloisi, the deputy political counselor, provided key advice. State PA gave clearance for the interviews and sent press guidance. This went on for almost two weeks. The Chinese kept insisting that the U.S. apologize for the accident, admit culpability, and say we were sorry. I suggested we say, "It's too bad you have such a sorry pilot."

*Q: In the end how was the dispute resolved?*

NEIGHBORS: In the final agreement we expressed regret for the incident and offered words of consolation to Wang Wei's family. But we did not accept blame for the incident. It was an accident.

The foreign press was covering all this with great intensity. The New York Times carried a long article, debating the words in Chinese that had been used to express our regret. I was amused. Our translation used *daoqian* while the Chinese chose *baoqian*. The difference between the two was subtle, but meaningful. The Chinese version, which appeared in all their government translations and their media, implies culpability on the part of the U.S. The New York Times article was saying the U.S. gave in. We let the Chinese use this word in the official translation. A good story, but not true. The negotiations were conducted entirely in English. The only official text was in English. The Chinese could choose their own translation of the English word "regret." This was a sly way of allowing both sides to get what they wanted. In the end we did not accept blame, and the Chinese did not give us our plane – at least not until they had disassembled it and gone through it with a fine tooth comb. After several months, the DOD had to rent a Russian Antonov – the biggest cargo plane in the world – to fly the EP-3 pieces back for us. This was not an ideal conclusion, but in the end both sides gave ground, negotiating a solution that defused a dangerous situation. It could have been much worse.



*Q: Now, did the embassy feel like it was under any particular pressure from Washington or the American press or the Congress?*

NEIGHBORS: I'll say. We felt pressure from all sides (*laughs*). The Chinese government was holding our aircrew hostage. The local media were hostile, the international press highly critical. There was a lot of pusillanimous posturing from Congress: "How dare, I say, how dare the Chinese imprison our people and pillage our plane." So, yes, the pressure was intense.

After six or seven days of working from dawn 'til midnight, I sneaked off one day to the golf course (*laughs*) with Gene Cretz, who later became our first ambassador to Libya. About the fifth hole I got an urgent call. "The ambassador's decided to hold a press conference at 11:00 this morning. Get back here right away." I raced back and made the event just in time. Afterwards Prueher said to me, "Lloyd, I know you don't want to say '**mother, may I**' every time you do something (*laughs*), but you should have told me you were taking off."

*Q: Now, you're talking long hours. What were you as PAO doing those long hours?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we dealt with hundreds of calls from journalists. The press, TV, and radio staked out the embassy all day and into the night. After they disappeared for the day, we went back to the embassy or to P&C to look at the news coming in and try to figure out what was going on down in Hainan Island. We prepared daily media reaction reports for the ambassador and for Washington. We were constantly in touch with State PA, the embassy political section, and Hainan, working on press guidance for the ambassador and for General Sealock. We also sent our PAO from Guangzhou, Salome Hernandez, to Hainan to help wrangle the press.

*Q: And I assume there's American journalists flying in - more and more each day.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, yes. This was one of the first times that an American journalist used a satellite phone to transmit a story from China.

*Q: How did that happen?*

NEIGHBORS: Under normal circumstances the foreign press depended on a satellite facility at a TV station or at a hotel to transmit their stories. But in this case one of the American journalists – from CNN, I believe – had a new piece of equipment, a satellite phone. When news came that the hostages were being released, all the TV cameramen wanted to document the moment when the plane took off carrying the American crew back. But the Chinese would not permit any cameras at the airfield. But, our journalist with the new phone wasn't deterred. She went over to a hill nearby the airport and captured for posterity the moment when the aircraft took off. The Chinese were furious. And that was OK (*laughs*).

*Q: So now the E-P3 incident is over. Could you explain to me what a PAO does when you're not dealing with a crisis?*

NEIGHBORS: A PAO is first of all the ambassador's press advisor. Depending on the ambassador, that duty can be easy or unbearable. With Prueher it was a pleasure. Prueher was the guy central casting chose to play the role of ambassador -- handsome, silver haired, of military bearing, the Tennessee version of a southern gentleman. He wore authority easily, was even-tempered, and calm in a crisis. Some leaders inspire fear, others loyalty. Prueher was the latter. No one wanted to disappoint him by falling below standard.

Prueher had come to us from the U.S. Navy. He was a retired four-star admiral with vast experience as a leader. He graduated from the Naval Academy, flew navy aircraft for 25 years, including a tour of combat duty in Vietnam. He was also a test pilot -- qualified to fly 54 different types of aircraft. His specialty as a test pilot was putting a plane into a spin and figuring out how to recover. We once asked him if he had ever ejected from a crippled plane.

"No," he replied, "but there were a few times when I really wanted to."

After hanging up his pilot's helmet, Prueher served as Commandant of the Naval Academy, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Command (CINCMED), and finally Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC).

Prueher came into the office of Commandant of the Naval Academy just in time to clean up a widespread cheating scandal. As CINCMED (Commander in Chief, Mediterranean) he had to deal with the Marine fighter that clipped a ski-lift cable in the Alps, killing a score of civilians. And as CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific) under Bill Clinton he faced a confrontation with China, sending aircraft carriers off the coast of Taiwan to protest Chinese missile launches in the vicinity. In all these roles Prueher had to deal frequently with an obstreperous press on difficult issues.

As the ambassador to China, Prueher did face restrictions from Washington on his dealings with the media. Richard Boucher, a former China hand, was the assistant secretary for public affairs (PA) at the time. He insisted that PA be made aware of all ambassadorial interviews, at least of all interviews likely to end up in the international news.

Under these restrictions, Prueher still did a number of on-the-record interviews. He also gave background briefings to the foreign press. These interviews were for the most part on deep background; that is, reporters could use the information to orient their stories, but they weren't supposed to attribute it to anyone. But they could come back to us if they had a particularly good quote and say, "Can we use this? Can we attribute it to an American diplomat or to a foreign diplomat?" Sometimes the ambassador said okay and sometimes no. But in this sense he was available to the press. Prueher also had an

assistant that he brought with him from the Navy. This fellow was savvy about public affairs. He used to talk to the press on deep background, just to give them a heads-up about important issues. He had Prueher's trust to be able to do this carefully. I don't remember any case where he got in trouble for it.

I was impressed by the way Prueher prepared for an interview. If he were doing an interview with Washington Post for instance, Press spokesman Frank Neville and I would prepare talking points for him. Then about 30 minutes before the interview, Frank and I would come to his office and talk him through the points. He would test out a few of the ideas, asking for our suggestions. Frank Neville was a wonderful officer, an intense individual who had mastered all the details of policy and was an excellent strategic thinker. As part of the briefing Frank would go through the points and say, "Sir, here are the three points that you need to make, one, two, three. And here are the two things that you must not say."

And then the ambassador would turn to me, and I would say, "And here is a memorable anecdote you can use to make your point." I always felt like I saw the world much like Ronald Reagan did, through stories and anecdotes. Frank saw the world through points one, two, three, four, and five. We were a good team.

Prueher would do this for about 15, 20 minutes with us. And then he'd say, "OK, leave me alone for 10 minutes." We'd go out, and he'd review his talking points. And then he'd be ready for the reporter to come in, and he'd do a very good job.

Another important lesson I learned from Prueher: the military knows how to plan. They do it for everything. If you're dealing with the lives of 200,000 troops, you pretty well better make plans, or chaos will ensue. Prueher made it clear that he would like P&C to do some strategic thinking about how he could help forward embassy public diplomacy goals over the coming six months.

So Frank and I sat down with the press section and the cultural affairs section to come up with the ambassador's public diplomacy game plan for the next six months. The plan said in summary, "We recommend that you (Ambassador Prueher) do an interview with the foreign journalists at this time and a background briefing for all of the foreign press focusing on these issues. In September you should also do a speech at a university and then you should meet with the editorial board of these various Chinese newspapers, let them know what the U.S. is up to." Prueher liked our plan and encouraged us to keep it up.

We did keep it up, even adding a few creative fillips to the plan. Over the course of three or four months, Frank and I drafted talking points for all embassy officers to use when engaging contacts on important bilateral issues, issues such as World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, most-favored-nation status for China, cross-Straits issues, nuclear disarmament, freedom of the press, and so forth. The format was simple. In the first paragraph we defined the problem, explaining how the U.S. and China differed on this issue. The second paragraph would say: this is the U.S. policy, simply stated. And

following that we gave talking points. This is what you can say on this matter if you're talking to a Chinese contact. Our talking points included maybe six to 10 bullets. Short sentences. Frank and I tried to write them in a way that they would be "sayable" and not good only on a piece of paper. That meant shorter sentences, less complicated language. Then we had all this translated into Chinese. We worked closely with our Chinese translators, insisting that they eschew formal written Chinese with its flowery phrases and classical allusions. We wanted clear phrases that a good language learner could easily master.

After clearing the documents throughout the embassy, P&C published them as pamphlets, one in English -- entitled Public Diplomacy Game Plan -- and the other in Chinese. We invited each section of the embassy to meet with us for a discussion of public diplomacy outreach. We passed out the Game Plan to everyone in attendance, and then Frank gave a short talk about how to use it. When you go to meet a contact, particularly if you're going to speak to them in Chinese, take a look at the talking points. This, for instance, is how you can talk to your contacts about cross-Straits issues in good Chinese.

I would follow up Frank with a few words on public speaking, giving tips on how to write an effective speech or do an interview. I worked closely with the heads of section to make sure they would promote the use of this material. The Economic Section chief, Lauren Moriarty, was particularly enthusiastic. She made all of her officers include a work requirement about public speaking. And to support this requirement, P&C arranged for her officers to go to universities or think tanks or newspapers for speaking engagements. Other embassy sections also participated in our public outreach programs, though not in such a systematic way. All this stemmed from ambassador Prueher's insistence that we plan well and execute better.

*Q: And of course a basic function of the embassy in the first place is to get America's story out there.*

NEIGHBORS: Right. I've always thought USIA's old motto, "Telling America's Story to the World," was the perfect mission statement.

*Q: Now, at this time though, you're changing ambassadors. Prueher departs Beijing on May 1, 2001. Mike Marine is Chargé. And Ambassador Clark Randt comes in about a month later. Anything interesting about the transition between the two ambassadors?*

NEIGHBORS: Clark T. "Sandy" Randt arrived in June 2001. From the beginning, he and I did not get along. He was difficult, a man of choleric temper, quick to anger and loathe to forgive. I would describe him as insecure and inarticulate. I think he recognized that his experience in China and in government did not match up to that of his illustrious predecessors -- Art Hummel, Stapleton Roy, Winston Lord. He also shared a suspicion that some political appointees have about the Foreign Service: that we are there to trap him and subvert his wishes. Randt was paranoid about the Foreign Service in general, even more so about officers who had long experience in China, believing they were

trying to show him up. I know he suspected me of that, though I'm the last person in the world to want to show up my boss (*laughs*).

I can give several evaluations of Randt, my own and that of other underlings. But the most interesting might be Randt's self evaluation – an evaluation I've heard him give many times to visiting groups. When people asked him how he got to be ambassador, he would say jokingly, "It's better to be lucky than good." He meant that in an I-am-a-humble-man sort of way. But I think it was a spot-on evaluation. He was the college classmate and, I believe, fraternity mate of George W. Bush at Yale. He worked as a corporate lawyer in Hong Kong for many years, and raised a lot of money from the expatriate community for Bush's presidential campaign. After the election finally concluded, most everyone in the State Department thought that Bush would nominate John Huntsman as ambassador. He had served as ambassador in Singapore. He spoke fluent Chinese from his missionary days in Taiwan. Everyone assumed he would be the nominee, and they sent to the White House a recommendation to that effect. And Bush says, "Oh, no, not Huntsman. Sandy Randt's going to be my ambassador to China." And that's how Randt became, I would say, more "lucky than good."

Randt was stunningly inarticulate. One evening the country team attended a dinner for the ambassador hosted by Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing. Li was a great bloviator, wanting to impress everyone at the table with his diplomatic acumen and his mastery of Chinese history and literature and the arts. That evening Li clearly had the assignment to speak frankly to the ambassador, cataloguing a series of grievances against the United States.

There was no choice. Randt had to defend the U.S. against these accusations. He began by saying he had five important points to make. By point number two he was hopelessly lost. Afterwards a guest who had never heard the ambassador hold forth, asked me,

"Is he always that incoherent?"

Randt was better in delivering a written public speech, although even with a text he had difficulty at first. To his credit, he recognized his shortcoming, and worked hard at improving as a public speaker. Press spokesman Frank Neville and I worked with him closely, on one occasion videotaping a practice speech. Afterwards, we reviewed the tape and critiqued the ambassador's performance. Frank and I didn't want to criticize him too much, so we brought in Mrs. Randt who was able to be frank in a way we could not.

When Ambassador Randt first arrived, he told the country team that he had a very thick skin and welcomed constructive criticism. If we thought him wrong on some issue, we should tell him about it. I took him at his word, and he never forgave me.

I told this story to my mother and she said, "Lloyd, you're 55-years-old. Haven't you learned that when people say they accept criticism gladly, they don't mean it (*laughs*)?" She understood the ambassador better than I did.

Not long after Randt arrived, I was giving a briefing to a large group of university students. This was something I regularly did. The students would come in. We would give them a briefing about China in general and about public diplomacy in particular. So I was briefing this group, and one student asked, “What happens when a new ambassador comes in? Do things change dramatically?”

My first thought was I wanted to describe American Foreign Service Officers as professionals. We serve at the ambassador’s pleasure. We do our best to carry out his policies and adapt to his work style. But in the case of China, I pointed out that our policy had been remarkably consistent throughout many changes of parties and presidents. Most presidential candidates would make statements during the campaign about Taiwan and how they were going to change our China policy. But once they stepped into the Oval Office, these new presidents faced reality and kept our policies pretty much the same as they had been.

So when Ambassador Randt arrived, he clearly had a different style, a different way of dealing with day-to-day issues. But overall our task and our direction remained consistent, and that’s the point I was trying to make to these students.

The next day I was summoned to DCM Mike Marine’s office for a scolding. Marine said,

“Lloyd, yesterday at this student briefing not all the participants were university students. The ambassador’s son, who was back on vacation from boarding school, was there, and asked you a question about Ambassador Randt. He said that you dissed the ambassador. You said something bad about him. And so the ambassador demanded that I call you in and find out what happened.”

So I explained to the DCM what had happened. I said,

“I’m a professional and I would not say anything bad about Ambassador Randt in public. That’s not something I would ever do.”

And Marine said, “Lloyd, I know you didn’t say anything bad, but you might have said something nice about him,” (*laughs*).

I wasn’t thinking about that at the time. I was just trying to explain how we are professionals, and no matter what changes come, we do our job well. At any rate, I was taken to task for that (*laughs*). Never thought the ambassador’s weasel son would be spying on me – and giving false report to boot.

The Ambassador and I had a number of other run-ins. Usually the less important the occasion, the more Randt ranted. One year for the Fourth of July celebration I wrote a speech for him, a short, sweet piece that emphasized the good work of the U.S. embassy and the importance of Fourth of July celebrations to our democratic nation.



Since I was going to introduce the ambassador, I wrote a short intro for myself. I was slated to speak right after the marine guards presented the colors. So what I planned to say was this:

“Let me read to you the names of the members of the Marine guards working at the embassy.” And so I read their names. And there was an Iranian name and there were some Latino names and Eastern European names and Asian names -- all in the Marine guards. And I said, “This illustrates something essential about the United States. We are an immigrant nation. Immigrants built America and continue to give us strength.”

I sent a copy of my remarks, my little introduction, to the front office as well along with the draft for the ambassador’s speech. The ambassador was *furious*. He thought I was trying to upstage him by saying something interesting. He wanted the Marine guard bit in HIS speech. And that was fine with me. I just couldn’t figure out why he was so angry. Showing him up was the last thing on my mind. A normal ambassador would have said, “Lloyd, this is so good, I want to use it. Do you mind?”

And I would have said, “Great, that makes your speech better.”

But not our ambassador. For him, I could do no right. Even my best efforts backfired.

For instance: I wanted to make a good first impression on Randt. And I felt our strategic planning under Prueher, our public diplomacy game plan, had been quite effective. If Prueher liked it, Randt would, too – at least that was our thinking. So my deputy Rich Stites, Frank Neville, and CAO Liz Kauffman and I got together and came up with a three-month plan for the ambassador Randt, saying in essence: As the new ambassador, you will have golden opportunities to meet the leaders of universities, think tanks, cultural organizations, and the media. We recommend that in September you visit this university and give a speech on education. You might do an interview with such-and-such paper, give a background briefing for the foreign press. The document provided a long detailed list of opportunities for the ambassador. We didn’t say, “We’ve already scheduled these.” We said, “This is what you might think about doing, and we believe it would be important for you to do these.” I was delighted with the work that Rich, Frank, and Liz had prepared. The DCM liked the memo as well. We sent it forward to the ambassador and never heard back – at least not for a long time. Months later I learned that the ambassador was enraged at P&C for sending him the memo. Once again we were trying to trick him into doing interviews and speeches that he didn’t want to do. We were trying to sabotage him.

No matter what I tried to do, it didn’t work with him. He was a venomous and vengeful man.

Years later back in Washington, I was talking to someone on the China Desk. We were remarking on the fact that American officers in Beijing were no longer permitted to talk to the press. Now we didn’t do many interviews even when Prueher was ambassador, but we weren’t forbidden from doing so. Why the prohibition under Randt? According to a

China Desk friend, the new DCM David Sidney, who succeeded Mike Marine, said that Randt had instituted this policy because the previous Public Affairs Section, meaning my Public Affairs Section, had leaked like a sieve. Now, if we had leaked like a sieve, I wonder why Mike Marine or the ambassador never *ever* on any occasion mentioned this to me. If we had been doing this, you would have thought that the Front Office might have told us about their suspicions or scolded us. But, they didn't, because it wasn't true. I did not leak stories to the press – with one exception.

I did leak a story about Ambassador Randt. This is how it happened. Ambassador Randt had a dog named Whiskey, a Wheaten terrier, a beautiful dog. When the ambassador first arrived at post and started giving parties, Whiskey was allowed to come in to the receptions and run around. That wasn't such a great idea, because in those days most Chinese were not used to pets, and many of them were afraid of dogs. So Whiskey would race around the room. One time I saw him cast a greedy eye on a piece of cake sitting defenseless on a low table. Whiskey galloped over and just sucked it right up in one gulp -- this whole piece of cake (*laughs*). It was funny but probably not appropriate for an ambassador's reception.

A slurping dog is not too bad. A biting dog is. Whiskey bit people without fear or favor. The Press and Cultural Section was located on the same compound with the ambassador's residence, so that's where the dog ran rampant. One day my wife was going into P&C, and heard one of the janitors, a woman, complaining. The woman pulled down her pants and showed my wife her upper thigh. There were big scars there from where the dog had bit her. As compensation the ambassador gave her 75 yuan (\$12) and a box of tea. Darryl Jencks, our American Center Director, had his suit ripped up by the dog. At least four or five others had the same experience.

In the United States, the victims would have sued Randt. Whiskey would have been put down. This was a vicious dog, and basically the ambassador did nothing about it. And I think this reflected his attitude towards his underlings.

One day my wife was talking to a journalist friend from Taiwan, and told her the story of Whiskey – with my knowledge and approval. I didn't expect her to write about the ambassador and the dog, but she did, and I didn't mind. The story ran in Taiwan under the headline, "At American Embassy, Dogs Have Rights, but Not Humans."

Apparently I'm not the only one who did not enjoy the Ambassador's company. Once I was talking to the State Department Lead Advance for a visit to Beijing by Secretary Rice. She told me,

"One of my jobs is to make sure the Secretary does not sit next to the Ambassador during official dinners."

*Q: As I understand, your Press and Cultural presence in China is pretty significant. You've got a lot of people working for you. There's a PAO at each of the consulates. As*

*the senior officer for the section, how did you keep in touch with all your PAO's and all the other public diplomatists?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah. Well, it was a huge post – even bigger now. We had press and cultural officers at our consulates in Shenyang, Chengdu, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. I made frequent trips to these posts and would often participate in programs with the PAO's. I remember, for instance, visiting Sheila Paskman when she was the branch PAO in Shenyang. Sheila was an outstanding officer. Later came to Beijing as assistant information officer and then graduated to Press spokesperson after I left post. The summer of 2013 she was posted to Liberia as the new DCM, just in time for the outbreak of Ebola.

At any rate, I visited Sheila in Shenyang right after our contentious presidential election of November 2000. Sheila and I saw this Constitutional challenge as an opportunity to talk about U.S. history and its democratic institutions. She managed to finagle an invitation to a local university (Shenyang University, I believe), to speak -- partially in English and partially in Chinese -- talking about the election, what it might mean for U.S.-China relations. The real challenge was to explain how in the world the Electoral College operates and why the 2000 election wasn't a disaster for the U.S. political system. We pointed out that despite the problems, in the end candidate Al Gore did not challenge the final decision with the Supreme Court. Power passed peacefully from one party to another – as it had done throughout American history. In the end the vicissitudes of Gore versus Bush had proved to be a validation of our system. So said we -- Sheila and I. And at the time we believed it.

I would almost always do programs like that when I went to our branch posts. I spoke frequently by telephone with our PAOs. We also convened branch PAO meetings once or twice a year. We would bring our far-flung PAOs to Beijing for a two-day conference in which we'd talk about our plans for the coming year, decide how we would allocate public diplomacy funds. During one Branch PAO Meeting, Frank Neville and I made a presentation on how to use our Public Diplomacy Game Plan, how these talking points in Chinese could help them with public outreach on key issues.

As I mentioned earlier, I worked in Shanghai under the old USIA regime. So I knew how an old fashioned public diplomacy operated from a provincial point of view. I also served as Deputy PAO for our huge USIS operations in Brazil. That gave me the view from the center.

But now I was China PAO, and the ancien régime of USIA had crumbled. We had been absorbed into the State Departments, and the life of a PAO changed – mostly for the worse. As an example, in 2000 all large USIS offices around the world had a Deputy PAO. After the demise of USIA, that position was eliminated at most posts. The theory: Political and Economic sections at embassies don't have deputies. Why should Public Diplomacy? Well, Political and Economic section chiefs don't supervise 20 American officers and 90 FSNs. They aren't responsible for managing large sums of grant money.

Good argument, I thought, but not good enough. We lost. My Beijing Deputy, Rich Stites was the last of his breed.

Under the old system the country PAO held the purse strings and was directly responsible for USIS operations in all the branch posts. A Branch PAO worked closely with his consul general (CG), but was not directly under his authority.

Under the new State system, the consuls general asserted a good deal more control over local operations, having a major say in what “their PAOs” should and could do. This new policy led to conflict between me and one consul general in particular, Hank Levine, of Shanghai. Hank was a brilliant officer with great language skills -- dynamic, forceful, intense and intensely irritating when he didn’t get his way. And unlike many other consuls general, Hank loved public affairs. And that was good. The bad part was that only Hank knew how public affairs should work in Shanghai. Didn’t matter what the rules were. Didn’t matter what public diplomacy in Washington or Beijing thought, Hank was right. And if you didn’t like Hank’s way, you were stupid -- a mindless bureaucratic gnome.

Hank and I got into some heated arguments about the use of International Visitors (IV) grants. He wanted to choose the grantees according to his own criteria and use the grants as rewards to his contacts. On one occasion he wanted to send a group of officials from an economic planning office in Shanghai on IV grants because he needed to work closely with them on an upcoming project. He wanted to ingratiate himself with the head of the delegation, so he promised them the grants without clearing it with anyone in Beijing – and he certainly did not clear with me or with the head of our IV program, Jennifer Galt.

The problem with Hank’s premature offer was this: Nearly all of the officials in the economic office had been to the United States on numerous occasions and were sure to go again. Some of them had even studied in the United States for several years. Hank’s nominees didn’t meet the basic rule for participation in an IV program: send young grantees with a future who have never visited the U.S. before.

Well, Hank didn’t like that rule. Besides, he had already promised the grants, and he wasn’t going to take “no” from a small-minded, pantywaist like me. I was equally determined not to give in completely. So I offered him a compromise. Look, I said, this group would be going to the U.S. anyway. I can offer them a Voluntary Visitor Program in Washington with a paid-for visit to perhaps one other city. We could not pay for their international transportation, but could organize a meaningful program for them and provide per diem for a few days.

Not good enough for the Shanghai CG. In the end (*laughs*), we had this big showdown with Ambassador Prueher adjudicating. Prueher sort of did a Solomon thing, splitting the baby. OK, you’re going to give Hank two of the grants the way he wants it, and the other three belong to you. I still didn’t think that that was the right way to do it, but we proceeded that way. Washington was angry but in the end grudgingly accepted our proposal.

Over a couple of years Hank and I had a number of other disagreements. Usually they amounted to who was in charge. Under the new system the consul general was the overall supervisor of his consulate PAO. On the other hand, I still controlled the program money. Hank would say, “Look, don’t ask what I’m going to do. You just send me the money and I’ll take care of it.”

And I would reply, “It doesn’t work that way. I want it to be used in ways that meet our standards – standards that have proven successful over many years.”

And Hank’s view was, “You’re just a rotten bureaucrat who never thinks creatively.”

One of Hank’s creative ideas was to transform all of his consulate officers into public diplomatists. This was creative, but the way he implemented the idea was not. For example, he appointed his political section chief as director of public outreach to universities in the region. And then he forbade the Shanghai PAO from having university contacts. Well, how can you have a PAO who is not allowed to organize programs at the universities? That’s what we do. That’s what we have been trained to do. This was unacceptable and Hank and I fought about that as well. Somehow political and economic officers seemed to think that public diplomacy work required no experience or special talent. Anyone could do it. But, heaven forbid if a PAO wanted to head up a political section. Fortunately, this attitude has begun to change as PD officers prove themselves as consuls general, DCMs, and even ambassadors.

*Q: Now you’ve spoken of working with ambassador Prueher and ambassador Randt. What about the DCM? Mike Marine was DCM for most of your Beijing tour, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Working with Mike Marine was an intense experience. Mike was the oldest of 10 brothers and sisters -- the epitome of the biggest-brother syndrome. He was always in charge, serious about everything. Mike did not have, shall we say, a gift for small talk. When you told jokes, he looked at you like, “Oh, here you go again. You’re telling another joke.” (*laughs*), I told a lot of them, so I know the reaction. He would smile -- sort of. And then back to the business at hand.

Mike joined the Marines after college. For a guy with his name, boot camp was a rough experience.

“Son,” the drill instructor said, “What’s your name?”

“Marine, Sir.”

“What, no one’s a marine till I say so. From now on you’re Shottenheimer.”

Well, Mike eventually did become a marine and regained the use of his last name. And the Marine Corps sense of duty and discipline stuck.

Mike was an excellent manager. I enjoyed working for him. He was spare with compliments, far from warm and fuzzy. He was not a great public speaker. When he had a written speech he was wooden with his delivery. I suspect he got much better at it when he was ambassador in Vietnam where he had a lot more practice. But in briefings, he was outstanding. He knew all the facts about every issue and was able to marshal them in a compelling fashion.

Mike paid attention to every tiny detail of the embassy; nothing too small for his attention. Section chiefs, such as myself, met with him a couple of times a week as a group. But once a month we each endured a one-on-one with the formidable Mr. Marine. I would edge into his office, and he would turn his chair around and reach back for his files. Mike did not do computers. He did paper. His OMS (Office Management Specialist, i.e., secretary) printed out every item that came in, and he filed them. So he would pull out the public affairs file, which was this enormous folder -- 100 pieces of paper in it. And he would go through each one of those papers during my one-hour review. He would put each paper in front of me and say,

“You said that you would be requesting a speaker to talk about economics and the World Trade Organization. What have you done on this?”

And I’d say, “Well, we’ve recruited this speaker. He’s coming on such and such a date.” So Mike would write that down on the piece of paper, put it back in the file.

The next paper might say, “On this day you promised that you would be doing this program. What has happened with this?”

I could say, “We decided this was not a good idea. We can’t do it. We don’t have enough money or we don’t have enough time.” That answer was OK with him if I had a persuasive reason why I couldn’t fulfill my promise. He would mark up that paper and put it in the “done” pile. After finishing my one-hour meeting, I would go back to the office and type out a to-do list for my public affairs colleagues – usually 50 or 60 items. I’d say, “Can you tell me what has happened with this request? What is this IV grantee doing?”

Mike would do this with every section in the embassy. No skipping. No forgetting a plan or a promise. The only problem I would have with his method was that he made no distinction between a piss-ant kind of issue and a vital task. I had given him a piece of paper of paper with a promise on it, and he had to check it off. Maybe this a little too anal retentive, but Mike was a good person to work with. Besides he protected me from Ambassador Randt. I needed that.

*Q: Now, under this new organization -- USIA's been reorganized -- how's your support in connection with Washington? Who do you talk to there?*

NEIGHBORS: At least in the beginning, things didn’t change much in the way we dealt with Washington. We talked to the same people. They just had new titles, with less



prestige. The powerful USIA area directors (assistant secretary equivalents) became public diplomacy office directors. Quite a comedown for them, but not much of a difference for those of us dealing with them from afar.

At the embassy level, however, the changes were palpable, particularly on the admin side. Before the amalgamation, P&C Beijing had its own admin officer, managed its own budget, purchased its own equipment, ran its own motor pool. Now State was in charge and they wanted us to know that – good and hard. Motor pool was a major point of contention. In the past we had our own cars and drivers dedicated to public affairs work.

Under the new regime, these cars became part of the overall embassy motor pool. The embassy wanted to make clear that we were no longer in control of these vehicles, and that they were in charge, and that we would no longer be coddled by having dedicated drivers for our events. If we needed a car, we would have to call up and reserve one.

Well, right after this new “teaching” regime went into effect, we had a visit by our undersecretary for public affairs and public diplomacy, the new R, as she was called. I don’t know why they picked R as the acronym for our undersecretary, but R she was, and R, Evelyn Lieberman, was coming to China to attend an EAP PAO conference and to examine our post. This was a big deal for us. Our new budget requests hung in the balance, so we tried hard to impress.

We had a heavy schedule set up for Lieberman. The first event was going to be at the Ministry of Culture. I had never been there myself and didn’t know Beijing well, having just arrived myself. So we picked up Lieberman at her hotel, and headed off for the Ministry of Culture – we thought. Now under the new State Department regime, we had been assigned a driver unknown to us. He didn’t know our routines, and like me, he wasn’t quite sure how to find the Ministry of Culture. After 20 minutes driving around we pulled up in front of an impressive office building. I looked up at the sign above the enormous front door. We were at the Ministry of Agriculture (*laughs*). Close, but not the place we wanted. We piled back into the car. I wasn’t sure what Lieberman was thinking, but it couldn’t be good.

After an extended conversation with the driver, he finally figured out where we needed to go. We headed back toward the Ministry of Culture. It wasn’t far away, but we had to drive around in circles because there were so many one-way roads. After 20 more minutes we pulled up in front of the real Ministry of Culture. I looked around. We were next door to Lieberman’s hotel (*laughs*). We could have walked there in three minutes.

Evelyn Lieberman was cool about all this. Didn’t hold it against us. But the incident did point out that P&C had teething problems. It took time to accept being part of State rather than working parallel to it. In the case of the motor pool, the Admin section admitted it was more effective to have a permanent driver assigned to us, and that’s what they did -- just too late to avoid embarrassing us in front of our big boss (*laughs*).

*Q: Speaking of big bosses, you now have a new president, new ambassador, new secretary of State, and new under secretary for public diplomacy. What did this mean for your programming? Did you focus on new themes?*

NEIGHBORS: We took our lead from President Bush. In two visits to China, he focused on the promotion of democracy, the development of civil society, the protection of free speech and human rights, and the advocacy of a free press. Those became our themes as well – though the Chinese regime did its best to make programming on these themes as difficult as possible.

Our first big opportunity to discuss these themes publicly was right after the disputed election of 2000. I've talked about that already. Our next chance was during the visit of Secretary of State Powell in July 2001. As soon as we learned about the Secretary's visit, Frank Neville and I began to negotiate with CCTV about a possible interview. CCTV wouldn't agree to do it live. We could accept tape, but sought assurance the interview would not be cut – except for cosmetic edits. We went back and forth on this for several weeks, but in the end reached an agreement. A prominent CCTV news anchor would interview the Secretary. The interview would last 27 minutes, and nothing would be cut.

In the event, Powell arrives, does the interview – a smashing job, hitting all the right points – even taking the Chinese to task for human rights violations. And CCTV, we believe, is going to air the show the next day – on its English channel only, so the viewing audience is limited, but still this is a breakthrough of major proportions.

I was so pleased by the interview that I started bragging to Washington Post correspondent Phillip Pan,

“You have to hear this interview, Phillip. The Secretary was great. He even talked about human rights, and CCTV has promised to carry the whole 27 minutes – uncut. CCTV will carry it tomorrow morning.”

You can imagine what happened next. The piece did air – all 24 minutes of it. Oops! Three minutes were missing, the three minutes that dealt with human rights, naturally.

Of course, this then became the big story for the Washington Post. Chinese censors edit the Secretary of State. By the time the news broke, the Secretary was already on his way to Sydney, high above the Pacific. I had to make the call to Press Spokesman Richard Boucher, telling him the bad news.

“Richard, “ I said. “They cut human rights out of the interview.”

“I'm shocked,” he replied. Meaning, what else is new?

This censorship, this blatant violation of our agreement was disappointing. But the Secretary did speak directly to the Chinese people on CCTV for 24 minutes, and that was

unprecedented. Besides, no one in Washington blamed us. The Chinese were just being bloody minded, per usual.

Frank and I tried to protest to CCTV. I even got the private number of a senior executive and tried to confront him about the censorship. Didn't do any good. What did help was an intervention by Ambassador Randt.

The ambassador had just arrived and was making courtesy calls. One of his first appointments was with the chief executive of the People's Daily publishing conglomerate. During his meeting with the chief executive, Randt mentioned Secretary Powell's truncated interview, asked if People's Daily (PD) might be interested in publishing an unedited transcript of the interview. The chief said, of course, he would put it up on the PD website.

And the PD chief was as good as his word. The full text did appear several days later. Of course, it popped up in such an obscure corner of the site, that few readers could have ever found it. But, PD did tell us where it was. We forwarded this information to editors of other newspapers and websites. Once they saw that the text had the PD imprimatur, they posted it as well – and the text got widely read – a victory for the good guys.

*Q: One of the things that certainly impinged on the embassy was 9/11, September 11 -- The attack on the Twin Towers in New York. How did you find out about it? How did the embassy react? The Chinese? How did the media respond?*

NEIGHBORS: A shattering event, 9/11. I was across the street from my apartment in a gym riding an exercise bike. The gym had these TV monitors up on all the walls. I was watching without sound and thought the first crash was the trailer for an adventure movie, an action film or something. Or maybe it was just an accident. That did happen back in the 1930s with the Empire State Building. And then I saw the second plane fly into the World Trade Towers and knew this was bad. The local press and foreign correspondents in Beijing were mad to cover every aspect of the event. But we didn't have much for them. All we could do was refer the media back to the State Department, because PA (Public Affairs) was making all the authoritative cleared comments.

The major impact for my office had to do with the International Visitors program. Frank Neville and I, along with Assistant Cultural Affairs (ACAO) Officer Jennifer Galt --who is now consul general in Guangzhou -- had worked diligently to make contacts with young members of the press and media in Beijing and throughout the country. Frank was a remarkably disciplined person. Every day at 3:00 p.m. he would go out and have coffee at the nearby Starbucks with a different journalist. Although the Chinese weren't printing much of what we had to offer, Frank used these meetings to explain our policies and tell them what we were thinking on issues of importance to the United States. In this way he got to know a number of young journalists quite well. Jennifer Galt, as ACAO, managed our flourishing International Visitor program.

So the three of us put together a major International Visitor project to send 15 young, promising journalists from all over China to the U.S. I think it was going to be a three-week program in which the grantees would go to maybe six different cities. They would visit The Washington Post and prominent television stations, and they'd go to New York and probably visit The New York Times, and then to a Midwestern city and see how more local papers work and finally out to the left coast. We had developed a sophisticated group project. Some of our young journalists did not know English well, but no matter. An escort/interpreter would be with them all the way.

The programming agency for this grant was the Institute for International Education, IIE, which is a wonderful NGO operating out of New York, with a smaller office in Washington D.C. IIE does a lot of programs for the State Department: International Visitor grants, the Fulbright Program, Humphrey grants. (My son worked for IIE for five years administering the Fulbright Program, so I have some insider knowledge of how they operate.)

At any rate, IIE was the developer of our IV program for Chinese journalists. They had prepared a complicated scenario for the visit. We had looked it over, saying, "Can we change a little bit here, do something a little different?" After a lot of back and forth we had come up with a solid plan, and our grantees, the budding journalists, were a topnotch group. And they headed off for the United States the second week of September 2001.

On September 11, our unwary group of 15 Chinese journalists went to IIE for an orientation briefing on their IV program. The briefing concluded, and 12 of the grantees left the room, heading for their next meeting. Three of them stayed behind, however, talking and glancing at the TV monitor hanging on the wall of the briefing room. Just then the monitors showed a plane crashing into the World Trade Towers. Someone working at IIE passed by the room at this moment and was stunned by what he saw. He reported that when the planes were shown crashing into the World Trade Towers, the three Chinese journalists cheered or expressed delight or did something -- yelled, looked enthusiastic -- definitely something beyond the pale.

Well, this was a big deal -- if it really happened. The person who saw the incident, told the vice president of IIE, Tom Farrell, about it, and Farrell put together a report, a one-pager alleging that our IV journalists had been cheering America's tragedy.

Farrell's report got back to the State Department. At that time Paul Blackburn was the director of the Office of Public Diplomacy for EAP. When he heard about the incident, he was just heading off to a weekly meeting with Secretary Powell. And when you go to these meetings you want to have something important to say. And this incident seemed to be pretty important. Paul brought it up, saying that this appeared to have really happened. Our Chinese IVs had stepped way out of line. Well, as soon as he brought it up, there was no way to step it back, no way we could investigate to find out what had really happened. Everyone at the meeting was outraged.

Immediately State leadership demanded that the IV trip be canceled – much discussion among Paul Blackburn, the director of the IV program, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Chinese Affairs, Don Keyser. Eventually the director of IV programs called me, telling me that the trip was going to be canceled. I asked if perhaps there had been a misunderstanding about what had happened. Had anyone queried the grantees? I also pointed out that 12 of 15 grantees weren't in the room when the incident took place. They certainly weren't guilty of anything. Why punish them by canceling the whole trip because of something that might or might not have happened?

Those were the wrong questions to ask at that time. Once the issue surfaced at the Secretary's meeting, there was no way that State wasn't going to cancel the trip. The attitude was: Look, we have these Chinese grantees cheering the death of 3,000 Americans. How can we possibly allow them to travel around at U.S. government expense? Under the circumstances I had no choice but to accept this decision.

Frank, Jennifer, and I were disheartened by this turn of events. Our grantees were handpicked journalists we knew were going to make an impact in China. They were in key positions and they were going to progress through the system rapidly. We wanted to impress them favorably and to help them learn about America, so when they wrote about us in the future they could have a more accurate background for it. So we were going to cancel the trip though at least 12 members were not even present when the supposed offense occurred.

At this point I knew we couldn't stop Washington from pulling the plug. So I took a different tack. I asked, "Could you have a senior person, like Don Keyser, go and tell the grantees that under the circumstances -- because of 9/11 and the emotion of the event -- we were going to have to cancel the trip." I thought if a high-ranking official could go and explain the situation, it might make our decision easier to swallow. I was made to feel like a traitor for even suggesting such a thing. In the event, I think the journalists understood and accepted that their program had to be cancelled.

The group came back to Beijing. Jennifer Galt and Frank Neville knew these journalists well, having nominated many of them for the grant, and having briefed all them before their trip. They had a follow-up meeting with the grantees – a group meeting as well as speaking to them individually. We wanted to know what had happened at IIE on 9/11. From the Chinese side, they denied that any of them had cheered this terrible event or that they had done anything wrong. But they claimed to have understood the emotional side of the U.S. decision. They saw it as an understandable over-reaction.

After all this talk, I still don't know what happened. Chinese often react to embarrassing situations by laughing. Americans find that offensive, not understanding that it's just a nervous reaction. Perhaps our three journalists saw this disturbing crash, and reacted with a nervous laugh.

Another scenario? Imagine if I were watching a Polish version of 9/11 on a TV and this happened in Warsaw, and I might say, “Holy cow! What happened there?” And it might look like to a non-English speaker that I was cheering. But I wasn’t.

I’m convinced that even if the Chinese journalists cheered, they were not thinking of the 3,000 people about to die. It was more like an action movie, not real. Before understanding the immensity of the event, the journalists may have had a flash of *schadenfreude*: concern for the victims, but a secret delight that the U.S. was getting payback for its worldwide military meddling. Under the circumstances, this was a repulsive reaction, but one shared by millions of people around the world.

To this day, I don’t know what happened with those three people in the room. I have a copy of the original report by Tom Farrell. I’ve reread it. Still puzzled.

*Q: But that raises an interesting point. Because with 9/11, with the total shutdown of the transportation network in the United States for four or five days, and then the emotion of it, a lot of international educational travel was canceled and was canceled for years.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that’s why the journalists understood it. It would have been difficult to carry out the program as it was envisioned.

*Q: Because I mean your Fulbright program would have collapsed for a year, so that certainly...*

NEIGHBORS: After 9/11?

*Q: After 9/11.*

NEIGHBORS: Actually it didn’t.

*Q: You got lucky, because Malaysia couldn’t get any of their people into the States for three years.*

NEIGHBORS: In China we had no problems. The Muslim connection probably made things difficult in Malaysia. But in China our programs continued as they had before.

After 9/11 Ambassador Randt emphasized in his public speeches that the Chinese government had been quite supportive. Chinese public opinion also rallied around America, agreeing this was a terrible thing to have happened. The Chinese government supported some of our anti-terrorist activities. After all, they had problems with Muslim extremists in western China themselves. Chinese are frequently jingoistic, chauvinistic. They don’t like America as a concept. But we at the embassy had a lot of support from the Chinese at this time, and we felt it.



At any rate, 9/11 was a very difficult time. And it involved a dramatic change of plans for President George W. Bush. He had been scheduled to visit both Beijing and Shanghai at the end of October, and we had already begun making plans.

*Q: That's right. He was scheduled to attend APEC, right?*

NEIGHBORS: APEC, yes, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. I've always thought that title sounds like it needs another noun (*laughs*). But even without a proper name, APEC is a big deal. The U.S. president almost attends the annual APEC leaders' summit. We -- the U.S. mission in China -- had already in August 2001 begun planning for a bilateral presidential visit to Beijing and attendance at the APEC meeting in Shanghai. But because of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush did not want to be out of the country too long. He decided that he would just come to Shanghai, postponing his Beijing visit for six months, till January 2002. Instead of getting rid of POTUS in one awful swoop, we had to do it twice, which was a boatload of work (*laughs*). But it was important that Bush did come to APEC, and I think he had a lot of sympathy from the Chinese people because of 9/11. His visit went quite well in Shanghai.

*Q: Well, go into that a little bit. Because of course he's coming to Shanghai, but obviously people are being sucked in from Beijing and Chengdu and whatnot to plan and support this visit.*

NEIGHBORS: I was control officer for the U.S. mission dealing with the press at the Shanghai APEC. Of course, I worked under the direction of the White House press advance, who came to Shanghai about two weeks before the event. But I was the guy responsible for putting the event together from the embassy/consulate side. I had the consulate public affairs team there working for me, and then we brought people down from Beijing and we brought others from Shenyang and Chengdu and Guangzhou and Hong Kong. For any presidential visit, at least when I was around, we always had to bring Francis Lai from Hong Kong. Francis was the best manager I ever met -- American or FSN -- and I've known a lot of outstanding management officers. He was a local employee, but he could have run any admin team anywhere in any embassy in the world. He was just brilliant and even-tempered and kind. Incredibly well organized. So we would always bring Francis in to help with the admin side, the vast admin side of making a presidential visit work. We also brought officers from other posts around Asia as well. For this type of high-level international conference, you have to throw people at the problems. And in those days before sequester and draconian budget cuts we had lots of people to throw into the breach.

An APEC summit is enormous -- about 25 heads of state and foreign ministers, along with hundreds of deputies and assistant deputies and sherpas and toadies and hangers on. The main APEC meetings took place at a big new convention center in the Pudong area, with a few events reserved for hotels on the periphery. Events at the convention center weren't too difficult logistically. Once you got the press into the center, it was relatively easy to move them around in small groups or "pools" to cover the separate activities -- such as bilateral meetings or press briefings.

The hard part about APEC? It's not just a heads-of-state meeting. The foreign ministers come as well. So we not only have to prepare for the White House press corps, we must deal with the Secretary of State's media groupies as well, who have their own quirks and demands. We have to set up a special filing center for them – anywhere from eight to 14 journalists -- as well as for the 135 members of the White House Traveling Press. This involves mind-boggling motor pool movements. We have to transport around the city 150 members of the press, as well as our own officers, press wranglers for each event.

Of course, not all 150 members of the press can cover each presidential event. Some of these are small-scale activities that can't accommodate all the journalists. To handle this problem we create smaller press pools: for example, for the president's bilateral meeting with the Japanese foreign minister, we select three cameramen and their soundmen, two still photographers, and four writers (or pencils, as journalist jargon calls them). The pool makes their reports available to all the other traveling White House press. We negotiate agonizingly with the Chinese side about the numbers that can be included in each press pool. We want less press at a particular event. The Chinese want more. We want the cameras to be 50 feet away, the Chinese want them closer. Or vice versa. It's never easy to get so many people to agree on so many details. Fights are frequent, but necessary. With so many moving parts for each event, the details must be worked out in advance. Otherwise, the whole thing will fall apart, you will get the blame, and will soon be on your way to Chad, where the job of press spokesman is not career enhancing.

In Shanghai, in addition to handling the APEC events, we also had to help arrange a bilateral press conference between George W. Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Jiang was leader of the Shanghai faction in Chinese politics and was delighted to host President Bush on his home turf. We had to organize a press conference for the two principals at an open-air site, just outside the walls of a beautiful Chinese guesthouse.

That was difficult enough. Putin proved more of a problem. As a Pacific Basin country, Russia has been an APEC member since 1998. Russian President Vladimir Putin was attending the summit, and we were tasked with doing the logistics for a press conference between Putin and George W. Bush. The first matter of business in preparing for a presidential press conference is to find a good site, one that is convenient for the press but that tells a visual story about where the event is taking place. The White House Advance is very particular about the choice of venues. We looked at a lot of different sites. Looked at, for instance, the Grand Ballroom in the Peace Hotel on the Bund, the fabled Shanghai waterfront. It's a beautiful old art deco building, very nice. It was a little shabbier in those days than it is now, but still an elegant place. So we thought about having it there. The ballroom on the top floor would have been a wonderful site, a place still echoing with the sound of 1930s jazz, the voice of Noel Coward – who wrote Private Lives while ensconced at the Peace —and the ghosts of merry dancers long gone. But there are only two tiny elevators that go up to the twelfth floor. And you have 300 journalists who are going to want to come to this event – plus a myriad of security people and all the hangers-on. From a security standpoint this would not work. We just couldn't get the people up and down the building. So we looked some more.

Finally, the White House decided that the best place to have the event was at the Portman Hotel, where the president would be staying. The Portman had a huge, beautiful atrium with plenty of room for crowds and convenient for the president to come down from his hotel suite for the press conference. Only one problem: the atrium looked like any hotel site in any place in the world. Nothing said China. And if you're going to have a press conference in Shanghai, you want it to look like China. You want something visually to say, "Boy, we are in China now, and the president is hard at work establishing our relationship with the Chinese and with the Russians at the same time." So how were we going to resolve this problem? We called the Shanghai Film Studio and asked them to build a movie set at the Portman that would without a doubt say China.

This was with just 24 hours notice. So the studio builds this set that looks like Chinese imperial palace. And they bring it into the Portman at 4:00 in the morning, driving this huge truck with all the set materials into a *highly* secure area, through a cordon of guards and fences around the president's hotel. Trying to get this shipment at 4:00 in the morning through security was just a filthy task. But we did it, and it looked like an imperial palace in the Land of Oz (*laughs*).

It was an imposing structure, vermillion walls with gold trim. It did look like we were in China, a China of the Boxer Rebellion days, perhaps. At any rate, the set does work and the two presidents give their press conference for 20 minutes, maybe 30 at most. And the set cost us \$13,000 to build. But that's chicken feed compared to what is spent on a presidential visit. Six months later President Bush visited Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. From what I heard, the cost of that visit to the three countries for about one week was 50 million dollars. For each site the U.S. Air Force brings in 20 supply flights. They fly in the limousine, the back-up limousine, the helicopter, dissembled, I believe, because the Chinese are not going to allow it to fly in Chinese airspace. I suppose if the president had an accident, we would fly the helicopter to pick him up without Chinese approval. The flights also bring in office supplies and computers. Over 100 security personnel also show up at each site. And the White House Communication Agency, WHCA, brings in all of its gear and installs another 600 telephone lines in the hotel. And they bring in many of the motorcade vehicles as well. Mind-boggling.

During these visits I spent a lot of time cooling my heels, sitting around with the press and the White House security team. I learned some interesting details about the motorcade. The president's Lincoln weighs as much as an 18-wheeler, semi-trailer truck. It can resist an attack by an RPG, an anti-tank (*laughs*) missile. It has its own oxygen system. The motorcade also has another vehicle that serves to defend against chemical or gas attacks. The agents who drive this SUV wear their anti-gas suits all the time the president is moving. And if you notice their complexion, they have this sort of gray pallor from breathing in carbon filter materials all the time. In case there's a chemical attack, they will be protected. And the president's car has its own oxygen system that can go into effect to protect him.

The motorcade has another vehicle, known as Linebacker, which is a big SUV, an *enormous* one. It's full of scary guys with guns. And it drives slightly out of line from the rest of the motorcade. If you see a motorcade going along, the cars will all be in a straight line. Only Linebacker is a little bit off to the side. If it sees any car threatening the motorcade, its job is to knock 'em off the road (*laughs*). One of the security agents told me that if you're riding along in the motorcade and you hear through the walkie-talkie the phrase "Sanitize," (*laughs*) you better duck -- because the agents will be sanitizing the area around the president's car -- with bullets.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: It's fun to learn all this arcana about how a presidential visit works. It's not always fun to deal with the electric tension that surrounds these visits. At some point during every presidential visit, I reach a state of complete despair. This event cannot possibly work. It's going to go crazy and I'm going to be a fool and I'll wind up pumping gas in Shreveport, Louisiana. But it doesn't work that way. The presidential apparatus rolls on, right over you, even if you make a mistake. And before too long it's over and everyone can breathe normally again.

*Q: A large number of journalists would be coming to something like the APEC Summit in Shanghai. Were your duties such that you interacted with the journalists?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. My most important duty during the APEC visit -- and in the visit to Beijing four months later -- was to ride in the motorcade press van. This is how it worked. Whenever the president had an event, a press pool would tag along in the motorcade. For each event the White House would choose some 10 to 14 of the traveling press chosen to ride in the motorcade with the president. Journalists morbidly refer to this as "The Death Watch," because when President Kennedy was assassinated, there weren't photographers/cameramen to record the event. After that, radio and TV and print media decided that any time a president goes anywhere, they need journalists along with the motorcade, just in case something unexpected happens. I got to ride in the motorcade and brief the journalists on the next event and on the situation in China in general.

I enjoyed the experience, though it was not without emotional highs and lows. We had a huge kerfuffle between White House security and the White House press advance and Chinese security over what the traveling press would do when the motorcade arrived at a site. In particular, the Chinese were concerned about press behavior at the site slated for the joint press conference with presidents Jiang Zemin and George W. Bush. The drill for the traveling press corps in these circumstances is this: they're way in the back of the motorcade, so as soon as the motorcade stops, they leap out and scramble to cover the greeting, the handshake, or whatever first event that has been planned. Well, the Chinese security and protocol people did not want this to happen. They didn't like the idea. They said, "You need to station journalists in advance at this site if you want a photograph."

And the White House was just as adamant, insisting, "This is the way we always do it. The motorcade press pool has to be able to cover the first event. It's not right to exclude

them. They must be there. We're going to get out of the van and quickly make our way to the front. We'll make it in time and we won't cause a problem." We argued back and forth. In the end, the press pool did leap out and race up to the front and it looked tacky.

Six months later when President Bush came to Beijing, we had the same argument about the press pool leaping out and finally the Chinese say, "No, this is not going to happen."

And the White House says, "The president wants this to happen. You have to refer it to a higher authority."

And the Chinese say, "President Jiang Zemin does not want this to happen. What other higher authority would you like us to go to?" In that event the motorcade pool press did jump out of the van, but they did not race to the front nor did they cover the handshake. Another pool, stationed in advance, got that shot, and it worked okay. The motorcade pool did, however, get to cover the rest of the event in a much more orderly fashion.

The problem often is that if one photographer misses a shot, and his rival gets it, he's in big trouble with his boss. If he regularly misses shots, he gets fired. "Why did UPI have that great picture of the president with the noodle vendor and *you didn't*?" That's why the cameramen are always pushing and shoving their way to the front, armed with badges and three cameras and various lenses and even portable step ladders so they can shoot over heads if need be.

*Q: In interacting with the journalists and the photographers and whatnot, any particularly sharp elbows?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, there's a fellow who always travels with the secretary, Mike Lee. I believe he works for AP. He's a Robert E. Lee kind of Lee, not a Chinese Lee. He has the sharpest elbows, the most irritating questions of any journalist I've ever met. He is *relentless* and never lets you get away with a careless answer. He's a good journalist. He's extremely arrogant. I didn't have much contact with him because he didn't deign to talk to people from the embassy. He was above that (*laughs*). I was below his pay grade by far, at least that's what he thought. But he was well-informed, smart, caustic. He would say, "So you're saying this today. But back on September 19<sup>th</sup> you said such-and-such. Isn't that contradictory?"

And the press secretary would reply, "Oh, but we were referring to different circumstances and blah, blah."

Lee would come back with, "Yes, but then before that, on the 13<sup>th</sup> you said this! That also contradicts it! Which is right?" And he would do this on every issue! He was just so irritating. He wrote good pieces, but, man, was he difficult.

I also had run-ins with the White House press advance team, who could be extremely demanding and difficult, unreasonably so at times. I particularly remember one press advance officer, a woman – skilled at her job, with years of experience. But she was

prickly as a hedgehog. And she was just going around all the time in every circumstance talking about the F...ing Chinese this and the F...-ing Chinese that, and just going on, and in places where the Chinese could easily hear her. I finally went up to her and said, "You know, some of us who are working with you on this visit have what you call F...ing Chinese for children and wives, and we don't appreciate you using that term. What's more the Chinese we're negotiating with probably hear what you're saying and it makes our job much more difficult when they know you're being so dismissive and nasty to them." Her boss apologized to me later on. She didn't apologize, but she did change her tune. After that we had a good, professional relationship. She came to Beijing as well and she screamed and yelled as usual, but she knew how to make things work and so we got along. But sometimes you have to tell the White House when they're doing something stupid.

*Q: Now, as the year 2002 passes, the U.S. has moved into Afghanistan. How did the Chinese media respond to that? Did that impact your interactions and your work?*

NEIGHBORS: It did have some impact. At that time some Chinese foreign policy analysts still used a Leninist view of how the world worked, though they had changed the terminology a bit. Instead of referring to the United States as an "imperialist power" they used the term "hegemonist power." In their view, we were seeking hegemony, control over China's sphere of influence in East Asia. So there were a lot of articles in the Chinese press about Afghanistan and about our role there and about how we were always minding other people's business.

At first I think there was sympathy for the U.S. in some circles since we were going into Afghanistan as a result of Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 attack. Some analysts conceded that the Taliban, who were sheltering Osama bin Laden and those who had committed the 9/11 attack, did deserve punishment.

As far as the press was concerned, many Chinese journalists realized they had missed the boat back in 1990 when they didn't do any coverage of the Gulf War. So they were more interested in starting to provide coverage when we went in Afghanistan. And when we invaded Iraq in 2003, the Chinese media covered the war much more fully than they had ever done before.

The media was changing dramatically in China at the time -- completely different from what it had been when I served in Shanghai during the 1980's. Back in those days the government exerted rigid control over all media. Newspapers and magazines for the most part regurgitated party pabulum. No one wanted to read them. The story goes that taxi drivers in Guangzhou with traffic violations in the mid-1980s were offered the choice of paying a fine or subscribing to the party newspaper. They all chose to pay the fine.

But, beginning in the late 1980s, government subsidies for newspapers and for other media were cut dramatically. TV, radio, and the press had to meet their budgets through advertising and subscriptions. And no one would advertise in a paper that no one wanted to read. So the editors had to work to make their products more compelling to the general



reader. This competition for readers and viewers and advertising revenue, coupled with a slight relaxation in censorship restrictions, sparked an efflorescence of newspapers and magazines and television news shows. There proved to be a thirst for good journalism, good writing.

Despite these positive developments, there remained many mysterious restrictions on what a reporter could safely cover. The embassy discovered, for example, that local newspapers in Guangzhou and Chengdu were engaged in commendable investigative journalism. Southern Weekend out of Guangzhou was a great place to start if you wanted to understand what was really happening in China. The editors there weren't afraid to report scandals, that is, if the scandals took place, say, in Liaoning Province or in Harbin way up north. They had leeway to do that because they weren't offending local officials who could strike terror into their hearts. They were allowed to criticize other provinces from a distance. Reporting on the top leadership in Beijing? Also taboo. The big guys don't have flaws.

But, despite these restrictions, it was fun to deal with the press at this time. We had a special in with the Huanqiu shibao, The Global Times, a Peoples Daily publication. Nowadays The Global Times has a reputation as a jingoistic newspaper, rabidly anti-U.S., and a mouthpiece for the government's more extreme positions.

In the early 2000s, Global Times was a different animal, an interesting paper to read. I read it eagerly every week, particularly its articles about the U.S. At one point, Frank Neville and I got to know some of the journalists there. We suggested they might like to meet our political counselor, Jim Moriarty, and his deputy, John Aloisi, who both spoke excellent Chinese and were experts in Chinese politics and U.S.-China relations. One day the four of us, Aloisi, Moriarty, Frank Neville and I, went to The Global Times. Jim made a short presentation on U.S.-Taiwan relations, particularly speaking to the issue of arms sales to Taiwan and the PRC installation of missiles along the Fujian Coast, the southern Chinese coast opposite to Taiwan.

Moriarty gave a short presentation, and then we had a discussion for about an hour or so about these issues, all in Chinese. The Global Times ran a two-page article on our discussion, fairly and accurately conveying Jim's message. I believe this may have been the first time that local media mentioned the presence of Chinese missiles facing Taiwan across the Straits. The editors also printed Moriarty's argument that these missiles might explain why Taiwan felt a need to arm itself and why the U.S. continued to sell defensive weapons to Taiwan.

That's how we were able to get significant coverage of a controversial topic in a key party-run paper. We could not do that today.

At that time we also had considerable success placing articles about the United States in Chinese newspapers and magazines. The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) back in Washington did much of this work from a distance. Thanks to the leadership of IIP deputy director John Dwyer and editor-in-chief Bob Holden, IIP responded to the

growing influence of the WEB by creating a dynamic Chinese-language website, Meiguo Cankao, or “American Reference.” For years Chinese VIPs had learned about the world through an internal circulation news bulletin called Cankao Xiaoxi, “Reference News.” This daily document carried key news from around the world, news unavailable to the hoi polloi. Well, IIP named its website after its Chinese predecessor. Meiguo Cankao translated a wide spectrum of articles about the U.S. into Chinese. We had a team of translators, many of whom had originally worked for VOA Chinese service.

Meiguo Cankao regularly sent their translated materials to us, and we would place it in a lot of different newspapers and magazines. Because all of these new magazines and newspapers were starting up, they craved new material. They were willing to print a lot of our stuff. Eventually, Meiguo Cankao established a relationship with several small-scale Chinese web-content providers in China who would take everything we could send them and launch it into the ether. Then it would be seen, and other bigger servers like sino.com and Ali Baba and Baidu would take some of this information and put it up on their own wildly popular sites. In that way our placement of articles grew dramatically over the years. It was simply a reflection of an evolving media. Of course nowadays -- I was in Beijing last year, the spring of 2012 -- the situation has changed even more dramatically, what with Twitter and blogs and other venues for public commentary.

*Q: And in that context you're talking about the sort of contemporary electronic journals that we deal with now. How was paper journalism organized during your assignment in the early 2000s? I mean were the newspapers that were privately owned enterprises? Or did the PLA own a newspaper and city government or provincial government own a media outlet? How did it work?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, this was one of the things that changed the most between my first assignment in China in the mid-1980s and my second tour from 2000-03. By 2003 most papers still had some connection with the government. But the government no longer subsidized them. And that made a huge difference. Newspapers had to make a profit in order to survive. They had to earn their own keep. During this time a lot of new newspapers sprang up, mostly with local government connections. The censorship bureaus would still look at what journalists were writing, but they had more leeway to discuss sensitive issues than ever before. Newspapers, even in the 1980s, often played the role of ombudsman. They would receive letters to the editor complaining about local social issues and take it as their duty to investigate the charges. At least with regard to smaller, non-political issues they did have an influence in righting wrongs and improving government services.

The questions asked by readers were usually of the why-is-my-sewage-system-not-working variety. Or what gives with electricity in the Huai'an district? The newspapers never published a letter asking, “Why is Jiang Zemin not really elected by the people?” (*laughs*) Papers rarely got involved in that kind of political protest. The Communist Party wouldn't allow it. But they were a lot looser in what they permitted. I think they saw the media as, in some ways, an outlet for complaints. And they saw the advantage of being able to allow this to a certain extent.

Newspapers had a good deal more leeway than TV, because TV was much more influential.

*Q: Don't we understand now that even some of the investigative journalism that might not get published still gets filtered up through the party system?*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. I think the leadership does look at the media as another way to see how the country is faring and to ferret out problems that may be festering beneath the social surface.

But the top leaders won't abide a public scolding. Demands for change in the structure of government and the role of the Communist Party are squelched with efficiency and brutality.

During my tenure in Beijing, PAS (Public Affairs Section) programming emphasized democratization. We emphasized the role of civil society in improving the lives of ordinary people and changing the way that government works. We also stressed the role of the press as a watchdog. We were following the lead of President George W. Bush, who emphasized these points throughout his administration, but in particular during a speech he gave at Beijing's renowned Qinghua University in January 2002.

PAS tried to emphasize these points in many of our programs. As you know every year each of our embassies around the world produces, at the behest of Congress, a human rights report, giving a human-rights grade to almost all countries where we have a mission. In Beijing, Mark Lambert, a talented political officer, did the first draft of this report, an agonizing process. Mark not only had to uncover what was going on in the crepuscular hinterland of China, he also had to negotiate every syllable of the report with the ardent advocates of Chinese reform back at DRL, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in Washington. These keepers of the flame had their own strong notions about how this report should be written.

I worked in DRL from 1999-2000 on the Community of Democracies Initiative. I knew the Assistant Secretary, Harold Koh, and had great respect for him and his work. I also understood well what DRL was trying to do in China, and supported their efforts. At the same time, DRL in Washington viewed the situation in China differently from how we saw it in Beijing. If you look at the State Department Human Rights Reports from the early 1980s up till the year 2000, they almost always said that the human rights situation in China had deteriorated over the past year. The report followed this declaration with a litany of human rights violations perpetrated by the Chinese government. These violations ran to hundreds of pages.

The problem was this: from the time I first arrived in Shanghai in 1983 till the early 2000s, the human rights situation in China had improved dramatically. It had not deteriorated – despite what our reports said, despite the still despicable nature of the Chinese government. In 2003 life for individuals in China was remarkably better, and they had much more freedom than at any time over the past 80 years.

When I first went to China in 1983, the Chinese government wanted to control where their citizens lived and where they studied, where they worked and whom they married and how many children they had. You'd go into factories and there'd be bulletin boards that indicated the menstrual cycles of all the female employees -- so that the leadership could control when they were having babies. And they could only have one. That sort of harsh intervention had mostly disappeared by the year 2000, at least in the big cities. Chinese could choose their own jobs, could choose -- with some limitations -- where they wanted to live. It was still difficult to move from one city to another, but a determined individual could do it. So in many ways life had improved dramatically for a majority of Chinese, despite all of the bad, certainly true, things written in our human rights report.

In the case of our embassy human rights report during the early 2000s, here's what would happen. Mark Lambert had all these knowledgeable contacts throughout China who were willing to talk to him about the human rights situation. Mark would try to confirm the stories he heard through other sources. If they seemed to be true and significant, he would include them in his annual report. He would also edit out a lot of the previous years' items that were no longer true. After a lot of editing in Beijing, with input from our consulates, and with the ambassador's imprimatur, he would send the report back to DC. DRL would see all of the gems that Mark had cut out from the previous year and go crazy. He tried to tell them, "Well, it's not there because it's not true anymore. The Chinese changed. They're not doing that now." So it would go back and forth. And in the end a lot of the shopworn DRL material stayed in the report.

Despite all the difficulties involved, the Human Rights Report was a valuable document, produced by talented officers who did their best to produce a clear picture of the situation in China. It was a big deal when it came out -- for us at the embassy, for the Chinese government, and for political activists struggling to change China for the better. In the past it had been difficult to get much publicity for it. But in 2002 you had a corps of new journalists interested in learning about international issues from the U.S. point of view. Most papers would write critically of the report. They had to, and that was all right. To put our best foot forward, PAS organized a press briefing with young journalists from a number of newspapers. Mark Lambert was the main speaker, but spokesman Frank Neville and I, along with several other embassy officers, also participated. Our goal was to explain why we wrote the report -- a Congressional mandate -- and what was our methodology.

By this time the Chinese had taken to issuing a white paper of their own, which criticized the U.S. for its human rights violations. We welcomed this report, while adding, "Almost all the items mentioned in the Chinese white paper were originally reported in U.S. newspaper and U.S. media. Our journalists are allowed to write about these issues. They are the ones revealing the problems. In China we can't use Chinese public reports because the press is shackled and human rights is often a tabooed topic. We feel that a country that wants to improve itself must be willing to accept and learn from criticism. And that's the way the U.S. press works. We suggest that China do the same." It was an

excellent session. We didn't have a big audience – maybe 15 journalists. But it was a new approach that opened a dialogue on a difficult issue.

Talking about freedom of speech and human rights reminds me once again of the importance of our exchange programs. Back in the 1988-89 the embassy gave an exchange grant to Xiao Qingzhang, a wily journalist who worked for the Shijie Jingji Daobao, the World Economic Herald. We sent him on a prestigious Edward R. Murrow Fellowship to Harvard for a year of study and travel. He went with his wife, Yang Meirong, also an experienced journalist who wrote frequently about cultural affairs and life in the United States.

Qing and Yang leapt at the opportunity to visit the U.S. They were flourishing at Harvard, but then the student protesters poured onto the streets of Tiananmen and the government cracked down. The World Economic Times bet on the wrong side. The editor-in-chief, Qin Benli, who was suffering from terminal cancer at the time, got in big trouble and was cashiered. These two journalist friends of mine, Yang and Qing, had been close associates of the editor-in-chief. A return to China at that time might well have meant prison for them. They certainly would have lost their jobs. So they decided to seek asylum in the United States. They're still here. I just visited them in San Diego this spring, 2013, where they're doing well.

Yang and Qing were unwilling to go back to China in the early 1990s, fearful of retribution on the part of the Chinese government. But by late in the decade they had safely returned for long visits, after they had become U.S. citizens and with the protection of an American passport.

I've gone on at length about the experience of Qing and Yang to emphasize once again the long-run importance of our exchange programs. These programs can pay off in surprising ways even when they appear to be a failure. After all, Qing and Yang, contrary to our original expectations, were unable to return to China to live and work. Despite that, they still were able to make a contribution to mutual understanding between the U.S. and China.

How did that happen? Let me explain. Xiao Qingzhang, the ex-Murrow scholar, was from Chongqing originally. Even though he had long ago left China, he still had contacts in the media, particularly in Sichuan province. One summer while I was on leave in the U.S., I called on him and his wife. We talked about Chinese politics, the media scene.

Out of the blue Qing said, "I can arrange for you to go to Chengdu. There's a big media conglomerate there, the Western China Metropolitan News Group. They can call in their journalists from all over the province if you would like to give a talk about journalism in America. I can arrange it."

Qing was as good as his word. I went to Chengdu and gave a talk on freedom of the press in the United States. I didn't call it that. That would have aroused too much attention. I just said I was going to talk about journalism in America. More than 200 journalists

showed up for the lecture. I spoke in Chinese – a 45-minute talk. Then the audience asked questions for another hour. I was exhausted, but exhilarated.

This venue allowed me to speak to an influential group on a topic essential to our embassy public diplomacy goals. I had the rare opportunity in China to explain the role of the press in America as a watchdog in helping society and government improve through constructive criticism. The basic notion is that if you are aware of your faults, you can correct them and make things better.

I also talked frankly about censorship in the United States. I said, “There really is not much governmental censorship. I talked about The Pentagon Papers, their publication by the New York Times. I explained how the U.S. government tried to stop this story from seeing light, and how the Supreme Court ruled that the government can’t do that. It can’t indulge in prior restraint, that is, banning a book before its publication.

After dealing with this attempt at government censorship, I then spoke about so-called commercial censorship, censorship in the sense that big corporations sometimes put pressure on media organizations to kill unfavorable stories. At that time, there was a movie out called “The Informer” with Russell Crowe playing a tobacco industry executive, a scientist who decides to reveal to the public evidence that smoking causes cancer. The movie is based on a real incident in which the scientist grants an interview to the CBS TV magazine, 60 Minutes. Christopher Plummer plays the interviewer, Mike Wallace.

Mike Wallace interviews this scientist who’s revealing that American tobacco companies had concealed information for many, many years about the bad effects of smoking. The interview would have been a fantastic scoop, but the tobacco industry puts fierce pressure on CBS, which in the end decides not to air the piece. So I’m talking about this to the Chengdu journalists and I say, “Remember, however, that in the U.S. you can’t keep these things a secret. Other media outlets find out about the squelched story and they get the scoop instead of CBS. So in the end this attempt at self-censorship becomes an enormous scandal. The news gets out, and the story is even bigger than it would have been originally.”

I concluded by saying, “In the U.S. there are attempts at commercial control of information, but this usually doesn’t work. That’s because there are so many free media outlets in the U.S., that someone’s going to find out the inside story and write about it.” This is becoming even more the case with blogs and Twitter and all the other sources of unfettered Internet commentary.

Around this same time I was also looking for ways to address the issue of human rights and civil society in a way that might be permitted by the ever-vigilant Chinese guardians of Chinese public opinion, those tasked with protecting the populace against American “spiritual pollution.”



To do this I decided to develop a tag-team lecture with John Berry, a colleague from the embassy press section. With Black American History Month approaching, we decided to talk about race in America and the role of Martin Luther King. Of course, we were talking about the American Civil Rights Movement, but we didn't bill it in those terms. That would have been anathema to the moral police at every university.

As I had done for many of my previous university lectures in China, I decided to use music to illustrate our points. I selected a number of songs that talked about the Civil Rights Movement and illustrated the problem of racism in America. John and I then made comments on the music, speaking about our own experiences as well. I talked about coming from Marshall, Texas, a segregated city when I was growing up. John Berry talked about his experience as a 16-year-old in 1963 attending the iconic march on the Lincoln Memorial and hearing in person Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. At that time John was in high school. He lived in Maryland. Came on his own to the greatest civil rights march in American history.

I started out the lecture by playing the song "Strange Fruit" as performed by Billie Holiday. "Strange Fruit" was a powerful civil rights song based on a poem by Abel Meeropol, a Bronx high school teacher, a member, incidentally, of the American Communist Party. In writing the song Meeropol was reacting to a dreadful photograph of two young black men being lynched by a mob in Marion, Indiana, in 1930. As the words to the song have it: "Strange fruit hangs from southern trees. Black men's bodies swaying in the breeze." Much against the advice of her agent and friends, Billie Holiday made this song a standard part of her repertoire. Her version was raw/gut-wrenching, a devastating condemnation of racism in America. It was difficult to start out a speech with this corrosive image of the United States. But John and I wanted to be frank about the problems that existed in the United States at that time.

We followed that up with a song by Big Bill Broonzy, a black blues singer. Broonzy had served in the military during World War I, had been a soldier. When he came back to America after the war, he wrote and performed the song, "When Will I Get To Be Called a Man?" In the 1920's, in the segregated South, black men were often referred to as *boys*. Broonzy said, "I can even go off to war and fight in World War I and risk getting killed. And I come back and they call me Soldier Boy." It's also a powerful song -- bitter but a good example of the black view of society and the way they were treated. They could risk death for their country, but their country gave them little but contempt and calumny in return.

After these bleak, but powerful songs, John and I moved to the best of the civil rights anthems. I noted that when you really want to inspire and convince an audience, move them to action, music can be more effective than words. During the Chinese Revolution, for example, revolutionary songs based on folk models stirred up the crowds. That's why song and dance troupes played a key role in the spread of Communist ideology and Chinese nationalism.

In much the same way, the civil rights movement used American folk music and Afro-American spirituals/religious songs as a call to action. They changed the words of old hymns to fit the new situation, moving their listeners from biblical times to the present with a few well-wrought analogies. Many of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were members of the Protestant Church -- Baptists, Methodists. Martin Luther King was a Baptist preacher. And many blacks saw themselves in the story of Moses leading the Israelite slaves out of bondage in Egypt.

From that point in the lecture John and I turned to the protest music of Bob Dylan, featuring his iconic protest song, "The Times They Are a Changing." We pointed out how the civil rights protest movement boiled up from below and wrought dramatic changes in American life. We told the story of Thurgood Marshall, a black lawyer, pleading the most famous civil rights case in American history, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, and how he later became a Supreme Court justice. We pointed out the increasing role of black Americans in the highest levels of government, noting the rise of Colin Powell and Condi Rice, and explaining how this would have been unthinkable when John and I were boys. (This was before Barack Obama came on the scene.).

We ended the lecture with a song by Bruce Springsteen called "Galveston Bay." "Galveston Bay" is a modern ballad, a song that tells a true story in the old tradition brought by the Scots and the English from the old world. Springsteen tells the tale of a man named Billy who fought in the Vietnam War, was wounded, and then came back to the U.S. He had grown up in Galveston and worked as a shrimp fisherman. The other character in the story is Le Bin Song, a Vietnamese fisherman who gets drafted into the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), fights against the North Vietnamese, but then is defeated, and flees Vietnam as a boat person, winding up as an immigrant in Galveston, Texas, where he, too, works as a shrimp fisherman. Problem is at this time the entrenched white fisherman and the Vietnamese boatmen are at odds with each other. The whites think that the Vietnamese, the foreigners are driving them out of business. So there's a great deal of rivalry.

Then one night members of the local Ku Klux Klan decide they're going to frighten the Vietnamese boat people and burn some of their boats. They come to Le Bin Song's boat and attack him. And he shoots one of them. Kills him. Now, in the United States and Texas of the 1930s or forties, a non-white killing a white might have been lynched and certainly would have been sent to prison. But as the ballad tells it, Li Bin Song was acquitted in a public trial, because the shooting was judged to have been in self-defense. This was an enormous change for the way American society and even conservative Texas works. In the ballad, Billy, the white fisherman, is standing on the courthouse steps when Li Bin Song comes out after the not-guilty verdict. Billy says, "You're a dead man, Li."

The scene switches to the Galveston docks at nighttime. Li Bin Song is smoking a cigarette on the deck of his ship. And Billy is hiding in the shadows with his K-Bar knife at hand. But at the last minute, Billy says, "Not worth it." And so he turns, puts his knife up, returns home, kisses his wife goodnight, and goes out and casts his net upon the waters. And so, that's a perfect illustration of the way things have changed in America.

*Q: This was a lecture to the Chinese.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, to Chinese students. John Barry and I gave this lecture several times at various universities. I gave it alone on some occasions. It got strong reactions from the students. I always tried to make the point that the United States is far from perfect as a country and as a democracy, but that we do have the oldest written constitution in the world. We're proud of that, but we're trying always to perfect that democracy, to make it better. We have flaws. Racism in America was an incredibly difficult problem, a blot on our society. We have worked diligently to make it better. We still have many flaws, but we know we can't get better unless we're willing to criticize ourselves.

After one lecture, I remember a student got up and gave a short speech. He noted that the United States was the greatest country, most powerful country in the world. But he was awaiting the day when China would reach the place where it could climb on the shoulders of other nations and crush them into the ground (*laughs*)! Didn't say it in quite those words, but that's what he was getting at.

In response I tried to say that if our two countries can develop a good relationship, we don't have to crush others into the ground. We can cooperate and make better lives for everyone.

At that same venue another student asked, "What can we as students do to make China a better place? What would you do?"

And I said, "It's not my position to decide what you need to do. I was just talking about the United States and how we have made things better by having an open society that allows criticism. But it's not my job at all to tell you what you need to do. You as students and Chinese citizens have to figure out what your role should be. More openness in government is important – at least that's what we think in the United States. I'm not trying to lecture you on what you should do. I'm just giving you an example of what the U.S. has learned through its experience."

On another occasion at Beijing University I got hit with an offbeat question from a puzzled student. He asked, "Recently our professor showed us the movie 'American Beauty.' Tell us, is American society really that weird?"

Now "American Beauty" is indeed a strange movie about American family life. The lead character, played by Kevin Spacey, lives next door to a hard-nosed ex-Marine who turns out to be a closet gay. Spacey is a middle-aged man dissatisfied with suburbia, with his wife and his life. He becomes infatuated with an 18-year-old girl who lives next door who's trying to seduce him. He ends up getting murdered. It's a strange tale, but an excellent movie. No wonder the Beijing University students were perplexed.

"So you think American society is weird," I replied. "Let me tell you a story – a story about China. When I was a graduate student at Indiana University, I wrote my thesis

about a Chinese short-story writer, Pu Songling, whom you all know.” Pu Songling was one of the most famous writers in Chinese history, wrote 600 short stories about the remarkable variety of human behavior, throwing in tales of ghosts and fox spirits and other strange beings for good measure. His magnum opus, Liaozhai Zhiyi has been translated into English (at least in the best known version) as Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio. All Chinese students have certainly seen movies based on Pu’s stories and have read a number of these tales as literary texts.

But I wanted to talk to them about one of Pu’s stranger tales, one that would never appear in a schoolbook anthology.

“I remember this one story,” I said, “about a young rogue named Chen, a brilliant scholar, but a wastrel as well, someone who liked to drink and womanize. He dallied with prostitutes, the famous courtesans of the city where he lived. Now his uncle was a scholar, too, but an upright man who insisted on disciplining his young nephew, making him toe the line and hit the books, to mix metaphors. As a result Chen passed the palace exams and gained a plum assignment in another province. Officials in those days were not allowed to serve as officials in their home province. In the course of his new assignment Chen met a young actor, a beautiful, talented young man. He fell in love with the actor and with his new bride as well (*laughs*).”

“Upon questioning the young man about his past, Chen discovered a horrible secret. The actor was his illegitimate son, the child of a maidservant who had lived in his uncle’s household. Chen was horrified by this discovery. Of course, he did not reveal the secret to the young man. He simply said to him, ‘You should not be an actor; it’s not a legitimate profession.’ With that he gave the young man a huge sum of money and dismissed him.

Chen moved to another city and had an affair with the region’s most beautiful courtesan, a young woman, only 20-years-old. Then he discovered to his horror that she was his illegitimate daughter. Mortified by this discovery, Chen murdered the girl, hoping to ensure that his own infamy will not come to light. He was arrested for murder and brought to trial, but because he was so wealthy, he was able to bribe the judge and get off scot-free. Despite his legal impunity, our fictional Scholar Chen was punished in a way that most traditional Chinese would consider essential. The author of the tale, Pu Songling, noted in a commentary added to the end of the story that although Chen had several illegitimate children, he had no legal offspring of his own to carry on his family name. So his family line was cut off. This was indeed a dire punishment in traditional China.”

So that’s how I answered the question about “American Beauty” and the “weirdness” of American society. I said, “I think it’s just that people all over the world can be peculiar and perverse (*laughs*). Not just Americans.”

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Some would argue that with the new socialist society in China, they have done away with these perversions. I suspect – indeed, I’m sure – this is not true.

*Q: Now, you’re coming up to the end of your tour in 2003, so in 2002 you would have started thinking about what you want to do next. What was on your mind? What was available?*

NEIGHBORS: I had spent most of my career out of Washington. I knew this would be the last assignment of my career. I was a minister-counselor at this time, and there was no way I was going to get promoted to career minister. Even if I did have an ambassador who wrote me rave reviews, that wasn’t in the cards.

With this in mind, I began looking for an assignment to an interesting place. When I was working on the Community of Democracies initially with Mort Halperin and Harold Koh, I visited Poland twice, thought Warsaw would be a good place to work. So I applied for the PAO-ship there. And after some back and forth and backstage maneuvering, I did get the job. HR offered me a so-called handshake. I accepted the offer, was paneled and assigned to it. At that point our Warsaw Ambassador Chris Hill – whom I did not know, but would work for later when he was Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs -- suddenly decided that he had his own candidate for the job. He insisted on canceling my assignment. In the following struggle HR backed me up fully. They said, “I’m sorry, but we have assigned Lloyd Neighbors. He has a handshake from us, and we can’t cancel his tour.”

At this point Ambassador Hill gave in. After all, he wasn’t even going to be in Warsaw by the time I was scheduled to arrive. Ironically, by the fall of 2003, just as I had begun to study Polish at FSI, I had medical problems that required surgery. My medical clearance was rescinded and assignment cancelled (*laughs*). So in hindsight HR might have been better off taking Chris Hill’s choice.

The last few months of my tour in Beijing did not go well. Several of my medical problems cropped up in the spring, so I wasn’t physically well. And then we had the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic to cope with, and that presented major problems for our public diplomacy outreach program. Most of the programs that we had been nurturing – our speaker programs and conferences and all the public events at the America Center -- had to be canceled. The embassy also restricted our travel outside Beijing. We couldn’t leave the city.

In the midst of all this I had to have minor surgery. Went to Singapore for it. And because I came from Beijing (the ostensible homeland of SARS), the hospital in Singapore treated me like a leper.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Before I could enter the hospital, I had my temperature checked three times. I had a lung x-ray. I was exhibiting no symptoms of SARS, but I had to have an

x-ray. My surgery was usually an outpatient procedure. But in this case the doctor operated late in the afternoon. As a precaution, he decided to keep me in hospital overnight. They put me in an isolated wing of the facility. Except for a nurse who would tiptoe in every three or four hours wearing gloves and a surgical mask, I saw not a soul. I suppose that was understandable. Singapore hospitals had had several cases of SARS and nurses had taken ill and died. So they were being reasonably cautious, but it was no fun for me.

*Q: This also coincided with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 20, 2003.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: How did that event have an impact on either the press scene or how the U.S. was observed or how the Chinese reacted to you?*

NEIGHBORS: The Chinese reaction differed from when we invaded Afghanistan in 2002. In that case most Chinese were sympathetic with our cause. After all, we had been attacked, and Afghanistan was harboring our attackers.

But for the Chinese, Iraq was another matter. They were much more concerned about this so-called “war of choice.” They accused the U.S. of being a hegemon, of capriciously and maliciously interfering in the affairs of other countries.

There was not much we could do about this Chinese reaction. We did not have ready access to a public pulpit, particularly since Ambassador Randt was loath to speak publicly on any topic, let alone a controversial one.

Around this time, however, I did have an invaluable opportunity to talk about U.S. policy vis-à-vis China and the history of our relationship. A representative from the embassy was invited to speak at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), which is a major Beijing think tank. CASS brings together an impressive coterie of Chinese scholars from all over the country to work on issues vital to China’s future.

In this case, in the winter of 2002, CASS was hosting a seminar to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué. They invited Ambassador Randt to speak, but he refused, and eventually the invitation made its way to me. So I went to the event speaking for the U.S. government. In my insouciant way, I had not realized just how much importance the Chinese were giving to the event. I was speaking for the United States, but the Chinese were represented at a much higher level. CASS had invited three distinguished former ambassadors to the United States, including Chai Zemin and Zhu Qizhen. So it was a high-ranking group. I was the minnow of the group. But I had prepared well and did manage to give my speech in Chinese, a speech made much more elegant by a fine Chinese text prepared by our press section translators.

I began the speech by relating my minor role in great events, showing how even these experiences on the periphery were indicative of the complex changes in the U.S.-China



relationship. I spoke of being in the Taipei motorcade with Warren Christopher when the U.S. broke relations with Taiwan. I spoke of being in Shanghai when Reagan came to call, and of my small role in later visits by Presidents Bush I & II.

After these opening anecdotes, I moved to more general comments. I used an old saying coined by the British novelist L.P. Hartley, who once wrote, “The past is a foreign country.” It’s easy for us to recognize the truth of this aphorism in the case of our own countries. I recognize that the United States of the 1950s, segregated Marshall, Texas, was a far different place than it is now. It is a different country. And Chinese know that the China of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution is a different universe from what China is today. But when we’re looking at a country not our own, it’s hard for us to recognize how that country has changed. Many in the U.S. still viewed China as the Orwellian land of the little blue ants who marched along under their communist dictators. Today, 10 years later, that view is changing. But it was still prevalent in the United States of 2003.

In those days the Chinese still viewed the U.S. through a Leninist prism. They no longer used Lenin’s disparaging term, “imperialism.” They had updated the jargon – now they called us a “hegemon” – but the effect was the same. They believed as a matter of faith that the U.S. hegemon sought to control the world. And part of our plan was to encircle China and prevent it from expanding.

To combat this accusation, I said, “In the 1960s, we were indeed trying to thwart the Soviet Union. Maybe 50 students from the Soviet Union were in the United States. Our trade with them was negligible. We had treaty allies aligned against them all around the world, weapons bristling in their face. We were indeed trying to encircle the Soviet Union and prevent its further expansion.” Then I said, “Look at China. You are one of our largest trading partners. We welcome tens of thousands of Chinese students each year to our country. We supported Chinese entrance into the WTO (World Trade Organization) and were pleased when Beijing was selected to host the 2008 Olympics. If this is an example of containment,” I said, “It’s too subtle for me to comprehend.”

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Why did I stress this point? Well, one of the most prominent members of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was a scholar named Wang Jisi. He was, and still is, an influential figure in the highest political circles. He has the ear of the chief advisors to the President of China. Recently he achieved fame as the articulator of the new Chinese policy to “March West,” that is, to pivot toward Central Asia and cultivate Chinese ties with the region.

Back in 2002, however, Wang was more interested in labeling the U.S. as the new hegemon. At every speech I heard him give, he emphasized his concept. He was a gracious man, and I liked him personally. But he could be caustic in his attacks on the United States. So, I was trying to get back at him and show how his view was simply not

accurate. Though the U.S. was wary of Chinese development – as it should be – we were not seeking to thwart China, but rather to find ways to cooperate for our mutual benefit.

The main theme of my talk was of course the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué. To explain what had happened back in 1972, I tried to give a new slant to an old adage. George Santayana once said that, “Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.” Well, that has become a cliché by now. Still true, but trite. To add an extra fillip, I said, “We realize that its corollary is also true: those who can’t forget history never get over it. In 1972 President Nixon and Mao Zedong and the Chinese leadership made a startling decision. They weren’t going to forget history. But they were going to ignore it long enough to get over the enmity that had divided their two countries. And that’s what Mao and Nixon did, and that’s the importance of the Shanghai Communiqué.”

My speech went over quite well. The U.S. embassy Beijing kept it on their website for five or six years afterwards. And the U.S. Center for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California University also had it posted for an extended period as well. Several years ago I was in Washington at a Chinese embassy reception and ran into a fellow who had been present at my CASS speech. Much to my surprise, he said to me, “You know, I still remember that speech you gave at CASS.”

The notion that someone still remembered a speech I gave years ago – that made me happy.

Even Mike Marine, our DCM liked it (*laughs*). I said to him once,

“You know, I think the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences liked my Shanghai Communiqué speech.”

“Well, they should have! It was a fine speech.”

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Mike Marine was, if nothing else, parsimonious with praise. That was one of the few compliments I ever got from him. So it made me feel good (*laughs*).

*Q: Lloyd, now you are winding up your stint as PAO Beijing. What’s your next assignment?*

NEIGHBORS: Originally, I wanted to stay abroad. As I explained before, I worked hard to get an assignment as PAO Warsaw. While working on the Community of Democracies Initiative back in 1999/2000, I took two TDY trips to Warsaw. I participated in the huge Community of Democracies in Warsaw, and found the city to be a fascinating place. My favorable experience in Eastern Europe before, in Croatia, made me interested in returning to the region. After some struggle, I got the Warsaw assignment.

Unfortunately, medical problems cropped up and I never made it to Poland. And that presented me with some difficulties. I had already started Polish language training back in Washington for a couple of months. And suddenly I had to have surgery, and my medical clearance got taken away. I had to find a new assignment on short notice. That's difficult. For help I turned to the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP), where I had worked from 1987-89. I still had contacts there. And they created for me what's called a "Y tour." That's a job category created for cases like mine, where you have an officer who needs a new assignment at the last minute. A bureau is allowed to create a one-year, stopgap assignment that an officer can fill until he finds a permanent position. It's a good system. Makes use of people who have skills, but need a short term appointment. That's how I wound up working for IIP.

*Q: Now, that's a Washington assignment. So, you left Beijing in May of 2003. Did you start this assignment later in the summer or when?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, I took a reasonably long home leave, and then I came to Washington in August 2003. I settled into my house and took a little more vacation. In September, my wife and I started Polish language training. Both of us were in Polish language training a couple of months. And we were enjoying it. Then things came a cropper, and I couldn't go to Warsaw. I had major surgery; it took me a couple months to recuperate. In January 2004 I began work with IIP on my Y tour. I was called the Bureau's senior advisor for evaluation.

*Q: Mm. What were you evaluating?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, OMB and the Office of the Inspector General had decided that IIP-along with most other State bureaus - was not effectively measuring its performance. We could cite our output. We knew how many books and magazines and films and speaker programs we were supporting. But, we didn't know how to measure the effect of our programs on our target audiences.

OMB wanted to change this state of affairs throughout government. What did this mean for IIP? Well, if we could not demonstrate the effectiveness of our programs, OMB would slash our budget.

This was an important initiative for the Bureau, and I was in on it from the start. My major task during nine-months on the Y tour was to help set up a rump unit called PEPI: Program, Evaluation, and Performance Improvement. What they wanted me to do was to set up an evaluation unit in IIP without staff or budget.

*Q: (laughs) No staffing or budget, but please evaluate effectiveness.*

NEIGHBORS: This turned out to be an interesting assignment. I had one other person working with me who was also on a Y tour. We sort of slunk around the Bureau scrounging for cash. That mission accomplished, we were able to hire a few contractors.

Since IIP had no money for program evaluations, we decided to turn to public diplomacy colleagues who did. And they had lots of money. I'm speaking of ECA, the Bureau of Exchanges and Cultural Affairs. ECA's budget was huge compared to IIP's, huge compared to most other bureaus in the Department. They got direct funding from Congress for their exchange programs: the Fulbright, International Visitors, Humphries, Citizen Exchanges and so forth.

ECA made good use of its money to create one of the most effective evaluation units within the State Department. OMB had evaluated ECA and given it the equivalent an A grade. They were seen as the model for other bureaus. So I went to them hat in hand and said, "IIP is trying to evaluate some of our programs. We know that you do polling and interviews with participants in your programs abroad at embassies and have funds for this. I wonder if you might cooperate with us and include some of our programs in your international surveys." ECA agreed. With this support we were able to set up PEPI and at least take the first steps on the arduous path to evaluation Nirvana.

*Q: Now, let me ask. The OMB requirement to do this kind of evaluation: Was that government-wide or just for the State Department?*

NEIGHBORS: It was government-wide, part of the PART, the Program Assessment and Rating Tool. The OMB was serious about this. And so were we. The problem came in finding the funds to do a meaningful evaluation.

In presidential campaigns, for instance, or other U.S. political campaigns, no person would run for political office without doing an intense analysis of the public they're trying to influence. Presidents depend on polling all the time in order to get reelected. The problem is OMB wants us to do similar kinds of polling to prove our programs are having an influence abroad. But we have only pocket change to do the surveys. Presidential campaigns have a virtually infinite amount of money to spend on polling and surveys and concept evaluation. We had *bupkis*.

That's why it was so difficult to organize surveys that would measure our effectiveness. In the past we had been content with measuring output. The International Information Bureau has over the past year produced this amount of essays or articles about American society and culture and politics. We have issued -- written and distributed -- 150 op-eds around the world. Quantity of output: that was easy. But could we really say, "Do any of the products that we produce have an influence on public opinion in the countries where we're using them?" There was the rub. Without money we couldn't do major public opinion surveys.

*Q: There was a time in the olden days, during the Cold War, when VOA or whatnot, would ask listeners to send in postcards or questions or that sort of thing as a measure of, you know: is there somebody out there?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. And we tried to do some of that. As part of its programming efforts, IIP produced what was called the Washington File, what eventually morphed into a

public-diplomacy website for the State Department, the public website that gave information about State Department programs and U.S. policy and culture and society. We did use this venue to encourage readers to respond to the articles we were producing. And we did try to analyze these responses. Of course, sophisticated analysis takes more money than we had. But, yeah, we did try to measure our operations in that way.

And as I said, ECA, the Exchanges Bureau, was much more effective in this, because they had a relatively sophisticated unit that did surveys abroad on how the International Visitor program worked or how cultural performances, dances, musicians, were received. They had the money to do these surveys, so they were more effective than we were. We were moving in the right direction, but at a snail's pace, and OMB wasn't happy about that.

*Q: Now, let me get this straight. Where actually are you assigned or sitting?*

NEIGHBORS: We were sitting in SA-44, State Annex Number 44, which is over near the Air and Space Museum. It's across the street from Voice of America.

That is where old USIA had its headquarters for many years. IIP now has new digs across the street from State in the renovated Pharmaceutical Building. But in 2003-05 we were still in Southwest DC.

*Q: And did you come up with any conclusions – your evaluation process?*

NEIGHBORS: During the eight months I was there we did some minor surveys that showed some of our programs were having an effect. But really, the project was just getting started. What I was trying to do was to set up a unit that could eventually do the measurement. I spent my time writing position descriptions and trying to hire contractors and bring them in. Startup was my task, not doing the actual evaluation. At least in the eight months I was there, we didn't have much success. But, in my next job, still with IIP, but after the Y Tour, I continued to work on evaluation, and we did make progress.

*Q: Well, why don't we move on then? After eight months on a Y Tour with the Bureau of International Information, what came up for you?*

NEIGHBORS: I found a position in the same bureau, IIP. They had an Office of Strategic Communications, a small unit (IIP/SC). Had maybe eight or 10 people in it. The position of office director came open unexpectedly, and I was asked to fill it. That would keep me gainfully, and perhaps usefully, employed until my retirement date on Oct 1, 2005. I jumped at the chance. I was pleased to take on this new job, because the Y tour, which only dealt with evaluations, had become a monomaniacal job – all eval all the time.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: I had been focused on just this one issue, which I found extremely difficult to do. I moved gladly into this new job, which had some of the old duties, but included many more issues to cover.

*Q: And was this also at the USIA building, or in State?*

NEIGHBORS: It was also at USIA, the old USIA building, yes. I just moved upstairs from where I was.

*Q: Now, if you were office director, who was head of the bureau, IIP? Or whom did you report to at any rate?*

NEIGHBORS: I reported to Frank Ward, who was the deputy coordinator of IIP. For most State bureaus, under normal circumstances -- he would have been the PDAS, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. But when USIA negotiated its melding with the State Department, internecine warfare broke out about how many assistant secretaries USIA would get under the new system. The number was limited, and only ECA and Public Affairs qualified. IIP was not considered worthy of an assistant secretary-ship, so our leader was called a coordinator instead.

Our coordinator at the time was a political appointee, Alex Feldman. He did have overseas experience working as a media guru in Singapore. Frank Ward, who'd worked many years in the Middle East, was the deputy coordinator. Frank had more "troops" under his command than many other bureaus considered worthy of an assistant secretary. At any rate, I reported to Frank Ward, our highly worthy, faux-PDAS.

*Q: And what were your duties and portfolio?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, this was a step up from working in PEPI, our Program Review and Performance Improvement unit. The Office of Strategic Communication was responsible for writing the Bureau Performance Plan or what was then termed the "Performance and Accountability Report." What did this entail? Every year all missions around the world and the bureaus at State Department draft a plan for the coming five years. This document describes the on-going political situation, the goals of the bureau, its plan for implementing these goals, and requests for additional funding and personnel. The Bureau Performance Plan was an essential tool.

My office's job was to write this plan, cramming all our bureaucratic desires into an unfriendly and unwieldy format. Fortunately, we had Joel Fishman. (Joel just retired last year after 45 years with USIA and State Department.) He was the main drafter. He and I worked closely together on this project. The plan included goals that we were trying to achieve during the year and, more important, how we would evaluate our performance in reaching these goals. So that was similar to what I'd been working on before with PEPI.

In my new incarnation I was also responsible for a unit that the IIP called the Office of Evaluation. This represented a further step in the evolution of PEPI. Under the constant



prodding of OMB (the Office of Management and Budget) evaluation had become a *sine qua non* for the Bureau. We had been ordered to prepare to undergo an OMB PART evaluation. PART stands for Partially Anesthetized Root-canal Therapy. No, actually it is an acronym for Performance Assessment Rating Tool. But it was painful. The controlling OMB theme was this: if you couldn't prove that your programs were successful, then OMB was going to cut your budget. And so I was responsible – at least in part – for demonstrating that IIP was not just pouring good government money down a rat hole.

*Q: Now, could we go back to these evaluation tools from OMB?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: I'm just thinking. What were you measuring? Were you're supposed to make this country a democracy in three years, or something like that? You know, how many countries are you supposed to invade?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, this was a difficult, probably insoluble, problem. Our sister bureau, ECA, could say, "OK, we sent this International Visitor group to the United States on such-and-such a program, and when they came back to their countries two of the participants were promoted to this position, five people wrote essays in local newspapers or did interviews on TV. As a result, millions of people in the target country learned more about the United States."

ECA could also do surveys of their program participants. This was harder for IIP to do. We did do simple surveys, asking readers of our Washington website to evaluate particular articles and comment on the quality of the site. That was part of our effort. We could sometimes try to measure reaction to op-eds that we had drafted and placed in international newspapers. But measuring influence was almost impossible. Particularly when we didn't have the money to go out and do wide-scale public polling. And it's foolish to expect that because we write one op-ed piece we're going to be able to prove that the whole country changed its mind and decided to become democratic. This was our problem. How do you measure influence?

*Q: Yeah, because this is the problem with evaluating these kinds of services. If you were the Water Department you could say OK, we've provided so much sanitary water over a period of time and we had no leaks or water main breaks. A salesman could say well, I sold 100 cars a month, but in fact he gets a sale because he can manipulate the price. But if you're talking about influencing people, for example, our impact on Mali, that's another matter. Even when American politicians poll, they are not exerting influence, changing minds, they are determining what thoughts are set in concrete in those minds, and then fit their pitch to what's already there, Nixon's silent majority.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, it's next to impossible, and then the OMB says if you can't prove your effectiveness, we're going to cut your budget.

*Q: Right. Now, did you interact with the OMB evaluators themselves or get any sense of what they were looking for?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we had these interminable, soporific meetings with OMB to talk about the problem. I always fell into the “slough of despond” on those days, because the agenda was so technical and involved so much detail and they wanted so much. I knew we couldn’t meet their requirements with the tools we had. So, yes, it was a painful process. Despite the difficulties, however, OMB was good at talking us through the procedure and suggesting: OK, if you do this kind of survey, we’re not going to like it because that won’t meet our criteria. But we suggest you try such-and-such. At this point we began to hire some people who did have experience in doing evaluation. I did not, so it was difficult for me. But we hired some people who knew how to make this work. And in the end we made progress.

*Q: Hired as contractors, not career Foreign Service people?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah. And eventually we managed to turn these contract positions into permanent jobs, GS positions. That happened after I left/retired. But I did help nudge the process forward.

In addition to our role in evaluations and planning, my office also got involved in helping IIP set up an internal website, called InfoCentral. It was an internal, restricted-access but unclassified website that provided PD officers around the world and in Washington with a public diplomacy toolkit, a “how-to” site that was of particular use to those dealing with the press. The site carried daily Department press guidance, summaries of the USG position on key foreign policy issues, guides for preparing briefing materials, contact lists, and other useful materials. My role was to help coordinate the development and the activities of this site. An employee I originally hired for the evaluation office, shifted over to working on our intranet website, and has been there ever since, making the site into an invaluable public diplomacy tool.

Preparing for PART and supervising work on the website was essential -- but not much fun. The fun part of my job came through my role as host and partial planner for weekly meetings of what we called the International Strategic Communication Fusion Team. This meeting brought together public diplomacy representatives from State Department, the Defense Department, the CIA, FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service), the FBI, Homeland Security, NSA, the Voice of America, USAID and others. All these disparate agencies within the U.S. government dealt with international public diplomacy issues. We had weekly meetings of the Fusion Team. Every session 40 to 50 people would come to discuss how the different elements of the U.S. government should handle prickly public diplomacy problems.

Through the Fusion Team I got to know all sorts of people who worked in what the military called strategic communications, and we civilians dub public diplomacy. My office got deeply involved in coordinating State Department activities with the military. You may have heard of MIST teams, that is, Military Information Support Teams.

Basically the DoD wanted to send small groups of personnel into our diplomatic missions abroad where they would coordinate with State public affairs teams to increase the effectiveness of our outreach programs.

The MIST teams offered a promise of increased resources for our tight embassy budgets. But as Emerson wrote: “For every benefit given, a tax is levied.” And the MIST tax could be heavy at times. These MISTers were can-do, gung-ho guys, who often lacked experience in public affairs. They would arrive at an embassy and leap fearlessly into action, producing pamphlets and devising other kinds of public programs. Unfortunately, in their enthusiasm and naiveté, they sometimes jumped into cultural quicksand. So one of my jobs, a key function of the Office of Strategic Communication, was to draft a MIST agreement acceptable to both the State Department and the DoD. According to this agreement, any MIST team that comes into a country is directly under the authority of the ambassador. The team cannot do anything unless they get the ambassador’s permission. Equally important, they must work hand-in-hand with the PAO.

This was an important agreement. The DOD has so much money and personnel. I used to think that pocket change for a DOD admin sergeant would far surpass my budget as PAO Beijing, one of State’s largest public affairs operations. So if we could recruit a MIST team for our mission, and the team would be under our control and we could tell them what to do, that would be a valuable addition to our limited resources. But to make this program work, we needed the agreement. We needed DOD to acknowledge the authority of the ambassador over the MISTs, and the PAO’s leading role in supervising their efforts.

One of the places where the MIST concept worked well was in the Philippines, where Kristie “I-am-the-Law” Kenney served as ambassador. For sure she wasn’t going to allow MIST to do anything stupid. You needed an ambassador like that, and you needed a good PAO, too, to carry out the MIST agreement and make the teams function productively.

As part of my work with the Fusion Team, I also got to attend a number of eye-opening conferences in Florida at the Special Operations Command. I went to a psychological operations (psyops) course at the JSOCU, the Joint Special Operations Command University, in Pensacola. This was an opportunity to meet a large number of impressive military officers dealing with strategic communications issues. I was asked to give a briefing at the conference on IIP programs. And so I got to enlighten our military colleagues about public diplomacy. I also attended a major conference on strategic communications at the Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida.

*Q: That must have been interesting.*

NEIGHBORS: At that conference I got to hear a heated dispute between the two DOD strategic-communication factions. It was compelling theater. On one side, you had the psychological operations group, the people who did public diplomacy, often in a similar fashion to the way my office did it when I was PAO in Beijing. And on the other side, you had the Defense Department Public Affairs Office, which is the office in the

Pentagon that has the daily task of answering journalists' questions about Defense Department policies and operations. The dispute between these two factions was this: Public Affairs did not want to have anything to do with the so-called PSYOPS, psychological operations or strategic communications abroad. They wanted to maintain their purity. They said, "We never lie. We never obfuscate. We always tell the truth. And you guys are engaged in black PSYOPS. You're trying to trick people."

Now, this was at a time when DOD contractors from the Lincoln Group -- among others -- were caught paying journalists in the Middle East to write favorable articles about the U.S. This became quite a scandal. Public Affairs at DOD wanted to isolate themselves from this kind of activity. The PSYOPS people understood that they shouldn't be paying for favorable articles. That was a no-no. But they did want to figure out how to present the DOD's position abroad in a favorable way, and yet still maintain the integrity of the program. So you got into these big shouting matches between the two groups, PSYOPS trying to defend what they were doing in the public realm, and Public Affairs saying,

"We're pure and you're dirty. We don't want anything to do with you."

I was fascinated to hear these arguments first hand and try to understand the bureaucratic maneuvering that lay behind them. I also got to attend some internal meetings at the Defense Department as well, in which they discussed these same issues.

*Q: Of course one of the reasons this issue comes forward is that USIA has been integrated into State. Its budget has changed. But you've got two wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq. DOD's got a major budget and they want to control some of their own public-affairs imaging.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, yes. I was just astonished at times when I would go to a Fusion Team meeting and the JSCOC (Joint Special Operations Command) guy in charge of strategic communication would say,

"Oh, we're setting up this new office for strategic communications and we have 75 billets to fill." That means they were going to have in one small arm of the Defense Department 75 new officers dedicated to public diplomacy issues. And you know, on our side, IIP would be lucky if we could get two new positions (*laughs*) over a five-year period, let alone 75 new billets. It was sobering and a bit frightening to see how much public diplomacy and State Department work abroad has been subsumed by the Department of Defense, simply because they have more money rather than they know what to do with it. They are talented officers, but often lacking in public diplomacy experience and local cultural and linguistic knowledge. They may be doing other jobs and then suddenly they're assigned to a Public Affairs Section, and have to perform without the necessary training or experience to do so effectively. Not surprising they screw up on occasion.

*Q: Now, part of this outfit, or part of this organization, and the combination of State and DoD at this time, was an increase in a number of political advisors to the major*

*commands. Were you aware of that? Did any of your USIA friends become POLADS (political advisors) to the military commands?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, they did. When I came into the Office of Strategic Communication, I took the place of Bill Parker. At that point Bill became political advisor to the Commander of SAC, the Strategic Air Command, in Omaha. He was an old USIA hand.

At some of the commands, for instance the Pacific Command in Honolulu, USIA always had an advisor on public affairs. This was in addition to a POLAD, political advisor, supplied by State. So I knew something about their work, although I was only obliquely involved with them.

As office director for Strategic Communications, I had another vital role for the Bureau. I was in charge of the writing, editing, and clearing of op-eds for distribution to our posts abroad. An embassy would come in and say,

“Our ambassador wants to publish an op-ed on, say, the role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy or the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks.” Sometimes an embassy would ask our office to write the op-ed, or sometimes they would say, “This is the op-ed that we’ve drafted, can you edit it and clear it for us?” We would do the required and then send out the edited and cleared op-ed to post, and post could try to place it in newspapers and magazines and websites.

*Q: Did that mean that your approval was required?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. It was.

*Q: So the post, in fact, could not generate anything and had to get Washington’s permission?*

NEIGHBORS: At least for major op-eds, yes, they were supposed to come to us. At this time, we had a conflict over this issue with the Bureau of Public Affairs, who thought they should be doing these op-eds. The conflict was rooted in the Smith-Mundt Act. This venerable piece of legislation – officially the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act -- had come out of the late 1940s and the Cold War. Smith-Mundt put restrictions on the role of the State Department and USIA in the dissemination of information about the United States. Under the law, the Bureau of Public Affairs at State provided information and answers to journalists working in the United States. USIA, on the other hand, was forbidden from using its products within the United States. We focused on foreign audiences, working through the USIS offices in our embassies abroad.

The theory behind the law was this: USIA should not be allowed to use government funds to propagandize the American people. This legally mandated division of duties made sense back in the old days, before the merger of State and USIA and the widespread use of the Internet.

As Director of the Office of Strategic Communications, I got involved in a struggle with Public Affairs (PA) over their role and ours in the production of op-eds for our posts abroad. At that time Richard Boucher was the assistant secretary for public affairs, a powerful advocate of PA prerogatives. Under his leadership PA began to take over more and more so-called outreach activities. I fought to retain IIP responsibility for post op-eds, leaving PA to produce items destined for U.S. papers and websites. In the end, we agreed to coordinate our activities. I helped draft guidelines on how op-eds would be done in the Department. Who would take up the pen? How would the op-eds be cleared? Who would transmit finished items to post? By getting the process down in writing I hoped to embed the role of the Office of Strategic Communication, my office, in the process. Given the ineffective leadership and ever-decreasing influence of IIP within the Department, I suspect this agreement no longer holds sway, and that PA rules.

But while I was in harness, IIP did have an important role in drafting and shaping op-eds, and that was one of the best parts of my job. Often we would receive mind-numbing, government-speak fodder from post, and would try to spin that straw into gold. We had a remarkable Y-tour officer in IIP/SC, Mark Jacobs. Mark was a published, even famous, novelist. One of his pieces appeared in The Atlantic's annual selection of the year's best American short stories. He wrote much of his first novel on the Metro during his hour-long commute each day from the far reaches of Virginia to USIA headquarters. He and I worked together on these IIP op-eds. And I think we did a good job of putting think pieces together. Of course, the best parts were often edited out in the cumbersome clearance process.

IIP/SC also got involved in combating misinformation or black propaganda about the United States and our policies. Todd Leventhal was key to this effort. For years Todd had analyzed accusations against the United States and debunked those that were false. As described earlier, I worked with him earlier during my stint in Brazil to debunk false stories about U.S. harvesting of third-world baby parts to save American toddlers.

Settled in IIP/SC, Todd took on a wide array of issues. He established a webpage called "How to Spot Misinformation." This became part of our IIP international website. On a regular basis he would focus on a particular issue, a new rumor, saying, "Look, this story has come out and here's what the truth is, and this is why the news stories are wrong."

Todd was an invaluable part of our outreach activities. Before joining USIA, he worked as a researcher for Richard Nixon, providing materials and fact checking for one of the ex-president's many works on foreign policy. Todd was a professional, and we were fortunate to have him.

*Q: Now, the website that you're talking about is the State Department intranet, not the Internet?*

NEIGHBORS: No. I'm talking about the Internet, the Department's public diplomacy window to the world. .



*Q: Oh.*

NEIGHBORS: It was basically a public site that people could look at and see information about the various bureaus, about IIP and ECA and the undersecretary for public affairs, public diplomacy. They could see what our positions were on public diplomacy issues around the world, and learn about the State Department's worldwide cultural and educational exchanges. If I remember correctly, the site was known as America.gov. It was one of the public faces of the Department of State.

*Q: Now, you were saying that this was during your so-called the Y-tour, correct?*

NEIGHBORS: No, this was after I became the office director for Strategic Communications. During my Y tour I focused on program evaluation. That job lasted maybe six months. And then I was paneled into the position of director of strategic communications for IIP.

*Q: OK. Now, you're coming up to your retirement date.*

NEIGHBORS: That was in September 2005.

*Q: Right. Is this one of those things where if you don't get promoted in six years, you're out?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. I was grandfathered under the old USIA system, so I had seven years to make the jump from minister counselor (MC) to career minister (CM). If you took into account all of the public diplomacy minister counselors, refugees from USIA, I think only one or two of them were ever promoted to career minister. And they had served as Assistant Secretaries of State. There was no chance I was going to get promoted to career minister. I knew I was going to be out in 2005.

*Q: Now, with the State Department and USIA, we have rank-in-person, which is equivalent to the military system.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: So as minister counselor, you're actually equivalent to a two star general.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. And this actually had some implications for me when I made TDY trips down to SOUTHCOM (Southern Command) in Tampa, and the Joint Special Operations "university" in Pensacola. I arrived in Pensacola for a strategic communication conference, and everybody else was in a hotel, but I had a house.

A general's house. It only had one bedroom, but had two stories with a living room, a beautiful veranda and a kitchen and a big TV and Bose stereo equipment. Generals live well.

*Q: Well, I think it's important to explain for this study, the notion of rank-in-person. A lot of people don't know that about the Foreign Service. They think our system is like the Civil Service where rank is connected to a particular job or position.*

NEIGHBORS: Right. That's an important distinction. That reminds me of an incident that happened in Qingdao back in 1986. At that time I was serving as PAO in Shanghai. I was asked to go to Shandong province, to Qingdao, one of the great ports of North China. The U.S. Navy was planning its first visit to a Chinese port in over 30 years. I was asked to help arrange the public diplomacy aspects of the visit.

During the course of the visit I got into a big argument with the captain of the USS Blue Ridge, the command ship of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. This was after we'd all been up working for 22 hours, finishing off a banquet that had begun at 12:30 in the morning. At the end of the banquet the captain got up and demanded to know where his interpreter was, because he was going to give a present to the Chinese commander. He started yelling at me. Why hadn't I arranged for an interpreter? Why hadn't I taken care of this matter?

I hadn't taken care of it because no one told me about the need for an interpreter (*laughs*). No one mentioned the presentation of the award either. So I yelled back at the captain.

The next day Lynn Noah, who was my PAO, went to the Navy. He heard about this incident and he told them, "Look, Mr. Neighbors is a Foreign Service Officer, class one," "He is equivalent in rank to the captain of your ship. How dare your captain treat him this way? You have to apologize."

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: The Navy did apologize. The captain didn't. I think he was busy on the ship or something, but his henchmen did. The military takes these ranks quite seriously. A captain can yell at his underlings, but he wasn't supposed to yell at me. I was very pleased with Lynn Noah defending me in this way. And this is a great example of rank-in-person. Basically, what that concept means is that even if you change jobs, your rank remains the same.

NEIGHBORS: Before moving on to October 1, 2005 and retirement day, I have a couple other things I want to say about my last assignment in IIP.

*Q: Yes, go ahead.*

NEIGHBORS: -- As director of the Office of Strategic Communications, I spent a lot of time on speaking and writing assignments. I frequently went over to FSI, the Foreign Service Institute, to participate in the PAO training course, a course for officers facing their first assignment as PAOs. Given my experience, I was able to give them the nitty-gritty about being a good PAO. FSI also offers area-studies courses. For instance, while I was at IIP, FSI gave a two-week course for Department of Defense analysts interested in China. As part of the course, I gave a one-hour lecture on the evolution of

the media in China from the mid-80s to 2004. Attendees rated this lecture as one of the best lectures in the two-week program.

Speaking at FSI was fun, but things got even better when I was invited to go to Vienna for a one-week training session for Foreign Service National employees (FSNs). On that occasion I team-taught a course in writing for FSNs. Great assignment: go to Vienna, eat strudel and Linzer torte, and get to meet our exceptional local employees from all over Eastern Europe and Central Asia. And I got to talk to them about the principles of good writing, a topic I've been pursuing for many years.

As you can see, I missed a lot when I had to cancel my final foreign-service assignment to Warsaw, but I fell into a job at the Office of Strategic Communications that allowed me great scope for action. It was fun. And then I retired.

*Q: So you retired in October 2005. On retirement, did they have the retirement dinner or that sort of thing? Ceremony?*

NEIGHBORS: Nope. Well, we just basically had a little ceremony in IIP. But it was no big deal at the time. There was a larger ceremony the next year that honored all retirees.

*Q: Yeah, that's probably on Foreign Affairs Day the following May.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that's right. I did attend a ceremony where Secretary Rice greeted us personally and thanked us for our service.

*Q: We have brought your career up to your retirement. But in fact, you've continued to make a contribution to the State Department and American foreign policy. I want to make sure that we cover all that. But at first you retired and you took a job in the private sector.*

NEIGHBORS: I did. Usually when you retire, you go to the retirement seminar, and I did attend part of that seminar, the part that told me how to invest my money and lose it in the stock market (*laughs*), how to survive the government-induced retirement process and so for forth.

There is, however, a second part to the retirement seminar -- the ins-and-outs of starting a second career, in other words, the job search. This part I did not attend. I already had a job with Anteon Corporation. Anteon at that time was a separate entity, since then it's been purchased by General Dynamics.

What did I do at Anteon? I helped set up, manage, and edit two news websites for the Department of Defense. Before I arrived, Anteon already had experience running two successful websites for EUCOM, the European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. The first was Southeast European Times, a website that presented area news in the ten languages of the Balkans. The other was Maghrebia, a website for North Africa, offered in French, Arabic, and English.

These were Department of Defense-sponsored news websites designed to promote a better understanding of U.S. policy, society, and culture. These sites were identified quite clearly. If you opened the site and clicked on “Who Are We?” you would find a note, saying, “This is a website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense, European Command.” So we were not trying to fool anyone. This was a Defense Department website and we said so.

Anteon had effectively run these two sites -- for the Balkans and for North Africa -- for a number of years. They were excellent sites. Anteon recruited stringers from the region to write stories. In 2005 Anteon got a contract to set up two similar sites for Central Asia and the Middle East. And that’s where I came in. To provide materials for the site, we recruited a Jordanian journalist who had worked for Al Jazeera and another experienced journalist from Pakistan, another from Tajikistan. We worked in the Anteon offices in Rockville, Maryland. I was asked to be the director of these two sites. The goal was to provide news about the Middle East and about Central Asia in the various languages of the region. We worked closely on the project with CENTCOM, Central Command, with headquarters in Tampa.

We bought rights from AFP (Agence France Presse) to use their news ticker as a basis for our rewritten stories. We also borrowed articles – with permission -- from Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Europe. We would rewrite these stories, trying to provide a daily picture of what was going on in the Middle East and Central Asia. When appropriate we also presented a defense of U.S. policy toward the region. The idea was to provide news and information not always available in local news sources.

In addition to news stories, we also posted opinion pieces and commentary written by experts from the region. We planned to offer opportunities for on-line discussions as the site matured. General Abizaid, the CENTCOM commander at the time, was a key supporter of our effort. After I had been at Anteon for about two months, we started producing the two sites, one for the Middle East and one for Central Asia on a daily basis. We did this for about nine months. The Middle Eastern site appeared in English, Arabic, and Farsi, the Central Asian in English, Pashto, Russian, and Urdu.

Unfortunately, our two sites never went live. I should explain what I mean by that. We did post our work on the Internet three to five times a week, but we were never allowed to advertise the sites or tell anyone they were there. For nine months we tested the waters. General Abizaid and CENTCOM could not get permission to let the two sites go public. So we were writing everyday, producing two news sites in six languages with photographs for a readership of perhaps 100 persons – within Anteon and at CENTCOM. I think if we had developed the sites further, they would have become more interesting as we recruited more stringers and writers, and figured out how to communicate with our audiences.

This was not a bad first effort. General Abizaid used to read the Arabic texts to see how we were doing with the translations. He liked them. Everyday we would send our material to CENTCOM for approval. Every once in a while they might make a few

changes, but they didn't do much censoring. They might say, "This story is wrong factually or we don't want to emphasize this story." But that kind of reaction was rare. Once we had approval, we would put post our materials on the Internet as though it were a public site. Truth is the sites weren't passworded. General Abizaid didn't want to bother with that. So, they were public sites, but no one knew they existed.

That changed one day. We had a Jordanian journalist, Natasha, who worked for Al Jazeera before coming to Anteon. She wrote a regular article for our Middle-Eastern site called "Best of the Blogs." She would analyze blogs from the Middle East, choose the most interesting, and discuss what they revealed about popular opinion in the region. To prepare her reports, Natasha had to read a great number of blogs. Well, one of the blogs she was following on line traced her back to our site. This was one of the only times anyone discovered our existence. The blogger then started commenting on our site, saying, "Hey, I've found a good site. It's done by the U.S. Defense Department, but they are saying some interesting things. Take a look."

At Anteon we were delighted to have some positive feedback. Not so at CENTCOM. As soon as they learned of the "security breach, they said, "Put a password on the sites. We don't have permission because we're not ready to go public," (*laughs*). So we got 25 people to look at our sites. Then we cloaked them.

*Q: Well now, these are new websites funded by DOD. But it certainly sounds more like State PD work. I mean what was DOD thinking?*

NEIGHBORS: This is just another example of the militarization of American foreign policy operations, including public diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East.

*Q: Well, it's because the military had the money and State didn't, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, absolutely! State didn't have money, and Congress wasn't about to give it to us.

In the end DOD spent over \$2 million on these sites. You may wonder why you've never heard of them. Well, that's another story. It involves a dispute at the highest levels of the Pentagon. You may remember Larry Di Rita. At one time he was the Defense Department press spokesman and then became a senior aide to Secretary Rumsfeld. Di Rita did not like the Anteon sites – no, he hated them. He conflated them with problems the Defense Department had a year or so before with the Lincoln Group, a private contractor that had – contrary to regulations – secretly paid journalists in the Middle East to write stories favorable to the United States. This became a giant scandal for the Pentagon, and Di Rita took a lot of heat for it during his daily press briefings.

Of course, we're not supposed to be paying journalists to slant the news. We knew that at Anteon. Unfortunately, De Rita feared that our sites for the Middle East and for Central Asia would be tainted by the Lincoln Group scandal. As a stalling action, he asked the

General Accountability Office (GAO) to inspect Anteon's four sites – EUCOM's two pre-existing sites plus our two in utero, so to speak-- to see if we were violating the rules.

GAO did the inspection and their report said, in essence: "No, these sites clearly identify themselves as being a part of the Department of Defense. They are not trying to fool anybody. It's clear they are USG/DOD sites. This does not resemble cases where DOD paid journalists secretly to write stories for us." So the report was done. It cleared Anteon of any blame. Our sites were fine. But the report could not be released until Larry Di Rita had been briefed on it. And he refused to be briefed -- canceled maybe four or five scheduled meetings on the topic. He just kept putting GAO off because he didn't like the results. Eventually, he had to listen. He was told that our sites were above board.

"I still don't like them." In the end General Abizaid had too many other policy fights to deal with (*laughs*). He gave up on Anteon, and I was out of a job.

Even though our effort was for naught, I enjoyed the experience. I'd never worked on Middle Eastern or Central Asian issues. So it was fun -- particularly working every day with journalists from the region and learning about issues I'd never heard of before. I also enjoyed being an editor and drafting stories. When you have to write about a region, you learn much more than if you simply read about it.

*Q: Well, that brings us to the summer of 2006. What was your next step? How did you get into the WAE business?*

NEIGHBORS: WAE stands for While Actually Employed. It's a method by which annuitants, retirees, can use their expertise, come back, and be of service to the State Department on temporary assignments. You get no benefits and are paid by the hour. One of the requirements is you have to register with a particular bureau as a WAE employee. Since I had spent most of my career with EAP, the Bureau of East Asian Pacific Affairs, I registered with them. After I left Anteon in the summer of 2006, I registered with EAP. And not long after that, in the fall of 2006, the annual APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit, unfolded in Hanoi.

EAP needed someone in Hanoi to help organize the media swarm that accompanies these events. The APEC summit presents us with peculiar problems in managing the press. APEC is spread over four days, a fast-moving, multifaceted event. And each of the four days presents a different challenge. The first day you have the sherpa-level meetings. At these confabs assistant secretary of state Chris Hill did the honors for the U.S. On the second day the Secretary of State arrived for the Foreign Minister's Meeting. And then for the final two days President Bush took over, attending various summit meetings, conducting one-on-one meetings with selected national leaders, and finishing up with bilateral calls on the Vietnamese leaderships. And so it's (*laughs*), it's a wild event -- presidential, secstate, and assistant sec state visits all rolled into one.

*Q: How many press are we talking about for each of these three events? In this case Secretary Rice arrived on November 15 and the president arrives on the 17.*



NEIGHBORS: And remember that assistant secretary Chris Hill arrived on the 14<sup>th</sup>, so we were dealing with him as well. A presidential visit usually has about 135 press, traveling press, mostly American media, with a few other international media outlets thrown in, such as AFP and BBC. And then of course there are always journalists from the region who show up, and then there's the swarm of Vietnamese journalists, too. The secretary of state travels with her own press, which usually numbers 10 to 14 correspondents. We had to set up press filing centers and briefing rooms for both of these contingents, one for the 135 White House press and then another smaller working area for the secretary's traveling press. Often there are big fights between these two groups. If the secretary's press corps tried to use the White House filing center, there would be blood.

And then of course we had Chris Hill as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP). Chris presented unique challenges for us. You see, Chris never met a journalist that he didn't like to talk to. He was good at it. Clearly he had Secretary Rice's blessing to speak on the record because he did it all the time and never got in trouble.

One of the reasons I got this WAE gig was because the ambassador in Hanoi was Mike Marine, who had been DCM, my boss in Beijing. And the DCM was John Aloisi, who had been the political counselor when I served in Beijing. The two of them knew me well. They saw how I worked on presidential visits in Beijing and in Shanghai. They knew I could do the job. So they asked me to come out. I came for five weeks, and I needed all of that time to prepare for the APEC onslaught.

*Q: Now, let's set the stage a little bit. These events are going to happen in Hanoi. There's an embassy in Hanoi. But it's probably got one PAO and one CAO and they're going to need bodies.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Basically the Press and Cultural Section in Hanoi had a PAO and IO. That was it. So they needed a lot of extra people to help out with the press. EAP didn't just bring me in, they brought a host of FSOs and FSNs from all over the region – probably 15 officers and at least ten FSNs.

*Q: Any other retirees but yourself?*

NEIGHBORS: I think I was the only retiree (WAE) working on the press side. There were, however, a bunch of WAEs handling the complicated admin side of the event. Several ex-admin officers for State Department in the early days of APEC came to all the summits. They were very good at organizing it. But eventually State decided it wanted to save money by getting current employees to do the work rather than these retirees. In recent years the WAE role in APEC has dwindled. But back in 2006, at least seven or eight WAEs did the honors.

*Q: Now, this was the event for which you got this WAE assignment. And five weeks out you're starting to set up.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: Were you there then to discuss with the secretary's advance people and the presidential advance people as to what they wanted?*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, yes, that was one of our main tasks: learning what Washington needed and making sure our Vietnamese counterparts understood these needs. In 2006 the Vietnamese had never hosted anything like an APEC mega-meeting. They simply did not know how things were supposed to work, and their foreign ministry, though staffed with a number of talented officers, was overwhelmed, particularly on the press side. If you will recall, they were expected to handle the problems of the 135 traveling American press and the secretary of state's press, plus the press from 20 some other countries, as well as their own journalists.

*Q: I was going to say, the American press wouldn't be the only ones covering the event.*

NEIGHBORS: Right. Thousands of media reps were converging on the city. And the foreign ministry had maybe five officers dedicated to dealing with the press. Our liaison with the foreign ministry was a University of Hanoi journalism graduate student who had never worked at the foreign ministry. She was willing to help, but incapable of answering any of our questions.

For all difficult questions we had to turn to the one or two officers within the foreign ministry authorized to make decisions. And they looked so harassed and beaten down (*laughs*). I felt sorry for them in many ways. On the other hand, we had the secretary of state's advance and the White House Press Advance screaming at us, "Do this, do that, that's not unacceptable." There was a heavy burden on our shoulders.

The APEC events were fairly well controlled, all taking place in a gargantuan conference center, completed just in time for APEC. For the summit, President Bush participated in a great number of events. He attended the APEC Leaders meetings, conducted a handful of bilateral meetings with select heads of states, and of course posed for the obligatory "funny shirt" photo (that's where all the leaders pose in a national shirt or jacket chosen by the host country). Though the schedule was hectic, all the events were confined to the same building, and that made life much easier for those of us engaged in media herding.

The APEC part was easy – relatively speaking. But President Bush's schedule also included a state visit to Vietnam. And that's where the problems proliferated. The bilateral visit entailed activities all around the city of Hanoi. And that meant lots of moving parts. The President could go easily anywhere he wanted no matter how bad the traffic, and in Hanoi it was plenty bad. But the press was a different story. Getting our high-strung correspondents around Hanoi to the correct venues at the right times required lots of advance planning, lots of screaming and gnashing of teeth.

*Q: What kind of problems were the Vietnamese having in hosting this event?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, the logistical requirements for the event would be difficult even for a country experienced in handling large-scale international conferences. They had to handle large delegations from more than 20 countries, including presidents and prime ministers and foreign ministers. Just providing airport clearance for all the official aircraft was a giant undertaking. When a U.S. president visits a country, for example, the U.S. Air Force flies in 20 to 25 support planes in advance, bringing the helicopter, the limousine and the back-up limousine and all the communications gear. The other heads of state have similar requirements, albeit less demanding than ours.

Just looking at the visit from my narrow point of view, transporting the press proved to be an enormous problem. The president's schedule involved events spread out all over the city. We had to transport at least part of the White House press to each of these events. Sometimes that involved drives of 45 minutes through heavy traffic. And because there were at least 20 other national delegations in Hanoi at the same time, there weren't enough trained local bus drivers to go around. The drivers of our five press buses, for example, had never seen Hanoi before and didn't speak a word of English (*laughs*).

And they were used to the communist, iron-rice-bowl way of working, that is, the government pretends to pay them, and they pretend to work.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: We knew transportation would be a key issue for the summit, so we brought Francis Lai down from Hong Kong to handle the motor pool. I had known Francis for 25 years and was his boss in Hong Kong for four of those years. I also knew that he was the best FSN I had ever worked with. That's why I insisted he come to help us run the motor pool, which is the most difficult, most thankless of all presidential visit tasks. If the press motor pool doesn't work, media coverage of the president's visit suffers, and the White House fumes, and the responsible American officer (me) suffers. I didn't want to suffer. Thanks to Francis, I did not.

Just to give you an idea of the problems Francis was facing. The day of President Bush's evening arrival, we had to do a complete drive through of all the events, because our press-bus drivers had no idea where they were. After all, they'd never been in Hanoi. So we're driving through city and practicing the routes. And we have to have volunteer English-speaking students on the buses to interpret for us and let the drivers know where we want them to go.

I remember Francis -- always prepared. The day of the president's arrival, he provided all the drivers with boxed lunches so that they wouldn't run off to eat when they might be needed. Ten minutes after he passed out the box lunches -- this is at like seven in the morning -- he came back to the buses, and the drivers had eaten everything up. And they were asking, "What are we going to do for lunch?" (*laughs*).

These kinds of things happen. POTUS visits are an adventure. We were planning motor pool movements and setting up press filing centers and briefing rooms, which involved many moving parts

At the same time we were setting up for the president, we also had other important U.S. officials arriving on the scene. In this first wave EAP Assistant Secretary Chris Hill required the most attention; he was like a rock star to the Japanese and Korean and Chinese reporters. They all knew him well because of his more-than-frequent trips to Beijing for the Six Party Talks on North Korea. Reporters always expected something good from Hill, and he seldom disappointed.

During his first day in Hanoi, Hill had an important meeting with either the Chinese or the Korean delegation at the Daewoo Hotel – across town from the Sheraton where we were preparing for President Bush’s arrival. I was in the lobby of the Sheraton working on press security issues, when I got a frantic call from the embassy press officer, Angela Agelar.

“Chris Hill is surrounded by 60 or 70 journalists at the Daewoo after his meeting with the Chinese delegation,” Angela said. “He told them that he couldn’t talk to them right now, but if they would come to the Sheraton Hotel in an hour, he would hold a press conference for them. Could you arrange for this to happen, Lloyd?”

Luckily, as I was speaking to Angela, I saw the chief of security for the hotel walking by. (This is one of the reasons why I came to Hanoi five weeks early, so I could meet all the people I needed to know to make things work). So I saw this guy and I put down the phone and raced over and buttonholed him, saying.

“We’re going to have a press conference in the courtyard of the hotel in one hour, and we need security for it.” The guy leapt into action, organizing ropes and stanchions so that we could keep the press penned in the foyer of the hotel. He also made arrangements so the press could quickly pass through hotel security. Since the president was coming soon, White House security was already in operation. This meant metal detectors, security devices everywhere.

An hour later Hill showed up, with 60 or 70 journalists milling around, but in an organized fashion, thanks to our friends in hotel security. Hill was coming to the Sheraton to meet with his Japanese and Korean counterparts to talk about mutual interests, but mainly about the Six Party Talks and how to deal with the North Koreans and the Chinese.

Prior to this meeting, Hill wanted to speak to the press. His two Korean and Japanese colleagues were standing beside him as he faced the press, but Hill did most of the talking, responding calmly to the frantic questions.

After about 10 minutes, Hill and his colleagues went off to a side room where they were to have their meeting. A few minutes later I was still standing in the foyer chatting up the press. Suddenly Angela came out of the meeting room and said,

“Lloyd, Chris wants us to bring in one TV cameraman and two still cameramen to take pictures of the meeting with the Japanese and the Korean representatives. But we have 60 people out here with a bunch of still photographers and TV Cameramen. How do we choose?”

Fortunately, I didn’t have to answer that question. We had a brilliant FSN from our embassy in Seoul who had come to Hanoi for the visit. And he’d done a lot of these large-scale media events. He stepped in front of the media mob and said,

“Listen up. We need two still photographers and one TV cameraman to record the beginning of this meeting. You guys choose.” (*laughs*). Our FSN knew that if he chose, everybody would be mad. But if the group chose, they could have no gripe. They would pool the event and share the photos with everyone else. And that’s what they did.

Choice made, the two fortunate photogs and the TV guys came into the room and saw Assistant Secretary Hill Chris and his two counterparts in conversation. Hill saw the group entering and a look of astonishment came across his face.

“Oh! There are cameramen here?” he said. “Oh. Would you two mind if they took a shot?” As if, “I didn’t expect this to happen,” (*laughs*).

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Hill was fun to work with. He was a real pro at working the press. But he did keep you on your toes – never knew when he’d be giving another interview.

*Q: Any of the journalists in particular cause a problem or require extra handling?*

NEIGHBORS: Whenever you’re dealing with 135 sleep-starved journalists working under high pressure on tight deadlines, you’re going to run into some crabby people. But on this visit, I don’t remember anyone being overly obstreperous. Preparation was the harder part. Once the president and his press corps arrived, our operation went reasonably well.

Every presidential motorcade includes one press bus that carries 10 to 12 journalists and several White House and Embassy media wranglers. These journalists come to events with the presidential motorcade, so access for them is not a problem. But for a big event like the meeting between President Bush and the Prime Minister of Vietnam -- where there was room for more than the 12 journalists in the motorcade – we had to transport an additional group of maybe 50 or 60 other journalists to the site at least an hour in advance. That’s so they could also pass through intensive American and Vietnamese security screens.

I particularly remember Bush's meeting with the prime minister at the presidential palace. The meeting room was small. We had installed risers at the side of the hall so that all the cameramen – we hoped – could have a clear shot of the opening moments of the meeting. My job for this event was to arrive early and save a place on the platform for the motorcade press who would arrive with the president. So I was fighting everybody off – all the Vietnamese press who had arrived much earlier. And we were on this three-tier platform -- up very high. And there were like 40 people on it, with enough room for 20 (*laughs*). Everybody was pushing and shoving, and the president was laughing, telling everyone to be careful and not fall off.

And those are the kinds of things that happen during these events. They're unplanned and difficult to deal with. In Hanoi, I had a political problem, too. When I first arrived, Ambassador Marine brought me into his office and told me,

"Our PAO does not have much experience with these high-level visits. He worked for VOA (Voice of America) for many years but he's a first time PAO. So we want you to take charge of this event."

I was okay with that. Only one problem: they didn't tell the PAO that I was in charge (*laughs*). So the PAO and I proceeded in the dark, neither of us knowing where our lines of authority began, nor where they ended. He was a nice fellow, however, and we worked out our disagreements with only a slip or two

*Q: Well, I would assume that one of the tangled lines would be the rest of the president's trip after the APEC, because the president went down to Ho Chi Minh City and did some events down there.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: And were you involved in organizing those and did you go on that?*

NEIGHBORS: I had absolutely nothing to do with that.

*Q: So you were totally APEC.*

NEIGHBORS: Press coverage for APEC and the bilateral events in Hanoi: those were my responsibilities.

The most memorable thing that happened during the visit-- at least from my perspective -- was President Bush's participation in a Vietnamese protestant church service. He did this to emphasize U.S. support for freedom of expression and freedom of religion. The Vietnamese government didn't approve of the church visit, but the White House insisted. And the president got what he wanted.



Because of the government's neuralgia on religious issues, the Bush visit to the church piqued the interest of the press, both Vietnamese and American. Certainly the church provided the most visually interesting part of the president's Hanoi schedule. All the APEC events took place in vast auditoriums with leaders giving speeches in front of lecterns and shaking hands with other leaders and smiling with flags in the background -- nothing much happening, visually boring.

But here Bush was going to a local church to show support for freedom of religion, in defiance of Government of Vietnam wishes. The dissident churches in Hanoi were filled with brave people, and Bush wanted to show support for them.

Sounds like a great idea. But, we faced problems in getting the media coverage we wanted for this key event, problems caused in part by White House inconsistencies. What do I mean by that? Well, the White House decided that to show respect for the worshippers, they would not allow any photos of the on-going service. They would not allow still photographers or TV cameramen inside. This infuriated the White House traveling press and the Vietnamese press as well. They were milling around outside screaming at me and all the other American press wranglers.

At this point the Vietnamese media discovered that the White House official photographer was inside the church ready to record the president's historic visit.

This issue comes up at every presidential visit I've worked on. An argument always erupts between the White House and the host government as to whether the president's official photographer is a member of the press or not. The White House insists that he is *not*. He wears a presidential pin that identifies him as part of the presidential party. We do not consider him to be a journalist. The host governments always disagree. They "know" he is a journalist.

So the press sees this American guy with a camera going inside the church, and they're furious. To make matters worse, the church wants to have their own photographer come and take pictures, too. They want a photographic record of this historic event; they want to have photographs that say,

"Look, the Vietnamese government allowed us to hold this church service. The U.S. government supports this. The President of the United States was here".

Unfortunately, when the church photographer tries to enter the site, White House security won't let him in. It turns out that the church's "private" photographer actually works for some Vietnamese media organization. So White House considers him to be a media photographer (*laughs*), and media photographers can't come in. It was funny. We're thinking their official photographer's a journalist while their government's thinking our official photographer's a journalist. Big fight, and I'm in the middle of it. The Vietnamese want the church photographer in and the White House wants to kick him out.

I'm arguing in favor of permitting the Vietnamese photographer to stay. I'm getting worked up, and suddenly it looks as though security may have to give all cameras the boot. I glance over at the White House photographer, and he gives me a look that says,

"Whose side are you on?"

The light dawns. "Why am I fighting for the Vietnamese?" *(laughs)*. I should shut up." And I do.

In the end the White House allows the church photographer to come in. But at the same time, outside the church our press wranglers are trying to corral the media, and a fight breaks out. The Vietnamese cameramen try to push their way through the doors. And Wendy Lyle, our PAO from Guangzhou, tries to force them back. They knock her down, giving her a huge bruise on the arm. At this point White House security gets into the act. They are not going to allow party crashers. Eventually peace is restored, but it was a nasty scene.

We probably could have handled the situation better. I don't know. Somehow the White House got it into its head that photographers inside the church would be disrespectful. But, truth is, the Vietnamese Christians welcomed the publicity.

Despite the problems the event went well, and the press did get shots of Bush as he was coming into the church. He paused for them and said a few words. But it would have been better to have shots - camera shots, that is -- inside the church *(laughs)*. Certainly it would have been better for me.

*Q: It sort of underlines the symbolic nature of a lot of these events, the atmospherics that the White House creates.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, that's why the press is essential to these events. Bush wanted it seen that he, as the President of the United States, supports Vietnamese believers in their right to go to church and worship freely. And he didn't want to only show support privately. He wanted the world to see that he supported religious freedom in Vietnam. That was the whole purpose of having the press there. Why, then, you may ask, did the White House want to restrict photography at the church event? Beats me.

*Q: The APEC Meeting itself was November 15 to 18, and then the president did his tour of Vietnam 19, 20 and departs. Did you leave right after this event?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, I did. I think I stayed there one day afterwards to recover and lick my wounds *(laughs)*.

*Q: Did you do an After Action Report that you turned into the embassy?*

NEIGHBORS: I did not. No. I reported when I went back to Washington. I talked to the Bureau Public Diplomacy Office. But I didn't draft anything. They weren't paying me to

do an extra day's work. In the end, I think the visit turned out well. Very difficult logistically, but it worked out fine, and the president was happy.

*Q: Now, you retired at a very senior rank. And in the next assignments we're going to talk about, I'm sure that your experience and rank were important. After this November assignment, did you do any more WAE work until Yangon?*

NEIGHBORS: By this time – given my age and weight – my WAE stints are all a blur. I did several assignments in Washington when I got back from Vietnam. First I worked as the China desk officer for public diplomacy. Karen Hughes had just taken over as the new R, the undersecretary for public affairs and public diplomacy. I arrived on the job two weeks before Hughes made her first official trip to China. I was responsible for clearing and helping draft the 35 policy papers that she had in her briefing book (*laughs*).

*Q: Again, the bureau couldn't staff that position or felt it couldn't staff it? Had to bring in a retiree?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, back in those halcyon days they seemed to have more money for WAEs, and they recognized my expertise. I can't remember the exact details, but one officer had been transferred unexpectedly, and a replacement off-cycle proved hard to find. They had a gap of a number of months. I filled it. Did the regular sort of China desk-officer work. Negotiated with the Chinese embassy over the possession of a dinosaur egg and (*laughs*) that sort of thing.

*Q: Now the WAE program as run by State is actually a part-time program. It has caps to it, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: Congress has imposed caps on the program in terms of how many days a year you can work and how much money you can actually make. So you had this -- you went to the APEC, you came back, worked on the desk for a little while. Did that sort of bleed into the next year and the next assignment, or was there a break?*

NEIGHBORS: The whole system is arcane. Congress has done its best to make it difficult to keep track of what you're allowed to do. You're allowed to work 1,080 hours per year.

And the amount of money you can earn in a year is also limited. In 2008 I worked as the deputy director of EAP, public diplomacy for eight or nine months, part of the time as a WAE, and part of the time as a contractor for a company called PRO-telligent.

*Q: The next major assignment you had was in 2007, July to September, as the acting PAO in Yangon under Ambassador Shari Villarosa.*

NEIGHBORS: Chargé.

*Q: She was chargé?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. We withdrew Ambassador Burt Levin (an old China hand) from Burma in 1990, I believe, right after the crackdown on Aung San Suu Kyi, and the democracy movement. Not till last year, 2013, did we restore normal diplomatic relations and appoint a new ambassador.

*Q: How did the opportunity to serve in Burma come up for you?*

NEIGHBORS: Serendipitously. In the olden days when I worked at USIA in Washington, one of my best friends was Than Lwin. He and I met as colleagues in USIA P (Programs) Bureau. Than worked as a U.S. government employee for over 40 years. He was originally from Burma. We frequently played golf together and he would tell me all these fascinating, adventurous stories about the capital Yangon and the legendary cities of Mandalay and Pagan and about riding elephants through the forests with his father.

Than's father, U Ba Lwin, was minister of education in Burma before the coup in 1962, a coup in which the infamous General Ne Win devastated the economy and destroyed the last vestiges of democracy. Before serving as minister of education, U Ba Lwin had been ambassador to Sri Lanka, Ceylon. At that same time the mother of Aung San Suu Kyi was serving as ambassador to India. The two families moved in the same circles. They knew each other well. At one point various go-betweens tried to set up a marriage between Aung San Suu Kyi and one of Than Lwin's older brothers. It didn't work out.

As you can see, Than Lwin's family was prominent in Burma prior to the coup in 1962. U Ba Lwin founded the first Burmese national school, that is, the first school not under the auspices of the British colonial government. To this day, U Ba Lwin is a revered figure in Burma. The old building that housed the Burmese national school sits across the street from the American Center. And in the school courtyard you can still see a statue of patriarch Lwin.

At the time of the coup in 1962 my friend Than had left Burma for studies in the United States. Unfortunately, U Ba Lwin lost power and the political situation changed drastically. U Ba Lwin was afraid his son would be arrested if he came back to Burma. Moreover, the Burmese government wouldn't give him permission to return. As a result, Than and his Burmese wife Mimi stayed away for many years, unable to comfort their parents during their declining years.

Than talked about Burma a lot, not obsessively, not boringly, but clearly with a mixture of love, regret, and nostalgia. It sometimes seemed as if every major figure in the old USIA hierarchy had served in Burma at one time or another. For instance, when I mentioned my ambassador in China, the incomparable Arthur Hummel, Than said,

"Oh, he was PAO in Burma. Later on became ambassador there. And Jodie Lewinsohn, one of our most famous USIA elders, her first assignment was of course as a junior

officer in Burma. The legendary Frank Scotton of Vietnam fame – also PAO in Burma. It seemed like all my old USIA colleagues had served in Yangon at one time or other. Than would ask, “When are you going?”

Never. Or so I thought. But one day in 2007 I received an email from the chargé, Shari Villarosa. Shari and I had worked together in Brazil. She served in the Economic Section when I was the deputy PAO. We knew each other well.

Years later she was in Burma, and discovered that I was doing WAE work. She emailed me, “Would you like to come to Burma? We need a PAO for at least two months.” I thought this is a great opportunity. I gotta go. And it turned out to be an interesting time, as they say in the pseudo-Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.” A lot of things happened while I was in Yangon – not all fun, but certainly interesting. I was there for two months and then I left for a week in Sydney to help handle the press for APEC and another presidential visit.

Originally I was just scheduled for two months in Burma, but then the EAP front office said, “Well, since you’re going to be in Burma anyway, why don’t you come down to Sydney and help out with APEC?” So I had this all set up to be in Sydney for two weeks working on APEC. My wife planned to come out and see the sights in Australia while I was working. But after I’d been in Burma a month, I got this message from EAP, saying, “Oh, we need to save money so you don’t have to come to Australia.” By this time my wife had bought her non-refundable air ticket to Australia, so I pleaded with Washington to let me come. They replied, “Can you come and work for one week, rather than two?” This turned out to be even better in the sense that I went to Australia for two weeks, my wife came, and we had a one-week vacation. And then I worked for a week on APEC.

But while I was in Australia, Burma exploded. The government raised bus fares, and protesters poured into the streets. Buddhist monks, a major force in dissident circles, offered immediate support. Sheri Villarosa contacted me in Sidney and said, “Please come back?” I couldn’t resist. And that’s how I managed to spend another full month in Burma at the height of the 2007 protests.

*Q: Now, the mission in Yangon was short a PAO. Why? I mean who else was there on the Press and Cultural side?*

NEIGHBORS: The Press and Cultural Section had two officers, a PAO and a deputy. The PAO curtailed his assignment. His replacement was still in language school -- not due to arrive for five or six months. The deputy was a second-tour officer with lots of enthusiasm and little experience. She worked intensively with the dissidents in Burma, which was a key part of her portfolio. But she didn’t always have a proper perspective on what activities were dangerous and what might be threatening to the mission if she got too involved. So Sheri Villarosa wanted someone to come Burma as mentor to the DPAO – put a rein on when needed (*laughs*).

I remember one time telling the DPAO that she was doing some stuff that was going to attract the attention of government officials, and they might crack down on the American Center, even close it. I told her, I said, “You know, our local staff thinks that you’re about to drive our bus off the cliff. You need to pull back a bit. I’m not trying to thwart you. I admire the work you’re doing with some important dissidents. But you need to be careful about going too far.”

*Q: What was going on?*

NEIGHBORS: I don’t know how much I can say about that (*laughs*). One of the reasons the PAO left early was that he had written a piece about teaching English to Buddhist monks, key leaders of the dissident movement. He wrote the piece for The New Yorker, which agreed to publish it. He was an excellent writer. The article was colorful and moving, evoking a world that Americans know little about. Major problem: even though he had changed the details of the story – the names and the places -- the regime would still know who he was talking about, and that would be dangerous, not only to the mission but to the monks.

*Q: There’s a reason for keeping things classified.*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. Foreign Service officers always walk a fine line when we deal with dissidents. We want to help them. We want to report the dissidents’ story back to the Department. But we don’t want to see them arrested and tortured because of our indiscretion.

Given these concerns, the department asked the PAO not to publish his article. At this time he was back in Washington and had a chance meeting with the under secretary for political affairs secretary of state. He complained that he was being thwarted in his efforts to publish an important article about Burma in the New Yorker. And the under secretary, not quite understanding the ramifications, said in essence “Look, that shouldn’t be. You should be allowed to write about monks. Go for it.”

When chargé Villarosa learned about this end run, she was livid. She immediately cabled Washington explaining how this article could endanger the lives of our contacts or bring about their imprisonment.

“You can’t allow this article to be published!” she said.

EAP agreed. The EAP assistant secretary (or one of his deputies, I’m not sure which) called The New Yorker and asked them not to publish the article, citing the injuries it might cause to our embassy contacts in Burma. This is not something the department likes to do. We don’t want to be seen as restricting our own media from covering an important story. But in this case we feared the blowback. The New Yorker took our point and spiked the article.



By the time I arrived, the semi-out-of-control PAO had left, but his talented, enthusiastic, albeit naïve, DPAO was still holding forth, engaging in a number of valuable but risky projects with our dissident contacts. I'm sure the DPAO thought I was brought in as a wet blanket to dampen the fires of her righteous ardor. She was right. At times righteous ardor can get you in trouble.

What was my biggest surprise upon arriving in Yangon? The American Center. It was an amazing institution. And I must confess that a lot of the Center's success could be attributed to the work of the PAO and the DPAO, who despite their flaws were good officers.

The American Center still functioned as a traditional USIS lending library. It also taught English to thousands of people a year. The library was on the first floor of a small, colonial style building. The embassy still has an iconic picture of Aung San Suu Kyi in the old days prior to her house arrest sitting in the Center garden reading a book. The library is relatively small – probably less than 1000 square feet of space – but on some days as many as 700 members come to use the reading room.

In the library our Burmese contacts could read magazines and articles and books and see videos available nowhere else in the country. We were uncensored. Readers could use the Internet unfiltered. We had a satellite dish that brought in the signal free from government restriction.

The American Center also taught English to thousands of people, including many of the poor and the disaffected. We had a scholarship fund focused on the non-elite, the outsiders. The British Council had a similar program. We had a scholarship vetting team made up of embassy officers and Center teachers that looked at applications and chose deserving candidates who couldn't afford our tuition fees. In this way we provided access to education for many prominent dissidents. The Center did not just teach English. We also organized poetry readings and speaking contests and book clubs that often featured works on prickly topics like the development of civil society and the importance of NGOs.

The American Center was a dynamic place to work. The regime resented us. They posted armed military sentries across the street from the entrance to the Center. They scrutinized (albeit from a distance) every person who entered the compound, at times trying to intimidate them. On one occasion a group of dissidents came to the center as part of a protest against the government. This raised government hackles. The embassy front office was concerned the government would try to shut us down as a result.

As you may gather, Burma was an odd place to work for a diplomat, particularly for someone like me dealing in public affairs. Every other place I served as a USIS officer my first task upon arriving in country was to meet the government officials with whom I would work, particularly those at the Foreign Ministry, the Ministries of Culture and Education. Then I would call on the universities. Not in Burma. The Foreign Ministry and the rest of the government had decamped to Naypyidaw, the new capital, leaving

behind a faux Foreign Ministry, a ghostly unit whose members wisely tried to avoid all contact with foreigners. Universities were also off-limits to us. I didn't meet any of these normal contacts.

I take that back. I did meet foreign affairs officials on two occasions. They summoned me to the rump Foreign Ministry in Yangon to lecture me about the activities of the American Center. During the first meeting they handed me a document and said, "Here is an English version of the laws governing the activities of foreign cultural centers in Yangon. We believe that you may be violating some of the regulations. Would you please study this?" (*laughs*). I don't think this official wanted to be harsh with us. After all, his son was probably studying English at the American Center. But he did what he was told, and I was chastened.

Those were the only times I ever met any Burmese officials. I did manage to visit a university in Yangon, MIT, that is, the Myanmar Institute of Theology, a Baptist seminary. The Baptists have proselytized in Burma for 150 years or more, with widespread success, particularly the Karen state upcountry. The Baptists were allowed to operate this seminary, which was basically a four-year liberal arts college. It emphasized theological studies, but general studies as well. Because the school was a theological seminary, it operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion, not the Ministry of Education. Ministry of Education colleges and universities were not allowed to contact the embassy. We were seen as a disruptive force, and the government wanted to avoid disruption at all costs.

The regime feared its students. So much so that the beautiful campuses in downtown Yangon had been closed for years. Instead the government established some half-baked college centers in the suburbs spread out so that students could not congregate and cause concern. At these new suburban centers, the curriculum was curious and the teaching methods singular. On the first day of class the professor gave his students a syllabus, showed them the questions that would be asked on the final exam, told them what the answers should be. Then the students went home and waited for the end of the semester when they could take the tests. The government had destroyed the education system because of fear of the students. This was the only government I've seen in my career that made the Chinese government seem benign. At least the Chinese government is competent and wants its people to succeed. The Burmese government was another story. "Keep the people impoverished and ignorant, and we can control them." That was its motto.

Burma was the richest, best-educated country in Southeast Asia in the late 1940s, after World War II. Now it's the poorest. Kudos to the xenophobic Ne Win and his ridiculous policies. The first thing the general did when he took power was to kick out all the Chinese and the Indian businessmen, the very people who made the economy work.

Ne Win was a superstitious man who did crazy things. He woke up one day and decided that Burmese needed to drive on the right side of the road. The left side was colonial.

Within a week or so the rules changed. No preparation, just we're going to drive on a different side of the road. Chaos ensued.

The generalissimo loved the number nine. At one point Burma was suffering from rampant inflation. Government officials decided that to deal with this problem they would issue a new currency, the kyat. And to please Ne Win, the new currency was denominated in multiples of nine. So you had nine-kyat, 45-kyat and 90-kyat bills. You can imagine the problems this caused for sales clerks making change.

But making change was the least of the problems caused by the new currency. By government fiat all money in the old currency was worthless. Banks would not exchange the old money for the new. Except for government cronies, who kept their money in dollars, everyone else went bankrupt. "Whip Inflation Now – Take away Everyone's Life Savings." Now there's a political slogan for you.

These were only a few of the ways the Burmese government did its best to make life miserable for everyone but the fortunate few at the top. Despite the misery, the Burmese were among the most winsome people I've ever met. Under extremely difficult conditions they often managed to live dignified, meaningful lives. Buddhism and its philosophy of stoic resignation perhaps played a role in making their suffering bearable.

*Q: Now, you're talking about the difficulties operating in this environment for the PAO. How about the embassy as a whole? What thoughts do you have on their ability to function?*

NEIGHBORS: Everyone in the embassy, no matter what section, had problems doing their jobs. First of all, only on rare occasions, could they meet with Burmese officials. Sometimes the chargé would be summoned up to Naypyidaw, the new capital, and harangued for hours. But that didn't help us understand what the central government was doing and thinking.

Because we couldn't deal with the government, much of our embassy work focused on civil society and Burma's budding NGO's. The embassy had substantial grant money that we were able to give to NGOs dedicated to the building of civil society. We funded projects, for example, working on planned parenthood, education, English teaching, environmental protection, and democracy promotion. The chargé and the other sections of the embassy decided which NGOs could make best use of our grants.

One of our best programs was training for journalists. As you can imagine, we weren't allowed to do this training in Burma, where the media were muzzled. We could, however, take selected journalists to other countries, to Thailand mostly, and train them there. The government knew about our grants, including the journalist training programs. They didn't like them one bit, but they tolerated them. Probably didn't want to offend the U.S. more than necessary.

When the embassy gives a grant, it appoints a grants officer, an American officer who signs the document and ensures that terms of the grant are carried out properly and that the money is wisely used. But in the case of Burma, we did not want to attract attention to our grantees, particularly when they were located up-country, say in Shan State or Kachin State. In those cases we often sent our local employees, FSN's, to the scene to scope things out. An FSN wouldn't attract as much attention as a foreign diplomat would in coming to a small Burmese town. That's one way we tried to protect our NGO grantees.

*Q: Now, you were Yangon during the monks' demonstrations. How did that begin to unfold and how did you see it?*

NEIGHBORS: During my first two months in Burma, I went with the political officer and others to attend events hosted by prominent dissidents, many of whom had served years in prison before being released. On one occasion we went to a monastery where the monks served *mohinga*, fish-noodle soup, to the country's most prominent dissidents in a ceremony expressing solidarity. The government was aware of the meeting, but did not stop it.

After two months in Yangon, I went to Australia for APEC, and that's when the protest began and the monks took to the streets. In its obtuse fashion the government had decided to double the fares for public transportation. For the majority of people in Yangon, who live on a dollar a day, this increase was intolerable. Protests erupted, and promised to turn violent. The monks in solidarity with the suffering population decided to come out in the streets and ensure that the protest were peaceful.

That's how the trouble started. At first it seemed the government didn't know how to handle the situation. For several days the monks peacefully demonstrated, and the embassy reported back to Washington. That's when the Sheri Villarosa called me in Sydney and said,

"No one else in Washington can get a Burmese visa. We need you. Please come back!" So I did.

Immediately upon arrival I was swamped with telephone press inquiries from outside the country. Foreign journalists could not get visas to cover the story, so Sheri Villarosa was doing five or 10 interviews a day by telephone with foreign press. I had to set up the interviews and prepare her and be there and make sure the press got the stories right. The Chargé and I also spoke to Washington frequently discussing how far she could go with her answers. What could she say without getting the embassy – and more important – the dissidents in trouble. Fortunately, Sheri was a pro. She knew the country well and had great judgment on when to trust a particular journalist and when to be wary.

It was a trying time for everyone in the mission. As I said earlier, foreign journalists could not get journalist visas to cover the protests. Instead they came as tourists, wearing ugly clothes and flip-flops, carrying backpacks. They were in a difficult position. They

wanted to cover the protest, but at the same time they didn't want to be too conspicuous. After all, they were breaking the law. The government shut down Internet and telephone communications. We did surreptitiously help journalists transmit their stories and photographs back to the real world using our satellite link with the world.

After a week or so of peaceful protest, the government cracked down. The Chargé wanted to make sure that no American diplomats were seen as fomenting these protests or making things worse. At the same time we needed to cover the protests and find out for Washington what was going on. Fortunately some of our local employees were able to blend in the crowds and cover the events – at a substantial risk to themselves.

One of our political officers demonstrated great ingenuity, renting a rooftop room at a hotel in the heart of the city. From there he and his colleagues could see some of the demonstrations unfolding below them. He had a video camera with him and was recording one of the marches. Suddenly everybody in the street started running, shots rang out, and someone fell to the ground. When our officer got back to the embassy, we looked at the video and discovered that he had by chance recorded the moment that a Japanese journalist had been killed by the police. We had a photo of the murder, a video. And we made that video available to press around the world. That's one of the times when we did make a difference, when we were able to make sure that the story of repression in Burma did not just disappear beneath the weight of government denial and prevarication.

Stories of government-instigated violence spread rapidly throughout the city. According to embassy sources, on the third day of the crackdown, government troops moved into the city under the cover of night. Loudspeakers announced from the darkened streets: "Everything is under control. Do not come to your windows and look out. Don't be nosy. If you are, we will arrest you."

With this warning in place, the military moved into the buildings and began to arrest known dissidents.

At that time I lived just 10-minutes walk from the embassy, in the old PAO house. One morning I came out my front door and saw several people – a middle-aged man, a young woman and two children -- standing by the embassy car that had come to pick me up. I was puzzled. What did they want?

"Can you help us?" the young woman said. "We live across the street. Last night our father was arrested."

The woman's father at one point had worked for Voice of America. He wasn't a hard-core activist, but had written some critical items about the Burmese government in the past and so was on their list of people to observe. As the protests spread, he joined in, offering food to the monks who were marching. He was arrested for that. We discovered in retrospect that 40% of the people on our guest list for the Fourth of July that year were arrested during the demonstrations. Fortunately, most of them were soon released. The

government was just trying to make a point: “You’re lucky this time. Try this again, and we’ll put you away for a long, long time.” The real leaders of the dissident movement weren’t so lucky. They received lengthy prison sentences.

*Q: This has relevance to the present moment; we’re talking here June 2013. Sgt. Manning is on trial for releasing all those State Department cables. Some of which would show preparations for July Fourth celebrations -- guest lists drawn from contact lists and who the embassy had been talking to. Repressive governments would love to get a hold of these lists.*

NEIGHBORS: Oh, absolutely. They may have had the lists anyway, but yes, a guest list may seem innocuous, but not to the ever suspicious Burmese government. As far as I know, the individuals we dealt with advocated peaceful change. But the dictatorship was not into change. They had all the money and all the power. All was right with the world as far as they were concerned. And so you’re right. Releasing information about guest lists and about other embassy contacts can result in people going to prison for many years.

*Q: Off on another subject, what was motivating these peaceful dissidents? Was it their understanding of domestic problems in Burma? Their understanding of the principles of democracy? I mean how was this all getting worked out in their minds?*

NEIGHBORS: Many of the dissidents had been political leaders in 1989 when it looked as though Aung San Suu Kyi and her party had won the elections and were prepared to assume power. In their eyes the military dictatorship was on its last legs. Then the military government rejected the results of the election and put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Many of her colleagues and people who worked with her were sent to prison for many years. Student leaders suffered a similar fate.

By 2007 some of the student leaders, now middle-aged, had been released from prison. Still unbowed, they once again moved to the front of the protests, advocating a return to democratic government.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s father, General Aung San, had been poised to become the first elected leader of a newly independent Burma when he was assassinated in 1947. The Burmese experiment with democracy continued through the 1950s. That ended in 1962 when economic problems and ethnic conflicts resulted in a military coup led by the nefarious Ne Win. The military has been in the saddle ever since, that is, until recently when the situation began to change.

But in 2007 those glimmers of hope were still below the horizon. In this seemingly hopeless situation, the dissidents stubbornly demanded a democratic system. They believed, and rightly so, that the military junta was impoverishing Burma, while enriching themselves.



While in Yangon, I talked to two physicians, Burmese physicians whom I met at an antique shop/bookstore that they operated. They told me that after working for a number of years as doctors in Burma, they couldn't afford to continue. The salaries for the two of them came to some ridiculously low amount -- around \$100 a month. And the hospital where they worked had no medicine, not even basic equipment such as sterile gloves to protect them when they were examining patients with hepatitis and AIDS and other infectious diseases. They couldn't make a living as doctors, so they gave up. Fortunately for them, they both came from erstwhile wealthy families. Unlike others, they had the wherewithal to change careers. Starting with the books and antiques assembled by their parents, they opened a shop, catering mostly to tourists and wealthy Burmese. The shop did well, but still it was sad. They had studied so hard to become doctors, but the corrupt system didn't allow them to work in the field of medicine.

*Q: Of course the demonstrations took up much of your time. But they didn't last that long. What else did you do as acting PAO in Yangon?*

NEIGHBORS: The most fulfilling aspect of my time in Burma: working in the American Center. As I mentioned earlier, the American Center stands just across the street from what had been the first Burmese National School, founded by U Ba Lwin, the father of my good friend and colleague Than Lwin. I felt fortunate to have this important connection with Burma's past, while at the same time working in a dynamic institution that was struggling to nurture a new democratic future for the nation.

During my brief stay in Yangon, I gave lectures on American education and American folk music, on the Civil Rights Movement in America. I gave this last talk before the monks went out in the streets. Being able to hear a speech on civil rights and Martin Luther King was a unique and powerful experience for our American Center members. This was especially true for our advanced English students, who often used texts focusing on democracy, American history, and society. We weren't just teaching English at the Center. We were, in essence, promoting civic responsibility, activism, and other such "subversive" ideas.

One of our best programs featured a cooperative arrangement with my alma mater, Indiana University. Under the auspices of a USAID grant, Indiana University provided an associate degree program for a group of 15 students. We sought to provide a few students from needy families with the chance to study at the college level, a chance they would never have under the corrupt, crumbling, government-run university system. Our Indiana cohort did their work via Internet. Of course, the public Internet in Burma was undependable and highly censored. As a work-around the Indiana students had a room at the American Center where they could use the Internet provided by our satellite feed. USAID also gave a grant to an American NGO to hire a proctor for the students. To my delight, the first group of five students received their associate degrees while I was in Yangon. As an Indiana alumnus, I was honored to do the honors at the graduation ceremony.

*Q: What a great opportunity!*

NEIGHBORS: I also used my connections in Hong Kong to help start up another educational exchange program in Burma. My good friend and fellow founder of the Hong Kong - America Center, Glenn Shive, came to visit me for a week while I was in Yangon. We did the usual tourist sites, most notably taking a long weekend trip to the Buddhas of Pagan.

Glenn being Glenn, he couldn't simply take a vacation. He wanted to learn more about education in Burma. So I set up a number of meetings for him. We went to the Myanmar Institute of Theology, MIT, where Glenn gave a lecture on religion and politics in America. He also spoke at the American Center on U.S. policy towards China. While at MIT we met a fellow named Bob Winter, a professor of American literature. Bob was married to a Burmese woman and had been teaching at MIT for a number of years on contract.

All these meetings started Glenn to thinking: "Is there anything we can do to give young Burmese a chance to study at the university level, a chance they would never have under their own system? Is there a way for the Hong Kong - America Center and the U.S. government to co-sponsor such an effort?"

After further discussion and cogitation, we decided that the answer to these two questions was "YES."

Glenn had a friend at Hong Kong University, a professor who was a Burma expert. As soon as he got back to Hong Kong, Glenn met with this professor. Together they came up with the idea of establishing an associate degree program for younger Burmese who worked at international NGOs. The idea was to focus on those employees who had not been able to receive a college education. We would give them a grant so they could spend two years pursuing this program, while at the same time spending a small portion of their time continuing to work for their NGOs.

In a relatively short time Glenn was able to work with the Open University of Hong Kong to conceptualize the program and get it approved by university authorities.

I was able to lend a hand as well. After Burma I came back to Washington and early in 2008 began another WAE tour as deputy director of public diplomacy for EAP. In this capacity I attended regular Burma task forces meetings. Given my recent experience in Yangon, I was able to describe to the task force our embassy public diplomacy programs, stressing the importance of USG grants to Burmese NGO's. As part of this presentation, I promoted Glenn's plan for a distance-learning, associate degree program through the Open University of Hong Kong. It took a couple of years to set the program in motion, but in the end the U.S. government agreed to fund a cohort of 25 students/NGO employees to pursue associate degrees. In 2012, I believe, the first group of 25 received their degrees, and USG funding became available for a second group.

Kudos as well to my esteemed colleague, Joe Bookbinder, who did yeoman's service in successfully nagging and cajoling and pleading for Washington to renew the grant. Joe had been the assistant information officer in Beijing when I was there as PAO. We're best of friends. Fortunately, he was PAO in Hong Kong when the Open University grant for Burma came up for renewal. I had talked at length with Joe about this grant, and he had worked on it with Glenn Shive, so he knew it well. The State Department was going to cancel the grant, until Joe jumped in and explained to them why it was essential. Thanks to Joe's intervention, the Department reversed course and found the funds.

As you can see, it was exciting to work in Burma, just doing the nitty-gritty stuff that helped people desperately in need. If you're doing public diplomacy exchanges in France, it's a lot of fun to be in France (*laughs*) eating camembert and going to the opera, but the French don't need our programs. (*laughs*). The Burmese do.

*Q: Well, it's interesting though because you're talking about some of these programs being contracted out to NGOs.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: I mean this is not the USIA of 20 years earlier, which would probably be running its own programs. USIA in 1950s, 1960s used to have movie showings out in the villages.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah. In some places we still do those kinds of programs – just with newer technology. Even in Burma we still showed movies, hosted poetry contests and concerts, and offered lectures by a host of American experts. We continued to do traditional USIS-style programming, but we multiplied our influence through grants to deserving NGO's. USAID works this way, too. Its modus operandi has changed dramatically. USAID in the 1960s, for example, had a thousand American employees in Brazil. By 1993 that number had fallen to less than ten. At the same time, USAID still carried out extensive programming in Brazil. They just did it by giving grants to local organizations and supervising the grants. The Press and Cultural Section in China operated in similar fashion – though on a much smaller scale. We gave small “democracy” grants to NGOs engaged in innovative programs to promote civil society, improve the status of women, train journalists, and so forth. Surprisingly there was more U.S. government money for such grants in Burma than there was in China. Maybe the need was greater.

*Q: Going back to our timeline, in 2008 you were the deputy director of public affairs in the Asia Pacific Bureau. Now, was that office a separate office in EAP or was that folded into Regional Affairs?*

NEIGHBORS: There is an Office of Public Diplomacy integrated into the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

*Q: And that, too, was part of the reorganization of USIA.*

NEIGHBORS: This is the way it works now. You have the EAP Office of Public Diplomacy, which has a deputy assistant secretary, an office director, a deputy director, a cultural coordinator and various other desk officers. Under the new State system the desk officers, for the most part, are embedded with the country office. For instance, the EAP China Desk Officer for Public Diplomacy sits on the China Desk rather than in the Public Diplomacy Office. He has two masters, the China desk office director plus the director of Public Diplomacy. Because I was the deputy director for Public Diplomacy, I supervised the China desk officer as well as the officers for Japan, Korea, Thailand, and the other Southeast Asia countries.

As deputy director I recruited officers to fill our public diplomacy vacancies. I helped people get jobs. There was power in that role, and I liked that (*laughs*). I worked closely with the desk of every country that had public diplomacy vacancies as well as with HR (Human Resources). But I was the one who assembled all the information about the different candidates and lobbied for our choices in the selection committee. Inadvertently, one of my choices for PAO helped me get a WAE tour in New Zealand after I retired. How did that happen? Well, the guy I sent to New Zealand as PAO turned out to be a dud – at least in the eyes of the ambassador. The ambassador, a difficult man, despised his new PAO, and the PAO returned the favor. He got fired, and I reaped the benefits. I took his place for a three-week stint in Wellington in 2010, a period that included a whirlwind visit by Secretary Clinton (*laughs*). I didn't do it on purpose.

*Q: This is within the context that the officer submits a list of the assignments he's interested in.*

NEIGHBORS: Right. Old USIA was a tiny organization so everyone knew everybody else, and you put in your bids for assignment and that was that. It was almost considered gauche to lobby too hard for a job. Your corridor reputation was widely known, and no amount of lobbying could forefend your fate.

Once in State, we USIA old timers discovered to our chagrin that we had to genuflect to the powers-that-be and kiss the ring. Otherwise, it was,

“You didn't bow the knee, so we're not considering you.”

This was a different world. And as deputy director of PD, I was one of the persons whose ring was kissed. I received hundreds of messages from prospective job candidates, some cogent and persuasive, some whiney and irritating. The process fascinated me. People reveal their personalities by the way they pursue a job, and I enjoyed having that insight. The process resembled a chess game with lots of complicated moves around the board. It's a good feeling when you can help people you know get the job of their dreams. That was rewarding.

*Q: The interesting thing about this is for this particular assignment you were WAE up to a point and then hit your caps, and they flipped you onto a contract.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that is true.

*Q: So you could show up the next day and keep on working without interruption.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that's exactly right.

*Q: So that's 2008. In 2009 did you stay on contract or then did you go back to being a WAE.*

NEIGHBORS: I went back to being WAE. For the most part since then I've worked as a WAE – usually four or five months per year.

*Q: 2009 is interesting because you have an assignment in Amman. But, you're an East Asia guy. How does Amman come up? It's in a different bureau. How did the East Asia guys decide you could be released to the deserts of NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs)?*

NEIGHBORS: Once again this was serendipitous. I was at a meeting. I don't remember what the meeting was, but one of my old friends, Pen Agnew, attended as well. Pen has worked for years in the NEA public diplomacy office in Washington. He is a Foreign Service Officer but he's been in the U.S. for a number of years – for medical reasons, I believe.

After the meeting I spoke to Pen, making a joke, I thought. I said,

“You wouldn't need a WAE in the Middle East, would you?”

And he said, “Want to go to Amman?”

“Sounds good to me.”

Because of my work with Anteon Corporation on their Middle East website, I did have some insight into the issues facing the U.S. in the Middle East. That helped convince Pen's bosses to take me on – even though I didn't speak Arabic, nor had I served in the area. That's how I unexpectedly got to spend three exciting months working at the American embassy in Jordan.

Steve Beecroft was the ambassador, Larry Mandel the DCM. The embassy in Amman was loaded with young talent. Ambassador Beecroft had been Executive Assistant to Secretaries Powell and Rice, head of the Executive Secretariat (S/S), the people who push all the paper to the Secretary and arrange her/his travel. This was a powerful position, one that puts exceptional demands on both mind and body. That Beecroft stayed steady in this job through the tenures of two Secretaries of State is a tribute to his intellectual gifts, management skills, and iron constitution. Tales of his tenure in the Secretariat were legion. My favorite: a colleague in the Secretariat walked into Beecroft's OpCenter office early, early one morning and found him asleep on the couch, stick'em notes pasted over

his eyes. (Lights in the Op-Center offices cannot be turned off.) No matter what time of day or night you sent him an email, he responded immediately – or so it seemed to us lesser mortals. Beecroft was a strait-laced, disciplined diplomat, the archetypical son of Mormon Utah. He demanded much of his embassy colleagues, but even more of himself.

Despite his high-powered pedigree and controlled demeanor, Beecroft often told self-deprecating, wistful tales about his youth. For instance, his father was an extremely wealthy Utah businessman/manufacturer. In the summer when Beecroft was a kid and his pals were out playing baseball and having fun, he worked in his father's factory – eight hours a day without fail, no time off for good behavior. Thus a director of the executive secretariat is made.

During his tenure in S/ES Beecroft met scores of dynamic young officers who traveled with the secretary and worked in the Ops Center. He recruited many of them to work at the embassy in Amman, and they were an exceptional group, multi-talented and dynamic. Their divergent ethnic and social backgrounds demonstrate the State Department's success in recruiting from a much wider manpower (or should I say human-power) pool than ever before. For example, the Economic Counselor, Natalie Brown, was African-American. From Amman she went on to serve as Deputy Chief of Mission in Tunis, helping to lead the embassy through the turbulent period following Arab Spring and the dramatic overthrow of President for life Ben Ali. Our Public Affairs Officer – she of the melodious name – was Jennifer Rasamimanana, also a protégée of the Ambassador. Jennifer's parents were Malagasy. Jennifer was on three-months maternity leave, and that's how I got the call work in Amman. Our talented press officer was Maria de Guadalupe Olson, also a product of the Secretary's travel team. I couldn't quite place Maria. Couldn't figure out her background. Then one day at the airport I ran into her and her father, who was returning to the U.S. after a short visit to the grandkids. Her father was dressed in a farmer's straw hat – boater style – with gabardine overalls, Mennonite attire.

Maria was a political officer with no experience as a press spokesperson. And this was the case with most of our officers in the public affairs section. They were still green – talented, willing, and hard working, but lacking in experience. That's one of the reasons why the front office asked an experienced PAO to take over the reins during Jennifer Rasamimanana's maternity leave. The post was facing an inspection in the fall and needed someone to come in and make sure that the paperwork was correct, grants managed correctly, and the American Center well managed. The ambassador also wanted me to show the P&C staff new possibilities for public outreach.

My first impression: our section was engaged in a rich series of public diplomacy activities, but Washington had not an inkling of what we were doing. And that was our fault. I immediately revived the publication of a weekly newsletter, an electronic document that hyped the activities of the ambassador and singled out our cultural, educational, and media programs, using lots of photographs and catchy headlines. “Hey, Washington, bet you didn't know we were doing this – and doing it well.” DC was delighted.



I also reinstituted a regular call to the NEA Public Diplomacy desk officer to keep him up to date on our activities. At first I ran into a problem caused by the embassy's odd workweek – odd, that is, outside the Middle East. Because Friday is a day of worship for Muslims, the embassy in Amman operated from Sunday through Thursday. When I first arrived in Jordan, I would go to my office on Sunday after a nice weekend. In the afternoon I would pick up the phone and call Washington. The phone would ring and ring, and no one would answer. I'd call another number. Still no answer. "It's already 10:00 am in DC. Don't these people ever work. I'd get madder and madder, till suddenly, "Duh, it's Sunday." Even in the Department most people do not work on Sunday.

Public Affairs Amman also helped manage an American Center, a unique operation that taught English to more than 12,000 students a year. The teachers and employees were U.S. government employees. There's an odd history behind that fact. Originally the embassy gave an operating grant to the Center, but was not involved in management. Then the American teachers at the Center began to have visa problems. That, along with a number of other technical issues, made it prudent to give Center employees status as USG employees. The new system worked well as far as visas were concerned, but it did dramatically increase the Public Affairs workload. It's no easy task to be in charge of a huge American Center, dealing with all its physical, fiscal, and personnel problems. We did have a very capable outside hire, an American, brought in to run the center on a day-to-day basis. From the embassy side, our chief manager of Center operations was an FSN, a shrewd and talented employee who had been working with the Center for many years.

When I arrived the American Center was operating smoothly and our public affairs budget was well managed, thanks in great part to this FSN. I was especially glad to have him there since the inspectors from Washington were due at post soon.

So I'm blissfully working away, preparing for the inspection, when our key FSN came up looking uncharacteristically somber and said,

"I need to talk to you privately."

"Uh, oh, I thought, this can't be good news." And my intuition was right.

"I've just been offered a job with the United Nations," he says. "It pays twice as much as I'm making now. And I'm leaving next week." (*laughs*).

Now I was faced with preparing for the inspectors sans admin officer. That was a challenge. For the inspectors, we (the public affairs section) had to fill out endless documents and write hundreds of pages of analysis of our programs and look at old grant files to insure we were handling them correctly, within the law and within Department regulations. I did all that, at the same time hiring a new admin FSN.

For complicated, ineluctable reasons, mostly medical, I had to leave post a few days before the inspectors arrived. I finished all the paperwork, but I didn't feel right leaving our section to face the inspectors without an experienced hand in place. To fill this gap, I recruited Renata Coleshill, who had been the executive officer for USIS Brazil when I served there as DPAO. Renata was the best. For her efforts in Brazil she had won the Replogle Award, designating her as the admin/management employee-of-the-year for State, USAID, and USIA. She shortened a vacation in Europe and agreed to come to post, arriving just a few days after I left. She was the ideal person to be there and talk to the inspectors about these management issues, which were key to assessing public affairs performance.

*Q: Now, let me ask. The kinds of grants that were being done in this environment, were they different from the ones in the China or Burma environment?*

NEIGHBORS: We tapped into a cornucopia of funds designated by the U.S. for democracy building in the Middle East. Considering the size of the country – population around 14 million – we had a large number of International Visitor grants. As an example, through the IV program we brought a group of lady imams – imamas, I suppose (*laughs*) -- to the United States as a group to look at Muslim life in America, see how Muslims were treated, how they were integrated into society, what role they played.

We brought another group of imams (men) to the U.S. on a similar program. We also helped plan and approve programs for the USG-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation and grants to such organizations as AMIDEAST, an NGO implemented educational exchange programs. We worked closely with USAID as well. USAID gave the public affairs section almost \$200,000 a year in grants for language study. USAID had well-placed, young Jordanian contacts in the water sector, in government management and other key sectors. They felt these contacts would benefit from a better knowledge of English. So USAID would give the American Center a grant, paying for a good number of Jordanian government and NGO workers to study English at our Center.

Two hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money for the public affairs section, pocket change for USAID. They had a budget of \$250 million a year for a country of 14 million people. The USAID director was the only person at the country team meetings who did not stand up when the ambassador came in (*laughs*). It's funny because he was a friendly, mild mannered sort of guy, but he didn't stand up. I don't know if he realized what he was doing. But how could he not?

*Q: That says a lot about power relations within the embassy.*

NEIGHBORS: The USAID director and the defense attaché had all the money. They each contributed about \$250 million a year to the Jordanian budget. Without that financial support, the government would have gone bankrupt.

*Q: As you mentioned before, Steve Beecroft was ambassador while you were in Jordan. What was it like working for him?*

NEIGHBORS: I enjoyed working for him. He was a straightforward guy, knew what he wanted, tough when he needed to be. I think he liked having an experienced old, old hand in charge as PAO. I helped him with a number of important projects.

The previous PAO had recruited State's Office of the Historian to write a history of U.S.-Jordanian relations. This was to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between our two countries in 1949. Just prior to my arrival, the PAO received a draft text from Washington. He forwarded it to the palace for comment. They didn't like it. They objected strenuously to mention of King Hussein and his relationship with the Israelis, particularly in regard to his conflict with the PLO.

I showed up, and the ambassador asked me if I could work out a redrafting of the document in a way that would be acceptable to Washington and to the royal palace. The ambassador was puzzled as to why our previous PAO had shown the document to the palace to begin with (*laughs*). He believed we should have just published the text without consultation, since it did not say anything that wasn't true. But he recognized that option was no longer possible now that we had asked for comments from the palace. My job was to fix the problem.

With some effort I managed to recruit an American writer to redo the text. She was an experienced editor, a long-term resident in Amman. Most important, she had inside contacts at the palace, contacts she could use to determine what would be acceptable from the Jordanian perspective. The embassy had gotten \$50,000 from Washington to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Much of that funding was tied up in the book. If we couldn't get it cleared and published, the money would go to waste, and we would be embarrassed. Fortunately, I found a way to help rewrite the text, get clearance, and use the money effectively.

I helped also draft the text of the brochure for the ambassador's Art-in-Embassies collection. Ambassadors are persons of privilege. And one of their biggest privileges is to borrow paintings from prominent American galleries, paintings that reveal something about themselves and demonstrate the cultural cornucopia that is the United States today. Under this program ambassadors are able to display artworks in the public areas of their residences as part of their representational activities. When guests arrive for official events they can look at the paintings and see something important about America's cultural heritage.

As part of the Art-in-Embassies Program, Ambassador Beecroft had funding for a catalogue of the paintings he had selected. I wrote the Forward to the catalogue for him. All of the paintings he had chosen featured palm trees – an interesting concept. Beecroft was from the American West -- Utah and California – a place where palm trees flourish and frequently form a part of the artistic landscape. The palm is also an iconic symbol in the Middle East, representing a life-giving oasis in the center of a harsh desert world. The ambassador thus thought the palm represented a cultural tie between the U.S. and Jordan. He was, however, a bit irritated by some of the paintings he received. A number of his

original selections were not available, so he got lesser-known works by the same artists. Not as good as he had expected, but still a worthy collection, and I had great fun working with him on the catalogue.

The day-to-day work in the embassy was good. I enjoyed it. But the best part of my three-month WAE assignment was the chance to become acquainted with the issues of the Middle East, to see a part of the world I had never seen, never even thought about seeing. I found most instructive a trip across the King Hussein/Allenby Bridge, the link between Jordan and the West Bank and Israel. I saw firsthand the frustrations facing Palestinians as they try to cross the border. My wife and I were carrying American passports, and we were frustrated, too. It's 50 or 60 miles between Amman and Jerusalem. Going to Jerusalem took us three hours – not good, but tolerable. Coming back, we had an irksome six-hour journey, full of boredom and irritation.

Despite the irritation, some parts of the trip between Jordan and Israel struck me as funny. For instance, my wife and I lined up to go through Israeli immigration, and I thought, "Oh, there are not too many people in line ahead of us – only 20 or so. We'll get across quickly."

Little did I realize the truth of the situation. After several minutes, I saw that each time a new person came to the front of the line, he would raise his hand and signal. And his brother and two sisters and his wife and the 15 kids of the several families would all come up, because they were going through customs as a group. So there were actually 150 people (*laughs*) in line in front of us and not 20.

At one point as we neared the front of the line, I noticed an older woman in a wheelchair being pushed forward. The guy standing behind me touches my shoulder and whispers,

"Don't let her cut in. If you allow her to cut in, her huge family will come with her and we'll be here forever. Don't be a soft-hearted American."

*Q: So you did travel out of Amman a little bit?*

NEIGHBORS: We did a lot of traveling on weekends. We contracted a driver, a Palestinian Christian driver from Bethlehem, who took us all over the country. We went to Petra twice. We went up north to Crusader castles and to the old Roman city of Jerash, to another Roman town (now called Umm Qais) overlooking the Sea of Galilee and the Golan Heights. Just had a wonderful time.

Petra proved to be the highlight of our travels in Jordan, as it is for most foreign visitors. We got a special tour of Petra thanks to our built-in embassy contacts at the American Center of Oriental Research. Each year the Center receives large grants from the U.S. government to sponsor archeological research and teach Arabic language. The director was Dr. Barbara Porter, whose father was the ambassador to Lebanon during the 1967 Middle East War. She's an archaeologist, a brilliant and engaging person. Her associate director, Chris Tuttle, is one of the world's leading experts on the Nabataean culture of

Petra. Chris was spending part of his summer working on a dig at the Great Temple in Petra and he invited us to come see him there.

With that invitation in mind my wife, daughter, and I went to Petra in August, and Chris was doing his thing. As we approached dig, we saw a Brown University flag hanging limp in the heat. Surprise. The lead archaeologist at this site had been for many years and still was Martha Joukowsky, a professor of anthropology and archeology at Brown University. And she was there in Petra that day along with her husband, a former professor at Brown and dean emeritus.

To make things even better, my daughter is a Brown alumna. So we got this marvelous tour of the great temple site, followed by a charming chat under the eaves of a tent out of reach of the scorching sun.

My daughter told Professor Joukowsky that she had graduated from Brown and then Mary, my wife, said she and I had met at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

“Oh,” Joukowsky replied, “I did a dig for the Chinese University back about 30 years ago in Guangdong.” Another connection established. Then her husband, the dean emeritus, mentioned that he had grown up in Shanghai, his parents having fled from Bolshevik Russia. Of course we had also lived in Shanghai and there was another bond. At the end of our chat, Dr. Joukowsky said,

“We’re finished for the day. Would you like a ride back to your hotel?”

Given that we were facing a two-mile, uphill trek in 100-degree heat, we accepted forthwith. As we discovered later, no cars are allowed in Petra, with only a few exceptions. The king can drive in, so can some of the park managers, so can Martha Joukowsky. So we got a ride up and out along the little-used route that goes along the cliffs above Petra. The view was spectacular.

*Q: Did you travel anywhere else in the region besides Israel?*

NEIGHBORS: We went to Damascus for a couple of days. Damascus was wonderful. Getting there – not so much. I had a visa problem.

*Q: What happened?*

NEIGHBORS: It was an adventure. My wife Mary and I hired a car to drive up to the border. I was carrying both a diplomatic and a tourist passport. We both had tourist visas issued by the hotel where we would be staying in Damascus. The hotel sent us an electronic version that we printed out. Since Mary was not working at our embassy in Jordan, she was traveling only on her tourist passport. So we exited Jordan and I got an exit stamp in my diplomatic passport, because that’s what I used to enter Jordan. And that proved to be a problem. We arrived at the Syrian border and I showed the immigration official my tourist passport along with the printout of my tourist visa. I used the tourist

passport because I was not visiting Syria officially. The immigration official looked at my passport and said,

“Do you have another passport?”

And I said, “Yes, I have a diplomatic passport. But I’m not a diplomat in Syria. I have a tourist visa.”

“You can’t come in.”

“Well, can you call the Foreign Ministry? I’m just coming as a one-day, one-night tourist.”

“It’s a Holy Day. The Foreign Ministry’s closed. I can’t call them.” And that was that as far as he was concerned.

So I was thinking,

“What in the world am I going to do? We’ve already paid for our hotel and we have our visas and we really want to go to Damascus, we’ve driven all this way. I’ve got to do something”

Then it came to me. I should call Jennifer Rasamimanana, our PAO in waiting. She would know what to do. Jennifer had just had a baby and was still on maternity leave in Amman. More important, her husband, Amar, was Syrian. So I called up Jennifer and said, “Is there anything you can think of that we might do? We’re at a loss. Particularly since the immigration official doesn’t speak much English.”

“Why don’t I let Amar talk to him?”

Amar was a wonderful guy, a charmer. I think at one point he had been a used-car salesman. He had a gift of gab. He was a talented chef, a used-car salesman and a masseuse -- did all sorts of things and did them well.

Amar came on the line, and I explained the situation to him.

“Let me talk to the guy.”

I tried to hand the phone to the immigration officer. He refused to take it. “No, no, I can’t do that,” he said.

“Please, please. This person speaks Arabic”

With a deep sigh our officer took the phone, all the while looking stern, like I am not going to allow you people to fool me. I don’t know what Amar was saying to him, but obviously he was schmoozing. Suddenly Mr. Somber bursts into laughter. Amar must



have told some funny story to lighten the mood. I assume he then talked about how this visa issue was important for relations with the U.S. Mr. Neighbors was a high-ranking official at the embassy and he just wanted to visit Syria for two days as a tourist. Surely you could make allowances for that and blah, blah, blah.

Whatever Amar said, it worked. The official handed the phone back to me, and Amar said,

“This is what you’re going to do. You’re going to get in your car, go back to the Jordanian border, get them to put a stamp in your tourist passport, and come back here and the Syrians will let you in.”

So I went back to the Jordanian border, but I couldn’t find anyone who spoke adequate English. My situation was complicated and I just couldn’t make myself clear. Finally they called the English speaker over and I explained to him what I needed. He was skeptical. I kept arguing. Finally, he said,

“OK, get in the car.”

“What’s happening,” I thought, “Are they arresting me?” (*laughs*).

Despite my misgivings, I got in the car, and we drove off, but only for a hundred yards or so. The reason we used the car, I discovered, was that the commissioner’s office, though not far away, was on the other side of a construction site. This made walking impossible.

I got out of the car and followed my escorts into a big, imposing office. An overweight, foreboding man in uniform sat behind the desk. In the movie version of this incident he would be played by Sydney Greenstreet. I tried to explain the situation to him. He wasn’t buying it. I pulled out my trump card,

“How about if I let you talk to somebody at the U.S. embassy who can explain this to you?”

I called Amar again (*laughs*). The official still looked stern, shaking his head as Amar went through his spiel. Suddenly he laughed, handed me the phone, and said, (*laughs*).

“OK, we’ll give you a stamp, but you’ll have to pay a fine.”

I paid the fine. It wasn’t much. The Jordanians put the exit stamp in my tourist passport, and we all returned to the Syrian border.

“OK,” the Syrian official said, “you can come in, but you have to pay for a visa.” I had already purchased a visa from the hotel, but that didn’t count. I paid again – maybe \$25. Mary had to purchase a new visa as well, even though Syrian officials had not questioned her right to enter the country. At any rate, we finally gathered up our suitcases and headed for Damascus. It was worth the drachmas and the drama.

On my way back to Amman two days later, the Jordanians made me pay another temporary visa fee.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Things worked out in the end, but I did get insight into the operations of the Middle-Eastern mindset and the foibles of bureaucracy.

*Q: Isn't there a Russian novel along these lines?*

NEIGHBORS: Clearly, yes. I asked Amar afterwards what he had said to the Syrian and Jordanian officials.

“I can't remember, but obviously it worked.”

*Q: Now, you're on the Asia Pacific WAE rolls and they turn to you from time to time for EAP assignments. So each assignment must mean there's a gap or something extraordinary has happened. But, in 2010 you were asked to take on another job in NEA as the acting cultural affairs officer in Tunis. Under Ambassador Gordon Gray. How did this assignment come to your attention?*

NEIGHBORS: NEA liked what I had done in Amman, and was open to finding another assignment for me. More important, the PAO in Tunis at the time was a fellow named John Berry who had worked for me in Beijing as assistant information officer. So when NEA gave him a choice of WAE's to fill an April-May 2010 summer gap in his section, John chose me without hesitation.

*Q: And that was to fill a vacancy, right?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, they did have a vacancy. The cultural affairs officer was going on paternity leave to be with his wife and baby back in the States. I had a chance to chat with him just before he left Tunis. By coincidence, he had just gotten his next assignment: after Tunis he was headed for two-years of Chinese language training and then on to a posting in China. He briefed me on Tunisia, and I told him what to expect in China.

*Q: Now, what does a short-term cultural affairs officer do?*

NEIGHBORS: That's a good question. *(laughter)*. Well, in Tunis I helped manage the post's International Visitors program, choosing prominent young people to go to the United States on short-term introductory exchange programs. During my micro-tenure as CAO, I also coordinated embassy participation in the annual Tunis International Book Fair. Our Cultural Section manned a booth at the fair where we displayed and sold a substantial collection of American books that the U.S. government had translated and published in Arabic and French – including President Obama's *Dreams of My Father*.

The Fair was a big deal for Tunisians. Erstwhile President Ben Ali and his wife visited our booth.

One inadvertent result of our participation in the Fair: I infuriated a senior FSN and one of his henchmen. The two of them had worked over 25 years at the embassy, first with the old USIS library, and then with our new, trimmed-down research center. And each year they expected to be sent to the book fair all day every day – including Saturday and Sunday -- so they could collect lots of overtime. I decided that some other FSNs, local employees, should have an opportunity to do some overtime, too. This would give our lower ranking employees a chance to get out of the office and make new contacts. It would also save our section money, since the newer employees overtime pay would be significantly lower.

With these thoughts in mind, I blithely posted an email notifying staff of my decisions. I became the guy who kicked the scorpions' nest. Our FSN director of the Research Center replied with a scathing email, the nastiest message I ever received in my foreign-service career. He talked about how I was a disgrace to the Foreign Service. Like so many Americans, I was ignorant of local rules and customs. I didn't know what I was doing. How dare I prevent him and his colleague, the experts, from being there for the entire book fair, blah, blah, blah, and so forth.

Truth to tell, manning our booth at the book fair did not require a high-level of expertise and experience. What it did need was enthusiasm and human warmth – two traits our librarian colleagues neither possessed nor understood. Years of shrinking library budgets and ever-dwindling responsibilities had sapped them of their sensibilities and made their motto, "Service with a Sneer."

Our center in Tunis, with its disaffected employees, is an extreme example of a problem that our research centers face all round the world. After 1989 and the end of the Cold War, USIA did away with 99% of our lending libraries cum American Centers, which were usually located off-campus, outside the embassy. These old centers lent books, answered reference questions, taught English, conducted speaker programs, hosted concerts, sponsored art exhibits, and offered study space to countless high school and college students.

Having destroyed our library system, USIA created much more modest research centers and for the most part moved them into the embassy compounds – for both financial and security reasons. In a place like Tunis the embassy is like a fortress. No outsider wants to enter those grim gates. Each day only a handful of people braved the security gantlet to reach the research center. And when they did, they came face-to-face with our two scorpions. Several times when I met new Tunisian contacts, I asked them, "Why don't you go to our research center? Our librarians can help you answer your questions about American policy."

And they said, "Oh, we've been there. They're too unfriendly."

I could understand this reaction after the email I got from the director. I trust and hope he's retired by now. The Cultural Section had another FSN who'd worked at the embassy forever. In contrast to his librarian colleagues, he was friendly, a nice fellow. But he insisted that all projects had to be done exactly the way he had done them for the past 150 years. Nothing must change. He would pout if you tried to do something differently. Even though I was only in Tunis for a short period, the work environment was not good, thanks mostly to these two or three FSN malcontents who should have been retired. Fortunately, we had a number of new FSNs eager to innovate and do good work. But the older guys were standing on the shoulders of their younger colleagues, not in order to see further, but to tramp them down.

In the State system, as you know, it's difficult to fire people. In the case of Tunis, I hope that by now the ravages of time and vicissitudes of life have worked their magic, and that these guys have left the service. But who knows? They may still be in place, wreaking havoc and spreading gloom.

*Q: Aside from dealing with fussy FSNs what else did you do in Tunis?*

NEIGHBORS: The embassy always invites an American writer to participate in the international book fair. In 2010 we continued the tradition, and that presented me with problems. For the event post had recruited an American writer, Mr. X, with an impressive record as a speaker for U.S. embassies throughout Europe. But I don't believe he had ever toured Tunisia for us.

I arrived on scene near the end point of negotiations. I called Mr. X. My first reaction: this guy's going to be a pain in the neck. He had *thousands* of questions about, "Do I really have to touch money? Can't you do it all -- pay everything in advance for me? And oh, I'm going to have to bring my partner as well because I'm a little bit older and I don't do these things well, so you have to pay for somebody to come along with me." And so the amount of money was climbing. We were going to have to pay for two grantees, not one.

After several days of back and forth messages, I told Mr. X,

"I'm sorry, but we just can't meet your requirements. It's too bad, but you know, we don't have the money for this level of service."

At this point we had to scurry around and find another writer to fill the gap. Fortunately, our nice, but irritating FSN knew an American writer from North Carolina who had toured Tunisia for us as an American speaker. Though now an American citizen, she hailed from Jamaica and had written a number of well-received novels about the islands. She was an excellent writer with a large, dynamic personality – even sang part of her lectures. Just the sort of person you need to liven up a book fair. We brought her to Tunis, and she gave a number of talks for us at the universities and at the book fair, and it worked out well.

Speaker programs are the bread and butter of embassy outreach efforts. During my brief stint in Tunis, I also helped organize a fascinating seminar for students from Sub-Saharan Africa who were studying in Tunis.

*Q: How did that come about?*

NEIGHBORS: One of our Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for African Affairs had scheduled a trip to Tunis to attend a local conference. Her bio indicated that she spoke French fluently. About this same time we became aware of a large group of French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africans studying at universities in Tunis. This seemed like a great opportunity to bring our DAS together with future leaders from a number of African countries to talk about U.S. policy toward the region. So, we invited about 20 of these young scholars to the embassy for a roundtable discussion. Unfortunately, the DAS had to cancel her visit at the last minute due to an emergency back in DC. What to do? Why not a tele-press conference? The DAS agreed, and the program went forward via the ether and with great success. We had students there from Tunisia itself, as well as from all over Sub-Saharan Africa, engaging in a lively discussion with our DAS. And our DCM joined us, speaking absolutely fluent French as well. This was great fun, probably the best program I witnessed during my brief sojourn in Tunis.

Of all my WAE experiences, Tunis ranks at the bottom, at least as far as work was concerned. But as a life experience: fabulous. For those two months Mary and I lived in Carthage – yes, the Carthage of Hannibal and St. Augustine and even St. Louis, King of France who died there on his way back from the Crusades. Every evening after dinner Mary and I took a walk across the grassy meadows near the house. In 15 minutes we would pass the American Cemetery, the verdant, pine-shaded resting place of more than 10,000 American soldiers who died in Tunisia during World War II. Remember Patton and the Battle of the Kasserine Pass? That took place in central Tunisia, maybe 100 miles from the capital.

Ten more minutes of walking from the cemetery, and we stood in the midst of Punic ruins and Roman aqueducts.

*Q: What a great experience.*

NEIGHBORS: With a 40-minutes walk we could reach the Punic Port where Hannibal left to fight the Romans. A turn in a different direction took us to the Carthage historical museum, a remarkable collection of artifacts that summarizes the dense web of history that created modern Tunisia.

From the point of view of U.S. public affairs activities, however, the place was soporific. This was before Arab Spring. As far as I could figure out, the U.S. didn't care about what was happening in Tunisia, and the Tunisians didn't give a damn about the U.S. The Tunisians focused on France and Europe and Africa. They complained about their lack of a cultural identity. "We go to French schools, speak fluent French even among ourselves, but the French disdain us. We speak Arabic, but other Arabs hold us in contempt. They

are suspicious of our dialect, since it has a strange in-mix of French and Berber words. So, we're not Arabs. And, Sub-Saharan Africans don't consider us as a part of their world. We're a nation built in no-man's land."

*Q: On the WAE side of it, you belong to EAP. EAP pays you for this Tunis assignment and then turns to NEA for reimbursement. Did any of this WAE minutia come to your attention?*

NEIGHBORS: Obviously, I could have been more effective working in NEA if I spoke Arabic – or French in the case of Tunis. Being tongue-tied, so to speak, hampered my capacity to reach out to a broader range of contacts. But in the short run, experience trumped language fluency. Ambassador Beecroft in Amman particularly liked me. He appreciated the leadership I offered to the post's talented, but inexperienced public affairs section. During three months in Amman I helped the embassy prepare for an inspection, arranged for redrafting a history of Jordanian and U.S. relations, wrote the text for the ambassador's Art-in-Embassies' catalogue, and lectured on American music and education. These activities did not require linguistic skill or regional expertise. In Tunis my experience was similar, though as CAO I was ignored by the Ambassador and DCM. I think they ignored the PAO as well.

*Q: Now, the next thing on your glorious WAE schedule, I think you helped Secretary Clinton attend the ASEAN Post-Ministerial in Hanoi from July 21-23, 2010. I assume you had to get there early? How did that assignment come up, and what did it involve?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. I went to Hanoi in July and August 2010. The PAO departed post in June, leaving only a relatively green press officer and a newly arrived junior officer to hold the fort. Secretary Clinton was coming on a whirlwind visit to attend the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) Ministerial, so post needed someone with experience in handling those kinds of visits. As you recall, I did a presidential visit to Hanoi in 2006 as a WAE press wrangler. The embassy front office figured if I survived a presidential visit to Vietnam, SecState would be a cakewalk. That's how I wound up in Vietnam for a second helping. In addition to the SecState visit, we also had a major ship visit in August. The USS John McCain came to Da Nang – a port call fraught with symbolism.

Those were major events surrounding my TDY in Hanoi. I also did other quotidian press and cultural work. But mainly I focused on those two events.

*Q: How big was the secretary's delegation for the ARF?*

NEIGHBORS: I don't have the exact numbers. Such a visit always includes advance teams handling scheduling and protocol and press and security and communications. Including the advance teams, leading officials and staff traveling with the Secretary and the press, the U.S. contingent probably numbered one hundred or more. Not presidential visit numbers, but impressive nevertheless.



From the press side, we had to deal with 15 journalists traveling with Secretary, as well as regional American press coming on their own to cover the event. It was a big deal.

*Q: Now, once the ASEAN meeting got going, what were your responsibilities?*

NEIGHBORS: Herding the American press: that was my number one duty during the ARF. Fortunately, most of the Secretary's scheduled events took place in Hanoi's gargantuan convention center. The Vietnamese built this center to host the APEC summit meeting back in 2006. As you recall, APEC Hanoi forms part of my WAE heritage, so I was familiar with the convention center. For Secretary Clinton's events at the center, I helped escort the traveling press, made sure they got to the correct meetings and interviews, provided them with schedule information and press backgrounders.

These international summits are usually pre-cooked. No surprises allowed. They feature boring platitudes from the leaders and prodigious yawns from the audience. This ARF was different. Two of the big dogs barked. Prior to the meeting in 2010 China had adopted a more aggressive policy toward its maritime neighbors, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines. This question, which involved the right of passage through strategic international waters, came to a head at the ARF in Hanoi. At one of the plenary sessions Secretary Clinton spoke about the South China Sea, noting that unobstructed passage through the region by American ships and aircraft – both military and civilian --were a "core interest" of the United States. In using the term "core interest," the Secretary had stolen a term of art from the Chinese and enraged her Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi. At the end of Clinton's speech, Yang went into a tirade against the United States. "You have no business interfering in Chinese affairs," he exploded, throwing all diplomatic niceties to the wind. At this point the Japanese delegation walked out. The Filipinos and the Vietnamese were furious.

According to reports, Yang Jiechi, who had learned to fulminate during his Red Guard days, was in fine fettle, infuriating everyone. Some of this was an act, I'm sure. But it certainly was not surprising that he reacted vigorously to what he saw as un-neighborly complaints from Vietnam and Japan and unwarranted meddling by the United States. So Yang blew up, and that made big news. The media were thrilled. The ARF meetings do have significant economic and political implications for the region. These issues are hard to make interesting for a jaded journalist. But a diplomatic set-to, one that gives a public airing to animosities bubbling beneath the surface, now there's a story with legs.

*Q: (laughs) You were there in Hanoi through August 2010. So what else was on your docket after the ARF delegations left town?*

NEIGHBORS: The U.S. ambassador at that time was Mike Michalak, who had previously been our APEC ambassador [Ed: Ambassador Michalak served in Vietnam from August 2007 to February 2011]. He knew Southeast Asia quite well, had been an economic officer in the region originally, I believe. For what it's worth, I had a good impression of him during my short stint in Vietnam. I'm not sure where he came from, but it should have been Chicago. A stocky man with a powerful physique, he drank beer

and smoked cigars and didn't mince words. You knew exactly where you stood with him. The Vietnamese appreciated his candor. He had followed my old boss, Mike Marine, in the job and had a similar, no-nonsense personality – though Marine was more OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) than Michalak, more given to micro-managing.

Despite the passing years and changing alliances, our relationship with Vietnam still invokes the past and the war, though surprisingly the Vietnamese seem to like us. When you win a war, you can be magnanimous. Besides, they need us now to counterbalance the real threat from the North: China. I do remember attending a reception at the ambassador's residence. A young woman came up to me -- seeing an old fella with wrinkles and gray hair – and said, “Are you coming to Vietnam for psychic healing, to get over fighting in the Vietnam War?”

“No, I was never drafted into the military. I served in the State Department instead. I've never been to Vietnam before.” She looked disappointed.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Apropos the scars of war, I helped organize a seminar on how to mitigate the effects of Agent Orange. Ambassador Michalak participated, along with a number of American experts on hazardous chemical “remediation.” The U.S. sprayed Agent Orange – a powerful defoliant-- all over the countryside in Vietnam during the war. The idea was to kill the vegetation that provided cover for Viet Cong guerrillas and North Vietnamese forces.

After the end of the war both American and Vietnamese activists charged that Agent Orange had severely damaged the health of those exposed to the chemical, particularly those who lived or worked in areas where Agent Orange was stored. After long negotiations, the U.S. agreed to work with the Vietnamese in cleaning up the old storage sites, preventing further damage to the health of those living near the areas of highest chemical concentration. As part of the public seminar, we brought in American experts to talk with their Vietnamese counterparts about this vital issue. The ambassador played a major role in the event, forcefully explaining the U.S. position and rebutting critiques of our policy.

Though in general we are working well with the Vietnamese on this issue, we do have some points of contention with them. For example, the U.S. has never admitted that Agent Orange causes long-term illnesses. We have, however, given subsidies to some American servicemen who claim they became ill 20 to 30 years after serving in Vietnam and being exposed to Agent Orange. The USG paid these claims, but noted that scientific evidence on this issue remains inconclusive.

For their part, the Vietnamese said: “You're giving money to U.S. servicemen for being exposed to Agent Orange. Why don't you give it to us?”

To which Ambassador Michalak's replied, cleverly articulating the U.S. policy. In essence, he said, "I am delighted you are concerned about the possible effects of Agent Orange, and we would applaud you, the Vietnamese government, if you were able to take care of your soldiers as we have done in the United States. We think compensation would be a good idea."

In short, the ambassador was saying that we would help clean up the contaminated sites where Agent Orange had been stored. But, we were not going to pay retirement/medical subsidies for Vietnamese soldiers. The Government of Vietnam should do that.

Another important bilateral event took place during my WAE tour, an event that once again evoked memories of the Vietnam War. The USS John McCain, a naval destroyer, paid a port call to Da Nang. The USS John McCain is named after two U.S. admirals, the grandfather and the father of Senator John McCain III, the U.S. war hero who fought in the Vietnam War. As you can imagine, the visit of this particular ship fascinated the Vietnamese. After all, Senator McCain is the most famous of the American POWs held in Hanoi. A statue at the edge of West Lake in Hanoi still commemorates the site of McCain's capture after he was shot down by Vietnamese anti-aircraft guns in October 1967.

The U.S. John McCain arrived on Aug 10, 2010, what must have been the hottest day of the year in Da Nang. I did learn, being in Hanoi and being in Da Nang, that those two places make Washington summers seem dry and cool. One day in Hanoi the temperature reached 108 degrees with 90% humidity. The day of the USS John McCain's arrival, my embassy press-section colleagues and I had to go to the port and wait there with members of the media, who were psyched for the event. Our role was to talk to the journalists, give them information about the ship, about its crew, and what the crew's on-shore activities would be. Unfortunately, the docks in Da Nan offered no shelter from the sun. So we're standing outside for about two or three hours and it was like 102 degrees (*laughs*). We were wilting.

Despite the discomfort for us, the visit went well. One of the highlights: an interview that the local press did with, with Lt. Cmdr. Nguyen, a young officer on the John McCain, a naturalized American born in Vietnam. (I don't really remember the officer's name, but Nguyen is a good guess, giving you at least a 20% chance of being correct. It's easier to tell the story if I have a name instead of always using the sometimes ambiguous pronoun "he.") Nguyen's father had been imprisoned in 1975 because he had served as an officer in the ARVN, the South Vietnamese Army. After six or seven years in prison, he was released in the early 1980s. Despite being "re-educated," Nguyen's father remained a reprobate, a social pariah. He couldn't find work, and the family suffered. They decided to flee Vietnam, sailing surreptitiously away in a leaky old boat somewhere around 1982 or 1983. After a few harrowing adventures, the family was rescued by a U.S. warship and brought to safety. Eventually they were allowed to immigrate and take asylum in the United States. Nguyen grew up and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and became an officer on the USS John McCain. Lt. Cmdr. Nguyen's unexpected "homecoming" to Vietnam was a big deal.

*Q: Amazing.*

NEIGHBORS: Nguyen told me another story. After graduating from the Academy and becoming an officer, he went to the Pentagon on assignment. One day he was talking to a fellow naval officer who was much older than he was.

“I asked this guy what ships he had been on. We Navy types always do that. Helps us size-up our new colleagues. So this guy mentions one particular ship that sounded very familiar to me.”

I asked him, “Do you remember in July 1983 when you were cruising off the Vietnamese coast, you picked up a small group of refugees from a rickety old boat?”

And the guy said, “Yes, I was on the ship and I remember it well.”

“That was me you rescued.”

That kind of story made Da Nang a fascinating place to visit. While I was there, I got to go to China Beach, the famous China Beach where the American military went on R&R. It’s a gorgeous beach, 10, 20 miles long, white beach, beautiful. Da Nang itself is a charming city, still not overwhelmed by the motorcycles that make walking and breathing an unpleasant chore in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. It was fun to go there and to see that spectacular beach. Such a sight won’t be there long. Chinese money is pouring in, and the beach is being walled off – no public access.

*Q: Right after Hanoi, you took another WAE assignment in New Zealand from October to November of 2010. How did that come up?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, it was my fault.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: *(laughs)* In 2008 I did a nine-month stint in Washington working as Deputy Director for Public Diplomacy for EAP, the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. One of my main responsibilities at that time was to recruit and assign officers for PD jobs around the region. In this effort sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. Some jobs have a plethora of heroic bidders. Some jobs go begging. Sometimes you don’t know enough about the person who’s applying, but he looks OK on paper. At any rate, I helped get an assignment in Wellington for an officer named Mark Wenig. And he was very pleased to be going there. He had really wanted to go to Sydney, because his wife grew up in Australia. But, I couldn’t give him that job; I had a better candidate. PAO Wellington, on the other hand, had few bidders. Wenig had the required experience and a good performance record, so I helped him get the assignment. He was happy till he arrived at post and met the new ambassador.

Wenig and the new ambassador, David Huebner, did not mix -- oil and water. Ambassador Huebner, who came from the Los Angeles legal scene, was a difficult man, with a personality as bristling as his red beard – a short Napoleonic-complex kind of guy. He ran the embassy like a law firm, believed everyone was desperate to make partner, believed all employees must work any hours he wanted them to work, perform any task, and never say no. [Ed: Ambassador Huebner served from December 2009 to January 2014.]

Despite his prickly personality and unreasonable demands, the ambassador truly was the smartest guy in the room. He had many excellent ideas. The problem was this. An ambassador in Wellington does not have enough to do. Without many political and economic problems to engage him, Huebner decided to focus his white-hot gaze on public affairs. He began by writing a blog on Facebook, and a very good blog it was – informative and provocative.

Unfortunately, Huebner harbored contempt for most of the people working in the Public Affairs Section. He loathed the older FSNs. He thought they were out-of-touch with new technology. More important, he resented their resistance to some of his proposals for innovation. During his three years as ambassador, Huebner managed to force out a number of the older FSNs. In some cases, that was for the best. But in other cases, the FSNs were excellent employees. Huebner just didn't like them.

Huebner also had a disconcerting way of bypassing the chain of command. When he wanted something done, he would go directly to the FSN who would eventually be handling the issue. He just didn't bother telling me what was going on. In most cases I didn't mind doing what the ambassador wanted, but I should have been informed, especially since some of his requests had important fiscal implications for Public Affairs.

So Huebner was a difficult guy. And at the same time, PAO Wenig didn't help himself. Wenig had a stubborn streak. He frequently opposed the ambassador's initiatives, but was either unwilling or unable to make a forceful defense of his case. Often he had right – but not might – on his side. In one case, however, he made a huge mistake. I can't believe that someone with his experience would have done this. But, he did.

Here's what happened. The ambassador continually pored over the public diplomacy cables coming from Washington. He glommed in on offers of Department financial assistance for cultural and educational exchange projects. On one occasion he saw that R, the undersecretary for public affairs and public diplomacy, was offering an innovation grant to posts with creative proposals for public outreach. And the ambassador said, "We need to come up with an idea to get this money. It's \$50,000. We don't have much money for our budget. This would be fantastic." The ambassador worked closely with the Public Affairs Section to draft a great proposal. And they did just that. The idea – which originated with Huebner himself – was to identify 20 young students, college students, to be the ambassador's personal advisors. That is, he wanted students working in the field of international relations, economics, politics, to meet with him regularly and discuss New Zealand-U.S. relations, affairs in the Pacific. They would advise him about U.S. policy

and public opinion in New Zealand. As part of the proposal, the embassy would organize a large-scale public conference, to which the ambassador would invite well-known specialists from the U.S. The conference would focus on U.S.-New Zealand relations and Pacific politics in general. The ambassador's student advisors would be major participants in the conference, helping to produce a formal paper at the end. Public Affairs wrote up the proposal, following the ambassador's suggestions to the tee and sent it back to R.

R loved the proposal. Public Affairs Wellington was slated to receive \$50K. Good news. But there was a canker in the rose. R did not move with Hueberian speed. It took forever for the transfer of funds to be processed. The money did not appear in Wellington till August 1, 2010, near the end of the fiscal year.

*Q: I see a problem brewing.*

NEIGHBORS: PAO Wenig, who already had a troubled relationship with the ambassador, said in effect,

"How can we be expected to select the students, invite the speakers from New Zealand and the U.S., and organize a major conference before the end of the fiscal year in September? It's too late; we can't do it. We'll have to send the money back."

The ambassador threw a fit. I can't blame him. The embassy had an excellent proposal and the money to carry it out. There was no way Huebner was going to allow time constraints to foil him. Given the ambassador's temperament, why in the world would Wenig go against him on this issue? And given clever planning, the conference did not have to take place before the end of September. The embassy just needed to commit money for the event (say, rent a site, recruit, speakers, etc.) before October 1. The event could take place later.

At any rate, this was the last straw for the ambassador. He made an incredible fuss about the PAO back to Washington. Eventually, Wenig himself decided he had had enough. With the ambassador's concurrence and to his delight, Wenig curtailed -- found a job back in Washington or Pakistan or somewhere. He left town and that's where I came in.

When Wenig curtailed, EAP/PD in Washington told Huebner he would not be getting a replacement for another nine months. The ambassador replied,

"That's OK, we'll make it work."

But then the ambassador, being a very determined sort of individual, kept bombarding Washington with complaints and saying such things as,

"Secretary Clinton is coming here in November. This is the first visit by a Secretary of State in 35 years. We have all these other important events taking place. I need more troops."



By this time, I had used up most of my WAE hours for the year. I'd been to Tunisia and Hanoi. I only had about three weeks left. But three weeks during the Clinton visit would be extremely helpful to post. So EAP/PD gave in to Huebner and asked me to go to Wellington for that short period. I leaped at the chance. This would be my third Secretary Clinton visit, my second of 2010.

The U.S. has had a rocky relationship with the Kiwis since the Reagan Administration. U.S. warships used to make frequent port calls in New Zealand. Then, because of strong public protests, the NZ government insisted on a public promise from the U.S. that our ships would not carry nuclear weapons when visiting New Zealand. The U.S. would make no such promise. Even if we weren't carrying nuclear weapons, we would not admit we weren't. As a result, the Kiwis stopped the port calls, cut off most military cooperation with the U.S. This state of affairs went on for decades. But by 2010 our relationship was improving. Clinton was coming to sign an agreement, one that would initiate a new strategic partnership. So the Clinton visit was important. I helped arrange the press for that. It was fun.

Soon after I arrived at post, I learned more about what happened when the ambassador blew up and decided to "fire" the PAO. After he heard that the PAO wanted to return the \$50,000 unused back to Washington, he came screaming into the PAO's office and said,

"You will have five options for how to use this money. You will have them ready for me to review by tomorrow at 3:00 p.m. I will choose the best one. We're damn well going to use this money."

Next day the Public Affairs staff came into Ambassador Huebner's office. Huebner was standing by the window holding a riding crop, beating it briskly into his hand.

Perhaps he was going to thrash the lot of them if they didn't produce. Who knows?

In the event, one of their plans passed muster. The conference went forward to great acclaim. The ambassador felt vindicated, and Wenig felt fired.

And that's where I came in. I got to meet the student advisors during Secretary Clinton's visit. An impressive group. Huebner insisted they have a chance to talk to the Secretary. They did, and she enjoyed it very much.

*Q: Now, the secretary's visit was November 2-5. Did you leave shortly after that?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I left not long after that. During her three-day visit to New Zealand, the Secretary also went to Christchurch. She was only in Wellington for a day and a night. Much to my delight, her schedule did include a powhiri, the traditional welcome ceremony in which Maori warriors do the haka dance, greeting and challenging visitors from afar. At first I suspected this wouldn't be much of an event. I was wrong. It's a serious event, taken seriously by all participants. Ambassador Huebner, representing the

Secretary of State, stepped to the front of the American delegation. The lead Maori warrior flung a dart down at his feet. The ambassador had to pick up the dart to indicate he and the Secretary had come in friendship. Not as easy as it sounds. While bending down and groping for the dart, the ambassador had to remember to keep his eyes focused on the eyes of the chief. If he looked down, that would be an insult to his hosts. Legend has it that a high-ranking Japanese diplomat once arrived at the ceremony un-briefed about how to behave. He bent low and nervously looked down at the dart. The chief smacked him in the shoulder with his Maori war club.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: It's dangerous not to know how the ritual is supposed to be done. But Ambassador Huebner knew the drill, and did it well. The ceremony was impressive, even moving, despite the constant wind and the threat of rain.

I was only in Wellington for three weeks, but that was enough time to learn that New Zealand is a remarkably beautiful place, and Wellington is the windiest city in the world. The Kiwis call it Windy Welly. On average, 175 days a year the wind howls at over 30 miles an hour.

That wind was featured in some of the media coverage of Secretary Clinton's visit to New Zealand. One leading newspaper featured the Secretary's arrival at the airport in Christchurch (not as windy as Welly, but probably a close second.) She's standing behind a lectern on the tarmac with an aide holding an umbrella over her head. But the umbrella has blown inside out (*laughs*). And the Secretary's hair is flying out straight to the side with the wind blowing 40 miles an hour (*laughs*). It was a funny photo, though probably not appreciated by the Secretary.

When I first arrived in Wellington, I wondered why no one carried an umbrella, despite the frequent forecasts of rain. I soon discovered why. Umbrellas don't last more than a few hours in that wind.

In a way my foreign-service career came full circle in Wellington. To my delight, I discovered that the Deputy Chief of Mission, DCM, was Robert Clark, Jr., the son of my first PAO in Taipei when I joined the Foreign Service in 1975. At that time Bob, Jr. had already left him for college, so I never met him in Taiwan. But it was fun to meet there in Wellington and reminisce with him about his father and about my early roots in USIA.

Bob Clark was getting ready to leave Wellington soon. As with the rest of the embassy staff, he wore himself out dealing with Ambassador Huebner, a mercurial man, given to Vesuvian eruptions. Umbrage was the ambassador's middle name. He went through life looking for slights. He knew he was smarter than you, and would not rest till you agreed. He proved, by the way, that throwing strategic tantrums isn't always counterproductive. He got his way by being loud and stubborn and irritating. For example, EAP told him in no uncertain terms,

“If you fire your PAO, you won’t get a replacement for at least nine months.”

Unfortunately, that meant that the role of PAO fell on the shoulders of Adrian Pratt, a junior officer on his first assignment in the Foreign Service. Before entering the State Department, Adrian had been a journalist and the managing editor of a newspaper in the Midwest. He was no callow youth, but he did not know the ins-and-outs of being a PAO. Under the tyrannous tutelage of Ambassador Huebner was no place to learn those ins and outs.

Faced with this problem, EAP/PD Washington backed down. It wasn’t fair, they reasoned, to have an untried officer dealing with such a difficult ambassador. That’s where I came in. After my three-week stint as PAO, Washington sent Pat Corcoran to the rescue for three months. Pat is another well-traveled, grizzled veteran, a New Yorker wise in the ways of diffusing difficult situations with humor. Dave Miller followed Pat for another three months, and by that time the “real” PAO showed up. I hadn’t thought of this before, but Pat, Dave, and I all served as PAOs in Hong Kong before we retired – the HK mafia to the rescue, so to speak.

*Q: Right. Now, 2011 comes up. You’re still enrolled as an EAP bureau, but this time you’re asked to go to Riyadh.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes!

*Q: This is another round of EAP-NEA ping pong!*

NEIGHBORS: True. Though as you know, I had already done two WAE tours in the Middle East and North Africa – Amman and Tunis. WAEs have to register with a home bureau, but we’re available for service worldwide. To find good WAE assignments with other bureaus, you have to depend on your reputation and on the “kindness of contacts.” If people know you and know you’ve done well, they will recruit you from other regions to work for them. In WHA, the Western Hemisphere Affairs, the director of public diplomacy, Kay Mayfield, recruited me earlier to work in the WHA press office. I did well, and now she asked if I wanted to go to Belize, to Belmopan, as PAO for two months. At the same time my friends in NEA invited me to Riyadh (*laughs*). I thought Belize actually is a great vacation place if you’re on the seacoast. But if you’re in Belmopan, you’re sort of in a malaria-ridden jungle, living in quasi-capital city with a population of 25,000 people. My friend from Brazil days, Gary McElhiney, had spent some time in Belmopan.

“The only interesting thing in Belmopan is the Blue Frog Inn, and even that has its limits. You don’t want to go there.”

He had a point. What’s more, the public affairs work in Belmopan would not be much of a challenge for me, and my wife Mary – who usually accompanies me on these sojourns – was not up for two months in an amenities-free, vermin-filled tropical village.

What about Riyadh? Would it be any better for Mary? In the end we decided that two years in Riyadh would be a trial, but two months, an adventure. Adventures aren't always fun, but in the end you have fine stories to tell. We'd had good experiences in Amman and in Tunisia living in two very different Arab cultures. So we decided to give Saudi Arabia a try.

*Q: Now, you were filling the PAO slot, basically the senior public diplomacy officer at post.*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: What kinds of duties then fall to that PAO job?*

NEIGHBORS: As PAO, I managed the embassy outreach program to the Saudi public. The Saudi Foreign Ministry tried to make my job as difficult as possible. It seems that several leading figures in the Saudi Foreign Ministry loathed the United States for some reason or other. And as you know, once a person reaches a high position in the Saudi government, they stay there for 30 or 40 years (*laughs*). These troublemakers did their best to make our diplomatic lives difficult. Any time we wanted to hold a public event or visit a public institution, we had to ask permission from the Foreign Ministry via a formal diplomatic note. With rare exceptions, we were not allowed to visit a university campus. This put a crimp in our public diplomacy style.

Fortunately, we did have a powerful public-diplomacy weapon to combat the obstructionist attitudes of the Foreign Ministry. I speak of Ambassador Jim Smith, the affable, outgoing, vigorous former Air Force general who made public outreach a key part of his mandate in Saudi Arabia. [Ed: Ambassador Smith served from October 2009 to Sept 2013.] As an Air Force pilot Smith flew missions out of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm. After retiring from the Air Force, he worked as an executive at Raytheon Corporation. Then in 2008 he served as a foreign policy advisor to the Obama campaign, hoping to be offered a key position at the Pentagon if Obama were to win. Obama did win, and Smith got his call – but not from the White House. Secretary Clinton was on the line, saying,

“Jim, we'd like you to go to Riyadh,” (*laughs*).

Smith was shocked. He had of course served in Saudi as an Air Force pilot, so he was no stranger to the place, but he was not an Arabist, not an expert in Middle Eastern affairs. Going to Saudi Arabia was probably the last thing on his mind.

“May I think about this for a day or two?” Smith asked Secretary Clinton.

She agreed, and Smith went to work thinking – really hard. He talked to his wife, Dr. Janet Breslin-Smith, a lobbyist on Capitol Hill, quite influential in her own right. The couple decided that he would not agree to serve as ambassador to Saudi Arabia unless she could come along, unless all embassy officers were allowed to bring their families. At

this time – in early 2009 – Riyadh was a so-called “unaccompanied post.” Officers assigned to our three posts in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to bring their families. The assignments were for one year only. That meant that just as our officers got up to speed, just as they began to understand the culture and the politics, they had to leave.

The policy of excluding families had been put in place following a terrorist attack on the American military.

*Q: Oh, the Khobar Towers explosions?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, that’s right. In 1996 terrorists attacked an Aramco compound. At that time U.S. Air Force personnel were living in the Khobar Towers, a building located on the compound. I believe 19 or 20 persons were killed. As a result the State Department withdrew all accompanying family members from our missions in Saudi Arabia.

By 2009, however, the situation had changed. The danger was less acute. So Smith went back to the Secretary and said,

“If the President wants me to Riyadh, I’ll go, but I have two conditions: my wife must be allowed to come with me, and Saudi Arabia should no longer be an unaccompanied assignment.”

“It’s about time we do that,” the Secretary replied.

As you may know, all foreign embassies in Riyadh are located on an enormous diplomatic compound. Diplomats not only work there, but live there as well, in irritating isolation from the rest of the society. This isolation made Riyadh a lonely, dispiriting place for American officers without their families on hand. That’s why Ambassador Smith went to work immediately to bring back families and make the post friendly to spouses and children. Since women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, the ambassador decided that they must have 24/7-access to motor pool cars. And since he couldn’t discriminate against male officers and male spouses, he included them in his edict. In other words, anyone in the embassy who needed a car at any time could call the motor pool and get a driver. This meant having to purchase more cars, hire more drivers, and spend a lot more money. But Secretary Clinton was behind the effort, so the money was there. The scheme worked well.

I arrived on the scene after Ambassador Smith had been “on seat” for a couple of years, so the embassy already bore the signs of his smart, decisive, congenial management style. He was a Georgia boy, slow of speech but quick of wit, disarmingly sly, a hugger at heart. He liked to throw his arm around your shoulder and praise you forward to more and better accomplishments. His DCM Tom Williams was brilliant as well, but with a different style. Once the ambassador was about to give him a big bear hug, and Tom pulled back,

“I’m from New England. I don’t do hugs,” he said.

Ambassador Smith showed great interest in every aspect of the embassy's mission. He frequently roamed the halls, dropping into offices unannounced. On one occasion I was busy typing out an important email message to Washington. I looked up, and there sat the ambassador, leaning back in an easy chair at the other end of my office. He'd been there for four or five minutes, just watching, bemused that I hadn't seen him come in. He just wanted to chat, find out what I – as an experienced outsider – thought of the embassy's public affairs section.

My first priority as PAO was to work with the front office to concoct outreach activities that would effectively involve the ambassador and his wife. Every week the ambassador held a scheduling meeting that involved representatives from the Political Section, the Economic Section, the ambassador's OMS (office management specialist), and the Public Affairs Section (PAS) to go over the ambassador's and Dr. Janet's (as the ambassador's wife was affectionately known throughout the embassy) schedule for the next two or three weeks.

I soon discovered that Dr. Janet had become a secret weapon in our public diplomacy arsenal. She could do programming with Saudi women, an important subset of Saudi society that was out of reach for male officers. Beyond dispute, Saudi women are an oppressed minority and face many difficulties finding their way in a suffocating patriarchal society. Despite these challenges, some Saudi women wield impressive political and social power behind the scenes. And that's where Dr. Janet came in. She tirelessly sought out opportunities to establish contact with the distaff movers and shakers, the tough, smart women who had made their way to prominence despite the odds against them.

In late October, much to my delight, the Mary McBride Band came to Saudi Arabia as Cultural Envoys sponsored by the Department of State. This was no pick-up group of has-beens. Mary and her band have performed over the years with Blondie, Jerry Lee Lewis, LL Cool J, Patti Smith, the Indigo Girls, and many others. Mary is best known for her ballad "No One's Gonna Love You Like Me," from the soundtrack of "Brokeback Mountain."

It so happens that Ambassador Smith and Dr. Janet knew Mary McBride well from her teenage years. She was the daughter of a lobbyist who lived on Capitol Hill and worked closely with the Smiths. The concert was thus a double pleasure for the ambassador. He brought great music to the cultural desert that is Riyadh, but he also got a chance to see an old family friend.

Hosting a concert in Riyadh is a difficult task. The Saudi powers-that-be are loath to issue visas to musical groups, let alone authorize public performances. Fortunately, the ambassador's residence was a wonderful place for a musical bash, and the Foreign Ministry would tacitly permit a private event of this nature. In late October the weather permitted an outdoor concert at the side of a palm encircled pool. The temperature



hovered at a shiver-inducing 95 degrees. (That did indeed feel cool after the 110-115 temps of the previous month.)

Before describing the McBride concert, I should say something about the status of music in the Kingdom. It has no status. It's banned from public places. For instance, if you go to shopping malls in Riyadh, you get the sounds of silence -- no elevator music, no sound track running in the background of your shopping life, just the click, click of footfalls sounding across the giant malls, just the whispers of Saudi women shrouded from head to toe in their funereal black robes and veils and gloves. Sometimes these days when I'm shopping in America, bombarded by music from all sides, I long for those halcyon days of Wahabist quietude. Not really.

Nietzsche once said, "Without music, life would be a mistake." The young Saudis who attended our embassy concert were determined not to make that mistake. They loved music. They struggled -- at least in their private lives, if not in public -- against the pitiless moral precepts being fostered on them by the *mutaween*, the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. These so-called "moral policemen" call to mind the "dementors" in the Harry Potter stories, the otherworldly ghouls that suck the joy out of all they touch, spreading sorrow and despair.

As soon as our concert guests entered the "safety" of the embassy grounds, they entered a world of normalcy, normal in the sense that women could shed their suffocating black abayas and appear in everyday, modest western dress. Men and women could speak to one another without arousing suspicion. And everyone had a great time, including Mary McBride and her band, who were inspired by the enthusiasm of the audience. The young men moved to the front of the arena and danced with infectious enthusiasm. The women hung back. They did not dance. But they did sway back and forth to the rhythm of the music, clearly having a good time.

My wife talked to some of the young men, asking them what they did for fun in Riyadh. The boys laughed and said, "We go over to each other's houses and play video games, watch movies, and go to shopping malls." Another fellow added, "There's not much fun to be had in Riyadh. We're not allowed to have fun here. Thank God for Dubai."

In addition to organizing concerts, PAS worked closely with the ambassador on other public outreach programs, particularly when he made one of his monthly trips to the provinces. Wherever he went, the ambassador would take along a PAS officer and an experienced FSN to create good media coverage for the visit.

More often than not, the ambassador would choose Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) Catherine Schweitzer to fill this public affairs role on his trips. Why did he favor Catherine? From experience he knew that few officers in the embassy knew more well-connected Saudis than Catherine. Amazing, isn't it, that a female officer could penetrate misogynist Saudi society in a way that put her male colleagues in the shade? Catherine Schweitzer was a young, dynamic officer with excellent Arabic and a lot of chutzpah. Because she was an American diplomat, she was allowed to have official

contact with Saudi men. She could meet them in the course of her work, and I think the Saudi men enjoyed the chance to talk to a woman outside their own family circle. And so they had a chance to chat with her, and they found her to be a valuable contact at the American embassy. At the same time, Catherine had incredible contacts among the elite, the princess-class of Saudi society. These women, despite the outward strictures against them, wielded significant influence and power behind the scenes

Catherine did not build up her list of contacts by accident. She proceeded with a plan from her first day in country. Every time she received a business card at a meeting or a reception or a cultural event, she would send a follow-up email message the next day, explaining to her new contact -- this is what I do at the embassy; we have these programs you might be interested in; hope to see you again soon. Over a two-year period she developed this impressive web of contacts, contacts that gave her access to places where we had never programmed before. Catherine serves as a model for how a young -- or even an old -- officer should dig into a challenging job and succeed in the face of so many factors that might forecast failure to those less determined and talented.

*Q: Impressive.*

NEIGHBORS: PAS Saudi Arabia also did a lot of student advising. As you know, a myriad of Saudi students study in the United States each year, and nearly all of them are on scholarship courtesy of King Abdullah. If you're a good student -- good enough to get into a reputable U.S. university -- you can apply for a scholarship and you will get it. And if you're a female student, your brother will get a grant as well, since Saudi women are not supposed to go anywhere unaccompanied. The brother gets to go along with his sister, paid for by the kingdom. From what I'm told, many of these young women, once they arrive in the United States, quickly shed their chaperones. And their brothers are too entranced with American women to worry about their responsibilities to sis. But in theory the female student must have a male minder -- a close relative - during her sojourn abroad.

This wasn't the only circumstance in which the lack of a male chaperone caused headaches for the embassy. Frequently the ambassador and Dr. Janet invited prominent Saudi women to their residence for luncheons, dinners, seminars, receptions and so forth. If the women tried to enter the diplomatic compound on their own, they would often be stopped by the guards -- no matter that they had a formal invitation in hand, no matter that the embassy had cleared the event in advance with the Foreign Ministry, no matter that the guards had an approved guest list. In these cases the Regional Security Officer would go to the gate and try to resolve the problem. If that didn't work, then the Ambassador or Dr. Janet would have to put in an appearance. In most cases that worked.

One day, however, the system seemed to break down in unseemly fashion. The head of our medical unit, Dr. X -- I've forgotten her name -- grew up in Somalia then immigrated to the U.S., where she studied medicine and became an American citizen. She spoke native Arabic. One evening she invited her two sisters and her brother to her house on the diplomatic compound. These three siblings worked for international organizations in

Riyadh. They arrived at the entrance to the compound and showed their IDs, noting they had been invited to dinner. The guards rudely refused to allow them in.

After arguing a few minutes, the brother called Doctor X. She immediately came to the front gate, asking why her brother and sisters were not permitted to enter the compound.

“You didn’t write a diplomatic note asking for permission,” the guard said.

“We don’t have to ask permission to host small, private dinners.”

And that was true. No one in the compound was required to do that. But the guards were not inclined to give in, particularly since Dr. X was a dark-skinned woman, speaking directly to them in Arabic, not swaddled from head to toe in somber black. At this point the guards began to curse Dr. X, accusing her of being an American whore, of defiling herself. Dr. X yelled back at them, and the situation deteriorated.

The next day the embassy sent a formal complaint to the Foreign Ministry, noting the facts of the case and citing the poor behavior of the guards. The Foreign Ministry replied that Dr. X was at fault. She had cursed and abused the guards. She should be the one to apologize.

*Q: Now, in that unique Saudi environment were there any special public affairs issues that you had to deal with?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, we had a gifted press officer working at the embassy in Riyadh. MD was originally a Palestinian from Ramallah, but had long been an American citizen and U.S. civil service employee. I first met him in the late 80’s when he worked for the Bureau of International Information Programs in State as a translator and writer. By the time I arrived in Riyadh, MD had been there a year, serving on a “so-called” excursion tour from IIP. Excursion tours allow State Department civil servants (GS employees) to fill a foreign-service position abroad when the embassy cannot find a suitable Foreign Service candidate for the job in question. As a former journalist and native speaker of Arabic, MD made the perfect press attaché for Riyadh, serving as a conduit between the embassy and the Arab media. He showed special skill in securing for the ambassador public platforms where he could explain U.S. policy and promote our interests. For example, thanks to MD’s advocacy with key contacts, the ambassador was able to issue a monthly op-ed piece for publication in Saudi papers. These op-eds explained our position on vital issues and stressed the importance of the Saudi relationship to the United States. MD also demonstrated great skill in speaking to Saudi journalists on background, filling them in on issues that we were not yet ready to address publicly.

MD was an excellent press officer. No problem. He was a poor office manager and supervisor. Big problem. As chief of the Press Section, he supposedly supervised two junior American officers, bright young men looking for guidance in how to channel their impressive talent and energy. Unfortunately, MD had never, to my knowledge, supervised anyone during his 20-year career at IIP. Didn’t know the meaning of the word. He had

this paternalistic view of the people under him. They had to listen to everything he said and they couldn't criticize him and they were not allowed to speak their own minds. If they disagreed with him or said anything against him, MD would take it as a deep insult to his manhood. He would pout and plot revenge. He seemed to have a particular animus against one of our junior officers who was an Arab-American. I suppose MD expected more deference to seniority than he got from his witty, sometimes flippant younger colleague.

As section chief, I had to insert myself into the mixture. MD's tour of duty was coming to an end in another six months, but he had requested an extension to his tour-of-duty. My first inclination was to refuse his request. MD's managerial incompetence was damaging our junior officers, and I wanted to protect them

I went to the ambassador and DCM and explained the situation to them.

"I understand your problem," the ambassador said. "But, you'll just have to figure out a way to work around MD's weaknesses. He's too valuable as press officer for me to give him up."

Despite my misgivings, I had to agree with the ambassador. So I went to work on a plan by which the junior officers could continue to work part time for MD, but not under his direct authority. Their supervisor would be the PAO. I was unable to implement this plan during my short stay at post, but I did discuss it at length with the incoming PAO and with our PD desk officer back in DC. They agreed to my plan and began to implement it in the months that followed.

When you work as a WAE, you get to meet all kinds of kinky characters. Embassy Riyadh had its share of them. The most fascinating? Without a doubt, Ken Bowra – General Ken Bowra (U.S. Army, ret), to be more precise. Bowra was the managing site director of a multi-billion dollar DOD project to provide assistance to the Saudi government in strengthening their national security system. This wasn't an aid project. The Saudis were paying for it -- every penny. They have more money than God, after all. But we were providing essential expert advice.

As I said, the director of this enormous program was Ken Bowra. Ken Bowra was in his mid-sixties, about my age, a short, balding man, with rosy cheeks and a cherubic smile on his face. He always seemed cheerful and gung-ho about everything he did -- a good man to have as a colleague.

Then one day someone said to me, "You should go on the Internet and take a look at the Ken Bowra action figures."

I googled "Ken Bowra action figures," and there they were: not one, but two. One evoked Bowra's time as a Special Forces operative in Cambodia-Vietnam where he trained the Montagnards and other indigenous fighters back in the early 1970s. The other figure showed General Bowra as a leader of Desert Storm Special Forces troops. Fascinated, I

went on to read Bowra's extensive Wikipedia entry. Bowra retired as a major general. The Wiki tale carries a photo from his Cambodian days. There he stands somewhere in the jungles of Southeast Asia, fit and handsome and looking dangerous, a rakish bandana wrapped round his head, bandoliers across his chest, a machine gun cradled in his arms, surrounded by 20 Montagnard warriors, men who would just as soon shoot you as look at you. I mean scary guys. One day I was talking to Ken and I mentioned that I had done two TDY assignments in Hanoi.

"Have you been back to Vietnam recently?" I asked.

"The last time I was there, everyone was trying to kill me. So no. I haven't been back."

Bowra was a Special Forces paratrooper, a master of freefall jumping, and all sorts of other wild things. Later in his career he was a senior advisor to NATO and commander of Special Forces in South COMM (Southern Command). A distinguished officer and a gentleman. And there he was at the U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

*Q: Your WAE PAO assignment in Riyadh closed out 2011. In 2012 the bell rings again for you. The East Asia and Pacific Bureau asked you in the April/May time period to be the acting senior cultural affairs officer in Beijing. The ambassador is Gary Locke. Again, how did that request come to you?*

NEIGHBORS: Well, I kept in regular contact with the EAP PD office. Every two or three weeks I would pass by the PD office and remind them that I was available for assignment. That's how the WAE system works. If you don't pester people, they forget about you. In the case of EAP PD, I knew the office director, Karl Stoltz, from my WAE stint in Burma in 2007. He was DCM in Yangon at the time. I was also friendly with the deputy director, Jane Carpenter Rock, who had responsibility for PD assignments in the region.

In the spring of 2012 Tony Hutchinson, the senior cultural affairs officer in Beijing (in effect, the deputy PAO), decided to retire early, accepting an assignment as Episcopal priest at a church in Portland, Oregon. His unexpected retirement could hardly have come at a worse time for post. When Tony left, PAS (Public Affairs Section) Beijing had just begun preparation for its role in the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue between the United States and China. The so-called S&ED was to be the largest bilateral conference in the history of the universe, except for when the Klingons met with the Federation (*laughs*). It was, and is every year, an enormous event. More than a thousand poobahs, sherpas, factotums, and flunkies were coming as part of the U.S. delegation. Secretary Clinton would lead the delegation, accompanied by the Secretaries of Defense, Treasury, Interior, and Commerce, as well as a myriad of assistant secretaries and three- and four-star generals. Deputy assistant secretaries were a dime-a-dozen, hardly noticed during the event, except when they were asked to carry luggage or make coffee. (I speak in jest, of course.)

So that's where I came into the picture. PAS needed an experienced officer to help with the arrangements for this pharaonic affair. I showed up in Beijing in early April 2012, about a month before the opening of the S&ED. My responsibility? Lead the PAS cultural section in preparations for the Third U.S.-China Consultation on People-to-People Exchange (CPE), a corollary event to be held at the same time as the S&ED and involving a U.S. delegation of "only" 120 government officials, university deans, and NGO activists. From the government side our delegation included Secretary of State Clinton; Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Tara Sonenshine; Assistant Secretary State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Ann Stock, as well as six other deputy assistant secretaries of state and a deputy assistant secretary of education. Even this comparatively minor sidebar to the S&ED was an enormous event in itself, and I was plunged into the middle of preparations for it.

*Q: Now, if you're dealing with such large delegations, did China have the hotels to house and buses to move all these people?*

NEIGHBORS: They did. Back in the early days when I was doing these kind of visits, like 1984 for Reagan, it was much more problematic. But the Chinese have done many similar events, do them often and do them well. I can't say that everything went smoothly, but it wasn't because there weren't enough buses and hotel space to go around. It still took a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth and yelling to get what we wanted. But that's inevitable – anywhere, anytime – for an event of this scale.

*Q: Who was the counterpart Chinese organization?*

NEIGHBORS: The Ministry of Education. It was propitious for me to be the point person for embassy, since I had worked closely with the Ministry of Education during my time in Beijing. The two Chinese officials in charge of preparations for our 2012 event were old friends. If we had some problems, I could call them up and they'd say, "Oh yes, Mr. Neighbors, how are you, and yes, we can, we can do that." Much easier to be persuasive when you're dealing with people you know. I think that was an advantage for me.

*Q: What was the venue for the Consultation on People-to-People Exchange? Where was this held?*

NEIGHBORS: The Working Sessions of the CPE took place at the hotel where most of the U.S. delegation was staying. The event of most interest to the press, however, was the plenary session, presided over by Secretary of State Clinton and her counterpart, State Counselor Liu Yandong. From a protocol standpoint, Counselor Yan outranked the Secretary. Within the Chinese system state counselors are like Titans, uniquely powerful creatures hovering between the gods of the Politburo and their merely mortal Ministers. The U.S. Government does not have a comparable position. Hence the protocol gap (at least from the PRC point of view). Despite that problem, Counselor Yan was the ideal host for Secretary Clinton at the CPE. They both were the highest-ranking women in their respective governments; they both included educational, cultural, and scientific



exchanges in their portfolios; and they knew each other well from previous official encounters.

The plenary session of the CPE took place on Tiananmen Square at the new National History Museum, a monumental structure with impressive exhibition space and less than impressive exhibits. Its holdings are vast, but the curators are forced to cram the rich story of Chinese history into a rigid ideological format that emphasizes the leading role of the party and the proletariat and the peasantry.

*Q: You raised an interesting comparative point. Of the facilities that are available to you in 2012 to conduct these kinds of meetings versus 10 or 20 years earlier, are we seeing how China has matured and developed a strong infrastructure for such international meetings?*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. China is a different world from what it was 20 years ago. At the same time we should remember that China has a tradition of putting on imperial extravaganzas stretching back for millennia. Every time I work on a presidential visit, I flashback to a painting from 17<sup>th</sup> century China that depicted the Qing dynasty Emperor Kang Xi proceeding grandly through the streets and canals of Suzhou, greeted by a swarm of local officials, surrounded by ministers and servants and guards, and followed at a well-enforced distance by the lowly citizens of the city. How did the advance teams of the time produce this show without phones and faxes and Internet? I suppose fear of banishment and death made them more than inventive as problem solvers.

Chairman Mao certainly did love a parade. Granted, his parades seemed less like a celebration, more like a public whipping. Mao's China, ravaged by war and self-inflicted wounds, had lost the fiscal and managerial wherewithal to stage grand events in the traditional fashion. The Cultural Revolution cut China off from the rest of the world, destroying the sophisticated diplomatic cadre who had once managed China's international relations with great skill. The Cultural Revolution also proved to be a disaster for the Chinese economy. And the lack of money meant that the infrastructure for hosting important international events did not exist.

Because of this lack of experience and shortage of cash, Chinese officials faced staggering problems in preparing for the visit of President Reagan to Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai in 1984. And I was there in Shanghai, full of panic, standing in the middle of the muddle, trying in a small way to make things work from the American side.

Just a small example, one that I mentioned earlier in my oral history: several days before D Day, I discovered there weren't enough hotel rooms to house all the 300 traveling press coming to Shanghai with the President. I sent a cable to the White House informing the lead press person, Mark Weinberg, that some journalists would have to double up in the Jinjiang Hotel. I soon learned that Mark was too busy to read his cables. I learned this the hard way, standing on the airport tarmac waiting for the President's plane to land, listening indignantly to Mark's tirade.

“The White House press corps won’t put up with this! They will not share rooms.”

But of course they did share. And they lived to tell the tale. Probably made the tale even better than it would have been otherwise. Besides they were coming with Reagan on an historic visit to China and that made everything alright.

Nowadays, those kinds of problems don’t exist. Five-star Chinese hotels are wonderful and ubiquitous in the major cities. Internet connections are fast, mobile phone service better than in the U.S. Transportation is available and efficient – unless you get stuck in a colossal traffic jam. So, yes, China is a different country from what it was 20 years ago.

*Q: To bring this back to your WAE assignment in Beijing, what was the focus of the Consultations on People-to-People Exchange?*

These yearly consultations focus on promoting U.S.-Chinese people-to-people exchanges in four areas: 1) Education, 2) Culture, 3) Science and Technology, and 4) Women’s Issues. In 2012 the USG put particular emphasis on what we call our 100 K Strong Program. This program was a brainchild of Assistant Secretary of State for EAP Kurt Campbell. In 2009 as the Bureau prepared for President Obama’s visit to China, Campbell demanded some “deliverables,” that is, agreements that the president could sign and joint projects he could push while in Beijing.

ECA (the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs) replied in a memo to Campbell, saying in effect, “Why doesn’t the President propose that the U.S. dramatically increase the number of American students going to China to study?”

“That’s a terrific idea,” said Campbell, “and I think we ought to establish a target. Let’s say 100,000 American students should go to China to study.” He just pulled this figure out of his hat because it sounded good (*laughs*). That’s an incredibly high number of American students. We do have that many Chinese students here in the U.S., but 100 K Americans – that was probably a bridge too far.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: An inflated goal perhaps. A worthy one nevertheless. And to meet that goal EAP established an office in the State Department that would work with NGOs to raise funds and inspire young Americans to forsake Trafalgar Square and the Via Veneto for Tiananmen and the Shanghai Bund.

I don’t believe we’re anywhere near the goal of 100,000 yet, but the number of American students in China has increased dramatically. And the 100 K concept has been picked up by the Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. They have their own 100,000 Strong Program designed to encourage Americans to learn Spanish or Portuguese and go to Latin America to work and study.

As part of the CPE, we wanted to promote and publicize the importance of educational exchanges between the U.S. and China. The best opportunity to do this would be at the Plenary Session moderated by State Counselor Yan and Secretary Clinton. We – that is, PAS -- recommended that an American Fulbright student, Daniel Tedesco, speak to the Plenary for five minutes, using Chinese to talk about why he was in China and what he hoped to gain from the experience. A Chinese student who had just returned from the United States would speak in English about her experiences. This turned out to be a marvelous event. I helped Fulbrighter Dan practice his presentation in Chinese and get over his pre-speech jitters, noting some of my own experiences under similar circumstances. His speech was a hit. Secretary Clinton loved it, lingering behind to speak with the young man after the session was over.

My telling of this episode so far may seem straightforward. In the event, however, our choosing of a candidate to represent American exchange students was no simple matter – lots of politics involved. Our assistant cultural affairs officer, Jake Jacanin, knew Dan Tedesco well, knew him to be a fine student as well as an enthusiastic promoter of student exchanges. After studying in China several years, Dan had returned to graduate school in the U.S. and set up an NGO, Global Connections, that sought to encourage more American students abroad. He was a bright, energetic guy, at times pushy – a trait common to anyone who runs a successful NGO. In his pushiness, Dan managed to tread on the toes of the people who ran our 100,000 Strong China movement. They did not like him intruding on their turf, did not want him to have the honor of speaking to the Secretary of State and State Counselor Yan on behalf of American students in China (*laughs*). One Hundred K had their own candidate for speaker, but they didn't mention this till the last second, after we had picked our guy, after he had prepared and practiced his speech. They demanded that we kick Dan out of the ceremony and install someone else, someone who would, they said, better represent the spirit of 100 K. We refused. We knew our candidate would do well. Besides, we were anxious to call attention to the importance of the Fulbright Program. In the end we won the argument. We felt vindicated, too, when Dan did a brilliant job. Thank goodness he didn't bomb. (If you don't believe me, you can still see his Plenary presentation on YouTube.)

*Q: Now, these events we're talking about were scheduled May 2-5. How much in advance of these events did you arrive? I guess my question is were they already organized when you arrived or were you faced with lots of work?*

NEIGHBORS: I arrived about a month in advance. Chaos reigned – not a surprising state of affairs given the scope and complexity of the upcoming events. I was already up-to-speed having met the key public diplomacy players and read the important documents prior to leaving Washington. The Beijing PAO, Tom Skipper, was an old colleague of mine. I worked for him as a WAE back in 2007. As soon as I arrived in Beijing, Tom turned over responsibility for organizing our part of the CPE to me and ACAO Jake Jacanin. We weren't working alone, of course. The entire Cultural Affairs Section was at our disposal. And an impressive group it was.

*Q: Had this section changed since you served as PAO in 2003?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, it had -- chiefly because the PD budget had grown substantially since 2003. Tom Skipper also deserves great credit because he saw the importance of solving his personnel needs by hiring EFMs (eligible family members), the spouses of American officers assigned to our missions aboard. These spouses are often talented individuals. After all, why wouldn't a Foreign Service officer – the cream of the U.S. government crop – be married to a bright, energetic, accomplished partner. Unfortunately, these spouses are often bored with their status in Beijing. They are not allowed to work on the local economy. They languish and grow dull with lack of use.

And that's where the EFM program came to the rescue in Beijing, providing an ideal solution to two problems. Spouses found rewarding jobs, and post filled its vacancies rapidly and at greatly reduced cost. You see, opening up a new Foreign-Service position abroad takes years of whining and wheedling with Washington. But an EFM position can often be approved instantaneously – instantaneous in State Department jargon, meaning five or six months.

After I left post in 2003, Beijing PAS got approval to expand significantly its number of EFMs. And this transformed the section. For instance, we hired one brilliant spouse whose husband served in the Defense Attaché's Office. She had worked for years as a museum curator, most recently with the Smithsonian and its new local museum in Anacostia. PAO Tom Skipper gave her carte blanche to reach out and contact the art world in Beijing and all around China. She helped organize exhibits. Her extensive contacts in the fine arts community enabled us to do programming with an influential group we had seldom been able to reach in the past.

In addition to the EFMs, post had added a number of Foreign Service officers to the Cultural Affairs Section. And without these increased numbers, it would have been difficult to bring off a successful CPE.

My role in the CPE was to serve as liaison between the organizers of the conference: the Ministry of Education in Beijing and the Departments of State and Education in Washington. With D Day still a month away, the schedule for the CPE remained in flux. Everyday I would receive emails from Washington with scores of questions for our Chinese hosts. Jake Jacanin and I would then dutifully proceed to the Ministry of Education where we presented our prickliest problems. We'd say,

"These are the questions we have from Washington. How can we work these out? We disagree with you on this. We think the focus should be this way."

Or, we'd say, "We don't like this venue. This timing should be changed slightly."

Fortunately the chief decision maker on the Chinese side was an old friend, Deputy Minister of Education Zhang Xueqin. This made it easier to deal with difficult issues. We'd done this before. We trusted each other. That kind of relationship is invaluable. And that's where a wizened (and wise, I hope) WAE can make a difference.

*Q: One of the things I'm hearing here, too, is you're using emails and the Internet to communicate back with Washington. It's not like 1984 when you had to depend on cumbersome cables. So the technology is assisting you.*

NEIGHBORS: Very much so. In my whole WAE career (*laughs*) eight years of doing these assignments abroad, I may have written five cables, and that was because Washington required a response by cable. Nowadays, posts do have a classified email system, but I rarely used it. Most of my public affairs work was indeed public, the big exception being Burma, where an incautious remark might destroy the life of a close contact. But Burma was about the only place I felt so constrained.

So, in answer to your question, communications has changed (*laughs*) dramatically, in the last ten years, particularly for PAOs. Political officers, on the other hand, are still wedded to the confidential cable.

But even with political officers, they can now easily draft cables in the appropriate format from their desktops. This is certainly an improvement for the olden days when I was a callow youth and had to type out cables on an IBM Selectric typewriter, making six carbon copies that all had to be changed if I made a mistake.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Maybe people were more succinct with their words back in the old days when we had to go through such pains to correct them.

*Q: That's my experience, especially when I was working with NEA. The senior officers there were incredibly succinct in their drafting. Not an extra "the" or "and" or anything else superfluous.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, yes. Which may have made their cables more easily perusable than the convoluted bloviations that emanate from our diplomatic representational facilities today.

*Q: Now, just on the cultural side, you had a gaggle of luminaries coming for the CPE, didn't you? In addition to their participation in the CPE, did they have time for other activities? Were you involved in planning for that as well?*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, I was -- in spades. The new Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy (known in Department jargon as R) Tara Sonenshine was making her first official trip abroad, and she had chosen China for that. Tom Skipper and I worked together closely in arranging her schedule. And that's where the fun part of such visits came in for me. In early 2002, when President Bush visited Beijing, my wife helped escort First Lady Laura Bush on a tour of the Forbidden City. What made this tour memorable was that Mrs. Bush (along with my wife and scores of American aides and security personnel and Chinese hosts and security) got to see a part of the Beijing palace

not open to the hoi polloi. The private, pocket-theater that catered to an audience of one --the opera-loving Qianlong emperor -- had just been restored with U.S. funds and was open for viewing, open at least if your spouse was president of the United States.

I envied my wife this experience. So, when Under Secretary Sonenshine's staff asked about a visit to the Forbidden City, I suggested we try to wrangle an invitation to see the Qianlong theater. The Chinese agreed. Even better, I was invited to come along as well. The theater was indeed a tiny wonder, with an elaborately decorated stage and a cunningly recessed viewing platform for the Son of Heaven. Most remarkable was the finely restored mural painted on one of the walls of the theater by the Italian Jesuit lay brother, Giuseppe Castiglione, who lived and painted in Beijing from 1715-66. Castiglione introduced into China the western painterly principles of perspective, but these principles did not exactly conform to the notions of Chinese artists and connoisseurs of traditional art forms. Castiglione painted a portrait of the Qianlong Emperor using western perspective, but the Emperor didn't like the shadows on the face. Made him redo do it.

On the other hand, the Emperor did like very much the mural Castiglione painted on the wall of his one-man theater. The mural shows a beautiful garden with lotus pond as seen from inside a building through a Chinese moon window. What a great picture, you think. Then you turn around and look out the real moon window on the opposite side of the theater. It's the same scene that Castiglione painted, and serves to remind the observer -- even a hide-bound Chinese classical artist -- what a brilliant job Castiglione has done in rendering a 3D world on a 2D surface. The effect was thrilling. Just another reason why I loved and still love being a Foreign Service officer (FSO).

*Q: Well, so when, when these two events, the U.S.-China Economic Strategic Dialogue and the People to People Exchange finished, did you then clean up and leave post?*

NEIGHBORS: No, I stayed on for another month. Had a wonderful time, made even better by the fact that my son Mark Neighbors, was serving at our embassy in Beijing at the time. He joined the Department of State as an FSO in 2011, and his first post abroad was Beijing. He's in the political cone, but nearly all junior officers these days start off doing consular work. Mark was no exception. He did one year on the visa line in Beijing during which he conducted 26,000 interviews, mostly in Chinese.

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Afterwards Mark did about nine months in the Economic Section and then three months as one of two staff aides to Ambassador Gary Locke. Locke of course is the former governor of Washington and Secretary of Commerce. He and Mark have a common bond -- more precisely, a common ancestor. The ambassador is a Cantonese American. His surname is an Anglicized version of the Cantonese word "Lok" or "Luo" as pronounced in Mandarin. My wife Mary is also from Canton, with the same surname, though she spells it Lok. Lok, which means "camel" in Chinese, is a rare surname, usually found only in southern China. So you have to assume that somewhere not too far



back in time the Ambassador and Mark are related. Question? Where in the world did people living in southern China get the surname “Camel”? Must have distant ancestors from Central Asia.

At any rate, Mark enjoyed his experience in Beijing, including the consular tour, despite the 26K interviews. The stint in the ambassador’s office proved to be especially rewarding. He got to know everyone in the embassy, learned the bureaucratic ropes, and got an insider’s view of a diplomatic mission in action. He has decided – at least for the time being – to focus his career on two regions of the world, East Asia/China, and Latin America. These will be his so-called major and minor areas of concentration. He and his wife Christina just finished studying Portuguese at FSI and have moved to Rio de Janeiro. Once again, Mark will be doing consular work, not political. But he figured the chance to be in Rio for the World Cup and the Olympics was worth a couple of extra years at the consular windows.

*Q: How else did you fill up your time in Beijing after the end of CPE? Why did you stay on for another month?*

I am involved in several interesting projects. For one, I worked closely with Lea Perez, a fellow WAE who over the years had developed an expertise in management and budgetary issues. Pat Kennedy, the Under Secretary of State for Management, asked her to come to Beijing to draft a plan for how PAS Beijing should deal with a dramatic increase in funding for public diplomacy. Almost needless to say, this was a rare experience for PAS sections around the world. Money gets taken away from the PD budget, not added to. That’s the rule. But Beijing was to be the exception.

You might ask where that PD money was coming from. Well, Lea Perez had just been working with PAS Japan on how to cut funds (*laughs*). Japan’s pain was our good fortune.

Pat Kennedy had promised to give the Japan money to Beijing – several million dollars, if I remember correctly. A million dollars may not sound like much to the DOD. An army logistics specialist in Afghanistan probably carries that much around in his pocket. But for State, that’s big bucks. Pat Kennedy had only one caveat about handing over the Japan budget cuts to Beijing. He required a plan that would analyze the public diplomacy environment in China, articulate new post goals, and explain how post could use additional funding and personnel to achieve these goals. During my extra month in country I worked closely with Lea Perez to draft this plan. For the most part I worked on the China background analysis and the goals. Lea worked on the overall concept, putting our goals into a worldwide framework and dealing with the budgetary and personnel issues. She did the bulk of the work, but I provided strong support.

My other major project in Beijing involved the American Center. The Center brought to mind my own experiences in China, back in the days of yesteryear – from 2000-2003. At that time, when I served as PAO, the Center operated under severe Chinese government restrictions. We were permitted to operate off-campus, in a commercial building, but

local authorities discouraged us from using the library as a programming space. Through our well-trained research librarians (both American and local) we concentrated on supplying research materials about the U.S. to academics and government agencies and offering student advising services to the countless college students wishing to study in the U.S.

Under Tom Skipper's leadership in 2011, the post made a key decision about the Center. They decided to get rid of the bulk of their book collection – which was seldom used -- and transform the resultant open space into a facility for public events. PAS set a goal of hosting one program a day, five days a week, at the American Center. The American Center Director, junior officer Jane Chongchit, had proven herself remarkably inventive in crafting these daily programs. Some of them were just small group sessions, 10 students coming together to talk about American politics or the environment or English teaching. On other occasions we brought in traveling American speakers to discuss hot topics – U.S.-China relations, WTO negotiations and such. The Center even did movie showings. They would ask young American officers from the Consular Section, including my son, to come and give an introduction to a film, for instance. My son got to introduce "The Blues Brothers," maybe his all-time favorite film (*laughs*).

This was a revelation to me – that the American Center could become a vibrant place, one that students would want to visit, even though the Center was located quite a distance from the university sector of the city. I was impressed – first by the fortitude of the American officers who carried out this transformation, and secondly by the relaxation of Chinese government vigilance. In 2003 this could not have happened.

I wanted to see for myself how a new-fangled program would work at the American Center. I asked the director if I could give a talk there one evening.

"Sounds good," she said. "What would you talk about?"

"I have a speech in the hopper, one I've given many times over the years in China and Taiwan. I talk about the American immigrant experience and how it has affected our system of education."

"Let's do it."

James Fallows, the former White House speechwriter and essayist for The Atlantic, gave me the idea for this speech. During the 1990s he lived in Japan and was struck by the remarkable differences between America, a nation built by immigrants, and more traditional societies, like Japan and China. So I drafted a speech based on that notion, the notion that immigrants have compelled change in our society, and dramatically influenced the way we educate our children.

Thinking I might have a chance to use this lecture on this trip to China, I brought along a copy of the text – in English. I asked if the Information Section could do a translation for me, and they did. I hadn't spoken much Chinese in about 10 years, but my Chinese is

good, particularly if I have a written text. And the translators and I worked producing a Chinese text that would be straightforward, rather than too flowery, a common flaw in Chinese oratory. In the end I got a nice, readable text, gave my speech in Chinese to an audience of about 50 people. The response was gratifying, lots of questions afterwards. I do have to admit that my rusty Chinese did break down during the half-hour Q&A session. I reverted to English, which most of the audience understood quite well. Such are the ravages of time.

My participation in this program gave me another surprise. I discovered that PAS Beijing had become a leader in using electronic media to reach out to our audiences. They recruited a journalism student from Tsinghua University to attend my lecture and write a story about it. He did the story in Chinese, and we put it up on our website. We got good publicity for my speech, and the student got practice doing what journalists do. At the same time our local employees were tweeting from the back of the room about my speech and responding in return to questions from Chinese twitterdom. I also learned that Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter) is much more efficient than its American counterpart – thanks to the nature of the Chinese language. Twitter limits you to 140 letters per tweet. Weibo's limit is 140 Chinese characters. Since most Chinese "words" consist of one or two characters long, a typical Weibo tweet can run to four or five sentences. Lots more information conveyed.

These innovations surprised me. In the short 10 years since I left the embassy in China, our capacity to reach young audiences had been transformed.

*Q: This kind of public affairs is being carried out in-country, so to speak. I would assume it's directed at a different audience than say those students who went and did some graduate work in the States and then returned. Much of your audience isn't going to leave country. You're it. You're their source for info about the U.S.*

NEIGHBORS: That's right, although many of our clientele are young people hoping eventually to study in the United States. They come to the American Center to practice their English and learn more about American culture and society. Others come to take advantage of our student advising facilities, which are co-located with the American Center – just across the hall, to be precise. Another group we hope to attract are the so-called alumni, alumni in the broad sense, including not only graduates of American universities, but also participants in USG exchanges such as the International Visitors Program.

*Q: Now, how unique is the contemporary embassy setup in Beijing? I mean would such American Research Centers and whatnot exist in Tokyo and Berlin and Paris?*

NEIGHBORS: Most embassies have them. But there's a huge difference in how active they are. For instance, the one I saw in Tunisia was moribund. When the new embassy was built in Tunis, the Department administrators and designers decided to locate the public affairs auditorium and research library behind grand fortress walls. Security was the watchword. And they did build a secure facility. Problem was no one wanted to come

there. The embassy in Tunis is located in a distant suburb far from the city. It's also a pain to go through all the complicated security checks to get into the compound. "If you build it, they will come," didn't work in this case. And I believe that proved to be true in the majority of our programming facilities located on embassy grounds.

In Jordan, another place I visited as a WAE -- the research center was in the embassy. The librarians answered questions that came in by email and phone. They regularly visited libraries throughout the country providing assistance and training. But, different from Tunis, we did have an auditorium located outside the embassy, connected with the dynamic American Center. The Center, which got a big annual grant from the U.S. government, taught English to around 12,000 Jordanians every year. Most of its operating budget, however, came through tuition fees. USAID made available a big chunk of money -- \$250 K per year -- for us to give scholarships for study of English to young people they had identified as future stars in the fields environmental protection, water resource development, and democracy promotion.

The American Center in Amman did have a small auditorium where the embassy could host speaker programs and seminars and such. Not ideal, but much better than in Tunis.

In general our research centers are not nearly as vibrant or effective as the old American USIS libraries had been. But in an era of budgetary constraints, libraries are expensive to operate. They also are vulnerable to terrorist threats. That's one of the reasons why we put the new centers within the embassy walls. So it was a tradeoff: security versus openness.

*Q: Let's back up a second and talk about those events that you helped organize in Beijing during your WAE stint in 2012. I'm assuming there was a different atmosphere in working with your Chinese counterparts this time as opposed to 25 years earlier when you were in Shanghai? Not that they didn't have to check with their bosses or something like that, but did they have better English -- better understanding of what they were trying to do and less, less fear?*

NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. When I was in Shanghai from 1983-7, 80% of my meetings I conducted in Chinese. The level of English was poor, particularly when you got out into the provinces. Today the situation is completely different. All of our key contacts seem to have master's degrees or PhD's from American universities. We still spoke Chinese some of the time, but English worked just as well.

*Q: One other comparison. Did you get a chance to see the living circumstances of people nowadays as opposed to 20 years ago?*

NEIGHBORS: I would say conditions have improved dramatically for people living in big cities nowadays. To see that, you just have to visit the local food markets. Back in the mid-80s in Beijing, for example, about the only vegetable available in winter was cabbage. And these cabbages were deposited in huge piles on dusty street corners all around the city, waiting for residents of the neighborhood to pick up their allotments. You

would take your heads of cabbage home, eat some right away, and pickle the rest. The government also rationed flour. You needed coupons to buy your share. If you went to a local restaurant and ordered dumplings, you had to pay coupons for the flour used to make the dough that made the wrappers that formed the dumplings.

By 2012 the miasma of scarcity and desperation that hung over the food markets of by-gone Beijing had disappeared. What could you buy at these new venues? Mangoes and rambutans and star fruit from Southeast Asia, apples and cherries from Washington state, Kobe beef and Kalamata olives, even frozen dog meat if you so desired. It was all there, an amazing cornucopia of goods from throughout the world. And many Beijingers drive their own cars to the market these days. The Beijing bicycle gangs of yore have all but disappeared from the streets. Yes, China has changed. And mostly for the better.

For years the Chinese have luxuriated in the benefits of a growing economy. But now the problems of unimpeded growth have appeared. When I lived in Beijing from 2000-2003, the pollution was already bad. If you parked your car outside for two days, the windshield would be covered in a thick, opaque layer of dust, grime, and grit. It would be dark inside the car. You couldn't see to drive if you didn't hose off the windshield first. If you looked outside your apartment window, however, you could usually see the building across the street. That wasn't true in 2012. The air pollution has gotten even worse – like LA of the 1960s on steroids, like London of the pea-soup-fog era. This is not a minor annoyance. It's a great hazard to the health of the citizens of Beijing. In 2012 the U.S. embassy in Beijing infuriated Chinese authorities by posting on our website daily air-pollution readings (measuring the concentration of small, dangerous particulates). The government tried to shut our postings down, but Chinese netizens protested vigorously, and the government backed down. Now Beijing authorities post their own, reasonably accurate readings.

*Q: What does this environmental degradation mean to the Chinese leadership?*

NEIGHBORS: This is a perplexing problem for the Chinese leadership. How can they deal with the devastating issues of environmental pollution and water shortages while maintaining the economic growth that keeps them in power? The Mandate of Heaven – in traditional Chinese parlance – falls on the Chinese Communist Party, not because people believe in the party, but because the party has dragged the country from poverty to prosperity, from impotence to power. If environmental degradation and governmental corruption interrupt this legacy of empowerment, the Mandate may be withdrawn.

*Q: Now, in 2013 did you have another WAE assignment?*

NEIGHBORS: I did. In 2013 I worked for six weeks in Washington, for WHA, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. I served as deputy director of the press office. But that was all for the year, a considerable cutback from my usual four or five months. The “sequester” of funds mandated by Congress has had an impact on State budgets, made many offices reluctant to spend money on WAEs. They now think thrice before sending us WAEs abroad where they have to pay extra for housing and per diem and

travel. Nowadays embassies are more likely to leave a gap unfilled, or to fill it with a current State employee, one whose salary is already being paid by Washington.

*Q: What was the need in the WHA Press Office then? Again, somebody's gone?*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah, I was just filling a gap. I didn't talk about it in our earlier interviews, but I did three stints in WHA, twice as deputy director of the press office and once as the PD desk officer for Mexico/Canada. The bureau press offices are busy places – calls and questions coming in everyday from the press, hundreds of emails. The WHA press office has two Foreign Service officers and two civil servants, plus sometimes an intern in the summer. The pace is frantic when everyone is there. A two-week gap while someone takes leave is doable, but a two-month gap can be too much for those left behind.

My first task every morning: come in at 6:30 a.m. to prepare the daily press briefing for the assistant secretary and her deputies. That involved sifting through seven or eight news-compilation sites, selecting the most important articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, putting them into a standardized format, and sending them to the Assistant Secretary (and 100 or so of our government colleagues) before 8:30. I enjoyed that part of the job very much, though it was a challenge to select the articles in Spanish, depending on my knowledge of Portuguese and quick glances at Google Translate when I was deeply in doubt.

*Q: The press office is then looking at the foreign press in that bureau and you're telling the Bureau Front Office what's being said in Buenos Aires today or Lima or Quito?*

NEIGHBORS: That's part of it. We work closely with the Bureau of Public Affairs, where the State Department's Press Spokesperson hangs her hat. Our press summary tries to include significant articles about the region. Maybe two-thirds of those articles come from the American press. The idea is to flag issues that may present problems that day for our bureau leadership and that may provoke questions for the Department's spokesperson.

*Q: So the first thing is, what is the U.S. press saying about the countries in WHA?*

NEIGHBORS: Right.

*Q: And the second part of it is what is the press in WHA saying about major issues that may involve the United States.*

NEIGHBORS: Right. And at the same time, early, early each morning, my office would receive an email from the press spokesperson's office -- Jen Psaki presided in the summer of 2013. The email would be a so-called "tasker" – do this or else.

The tasker would say, in essence, these are the questions we are likely to get at the noon press briefing today. Please provide cleared press guidance (i.e., talking points for the



spokesperson) by 11:30 today. Once we received these instructions, we would spring into action. (Perhaps amble into action would be a better phrase for those of us WAE's.)

*Q: (laughs)*

NEIGHBORS: Let's say one day we're tasked by the Press Office of the Bureau of Public Affairs (PA) to provide press guidance on an issue that's hitting the front pages in Brazil. For example, the Brazilians might go bonkers over NSA wiretaps of President Rousseff. Journalists are certain to raise this issue at the noon press briefing. The spokesperson needs something to say. At that point I would send a note to the Brazil desk PD officer, asking him to coordinate a response to possible questions. I might also include the text of any similar press guidance we have produced in the past on this issue. Brazil desk officers quickly come up with a draft text, clearing it (at a minimum) with the offices of the Deputy Secretary, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the Director of Policy Planning, as well as the desks of other countries involved in the wiretapping incident. In this case, a particularly sensitive issue, we would also probably involve the National Security Council and the Justice Department in the clearance process. Once the Brazil desk has a cleared text, they would send it back to me. If the Director of the WHA press office and I agree with the text, we would then get it cleared by the WHA Front Office; i.e., by the WHA Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) responsible for Brazilian affairs, by the PD DAS, and finally by Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobs.

With 15 – 20 bright, ambitious officers contributing their two cents to each line, the results are often not pretty – or should I say not euphonious. The drafters seem to forget they're writing an answer that should be easily spoken and understood from the podium. That's not true when the press guidance comes out as a series of 150-word sentences with a shower of subordinate clauses and qualifications and parenthetical comments.

The State Department clearance process can certainly be frustrating. I once heard Tom Pickering, the dean/the paragon/the cynosure of all Foreign Service officers, speak to a group of interns at the Department. One young man, who had clearly spent much of his summer clearing cables, asked,

“Sir, why do we have such a complicated clearance process in the Department?”

“We have to speak with one voice,” Pickering replied. “We can't have one office announcing that U.S. policy is this way, and another office saying, no, it's that way. But, I have to admit,” he continued, “When I see a cable with 35 clearances on it, I want to puke.”

After I get through puking and getting clearance from our Front Office, I send the press guidance on to PA via email, indicating this is the best we can do for today and hoping they won't have further questions. At this point, about 11:30, the director and I go to the morning briefing for the press spokesperson (in this case, Jen Psaki). In this daily session all the different bureaus bring in guidance for the questions that PA posed to them early that morning. We hand paper copies of our guidance to Jen and her assistants. The

assistants make sure she has the final version of the guidance in her briefing folder. She quickly looks over the Q & A's. She might ask us to explain why we propose to answer this way. After an explanation, she might still disagree, saying, "Well, I don't think I can say that." and then you must re-emphasize why she should use our version and why the bureaucracy and the media might bite her head off if she went off message or just winged it. We also might try to warn her about other questions that could come up.

Overall, it's an interesting, frustrating procedure. Sort of like rats running in a cage on a treadmill. You must never stop. As soon as you're through briefing Jen Psaki, you get back to your office and there's a message saying, "The press bull pen (the journalists who hang out around the State press office every afternoon) wants to know – blah, blah, blah." Or, "A question was raised during the press briefing. The press spokesperson did not have an answer at the time, but promised a response by COB today. Please send us your guidance soonest." So back once more, into the breach.

*Q: This is what's called a taken question.*

NEIGHBORS: A taken question, right. A taken question means PA has promised journalists that they will get her an answer by the end of the day, and that answer will be posted on the State Department's website.

*Q: Again, it requires you to coordinate with every office in the bureau.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes. Every office in the bureau and with other bureaus and other government departments and agencies as well. If, for example, it's a question about the extradition of a known smuggler or a drug kingpin who's been arrested, then we usually follow the lead of the Department of Justice on legal issues. But we might also have to clear our press statements with the National Security Council, with DEA, and the Office of Homeland Security.

In 2009 I worked for about six weeks as director of the East Asia & Pacific (EAP) press office – another WAE gig. At that time Jim Steinberg was the Deputy Secretary of State. And he insisted that no press statement, press guidance could be released until he had personally cleared it. But he was a busy man. He often didn't get to the guidance until late in the afternoon. That was a problem. The press spokesman had to say something by 1:00 p.m. at the daily press briefing. So we would send down draft guidance that had been cleared by most everybody else in the world, but not the Deputy. We would brief the spokesman on the draft text, and he would use it for his briefing.

About 4:00 in the afternoon Steinberg's office would come back with an email, saying, "The Deputy Secretary has made the following changes to this guidance. You can't say this and this and this." Steinberg usually cut the text in half, taking out much of the substance. He seemed to think that when it came to press guidance, less was better. So despite the fact that the press spokesman had already made a statement publicly about an issue, the official press guidance released to our embassies would not include the items edited out by the deputy secretary. Of course, the deputy did not edit the official

transcripts of the spokesman. Those always went out as spoken, with all the warts and blemishes and hemmings and hawings of any adlib public performance.

*Q: Well, it says something about democracy and the U.S. government and the State Department as an organization that what's going on in the press is paid attention to in this detail and responded to.*

NEIGHBORS: I agree. Your point reminds me of an important issue I dealt with as PAO in Beijing. Every year the State Department issues a Congressionally mandated Human Rights Report on China, as well as on most other countries in the world. Responsibility for these reports falls on the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL). Because of political pressure in the United States, the report on China attracts considerable attention. DRL works closely with the embassy in Beijing to put together a thorough, painstakingly researched document. To produce the report they interview hundreds – maybe even thousands -- of Chinese government officials, academics, businessmen, and dissidents, both within China and within the immigrant community.

Every time this report comes out, the Chinese government bristles. Your report distorts the truth about China, they say. It insults the Chinese government and “hurts the feelings of the Chinese people.” (If you believe what you see in countless Chinese editorials, the Chinese people have extremely delicate sensibilities that are constantly being hurt by foreign snubs and slanders.) If you’re so high and mighty and good, the Chinese add, why don’t you do a human rights report on yourself?

In the early 2000s the Chinese Foreign Ministry decided to issue its own annual white paper report on U.S. human rights situations. We immediately acknowledged and welcomed the report. We challenged the Foreign Ministry when we thought the report was wrong, but we didn’t object to its publication. We also pointed out that the Chinese report was almost entirely based on items taken from American media sources – newspapers, television, Internet news sites. These sites are open to the American people. We can read about our own problems with racial discrimination, social inequity, corruption, and poverty. The Chinese media can cover these problems as well – as long as they’re happening in the United States. In China the media covers up government misfeasance and corruption. It suppresses dissent and paints all protesters as unpatriotic. And because these problems are often covered up, our annual human rights report on China sometimes -- but not often -- gets the facts wrong. We do make mistakes, and the Foreign Ministry pounces on those mistakes.

I think the attitude toward human rights and the human rights report reveals a major difference between the way China works and the U.S. works. In our public diplomacy programs we try to point out that a government that permits public criticism can better understand its shortcomings. And that’s the path to progress. Chinese leaders aren’t buying this. They came of age during the Cultural Revolution when public criticism did not lead to reform and compromise, but rather to denunciation, destruction, and death.

*Q: To wrap up our observations, what do you think has changed most about the job of USIA since you started?*

NEIGHBORS: When I first started with USIA – back in 1975 – individual officers had more leeway to invent their own programs and carry them out. We received funding and resources from Washington. We had to follow general USIA programming themes, but basically we were on our own. We communicated by cable or letter, rarely by telephone. No one was looking over our shoulders -- particularly, if we were at a so-called branch post outside the capital city. We weren't bombarded by hundreds of emails everyday, emails telling us what to do and think and say.

For instance, in pre-Internet days embassy press officers had a lot more latitude in answering local questions from the press. Nowadays for almost every question that comes in, we have to go back to Washington and say, "What should I say about this?" And we can't speak 'til we've received cleared guidance, and that means we're sitting on our hands for half-a-day or more while the local press goes crazy waiting for an answer to a seemingly simple question.

In the past the press officer just would have gone out and made a reasonable calculation of what he should say about, well, the murder of a drug agent in Juarez, for instance. It's fairly easy to come up with the minimal thing that you need to say about this issue. Express regret for the death of the agent. Make clear the determination of the U.S. government to work with Mexican agencies to investigate the murder and bring the perps to justice. But instead of being able to make that simple statement immediately, we have to notify Washington. Washington then ties itself in knots, spends countless man-hours, all to produce press guidance that says what common sense told us to say in the first place.

I'm not saying fast communications are always bad. In some delicate situations post must have guidance before speaking out. Sometimes embassy press officers go off the reservation because they don't fully understand U.S. policy or because they're not privy to behind-the-scenes machinations in Washington.

Marshall Green, former ambassador to Indonesia and Assistant Secretary of State for EAP back in the Kissinger era, had a similar take on these issues back in the late 1980s when I was recruiting him for a speaker program in Asia. He noted that back in the old days when an ambassador or a press spokesman made a mistake, it was believable for the White House to condemn him as an idiot who didn't know what he was talking about. An ambassador, according to Green, could even help broach an idea as a trial balloon. If this balloon were popped by sharp media tongues, then Washington could blame the ambassador for misspeaking.

Nowadays that rarely happens. Everybody knows that an ambassador is on a short leash. He seldom speaks without Washington approval. If an ambassador says something – even if it sounds stupid -- it must be the policy. At least that's what the media thinks. After all, the ambassador gets his daily instructions from Washington, doesn't he?

Another major difference between now and the halcyon days of USIA: we now have far less funding for large cultural programs. When I first started with USIA in the 1970s and 80s, the U.S. government still believed that American art, dance, and music exuded an irresistible appeal to foreign audiences, providing a soft-power projection of American strength. Even in the backward burb of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in the late 70s I helped organize an art exhibit by the renowned abstract painter Helen Frankenthaler, a concert by the gifted violinist Eudice Shapiro, and a dance performance by the incomparable Alwin Nikolais Dancers.

The Department still sponsors cultural performance and exhibits, but on a smaller scale. Somehow back in the 1990s when USIA faced dramatic budget cuts, the leadership decided that our programs must have ideological weight, must deliver hard-hitting messages that explain and advocate U.S. policy. Of course, this shift of focus only made us sound more and more like old Soviet and PRC propagandists.

USIA also disarmed itself by shutting down its libraries and English-teaching centers. Just think of it. Back in the 1970s and 80s a myriad of students learned English and studied about the U.S. in our Thomas Jefferson Center in Manila, in the Casa Thomas Jefferson in Brasilia, the American Center in New Delhi, and hundreds of other places around the world. And American Foreign Service officers led these Centers, gaining invaluable management experience, making countless friends for the United States. And we gave all that up. What a stupid thing to do. I will confess that USIA didn't have much of a choice. Congress wouldn't give us the money to keep these valuable programs in operation. Thus an amendment to my comments: what a stupid thing for Congress to do.

Over the years I have also noticed the militarization of American foreign policy. The Pentagon has a much larger role in making foreign policy and in carrying it out. In the area of public diplomacy we also feel their hot breath as they encroach upon territory once allotted to civilians. They have the money and we don't. Simple as that.

*Q: Secretary Powell used to say most army bands are bigger than the Foreign Service.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes, yes, I think that's true. And Army quartermasters carry around enough pocket change to fund a large embassy public affairs operation.

*Q: USIA has been reorganized a couple of times.*

NEIGHBORS: Yes.

*Q: Most recently in 2000.*

NEIGHBORS: Yeah.

*Q: What do you think was good or disadvantageous in those reorganizations?*

NEIGHBORS: Al Gore and Jesse Helms orchestrated the dissolution of USIA in 2000 -- payback to Helms for his vote on some forgotten issue -- at least forgotten by me. May have been support for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

As a result of their collusion, State swallowed up USIA like the Borg in Star Trek. “Resistance is futile.” The prevailing rationale in Congress was that consolidation would save money and provide for more efficient embassy operations abroad, more consistency of our public diplomacy message. In other words, USIA operations, once blended into the larger State bureaucracy would become much more dynamic and agile. Yeah, right.

In negotiating consolidation, State representatives promised not to ignore USIA precedents and experience. They promised to adopt “best practices” whenever the State way differed from the USIA way. Funny how “best practices” invariably turned out to be the State way. So much for promises.

Congress did do one very good thing in overseeing consolidation. They insisted upon creating a firewall to separate public diplomacy funding from the rest of the State budget. Without that firewall ambassadors and admin officers around the world would have long ago redirected that money from artsy-fartsy stuff in support of more “serious” foreign policy tasks such as preparing the annual bauxite report and repaving the ambassador’s driveway.

The Foreign Service Institute has a training class on how to deal with change. According to this class, it takes one-and-a-half years to get over a major organizational change. One-and-a-half years! Damnation! (When you’re as old as hell like me, you get a big bang out of saying words like “damnation.”) USIA disappeared 13 years ago, and I’m still mad.

Before I work myself into a frenzy, let me say some good things that came along with amalgamation. The melding of public diplomacy with other embassy operations enables our other State colleagues to understand us better. It has given public diplomacy officers a much greater opportunity to advance within the ranks, to become ambassadors or chiefs of mission or principal officers at consulates. Just to cite a few examples from the China scene, the consuls general now serving in Guangzhou and Shenyang, Jennifer Galt and Scott Weinhold, are public diplomacy officers. Jeff Brown, another PD colleague of mine, has served as DCM Quito and Buenos Aires. He is now the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, a position not available back in USIA days.

But when it comes to consolidation, I’m still of the every-silver-lining-has-a-dark-cloud-surrounding-it school. This promising new upward path for PD officers has a downside. We now have trouble now filling PAO positions at major posts, like Tokyo and Beijing and Manila. By the time a PD officer has the experience to be PAO in Beijing, she could also be the CG in Shanghai. PAO Beijing is good, but consul general in Shanghai better. You have a lot more autonomy than you do working as the PAO. You’re not directly under the thumb of the ambassador or the DCM. And that’s good, even if they are princes among men.



Just as an example, Beatrice Camp, an old friend of mine from her junior officer days in China, rose rapidly through the ranks of public diplomacy. Then in the early 2000's she got the chance to be consul general in Chiang Mai. She excelled there. At that point Bea would've been an outstanding PAO at any post in the world. But she got a better offer: CG Shanghai, one of the great jobs in the Foreign Service. State HR and the regional bureaus have discovered that PD officers, because of the nature of their jobs, have a lot of experience managing money and people. Political officers usually work with their own American colleagues. They don't manage many FSNs, just a handful. Like the Queen, they rarely touch money. But, a public affairs officer at a large embassy might be managing 10, 15 Americans and 50, 60, 70 FSNs. We have a lot of experience in personnel issues. We also manage budgets, supervise grants. All this experience gives PD officers a leg up when they're asked to take on the role of DCM or CG. This change brought about by consolidation has thus been good for many individual careers, but bad for public diplomacy. We're losing our PAOs to better career opportunities.

*Q: Looking back over the years, how would you sum up your career in the Foreign Service?*

NEIGHBORS: Serendipity – surprised by joy -- a word I've used several times in this narrative. Without planning it, I stumbled onto the one job that best suited my talents and my inclinations. I started out in graduate school intending to be a professor, a master of traditional Chinese literature. I soon learned that I did not have the single-mindedness, the obsessive nature necessary to be a great scholar. I was too much the dilettante to do well in the halls of academe, where specialization is a sine qua non.

Having grown up an Air Force brat, moving every one or two years to a new town and a new school with new friends and sometimes even a new language, I had grown accustomed to change. I needed it. And what better place to battle the boredom of quotidian life than in the foreign service, where every four or five years I had to wrap my tongue around a new language, where every venture into the streets became an adventure, where new cultures and cuisines added welcome spice to my daily routine.

As a PAO I had to master the basics of American society, policy, history, culture, and the arts. I had to present my knowledge of the United States to skeptical foreign audiences in a lively and persuasive manner. I gave speeches in Chinese, Portuguese, and Croatian to students and scholars and government leaders. Talked about American music and history and politics on the radio. Spoke to the press on the record and on background. Drafted op-eds on key policy issues. Wrote speeches for ambassadors, helped arrange press conferences for presidents and secretaries of state. I organized speeches, concerts, and exhibits by some of America's greatest artists: The Alvin Nikolais Dancers, the Alvin Ailey Dancers, Sweet Honey in the Rock, painter Helen Frankenthaler. Listened as Poet Laureate Richard Haas read his work and translated from English to Chinese for Alan Ginsberg. I accompanied journalists as they rode U.S. Navy helicopters and Chinese patrol boats, watched the USS John McCain sail into Da Nang harbor. Every day

provided a different slant on life, a rapidly rotating view of the world, new issues to interpret and explain.

One day when my mother was 90, she said to me,

“Lloyd, you know, my body is old and falling apart. But in my head I still feel like I’m 16.”

That’s the way I feel about being a diplomat. Despite many good reasons for cynicism and disillusion, in my heart I’m still 30, just starting out on a compelling career.

*End of interview*

For an overview of USIA as an organization, please read Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).