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

RICK RUTH

Interviewed by: Dan Whitman
Initial interview date: December 10, 2020

INTERVIEW

Q: This is Dan Whitman, recording a conversation with Rick Ruth. I'm going to turn on my back-up there. We're supposed to say that at the beginning and ending of each interview. It is December 10, 2020. Rick Ruth, how far back may we go in your life? We like to go back to the moment of birth, but maybe you don't remember that part.

Thinking back to your development, we're thinking about how you became you. What occurs to you from your early childhood or adolescence as a memory of significance? Where did you come from? Who were your people? Everything like that.

RUTH: Ah, how did I become me, separate from how did I become a State Department employee.

Q: Well, eventually—

RUTH: Well, two things. No, I'll make it three things. First of all, I had a very happy middle class American life, almost stereotypical. My mother and father were from very small towns and had what I would call bedrock American values. My father dropped out of high school in Harlan County, Kentucky before his senior year because his only pair of shoes was falling apart and his family had no money for a new pair. One of his teachers offered to buy him shoes, but that would have been charity.

He joined the navy at seventeen, six months before Pearl Harbor. Unfortunate timing, perhaps, but it got him out of Appalachia. They shipped him off to the San Diego Naval Training Center and when he saw the ocean and the beach and the palm trees and felt the sunshine, he said, "If I survive the war, I'm never going back to Kentucky. I'm staying here in San Diego."

So, my sister and I were raised in San Diego. No way to tell how it would have been different had we been raised in Harlan County. I certainly would never have surfed. My mother was from a very very tiny town in Maine—Southwest Harbor on Mt. Desert Island—where my Dad was assigned. They met at the movies [a three-reeler being shown in a vacant storefront] and fell in love at first sight. After their first meeting, they each

went back to their separate friends and said, “I just met the person I’m going to marry.” And so it was.

So, I had marvelous parents and a childhood right out of a typical 1950s television sitcom. I ran through the sprinkler on hot days, rode my bike all over the neighborhood, played backyard football, and caught tadpoles in ponds.

Q: Like “Leave It to Beaver.”

RUTH: Absolutely. I also had early exposure to international travel because my father was in the navy. When I was four and five years old, we lived in Japan. Young as I was, I have vivid memories of those two years in Japan. So, if there is a root cause of my wanderlust, I can perhaps trace it back there with some fairness.

The third thing I would say is that my parents—mostly but not exclusively my mother—introduced me to poetry at a young age. So, I ended up as a literature major in college with a mad desire to see the world and everything sort of flowed from there.

Q: Amazing. We couldn’t have made this up. So, your connection to Appalachia, was it purely background, or did you actually live in Appalachia at some point?

RUTH: I never lived there for an extended period of time, but visited a lot, because that’s where my grandparents on my father’s side lived. I’ve continued to go back there over the years, both to Tennessee and Kentucky. I’m also my father’s son in that his values became some of mine. There’s no doubt I’ve been strongly influenced by being raised by children of the Great Depression and World War II. You lived your life so that you could look anyone straight in the eye; your word was your bond; a promise given was a promise kept; you never picked on the little guy or kicked anyone when they were down; you respected women; you saluted the flag.

Q: Now, this is famous Harlan County, which has a history of its own. That’s something you must have followed or been aware of. What is your understanding of the unfortunate stuff that happened in Harlan County in—what was it, the ’70s?

RUTH: Yes, it was Bloody Harlan. That’s right. There’s an old song that says, “The fightin’est of the union men were the Harlan County boys.” I learned about it, of course, directly from my father, grandfather, and other relatives. When my father joined the navy and went off to the Naval Training Center, at first, no one would associate with him. He wasn’t making any friends. He went to his commanding officer and said—he was seventeen years old—, “Nobody will talk to me. I don’t have any friends.” His commanding officer said, “That’s because you’re from Harlan County, and they think that if they say something you don’t like, you’re going to pull a knife on them.”

Q: Now, I know it's hard to imagine, Rick, that there are people younger than you and me, but there are, and some of them may not know about Harlan County. Can you give a brief synopsis of why this is such a famous place?

RUTH: Well, Harlan County was the epicenter of the movement to unionize the coal mines, much of it in the '30s, but in the '40s as well. The coal companies got rich off of the miners and wanted to keep it that way. Coal mining was very hard, dangerous work. The coal companies were not interested in the miners unionizing because they didn't want to pay them more or have to provide them decent health coverage or benefits. Let me give you a couple of examples from my own family to show how rough it was—

One of my great uncles, my father's uncle, Charles Ruth, was known as "Chalk." He was a union picket in a place called Crummies Creek in Harlan County. He and several other men went into the company store. These general stores were called "company stores" because they were owned by the mining company. A small thing that a lot of people aren't aware of is that this was a time when the miners were not paid in money. They were not paid in U.S. dollars. They were paid in what was called "company scrip." The coal company printed its own money and minted its own coins, and you could only spend them in the company store. That was a way of locking the miners into servitude.

Well, it was a hot day. He and a couple of other miners went into the company store to buy something to drink. They didn't have company scrip. They said they wanted to pay in dollars for soda pop, or "dope," as they called it in that part of the country at that time. Heated words were exchanged. The manager of the company store had a machine gun on a tripod covered up on his counter. He pulled off the cloth that was covering it and he just mowed them down. Four union pickets were killed and five were wounded. The Harlan newspaper [The Harlan Daily Enterprise] called it the Crummies Creek Massacre.

My own father, when he was in elementary school, remembers having to hide under the desks with the teacher and the other students when there was shooting going on in the valley, or the holler, as they called it, where the one-room schoolhouse was. The union and the "scabs," or the union-busters, were shooting at each other. It was a rough time, and Harlan County was the scene of much of it, and, in many ways, the symbol of it.

Q: Yeah. I didn't realize it went all the way back to the '20s and '30s. I guess that this is part of what inspired Pete Seeger, is it not?

RUTH: Yes, it is. I used to call Pete Seeger the only communist I ever liked.

Q: Now, that could be one of the subtitles of the autobiography that this is going to turn into. So, Charles "Chalk" Ruth was what to you?

RUTH: He was my great uncle Charles. His nickname was Chalk. In fact, his headstone was paid for by the coal miners' union, and it says on it, "Greater love hath no man than this."

Q: That deserves a few seconds of silence. That's an amazing story. But you never met him, I guess, did you?

RUTH: Unfortunately, no.

Q: So, your schooling was in San Diego, is that right?

RUTH: Yes, I grew up in San Diego.

Q: And early on, you had an interest in poetry and literature. Is there anything about your high school experience that we need to know?

RUTH: I don't think so in particular. I had wonderful teachers.

Q: Were you in the debate club? Did you study Latin? Were you in sports?

RUTH: No to all. I didn't stand out in any way in high school and I refused to join anything. I gave a tip of my hat earlier to my parents for introducing me to poetry. Leaving human beings aside for the moment, my lifelong love affair has always been with words and language. So, whether it's poetry, whether it's ending up as a literature major, whether it's writing speeches as a government bureaucrat— Whatever it is, my love is words. So, having excellent teachers, happening to have a succession of marvelous English teachers, that just helped feed my passion.

Q: Do you remember when or how you learned that you had this love?

RUTH: That awareness came later. It was just part of who I was when I was young. That was what I was interested in; that was what I read. I also scribbled execrable juvenile poetry as many do when they're young.

Q: Yeah, mine was worse than yours, I promise.

RUTH: We'll never know. But I realized later on, when I became a parent, that my mother and father may have been somewhat devious—although probably innocently devious—because they didn't try to introduce me to "great" poetry. They weren't giving me Shakespeare or Tennyson or anything like that. There were a couple of different things they did. One is that they introduced me to silly poetry, like Ogden Nash. We all knew, "The cow is of the bovine ilk; one end is moo, the other milk." What kid doesn't like silly rhymes?

Q: "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker," right?

RUTH: Exactly. This was silly poetry, but it got you in the mood for rhyme and rhythm. They also introduced me to what I would call second-rate heroic poetry. It was the kind

of thing that would appeal to a young boy, like Kipling. "Oh, East is East and West and West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently, at God's great Judgement Seat—" Well, you can argue all you want over whether that's actually good poetry or not, but it has strong rhythm and powerful rhyme. It's about a topic that's manly—it's about war and adventure and bravery and these sorts of things. "What dam of lances brought thee forth to jest at the dawn with Death?" So, they weren't giving me Shakespearean sonnets, which surely would have turned me off. They were giving me good stuff appropriate for me and my age. My mother's favorite poem was *The Highwayman* by Alfred Noyes. My father had an album of poetry by Robert Service, Kiplingesque stuff like *The Cremation of Sam McGee* and *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*. I can still hear it.

Q: We think of Kipling as the Victorian British poet, but he actually did live in Vermont at one point. He had an American side to him. We forgot to talk about siblings. Were you an only child?

RUTH: I have a marvelous older sister.

Q: Okay. Anything— Does your sister join your mother in conspiring to draw you towards silly poetry?

RUTH: She was a year and a half older and much wilier. For one thing, she could always beat the crap out of me. That was salutary. She was also smart enough to use me as her cat's paw. This was, as you said, like "Leave It to Beaver." My sister would go in—we actually had a cookie jar in the kitchen—and she would ask for a cookie. If my mother said, "No, it's too close to dinner," then she would come back, find me, and say, "Mom says we can each have cookies. Go get a couple." It was that kind of thing. So, we had a normal brother-sister relationship. I'm in touch with her regularly and I adore her.

Q: That, too, is important. I think the records have been locked away in a safe by now, so you can tell us, when she beat the crap out of you, did you deserve it?

RUTH: Oh, always, I'm sure. And I'm sure little girls develop hand-eye coordination a lot quicker than boys do. At least I console myself with that belief.

Q: I can almost imagine. A year and a half. That sounds like the ideal gap between siblings. So, you went to what, a conventional high school. You realized, by the time you were finishing, that literature was your thing, and poetry in particular.

RUTH: Absolutely.

Q: Did you go straight to college at that point?

RUTH: I went to the University of California at San Diego, which is one of the loveliest campuses of the many lovely colleges in the UC system. It's beautiful there on the cliffs

over La Jolla. I went there for two years—in fact, I was in the very first class at John Muir College—and then transferred to the University of Arizona in Tucson, where I got my BA [Bachelor of Arts] in 1971 and then in 1973 an MA [Master of Arts] in Russian language and literature.

Q: Did you go there because they had better Russian courses?

RUTH: No, I went there because my girlfriend was there.

Q: Ah, well, wait, let's get to that. It wasn't across a continent, but you went to a state next door. Should we talk about— This was important enough to you to transfer colleges. Looking back, anything else to say about the importance of that friendship or relationship?

RUTH: Not in particular. At that point, I was a classic undeclared liberal arts major with a bent towards literature and anthropology and history and that kind of thing.

Q: Sounds familiar.

RUTH: I'm sure. I believe that a general liberal arts education is still the best preparation for diplomacy and the Foreign Service. So, it didn't matter to me that much whether I was at UC San Diego or the University of Arizona, but there was one important difference: the University of Arizona was out of state, and therefore I had to pay out-of-state tuition, which was money my family did not have. I mentioned earlier about my parents being children of the Depression. So, my father said, "Son, I dropped out of high school. You're already in college. Why should I pay for you to go out of state just so you can be with your girlfriend?"

So, I, being his son, completely agreed with that. It made perfect sense. I worked every summer and during the school year in different places around the campus and the neighborhood to pay for the out of state tuition. I cleaned dorms in the summer and lived in them during the school year. I also kept changing my major—having a different one each of my four undergrad years—but I ended up with Russian.

Q: Knowing that these days— I won't ask the amount that out-of-state tuition was, but I'm sure it was not ninety thousand dollars, as it is now.

RUTH: Yeah, it was closer to five hundred or six hundred dollars, but it was five hundred or six hundred dollars a semester that I didn't have handy.

Q: Incredible. So many emotions come through. I do want to talk a lot, either now or later, because you mentioned liberal arts as the best background for a diplomatic career. I absolutely agree from my own experience. But this interview will be a source for people considering the Foreign Service. Do you want to talk about that at this time, or should we reserve that for later? I have strong feelings about that.

RUTH: You're the boss.

Q: Let's go for it. You ended up studying Russian, which I'm doing now, by the way, like fifty years too late. But I get it. I've always wanted to do it.

RUTH: Better late than never, as the Russians say.

Q: Let's talk about the importance of what we used to call a general or liberal—we're not supposed to use that word anymore—arts education. It seems to me a tremendous cultural loss that we no longer take that for granted. But that's me; I want to hear you on this subject. What is it about that conventional tertiary education that we all strived for in the '50s, '60s, and '70s that was so good? It still exists, but it's just not the same. I don't know if it's lost its value or possibly increased, but it's just different. What was it about that experience that brought your mind to life and made you an able diplomat?

RUTH: Excellent questions. Several things come to mind. First of all, as I've talked about my family background, my father dropping out of high school. My mother finished high school. My mother met my father when she was still in high school. He was a sailor based nearby. Her parents wouldn't let them get married until she graduated from high school—not college, but high school. So, they waited. Immediately after she graduated high school, they got married and started life together in Corpus Christi, Texas, at the Naval Air Station there, which is where I was born.

My parents placed a tremendous premium on education. They believed firmly that education was the path to success and a good future in life. They were determined that my sister and I would have a good education. We would study, we would do our homework, and that was an important thing. That was instilled in me right from the get-go. I didn't even know it was being instilled in me until later, but it was. Education matters.

Another very important thing is that I am a vehement opponent of the notion that one goes to college to get a job. In other words, all of education is not vocational training. It is not a form of manufacturing. As you and I have seen around the world, in many countries, higher education is part of workforce management. If the government needs more doctors, more chemists, more physicists, more civil engineers, it wants the universities to crank them out.

The only purpose of learning—and I prefer the word "learning" to "education," because "education" presumes a bureaucracy and learning does not—is to understand the one single life you have here on Earth. That's what education or learning, I hope, is going to tell each person—why you're here, and what you plan to do about it. If you get a good job out of it, bravo, but that's not the point.

Q: Again, I'm moved to silence by this. As you can see from my body language, I rejoice at hearing anybody say this, but particularly you, Rick. Also, the idea that education is a bureaucracy and learning is not— I wonder if you remember the '50s and '60s as I do. We were taught to think for ourselves. That seems to no longer be the case exactly as it was. Do you remember teachers—even science teachers—saying, No, it's not the purpose of the liver, it's the function *of the liver. Did you go through that sort of thing, where teachers were very careful not to impose on us any ideological or religious beliefs? Did you go through that, as I did?*

RUTH: I remember that, indeed. I would not have thought about it that way at that time, of course, because like you, I was in the middle of it and it seemed normal, but yes. Looking back, whether it was my biology teacher or my German teacher or my English teacher, they did not seek to impose any particular paradigm, any dogma, any particular purpose to what we were doing. It was the knowledge that you were supposed to have to live an examined, educated life and be a good citizen.

Q: Well, I'm not here to judge, but I do believe that that has profoundly changed. I don't know if it's been lost entirely or partly, but that's maybe something to talk about later as we get into your development as a diplomat. I want to try to get your opinions more than mine.

RUTH: Well, to bring it back to diplomacy, which is where we began, there is a third thing. That is that I believe if you are going to be successful at foreign policy, foreign affairs, diplomacy, international engagement, call it what you will—you have to understand the material you're working with. That material is humanity. If you're going to understand humanity, then you should study the humanities. Now, I love good doctors. I've had a whole village of them to keep me alive and going. I bless them every day. When I go over a bridge, I don't want it to collapse under me. When I go up an elevator, I want it to come back down again, safe and sound. I have no issues with science and math.

But sometimes I think that if I hear the term STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math] one more time, I'm going to puke. When I look around the world, what the world keenly lacks is not civil engineers and chemists. What the world lacks is people with decency and moral conscience and character. That's what I think comes from the humanities.

Q: You keep moving me to silence. This is unusual.

RUTH: How come I could never do that at work?

Q: No one can ever do that at work. This is marvelous. I'm saying that very subjectively because I so vigorously agree. Just as a quick interjection, I did have a group of undergraduates this fall at one of the local universities—I guess you know that. They were lovely young people. They came in knowing nothing from high school. They were all declared international relations majors. I said, "How are things going in Minsk this

week?" Nobody had ever heard of Minsk or Belarus. So, I said, "If you are a thoracic surgeon going into the operating theater to do a heart transplant and you've never studied anatomy, this will not go well. You must become news junkies." I think that fifteen weeks later, some of them have.

My own reaction is that young people are marvelous, they're terrific. They want exactly what you're talking about, but they have so few role models to remind them that humanity is, in fact, the subject matter. So, thank you for that.

So, you went from UCSD to the University of Arizona. It gets a little bit warm there, in the summer. Did you ever spend a summer in Phoenix? Oh my God.

RUTH: Tucson was where it was.

Q: Sorry, Tucson. That's even more to the south.

RUTH: Our arch rivals at Arizona State, the Sun Devils, are up in Phoenix.

Q: We can edit this out of the transcript.

RUTH: I lived in Tucson for seven years. I lived there and eventually taught there. I was on the faculty for several years after I got my master's degree. I loved Tucson. It's a wonderful, beautiful, civilized place.

Q: So, the heat didn't get to you? San Diego has such a benign climate, and Tucson is such a severe one.

RUTH: It's almost a joke, of course, but it's dry heat. And after a hot day and then a heavy rain, the ground can almost steam and smell like baked bread.

Q: So, you mentioned German, at one point. Did you study German and Russian at an early stage?

RUTH: I studied German in high school. I had intended to study German in college, but this is where it's necessary for me to introduce the critical role of "serendipity" in my life. I'm going to give in to my inner pedant for a second here. I discovered, later in life, that the term "serendipity" comes from old Persian tales in *The Arabian Nights.* There were three princes of Serendip, which is an old name for Sri Lanka or Ceylon. Their gift was the ability to recognize the value of the unexpected. So, these brothers and princes would go on a caravan for one thing, say, but on the way, they would discover something else, and they realized that what they stumbled across was more valuable than what they had set out for. They were able to adjust and change their direction for that more valuable thing. The British writer Horace Walpole, upon reading these tales, coined the term "serendipity" to capture the concept.

I see a lot of my life as a series of serendipitous events. So, here I was, before computers, registering as a freshman at seventeen years old at UC San Diego. There were boxes full of paper documents on the registration table, because nobody had computers or phones in those ancient days. Somebody said, "Well, you have to take a language." UCSD, bless its heart, had a foreign language requirement. Every university should.

I said, "I want to take German."

They reached into a cardboard box and pulled out my high school transcript and said, "You had two years of high school German. You have to take second-year college German."

I said, "Whoa, no, wait, hold on. I said I *took* German. I didn't say I *learned* German." I wasn't going to start second-year college German. French was available but I couldn't take French because my older sister—you remember her, of course—excelled at French. She won county-wide honors. I wasn't going to go head-to-head with my sister in French. Spanish was also available. I wouldn't take Spanish, because I took Spanish in junior high school, and also, I was living in San Diego. It just seemed too familiar and every-day. I certainly wish I knew Spanish.

There was only one other language left; UCSD only offered four languages. The fourth language was Russian. So, the one and only reason I took Russian was because it was the only language that I thought wasn't "taken." That's how I started Russian. That's serendipity.

Q: Your story is almost identical to mine with French. I had one year of high school French, was placed in a course I couldn't possibly fail, was getting an F, had to learn it quickly, and ended up majoring in it and making a career out of it. Anyway, serendipity, I'm all for it. But I guess that by definition, we can't aim for it because it only works if it really is unexpected. So, you actually began Russian in San Diego, is that it?

RUTH: Yes.

Q: By the time you transferred, you were on to Russian and knew that this was going to be part of your—

RUTH: I was an archaeology major at that point, and Russian was my minor. I had a different major every single year at the undergraduate level, and I only switched to Russian as my major my fourth year.

Q: That's a liberal education. That's great. So, you graduated in a way where they actually employed you as junior staff, you said?

RUTH: Not yet. I went on to my master's degree. I spent two years as a graduate teaching assistant getting a master's degree, and then they hired me as an instructor—full-time faculty, but without a doctorate.

Q: And that was for Russian language?

RUTH: Russian language and the survey literature courses in translation. You know, the big humanities courses you have to take six credits of to graduate. That kind of thing. So, I taught nineteenth century Russian literature courses and beginning grammar and conversation.

I loved teaching. I didn't love all the collateral duties that came with it, but I loved pure classroom teaching. On the very first day of a class, I felt like I had a secret that the students didn't know. And that secret was that they were going to like this class.

Q: If there is reincarnation, I want to be born as you. That is exactly what I think I was meant to do, and I just kind of missed it. That is just marvelous. I have to ask, did the girlfriend remain in the picture?

RUTH: No.

Q: Okay. Doesn't matter then. So, here we are now, we've got you in Tucson. You've come to love the Arizona dry heat and I guess the stark landscape.

RUTH: And the food. Sonoran food—

Q: Was it Tex-Mex?

RUTH: No, it was Sonoran. It's similar to Tex-Mex.

Q: Oh, excuse me. That's genuinely Mexican, right?

RUTH: Oh, yeah.

Q: So, we have to talk about Trotsky in Mexico at some point, I guess. Maybe later. Okay. So, wow. Two years plus two years plus three years. Before we go on from there, what else can we remember? Let's take it back to your junior, senior years in Tucson. What else was going on in your mind and in the world at that time? Should we get approximate dates? Was this late '60s?

RUTH: That would have been '70, '71. So, it was coming off of and through the end of the Vietnam War. I had a student deferment, as far as the draft was concerned, and then when student deferments ended I was in the very first lottery in 1969. You, of course, will remember the first time they switched to the lottery.

Q: I got the bad number, but I did not serve.

RUTH: I was living in Yavapai Hall at the University of Arizona, and there was only one television, and that was in the common room. I was coming back from my job in the library.

Sidebar: I had a job in the university library that is funny to describe now because it is so dated. Libraries subscribed to numerous newspapers and displayed them hanging in racks from long wooden dowels that had slots cut in them so the newspapers would hang down. My job was to receive the newspapers, open them up, thread the pages through those slots, and hang them out in the reading room.

Anyway, I came back a little bit late, and they were in the forties or something like that. There was no list of what they had already covered. So, I figured, ah, I couldn't have been in the first thirty or forty. That wouldn't happen. So, by the time they got past the number three hundred, I was starting to sweat. But it turns out I was number 342, and they never got to me. The headline the next day in the student paper was "Happy Birthday, September 14!"

Q: I was number 13, and that's a whole other story. So, I do remember that part of the 1970s. It had to do with your birth date, right?

RUTH: That's correct. So, there was the Vietnam War, there was Nixon and Watergate. There were hippies and surfers. I grew up on the Beach Boys and surfed in southern California. If you listen to the names of the beaches the Beach Boys mention in the song "Surfin' Safari," I've been to all those beaches. I was in San Francisco in 1967 for the so-called "Summer of Love" and all that. So, I'm an old hippie.

Q: I have to say, if I saw you on a beach in California these days, I wouldn't be too surprised.

RUTH: That would be nice.

Q: So, nobody wanted to go to Vietnam, even those who believed that this was something valuable for the United States. Even those who believed in it didn't want to really do it. So, you were not disappointed, I'm sure, to be number 342, and this gave you freedom to do what?

RUTH: I got to pursue my studies and my girlfriend. Then, when I got my master's degree, the university was kind enough to offer me an instructor position. I accepted that happily. It was time for the next step, so I applied to the University of Michigan for their doctoral program in Slavic linguistics. Ann Arbor is a wonderful school there with a great program. Plus the best bacon cheeseburger I ever had was in Ann Arbor. I wasn't particularly crazy about the idea of going on for the PhD because it sounded pretty

narrow and boring, frankly. But I had academia on the brain, and that was, seemingly, the only thing you could do, just keep going up the ever-narrowing pyramid.

I'd been accepted, so that was nice. I was looking into housing and so forth. Then, another extremely important, serendipitous event took place. I was walking down the main corridor of the Modern Languages Building in Arizona one morning, which is where my office was, there was a brand-new poster on the wall. It was a lovely, multi-colored poster of the cupolas on St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square. It said, in Russian, "Travel around Russia— and get paid for it!"

Well, it was like Saul on the road to Damascus. I practically fell to my knees in a burst of radiant light, because it was clear that this could be the answer to my prayers. I had not been to Russia, and it was getting increasingly—personally and professionally—awkward to not have been there. The literature classes didn't matter. Some of the students would sleep in the back row and that sort of thing. That's fine. That's normal. But in the language classes— Arizona didn't have a language requirement at that time, so nobody took Russian unless they wanted to. I had really good, motivated students, and they would say, Is this what they say in Moscow, Mr. Ruth?

And I didn't know! I couldn't get there because I had no money of my own and couldn't manage to swing a scholarship. I applied to IREX [International Research & Exchanges Board] one summer for their graduate student program in St. Petersburg [Leningrad], and got a very nice letter from a man I came to know later, a senior vice president at IREX, turning me down. I then later ran into him when he was paying a call on Charles Wick, the director of USIA [United States Information Agency] and I was now Wick's deputy chief of staff.

I introduced myself and said, "Oh, by the way, I've heard your name before. You turned me down for a program at IREX." I regret doing that. It was petty of me and he turned a little pale, as if he saw his grant go a-glimmering.

Q: Well, it was very difficult. This was the worst part of the cold war, before '75 was the Helsinki Final Act. Before that, it really was very difficult.

RUTH: It was very difficult and again, I didn't want to go to the "Soviet Union." I wanted to go to "Russia." I wasn't interested in politics or economics or any of those things. I was interested in *Russia*, but I couldn't get there. So, here was this poster that not only said, "We'll get you there and you don't have to pay us," but, "We'll pay you to go there." Hallelujah. That's the first time I ever saw the name United States Information Agency.

Just to show you what a country mouse I was, I recall being impressed by the fact that it said United States Information Agency, Washington, DC, 20547. I thought, They have their own zip code! This is an organization so important and renowned that they have their own separate zip code. There's no street address.

Q: Now that you mention it, I do remember— What was it? 20— 20547. Absolutely. That was the address.

RUTH: I still have the poster. So, I applied for the program, took the telephone language test with a wonderful man named Juri Jelagin, who later became my colleague when I went to work with USIA. I flew out to Los Angeles for a panel interview and a security interview, and I ended up being a USIA exhibit guide starting in 1975. January.

Q: Oh. That was, in fact, a relatively good year in the cold war because of the Helsinki Final Act.

RUTH: Yes, and there was the docking of Apollo and Soyuz and some other things.

Q: Yeah. So, all sorts of other openings. I think you just said that this was the first awareness you had that there was such a thing as U.S. Information Agency. So, your first professional position beyond university was with USIA. You are a famous tribe, those who went on that program, and I know you probably remain friends with some of them. How many people did USIA send on that occasion? Were there dozens?

RUTH: There were usually two dozen guides, mostly in their twenties but sometimes in their thirties. Plus, there was the small exhibit staff, an escort officer from the embassy and a research officer. So, about two dozen.

Q: And you would spend what, a few months? A semester?

RUTH: It was about nine months. The exhibits were quite lavish, quite extensive. The one I was on, Technology for the American Home, was a two-story exhibit, and the guides, along with local specialists like electricians and so forth from the Soviet side, actually had to construct the exhibit. So, we got everything out of the containers. It traveled on containers by train. We were putting up all the beams and the panels—

Since it was about the American home, we had furniture, refrigerators, stoves. It was a lot of heavy equipment. We were the workforce that actually put it all together, as well. One of the virtues of that is that when the exhibit was packed up and traveling by train to the next city, you were free for a spell, and you got to travel around to other parts of the Soviet Union as long as you showed up at the next exhibit city on time.

Q: So, there was only one exhibit at a time in the country, and it traveled?

RUTH: Right. It would show for a month in Tashkent, and then— Just to take our specific case, it would show for a month in the city of Tashkent, then it would travel to Baku, and then it would travel to Moscow. Those were my three cities. In between, while the train was taking the exhibit between cities, you could work with the state tourism agency, Intourist, to see other places and travel around a bit.

Q: Marvelous. That reminds us of in the '50s when Khrushchev came to the U.S., and Nixon said, "This is a refrigerator," and Khrushchev didn't believe it.

RUTH: The fact that we had kitchens sort of reminded people of the earlier Nixon-Khrushchev "kitchen debate."

Q: Right. And we are told that Soviet citizens, at that time, when they were looking at the few American movies that passed the censorship test— The Soviet censors thought they were looking at the plot and the characters, but in fact, they were looking behind the characters at the background, which included refrigerators and stoves. This was one of the few pieces of information that got through. Wow. So, were you there for nine months or more?

RUTH: Nine months, and then they had a new group. There were exceptions, but nine months was generally all one could stand. It was exhausting, difficult, stressful work, and again, we're leaping ahead here, but the KGB [Committee for State Security] was on our trail. Two of my colleagues in that guide group had to be sent home because they were compromised by the KGB during the course of those nine months.

Q: Obviously intriguing, to be part of a thriller novel, kind of. Aside from that aspect of it, I take it that your meetings of Soviet citizens were fleeting. They would walk through the exhibit. Did you get to know any of them?

RUTH: Not terribly well. You had to be careful, because many weren't actually trying to be your friend, thus poisoning things for all. They were trying to suborn you, which is just an unfortunate aspect of Soviet society at that time. It was a police state.

Q: So, you were briefed to be careful and cautious, I'm sure. Aside from that, you may have met a thousand people in one day, and you knew that some of them were there to compromise you, but I'm assuming that the majority were just curious people. Can you describe what the interactions were like, knowing that they had to be limited on both sides? You didn't want to unwittingly compromise an innocent Soviet citizen and get them in trouble. So, did you spend five minutes or fifteen minutes with a person?

RUTH: It varied. But let me pull the camera back to a wider focus. Because of the information communications revolution, which now seems like something we've had all our lives—like here's my phone; I couldn't live without it— If it fell into the Potomac River, I'd dive after it. But I digress.

One of the most difficult things to convey to young people today—and I know you work with young people—is how completely the Soviet government could limit access to information to a sixth of the world's surface and a population of three hundred million people. There was no Internet. There were no computers. There were no cell phones. There was no satellite television. You couldn't make a long-distance phone call from the

Soviet Union except from a state-approved location that they monitored. You couldn't subscribe to a foreign newspaper or magazine. You couldn't send a telegram. There was nothing.

You could go down every mode of current and antiquated technology that you want to, and the Soviet government had its thumb on the throat of every kind of communication. So, here you have the conundrum—which eventually helped bring the Soviet Union down—of a highly-educated population treated like children. The Soviet Union believed in education. They believed in culture, art, education, science. They went into space before we did. They had the Bolshoi Ballet. They had libraries in every city that were free public libraries, just like we do. They believed in education.

And yet, they only believed in education in a focused, limited way. When it came to politics, to the larger world, or to religion, they treated their people like children. That creates an inherent tension that can only be resolved with some kind of political or literal violence. You can't do that to people. China will figure that out one of these days, too.

So, what we had was a situation where, again— It sounds like I'm being melodramatic, but an official U.S. government presence in a city like Tashkent or Baku in the 1970s was like having a UFO land outside Washington or outside Tucson and having aliens come out and speak to you in your language.

We were in Tashkent in January of 1975. It was a bitterly cold, icy January. I remember it well. People began lining up at midnight to get in at ten am. They came through by the thousands. They had to endure not just the cold, the dark and the seemingly endless wait, but the police—or the militiamen, as they were called—would sometimes pull a couple of police cars up, almost bumper to bumper to each other, so that people had to file through one-by-one while they were scrutinized and even berated.

They weren't supposed to be going to an American exhibit. Why would they be interested in that? The police would pull people out randomly. Why aren't you at school? Why aren't you at home? Why aren't you at work? So, sometimes you'd wait six, seven, eight hours, and then the police would pull you out of line and not even let you go in.

Forty years later I met a woman in Tashkent who had stood in that dark and cold line when she was a child with her parents. She recalled little about the exhibit but vividly recalled the seemingly endless wait in line. When I met her she was the head of a private school.

It so happened that I was sometimes on the very first stand, as they called them, that the visitors came to. It was a kitchen called the Country Kitchen. I remember the very first morning when the visitors just came pouring in through the open doors of the big sports hall [which, BTW, still stands]. They started firing questions machine gun style, very short and very quick: What about crime? What about drugs? What about racism? What

about Watergate? What about Vietnam? My first thought, not surprisingly, was, Oh, dear God, this is going to be a really long day and a really long exhibit.

But it turns out that they were not trying to be hostile, difficult, or confrontational. They were asking about things like drugs, racism, crime, Watergate, and so forth because that's what they knew about. That's what the official Soviet media talked about all the time. Official media didn't say anything good about the United States. It talked about everything bad so that's what was on their minds.

Going back to what I said about control of information, Soviet citizens, except for the occasional listener to Voice of America or Radio Liberty or so on, had no access to any independent sources of information about the United States. They only knew the official propaganda. Yet they knew the propaganda wasn't entirely true. They would say directly to us, We know our government lies to us, because it lies to us about our daily lives, about things we can see with our own eyes, like what our apartments are like, how easy it is to get a car, what kind of food there is in the stores, what it costs. If they lie about that, then of course they lie about America.

Q: I'm not at all surprised that they had those thoughts, but I'm very surprised that they would articulate those thoughts to an unknown foreigner.

RUTH: Well, that was the sense of urgency that they felt. They knew that it mattered. Again, they would say directly, once they calmed down from the initial rapid-fire questions, Look, we don't understand what America is because our government tells us certain things and not others. We don't know what is true and what's not true. We don't know how to separate the propaganda and the lies from the truth about America. On the one hand, America is always the capitalist enemy, and yet, on the other hand, America is always the standard of comparison—in science, in culture, in arts, in sports. How can America be so rich, so great, so cultured, so civilized, get to the moon, if it's an inferno of crime and drugs and racism and corruption and venality?

So, not to put any pressure on us, they would say, Okay, your job is to explain it to us. How can this be? What they were saying was, We know these questions matter. It's important for us to understand what America is, what its values are, how it works, and we can't do that based just on the information we get from our own government. We have no other sources. Here you are. You speak Russian. Explain it to us. It was quite an interesting challenge.

Q: Of course. It speaks very well of the intellect of those people, that they would have the courage and the insight to ask those questions, and not to blindly accept what propaganda they were given. Now, to a greatly different degree, I guess there was a mirror image. I was always told that the Russians were the enemy, the Russians are barbarians. We were raised on photographs of obese women driving tractors, and this was proof that this was an uncivilized country. So, it was a mirror, but in our case, we had choices.

This is remarkable. I'm guessing that from the very beginning you must have seen the profound significance of what you were doing, both horizontally and vertically. You had one on one, vertical communications, but you also met quite a number of people. This is, I think, the USIA dilemma, the vertical and the horizontal. So, you had both from the very beginning.

RUTH: Yes. I'll mention two things quickly. One is that one of the instructions we were given as part of our training proved to be extraordinarily useful to me there on the exhibit and then throughout my career. This is what they told us, Don't insult your host. Don't insult the Soviet Union. Talk about America.

The Soviet visitors expected us, I believe, because of the nature of the times, to hit back when they insulted the United States. They'd say something awful, or, America did nothing in World War II, or, You deliberately collaborated with the Nazis and let us die while we bore the burden of fighting. They'd air their grievances and complaints.

I think they expected us to push back and say, Oh, yeah? What about you? What about the evils of the Soviet Union, like your oppression of religion, and genocide, and Stalin, and— We didn't do that.

We weren't ordered not to, but we were told that it's more effective if you just say, "Okay, you want to know about crime in the United States? You want to know whether Blacks are ever lynched in the United States? You want to know why Nixon had to step down? You want to know why we lied about bombing Cambodia?" [Remember, this was the '70s.] We just had to talk about America, to tell what we knew.

When the Soviet visitors understood that we were not there to be propagandists, and that we were not there just to counterpunch, but that we were there to tell what we knew as individual human beings—so, my story was different than the story of the guide a few yards away—they understood that they were actually involved in a conversation with a human being, not a government functionary. It made a tremendous impact, both in its content and in the nature of the conversation—the meta-conversation.

Q: Tremendous wisdom. Who do you suppose, at USIA, had the wisdom to give those instructions? Do we know who that was?

RUTH: I mean, I could probably remember who ran the Exhibit Service at that time.

Q: We can look it up later. That's absolutely amazing. In the last three and a half years, it has been a matter of pushing back against some loss of credibility, but that's a current situation. This is absolutely amazing. So, you were cautious, you were open, you communicated. Did you consciously stop short of creating friendships?

RUTH: Yes. We would often be asked to meet after the exhibit closed—Can we meet you this evening? Can we see you on your off day? We were open six days a week. I always said no. That was pretty much what we were advised to do, say no. It makes for a more difficult and stressful experience, but it largely proved right. Overwhelmingly, the young people who asked to see you outside the exhibit confines were perfectly normal, but enough of them were provocateurs or KGB—

In fact, it was in Tashkent, the very first city on this exhibit, when we had to send one of the guides home. It's classic, almost. You can write it yourself without me saying anymore. He became friendly with a young woman, they slept together, and then middle-aged men in suits came to his door and said, You have given a sexually transmitted disease to this young woman. That's a crime in the Soviet Union. Now, either you tell us what we want to know, or else. And he did for a while, but the pressure became too great. He confessed to the exhibit director and was sent home immediately.

Q: I'm sure you're reading or will read soon this week's New Yorker. The story in there is about Maria Butina and her American lover. It's a fascinating story. We really don't know the whole extent of it, because while there still is something called the FSB [Federal Security Service], I'm sure they've modernized. I'm sure they have different ways of doing things.

So, lacking local friendships, there must have been a very tight esprit de coeur among the American exhibit people. Is that correct?

RUTH: One of the things I learned about on the exhibit is what in the military they call "small unit cohesion." You bonded with your fellow guides. You got to know them, or you got to hate them, but you bonded with them.

Q: Generally, I know that some of them became USIA officers, because I've met them, but what happened to most of them afterwards? I'm sure you've stayed in touch.

RUTH: Well, one of the best things about the exhibit program was that it was a pipeline for the State Department and Foreign Service of young men and women interested in the Soviet Union, which was, of course, our primary political opponent in all ways at that time. Eventually, people like John Byerly and others went to the highest ranks and became ambassadors. There was Rose Gottemoeller, who headed up Arms Control and Disarmament at the State Department and is one of our chief negotiators on arms control treaties.

It made an equal impression on the Soviet side. I went back to Tashkent forty years later. I was being taken around to different meetings by the embassy. I was now a visiting poobah, of course, having appointments with university rectors and that kind of thing. One meeting in particular stands out. I was meeting with the rector of a Tashkent university. There was an almost obligatory long table with a green felt covering. There were cut glass bowls with candy and pitchers of water.

The rector was on one side of the long table, flanked by the head of the International Department and several professors. On the opposite side were the public affairs officers and several FSNs [Foreign Service nationals]. The Uzbeks, who are unfailingly hospitable and warm, began by asking, Well, how do you like Tashkent? Have you been here before?

I said, "Well, yes, I have been here before, but it was forty years ago."

That got their attention. I mentioned the exhibit, and a senior professor, who was at the end of the table, sat up a little bit straighter and raised his hand, looked at me and pointed his finger at me, and said, "I know you." There was silence. Dan, I'm telling you, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. He said, "You were on the exhibit. You were on the very first stand."

I said, "Yes, I was."

He said, "You were in a kitchen."

I said, "Yes, that's right."

He said, "You and I met later. I happened to run into you. I saw you with some friends at the downtown central bazaar in Tashkent, and you were kind enough to stop and talk to me for a while. You were the first American I ever met, and I remember you." It was almost an out-of-body experience.

When the meeting was over, he and I shook hands and each of us said, "*Do vstrechi*" (Till we meet again).

In an act of unparalleled thoughtfulness, A/S Marie Royce, for my retirement ceremony, arranged for this professor to make a videotape conveying his regards. It was amazing.

Q: Softball question: will social media ever replace this type of experience?

RUTH: Of course not.

Q: Thank you.

RUTH: Nothing will ever replace human authenticity.

Q: Thank you. Did you ever meet George F. Kennedy? It seems he had the same feeling about that country that you did. He hated the government and loved the country. No? Okay. Did you ever meet Hans Tuch, the recently deceased—

RUTH: Oh, Tom Tuch, yes, I had the good fortune, on a number of occasions, of being able to talk to Tom.

Q: He was in Moscow, but I forget when. I think it was after you. It was maybe in the '80s or '90s. Of course, his story about post-World War II Germany is a little bit analogous to yours.

RUTH: With McCarthy and everything, yes.

Q: It's not a perfect match. Yeah, McCarthy. You know that story, I guess, of the right-winger who was looking at his library.

RUTH: Roy Cohn and the libraries, yes. He was referred to by some as a "junketeering gumshoe."

Q: Well, I mean— We'll tell the story later. You may have read one of the last articles that he published. This is remarkable. I'm sure that you must have had a sense, during these nine months, that this was a really valuable experience, and very applicable to a future career. Did you get it, right from the very beginning?

RUTH: Not exactly. This goes back to something I said earlier. I wasn't there to be in the Soviet Union. I was there to be in Russia. I was a Russian major, and I wasn't the least bit interested in international politics or comparative foreign policy or economics or any of that stuff. I wanted to speak Russian well. I wanted to immerse myself in Russian culture. Now, of course, it was the Soviet Union, so I was in Tashkent and Baku. Luckily, I was also able to go to Moscow.

One of the things that I was most interested in was my language ability. What an amazing opportunity to practice one's foreign language ability. As you well know, and as I've learned from teaching and being on both sides of the classroom, the single biggest obstacle that most language students face is they become obsessed with correctness. They want to get the irregular genitive plural correct so that they don't get graded down for making a mistake. But when you're in a situation where you are absolutely compelled to communicate, where somebody is asking you, "Please, tell me about America," and there's no other language you have recourse to, not a single word of English will avail you, you have to speak Russian. You just do it. That's the biggest language hurdle to overcome. For me, that was the first and most important thing.

Q: That's marvelous. As I struggle with the language now, I notice that Russians are perfectly aware of the genitive plural and the locative and all of this. They may not even know all the names of the cases, but they do it, as any native language speaker does, sort of unconsciously. However, they seem to be very tolerant of foreigners struggling with their language. Was that your experience?

RUTH: Yes. The Russians love it when you try. You could try at any level of Russian, and they would be helping you. They were always complimentary. Even if you made a thousand grammatical errors, they knew what you were saying. That was the main thing, to communicate.

Q: Partly because they're such nice people, and partly because they do not speak any other language themselves. So, they have to be tolerant in order for communication to take place. What a marvelous nine months it must have been. I'm sure you've stayed in touch with some of those. Were you with a contingent that remained the same, or were there in and out replacements coming in?

RUTH: There was a single contingent of guides for every three cities. Each exhibit went to six cities, but they swapped the guides out at the halfway point because it was so demanding.

Q: Okay. So, I'm sure that you became lifelong friends with some of them, at least. As you got to the end of the nine months, what were your thoughts about how to convert this into a future life, either academically or otherwise?

RUTH: Going through Washington at the start of the exhibit for a couple of weeks of "training" and then for processing out on the way back, I encountered what was for me, at that point, a hitherto unknown creature: the Foreign Service officer. I had never heard of them, knew nothing about them, and I had never crossed paths with one. I noticed that they traveled all the time. I love to travel. They made a lot more money than I did. I like money. I discovered that teaching Russian in southern Arizona is a great way to starve to death. I was making nine thousand dollars a year on a ten-month contract in the 1970s.

Q: That's pretty good, for the early '70s.

RUTH: I didn't complain. I was having fun. I had taken a leave of absence for a year to go on the exhibit. I went back to Arizona and was teaching again. I got a phone call from someone I had met at USIA who said, "The job of recruiting exhibit guides in the United States for future exhibits is coming open. Would you like it?"

I had already been accepted at Michigan for their doctoral program, so I had the classic decision to make: practitioner versus scholar. You obviously know what I chose; I took practitioner, lured in part by the amazing salary of $12,500 a year. Besides, I would have had to pay Michigan to go there and study, but Washington was going to pay me. So, I packed up all my worldly possessions. I put them in the smallest U-Haul trailer you could rent [it was sixty-five dollars], hitched it up to the back of my 1953 Buick Special [which had cost me $150 cash American], and headed off to Washington to join the best and the brightest.

Q: I'm speechless again. I had a Buick! Instead of a U-Haul, when the Buick became a Volkswagen, my policy was to never own anything that would not fit in the Volkswagen.

12,500 is big bucks. I have a Zoom requirement—it's not something I want to do, but I need to do it—at 4:30. I've been putting this on as a backup, so I'm going to say this has been Dan Whitman talking to Rick Ruth. It's December whatever I said it was. It's the tenth of 2020. I'm going to stop recording. Let's see.

Q: Here we go. I'm supposed to give the date. This is Dan Whitman talking to Rick Ruth. It's December 11, 2020. When we spoke yesterday, Rick, we established that in the eternal human struggle between the nomadic and the sedentary, you had just found your inner nomad. So, let's go from there. You took a U-Haul and a Buick that you bought for 150 dollars—that's a sore point—and you went to Washington, I think.

RUTH: That's right, to be the recruiter of Americans for future exhibits in the Soviet Union.

Q: Oh, okay. So, we're ahead of that. You've come back nine months later—

RUTH: Yeah, I came back from the exhibit and taught for a year at the university. I had been on a leave of absence. Then I was offered this particular position in Washington, so I chose the practitioner's life rather than the academic's life, and it was the right choice for me.

Q: Good. So, yes, you did go through some of this yesterday. We talked about one contingent for three cities, leave of absence from the university, back to Arizona, recruited for exhibits. You let the University of Michigan go. You were earning a lot of money—12,500. So, we have you now in Tucson, is that right?

RUTH: Yes. I'm now in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The national capital area, as they say.

This was when I discovered a grave truth about working for Uncle Sam. You can't save the government money. I could have had a two thousand dollar moving allowance, but I waived it out of sheer patriotism. I had so few possessions that I knew that two thousand dollars was way too much money. Hence the U-Haul trailer. But USIA wouldn't reimburse me the sixty-five dollars because I didn't have the trailer weighed empty on a certified scale and then weighed full. Lesson learned.

Q: Okay. What we call the DMV [DC, Maryland, and Virginia] now. What came next?

RUTH: Well, I did that for about a year, and then I kept observing the comings and goings of Foreign Service officers. I was not in the Foreign Service at that time; I was in a position that was classified as Foreign Service Limited Reserve, one of those obscure personnel categories.

Q: It was like a civilian reserve sort of thing?

RUTH: In a sense, yes. It was neither fish nor fowl. I was continually attracted by the travel and other opportunities of the Foreign Service, so I took the written exam and squeaked by on that—I believe by one point, I was told. But you know, over the hurdle is over the hurdle. After the written exam you had an in-basket test, and then you had a panel interview with Foreign Service officers—who all looked like you and I do now. I was particularly fond of the in-basket test. I didn't just harbor an inner nomad but, apparently, an inner bureaucrat— Did you take the in-basket test, Dan?

Q: I did. Of course, then it was all hard copy, with little notes and paper of different sizes. It was kind of fun, wasn't it?

RUTH: It was. Of course, the tricky thing they did—and I'm not sure they did this universally—was that if you started at the top of the in-basket and worked your way through paper by paper, you didn't discover until about three-quarters of the way down the stack that there was a flash message saying the secretary of state was coming "all of a sudden." Anyway—

Q: Great. So, somehow, you got through that. You knew to go through— Actually, for people considering the exam, it's good to take in large amounts of information quickly, isn't it, before digging into the details? You'll always do better in a bureaucracy, I think. I guess that's what got you through the in-basket test, right?

RUTH: Well, it was a couple of things. I mean, one of my practices—and it was reconfirmed by my experience with the in-basket test—is never do things one step at a time without looking towards the end point. So, I had, simply because it was my custom, flipped through every paper in the in-basket first just to make sure that I knew what I was facing in the largest possible sense. It turned out to be a useful thing. That's a practice that I have continued—to gather as much universal, 360 information—whatever cliché we like to use—about something *before* taking that first step, because the first step is so often the critical one.

Q: Yeah. Excellent. So, you actually remember the in-basket test, which was an administrative conundrum, if I remember. It wasn't like the hypotheticals, where the terrorists have abducted someone. It was more of an administrative thing.

RUTH: Absolutely right. There were things like somebody's furniture, a dinner invitation, and all the odds and ends that you come across in the embassy situation. From the oral exam, I only remember one question, which turned out to be perfect for a lit major: I was asked if I could relate Jack Kerouac's book *On the Road* to the French existentialists.

Q: No problem!

RUTH: No problem, but I was astonished that that was a question that would be asked.

Q: Wow. I certainly don't remember anything like that, but of course, they were looking at your knowledge, both of American culture but also in the context of other cultures—French, in this case. It was all about existentialism at the time, then structuralism and so forth. But that's kind of funny. The in-basket test has evolved; it's now something called the case management scenario. It's done on a computer, but it's the same idea.

RUTH: And the assessment center approach, where they bring you together with other applicants and observe you role-modeling a country team meeting or something like that. That was not the case in my time.

Q: The group exercise. Was that part of your exam?

RUTH: No, I didn't have any group exercise.

Q: Ah, okay. They're observing behavior, not outcomes. We know that. Okay. These are great moments and milestones in a person's life. This was the experience which brought you into your new life. How quickly did that happen? They didn't accept people immediately at that time, did they? You would wait for a letter, I think.

RUTH: From the time I initially applied and took the written exam to the time I was sworn in was at least a year, a year and a quarter, or something like that.

Q: How did you cool your heels while waiting? Were you eager to come in?

RUTH: I was already working for USIA as the exhibit guide recruiter, so I just kept doing my job while the Foreign Service application process went on in the background. It was perfect.

Q: Perfect. So, when you were taken in, were they sending junior officers to the Rosslyn center in those days? Where were you trained?

RUTH: It was a different system at the U.S. Information Agency, far different than now at the State Department. But when you were a JOT, a junior officer trainee, in the Foreign Service—you will remember, of course—embassies actually had to bid on having a junior officer. They had to come in with a plan and demonstrate that they would be able to give you a substantive, worthwhile training experience at that embassy and give you real work to do. So, it wasn't like we were just cannon fodder being shot out around the world; they had to bid on you.

There was a process whereby you were allowed to rank the ten posts that you were the most interested in from the ones that were available. I ranked Afghanistan number one. I was not only the only person to rank it number one, but I was the only person to put it on my top ten at all. Therefore, I was assigned to Afghanistan, but I never went on that assignment.

This is another example of what the Foreign Service reality is like: between the time I was assigned to Afghanistan, in fact the weekend before I was going to begin language training at FSI [Foreign Service Institute], is when Ambassador [Adolph] "Spike" Dubs was murdered in Kabul in a botched rescue attempt. They started pulling Americans out of Afghanistan and out of the embassy. They weren't going to send a junior officer in. So, I had to switch assignments.

Q: Oh my gosh. So, it would have been Dari or Pashtu or something?

RUTH: It was going to be Dari, yes.

Q: But I guess you never even made it to FSI.

RUTH: Never even got to FSI. The then-area director, as we called them, for NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] was someone I'm sure you know, the estimable Dr. William Rugh. He called me in personally. He didn't have to; he could have left that to a subordinate. But he called me in himself and said, "Well, you're not going to Afghanistan. What do you want to do? Got any ideas?" I thought that was wonderfully gentlemanly of him.

Without quite realizing the import of my words, I said, "I've always wanted to learn Arabic." I swear, Dan, he pushed a button beneath his desk, the floor opened under my chair, and I immediately went down a tunnel and into a classroom where they were teaching Arabic. I didn't realize that it was hard to get people to take Arabic, perhaps because they found the language onerous or the living conditions too challenging or unwelcoming for family situations, particularly in countries like Saudi Arabia, where I eventually ended up. That was my second assignment.

Well, I was out of step with FSI, so they called up Berlitz and said, Can you give somebody six months of intensive Arabic? Well, all Berlitz heard was *ka-ching!* So, there I was. They gave me a teacher who was an absolutely delightful young Lebanese-American woman. She had never been a teacher for one second in her life, but she was a native speaker of Arabic. So, for six months, five hours a day and five days a week, I was one-on-one with Wafa. Like I said, she was a terrific person, but she was not a teacher. Moreover, she decided we would speak only Arabic. I vividly recall her holding up her thumb and having me repeat "wahed." It means "one." I thought it meant "thumb." I swear, if we went back to the apartment I lived in at that time, there'd be a big depression in the brick wall at about the level of my forehead where I just beat it against the wall every single night, trying to learn Arabic.

Q: I've heard so many stories of people struggling with Arabic, cruelly deceived and going in with the best of intentions. I've seen very smart people cry.

RUTH: It's a beautiful language and it's well worth the effort, but it's tough.

Q: I'm sure. So, Russian and Arabic, oh my gosh. Takes a lot of brain capacity for all of that. In those days, the normal thing would have been twelve months in FSI and twelve months in Tunis, but you didn't have that.

RUTH: I didn't have that. They were very clear that they weren't going to waste that amount of time and money on an untested officer because of the number of people who curtailed in NEA or would come back after only one assignment because they just did not want to work in that part of the world for any number of reasons. So, it was too much money to spend without being sure of me.

Q: I do remember, as a JOT, going to— We were required to go to each area. There were card tables. The NEA person came up, and I thought, Cairo? Rabat? Sure! I said to him, "If I bid on either of these posts, will all my other bids be disregarded? Will I spend the rest of my life in the Middle East?" If you knew then what you know now about being sucked into the NEA blessing—which is a great blessing for people who have an interest in that—would this have been your choice, do you think? Once you're in, you're in.

RUTH: Oh, yeah. I didn't join the Foreign Service to go to Paris. I joined the Foreign Service to go to Afghanistan.

Q: So, it wasn't Afghanistan, and it wasn't Saudi Arabia. What was it?

RUTH: I went to Amman, Jordan.

Q: Okay. A nice, easy entry, I think, because Jordan is one of the more normal places to live. Black September was in '75. This would have been after this, I guess.

RUTH: Yes. Jordan is a marvelous country with marvelous, marvelous people.

Q: Wonderful. Let's get you to Amman. You were out there within six months?

RUTH: Yeah.

Q: That's remarkable.

RUTH: I got a 2/2 out of Berlitz, so off I went.

Q: That's something for the record, 2/2 within six months— You're a smart fellow.

RUTH: Well, I don't know about that, but as I said previously, languages and words are my passion. So, there are a lot of things I can't do in this world—can't sing, can't dance, that kind of thing—but if it's words, I'm pretty good at it. So, off I went to Jordan. Now, it was interesting. Every cloud has a silver lining, and conversely, every silver lining has a cloud.

I spent six months with the wonderful Wafa learning Arabic. I got out to post and signed up for additional Arabic language courses. This time the instructor was a male. After the first couple of sentences were out of my mouth on the first day, he looked at me severely and said, "You speak Arabic like a woman!"

I said, "Okay, thanks." It wasn't like in some of the Asian languages where there are actually different grammatical forms of address, it was that I spoke too softly, too mildly. So, anyway, I had to get past that.

Q: But you had learned Levantine Arabic, so that was not an issue, right?

RUTH: Jordan was a marvelous assignment. It was not nearly long enough. I learned several things there. First and foremost, I learned the absolute priceless value of what were then known as our Foreign Service national employees, now often called Locally Employed Staff. We could not survive without them. This is true in many countries, as you know, Dan, and it was certainly true in Jordan.

Because the society was conservative—not Saudi Arabia conservative, but conservative—many fathers would not let their daughters work in retail or even in the Jordanian government, because they'd be surrounded by men, and we know what men are like. But they would let their very well-educated, smart, talented, capable daughters work at some foreign, particularly Western embassy, and particularly American embassy.

We had mostly Jordanian, but some Lebanese colleagues. They knew everybody. They had gone to the best schools. They traveled in elite circles. They could get anybody on the phone on a first name basis, at the palace, a ministry, or the university. Clearly that was a blessing. They were wonderful people. They were talented. They were devoted to the work. That, perhaps, was the biggest eye-opener for me, the incalculable benefit we derive from those relationships.

Q: So, you caught onto that immediately. Did your American colleagues understand that with the same depth that you did?

RUTH: Most of them did, but you know, it was particularly true of USIA, because of the nature of our work. In Jordan, at that time, there was a separate, free-standing, three-story American cultural center. It had a walk-in, open stack public library. It had exhibit space and meeting space. It was separate from the embassy. It wasn't on U.S. embassy grounds. You could not access the embassy the way you could access the American Center. We wanted Jordanians to come in. We invited them to come in.

Q: Maybe it's time to discuss for a moment the loss to diplomacy of fortress embassies, which is now—whether we like it or not—here. There are reasons, and clearly we've lost a lot. Do you have any thoughts at this time? Or we can come back to this later.

There's no such thing anymore almost anywhere as an American cultural center.

RUTH: Indeed. You and I and all of us, we all want to come home alive from our assignments. As you were just indicating, we understand the reasons for security. But what we haven't done is allowed for that and compensated for it.

Take for example a cosmopolitan, metropolitan world city like Istanbul. The old American consulate [known as the Palazzo Corpi] was right downtown in the oldest, most historic, most bustling part of Istanbul. It was one block from the hotel where passengers who came on the Orient Express stayed— I mean, we were right there in the heart of it all, but it was absolutely unsustainable from a security point of view. So, we moved out to the outskirts of Istanbul, into a building that looked like a crusader castle. It was now a half an hour minimum drive to get out there, each direction. Hardly anyone came in because it was now a fortress.

I understand why we had to make the move and I don't dispute the decision. But what we failed to do is compensate for the drastic change in the nature of our presence. Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city with numerous institutions and venues eager to collaborate with the United States. If we had paid attention to what I call our public presence or our public profile in Istanbul, we would have added into the multi-million if not billion-dollar cost of that new consulate a few hundred thousand dollars a year to facilitate American artists, American speakers, American cultural groups coming through all the fabulous venues in a city like Istanbul. That way, it wouldn't look like we had physically and morally and culturally and intellectually abandoned Istanbul. It wouldn't look like we'd turned our backs on Istanbul.

No official American would have needed an office in an insecure area, but you could've kept speakers, groups, and cultural activities rotating through Istanbul at whatever pace you wanted to so that the Turks wouldn't think America had walked away.

Q: So, in a way there was a double loss, because at about the time that new embassy compounds were divined—there were like three different models, and it was cookie cutter—the budget for—and—went way down. So, it was a double loss.

RUTH: It was a double loss, but it would have been possible to significantly compensate for it. We failed to do that. What I'm describing we could still do.

Q: Of course, but we'd have to have much more money than we do have for—and—and all. It's a pity. Now, you've just done the opposite of a flashback with a flashforward. Were you in Istanbul at a later time?

RUTH: I visited there a good deal over the years.

Q: Oh, okay. I had the impression maybe you were assigned there. Okay. So, here we are in Amman. You say it went too quickly. The JOT experience is usually one year of training and one year in a junior position. Is that what you did?

RUTH: Yes, and I started off in the political section. One of USIA's best practices was requiring first-tour junior officers to rotate through other sections of the embassy.

It was highly educational in so many ways. Early on, Ambassador Veliotes visited a Palestinian refugee camp and I was the "action" officer. Heady stuff. When we arrived and got out of our vehicles, a young man from the palace courteously asked us if we would like to "wash our hands." He indicated what I thought was a rather scrofulous looking cinder block building with a rusty tin roof. I must have looked doubtful about the prospect because Veliotes chuckled, elbowed me and said: "Come on, Rick. First law of diplomacy: pee every chance you get."

But one of the benefits of being the lowest person on the totem pole with a security clearance is that I walked once a day, Monday through Friday, from the cultural center [where my office was] to the embassy to pick up the traffic. Of course, this was before all modern communication. I had the privilege of leafing through it—not classified, of course—as I walked down the sidewalk back to the cultural center.

One day, after about six or seven months in Amman, here was a cable saying, "Congratulations to FSIO [Foreign Service information officer] Rick Ruth on your assignment to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia!"

Q: No way. Wait a minute, they never discussed this with you? They just did it?

RUTH: Yep. They just did it. Our wonderful Jordanian friends held the equivalent of a wake for us because they said, Nobody has any fun down there. It's interesting of course—and you understand perfectly—but externally, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are both Arab. They're both Muslim. They're both kingdoms. But they couldn't be more different.

Q: Right. Jordan's quite open, Saudi's quite closed—or at least it certainly was then. So, your FSN colleagues saw this as something to lament, I guess.

RUTH: It was something to lament, but at that point, I was in no position to argue with anybody. I'll get back to that later in my career, when I argued a lot with people, but at that point, I was in no position to argue with anyone. So, off we went to Jeddah in 1979.

Q: Were you curtailed, or was this a normal follow-on? Did they cut your tour short in Amman to send you to Jeddah?

RUTH: They curtailed the tour in Amman and gave me a regular two-year assignment as program officer in Jeddah. It was an odd set-up because the capital of Saudi Arabia, then as now, is Riyadh, but embassies weren't allowed in Riyadh at that time. They hadn't

built the diplomatic quarter there yet. So, all of the embassies, including the American embassy, were in Jeddah—the Hajj Port on the Red Sea.

When I got to Jeddah, I discovered that the public affairs officer was in Riyadh. The ambassador apparently couldn't stand the PAO, so he concocted the story that the PAO could be the advance person, getting ready for the eventual move of the embassy to Riyadh.

Q: But that person was your boss. So, you're in Jeddah and your boss is in Riyadh. Is that it?

RUTH: Yeah.

Q: How quickly did you learn that there was bad blood between the ambassador and the PAO?

RUTH: Instantaneously. I asked the question, "Why is the public affairs officer in Riyadh when everybody else, except his secretary and one other person, is in Jeddah?" That situation resolved itself because the Office of Inspector General [OIG] made a routine inspection visit right at that time, and they started, of course, with the PAO in Riyadh. They called on him first thing in the morning and discovered that his secretary was—his wife.

Q: Oh, that doesn't work.

RUTH: They sent her home right on the spot, and he departed the country quickly thereafter, but it did have the benefit of his replacement being allowed to be in Jeddah after all.

Q: So, maybe that's—

RUTH: It wasn't a problem with all PAOs, the ambassador just disliked *that* PAO.

Q: Right, got it. So, maybe the IG [inspector general] did a great service to the ambassador?

RUTH: I think the IG did a great service all around, yes.

Q: Well, very interesting. My first assignment was exactly the same. Jerry—was fired the day I arrived. That's a similar story. I was warned about this and told, "Make sure you understand which FSN is in which faction."

I said, "I don't do factions. I'm inviting them all to my house on Friday. Anyone who wants to come is welcome." I was told I wasn't allowed to do this, but I did it. Anyway, again, some similarities.

How was the language? Was there any transition issue between Jordan and Saudi? Did you have to adopt a more polite way of talking or something like that?

RUTH: Not really. The biggest challenge I had in Jordan, in that sense, was learning to drink coffee. I absolutely detest coffee. I detest the smell of it. Yet, you are given coffee in every office, every visit, every occasion. It's not just coffee, but thick, what we would call Turkish, coffee. They called it Jordanian coffee, of course. So, my dear patient wife and I would sit in our kitchen at a little table and I would practice drinking coffee—which she dearly loves. She would watch my facial expression to make sure I wasn't grimacing like I was choking down poison. It took a while before I could actually drink coffee with a straight face. These are the things we do for our country, Dan.

Q: Did you master the art of taking tiny sips and seeming to drink normally?

RUTH: Yes, that worked out well. Then, when I got to Saudi Arabia, the problem largely went away because it was tea.

Q: Oh, yes, I was going to ask what happened to the tea.

RUTH: I love tea, so that's fine.

Q: Tea is traditional in that part of the world, and coffee is not. Coffee is a European thing.

RUTH: Yes, although they did have a drink they called coffee in Saudi Arabia, but it was cardamom coffee made from the cardamom spice.

Q: Do you still hate coffee?

RUTH: I still hate coffee. I still hate even the smell of it.

Q: So, you do have some values that have endured throughout your life. That's good. Well, thank you for your sacrifices and your service. Greater love hath no diplomat than to drink horrible stuff.

RUTH: The Jeddah assignment taught me to be entrepreneurial, because Saudi bureaucracy—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the usual organizations we would work with—were in their infancy, if you will. They were learning to live in the larger world and doing a very nice job. Saudis are wonderful people. I had friends there and enjoyed it, in spite of the strictures that are there on women and popular entertainment and so forth.

But in terms of the work— I think everyone who serves in the Middle East knows the phrase *Insha'Allah*—Should Allah will it. So, you would make an appointment with

someone in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs' North America desk for an appointment on Thursday at three, and they would say, Insha'Allah. If you went there on Thursday at three, and they were not there, you had no right to be upset, because they didn't say they would be there. They said, If Allah wills it, I will be there.

Q: We call this fatalism, yes.

RUTH: In fact, they would even say later on, when I knew them better, that it's rather cheeky on our part, as mortal human beings, to say, Five days from now, at this exact moment, I will be in this exact place. Who can say that, really?

Q: Playing God. Shame on you for having these thoughts.

RUTH: Well, what I began to do was what they would do. If I wanted to see somebody in an office, I simply went there with no advance notice. If they were there, they were happy to see me. They'd say, Come in, sit down, have a seat, let's talk! Even if there were five other people there, we would meet. We would all sit around in chairs and on couches, and we'd all talk. If they weren't there, they weren't there, and I'd just come back another time. That worked out perfectly.

So, I could survive in Saudi culture. I could survive American culture. The problem was when the two worlds collided. There was a perfect example of that. You asked, last time, about moments that stick in my mind and that had resonance longer than that moment. We were doing a classic USIA thing, we were setting up an exhibit of Ansel Adams photographs. Everybody from a certain generation has done an Ansel Adams photo show. It was particularly suitable for Saudi Arabia because there were no human images.

But we had recruited—and this was quite a coup for us—His Royal Highness the Emir of Mecca to come and be the opener on the Saudi side. We had the American ambassador on the American side. Everything was fine except that, for whatever reason, the ambassador was annoyed at having to do this. I don't know whether he had a conflict or something, but he was very irritated about it, and he would have his staff repeatedly call me in the run-up to this opening and say, "Look, the ambassador's only got fifteen minutes. It's got to start exactly on time. He will be there at two o'clock. He will cut the ribbon. He will make remarks. He will get out of there and go. You have to make sure that the Saudis are there."

Q: Impossible.

RUTH: Right, like *I'm* going to harass His Royal Highness the Emir of Mecca, the Custodian of the Holy Places. Right. So, what is the lesson I learned from this that I used going forward? I found myself one day sitting at my Olympus Two Selectric typewriter [the one with the erase key—the greatest typewriter ever made] swigging Pepto Bismol right out of the bottle. I wasn't pouring it into a spoon or taking tablets. I was just drinking Pepto Bismol out of a bottle, I was so distressed by this situation. But

fortunately, at some point, I had a moment of cosmic consciousness, and I said to myself, Rick, my boy, you're not going to make it much longer at this rate. You can't be sitting at your typewriter drinking Pepto Bismol out of a bottle like it was soda.

So, I resolved right then and there to chill and to stay chill. You know the work ethic, Dan, just as well as I do. I was raised to work hard, to always do right, and to give my boss 100 percent. I still do. So, the boss wants 100 percent? I give 100 percent. The boss wants 110 percent, I give them 110 percent. But if they want more than that? I just laugh. At that point, I stop and say, "What are you going to do? Shoot me?"

Q: Great lesson. This cannot be taught.

RUTH: No, you have to experience it.

Q: When you are a subordinate to someone, it seems like chilling— When someone subordinate to you does it, it seems like lack of interest.

RUTH: There you go.

Q: So, it's all relative and Insha'Allah. Europeans say that, too. Well, that is a great moment. So, apparently you were not decapitated by the ambassador that day or ever, because I see that your head sits properly. So, the emir was probably a bit late?

RUTH: Just a little bit, but again, he was as gracious and hospitable as one could wish. It all worked out fine. Changing topics—two years in Saudi Arabia were obviously much more trying for my wife than for me because she was confined to our home unless I was there to drive. There were no buses. She could not take a taxi, because an unaccompanied woman was not allowed to be in a motor vehicle with a male who was not her relative.

So, it was tough on her, but we found a lot of things to do. We found friends. We went camping with the U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] folks down towards Yemen. We did a lot. Tania and I traveled inside the country, camped, visited bazaars, and avoided the old men who belonged to what was known as the Committee to Protect Virtue and to Discourage Vice. They went around public places with horsehair switches and admonished women who were showing wrists or ankles.

But, finally, we got to go where we wanted to go. My next assignment was Moscow. Two years in Saudi Arabia, and then it was off to Moscow.

Q: Oh, wow. Well, wait, this is too fast. We want to suck the juice out of the bones of Saudi Arabia. So, Tania. I don't think that was part of the narrative. What happened that brought somebody named Tania in?

RUTH: I got married to another exhibit guide. Best thing I ever did.

Q: That's all we need for the record.

RUTH: Married for forty-five years.

Q: Oh, that's terrific. So, did the ambassador ever learn to chill in Jeddah?

RUTH: No. Actually, he was eventually recalled by the OIG for some "irregularity" with Arabic carpets.

Q: For the record, Rick Ruth is keeping a straight face. This is marvelous.

RUTH: He was a political appointee.

Q: I don't believe a word of that, but that's a great story. So, no regrets, I think. I'm guessing that if you were being stressed by these unreasonable demands, so was everybody else—the FSNs, the other Americans—

RUTH: The ambassador was actually very gentlemanly. I never had any personal problems with him or issues at all. He could be totally oblivious—and he or she, the ambassador, should be oblivious—to the fact that the most junior officer in the embassy was having angst about pulling off some photo exhibit opening. He was communicating through his Foreign Service staff assistant. Sometimes, I imagine his wishes were accelerated and exaggerated a bit by his efficient staff.

Q: Very generous of you to say that, but I think good ambassadors do know their employees. There are good ones and others. Great story. This happened while— Were you in Jeddah beyond the time the ambassador was there? Did they have a charge?

RUTH: I left while he was still there.

Q: Okay. Now, let's talk a little bit more about the good things in Jeddah. You've said how charming the people were. There was no longer, as there had been in the exhibit situation, any prohibition in having friends and having interactions. In fact, I'm guessing that you may have been a little bit surprised at how pleasant the thing was, because your people in Amman had given you a wake, thinking, Oh, my God, he's going to hell. But it was not hell. In what ways was it fulfilling?

RUTH: In several ways. That's a wonderful question, Dan. In Saudi Arabia then—and it's starting to change a bit now—there were no public movie theaters. There were no public entertainment facilities—no concerts, none of those public entertainment activities. They were banned. Most restaurants in Riyadh did not allow men and women to dine together, although they did in Jeddah. We used to call it the San Francisco of Saudi Arabia—relative to the rest of the country, it was much more open. It was also much more ethnically diverse.

We found Saudis to be good friends and good colleagues. Not on a lot of occasions, but on some occasions, we went to lunch or dinner in Saudi homes, which was not a terribly common thing at that time—not for any political or security reason, but just because of the vast difference in cultural attitudes and so on.

Like I said, we got out into the more rural parts of Saudi Arabia, because there were permanent camps set up there by the U.S. Geological Survey. We made friends with the USGS people, who then camped out in the country. So, it was very pleasant in that sense.

But let's switch to a more relevant Foreign Service topic. When I joined the Foreign Service and realized I was going to be having X number of overseas assignments, I made a personal decision that I would select some large issue that interested me in life, politics, or society that was connected to that country or region and try to come to a personal understanding of it. Now, what the hell do I mean by all of that?

For example, when I went to Jordan, I resolved to see if I could come to a personal, Rick Ruth understanding: What did I think about Israel and Palestine in the Middle East? Let me read, let me talk, let me hear, let me listen, let me try to understand. I didn't want to just be hearing people on all sides of the story hammer at each other. I thought I should have my own grip on what was going on in the Middle East.

In Saudi Arabia, I would try to understand Islam. What could I, as a typical young American, learn so that, again, I was not whipsawed back and forth by other peoples' descriptions or characterizations of Islam? Obviously, in Russia, it was world communism. That was for me a very important part of my stay in those countries. I didn't just want to do the work that the job brought, but to try to have a larger understanding of global issues that were of importance and relevance to the job of diplomacy, and also to being a citizen of the world.

Q: Again, I'll observe that this type of approach probably cannot be taught. You came upon it independently. That's quite something. If you're assigned to Rome, you need to know something about the Vatican, right? You were in the world center— Maybe not demographically, but Mecca was the center of the Islamic world. Here we had Sunnis, correct?

RUTH: Yes.

Q: Did you get into that? Did you learn through experience or through secular sources? Sunni and Shi'a— Was that an issue, or was everybody Sunni?

RUTH: Pretty much everybody was Sunni. Saudi is all Sunni, but of course, there were tens of thousands of workers from other countries in Saudi Arabia. Some were Shi'a. When you checked into a hotel, the registration form asked for your religion. If you didn't fill it out, they put in Christian.

Q: That's creepy. I'm not saying the people are creepy, but the procedure.

RUTH: Yeah, but they were required to have that blank filled in, so if you didn't fill it in, they did. They didn't have the option like we do of a "prefer not to answer."

Q: I was talking to someone you might know. Randa Slim. Is that somebody you've ever met from the Middle East Institute? She's Lebanese. She was explaining that in Lebanon, the legal system says that you cannot choose your religion. You must, in your official papers— You are whatever your father was, never mind the mother. Is it the same in Saudi?

RUTH: Well, it is presumed that if you're a Saudi and your parents were Muslim, you're Muslim. It wasn't—

Q: Oh, you could just say Muslim. You didn't have to say Sunni.

RUTH: Yes. It was just like the air you breathe.

Q: So, everything in this society is very formal, and yet I'm getting the impression from you that the interactions with people were not overly, painfully formal, and they were actually quite friendly. Isn't that a cognitive dissonance for them?

RUTH: It could be. Particularly later— This, of course, was before 9/11, but particularly after, people would talk about Islam and loosely characterize what kind of religion they thought Islam was with sweeping and often insulting generalities. Here's what I remember: We were out once at one of the U.S. Geological Survey camps in a remote, rural part of Saudi Arabia. They always had the USGS looking for something besides oil. We were walking through a small cluster of traditional Saudi homes—multi-story mud brick and wooden pole construction. It was midday. It was blistering hot. It was Saudi Arabia; of course it was blistering hot. There was not a shadow anywhere to stand in.

There were four of us—two couples. My wife and I, and another American couple, our USGS friends. We were walking between the buildings, not a soul in sight, until we saw this little boy—probably four or five years old—outside one of the houses. We were obviously the most interesting thing he'd seen in a while, so he started walking towards us. He held out his hand. I put out my hand, and he not only took my hand to shake it, but he brought it towards him, and he kissed the back of my hand.

Then he continued to hold onto my hand and led all of us to his house. He opened the door without making any announcement of any kind. He led us up a flight of stairs into a small sunny room where his mother and father were sitting cross-legged on the floor having lunch. They looked up, and I swear to you, Dan, not for one nanosecond was there anything in their eyes except pleasure and hospitality. They said, This is wonderful! Guests! This is perfect because we're having our meal. Come join us!

Now, I challenge anybody in America to say that that would be their reaction if their four- or five-year-old child walked in with four adult strangers while they were having lunch.

Q: That's a very beautiful story.

RUTH: I have other stories, but I'll stick with that one. That is also Saudi Arabia.

Q: That's amazing. Now, since you were there, the population has doubled, and the rules have changed. There's been some modernization; a few steps forward and a few steps back. Have you stayed in touch? It's a country that has changed enormously in the last twenty years, right?

RUTH: I have not stayed in touch, nor have I ever been back. I've been able to go back to the other countries I served in, but not Saudi Arabia.

Q: It's a very high-stakes place, a center of wealth and religion and now, a demographic explosion, as well as a government that I think understands they need to accommodate young people coming out of schools. They cannot just abandon them. There are too many of them. Very interesting. So, Jeddah. Riyadh was sort of under re-construction. What was the situation? The embassy eventually moved to Riyadh, yes?

RUTH: There was a multi-year, multi-bazillion dollar project to build an entire diplomatic quarter there where every single foreign embassy would be required to move and have its housing and headquarters and chanceries.

Q: So, was this like Abuja, where everybody had to do it at the same time?

RUTH: No, it was phased, but it was similar to that. It was done by royal decree.

Q: So, this was after your time?

RUTH: After my time.

Q: So, the people, there was a sort of gentleness and hospitality and even an openness, which you had never been permitted to see when you were in the exhibits gig in the Soviet Union. I don't know where you stand on this question of whether people are really the same everywhere. I would say no, but maybe hospitality is a universal value, and some people actually do it while others think they're doing it. We can't compare Russia or the Soviet Union with Saudi— Are you glad—you must be—that there are so many Saudi students now in the United States? I guess the government, which pays for all of this, has decided that this is a good thing for their young people.

RUTH: It's gone through cycles, and a lot of it has little to do with politics. There were upwards of forty thousand Saudi students in the United States at one point and then it began to taper off radically because the Saudi government had completed a multi-year

investment project to build indigenous universities. Once they finished King Abdul Aziz and other universities, they required their students to go there.

Then, once they began to normalize that situation, it became acceptable again for the Saudi government to sponsor study abroad. The Saudi government provided pretty much everybody a scholarship unless they had independent wealth, which many of them did. They started traveling and going to college around the world, but the destination of choice has always been primarily the United States.

Q: In this, they're kind of like the Norwegian government, which also subsidizes travel and study for its young people. This is very enlightened. So, as a Westerner, I have, of course, an involuntary reaction when I think of strict conservatism and social norms that keep women shut up in the house. I have this kind of typical Western reaction. Can we discuss, between the gentleness and the kindness of the people and the rigidity of the system, was it compatible? Was it as crazy as the Soviet system was for Russia?

RUTH: I mean, you make the point about the question of whether people are the same everywhere. Well, by and large, people are the same everywhere, but the pressures upon them are different. I mean, the Soviet citizens who were a danger to exhibit guides were not ordinary Soviet citizens just deciding, I think I'll be mean to an American today. They were all paid Soviet government agents.

In fact, it's worth pointing out, I think, that during the entire time I was there on the exhibit and later when I served two years at the embassy, never—not one single time—did I have an unpleasant personal encounter with a Russian or a Soviet because I was an American. Never. Any difficulty or hostility was always official. It was never personal. In fact, I met Russians that identified with Americans as "two great peoples who conquered continents and now could jointly rule the world." That kind of thing. It was a rivalry, but they saw us as very similar.

Tania and I had dinner with a Saudi who was fascinated by the Soviet Union. Every time he left Saudi Arabia, he would come back with books that he purchased in the West, about Stalin and the cold war, and so on. If they found them at the airport, they would always seize them. He was seriously aggravated by it. "I bought these books in New York or London or wherever, and they took them away! They make it hard on you." So, it wasn't about him and his inquisitiveness and his openness. It was the rigidity of the system.

Q: Okay. So, who kept this going? I'm guessing that 98 percent of the population didn't really like being restrained in that way, and two percent made it so for the others.

RUTH: People change slowly. You know that, Dan. People don't change the way technology changes. The evolution, as one Russian scholar noted, from the crossbow to the machine gun is one kind of evolution. People don't change that way. If I went back to prehistoric times, I would starve to death or be eaten by wild animals before I could ever

fashion a stone into a spearhead and use it as a weapon. If someone was brought forward from prehistoric times and given a cellphone, there would be nothing they could do with it.

But if you read Egyptian romantic poetry, Sumerian, Greek, it's much the same then and now. Or read the Song of Solomon. It's the same. When you read, "Behold thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair. Thou hast doves' eyes," you know exactly what that person was feeling. It hasn't changed one bit. So, people change slowly. People have a lot of continuity. PD [public diplomacy] professionals always need to understand and remember that, particularly under the onslaught of new developments in the field of communications technology.

I'll give you one more quick example. I was talking to a Saudi official in his office one time when he got a phone call—clearly a disturbing phone call. It turned out that his father had been in a car accident. Now, his father was fine and wasn't hurt, and the other driver had been at fault. They had arrested the other driver because he was guilty of speeding or running through a red light, whatever he had done.

But it was Ramadan. In Ramadan, as you know, it's very special to break the day's fast with your family and your loved ones when the sun goes down. The Saudi official I was talking to excused himself and said, "I have to go now." He wasn't going, initially, to check on his father. His father was fine. He was going to the jail, to the police station, to make sure they let the other driver go free so that man could have dinner with his family on Ramadan and break the fast.

Now, I tend to judge religions by their practitioners, not by their propagandists. So, I have these memories of Saudi Arabia that are very important to me and that I used, I hope, to gain that larger understanding of Islam in the world.

Q: You're giving a very human face to a country that is mysterious to most of us. If you haven't been there, which most of us haven't, certain images come to mind. I was reading, at the request of a friend in the hospital, the Psalms aloud, which I hadn't done in decades, and I realized what they were all about. These are people lost in the desert. Everything's working against them; the enemy's everywhere; the sun is too hot; there is no water. All they're saying is, Could somebody please help us? That's actually what the Psalms are all about, I think. It suddenly became clear as I was reading them aloud. Well, Rick, we can get you from Jeddah to Moscow today or next time. It's your call.

RUTH: No, your call.

Q: Let's get you packed up and get your HHE [household effects] on the way. Do you have time for that?

RUTH: Sure.

Q: So, we are now, what, 1981?

RUTH: Correct.

Q: Did you get the news the same way you had learned about Jeddah, where somebody just said, "You're going to Moscow," or did they actually take your wishes into consideration?

RUTH: I actually bid on Moscow and went through the process.

Q: And they knew you were the guy, that you had Russian and you'd worked in the exhibits.

RUTH: Sure. In the USIA days, it was actually policy that if you joined the Foreign Service with a particular strength in one geographic area, they would deliberately send you somewhere else. And I agreed with that policy; they were making sure that you were truly worldwide available and not going to be some kind of prima donna who said, "Oh, I only do Asia," or that kind of thing.

Q: Right. I was told two or three years in that because I had French, that was why I had not been sent to Africa. Okay. But then, this is now your third assignment. I mean, Amman was very quick, and Jeddah was two years.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: Okay. So, that's a relatively quick time. It's about three years or so. So, finally, this is your third time, and they said, What do you want? You asked for Moscow, and you got it. So, you went on a direct transfer. Did you have home leave?

RUTH: It was direct transfer. It was the only time I ever got the clothing allowance.

Q: Oh, I guess so. You went from the hottest place in the world to the coldest place in the world. Okay. I never had a home leave. Did you ever have one?

RUTH: I don't think we ever did either. I carried home leave around with me on the books until I retired.

Q: That's kind of funny. Okay. So, you're jazzed up. You're psyched. You're ready to go and use your skills and go back to this place. It was stressful when you were there for the nine months, but it was an intense experience, and it was time to get back in a different capacity. You were, what, an ACAO [assistant cultural affairs officer]?

RUTH: It was so long ago technologically that my title was assistant information officer for audio-visual. The term audio-visual doesn't exist anymore in the common sense that we knew it when we were high school students.

Q: I had exactly that assignment in Madrid. I was at the very bottom. I thought, Oh, Audio-Visual, that's kind of snazzy. I didn't understand at all that the embassy considered the printed press the only media worth following. I don't think they quite understood. But, okay, for media. What was there in Moscow at that time to follow in the media? It was government radio and TV, right?

RUTH: All of it was government radio and television, of course. It was a complete monopoly. First of all, we weren't allowed to be called the U.S. Information Agency. That was forbidden for complex political reasons, and so we were called Press and Culture. We were only allowed to be an extension of the State Department, not an independent agency. They wouldn't allow yet another government agency to be present in Moscow. So, we were called Press & Culture Up, which was the information section, and Press & Culture Down, on the lower floor, which was the education and cultural section.

Q: This was in all Warsaw Pact countries, I think, not just the Soviet Union. Now, again, I have an involuntary reaction when I think Soviet media in 1981. I'm thinking, what in the world could an American diplomat do? Did that question come to your mind?

RUTH: Not a whole lot, because we didn't actually fool ourselves into thinking we could make any headway into the Soviet media, nor was there really any point in reporting on the Soviet media, because it was all just propaganda and lies and the usual sorts of things. Plus there was a vast apparatus based in the U.S. monitoring and analyzing Soviet media. So, what we mostly tried to do was to bring Americans and American programs in on a wide variety of topics—

Even though we were called Press & Culture Up and Press & Culture Down, it was all a mixture, so we would bring, for example, Alan Pakula, the director of *Sophie's Choice,* to Moscow. We brought jazz musicians like Chick Corea. There was the Moscow Film Festival, which we worked around. Of course, the exhibits were still going on in different parts of the country. So, there was always something to keep busy with.

Q: Okay. Well, that sounds much more ample than just media. It's actually all kinds of social interaction. I guess the European phrase is, "Culture is politics." That's a big thing, apparently. American diplomats often just cannot understand that. They cannot understand that a great piano piece or a quartet has a profound significance in Russia in a way that it might not in the U.S. So, you were part of a team that was actually bringing Americans.

RUTH: That's right.

Q: Now, it's time to talk about the Washington bureaucracy. You were dealing, in the field, with P, I guess, as they called it. Did they call it P, at the time, Programs?

RUTH: Yes. The major divisions of USIA in the late ’80s were Programs [P], Educational and Cultural Affairs [E], Voice of America [VOA], Television and Film Service [TV] and Management [M].

Q: Let’s talk about P, since now it has been basically dissolved and merged into PA, and there really is no IIP [Bureau of International Information Programs], as I understand it. So, let’s talk about the glory days of P at USIA. What were your dealings with them? What were they able to provide you? Was it carte blanche for you? Would they give you anything?

RUTH: Well, of course, you know that in those days, Moscow was the premier post—in terms of politics, in terms of intrigue, in terms of career advancement. Moscow was the big time. There were also large risks, of course. We were followed and surveilled. Our apartment was bugged—all those sorts of things. You just didn’t worry about it. It did not have the severe consequences, thank goodness, that it’s having with diplomats now. They beamed microwaves at our offices, but apparently not at us.

Q: Did you know that at the time? I mean, you knew there was a lot of surveillance, but did you know that—

RUTH: We knew that they were beaming microwaves at the embassy, yes, but again, they didn’t seem to be targeting individuals at that time. Perhaps they were activating sensors in the new building. I don’t know. Of course, every now and then somebody on our side was caught and booted out because we did have CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] agents there undercover. It’s important to note here that USIA never provided cover for intelligence agencies. It was a matter of some distress to the intelligence agencies, in some cases, because we had such access and currency out in the population with cultural and media and educational activities. We would have made ideal agents, but USIA didn’t provide cover.

Q: Apparently in ARA [Bureau of Inter-American Affairs] in the ’70s there were some instances, and that’s why USIA became so careful later.

RUTH: That was in the very early days, yes. Understood.

Q: Was this that old, crowded embassy where everybody had one square meter to work in?

RUTH: It was on Tchaikovsky Street, yes. It was the old embassy, not the new one. The new one was finished while I was there.

Q: Well, the new one needed like fifteen years to get the bugs out of the walls or something like that.

RUTH: It took a long time. Lots of mistakes were made.

Q: So, you were in the old building. Nobody loved that building, as I understand.

RUTH: Well, maybe nobody loved it, but it was home. We talked earlier about the value of Foreign Service nationals. Well, they were equally valuable in Moscow and St. Petersburg—Leningrad, of course, at that time. But they were also the direct employees of or reported regularly to the KGB. It was understood that it was part of their job. They would report to the KGB and say, Here's what I learned. Here's what I heard. Here's what I know about Mr. Ruth. That was understood. We didn't talk about it; it was just understood. They were still terrific colleagues.

That's one of the aspects of public diplomacy and exchanges that people often overlook: the tremendous logistical complexity. Human beings are not tweets. We are not Facebook postings. People are not "fire and forget." I went to Moscow years later with Vladimir Horowitz. I also went when Van Cliburn made his return. I don't mean to be eye-glazingly boring, but public diplomacy and exchanges are logistically complex. You're moving human beings around. You need studios, you need microphones, you need compatible current, you need adapter plugs, you need a dais, you need plane tickets and hotels, you need notepaper, you need folding chairs. You don't need all that to send a Tweet, but you do to work with human beings.

If you have a Fulbrighter, you have to have a classroom and a home and dormitories and textbooks and stipends. You have to have a course catalog. So, our FSNs, while they reported routinely, as they were required to do as a part of their job, to their overseers, that didn't make them any less valuable or important or good colleagues. They were doing 1,001 day-to-day things to make public diplomacy work. They never sabotaged anything. They never undercut anything. They were always a plus.

Q: That's great. So, NTSC [National Television Standards Committee] and PAL [Phase Alternate Lines]. You remember that?

RUTH: Oh yes, oh my gosh.

Q: Someone would always get it wrong, and you'd get a VHS [Video Home System] tape that just wouldn't work. But getting back to dealing with your American colleagues in Washington in the P Bureau— Or was it E and P?

RUTH: We worked with both.

Q: Was that above your level as a third-tour officer, or were you in frequent touch with our colleagues in those two bureaus in Washington?

RUTH: I was not personally in touch with them, because again, I worked for the information officer who worked for the public affairs officer. In Moscow, from a professional point of view, it was interesting because for the first time, I came across a

genuine first-rate public affairs officer, may he rest in peace: Raymond E. Benson. He was a dynamo of activity. He was smart, he was entrepreneurial. He's the one who taught me that a PAO could be a field general. In other words, I need speakers, I need musicians, I need students, I need whatever it is. Then you bring them all together like you would infantry and ships and aircraft. Bring them all together and advance on your goal.

I remember he sent me on a trip, once, back to Washington for— You mentioned Amparts, which we now call U.S. Speakers. He sent me back to Washington at his expense, out of his budget, for no other purpose than to try and convince the International Visitor Office to work more closely with the Speakers Office. Visitors would come back from the United States, and they would say, The single best person we met on our visit to the United States was the professor at Utah State. That woman is fantastic on X topic.

He would say, "Then we need to bring her, a year later, to Moscow to follow up." He wanted them to put that together as SOP [standard operating procedure]. They didn't, but that's a whole other story.

Q: That's right. As you know, I went with IV groups over a twelve-year period, and we always had a final report. We would ask that specific question, but as far as I knew, there was never any follow-up.

RUTH: Good PAOs would always do it, but it was never made part of the system.

Q: So, Raymond Benson trusted you to make a major bureaucratic improvement in Washington, and you did damn well but it didn't work. Is that how it went?

RUTH: It didn't work, but it was a good try.

Q: You got a nice trip home. Okay. That shows that he had a lot of trust, though. Many PAOs would say, Only I can fix this. My junior officer will get the benefit. So, that's remarkable that he gave you that trust, and I'm sure it was the right thing to do. So, even looking at it obliquely as you did, since you didn't have direct contact, what was your sense of the flow of resources from Washington?

We know it was much greater back then that it is now because there was money, and ever more so when Charles Wick came. But how often did you get visitors? How free-flowing was the money? You've mentioned that Moscow had an extraordinarily high priority because of the geopolitics of it, so I'm guessing you got more than a normal three hundred million population country would get. You got maybe a little bit like Spain after Franco, which got a big boost. Was that happening?

RUTH: I have no idea what the budget was, but nothing was ever cancelled. Nothing ever failed because we ran out of money.

Q: What was the pace of programming? Did you have one or two a month? One a week?

RUTH: It was more like a couple of times a month. Again, it was hard to do things in the Soviet Union. You still had to get visas. You still had to go through the logistics.

Q: Not to mention the vast geography. If you go anywhere out of Moscow, you're going five thousand miles. How often was that possible? Was most everything done in Moscow?

RUTH: That's right. We did a lot of programming in Moscow, but we did try to get people out. Most commonly, they would go to Leningrad as the second city, but we tried to get them out to the other republics. We were pretty good at it, but yes, it was a formidably large country with a formidable bureaucracy. There were also closed areas. We can't forget that a vast portion of the Soviet Union was simply off-limits to all foreigners. So, we weren't going to send anybody to a large swath of the country. If you were sending them to Vladivostok, you just blew all your time and money flying them back and forth eleven time zones. So, it was a challenge, but again, Moscow was a priority. We never ran short of resources, and we had good support from Washington.

Q: Did you by any chance overlap with Mark Taplin? You know his book, I'm sure, Open Cities.

RUTH: Sure, I know Mark well, of course.

Q: Were you there at the same time, by any chance?

RUTH: No, not at the same time.

Q: Okay, because his book is about that moment when the cities were suddenly opened, and he was one of the lucky first ones to actually see some of these places. Okay. Compare the tight lid that you had as an exhibit interpreter versus your relative freedom, I think, as a diplomat. How different was your life? What was the contrast between the exhibit experience and— Were you a PDO [public diplomacy officer]? Was that what called you?

RUTH: So, in terms of daily life, it was night and day difference because I was married, I lived in an apartment, and that was where I lived for two years, as opposed to shuttling back and forth in a bus from a hotel every morning for the job. Obviously, now as a Foreign Service officer, I had a security clearance and I had work to do. It was a very different situation altogether.

Clearly, there was a tremendous emphasis on security of all types—information security, physical security, operational security—because it was the Soviet Union. It's still like that in Russia. The Soviet Union was just a phase that Russia went through. It's the same country. It's the same people. That just happened to be their Soviet phase. Tania and I had our own car. On weekends and evenings, we could go out to restaurants. We could go to the theater.

Russian society is an enormously cultured society, and the Russian people are and think of themselves as an educated and cultured people. That's an important key to working with Russians that we grievously overlook. There is nothing you can't do in Moscow and no one you can't approach if you do it through culture. Some years later, I was the Soviet desk officer for USIA. I got a phone call from Van Cliburn's agent, and the guy who ran the Van Cliburn Piano Competition. He said, "Van Cliburn wants to go back to Moscow, but he doesn't want to go unless Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev attend his concert. Can we make that happen?"

I said, "Sure. Raisa Gorbacheva has a personal foundation. You get in touch with the embassy here. You tell them that Van Cliburn will come back and give a special concert as a benefit for her charity." And it was done. If we hem and haw about our differences, we don't get anywhere, but if we look for the commonalities, they're there. A more impressive task that I pulled off a few months later was sweet-talking the New York Passport Office into staying open late just to accommodate Van Cliburn's mother, the formidable Rildia Bee Cliburn.

Q: We'll never know, but why did the Soviets allow Van Cliburn to win the Tchaikovsky Competition? I remember it didn't seem possible. What happened?

RUTH: He won, fair and square. Again, Russians are enormously cultured. They believe in these things, in literature and drama and music and dance. That's part of who they are. They don't screw with that.

Q: Understood. To be sure that we get everything out of— You were in Moscow for two or three years?

RUTH: Two years. Yeah, there's a whole long story about what happened there.

Q: I want to make sure we get all of that fresh in our next interview, so I think we'll sign off. This is Dan Whitman talking to Rick Ruth. It's still December 11, 2020, and let's see. Stop recording. Okay.

And here we are. This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. Why do I always have to look it up? It's December 12, 2020. We're going to go back to 1981 and get you in Moscow, where we left off. Onward.

RUTH: Right.

Q: Oh, you want a question? The question when we last spoke yesterday was— We were talking about the logistical value, not to mention the personal context, of FSNs, even while knowing that they had more than one person they were reporting to, wink wink. You were also talking about the political—if I can say it that way—importance of culture in Slavic countries and particularly in Russia, where a concert or theater performance is

something much more significant. In the minds of Russians, educated or not educated, the whole concept of culture seems to be taken very seriously. I was going to say more seriously. Let's not compare, but it was taken very seriously as an aspect of life, in the same way that Americans might think of geopolitics. Can you pick up with that theme?

RUTH: Sure. It's one of the challenges in public diplomacy, and particularly in exchanges, where the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs [ECA] has the cultural portfolio. There's such a disparity or asymmetry, if you will, between the way Russians or Soviets and many other countries in the world look at culture, esteem culture, and recognize the value of their premier cultural figures relative to what we do in the United States. The impact of artists, poets, dramatists, singers, musicians, dancers in many other countries far exceeds our day-to-day understanding of how important those people are in the United States. I would defy you to ask very many Americans to name the poet laureate of the United States.

But again, if we mirror image other countries—and we're talking about the Soviet Union now, but this goes for Russia today, as well—and fail to grasp the importance, the status, and the function of culture to go straight to the heart and identity of individuals in other countries, then we're neglecting a tremendous opportunity, not to be manipulative or exploitative, but to meet on mutual grounds.

When it comes to culture and heritage, there are no large and small countries. There are no superpowers and no satellites. The indigenous culture of Southeast Asia or the music of Central America is every bit as valid, as good, as precious as anything that has come out of North America. We should understand that. Of course, we do, as public diplomacy professionals, but it's sometimes a difficult lift to get to the political level and the higher level in the foreign policy community to understand the value of that kind of investment in cultural exchange.

Q: Point taken very much. We get hints of this. Destiny almost makes it easy for us by giving us people like Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky who are cultural figures but have enormous political weight. You would think that our political colleagues would have a leg up because of these. It's so obvious, so clear, that these individuals and others who were poets and writers and historians made a tremendous difference in the actual resolution of the cold war. It's kind of amazing that these go unnoticed.

Okay. So, do examples come to mind? You've mentioned before how you went to the theater, how open it was in Moscow, even during the cold war, as a member of the audience. You were totally free to go anywhere. Regarding more particularly the work that you did— You mention bringing Van Cliburn and Horowitz. Can you remember other instances where the American public diplomacy apparatus got it right and actually did use these figures effectively?

RUTH: Back in the older days of the cold war, back in the times of Eisenhower and after, it was understood that it was worth the taxpayer's dollar to make sure that culture was

part of the portfolio with which we engaged the Soviet Union—and other countries as well, but primarily we were talking, of course, about the arch enemy and the rival, the Soviet Union, for a number of decades. The USG used to allocate separate special funding to make these things happen.

Back in the 1950s, we sent the entire Broadway cast of *Porgy and Bess* to the Soviet Union. One of the best things that happened in that regard was that *The New Yorker* magazine sent along one of its junior writers to cover it, and his name just happened to be Truman Capote. He wrote a beautiful book called *The Muses are Heard,* all about the tour. They were putting on a quintessentially American spectacle in *Porgy and Bess,* not only to a foreign audience and an audience speaking a different language, but one with no cultural or historical understanding of Catfish Row or what it means to say, "There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York—"

There is another important issue to understand about cultural programming—the very delicate role of taxpayer funding for culture in the United States.

Q: No Ministry of Culture in the U.S.

RUTH: I'm not advocating for one, but yes, unlike many countries we have no Ministry of Culture, no Ministry of Arts, no Ministry of Youth, no Ministry of Sports. There is a strong underlying sense with many Americans—and this is entirely understandable—that culture is private. The arts are personal and should not be funded with taxes. An artist will prosper if people will buy his or her paintings, or buy tickets to his or her performances, or buy his or her music. The government shouldn't have anything to do with that.

So, you not only have the asymmetry of trying to get American culture out around the world, but you have the separate story of how you have to deal very carefully with Congress and other senior policymakers in the government simply to fund such programming. I remember you brought up, I think last time, American film. Soviet audiences would be looking beyond the story to see what kind of cars we are driving. What's in the store windows? If they're doing a cops and robbers show in Manhattan, they're not just following the plotline, Soviet viewers were also looking at Fifth Avenue and saying, Look at the shoes they're wearing.

But it's even more than that, Dan. Let's take the Moscow Film Festival. I remember one year when the U.S. entry was *A Soldier's Story.* It was a scathing indictment of racism in the American military. A number of prominent Americans were aghast. The Moscow Film Festival was a private event. The U.S. Government did not pick the movie. But some critics were appalled that we would show such an "anti-American" movie in the home of our archenemy. Thus, it seems, shooting ourselves in the foot.

But in fact, the contrary was true. What the audience walked away thinking and even articulating was, My God. They're allowed to criticize their country. They're free. They

can say what they want and not go to jail or be sent to whatever the equivalent of Siberia is in the United States. It's often very difficult to convince members of an administration, members of Congress, prominent Americans, that culture has all those different, powerful aspects to it that we don't see in our day-to-day life in the United States. But they have tremendous resonance overseas.

Q: Very beautifully explained. I believe I remember hearing that Porgy and Bess was enormously popular in the Soviet Union. It was performed in English. That didn't matter. They got it and they were very touched by it, from what I understand.

RUTH: They actually sent people out on stage in advance of every act to explain in Russian what you were about to see. So, they had a little bit of understanding, because, of course, it wasn't done in Russian; it was done in English.

Q: Isn't that better than electronic subtitles?

RUTH: There you go. Of course, another one of the supreme ironies, if you will, is that exporting American culture, whatever you think of it—high culture, low culture, popular culture; you can love it, you can hate it—hardly requires the USG [United States government] to lift a finger. American popular culture is the most pervasive, influential popular culture in the world. Everyone knows Beyonce. Everyone has seen, or wants to see, *Star Wars* and *Black Panther*. And it's not just music and art; it's fast food, clothing, you name it.

As practitioners and professionals in public diplomacy and foreign affairs, we need to understand and recognize the existence of our popular culture in the world, how it resonates internationally, and how to best utilize it. We survey our exchange students every year. We've been doing it for decades. Still, to this day, young people who come to the United States say that their number one source of information about the United States remains movies and television. That's fine, however wildly inaccurate it is, if we understand it.

Popular culture is one of the competitive advantages that America has in the world, to be nakedly political about it. We need to understand it and we need to utilize it, whether it's as jazz ambassadors or whether it's *Porgy and Bess*. We could send the same caliber of American artists around the world today and see they would have the same tremendous and controversial impact.

Q: You know, there's a parallel history of the 1950s, as you mentioned. The Boston symphony, I think, was sent to France by the CIA. This was at a time when USIA had just barely been born. It was groping to find its way, and somebody in the U.S. government just happened to be at the CIA and understood the value of what you're saying. Very properly, it then transferred over to USIA where it was then housed, but others in the federal government did understand this. It's counterintuitive to think about.

Now, do you want to mention Dave Brubeck and people like that, and the role they played in opening mutual understanding in Eastern Europe?

RUTH: The whole jazz ambassadors program is a marvelous topic. If anyone wants to look, there's a book by Penny Von Eschen called *Satchmo Blows Up the World.* It's an in-depth look at the jazz ambassadors. It not only covers the extraordinary impact that these cultural envoys of the United States had in the Soviet Union, Africa, the Middle East, and other countries where they traveled, but it talks about jazz as a quintessentially American form of art and even, as we've all heard, quintessentially democratic. Everyone plays together, but every individual riffs on their own at a certain point in a certain way. You can interpret; you don't simply have to follow the score as you do in some classical forms.

But the book is also interesting because it talks about the very difficult balancing act that these artists undertook in performing their art and representing the United States while being the objects of racism at the same time. Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong perfectly well understood that, on the one hand, they were being given a magnificent opportunity to showcase their accomplishments, their art, their genius to new audiences. They very much wanted to do that. They were also being given a chance to represent their country, the United States of America, and they were proud to do that.

But at the same time, they understood that the State Department was, at least in part, cynically using them to counter Soviet arguments about racism in America. We were selecting not only, but in very large part, Black artists in order to try and rebut that. I think it was Duke Ellington who said, at one point, when he skipped a State Department advance briefing before departure, "I don't need a lot of white people to tell me about race in America."

There was even an element in some of the State Department advertising and promotion for this that seemed to convey that, somehow, jazz was not difficult or sophisticated artistically, but rather a natural welling up of the spirit of the artist. Of course, that was profoundly wrong and insulting as well. These sophisticated jazz artists and musicians and singers had to delicately balance what was going on in America and their own personal experience with racism and prejudice in America, with this marvelous opportunity to represent this country that they loved nonetheless and to showcase the art they were so proud of. So, it's a fascinating issue, all in all.

Q: Absolutely. When Brubeck was celebrated in the Ben Franklin room, I don't know if you were there that day.

RUTH: I was not, no.

Q: He was eighty-three or more. He was very moved by this sort of lifetime achievement thing. We know that presidents would call him up, even when he had a lucrative gig, and I

think maybe Eisenhower or Kennedy would say, I need you in Thailand, and he would drop the lucrative thing and rush off to serve his country. That's quite something.

Should we discuss the role of Soviet émigrés? Brodsky, Solzhenitsyn, all that. Was this part of your portfolio? These were brilliant artists who had managed— There was the ballet dancer who made it to New York. Were these— Did their activities and their existence form a part of the public affairs and public diplomacy section in Moscow? You were aware of them—

RUTH: No, they had no prominent kind of role or profile in our activities. That was partly because many of the artistic figures, as you indicated just a little bit ago, were seen more as political than as artistic. Because of the nature of the Soviet Union, because of the persecution of these individuals and their own histories—whether they defected or engaged in what was called *samizdat*, self-publication, or smuggled their books out to the West, whether like Pasternak they were forced to decline the Nobel Prize—and because of the way the Soviet Union treated these individuals, that made them, for all practical purposes, political figures more than artistic figures for the purposes of U.S. diplomacy and public diplomacy.

Q: Yeah. It's kind of paradoxical. We were saying earlier how Americans in other nations don't quite get it, in terms of the importance of culture, and yet I think most Americans would consider these individuals as more cultural than political. I could be wrong.

RUTH: They should understand that that's why the leadership of the Soviet Union saw them as such a threat. That is why they jailed them, that is why they intimidated them, that is why they took other extraordinary measures to silence them. They understood the power.

Q: Now, aside from public diplomacy, you were in Moscow in not the worst time of the cold war, but it was a pretty bad time. You were public diplomacy, not consular, but what about refuseniks and the atmosphere of Soviets who really would rather have left and were prevented from doing so? Was that an aspect of the life you lived?

RUTH: It was an aspect off and on. We had one—long-forgotten now, of course—very prominent case at the time I was there. That was the group of seven Pentecostals who were living in the embassy basement—the Vashchenko family. They had sought refuge with the embassy, and we would not throw them out because we knew what would happen to them. We engaged in months, if not years, of negotiations with the Soviet government to try and be able to get them out. It finally broke free when one of the Pentecostals needed medical assistance. I had the privilege, if you will—along with a couple of other embassy officers—of escorting the woman to the local hospital, Botkin Hospital, and handling any press or publicity associated with that activity. It was something that the American press was keenly interested in. They eventually were allowed to depart for Israel.

Q: I think I remember that. They were in the embassy for more than a year.

RUTH: Yes, they were there for an extended period of time, about five years as I recall.

Q: They were there just on the basis of religious persecution, I guess we would call it?

RUTH: Absolutely. The Soviet Union was officially an atheist state, and religion was persecuted.

Q: Wow. So, gee whiz, they were in the same building— Well, were you working— You were not in the embassy?

RUTH: They were in the same building that my office was in.

Q: So, I guess you met them and spoke to them at times?

RUTH: On the odd occasion. They kept largely to themselves.

Q: Incredible story. This was a standoff. There were so many during the cold war, where the Soviet Union would either threaten to imprison or prevent exile. In some cases, they would actually chase them away and say, You're no longer a Soviet citizen. Goodbye. I don't know if those considered themselves lucky or unlucky. They were sent away in disgrace, but then again, some of them did very well when they landed in the West.

Okay. Let's think of some anecdotes, if we could, of your work in what we now call Public Affairs Sections [PA]. You've explained that this was Press and Culture, not USIS. Do certain programs stand out in your memory, either visiting Americans or— Actually, there was an exchange program that was interrupted by KAL [Korean Airlines Flight 902]. I remember that. That was when the Korean passenger plane was shot down and suddenly, all the exchanges stopped. That was in '83, I think.

RUTH: That was actually the same month I departed my assignment. I was packing up and moving out at the time that happened. But, as you know, there were numerous cataclysmic world events that have made exchanges go up and down. For example, there was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the American boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980. It seems like centuries ago now, but one of the things that's interesting to me is that while exchanges were reduced by the Soviet side as a result, they were not eliminated. The Soviet Union valued exchanges for its own reasons and even something as dramatic as the Afghan war and our boycotting of the Olympics didn't cause them to retaliate with a complete cessation of exchanges.

Q: I was working with one of the contract agencies doing IV at the time, and I think I remember that the normal IV program—whether it was the Soviet side or the U.S. side, I don't know—was basically suspended. The only type of exchange—I think it would have been in '83, '84—was what they called district heating for massive housing complexes. It

was a scientific exchange, and a very positive one, but if I remember, the IV and the cultural exchange was— If it wasn't eliminated, it was down to almost nothing, and that was a very difficult time. If you had asked for an extension, you would have been active at that time. It could only have been sad and frustrating, but maybe you could have assisted in some way in keeping things going.

RUTH: As I mentioned at the end of our last conversation, I requested a third-year extension in Moscow, and it was denied.

Q: Yes. Well, you may have a certain bitterness about that, but you got your nine months plus your two years, so I think that's a great blessing, actually.

RUTH: It was an interesting process, yes.

Q: Let's think of some of the snapshots or anecdotes. You mentioned that you went often to art exhibits and theater and the symphony. Do any of these stand out in your memory as really formative?

RUTH: I think one of the things that's interesting to point out is something that's long forgotten by most now, and that is that we used to publish a monthly magazine in Russian called *America Illustrated.* It was a beautiful magazine, very interesting, and extremely popular. When I was able to visit a private citizen's apartment or home, I would often find that there were copies of *America Illustrated* from decades ago. No one ever threw them away. If you got a copy of an *America* magazine, you kept it.

One of my jobs as AIO/AV [assistant information officer, audio-visual], as it turned out, was to go around Moscow to the different kiosks that sold newspapers and magazines and check and make sure they were actually selling *America Illustrated.* We had an agreement. We had *Soviet Life* in the United States. Everything was reciprocal. The exhibits were reciprocal; the magazines were reciprocal. The Soviets were very keen, and the Russians still are, on strict reciprocity.

So, we would go around to designated kiosks and check, Do you have this month's *America Illustrated*? Let me see them. How many copies did you get? You'd watch them being sold. It was enormously popular. One of the unfortunate aspects of the run-up to the merger of USIA with the State Department was the closure of *America Illustrated.*

Q: You don't have to say so, but I will name Joe Duffey as the individual who killed publications. You don't have to go on record saying that, but I will. After saying publicly how much he prized the written word and the hard copy phenomenon, he quickly after that acted.

RUTH: Oh, we had our budgetary death march in the mid-'90s, in which every year the budget was smaller than the year before, and things had to be cut. But we're skipping far ahead.

Q: We'll get to that later, yes.

RUTH: That was definitely an interesting aspect, though. Of course, exhibits were still going on. I was able to visit some of the more recent exhibits while I was in Moscow serving, as well, which was fascinating.

Q: Okay. Anyway, that's fascinating. America Illustrated. I think it was called Topic, the magazine in Africa, which was equally prized. You said people didn't give them away, but I believe that any copy of that magazine would circulate to many dozens of people.

RUTH: Oh, they shared them widely. Absolutely. They did that with the exhibit brochures we gave out from the traveling exhibits, too.

Q: So, distribution figures were misleading, because in fact, the penetration was much larger than the numbers of copies.

RUTH: Absolutely right.

Q: Terrific. What about some of the performances and exhibits that you attended? Do any of them stand out in your mind during those two years?

RUTH: During those two years, not especially. I went back after a brief period of time in Washington and a few other jobs, and I was the desk officer. I continued to travel back to the Soviet Union. So, for example, the Van Cliburn concert, the Horowitz concert—those were things I did later coming back from Washington, not while I was there on my two years.

Q: We will be sure to pick up on that when we get to that point chronologically. What was I going to ask? I had a brilliant question and it's gone. So, anything else about living in Moscow? Oh, I was going to ask— We can skip ahead, just for this one question. Was it pretty easy to get a visa? Because nowadays, it's not.

RUTH: It was not easy, but it wasn't extraordinarily difficult, either, if you were on a diplomatic passport and you were on what the Russians call *komandirovka*—an official assignment. You had to jump through all the hoops exactly right. The Soviets were very big on having lots of rules and regulations and requiring you to follow every one of them precisely. It was often touch and go.

Q: Yeah. The current PAO, Karl Stoltz, waited twelve months to get his visa.

RUTH: Yes, good man. I wondered if he would ever get there.

Q: It's quite a bit more difficult now than it was, paradoxically. Supposedly, we're not in a cold war, but—

RUTH: Well the level of trust between the American government and the Russian government at the highest level has so grievously deteriorated across the board on all issues, from arms control to culture to economics to you name it, that the distrust has filtered down, as it inevitably does, to every level of the bureaucracy. Everything becomes harder and more difficult.

Q: Yeah. A terrible shame, and very frustrating and sad. These things go in cycles. I certainly hope that the movement of the cycle keeps going. Someday, we want this to be more normal. That was the wish during the cold war, too.

I think you've given a good account of your two years in Moscow. I want to give you another chance to bring in any other aspect of life—shopping; traveling within the country; friendships with neighbors that had to have some limits to them, perhaps, because you never quite knew what you were dealing with—that you'd like to add.

RUTH: Oh, indeed. Our first child was born during the Moscow assignment. One of the high points of my life. Our son was born in the U.S. because no one ever went willingly into a Soviet hospital.

I have mentioned before my great interest in "Russia" as opposed to the 'Soviet Union." And it was indeed a great thrill for us to see Russian villages and the countryside—to see birch forests, to see glorious churches with their cupolas shining in the sun, to visit farmers markets, to gather pussy willows. In Russia, because of the climate, Palm Sunday is Pussy Willow Sunday.

And I was able to satisfy my obsession with improving my Russian language ability.

Again, I mentioned before that one of the difficult things for young people today to understand was the ability of the Soviet government to control and interdict the flow of information. They could really keep a large, educated population in a state of grievous ignorance about a great deal of things about the world. But they controlled much more than information.

The ruble, for example, was not a convertible currency. It was largely useless outside of Russia and sometimes it was even useless inside Russia. There was an entire chain of stores—grocery stores, drug stores, retail stores—across the Soviet Union that only operated on foreign currency. Russian citizens were not even allowed to go in them, and they were not allowed to spend rubles—their own national currency.

Q: GUM [Gosudarstvenny Universal'nyy Magazin—State Department Store]?

RUTH: The famous GUM Department Store on Red Square was not a foreign currency store. The hard currency stores—Beriozki as they were called—sold all manner of scarce and desirable items— When I say desirable, I don't mean gold and jewels, I mean like

milk and lettuce. If you wanted certain kinds of food stuffs, books, music that were unavailable in the Soviet economy, you could only get them from a hard currency store. Of course, that created an enormous black market, as any situation like that would. People learned to live with that.

Q: Now, I've never lived in Eastern Europe. My knowledge is all indirect. But I'm thinking of movies like The Death of Stalin, or *the German movie The Life of Others, which imply that nobody believed what their government was saying. When there was an opportunity to just turn your back on it, they all did spontaneously. Is there any truth to that? Did people really drink the Kool-Aid? What do you think?*

RUTH: There were absolutely people who drank the Kool-Aid. There were absolutely people who believed 100 percent in the virtues and advantages of communism over capitalism. There were people who were horrified at what they saw as cruelties and excesses and greed of capitalism. There were people who truly believed that we held back deliberately from engaging Hitler in World War II in Europe because we wanted Hitler to bleed the Soviet Union dry. Yes, they believed those things.

Were there cynics? Were there fellow travelers? Were there people just playing the game to get along? Of course. They were all there, too. You had everything.

Q: Was it necessary to be a party member in order to succeed in the Russian economy?

RUTH: Yes, by and large, if you wanted to rise to a certain level in the government, in a university or elsewhere, you needed to join the Party. Party members had access to goods—similar to what I was just saying about hard currency stores—that were unavailable to the general population.

Money per se was not the thing. It was all about access and power. So, for example, high Soviet officials rode around in big black limousines, called ZILs [named for the factory where they were manufactured, *Zavod imeni Lenina*]. Well, even if somehow you managed to amass an ungodly amount of wealth, you still couldn't have one of those cars. It was all about rationing to the power structure. So, in America, money can be a great leveler. If you have the money you can pretty much buy anything you want with it. But that was not true in the Soviet Union. No matter how much money you had, there were things you could not buy.

Q: But there was every incentive to sell your soul, say you believed, and join the party. Could you just join the party by saying, "I join the party," or do you have to be accepted?

RUTH: There was a process, of course, although I don't really know much about it. Another thing is—Russians had the most marvelous sense of humor. Hard times bring out the grim humor in people. If you paid attention to Soviet jokes, you understood that they saw their system and its defects far more keenly than we ever could. There was a joke

about joining the Party. It has a young man being questioned about his fitness for Party membership. He has to forswear drinking, carousing, gambling, affairs and so on. Finally, he is asked if he would die for the Party. He shrugs and says, Sure. If I've given up all of that, why live?

Q: I have a couple of books of those jokes. They're the best jokes in the world. There's the Georgian who is on an airplane flying from Tbilisi to Moscow that hijackers try to divert to Paris. So the Georgian fights down the hijackers and is greeted as a hero in Moscow. So then when the press interviews him and says, How did you do it? Why did you do it?

He says, "What could I have done with five kilos of oranges in Paris?"

The truth is that these jokes were quite audacious, actually, but I guess they weren't attributed to any individual. There's the great one of the man who goes to the KGB and says, "I'm reporting a lost parrot." Do you know that one?

RUTH: I don't know that one.

Q: They said, We don't care. We don't do that.

"I just want you to know that I strongly disagree with everything it says." These are great jokes. Where did they come from? I remember reading some of these and hearing some of these and thinking, oh my gosh. Everybody in the Soviet Union understands that the whole system is shoddy. Yet that's very naïve on my part.

RUTH: Oh, but they did understand. As I said when we were discussing the exhibits, they would come to us and say, We know our government lies to us. It was transparent, because they lied about their own daily lives. It was like the joke about the Georgian with five kilos of oranges; that's perfect.

But of course, many of the jokes weren't really *funny.* I'll tell just one. Nixon is in Moscow for a summit with Brezhnev. They're up in Brezhnev's apartment on the top story of one of these Stalinesque skyscrapers, and they're just talking. They want to show off for each other, so Nixon points to one of his military escorts and says, "Jump off the balcony."

They're like twenty stories up. So, the young man goes over, looks down over the balcony, comes back, and says, "No, Mr. President, I'm sorry."

Nixon says, "Why not?"

He says, "Mr. President, You have to understand, I have a wife and family."

So, Brezhnev is chuckling, as you are chuckling now. He then tells one of his soldiers to do the same. The young Soviet soldier sprints as fast as he can to the balcony, never

hesitates, and dives right over. Nixon can't believe it. Horrified, he rushes downstairs in the elevator, goes out to the sidewalk where the young Russian is gasping his last breath. Nixon says, "Young man, why on earth did you do that?"

He says, "Mr. President, you have to understand. I have a wife and family."

Q: These are cruel. Wonderful insights, though. As you said, the ability of the totalitarian state to interdict information— These were enormously valuable for outsiders to understand the way Russians really thought.

So, again, open question: I guess you mentioned having this writer friend writing scurrilous books about the U.S. Was there always a limit to how far you could go in a friendship in the Soviet Union?

RUTH: Sure. You didn't want to get anybody else in trouble. You had to be careful. They surveilled you any time they wanted to. Sometimes they were very heavy-handed about it because they didn't care. In fact, they were heavy-handed, in many cases, about street surveillance because they wanted you to know that they owned you. You were in their country, and they owned you. They didn't have to hide or be secretive about it. They could bug your apartment and do whatever they liked.

There were regular cases where somebody from the embassy would go on leave and when they came back, they'd find that "someone" had gone into the apartment and left the refrigerator door open so everything would spoil. Or they would use the toilet and not flush it. It was just to let you know, We own you when you're in our country. So, you had to be delicate about it.

Q: Even when I went as a tourist to Leningrad in '88 for three days, it was very obvious I was being observed and followed. It was very funny, because it was so unlikely that any of this could have been a coincidence. So, people have wonderful anecdotes about these things, but I see that you weren't particularly ruffled. You understood what was going on. It is what it is, and you went about your business. Was that the case? Did most Americans bear up under this? It must have been kind of stressful, but did most of them just take it in stride?

RUTH: Moscow was a stressful post because we were in a hostile power. It was a police state with surveillance and surreptitious recording of your apartment or your home. You were easily recognizable as a foreigner—by your looks, by your accent.

The culture was high, the food was low. Restaurants and cafés were pretty lousy. I still remember when the first McDonald's opened in Pushkin Square and was mobbed—not so much for the food but because of the service.

It's not a joke. I was at a dinner once in Moscow with a high-powered group invited by *Time* magazine. *Time* used to have an annual CEO visit where they would bring business

leaders from different American corporations, the Fortune 500 types, to Moscow and Leningrad for a tour and meetings. There was a big dinner in Armand Hammer's International Hotel in Moscow, and at the end of the hors d'oeuvres and the soup, there was an embarrassed pause, because they had no entrée. They had purchased the meat—steak—to be served for a hundred plus people, and the staff had sold it on the black market out the back door of the hotel.

So, on the one hand, it was an adventure, no question about that. But was it stressful? Sure, particularly for families. It's hard to get things for children. Hard to get the right food. You can't get those Cheerios that your kids want every morning.

Q: Right. Famously, I think McDonald's instructed its staff to smile or else. I think it was the smiles that impressed Muscovites, I think.

RUTH: Somewhat. They all thought Americans smiled too much. They said we looked like idiots.

Q: Right. That's an interesting cultural difference. I don't know if it's of any importance, but I've been told that if you smile in Russia, you're considered an idiot. If you don't smile in the U.S., you're considered hostile. These are little things. Once you understand them, it's nothing, but they are genuine differences. In Madrid, by the way, I took a Spaniard to dinner for his birthday at eight o'clock. The waiter said, "Come back at ten." So, the exact opposite. There's always been an interesting thing between Spain and Poland and Russia, culturally and historically. There are some links. In the Spanish Civil War, the Soviets were actually trying to help the elected government in Madrid. It's an interesting history.

So, we can certainly come back to this most important assignment. I won't say the *most, but it was very meaningful to you, I'm sure. You had devoted part of your life to learning the language and culture. You had been there as an exhibit interpreter. You got to go back on your third assignment, which is not bad. Then, you were the desk officer later. We'll want to hear. I'm sure there were stories from that.*

Let's get you now from Moscow 1983, I guess. You had asked for another year, they said no. You got two years, so that's pretty good. Then what? What happened next?

RUTH: Well, I requested that third year, and I was feeling confident that I would receive it. Moscow was a popular place to serve in the sense that it was career-enhancing—punch your ticket in the capital of the Soviet Union—but many people avoided it like the plague because they didn't want to study Russian, which is spoken nowhere else in the world. It wasn't like learning French, a world language. Again, I had the enthusiastic support of the public affairs officer. I even had the on-record support of the ambassador, the estimable Arthur A. Hartman. So, I might be forgiven for thinking it was a slam dunk.

Then, one day, I was told there was a phone call for me to take up in the SCIF [Secure Compartmented Information Facility], the place where classified or sensitive phone calls took place. It was my career counselor. You'll know this term, Dan. Anybody reading this will know what a career counselor was. This was somebody who I'd never met, of course. Basically you got a cable or an email every so often saying, "Hi, I'm your career counselor," and then you never saw them again until the next cable came saying, "Hi, I'm your new career counselor."

Anyway, this person said, "You're not going to be extended in Moscow. You're going to go to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia as the branch PAO."

Q: Oh, I see. "You know Arabic, so we're going to get you." Is that how it worked?

RUTH: See, Dan, you know the system too well. That's exactly right. I expressed some dissatisfaction with that, and my career counselor actually got quite huffy about it and said, "Look, I'm doing you a favor. I don't have to make this phone call. The decision's made. The cable's coming. I'm doing you a courtesy and a favor by giving you this head's up."

Q: Wait, what about the bidding system? Was there no bidding? They just did this?

RUTH: Oh, you're jumping ahead now. So, the cable came assigning me as branch PAO to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I sent a cable back appealing that assignment. Then I got another notice that there was a phone call upstairs. This time, it was one of the deputy directors in the European area saying, "Forget about Dhahran. That's off. We want you to be the assistant PAO in Sofia, Bulgaria."

I was not interested in Sofia, Bulgaria. I'm happy to have this conversation reflect all of my pettiness. It can be a strength. The Sofia job was a first-time junior officer assignment. I thought: I'm now on my third assignment. I've already been promoted. This makes no career sense. Later on, when I spoke to the deputy director of the European Area Office, he said that he knew it was a bad assignment for me but that the PAO was a disaster and they needed someone to back up the operation.

Q: Oh, that's not petty. A step backwards is not a good thing.

RUTH: So, there was some grumbling and that phone call ended, and then later, I learned two other things. I ran into the individual who was responsible for assigning me to Dhahran. It was exactly as you divined. The General Accounting Office, as it was called then, came through and did a survey of LDPs [language-designated positions]—positions where a certain level of language ability is specified. They criticized USIA for not having qualified people in those positions. So, as you said, there was BPAO Dhahran needing Arabic. I had 2/2 Arabic. So, that was that. In fact, this very senior official said, "I knew it was a terrible assignment for you, but it was no skin off my nose." Charming.

So USIA had wanted to make two assignments they knew made little sense for me.

What I also learned is that they took my case all the way to the associate director for management, who, at that time, was a political appointee who did not like Foreign Service officers. He thought we were all prima donnas. I suppose my decisions only underscored that impression for him. He said, "Well, Ruth has turned down two valid assignments. He's out of the Foreign Service."

A colleague of mine who happened to be in that meeting, because he was the personnel officer for the European Area, said, "Well, sir, there's one other possibility. That is the Operations Center. He can do shift work as a watch officer because we have a terrible time getting anybody assigned there. Nobody wants to do it. It's shift work. It's awful."

So, this fellow, who disliked Foreign Service officers, was attracted to that option and said, "Okay. That's it. Ruth goes to the OpCenter to be a watch officer or he's out of the Foreign Service." So, I came back to the watch.

Q: Nowadays that's a promotion job, but I guess back then—

RUTH: Well, it wasn't the State Department Operations Center. It was the USIA Operations Center, which, in fact, was a difficult spot. Anyway, I was back in Washington a few months later and settling the family into a new apartment and all of that. I got a phone call— Oh, those phone calls. I got a phone call saying, "Can you come down to USIA headquarters right away? We have an unexpected vacancy in the Soviet desk officer position, and we want you to have it."

So, I went down to USIA HQ in jeans and a t-shirt and went to the office of this individual who was my career counselor, the one who had made the phone call. I had never met him. When I got to his office, the door was open and he was on the phone with his back to the door, so I waited for a moment for him to finish his call. When he got off, I tapped on the door. He turned around, and I said, "Hi, I'm Rick Ruth."

The first words out of his mouth were, "You can't have it." He didn't say, "Hello." He didn't say his name. He didn't say anything. He just said, "You can't have it."

I said, "I beg your pardon?"

He said, "The desk officer job. You can't have it. I've spoken to the head of Personnel, and we don't like your attitude."

I said, "Okay. Fine. Operations Center, here I come. No problem." Off I went. So, I started doing shift work. I was a day sleeper and doing midnight to eight, the graveyard shift and all of that. It was genuinely dreadful. Now the plot thickens. The chief of the Operations Center was a senior Foreign Service officer who was desperate to get back to Latin America. He was a Latin America hand, his wife was from Latin America, and he

really wanted to get back there. But his boss, the executive secretary—we're really getting into the weeds now—wouldn't let him go without an immediate replacement on hand. Nobody wanted the awful job of being chief of the Operations Center, though, so he was stuck.

He called me in and said, "Look. You bid on my job, but don't let on to the boss why you're doing it, because if he knows I put you up to it—"

So, I went to see his boss [as if it were entirely my idea], the executive secretary of USIA, and I said, "Sir, what do you think about me bidding on chief of the Operations Center?"

He thought for a little bit, and he said, "No. Don't do it. It's above your grade and experience. It wouldn't look good."

I said, "Hmm, okay." Then I went to see the person who was now my career counselor. This was eight months after I had come back, so I had a new career counselor. I went to see that person and I said the same thing. I said, "What do you think about me bidding on the chief of the Operations Center?"

She also thought, and then she said, "No, people will laugh at you. If you bid on jobs so far above your competence, you're going to get a bad reputation."

So, I said, "Okay, thank you," and I went and bid on the job. I got it.

Q: Against everybody's advice. You're quite a troublemaker. I never knew that about you.

RUTH: Then, a few months later, I got a phone call from the European Area, from the same guy who had called me in Moscow about Bulgaria, and he said, "Rick, you're not going to believe this, but we've lost our Soviet desk officer again unexpectedly." It was a tandem couple, and he had to go off with his wife. "We want you to have the job."

I said, "We've just been through this."

He said, "No, this time it's wired. Just put your request in and you've got it. We wired it this time. No more mishaps."

So, I moved from the OpCenter to the European Area to be the country affairs officer for the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] and Baltic States.

Q: Wow. This is a crazy story. This is absolutely crazy. These days they call them CDOs, career development officers, but of course, we call them career destruction officers. Nobody likes their CDO unless that person is Phil du Chateau, because he was good.

RUTH: Phil was wonderful. He still is.

Q: He's retired, I guess.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: But we all loved him, because he cared about us— We're getting into the merger now, but he kept the PD spirit alive with Personnel after the merger and was much loved for it. Well, this is very funny. So, was it one year in the OpCenter?

RUTH: A little less, yeah.

Q: Okay. God forbid it had been a full tour of two years. It sounds like not much fun at all with night shifts and all of that. So, it was a triple blessing to go to the next phase. This was a country that you were passionately interested in and knew very well, and you didn't have to do night shifts anymore, and you overcame the prior obstacles for that very same job. This is a very happy moment. As Satan says in Master and Margarita, "If there weren't evil, you would never know what good is."

RUTH: There you go. One of the greatest books of all time.

Q: It's great. So, should we put a bookend on this? Should we say goodbye to the OpCenter? Did anything of interest happen? Were there any crises like KAL, for example, that you had to deal with?

RUTH: No, nothing terribly interesting came of being the chief of the Operations Center. It was the most unlikable job I ever had. That was partly because other people—that I was responsible for and whose decisions I was responsible for—were making decisions all night long while I was asleep. I would walk into the office in the morning and people would say, Oh, my God, you're not going to believe the trouble you're in now because of what happened at two am. It was that kind of thing. It wasn't the greatest.

Q: Before we leave this pitiful episode, you advanced to be the chief of the whole thing. Was that not career-enhancing, at some point?

RUTH: Well, the thing that made the chief of the OpCenter job interesting in retrospect was that it put me in touch with the director [now Charles Wick], because the OpCenter was part of the director's office. So, there would be occasions where I would call him after hours to let him know certain kinds of information or to patch him through to an ambassador or whatever it happened to be. There were even occasions when I woke him up at night to pass along some kind of flash information about something going on that I knew he'd want to know about. So, I was introduced very modestly into his consciousness.

That was then followed by being the Soviet desk officer. Of course, like his good friend, then-President Ronald Reagan, Charles Wick was obsessed with the Soviet Union.

Therefore, by becoming the Soviet desk officer, I became a part of Charles Wick's life, and he became a part of my life. I would travel to the Soviet Union with him. I would go to meetings with him. I would write his briefing memos. I would sit in on his meetings with the Soviet ambassador. Well, Russia and the Soviet Union were his obsession, and therefore I was routinely in his line of sight.

Q: Now, that's of enormous value. Very few people liked him, but we all acknowledged he doubled the resources, and he had a direct line to the president. He really made USIA suddenly noticeable. So, actually, the OpCenter position, which was no fun, got you introduced to Charles Wick. That's a most important episode.

RUTH: In a brief way, that's right. Then, the Soviet desk officer position cemented that.

Q: I propose that we get into that next time. Charles Wick is such an important person, pro and con, and I think we should have a discussion just on that relationship. This is quite interesting. OpCenter. He got to know you as somebody who was a reliable person who knew when to bring something to his attention. That's not easy. I'm guessing he learned to trust you at that time, and then when you became Soviet desk officer, the relationship was solidified. That doesn't mean it was a love-love thing, but it was a very important professional connection for you, for the U.S. public diplomacy programs in the Soviet Union, and for USIA. I think this was a very key moment.

RUTH: It was.

Q: I think we're going to sign off just for the moment. This is Rick Ruth, Dan Whitman. It's December 12, 2020. We're now going to— Let's see if I know how to do this. Stop recording.

This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman. We're talking on December 16—Beethoven's birthday—2020. Rick, we had you in the OpCenter at USIA, which led you to become known to Charles Wick. Let's take it from there.

RUTH: Right. Well, the next thing that happened, without getting too much into personnel weeds, is that I got a phone call from the European area saying that once again, they were looking for a USSR country affairs officer—the Russia desk officer, as it was commonly called. This time, it worked. I moved from chief of the OpCenter to the European Area.

I think the full name is actually important. It was country affairs officer for the USSR and Baltic States. The United States never recognized the forcible incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia into the Soviet Union. When I would give Soviet diplomats my card, they would look at it, and they would always be incensed. What the heck is this? What do you mean *and* Baltic States? I would have the pleasure, of which I never tired, of explaining to them that the Baltics were not part of the Soviet Union through any

voluntary or democratic process. They were conquered territory, and we weren't having it.

Anyway, it was a great pleasure last year when I went to Estonia for the first time. I felt like I'd completed the circle.

Q: That's great. I remember the maps where the Baltic states were sort of shaded gray or something like that. Aside from that symbolic non-recognition and the psychological backing of the people in those countries, did the U.S. ever actually do anything to actually lead to the eventual 1991 independence?

RUTH: Well, there wasn't much we could do except support them from the sidelines in whatever ways possible. But there really wasn't much we or any of the European countries that were their neighbors—Finland and others, which were related culturally and historically—could do because of the military strength of the Soviet Union. But once the opportunity arose, then we took very quick advantage of it.

But yes, to your question, I moved to be the Russia or Soviet desk officer. Of course, we're now talking about the 1980s. Charles Wick was the longest-serving director of USIA, and he essentially served through the '80s. He was there from '81 to '89. That was coterminous with Ronald Reagan as president. That decade, by most practical measures, was the high-water mark of public diplomacy as an important part of American foreign policy.

Very quickly— We can dwell on anything you think is worth pursuing, but keeping in mind, from the vantage point of today, what USIA looked like then— First of all, we need to note that a few years before, under Jimmy Carter, they had moved the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs out of the State Department and into USIA. Many people think it was part of USIA from the outset, but it was not, of course, because of Senator Fulbright, in particular, not wanting education and culture—mostly education and the Fulbright program—to be cohabiting with what he considered to be propaganda and informational or psychological operations activities at USIA.

But Jimmy Carter, with a bit of squaring of the circle and a new name—the U.S. International Communication Agency—and a so-called second mandate of explaining the world to America and not just telling America's story to the world— ECA came to USIA. The so-called second mandate had a short and unhappy life.

Under Charles Wick, we saw what other parts of the government have seen many times, and that is the power that comes when your boss is an intimate of the president of the United States, politically and personally. Charles Wick was so close to the president that every Christmas he dressed up as Santa Claus and visited the Reagan home—before and after they were in the White House—to give presents to their children and family. They really were tight. Politically, they were of one mind, as well.

I'll just go through this quickly, and then we can revisit anything you think is worth it. But very quickly, of course, Wick added WorldNet. He began to increase television capacity. We had Radio and Television Marti in Cuba. We had the U.S.-USSR Information Talks. We had cultural agreements signed by Reagan and Gorbachev at the highest level. We had Charles Wick interacting with senior Soviet officials on information issues. They created the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange. They started Artistic Ambassadors.

They had the U.S.-Russia Exchanges Office. It was called the Presidential Exchanges Office, originally under a high-profile individual named Steve Rhinesmith, who came from the private sector. Wick had a whole series of high-powered private sector advisory committees with a blue-ribbon membership that he could call on as he wished. The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy was a real player at that time, because the two key figures were the legendary Washington lobbyist Tom Korologos and Ed Feulner, who was one of the founders and leaders of the Heritage Foundation. They weren't just rubber stamps or passive observers; they played in this game for and against Wick, depending on the issue.

Then you had triumphs, as they were labeled at the time, such as the INF [Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces] Agreement on intermediate nuclear forces in Europe, where public diplomacy was recognized by the State Department and the White House as having played a key role in shaping public attitudes to make the landmark agreement possible. It was, Dan, a high-water mark for public diplomacy, to be at the forefront of foreign policy and really be a player in a way it seldom was before or has been since.

Q: And there you were at the very center of it. As you said last time, the U.S.-USSR relationship was the high-profile relationship of the time. There you were in the very middle of it at USIA. I'm sure you had contacts with your counterparts in the State Department before amalgamation. You must have. This really put you on center stage.

Going back to the assignment you had to wait for— You were denied a third year in Moscow. You bid on this job and didn't get it. You went to the OpCenter, and then you got the desk. Do you believe in destiny?

RUTH: I believe in serendipity, Dan.

Q: Oh, I remember. It's all on the record.

RUTH: I don't think things happen to you that will determine what you do. I think things happen to you that you can make the most of. With luck, you can be like Rumpelstiltskin and make straw into gold. Or, in some cases, you make gold into straw.

Q: That's brilliant. Again, I want to leave a few seconds of silence to honor that great remark. So, where do we start? WorldNet was an expensive thing. When we think back— We're talking right now on Zoom, which we could be doing even if you were in China or

Mongolia, and we're doing it for free. WorldNet— I believe the cost per hour of production was twenty thousand dollars, which was a lot of money, back then. I don't know if it was controversial, and I'm not trying to pick at it, but I do remember that in 1985, Wick was interviewed on one of the networks, and the journalist said, "How many listeners or viewers do you have?"

He said, "Three billion." The journalist was nonplussed. He understood this was an unlikely number, so he asked the question two more times until Wick, very poker faced, maintained that there were three billion. Of course, we know that what he meant by that was three billion potential viewers. But it seemed like an outrageous claim at that time. What do you remember, since you were there at the nascence of WorldNet? You must have been involved in how it was set up and the funding. It took a lot of money.

RUTH: It took a lot of money. I wasn't particularly involved in the set-up of it. I just had a ringside seat, if you will, because Al Snyder, who was one of the longtime heads of USIA TV, was a confidante of Wick's. But what you had was an interesting clash between resources and the obvious need for the United States government and its public diplomacy apparatus to have a television capability—

One thing we didn't mention, just now, is that in the background throughout the 1980s are some of the now-legendary developments in the history of communications. There was everything from Gameboy to the Internet to CD-ROMs [Compact Disc Read Only Memory] and more. The advances were just pouring out of Silicon Valley and elsewhere. There was certainly no argument that the United States government needed to up its game. Just as we talk about having to keep up with modern technology now, they were doing the same thing then. How can you have the greatest power in the world and its public diplomacy apparatus locked in global combat with the Soviet Union, and we're not using television? You've got to use television.

So, you had that argument, but you also had the brash showmanship style of Charles Wick, which irritated a great many people. Particularly with his sense—and he would never say it this way or mean it this way, but with the president in his back pocket or the president standing behind him as a protector— So, yes, there were many on the Hill who complained about the cost of WorldNet, and I vividly remember the mini scandal that blew up when he talked about the billions of viewers. At some point, I think he said there were more viewers than the population of the world. But he was multiplying potential viewers and repeated viewers and so on and so forth.

So, people acknowledged that it was an important aspect in development, but people were often irritated by his manner of doing it or by such showmanly things as *Let Poland Be Poland* with Frank Sinatra, where people just cringed at what they thought was the vulgar showmanship of it while acknowledging the need to make progress in that technological area.

Q: That movie, Let Poland Be Poland, was endlessly long. If it had an audience, I don't know if anybody would have made it. It was something like two hours long. I don't know if the packaging— Today, Rick—just earlier today there was a webinar with David Ensor and Amanda Bennett talking about the current crisis of VOA. That reminds me that VOA has basically taken over the television function. It does this through various ways. It's connected to Facebook and other ways. It suddenly occurs to me: why would VOA not have extended its broadcasting into TV? Was there any discussion of that that you remember?

RUTH: Well, there was, and eventually, after Wick's time, there was legislation that consolidated WorldNet, VOA, Radio TV Marti, and some of the other broadcasting assets into the Bureau of Broadcasting, as it existed for several years. Then it was hived off to be the Broadcasting Board of Governors at the time that the rest of USIA was merged with State. But the main reason was that if VOA added TV, it wouldn't be as special. It wouldn't be visible and distinct. That was extremely important, not only that it be a major production, almost in a Hollywood fashion, but that it would receive attention so the Soviets and other people would notice that we were now doing television. We weren't just incrementally adding their capabilities.

Q: That sounds like the personal touch of Charles Wick.

RUTH: Sure, and others, as well. As you know, no political appointee ever enters office saying, "I intend to pursue the wise policies of my predecessor." Everybody has to make a splash. One way you make a splash is to make something that's distinct and visible and allegedly different than anything that's gone before.

Q: As he certainly did. I wonder if you'd be willing to do a parenthesis here. Because VOA is today in a crisis, we need not discuss the crisis it's in now with leadership and possible changes in the new administration, but suddenly the history of BBG [Broadcasting Board of Governors], USAGM [U.S. Agency for Global Media], and others— If you can remember the broad outlines of the various changes in management during your time, I think it would be worth getting that on the record, if you'd be willing to.

RUTH: Well, I'd be willing to, but honestly I don't remember a whole lot about it. Of course, the original distinction was between the originally CIA-funded Radio Liberty or Radio Free Europe, which were meant to be surrogate broadcasters. The big distinction, as you know—I'll just say it for the record—or the fracture line in broadcasting was, were you broadcasting independent news about the United States in the world, as any news organization would, or were you serving as a domestic broadcaster in exile? That's what the surrogate broadcasting meant.

So, Radio Liberty and the other Eastern European language broadcasts broadcast as if they were Russian, Bulgarian, Czech, but they happened to be in exile. So, they reported local news, domestic stories from that perspective, as opposed to the Voice of America,

which broadcast news as the BBC would. This is very sketchy and likely to be a tad inaccurate because I was never especially interested in broadcasting.

Q: This is actually tremendously important, because credibility, which is being fractured in so many ways these days—as opposed to VOA— You've just made a very interesting distinction. I don't think many people understand the difference in what you've just said. Would you be able to elaborate? How did that affect the style? You said domestic coverage in exile— As I remember, the point was to cover the domestic news of the countries they were broadcasting to, only doing it from the outside. Now, VOA was more universal, international news and less specialized with domestic news in different countries. Granted, you weren't part of this apparatus, but do you remember how the styles differed? As I understand it, Radio Liberty was jammed, but VOA was not jammed. Do I remember that correctly?

RUTH: It was jammed for many years. Then, one of the agreements, actually, during the Reagan-Gorbachev era was for the Soviets to scale back on the jamming of the Voice of America. Of course, its name is the Voice of America. It began in World War II. Its first broadcast and its first broadcaster said, "We will tell you good news, we will tell you bad news, but we will always tell you the truth." So, that has always been the bedrock creed of the Voice of America. It's not propaganda. It's the truth. It's the news.

One of the difficulties, one of the tensions, I should say, that runs through any such entity like that is to say, "We work for the U.S. government. Uncle Sam pays our salary. The American taxpayer pays our salary and puts a roof over our heads, but we broadcast independently of U.S. government foreign policy and independent of any U.S. government political pressure."

In the same way, to harken back to what we just said a few minutes ago, that's why Senator William Fulbright didn't want his Fulbright Scholar program in USIA. He wanted to be able to say it was independent of any political pressure. We don't pick people to be Fulbright scholars because of political patronage. They can have views that are opposite to the administration. They don't have to toe the administration's political line. They are independent scholars and researchers. There's always been that awkwardness or tension inside the United States because a lot of people in America would say, Heck, if we're paying their salaries, they need to do the job we want them to do.

People in other countries, of course, will give you a very skeptical look when you say, "Yes, VOA is completely paid for by the United States government, but it's independent of American government policy." That can be a hard sell.

Q: How in the world could Fulbright grants be administered other than by State or USICA [United States International Communication Agency] or USIA? What did he have in mind?

RUTH: I mean, he was fine with it being at the State Department. First of all, it was Thomas Jefferson's Department of State. It covered the world and did everything, whereas he saw USIA in those very early days—especially since it began in the 1950s under Eisenhower—as more propagandistic. At the outset, it was agreed, as I mentioned, that ECA would not be part of USIA when it was created because Fulbright and others lobbied with Eisenhower to not do that. They thought that that would be too strange of bedfellows to have. Again, what they freely called propaganda and psychological operations—what we now call "information and strategic communications."

Fulbright, I believe, wanted the U.S. government and the American people to be associated with it and, if you will, get credit for it, for that kind of intellectual engagement. A professor at Oxford once said that the Fulbright program was responsible for the largest and most significant movement of scholars across the face of the earth since the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Not too shabby.

Q: Did you ever meet a person outside of the U.S. who understood the distinction between the State Department and USIA? I did not.

RUTH: In a practical sense, a lot of people did, but you're right, if you pushed them on it, they would say, Well, it's whatever the president wants to happen. It's whatever the secretary of state wants to happen. If you're talking about the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries, or even just more skeptical countries like India, they would say that if the president really wanted to and it was a matter of the utmost national security, he could tell *The New York Times* what to do. People who come from a different culture, just as we do, mirror image their neighbors. Just as we do, they assume that the way they operate is the way we operate. That was always one of the biggest challenges. We have to explain how America operates.

When I went on the exhibit—it was shortly after Watergate—Soviet visitors would often say, Okay, the president fired the attorney general. So what? He was the attorney general's boss, wasn't he? Can't the boss fire people? It was in just that very straightforward, plainspoken way.

You had to say, "Well, yes, of course the president hired him and can fire him. That's the president's prerogative. But we don't want the president to do it for a corrupt reason.

Then they would nod sagely and go, Ah, well, now you're on thin ice.

Q: Well, we must say that we're only three days past the day that Bill Barr has given notice as attorney general, and that really did have to do with the wishes of the White House. Not to be too esoteric, but I had thought—and maybe I was incorrect about this—that the Soviet Union actually did not jam VOA, and that that was the reason for the creation of the Special English program. VOA understood that it did have an audience—not a huge one, but an audience that had some understanding of English. I believe I remember that anecdote, but—

RUTH: Well, of course, VOA was broadcast all around the world and Special English was enormously popular all around the world, even exclusive of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

Q: I was actually told by Alan Heil that it was created for—

RUTH: If Alan Heil said it, it's true.

Q: He said it was created for the Soviet Union and, if I remember correctly, the reason was that while Radio Liberty was being jammed, VOA was not for some reason I don't understand. That's esoterica.

RUTH: I'm not a specialist, as Alan is, in the history of broadcasting.

Q: Okay. There's so much to go into here. Let's see. You've mentioned the topic. In addition to WorldNet and the surrogate broadcasters, there was Marti, which was controversial from the start and never had much of an audience because of the successful jamming of the Cuban government. You also mentioned cultural agreements, the U.S. Advisory Commission. I didn't realize that it was at this time during the Wick period that the Advisory Commission was created. Is that correct?

RUTH: It was created before that, but for most of its existence, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy has been a rather sleepy body or a bystander. For the last four years, it's been entirely moribund in terms of the actual commissioners.

They have some pretty good reasons why. It's not because of the quality of the commissioners. The commissioners are excellent professionals. But you have to have some political juice. They hadn't been fully staffed. They hadn't had any appointees from President Trump's administration to bring that extra clout. But it was probably, again, the high-water mark of the commission when they had individuals of recognized prominence, like Tom Korologos, Ed Feulner, and others on the commission. Sometimes, they would disagree rather sharply with Director Wick on some issues. It would be news. That doesn't happen anymore.

Q: In fact, since Wick, I don't remember a time when the commission made a recommendation that anybody ever noticed.

RUTH: You're right. I'll tell you one ghastly work-a-day anecdote. The staff of the Advisory Commission—they have a professional, full-time staff that manages the day-to-day operations—would have regular meetings. The first meeting that the staff of the Advisory Commission held following the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] proposal to abolish the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs—which you would think would be a pretty big-ticket item to talk about—the number one item on their agenda was whether or not each public diplomacy bureau should have a separate page on

the website of the State Department's Ralph Bunche Library. So, they could get lost in small things. Again, that was for a variety of reasons, some of which are entirely understandable, and one can sympathize with them.

When it came my turn to speak at the meeting, I said that it reminded me of an old painting that showed a farmer calmly plowing his field and completely ignoring a volcano erupting in the background. I stole the image from Auden's wonderful poem: *Musee des Beaux Arts*.

The Advisory Commission has kept a very low profile for quite some time. There's nothing for you to remember about their recommendations, particularly. Some of the staff have been superb. There are some superb officers working there, but there's only so much they can do if the commission above them doesn't have any clout or any particular profile. While the commissioners, as I said, have been excellent individuals—smart, astute people—if you don't have any political backing, then you have to keep a low profile. So, the Advisory Commission's been whipsawed back and forth a lot and has paid the price for that.

Q: We should note Bruce Gregory, who was the non-political employee who ran the thing for some years, quite ably, I think. He's now at GW [George Washington University]. I guess he had the misfortune of coming a bit too late to be part of the Wick period.

RUTH: I can't remember exactly when different commissioners and Bruce came and went, but I worked with Bruce— I was his liaison while he was at the Advisory Commission, and he was the high-water mark for that position, too.

Q: Thanks for that mention, which will stand in the record. He was very active and very much a friend of USIS officers in the field. So, there's the question of where E, ECA, CU or whatever you want to call it goes. There's so much politics there, and it's 100 percent domestic politics. Did the people working on this understand that foreigners just didn't want to make this decision? This was the U.S. government, period, end of story. Isn't that the way most non-Americans saw educational and cultural exchanges, as the U.S. government?

RUTH: Yes, for the most part, sure. Of course. There's no reason for most individuals in other countries to have any particularly nuanced understanding of the differences in our bureaucracy and our philosophies, but in many cases, it didn't matter. The attraction, particularly if we're talking about education and cultural affairs, then as now, was that it's America. Nobody particularly cares which part of the bureaucratic structure is responsible for it or which funding stream covers it. The point is that you're a young man, a young woman, a professor somewhere, a student, and you have an opportunity for X amount of time to come to the United States, so you're going to do it.

Q: That's a very positive, broad view. I think the people arguing and bickering about this in Washington were in a rabbit hole, in some senses. They were trying to correct a

misperception. I don't think they ever succeeded in doing that, in making these various administrative changes. Now, the Baltic countries. They did have legations. They weren't embassies. I'm wondering if while you were the desk for USSR and the Baltics— There were Baltic representations. They weren't accredited. But did you have contact with them?

RUTH: No, I really did not.

Q: Okay. They have now become embassies.

RUTH: I would like to point out in that theme, though, that a couple of years ago on Baltic Independence Day, when President Trump hosted the heads of state of all three Baltic countries in the White House, all three of them were alumni of ECA programs.

Q: Another fifteen second pause. That's amazing. Wasn't the first president of independent Estonia a U.S. citizen? Maybe it was the foreign minister, something like that. So, the connection is very close. I've had the pleasure of interviewing Michael Polt. I don't know if you know him. Much later, he was ambassador to Estonia, and he talks about how although these are tiny countries with 1.2 million people or less, the sense of identity is as strong as any country in the world. He made that point.

Okay. While you were desk, I guess you had the opportunity to make field visits. Can you talk about how and when and why and what came of them?

RUTH: Well, yes. There were a couple of highlights during Wick's tenure for me professionally. One was that, again, thanks to his influence and the fact that cultural agreements between the U.S. and USSR were raised to a high political summit level, I was able to go to Moscow at one point and be present in the Red Room, as it's called—the *Krasnaya Gostinitsa*—at the Kremlin when Reagan and Gorbachev signed one of the cultural agreements.

As I said when we started some sessions ago, you know my personal interest in Russian language and culture. The Legal Office had authorized me to be the individual who guaranteed that the two versions of the treaty, Russian and English, were in fact accurate translations of each other. So, I got to be up there in the room with the big boys. That was fun.

Q: So, the Soviets also had a person like you looking at both agreements?

RUTH: Yes. He and I were up until three am the night before just crossing the Ts and dotting the Is and making sure everything was just right for signature. Then, the hard work fell to the Soviet side because they had to print the documents, since we were in Moscow, and get them ready for signature.

Q: So, there was a Rick Ruth clone over there, a mirror image! Did you get to know this person more than on that one occasion?

RUTH: I would see that person on several occasions, whenever I would go to Moscow. Sometimes he would come to the United States. By the way, he later emigrated to the United States. The other highlight was in Reykjavik, which was again a Reagan-Gorbachev summit. One of the admirable things, in my opinion, that Charles Wick did was he raised the media disparity, the disparity in American media access to Soviet officials and Soviet society and their essentially unfettered access to American government and society. He raised their disinformation issues, as well.

He raised that to a high, visible level. He engaged in writing letters and sending messages to very senior Soviet officials, like Leonid Zamyatin in the Central Committee responsible for information and ideological issues and Valentin Falin, who was the head of Novosti, which was a news or public affairs entity in the Soviet government. They saw that as roughly equivalent to the media activities of USIA.

There was also a senior advisor to Secretary Gorbachev named Alexander Yakovlev. Yakovlev I'll mention just briefly. He was a Soviet citizen who studied in the United States as a young man. He was not on a USIA or ECA program, but he studied in the United States and was profoundly influenced by it. Later on in his career he was an advisor to Gorbachev, he was known as the architect of "*glasnost*" (openness and transparency). This was a term for the long-awaited opening up of the Soviet Union, along with the so-called "*perestroika*," the restructuring of the Soviet Union.

That made him of particular interest to Charles Wick, because he involved himself in these issues of openness and media in Soviet society. Director Wick was able to obtain a separate meeting with him in Reykjavik on the margins of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, each of them flanked by their senior people. Over in the corner, scribbling away, there was an ink-stained wretch, and that was me. I got to be the notetaker for that meeting, and it was a hoot.

The first thing that Charles Wick did was he read to Yakovlev aloud from Yakovlev's classified biography. Now, of course, Wick didn't reveal any secrets. All he said was things like, "Alexander Yakovlev has a reputation as a tough bargainer." That kind of stuff. But it absolutely charmed Yakovlev. They realized that they were dealing with somebody who was not a bureaucrat. They were dealing with a genuine player here, and someone they knew from their own intelligence was close to the president. So, it was quite a remarkable and free-wheeling meeting, which continued the process of what were called the U.S.-USSR Information Talks. Those were, again, a highlight of Wick's tenure.

Q: This is not a footnote. This is— I did not know that you were at the Reykjavik Summit. This is an enormous moment in history when, but for the Strategic Defense Initiative, there could have been serious disarmament. I remember Jack Matlock came directly from

Reykjavik to Denmark, where he was my—actually, he was in a state of excitement. He was in a taxicab, and he said, "Do you understand! We came this close!"

Now, you were in parallel— I didn't even realize that there were parallel cultural talks going on, even as Reagan and Gorbachev were in that room. I think there were only three or four people in that room.

RUTH: Yeah, we weren't in that room.

Q: So, that was an event of enormous importance. We all remember the photo of Reagan and Gorbachev coming out looking hang-dogged because they had come this close but hadn't quite made it. Gorbachev said Reagan was very stubborn about SDI. But honestly, let's really talk about the parallel cultural and education exchange talks. I actually didn't realize there was such a thing. This was happening, obviously, at the same time. Let's hear more.

RUTH: This encompassed a period of several years, and it largely involved an entity that you mentioned last time, and that is the P Bureau, the Bureau of Policy and Programs. The assistant director there was the prime support for these talks. But what Wick did was something that was part of his usual style. He made it all of society. He brought in individuals from regional media, broadcasting, radio, and he not only took them as a delegation to Moscow, but he had the Soviets bring a delegation here.

They would go over things that now, again, still sound quite familiar to us in many ways, but they were sharper edged back then. Why could Soviet reporters travel freely around the United States back then and call up anybody they wanted to and interview anybody they wanted to, but we couldn't do that there? Why could they get an op-ed in *The New York Times* if we couldn't get an op-ed in *Pravda.* That kind of stuff.

I think they had utility, if for no other reason than because they raised the profile of the issue. It's interesting now, with so much discussion about disinformation, particularly coming from Russia or China, but let's say Russia, that nobody has adopted that strategy again. Nobody has tried to raise it to a more direct, personal, bilateral issue. Partly, that's because we have nothing at all going on with the Russians, but one could imagine. Their answers would be different, of course, because it's no longer the Soviet Union, but a lot of the issues remain the same. We just haven't raised them to that political profile level, which might actually be quite interesting and shine a light on their disinformation activities.

Q: Paradoxically, during the cold war, there was Amnesty and other NGOs— I don't know if they or some of the others were in Moscow, but Putin has now expelled them all. So, in a way, the cold war had more cultural and intellectual ferment bilaterally than the current period. It's a myth—or a fact, I don't know—that Wick had his favorite— You said he brought in all of society. He was very active and dynamic in doing that. It was

said that he had his favorites, and he had a so-called blacklist of Noam Chomsky and others.

RUTH: Well, with Charles Wick, you had to take the good with the bad. Even though it was the high-water mark, as I keep tediously saying, of public diplomacy at the forefront of foreign affairs, you had a real downside to Director Wick, also. He was short-tempered, inclined to be angry for small reasons. He would be what many people considered to be breathtakingly tasteless, in many cases. Once, he was meeting with an eastern European ambassador who said to him, breaking the ice in his first meeting, "Well, you know, Mr. Wick, I plan to talk frankly to you because I'm not really a diplomat." He was not a career ambassador from his country. He said, "I'm a plainspoken individual."

Wick knew, from having read his bio, that this individual had been in a concentration camp in World War II. When he said, "I'm a plainspoken person," Wick shot back, "No wonder they sent you to a concentration camp." That almost brought the meeting to a halt.

There was also a famous incident where Wick was having an office meeting with one of our most distinguished Black ambassadors, who happened to be serving in an African country at that time. Wick could not get it through his head that his guest was the American ambassador to that African country. He thought he was the African ambassador to our country. He kept complimenting him on his English language ability. So, you had to put up with that aspect of Charles Wick, as well.

Q: This wouldn't have been Ed Perkins, by any chance?

RUTH: I'll leave the names out.

Q: I'll withdraw the question. Wow. That's spectacular. Were you there during the famous incident of the couch that had a chocolate stain on it? Does that ring a bell?

RUTH: That was Bruce Gelb.

Q: That was Bruce Gelb? Oh, I thought it was Wick. Never mind.

RUTH: Well, I was there. When you get to it, I can tell you all about it.

Q: Okay. I know what the legend is, that it was something other than chocolate.

RUTH: Oh, I was in the room. I'll tell you all about it.

Q: Oh, so you left that chocolate bar.

RUTH: I'll tell you the story when we get to it.

Q: Okay. Wick wore body armor even inside the USIA building. Was he crazy paranoid?

RUTH: He had an armored coat, but he didn't wear it inside the building. It was a very heavy coat. It was hung in the closet. But he did have one.

Q: Okay. We've settled that. So, during this period, you were the most prized desk, both because of who you were and because of the position you occupied. I'm imagining that Wick came to you as often or more often than maybe any other officer in the building.

RUTH: Not really. It just sounds that way through my lens. There were many senior officials at USIA—career and political—that Wick engaged with frequently and relied on. I mean, some of the things we've talked about took place over a spread of years because, as we discussed, Wick was the longest-serving director of USIA. But I was the country affairs officer for about three years, and then I moved over and became what was at that point called the executive assistant to the director. Wick went through executive assistants—and sometimes they were called deputy chief of staff, but generally executive assistant—sort of like salted peanuts. Some people did very well. Bob Earle, for example, stayed there for a good long time and did an extremely able job. There was one poor fellow whose name I will not mention who started on a Monday and was fired on that Friday. Some were political, some were career.

Now, some quick background. I was still in the Foreign Service. But, as you've noticed, I'm in Washington. Our Personnel Office was on my tail. They wanted to get Rick Ruth overseas because I was in the Foreign Service, and I needed to go overseas. Other people were saying, I have to go overseas. Why doesn't Rick Ruth have to go overseas? That's perfectly reasonable and understandable. The point is that I did not wish to serve overseas. My family wasn't interested in being abroad. So, I was always looking for some way to stay.

I was initially going to be the executive assistant to the then-Deputy Director of USIA Marvin Stone. He was the former editor in chief of *U.S. News & World Report* and a thoroughly decent man, thoughtful, experienced. That was a job that wasn't advertised in the normal way, because as with the director, the deputy director got to choose who he wanted. So, I went to see Marvin, I said to him, "I know you're looking for a new assistant. Should you be so inclined, I'd be very interested in the job."

He was so inclined and so I was set to replace the career Foreign Service officer who was rotating overseas for his next assignment. Or I thought it was set.

I called the head of Personnel, who said, "Nope, sorry. You can't have that job." Does that sound familiar? He said, "You're in the Foreign Service, damn it. You have to go overseas."

So, I said, “Okay, got it.” Then I didn’t do anything at all. I didn’t say anything to Mr. Stone or his executive assistant.

The individual who I was supposed to replace came to see me after a couple of days and said, “Look, I’ve got to get off to my next assignment. When are you starting?”

I said, “I’m not starting, because I can’t have the job.”

He said, “Does the head of Personnel [he said the individual’s name, of course] know that the deputy director wants you to do it?”

I said, “Yeah.”

Of course, there were some phone calls. I can only gather what they were like, but I started the next Monday in the deputy director’s office.

I was there on that first morning for maybe thirty or forty minutes at most when Director Wick’s secretary, the marvelous and indefatigable Mary Knott, came around the corner and said, “Mr. Wick’s on the way to the office. He called to say he wants to see you when he gets here.”

I nodded.

A few minutes later the intercom buzzed and I was asked to come around to the director’s office. I went in, and Director Wick was sitting there with Marvin Stone on one side and his chief of staff, Pat Siemien, on the other side. I sat down, perhaps looking a bit confused, and Wick said, “We’re going to make a player swap. I get you, and Marvin gets,” fill in the blank.

I looked at Marvin, who was ostensibly my boss at that moment, and he shrugged and said, “There’s nothing you can do. It’s a done deal.” Wick wasn’t bothered by that kind of conversation happening right in front of him. He just wanted what he wanted. So, that morning, I began as his executive assistant, and I stayed in that job for eleven years, until there was no more USIA. Eighty-eight to ’99.

Q: Wow. I’m nonplussed. Sorry, what year to what year?

RUTH: From July of ’88 to October of ’99. Until the merger.

Q: Incredible. Eleven years. I knew you were there forever, but I didn’t think it was as long as eleven years. I thought forever was more than eleven.

RUTH: So, it was the rest of Wick, Bruce Gelb, Henry Catto, and Joseph Duffey.

Q: In Spain it's called the dedocracia—the choice by finger. It's not a democracy, it's a finger-ocracy. So, this was purely an action of Wick, who had worked with you, knew you, trusted you, and wanted you by his side. It was that simple. HR [Bureau of Human Resources] had to swallow it or make you Civil Service. How did that work?

RUTH: That actually comes later.

Q: Good. Later. So, you thought you were going in to work with Marvin Stone, but you were elevated to work with the director. This is not a random event. You had been working for three years as the Soviet desk. But you had probably interacted with him almost on a daily basis, I guess.

RUTH: Yes, it was very frequent. I traveled to Moscow and to Iceland and was there with him. Wick had a very positive feeling about President Reagan's accomplishments and his tandem accomplishments in this area. I was just part of that rosy glow he had about all these things. I was always in the picture somewhere in the corner or taking notes at the end of the table or something. So, at some point, he just said, "Yeah, this is the guy I want in my office now."

Q: I don't know if you were quite as low-profile as that, but I wasn't in the room, so I can't argue with you. Before we actually get to this eleven-year thing, let's take any recollections that you have from the Soviet-Baltic desk that may be relevant. We've talked about the trip to Moscow, the Red Room, and the historic visit to Reykjavik. That was in '88, I think, '87, maybe.

RUTH: It was '86.

Q: Was it? Okay. So, what else comes to mind about that thoroughly fascinating, engaging task of being the cultural and educational exchange person involved in the Soviet Union, Baltic states—theoretically—and the U.S.? This was, especially at that time, an extremely important and high-profile position. Let's get some recollections or anecdotes out of that if there are some.

RUTH: Sure. Some of the recollections and anecdotes we've already touched on, like meeting with Yakovlev on the margins of the Reykjavik summit, the high-level agreements in Moscow about cultural and educational exchanges. This was also a time when the so-called space bridges, the *telemosty*, were taking place for the first time between the United States and the Soviet Union. There were some major news and public affairs figures hosting them back and forth, notably Phil Donahue and Vlad Pozner. It was all very exciting and new. But if we scroll back to my origins— I'd been wanting to study and had studied Russia and the Soviet Union for a long time now. I had been professionally and academically involved in it. I must tell you, it had never occurred to me for a nanosecond that I would ever be alive when there was no Soviet Union. The Soviet Union looked to me like it was never going to go anywhere.

Q: To everybody, I feel like.

RUTH: First of all, you had this series of senior Soviet leaders who died in fairly rapid succession. Brezhnev passed away, and then Yuri Andropov passed away, and then Konstantin Chernenko passed away. The joke was, in diplomatic circles, that the Soviets had invented a new form of diplomatic activity—the working funeral. Finally, the figure of Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. Watching all of these things happen and being privileged to be at that desk in USIA, and then, of course, leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in '89 and then the collapse of the Soviet Union— This, to me, was almost miraculous.

I thought that even if I lived to be a hundred years old, I would never live a day when there was no Soviet Union in the world. To watch it not only collapse but do so almost bloodlessly and almost peacefully— But when you think about the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and its missiles and the proxy wars we fought everywhere from the Congo to Vietnam, for the Soviet Union to have simply collapsed and rotted from within and disappeared was amazing.

To watch not only how that happened geopolitically but how the American community reacted to that as more and more openings were possible— There were pro-peace, pro-friendship groups springing up regularly and we began doing more joint activities with different parts of Russian society, which had never been possible before. There were joint sporting events, joint cultural events, et cetera. There was one fellow who went to Moscow dressed as Uncle Sam and walked around on stilts. People were giddy with excitement, just as you mentioned some of the excitement coming out of Reykjavik, that really historic change was taking place. A real rapprochement was taking place between our two countries.

There was such an upsurge of activity between our two countries that I was actually assigned a deputy desk officer. I was not especially giddy about all the enthusiastic and idealistic peace organizations that sprang up. There were peace walks, peace runs, peace regattas. Perhaps my favorite was peace cranes, where paper cranes would be released simultaneously in the Potomac River, the Moscow River, and the Ganges.

Representatives of all of these groups wanted to come by for a briefing of some sort. I let my deputy know that she would have to deal with any organization that had peace in its name and she was to keep them away from me.

Q: It was astonishing and exciting to everybody, but especially to you because you had invested so much energy and authentic curiosity in becoming immersed in all of this. This is outside of the Soviet desk, but I guess the incredible change of events that led to the quick disappearance— I guess that started in Berlin when the wall came down and an East German officer mistakenly announced on the radio, "I guess it's okay. You can go now." Meanwhile, Vernon Walters was there shuttling between Bonn and Berlin, and at

his side was Neal Walsh. Were you in touch with Neal at that time? I know you got to know him later.

RUTH: I wasn't really in touch with him, no.

Q: This is incredible. I think we should give Rick Ruth credit for the collapse of the Soviet Union. I think you pushed them beyond their breaking point. You must have been under Wick's influence as an antagonistic person. I can't imagine it. A little bit more seriously, though, diplomacy is not usually thought of as antagonistic. You push and you push, but you do it with a kind of respectful tone. Wick never had a respectful tone. How was it to work with that? I'm guessing you were never asked to change your personality. He had you there because he liked the way you approached things and you were not antagonistic. How did that fit?

RUTH: It's interesting you should ask that, Dan. Thank you. You're quite good at this. I used to say that after I left Wick's office that first moment when he said, "We're making the player swap and you're my new executive assistant," I did two things. I called my wife, and I went into the men's room and puked. I'm not sure which I did first and which I did second.

But one of the virtues of having been in the OpCenter and then Russia desk officer is that I had had a very excellent view of all my predecessors as executive assistants and how they operated. Some of them did well and some of them flamed out quickly, but what I noticed most clearly was that because Charles Wick was—and there's no way around this—an extraordinarily difficult individual—I had seen him throw papers back at a person who was standing in front of a desk so that they hit them on the chest and fell to the floor. He would berate people. He would talk about people in the third person while they were standing right next to him in order to belittle them. "What do you think he thinks about this?" That kind of thing.

Most people, when they notice that someone in their presence is nervous or ill at ease or even a bit frightened, take steps to calm that person down, to put them at ease. Wick was the opposite. He was like a shark in the water. If he saw that there was someone afraid of him, he went after them and he belittled them and humiliated them.

So, I had watched my predecessors—not knowing at the time that they were my predecessors—alter their own personal styles, their own personalities in some cases, to try to accommodate this larger than life individual. They were also, of course, trying to divert or forestall his wrath. I remember that there was one particular predecessor who became a very angry, dictatorial kind of executive assistant. That was so that if Wick ever said, "These people screwed up," he could say, "Don't worry boss. I already reamed them out." He was yelling at people preemptively.

I also saw people do the opposite. They would try to make themselves invisible. Wick had a very large office, and his desk was at the back of it. One predecessor, when he

entered Wick's office, instead of walking straight to his desk, even if he was putting something on the desk for Wick's attention, would move to the side and walk along the wall as if he was trying to be as invisible as possible and maybe not be noticed. These were good people who were just trying to deal with a difficult situation.

What I concluded was that none of it worked. Or maybe it worked for them; that's fine. They went off to another assignment, eventually, and maybe they got what they wanted. But it didn't look to me like it actually really worked. So, I thought that I would just be myself. That would work or it wouldn't work and that's fine. I said, quite cynically, "If he fires me after one week," like he did this other poor soul, "people won't blame me. People will just say, 'There goes Wick again, and this time it was Rick Ruth.'" So, I figured I might as well just be myself, be normal, and what happens, happens.

The very first day I was on the job, it was around 5:30 in the evening or something like that. I had some papers for the director. I went into his office. He was sitting there with three or four people on his staff, talking. As I entered, I heard him say, "Well, I guess I'll be going home."

I said, "You can't go home."

He looked up and said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "I got work for you to do."

He perked right up and said, "Really? What do you have?" He never said a cross word to me in the time I was there.

Q: Another fifteen second pause. That's just amazing.

RUTH: I was his last executive assistant. I saw him out the door on the last day, down to the Fourth and C Street entrance where I put him in his car. The director of USIA had his own car and driver.

Q: Did he sit in cabinet meetings? He did, didn't he?

RUTH: Often. He wasn't a member of the cabinet, but he was invited to National Security meetings and high-level meetings.

Q: That was very rare with following individuals in that capacity. I believe that Wick, because of his friendship with the president, had access much more than those who came after.

RUTH: He had much more access than anyone who came before or after.

Q: There was the exception maybe of Edward R. Murrow, but that's it.

RUTH: Murrow would be the only comparison, yes.

Q: So, what a revolutionary, innovative, and explosive management style, to be yourself. Who would have thought of such a thing? You decided to be yourself.

RUTH: It's win-win.

Q: And it worked! Well, let's talk about management style for a moment. How could you keep your equanimity with all of this anger and explosive behavior? What's the secret, other than vomiting on the first day? What else were you able to do to keep your confidence in yourself, other than just the intellectual understanding that there was no real alternative? What should others think about when they get into this type of assignment?

RUTH: Well, over the years, since I've become gray-haired and venerable, there's been a steady stream—as you know—of people going to executive development programs and coming to interview me as part of this, asking how to do this or that. What I always told them, and what I was just referring to now, is that there are always two aspects to any work situation. There's the thing itself. Is this memo going to go forward? Is this decision going to be made? Is this phone call going to happen? Whatever that "thing" is.

Then there's a second part, which is how you approach it personally and professionally. If you distort or contort your own personality in order to try and make something happen, then you expose yourself to the possibility of a lose-lose. In other words, the decision turns out opposite from what you wanted or may have recommended, and you weren't true to yourself, either. So, you lost on both counts. If you're always true to yourself, the worst that can ever happen is you have a win and a loss. You never have a lose-lose, because you've always been true to yourself. So, it's very pragmatic. It's not idealistic, in that sense; it's very pragmatic.

Q: Marvelous formulation. We've met so many who have tried to mirror their bosses. The majority of them did so unsuccessfully. Some of the bosses back then— We had screamers. Supposedly, the selection process these days does not favor screamers, but they seem to always be out there. This is a very current, painful issue in many embassies, especially with COVID. There are some chiefs of mission that I know of who have no interest at all in protecting their staff from COVID. People are having a very rough time and would be well-advised to take your principle of lose-win or win-win, but not lose-lose. That's a great way to put it. Any other anecdotes from the three years on the desk? How many times did you travel to the field?

RUTH: I don't know. I went to the Soviet Union quite a lot.

Q: Okay. In each case, this was culture and policy mixing in the way it always has in Eastern Europe but that it rarely has done in the U.S. Wick, with his foibles, did

apparently understand that education and culture is policy. He did have that understanding. So, what sorts of bilateral or multilateral agreements were you able to notice were happening because this whole endeavor had political clout in Washington?

RUTH: Well, again, of course, because the Soviet Union in particular was a top-down autocracy—though every government is top-down—the fact that the bilateral cultural, educational, scientific, educational exchange agreements between the U.S. and the USSR were blessed at the presidential-general secretary level, gave them tremendous clout. That cascaded down throughout the bureaucracy, because when we were doing exhibits, or *America Magazine* distribution, or sending Fulbrighters, whatever it was, everyone in the Soviet system and hierarchy understood that this came from on high. This was to be done. So, the fact that Wick was able to elevate it to that high summit political level did us an extreme amount of good.

Then, of course, I think the number one thing that he might point to was the recurring U.S.-USSR Information Talks and his efforts to try to get more equity and fairness and more access for the American media in the Soviet Union. That was overtaken by the collapse of the Soviet Union and exists to this day with Russia, but that's a longstanding issue.

Q: Wick was not a minister in the sense that the cultural minister was in the Soviet Union. How did that work? He would be signing— His counterpart would be signing on behalf of a ministry. Did they understand Wick to be the equivalent of a minister? Did it matter?

RUTH: Wick typically didn't sign the agreements.

Q: Okay. Wick was willing and able to do it that way, so it would be the secretary of state who would sign?

RUTH: Whoever was the appropriate official.

Q: Okay. So, Wick, in that sense, was willing to be perceived as the number two.

RUTH: I don't think he saw it that way.

Q: Okay. You've mentioned the information exchange agreements. I don't quite understand what they consisted of, because there was— As you say, they were asymmetrical. What sorts of agreements do you think actually improved the bilateral relationship?

RUTH: Yeah, good question. It wasn't so much that there were any particular agreements signed. It was that the issue was aired and publicized and raised at a very high level. So, essentially, Wick put a spotlight on the fact that there was such asymmetry, such inequity, between American media and other kinds of access in the Soviet Union and what Soviets were allowed to do freely in the United States. From his point of view, he was able to

make the Soviets squirm a little. This was bilateral in its essence, but it was also designed to show the rest of the world that the Soviet Union is not the model you want to follow. Again, this was a global campaign for influence, as we have now in a different iteration. He was showing all the other countries in the world—the third world, the neutral caucus, the non-aligned states—that the model you want to follow is the model of freedom and democracy in the United States, not the model of authoritarianism in the Soviet Union.

Q: Do you think that this spotlight changed Soviet behavior at all?

RUTH: I think it contributed. There's no one thing you can point to. The Soviet Union, in my mind—people can differ on this, of course—collapsed primarily from internal rot. It would not have collapsed internally if there had not been a very aggressive and vigilant U.S. foreign policy and military security policy to make sure the Soviet Union couldn't keep expanding around the world and into space and so on. The Soviet Union had to be contained, and once contained, that exacerbated its internal problems. As we talked about way back when on the exhibit, the Soviet government attempted to create a highly sophisticated, highly educated scientific, technical, and cultural society. Yet politically and morally, they treated their citizens as children. That internal contradiction helped destroy them.

Q: The pushback from the other side, which was basically the method of containment of George Kennan— He advocated for pushing but not having an open conflict. He did say, in his long telegram, that the Soviet Union would not last. You're talking about a so-called grand strategy, which came from the mid-'40s—'46 or '47—and which actually did prevail.

Now, when you talk about third world countries choosing this model or that model, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 produced the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe]. Part of the idea here was that the Soviet Union may have been tricked. They wanted to have their Warsaw Pact countries' boundaries officially recognized by the West. In return, the West wanted to have some cultural and information reforms on the part of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union never intended to implement them, but I guess events kind of pushed them in that direction, didn't they, especially with the nudging of Wick. It sounds as if the intention of the Helsinki Final Act, in a way, did come about, partly because of Wick's personality.

RUTH: We're focusing on, of course, a very small—but to us, fascinating—piece of public diplomacy exchanges. In the background, of course, we have the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. We have the Star Wars Initiative. We had the fact that the Soviet Union had no chance, with its economy, to out-compete or out-spend the United States. We had proxy battles going on from Nicaragua to other hotspots in the world. So, there were lots of challenges economically, politically, and militarily to the Soviet Union. Public diplomacy and exchanges were a piece of that, so we focus on them, but we don't want to lose sight of the fact that this was happening in a much larger, much more consequential universe.

Q: Since you're mentioning it, I'm wondering if as the Soviet desk and later as executive— You said there's a precise name. The executive assistant. We were watching the entire world, with each country basically making its choice between Soviet and liberal Western countries. Did this draw you into common activities and discussions with other area offices in USIA like Africa, Latin America, Middle East? Was your task, oriented towards this one huge country, ever put in the context of a grand strategy with Africa, Latin America, and so on?

RUTH: Not really. I was pretty monomaniacal.

Q: Well, I don't believe that, of course. But your own attention and your responsibilities drew you towards understanding and analyzing the actions and the background of this country. You were the perfect person to do that. You had studied them.

RUTH: Back in one of our earlier discussions, I mentioned that when I joined the Foreign Service, I made a promise to myself that wherever I was assigned, in addition to the work that I had to do there as an American diplomat, I would try to come to a personal, intellectual understanding of a larger issue of the day. So, I mentioned, for example, Middle East peace when I was in Jordan. The role of Islam in the world when I was in Saudi Arabia. Then, of course, world communism when I was assigned to Moscow and continuing on through my time at the Soviet desk. So, that was a topic that interested me greatly.

In short, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that the USSR was an evil empire. I often recall Vaclav Havel's reference to the "vast human degradation" brought about by the Kremlin.

But I had a wise and good friend—Bob McCarthy—who was the public affairs officer in Moscow through some of the intense times with the fall of the Berlin Wall and so forth. He used to joke that people would always say, Wow, you were there when history was being made! It must have been amazing. What do you remember from being in Moscow in '89 and '90?

He would say, "I remember the same thing as if I'd been on a ship at the Battle of Midway," the pivotal battle of World War II. "I was down inside the belly of the ship shoveling coal into the furnace. That's all I remember. 'Another shovel of coal. Hey! More coal! More coal!' It was hot. It was dirty. I was working my tail off. That's what I remember. It didn't feel much like history at the time."

Q: That's a very good point. We know that at the Battle of the Bulge, almost everybody involved was completely lost. It was foggy. Nobody knew where they were. They didn't know where the enemy was. That's a very good point. The atomized experience that we have in large events— If you weren't in the room signing something with the head of state, you were really just seeing one actual part of it. I mention this because I was in the

Africa Bureau, at the time, in USIA. Everything we did was determined or influenced by— Every African country went one way or another, West or East. There was a lot of cynical alliance-building based on lack of genuine liberal democracy and people just saying the right words to get money, either from Moscow or from Washington. They sort of said whatever they had to say.

Let's look backwards just for a moment on your three years at the Soviet and Baltic desk. Then, next time, let's really get you over into the front office, beginning with that crucial moment of vomiting in the men's room. That's quite a stark division. I absolutely understand it. But next time, I want to get something about what went through your mind in that incredible moment. I'd like to get to that next time.

To wrap up this session, can you— As I've asked, are there more anecdotes, more moments that you remember, interactions? Were you over at the State Department with the Soviet desk there? Not so much? Okay. But Wick was, and people at a different level must have been over there all the time.

RUTH: Yes, of course.

Q: Didn't Wick go there every morning for the morning staff meeting?

RUTH: That has depended upon the secretary of state. During Wick's time and during Gelb's and others'— Depending on the secretary of state, if they held a morning staff meeting that was interagency, then it was almost standard operating procedure that the director of USIA would be invited to that morning meeting.

Q: Would he bring any staff with him when he did that?

RUTH: Oh, no.

Q: Oh, okay. So, interactions with others— You were based— I remember you racing through the sixth floor where the P Bureau was, usually with a stack full of papers, very purposeful. I remember that you were always very purposeful. People made way for you, like, Uh oh, here comes Rick Ruth. He's got something. Nobody ever— Everybody always welcomed seeing you, but they knew that whenever they saw you, there was something happening that might create work.

RUTH: Do you remember Z-grams?

Q: Oh, how could I not? I have a great Z-gram story, and I'm going to have to tell it.

RUTH: Well, there was a woman in the Front Office, a very wonderful woman, whose responsibility was to capture all the Z-grams and send taskers around the agency to get them answered. Wick would often just dictate them or tape them, and then she would listen to the tapes, type them out, and send them out. There were forms. In the European

Area Office, when I was desk officer, every workday morning the EU [European Union] Front Office would circulate a new printed sheet of all the Z-grams tasked to EU, what needed to be done and who was the action officer. I remember one particular day when it came out, an 8x11 sheet, single spaced sheet with I don't know how many Z-grams on it, but the action officer on every single one was me. It was all about the Soviet Union. So, when I was purposefully rushing around the building with my papers, you were right; we were shoveling coal all the time into that furnace. A couple of times I pulled all-nighters. But I tried very hard to avoid that and mostly succeeded.

Q: It may have been at that very same time—1985—that Miller Crouch was the policy officer in the European Bureau— The word got to the Front Office that Wick was creating a morale problem by having too many Z-grams. It was demoralizing the staff. I absolutely remember that he tasked Miller with answering a Z-gram to explain why the morale was low. He actually created a tasking which itself was the cause of demoralized people, and he created yet another one so he could understand. That was a good one. It must have been at that same time.

RUTH: Probably. One last thing: When he was going to have a meeting and you prepared a briefing memorandum for him, you would put in the memo that Ambassador So-and-So or whoever it was likely to raise the following issues. He was going to ask for this, or that, or raise this. I remember that early on, Wick looked at one of them and said, "Well, if we know what he's going to ask, why don't we just do all the things he wants now, and I'll tell him they're done when he gets here?"

Q: I thought you were going to say that he would create another tasker saying, "Let's get the questions and imagine what the answers would be." But that's funny. Did any of that ever happen?

RUTH: No. I had to say, "But sir, we're not actually going to do the things he wants. That's the problem."

Q: Maybe that's why you lasted eleven years. You actually told him the truth. Many people would not have dared to do that. I do remember that people were terrified of him. Somehow, you had the confidence in yourself— I can't end this discussion without one—I've asked it already, but how can you keep your equanimity with a person who's that demanding, other than understanding that the alternative is worse? Don't you have any tricks on how to keep equanimity in a situation like that?

RUTH: Sure, but it takes us far astray, because for me, it goes back to existentialism.

Q: Let's go right there. Seriously? Let's have it.

RUTH: Obviously these things are open to wide debate and have been debated since the dawn of time, but for me personally, if you only have—speaking as an existentialist—one life to live, then clearly, every day, every hour of that life, becomes supremely precious.

So, you need to pay close attention to what you do with that time, because it's all you have. So, why be false to yourself? Every minute you spend being false to yourself is gone forever.

Q: I wish this could be taught at FSI. They've tried, but they haven't done very well at it. Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman are talking on December 16, 2020. I am enormously grateful for these thoughts. Thank you.

RUTH: You're very kind.

Q: Let's see. Stop recording.

Q: So, this is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. It is December 19, 2020. When we last spoke, Rick, you were talking about the importance— You said there's only one life to live, and you were talking about why it is that a person in a difficult situation, under great pressure, is best advised to go by their own inner truth rather than succumb to somebody else's bullishness. You said every moment is precious, so why waste even one moment not being your true self.

Now, this was in the context of talking about Charles Wick, but we don't have to pick on poor Charles Wick. Where do we go from there? You spent eleven years in that Front Office. You went from Wick to Duffey, I guess.

RUTH: From Wick to Gelb to Catto to Duffy, and then there was the merger. So, obviously, the great events of the world take no cognizance of who's running USIA. They just keep going their merry way. But at the end of the Reagan administration, when I— As I said, on Charles Wick's very last day, he wanted to say goodbye to the people in the European Area Office because he had done so much with the Soviet Union and Europe and so forth. So, he wanted to say goodbye to them in particular.

Interestingly, he was on the eighth floor of the building—this was Fourth and C, Southwest—and they were also on the eighth floor of the building, and he didn't know where they were because he had never been down there before. They came to see him. He didn't go to see them. So, he came out and asked me if I could take him there, which of course I did. That was very nice. Then, we went downstairs, where his car and driver—the wonderful Mr. James Rayford—were waiting for him, and I put him in his car, closed the door, and waved goodbye.

Then, a while later, the next thing was the arrival of Bruce Gelb as the next director of USIA.

Q: The same day?

RUTH: Oh, no. I guess it took a few months for the nomination and Senate confirmation process and all that.

Q: So, did Wick arrange things to make sure that you would remain in that position?

RUTH: Not at all. Bruce Gelb was a prominent New York area businessman— His family ran first Clairol and then Bristol-Meyers, and he'd gone to the same prep school as George Bush forty-one, Phillips Academy in Andover. They had slightly known each other there. They were in different grades. The president was an upperclassman when Gelb started there, but they had encountered each other.

A person who's been nominated can't sit in the office that is going to be his or hers before their Senate confirmation, that would be presuming on the Senate's prerogatives. Bruce Gelb temporarily sat down the hall in one of the associate director's offices. It was agreed that it would make sense if I would have a standing appointment with him first thing every morning, and I would brief him on what had happened in the last twenty-four hours or over the weekend just so, that as he was prepping for his confirmation, he could remain current with what was going on and start to get familiar with the terminology and organizational structure of the agency.

My favorite story from that time—one of my favorites, actually, of all time—comes from the first of those morning meetings. He and I sat down, not across a desk, but knee to knee in a couple of chairs [his choice, of course] to go over things. I had a letter of congratulations for him on his nomination from Larry Eagleburger over at the State Department. So, I handed him the letter with the envelope stapled to it in the back, as was customary. I said, "This is very nice. You have a letter of congratulations from Secretary Eagleburger."

He read it over silently and then looked up at me and said: "Why are you reading my mail?"

He was straight out of the private sector. This was his first government job. So an understandable if unexpected question, I said, "Well, sir, that's a marvelous question. The truth of the matter is that it's not your mail. It's the U.S. people's mail. It doesn't belong to you. It belongs to history." He liked that. I said, "When your tenure is over, you can't take this letter with you. It goes to the National Archives. It's not your mail."

Then, I did add, of course, "If there are particular individuals whose mail you would rather we not open because they're personal, you just tell us who they are and we won't open them. But the secretary of state is an official of the government, so of course we opened it and made a record of it."

That was perfectly fine with him. It was just a wonderful question. Talk about two worlds colliding—the private sector and the U.S. government.

Q: That's a good one. That implies, of course, that Gelb was on a learning curve. Now, we know where this ended up. You ended up keeping the same job. How did that happen?

RUTH: Well, at some point in those mornings where we were going through things, he asked me if I would stay. I said I would be delighted to, and I mentioned to him, trying to be an honest man, that I was in the Foreign Service, and I was overdue to go overseas. The Personnel Office was on my case to make me go. Could he do anything about that?

So, he called the associate director for management, a wonderful fellow named Henry Hockeimer, to come join us. Henry came immediately. The discussion was, well, couldn't I just convert to the Civil Service? Gelb said, "Sounds reasonable." He turned to Henry and said, "Can you make that happen?"

Mr. Hockeimer went off and came back pretty quickly and said, "It can't be done. This is something that Congress pays close attention to." He talked about "burrowing in" and having an unfair advantage in occupying a job, et cetera.

So, I said, "That's fine. I'll let it go. But perhaps, since it is the director personally asking me to stay, you could at least tell the HR people to leave me alone for a while? I understand that I'm in the Foreign Service and I need to go overseas. That's on the record. But they don't need to call me every week or two weeks and harumph at me."

So, that was fine. Then, fast-forwarding one year later to the day, I got a phone call from the head of Personnel, who said, "Well, Rick, I thought the director would be sick of you by now, but he isn't, so we're going to go ahead and convert you to the Civil Service." It was all done in two weeks. Done. Over. So, that's when I converted to the Civil Service.

Q: We know that other people do this these days. Few or no people had done it at that time. Was there even a procedure? This is a miraculous story for you and USIA, but was there a mechanism for doing this, or was everything an exception for you?

RUTH: How our HR office did it with a magic wand, I don't know, but obviously I must have been the beneficiary of some sort of privilege because it was the director who had asked.

Q: So, in fact, you resigned one job and took another. Was it that simple?

RUTH: I stayed at the same desk, same job title, same telephone number, but converted personnel systems. It was all invisible to the outside world.

Q: So, then you were in the GS [General Schedule] system. This would have been what year?

RUTH: Nineteen ninety, I think. Gelb was director from '89 to '91.

Q: Okay. That's also an interesting historical point on the whole HR system. I guess that now it's kind of commonplace for people to do this. It's not very frequent, but there are

lots of instances of people who do this. There are also a few going in the opposite direction. There aren't many, but there are those who go on an excursion tour and then they like it, and they manage to convert.

Okay. So, Gelb— How long had you been with Gelb that made you indispensable to him? You said a year?

RUTH: Well, he came in '89, after the presidential election of '88, and I stayed. He lasted as the director for two years before the White House did in fact dismiss him. But they dismissed him in the way that they dismissed wealthy Republican donors—they made him the ambassador to Belgium. The reason that this came about was because he had an ongoing feud, if you will, or difference of opinion with the director of the Voice of America, later the director of the Bureau of Broadcasting, Richard Carlson, who was a very prominent journalist and political activist at that time. He's also the father of Tucker Carlson.

To make it more palatable, at the same time that Gelb was removed from USIA and made ambassador to Belgium, Carlson was moved to be ambassador to the Seychelles.

Q: That's about as far away as you can get.

RUTH: So, they both became ambassadors. They had had an ongoing feud about a number of things that had spilled over into the press, particularly a gossip column in the former *Washington Times* called "Charlotte's Web," where derogatory or mocking anecdotes or stories about Gelb would often show up, much to his aggravation. He generally assumed that Carlson was behind those sorts of things. I'm not sure that he was. But anyway, finally it was just too annoying for the White House to bother with, so they separated them and sent them off to be ambassadors in different parts of the world. Anyway, that's why I said Gelb "lasted" for two years. They were two very busy, consequential years.

Q: Yeah. In the old days, if you had a person of importance and you were really sick of them, you would send them overseas to be an ambassador. I guess that doesn't happen much anymore, does it?

RUTH: Not to the same extent. I mean, are you familiar with Ambrose Bierce and *The Devil's Dictionary?*

Q: I know it by heart.

RUTH: You may recall, then, that roughly speaking his definition of a diplomat is someone who is given a job to serve their government on the condition that they leave the country.

Q: A great man. A pity he disappeared on that dock that day, whatever he did. Maybe he walked off into the ocean. A wonderful reference for people. Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary. Terrific. Okay. Two years of Gelb. Now, what was percolating at that time? This happened to be as the wall came down.

RUTH: That's right. These were very busy times. The world was moving along. So, the Soviet Union continued to unravel. It took a long time to unravel. It went through various elections and transformations and so forth and so on, but it was all unraveling. At the same time, all of Eastern Europe was in ferment, and the communist governments were being tossed out in various ways. We had Solidarity and Lech Walesa in Poland. We had the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia with Vaclav Havel becoming prime minister. There were the Bulgarians, the East Germans— Of course, it was tougher in Romania, where Ceausescu and his wife fled and were caught and summarily executed. Then, Yugoslavia began to crumble and stayed crumbled violently, unfortunately, for a decade to follow.

You had a lot of arms control agreements in those days. START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] and other kinds of talks began. But you also had the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and you had de Klerk coming to power in South Africa and beginning to dismantle apartheid and releasing Nelson Mandela from Robben Island. I'm particularly fond of remembering de Klerk because he was an international visitor for USIA about a decade before he came to power as prime minister.

Q: Bob Heath was PAO.

RUTH: Oh, was he? Good for Bob. De Klerk had said on the record with *The New York Times* and other outlets over the years that one of the factors in his personal decision that he must do something to end apartheid came to him when he was on the IVLP program in the United States. It wasn't because he saw what a multiracial society ought to look like, but because he saw how bad it looked and realized it was wrong everywhere. So, that kind of transformation with a bit of assistance from one of the ECA public diplomacy programs is, I think, a great anecdote.

That came in handy— I'll just quickly skip up to the start of Secretary Tillerson's tenure, when his Advance Team came in. Several of us were meeting with them. I mentioned how many world leaders were alumni of ECA programs. They nodded, that was good. I mentioned X number of Nobel Prize winners were also alumni of our programs, and the head of their group said, "So what?"

I gave them the de Klerk example, and they said, Okay, understood. Got it. So, those kinds of things come in handy in a variety of ways because they encapsulate the power of these things in a way that's quickly politically and universally understood.

Q: Yeah. Yet— I don't know about before that, but out of the time we're talking about, in the Africa Bureau, I was in the public diplomacy section of it, and there was an election

in South Africa. Half of the new cabinet were IV alumni, and I mentioned that in a meeting with the Front Office. The individual running the meeting said, "So, what? How do we know this had any good influence?"

In one of my snottier moments, I said, "I wasn't there during the debriefing, sir. If you wish, I can track them down and ask them." So, even our own professional colleagues sometimes— It's really a struggle to get them to understand the value.

RUTH: Of course, it is, you're absolutely right. Sometimes, it's because it's in their interest to diminish what we do. They think it's a zero-sum game where the more important public diplomacy is, the less important they are. So, no matter what any of us would say to such an individual, it probably wouldn't have any effect. There's a wonderful Navajo saying: "You cannot awaken a person who is pretending to be asleep." So, if the person you're talking to doesn't want to know, then he's never going to act like he gets it.

Q: Where did you learn that? That's a great thought. Fantastic. So, back to Gelb and his two years. I do remember his visit to Spain. It was very bizarre. Did you accompany him on any of his overseas trips?

RUTH: I went with him when he went to Russia. It was sort of understood that I was the Russia guy, still. So, that was interesting. In fact, that's when he and I went for the first time to the first McDonald's in Moscow on Pushkin Square. There was an exhibit there, Design USA, which was the final exhibit of all USIA exhibits in the USSR. He and I went to take a look at that. But I did not go to Spain.

Q: Well, I know what he was up to. I can tell you after we're no longer recording.

RUTH: Ah. Well, one of the interesting things about Gelb—which, you know, was true a bit of Charles Wick, also—is what I consider to be the ongoing curse of businessmen or women believing that the government "should be run like a business." We still hear it all the time. It is a canard, of course. It is utter foolishness and does nothing but harm. But you can't kill it off. It has a thousand lives. So, we spent a lot of time in discussions—not just me, but others, too—with the director about whether or not, in fact, the government should be run like a business. Gelb took it so far as to call PAOs "branch managers."

Q: Well, in what ways do these two comments not connect? The common place is that businesses have to make a profit, and government should not ever have that as an objective. Is that the main difference?

RUTH: Bingo. The U.S. government is based on values. It's not based on profit.

So, Gelb was one of those who did have those characteristics. Did he ever catch on? Did he ever make the transition, really, to being government as opposed to business?

RUTH: Not really, no. Two years wasn't enough. I should say that from everything I heard, he was a very capable ambassador in Belgium.

Q: Okay. If there's a place where we don't really need a first-rate ambassador, I think Belgium is always going to be a good bilateral relationship. There are three ambassadors in Brussels. He was bilateral, I guess. So, in a way, you can't fail, maybe. Anything else from that two-year period that we need to highlight before going on to the next director?

RUTH: Not really. There were the major trends geopolitically that we talked about. A two-year slice from that period of time is not that much from a public diplomacy point of view. There were no particular key issues that I can recall, other than the fact that everything kept moving. So, the pressure to come up with the peace dividend—which we'll hear more about later, of course, from Jesse Helms and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the pressure to do away with USIA. They were just beginning, at that point. The Soviet Union was still officially with us, and it was too soon to declare complete cold war victory, but you could see that the seeds of it had started to sprout.

Q: Very important, because that sort of morphed into the idea during the Clinton administration that USIA was maybe not so essential anymore. Would you say that USIA coasted, post-Reagan and into Bush I? It didn't have the high profile that it did under Wick. How was the budget? Did the budget pretty much coast at the same level?

RUTH: It was pretty much status quo. Of course, like I said, Bruce Gelb did know President Bush at a certain level, but it was not the kind of relationship that Charles Wick had with Ronald Reagan. So, there was a bit of a loss politically, there, in terms of clout in Washington. As director, Bruce Gelb wasn't invited to as many sorts of principal committee meetings at the National Security Council and so on as Wick had been. So, there was some loss of connectivity there.

But it was a busy time for public diplomacy, because again, all these things we just mentioned about the Soviet Union and all of Eastern Europe radically switching over to a democratic model— This was the time when the Baltic States, as we talked about, tried to very peacefully but shrewdly and boldly assert their independence from the Soviet Union. So, a lot of history was being made, and the seeds were planted of the Iraq War with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. But frankly, from a USIA domestic, internal, parochial point of view, a lot of the big story was the ongoing difficulties and leadership issues between the director and Broadcasting.

Q: Aside from the personality clash, we know that there was always a kind of difficulty in getting VOA editorials signed off by area offices at USIA. Did the frictions get to that level? Did that actually change the relationship? The relationship was never easy between USIA and VOA. Did it get worse or the same?

RUTH: I don't want to overfocus on the personality side of it, because this was the time, also, during Gelb's tenure when the Bureau of Broadcasting was consolidated in

legislation and became the Bureau of Broadcasting as opposed to Voice of America, WorldNet, Radio, and TV Marti, et cetera. So, that was historic for Broadcasting. But you're absolutely right. Public diplomacy and Broadcasting have always been strange bedfellows, and the relationship has always been uneasy.

It was, of course, reflected most graphically a few years later when, at the time of the "merger," Broadcasting was pulled entirely out of the State Department and USIA and made independent. That was partly because there was a very strong lobby in the U.S. Congress, including now-President-Elect Joe Biden. But also, there was the foreign policy community and the think tank crowd in Washington. They were, justifiably, enormous fans of the power of broadcasting.

This was a time when communications was still growing and exploding. We were still talking about the Internet growing and gaming growing and all of these things on the communications side. A lot of people were saying, Look at what broadcasting did during the cold war with jazz and music around the world. The VOA Albanian service at that time was called "The Voice of the Nightingale," because it sang sweetly in the night.

So, there was a great appreciation of the power of international broadcasting and a great sense of television having come online, but also of the explosion in kinds and types and scope of communication. Broadcasting offered a special and eventually unique place in public diplomacy, and that's why there was inherent friction. It's still not settled. One of the reasons that there's so much controversy now over broadcasting is because these issues still continue to fester.

Q: Right. Havel was also very public in saying VOA sustained him intellectually before he became president of Czechoslovakia, at that time. Well, one of the difficulties which may seem esoteric to Americans observing this— The charter of VOA, of course, is to have editorial independence. It considers itself an objective news programming organization, with the exception of the editorials. The editorials always say, "This is the policy of the United States government." That's where there was daily friction. If they were to say it was the policy, that meant they had to get it cleared by the area offices, and that was never a smooth process.

I guess that's one of the issues that you mentioned that is still a thorn in its side. The State Department—generalizing—tends to see that editorial staff as a little bit crazy and right-wing. Very often, they're just correcting the facts, but then the editorial staff gets very upset. They believe they're being forced to change their message, which is not— Anyway, it's really one of these dialogues of the depth of things.

RUTH: No, you're quite right, Dan, and that did start under Charles Wick, of course. One of the reasons for it— I mean, in Broadcasting mythology, it may be seen as nothing but heavy-handed State Department or USIA policy intrusion into their independence, but in fact, a lot of listeners in other countries used to say, We understand that you're independent, but within all of that news, we would like to understand what is the official

policy of the United States government. So, in addition to representing the spectrum and diversity of opinion, we would like to know the policy of the U.S. government.

So this was one of those wonderful things where yesterday's solution becomes today's problem. Yesterday's solution was, okay, while Broadcasting remains independent and we won't interfere with that in any way, shape or form, every now and then they should have two minutes where they say, The following two minutes—like, this is your warning—is the official policy of the U.S. government. Early on, there were Foreign Service officers in that job, like a good friend of mine, Jack Harrod, who worked in the VOA Policy Office in those days. There was a different mindset in those days. Then political appointees and others came on board and the vision changed. As you were indicating quite accurately, the editorials and the clearance process began to be seen as an intrusion on the independence of broadcasting. As personalities shifted, the arguments and the debates and the aggravation just grew and grew until it became an ongoing sore point, even past merger times.

Q: Yeah. I guess we'll never know what effect, if any, those editorials had on foreign audiences. We know anecdotally that that was usually the bathroom break. Usually, people would tune in because of the jazz. Many audiences really had no interest in listening to us anyway, and those who wrote the editorials would have been astonished at the lack of interest. As you say, there were those who said, Well, okay. You've told us what happened. Now, what's your opinion about this? But we just don't know, because our survey techniques were never able to get that fine a read on it.

Okay. VOA. I do want to talk later, as we talk about the merger, about the creation of BBG, now USAGM. They keep changing the entity. I actually have never been clear on exactly what the functions are and did they really change as the names changed. Let's get into that later. So, Gelb. Goodbye Gelb, off to Brussels, and Rick Ruth is still in that same office. What happens next? You just saw them coming and going, and there you were.

RUTH: Well, Bruce Gelb was replaced, in many ways, by his diametric opposite. He was replaced by the absolutely splendid Henry E. Catto. Why I say diametric opposite is because Bruce Gelb was an accomplished businessman and a successful one, but he was a complete outsider and new to government. Henry Catto not only was a successful, prosperous businessman, but he was very politically well-connected. He was good friends with James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, and if you were the head of USIA, those were two good people to be close to. He also had a resume that just didn't end. He had been our chief of protocol as well as the U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James in London. He had been ambassador to El Salvador as well as assistant secretary for public affairs at the Department of Defense [DOD].

He was a political appointee, but he had a resume like a career ambassador. He was able to move freely back and forth in both worlds. That made him, on top of the fact that he was a wonderfully decent, kind, and thoughtful human being with a great sense of humor, a balm for USIA. We were a rather wounded, irritable agency after two years of Bruce

Gelb. I'm sorry if he reads this, but we were a rather bruised agency at the time of his departure. Henry Catto was the perfect balm for that.

But two final anecdotes about my time with Director Gelb. First, something you asked about a while back, the "chocolate stain" on the couch in the director's office. Each morning when Gelb was going to attend the secretary of state's morning staff meeting, he would first meet in his office with three people—the counselor of the agency, the head of the Program Bureau, and me. As people will do, we all sat in the exact same place each time. One morning, the head of programs paused for a moment and looked down at the spot where he always sat. There was an irregular brown stain on the cushion. Without losing a beat, he flipped the cushion over and sat down. The meeting went on. The director departed. End of story. It's necessary to note here that the director and some of his staff were big fans of a chocolate-flavored energy drink [Nutrament, if I recall correctly] and cans of it were always in the office. If someone had asked me about the stain, I would have likely surmised that one of the cans had spilled. But no one asked me and I promptly forgot all about it. That is, I forgot for about fifteen minutes.

After that peaceful fifteen minutes, the head of USIA Security came to see me and closed the door behind him. Always a bad sign. He asked me if I had heard rumors about two political appointees—a man and a woman—having an affair. I said I had heard them, yes. I had no reason whatsoever to think they were true, but I had heard them. The head of security said that the director had called from his car en route to the department and alleged that these two had had sex on his couch and deliberately left a stain to show their contempt for him. He asked security to have the FBI analyze the cushion—which the head of security took with him. The head of security was no fool and was not about to look like one in the eyes of the law enforcement community, so he took the cushion to a relative who was a dry cleaner. The dry cleaner declared it to be chocolate milk.

Second, on Director Gelb's penultimate day in the office he suddenly showed up in my doorway. He prefaced his remarks by saying that he was about to depart, that we had done good work together, that he liked and respected me, but he needed me to know that he knew that I was the one who had repeatedly leaked derogatory information about him to the press. I denied it. He waved my denial away, saying that the Office of Security had investigated and that I was "Source C." I was about to pursue this when he expressed the desire to let bygones be bygones and disappeared from my office door. Sigh.

I made my way to the Office of Security to see a colleague there. I asked him if they had just undertaken an investigation into leaks to the press. He said he couldn't discuss it. I related what had just happened in my office. It was his turn to sigh. He handed me a bright red legal-sized folder and said that no one could know he had given it to me. I couldn't stay in his office or anywhere nearby to read it and I certainly couldn't go back to my office. Well, there's always one private place where a guy can go and sit in peace for a while—the Eighth floor men's room.

The report, just like the one given to the director, was filled with references to Source A and Source B and C, so on. But—there was a tab at the end of the report—which had also been given to the director—that identified all the "sources" by name. The director clearly never got that far. Not reading documents to the end was a frequent problem he had. Source C was described in the report as a senior civil servant and former FSO. I guess the director had stopped at that point and figured he had his culprit. I returned the folder.

So, the next day, on his last day, I went into his office and, standing in the doorway, said that I wanted him to know that I was not Source C—that Source C was, and I gave him the person's name. He looked somewhat indignant and said: "How dare you accuse [that person]?" I replied that he had just accused me of being the leaker. "I did not," was his retort. I said: "Sir, excuse me, but just yesterday you came into my office and said you knew that I was Source C." Oh yeah, he conceded. Then, with a suspicious look asked the question I knew was coming, "Where did you get a copy of the report?" "It doesn't matter," I replied. "As you said yesterday, we've had some good times and done some good work. I wish you the best in Brussels."

Q: How much of the agency's pain was misdirected to believe that you were the source of it? You were the messenger delivering Z-grams under Wick. You were— Those who were heads of area offices and all that, you were their contact. Did they understand that you were really the messenger? How much of this came on to you?

RUTH: You know, I can only hope that they saw me as an honest broker. If anybody was grinding their teeth every single time they heard my name, or if they spit on the ground when my name was mentioned, they kept it from me, and I was good with that.

Q: Not that I know of. Sometimes gossip would reach me, but I never heard such a thing.

RUTH: Well, as we touched on in an earlier conversation, I believe that the basis for any successful or productive relationship, at work or anywhere in life, is respect—what I call the "Aretha Franklin Principle": R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Nobody, under any circumstances, regardless of the issue or level of tension, should ever be treated with anything other than the utmost respect. What any manager or executive can and should be able to guarantee the people who work with them and for them is that the process of arriving at a decision will be fair and open. To the extent that I could make the process as respectful and open and fair as possible, even if people were going to be disappointed at the eventual outcome, I did that.

Q: What you've just said, Rick, is echoed by the book that Bob Gates published this year.

RUTH: Oh, really?

Q: He says— I think this is a quote, "Consensus is the enemy." He talks about his previous— Before being at the Pentagon, he was NSC [National Security Council]. He was under Scowcroft, I guess. He talks, in that book, about having multiplicity of

opinions during the process, and a uniformity after the decision is made. He talks about the first phase, which must be a phase of dissent, discussion, and difference. Consensus will actually prevent a good decision from being made. This is a whole thing.

RUTH: Amen to that. You want every voice heard. You want everybody to feel they had full time and opportunity to say what they wanted and to express their views, and then you come up with a decision.

Q: So, once again, a director of USIA found you to be the person he needed by his side. This is the third time now. How did Catto come to this decision, as his predecessors did?

RUTH: We never really spoke about it. There I was. I used to say to people that I was like tap water—all you had to do was turn the handle, and there I was. I may not be very exciting, but I'm never bad for you. Anyway, Henry Catto showed up the first day, and there I was, along with the desks and the chairs, and there I stayed.

Q: So, his perception was that when he got an office and a chair and a desk, he also got Rick Ruth as part of the deal?

RUTH: I guess so. But, you know, if he had had any reason to be dissatisfied with me, I have no doubt that he would have found an elegant and polished way to have moved me off to greener pastures. Everybody likes to have a boss who can't be rolled, somebody who can't be pressured. One of my favorite Henry Catto anecdotes comes from the time when our ambassador to the Vatican or the Holy See, who I shall leave nameless, came in to see him. The ambassador asked for additional resources, which was an ongoing thing with the Vatican. They always wanted more resources.

We had discussed this in advance, and Catto told him that no, he was sorry, but that wasn't possible. The resources and support he had from Embassy Rome were, in our view, sufficient. The ambassador got a little bit huffy and said, "I'm sorry to hear that. I can't accept that as an answer. I'm going to have to raise this with the secretary of state. I'll have to bring this up with Secretary Baker."

Catto shrugged and said, "Of course, that's fine. If you'd like, I can bring it up with him. Jim and Brent and I are playing poker tomorrow night." So, the ambassador shrank down a few sizes and headed for the door. That's the kind of boss everybody likes to have.

Q: That's great. Trivial Pursuit: in what two places in the world do you have line of sight between two capitals?

RUTH: What a wonderful question. I have no clue—

Q: That would be Rome, the capital of Italy, and also the Vatican is a capital. The others are Brazzaville and Kinshasa.

RUTH: There you go. I never would have thought of that. That's cool.

Q: Only those two. So, the Catto period— Was it '92 to late '93?

RUTH: It was '91 to '93.

Q: Oh, '91 to '93. Okay. Because the election was '93, right? Then, Clinton came in '94, I guess?

RUTH: Yes. Gelb and Catto each had two years of Bush forty-one's presidency.

Q: Okay. I got it wrong earlier, I think I— Oh, no, you said it. '89 to '91, '91 to '93. Okay. So, this was smooth sailing in terms of the internal workings of the agency, but there was a lot happening. The Gulf War I was in early or mid-'91, I think.

RUTH: You're right. Ninety-one was the Gulf War. It was also the year that the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] was formally dissolved.

Q: Right. Wow. What a period, especially with the creation of— We kept using different terms. First it was the Former Soviet— FIS— Former whatever. They had all these different names for what used to be the Warsaw Pact. Oh, and this created a whole bunch of new embassies and public affairs offices. Let's talk about that. Suddenly, we had fifteen more capitals to deal with. So, we had had embassies— You called it "Press and Culture," which was what it was called in Warsaw countries. Did this change the staffing or the approach of public affairs sections in the former Soviet states?

RUTH: Well, it didn't so much change it qualitatively, but as you said, quantitatively, it was an explosion. Not only were there fifteen countries instead of one, but there were fifteen public affairs officers instead of one. A lot of people, including some former USIA exhibit guides, had their first chance to become an ambassador when all of a sudden, people were looking around for a whole lot of people to be ambassadors on short notice in countries where a lot of political appointees were not interested. It also helped to have a background in Russian and Soviet affairs.

Q: Yeah. These were the 'Stans, the Baltic countries—

RUTH: Sure, there were the Caucuses, Central Asia, that's right.

Q: We know that this was a tremendous humiliation for the USSR and for the leader of the USSR, and Putin has often called it the greatest tragedy in human history or whatever. There you were, while this was happening, a Sovietologist. You've made it very clear that Russia was your interest, though, not the passing phase of that regime. How do you remember the change in the bilateral relationship? Gorbachev-Bush and Bush-Gorbachev— I don't know if this trickled down to USIA, but how did the public

diplomacy activities and tone change in those fifteen countries, and also with the Russian Federation?

RUTH: Excellent question. The high-level direction from President Bush, at that time, was, "Don't gloat. We're not going to do our happy dance about 'we won, you lost.'" That was wise. We might have been owed a little bit more of a party than we actually had, but that window was fleeting. The concentric circles expanded out from this— It was during Henry Catto's tenure that we reopened USIA or USIS, as it was called, in Laos, Cambodia, and some other countries that had been in the Soviet/communist sphere of influence.

It was, as you mentioned, Gulf War time, so people were quickly distracted from the fall of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact into the ongoing conflict— There are still American troops in Iraq. So, from the initial heady days of Colin Powell raining military wrath on Saddam Hussein, him being ousted, and us invading later on in 2003— World events just kept moving along. The real issue for USIA, as you well know, was not that we changed particularly in how we approached the world, but how Congress began to look at us. As I said, the seeds began to sprout of our eventual demise. It has often been said that the most perilous moment for any movement or organization is the moment of victory. That was true of us. We lost the common enemy. We lost the common motivation. We fell prey to squabbling over the bones.

Q: You mentioned Jesse Helms as one of the thinkers behind this, but it became a very bipartisan thing. It was under Clinton's watch that USIA was ended.

RUTH: Sure, but it was a devil's bargain. What did Clinton care? It wasn't important to him. To sort of fast-forward—not even that much—Senator Helms made what was an entirely plausible and understandable, if superficial, argument about the "peace dividend," as it was called. He made the case that if the United States had in fact been bulking up—namely, spending money—in almost every aspect of its existence around the world for decades to defeat the threat of world communism, now that we had won, hands down, and the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, surely then, my friends and fellow taxpayers, there is some burden that can be lifted off the shoulders of the American taxpayer. Among other things, he identified USAID [United States Agency for International Development], USIA, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, ACDA. He called them "bloated cold war bureaucracies" and said they needed to go.

That became the driving dynamic for much of USIA through '99 and the merger. It's not that the world stopped, and not that we stopped doing anything. For example, the fall of the Soviet Union led us to create the Future Leaders Exchange Program, a brainchild of Senator Bill Bradley, which continues to this day and has grown and has been a marvelous program. That's the FLEX Program. Russia bailed out of it a few years ago for its own reasons, but the program itself continues very robustly.

Q: Yeah. I guess my point was there's the irony that we often vilify Helms—or at least I do—for not understanding that the ongoing bilateral, multilateral relations were just as important. But there's also the irony that the Clinton administration basically adopted that idea.

RUTH: Yes. It just wasn't important.

Q: Yeah. Well, we'll get to that when we get to '99, that painful year. Although, actually, you'll tell us later, but many of us have always been curious— It didn't just happen in '99. We know it was a gradual process.

RUTH: Oh, yes. Ninety-nine was just the coup de grace. It was the middle '90s that were USIA's budgetary death march. Every year, the budget was smaller than the year before. Things had to go. There was simply no way around it. We had to be smaller. We can talk about that when the time comes.

Q: We also cannot avoid citing Duffey as the individual who oversaw all that, but again, we'll get to that.

RUTH: Yes, he oversaw it and was victimized by it, simultaneously. When your president strikes a deal with Jesse Helms and Madeleine Albright, you're kind of screwed in the middle.

Q: I'll be most interested to hear more about that when we get to it, because that's not the way I remember it. So, Catto. Suddenly, you had a gentleman and a person with incredible— He was having poker with the top notch. He had a thorough knowledge and was a gracious person. Then there's the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the creation of new embassies and public affairs sections or USIS sections. There are Cambodia and Laos. What else? This is a very momentous period, '91 to '92.

RUTH: Well, the whole period—starting under Wick and going through Gelb and through Catto— Like I said, world events, as we know, are utterly indifferent to who's running USIA or even to who's running the State Department. They just go their own way. So, these long-term issues with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, beginning with the collapse of Yugoslavia and all of the issues that stemmed from that— You've probably heard the old joke that the problem with the Balkans is that they produce more history than can be consumed locally.

We were still looking at Southeast Asia post-Vietnam. We were reopening Laos and Cambodia, places where we have tricky history and tricky relationships. We have the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. That was reminiscent of Black Lives Matter today. So, all of the major issues just keep going uninterrupted, and it's a little bit difficult—and I applaud you for the effort—to try to slice them up like a deli meat and say, "Okay, well, what happened during the two years when it was Gelb, and then two years when it was Catto?" because of course, it doesn't work that way.

Q: In my defense, I will just say that my questions are more about you, Rick Ruth.

RUTH: Oh, I can always talk about me.

Q: You're very gracious in identifying yourself with events that transcended you and the agency. The interview is an interview about you, but thank you for seeing that large context.

RUTH: I fear boring people about me, because my career and personnel issues are still percolating along merrily. It was under Henry Catto that I switched from the GS [General Schedule] Civil Service to the Senior Executive Service [SES]. Now, again, for people who are not familiar with all of this arcana, there's a Foreign Service and a Senior Foreign Service [SFS]. You can't simply be "promoted" into the SFS, you have to apply and be accepted. Legislation some decades back created a parallel system for the Civil Service with the SES being the SFS equivalent. Once again, you could not just be promoted into it, you had to apply, have references, meet the qualifications, and be accepted.

You made more money, of course, if you made it into the Senior Executive Service, and that was in exchange for greater responsibility. Supposedly—this is one part of the SES Act that's never been realized—you were supposed to be portable. You were supposed to be movable, so that there would be a core of senior executives who could go anywhere and do anything in the federal government. That's never happened. It's still on the books, but it's never happened.

For us, it's not arcana. For anybody ever reading this it probably won't be arcana. But since I was a Foreign Service officer Class One, the next logical step would have been Senior Foreign Service. Every year there's a promotion panel for every FS grade level and the results are made public. One day, at a time when the FS promotion panels were meeting, the head of "my" promotion panel, a distinguished FSO who had been an ambassador and an area director, came to see me and closed the door. He had just been the chair of the promotion panel for Class One officers. He said, "Rick, I've come to tell you that you're not going to get promoted this year. I want you to know that you are far and away the best person in all of Class One, but you know we have an up or out system. There are Class One officers who, if they don't get promoted this year, will have to resign. This is their last shot at promotion." He concluded by saying: "You're going to get promoted. When you're a chief, you're going to want to have indians."

Q: Well, that's kind of a touching, humane thing. It also shows a system that's not well-designed. If merit is not the only criterion, then there's something that needs to be tweaked, I guess. In the Civil Service system, as I understand it, prior to SES, the only way to be promoted is to actually obtain another position.

RUTH: That's correct.

Q: But you're saying that that's not the case in—

RUTH: Well, in a way, that is still the problem. The GS system is very crystalline. I went through the SES process. I submitted letters of reference. I demonstrated a sufficient scope of management authority. I was fortunate to be able to check all the boxes for the Senior Executive Service.

Q: Great. So, things are beginning to go really bad in the former Yugoslavia. I guess Samantha Power must have been over there at that time as a journalist. It was maybe '93 or '94. After Catto, then we have the new administration, and we have Clinton coming in. Take us chronologically up to that point. Is there anything more that happens to you during the Catto period? I'm guessing you went to Russia a couple of times, because you were the guy.

RUTH: Yes, Director Catto and I went to Russia a couple of times. He passed away some years ago, but he will always remain in my mind as one of the sterling examples of what a political appointee and government executive should be like. Shortly after becoming director, Catto hotsed all the PAOs—who were in town for a conference—at his home out on Georgetown Pike. He asked me to draft remarks. A routine request. I drafted normal remarks and, for a lark, also some execrable lyrics, such as:

My name is Catto
But they call me The Cat,
You're all around the world
But I know where you're at.

And so forth and so on in that vein. He chose to give the lyrics on the condition that he and I do it as a duet. So we did.

So, history rolled on, as we've talked about, but he was very good for the internal, mental, and organizational health of USIA. Then, of course, Bill Clinton became president, and Bill Clinton was a good friend of Joseph Duffey—or vice versa. He approached Dr. Duffey and asked him what he wanted to be. Clinton said, "Tell me the job you want."

Duffey said, "I want to be the head of USIA." In a previous incarnation, he had been the assistant secretary of cultural affairs at the State Department. Of course, he had been president of the University of Massachusetts. He was then president of American University. He had a very distinguished career as an academic. He chose USIA, and so starting in '93 until '99, until almost the end—he did resign early—he became one of the longer serving directors of USIA.

Q: Let's take up Duffey next time, perhaps, and make a good, clean break with Catto. In fact, that's astonishing that Duffey— Maybe I knew that, but I thought that Duffey was

kind of given USIA and told, "Here's what you're going to do." But in fact, he chose it. Okay. So, it's Catto until Clinton came in in January of '93.

RUTH: He left at the end of '93, I think.

Q: Oh, you were in Moscow before, during, and after the decline of the Soviet Union. From what you saw in your bilateral meetings and such, what did you notice in terms of the mood change? It must have been more somber, more gloomy.

RUTH: Yes and no. Russia, even without all the rest of the Soviet Union, is an extraordinarily complex society and culture, just like we are and any other major country is. So, they had people who, of course, felt defeated and were downcast and thought that, as Putin has done when he plays the grievance card, a terrible tragedy occurred and that the West conspired against them and brought them down. There was a joke at that time that you should feel sorry for the Soviet Union because it had been surrounded by hostile communist states.

But there was also a tremendous amount of excitement. This was the time of Boris Yeltsin, the battle for the White House and for freedom. There was the excitement of all these other countries that had been socialist republics, as part of what had been called "the prison house of Europe" during the nineteenth century, becoming independent states. I've already mentioned my trip to Tashkent a couple of years ago. I'd be asked at the start of each meeting if I had been to Uzbekistan before. When I replied that I had been there forty years before, the inevitable next question was: "What's changed?"

"That could be a long answer," I would say, "but the most significant thing is that when I was here forty years ago, you weren't a country. You were a Soviet Socialist Republic. You weren't independent. You didn't have an American embassy. You didn't have your own flag or your own elected president."

Q: That's funny. You would think that that would be uppermost in their minds, and that they would ask the question only to test you and see if you got the right answer. But in fact, you brought to them a new perception of themselves.

RUTH: They were thinking about Western hotels and more cars and restaurants and high-rise buildings and such things. They weren't thinking politically over forty years. First of all, I think I said this before so I'll just say it quickly, I never thought that I would live a day of my life when there'd be no Soviet Union in the world. The Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact—they looked as solid as anything could be, and then they collapsed.

That was for a variety of very good reasons, but nobody foresaw them. If any Sovietologist tells you they predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union or when and how it happened, they're lying. Nobody did. So, these were heady times. Very heady times.

I think the proof of it is that a couple of years ago—I guess three years ago, now—we had the hundredth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, and nobody cared. Even the government of Russia, even Moscow, did not hold a celebration to mark the hundredth anniversary of Lenin's revolution. It didn't matter anymore. It's gone. So, yes, there was an overwhelming feeling of forward motion and excitement and, of course, great relief that democracy, if you will, had prevailed. The Soviet Union was the evil empire. People can have their own opinions, but there is absolutely no doubt about it in mine: it was deeply evil. Good riddance to it.

Q: It doesn't matter, but I've always seen it exactly the same way. Reagan was criticized for that term, and I remember thinking, What about this is wrong? He actually got it. Was it Reagan or was it Bush— Oh, no, the axis of evil. That was another thing. The evil empire. That was Reagan, right?

RUTH: That was Reagan.

Q: It was accurate, I think. But the important part here is that you're the one who's lived in that country and observed it from close and far, and you're validating that term. That's pretty important. So, there you still are. Now we're going in '92. That was the election campaign, which at the time seemed to go on forever. There you were in an office that's about to change political parties. What goes on in an office like the front office of USIA when a political party goes out of office? What happens to the executive director?

RUTH: I personally love transitions. I'm sort of a change junkie. I like things to be stirred up. I like a little bit of excitement. Of course, changes in administration are always a human drama because the political appointees are downcast. Let me be very clear: 99 and 9/10 percent of all the political appointees I encountered were normal, decent, hard working people like you and me. You work with them every day. You like them; you don't like them. They're just folks, and we get the job done. So, to have good colleagues you work with every day suddenly be confronted with the need to find a new job isn't easy for anyone. Sometimes, when you had a transition within the same political party, such as Reagan-Bush, some political appointees think that they'll get to stay, but they don't. To Democrats or to outsiders Reagan and Bush supporters may look the same. After all, Bush was Reagan's vice president. But the people who are inside the game don't see it that way. There are Reagan people and there are Bush people, in the same way that there are Obama people and there are Biden people. Everybody knows who is who and who is not.

Then, there's also the great mystery, like, who is going to be the secretary of state? Who is going to be the director of USIA? Then there are the associate directors and the assistant secretaries and so on. These are all hugely consequential. Everybody's got their lottery going and their betting going like, Oh, I heard this rumor and I heard that rumor. So, it's a real time of change, both in terms of individual personalities and institutionally. We'll get into this later, but you get someone like Brian Atwood at USAID who fought like a tiger against the merger. Then you get Dr. Duffey, who took a different approach to

the merger. We'll talk about that later. But those appointments are enormously consequential. I always thought transitions were a whole lot of fun.

After Bill Clinton's election, I was sitting at my desk in the USIA director's office. It was not too long after January 20. I got a phone call from the guard desk, from one of the security guards down in the lobby. This is still Fourth and C Southwest. They called up and said, "I have a woman here in the lobby who says she's the head of the Clinton Advance Team for USIA. What should I do?"

I said, "For God's sake, send her up right now." He did, and it was Iris Burnett, who was a wonderful colleague for many years. So, you never know how and what's going to happen, but you have to embrace the future. You have to embrace change.

Q: Another powerful point. I'm imagining that you're surrounded by political appointees—the director, the deputy director. Maybe under Clinton there were a lot more.

RUTH: Chief of staff was always a political appointee.

Q: But there you were. You weren't stressed, because you were not a political appointee. It's a lovely position to be in. Let's get into— Let's take it from that moment that that guard called you. You would think they would have made an appointment, right? We know that the transition team was not the most highly polished in the history of American diplomatic history. But let's talk about that particular transition next time.

RUTH: Okay.

Q: So, we're now recording. It's December 23. It's Christmas Eve Eve, something like that. This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman. We're picking up from our fifth session last time, I think. Rick, last time, we were talking about transitions, because you've been through more transitions in a single position maybe than anybody else alive.

RUTH: Ah, what an honor.

Q: Well, it does show that a number of people of different persuasions trusted you, and should. You were mentioning last time that world events did not stop while our bureaucracies went through the things they went through. You were mentioning the late Henry Catto when you were elevated to SES. That's an internal HR matter, but if there's anything more to capture on that, that would be good. Then, your own trajectory took you to the same place and same office, this time with Clinton as president and Joe Duffey as director. You mentioned that Duffey had been president of UMass [University of Massachusetts] and American University [AU]. Then, he came, and there you were. Let's take it from that point.

RUTH: Okay. Thank you very much, Dan. It was an interesting time, of course, because Bill Clinton had just swept into office. He was quite the powerhouse candidate and

president. It had turned out, by quirk of fate, that Bill Clinton had been a volunteer in Joe Duffey's unsuccessful campaign to run for Senate some years before. As I think I mentioned, he actually approached Duffey and said, "What job would you like to have? Carte blanche."

Duffey replied, "I want to be the director of USIA." His background was, on paper, absolutely impeccable. He had already been the assistant secretary for ECA when ECA was still at the State Department. Again, he was president of UMass and AU, chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities [NEH]. On paper, he was perfect. Things were quite positive.

But parallel to what was happening internally with Joe Duffey's nomination and appointment and confirmation, we had the aftermath—which continues, in some ways, to this day—of the cataclysmic, seismic collapse of the Soviet Union. As we mentioned last time, there's that old saying that no moment for any movement or organization is more perilous than that of victory. We lost our common enemy, the common threat that helped unite a lot of disparate parts of the U.S. government. The hue and cry for change, for a peace dividend, for a smaller government and so on, was led, at least from USIA's perspective, by then-North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, who was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He and the Clinton administration sparred over an endless number of things— As you reminded me last time, this is more about me. I'm not trying to write a history book of the time.

Q: No, both are part of the story.

RUTH: Well, the tension that you had was, first of all, Jesse Helms wanted to radically shrink the entire foreign affairs budget. He was leery of entangling alliances and treaties and commitments and so forth. Of course, as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he oversaw ratification of those treaties. He and then-Secretary of State Albright sparred for a long time over the UN [United Nations] budget, for example. Albright wanted to plus up and invest and pay back dues in the UN. Helms didn't like the UN. Helms was very suspicious of treaties, so he was very much leery of the Chemical Weapons Convention, for example, which was something that was important to President Clinton.

Again, to get back to what we're talking about here more locally, he wanted to shrink the foreign affairs bureaucracy itself and referred to USAID, USIA, and ACDA [Arms Control and Disarmament Agency] as "bloated cold war bureaucracies." He thought they should be done away with. He used his desire to shrink them or abolish them as chips in playing those other games. So, for example, he held the Chemical Weapons Convention and other things that were of high priority to President Clinton and Secretary Albright hostage to his desire to restructure and shrink down the foreign affairs community. In fact, at one point, even Secretary of State Christopher opined publicly, "Maybe it's a good idea to have USIA or USAID as part of the State Department." Of course, as the Russians say, that was water on Senator Helms' mill. And so it began.

It was interesting. When I think back, as you're causing me to do in these useful conversations, I remember that in the years before Duffey was appointed and Clinton was elected, everything seemed to be very much turned outward. There was so much of significance happening in the world. When I think back on the next eight years, it's like everything turned inwards. The world didn't stop. Events keep happening; the world keeps changing. But we were so focused—necessarily, in many ways—on the fact that we were under threat in budgetary terms. We were under threat in existential terms to disappear as an independent agency.

A lot of what I remember is all the different steps we took, both to try to prevent that and to eventually accommodate it when it proved to be inexorable. So, there was the steady shutting down of so many aspects of public diplomacy. You know them as well as I do, but the list is almost endless. We cut back on magazines, culture, sports, and arts. We closed cultural centers and libraries. We turned our librarians into information resource officers. We RIF-ed [reduction in force] the agency, which was an appalling task. We gave away an entire incoming Foreign Service class. They called themselves "the lost class." We stopped the exhibit service. We cut motion pictures. Everything was being pared back. This didn't happen, of course, overnight. It was painful and protracted over a number of years—what I've always called the budgetary death march. That then culminated in the swallowing of all those agencies by the Department of State.

It was interesting, of course, watching Washington politics. J. Brian Atwood, who was the director of USAID at that time, was a very vocal critic of the idea of moving AID into the State Department. He earned the private and public wrath of the White House, because the White House was eventually on board with this. But he would not let it go. He had a lot of trouble with Senator Helms. As I recall, he was nominated to be an ambassador, at one point, and Helms spiked that out of irritation.

I do know that Dr. Duffey paid a call on Madeleine Albright to suggest to her that USIA enter the State Department under the same terms that USAID did—in other words, that USAID essentially remained intact, but was layered under the secretary of state. The administrator would report to the secretary. That's essentially how it is now. Joe Duffey offered that solution or option to Secretary Albright. She would have none of it. So, in the end, USIA and ACDA became the two of those three "bloated cold war agencies," per Senator Helms, that were actually fully merged into the State Department.

I was not a major player in that. It's interesting, thinking back, since I just spent the last twenty years in R [Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs] in the State Department, how vast and more complicated USIA was as an independent agency of the government. First of all, of course, we had international broadcasting. That was not just VOA but also Radio Marti and some of the other broadcasting entities. As an independent agency, of course, we had our own General Counsel's Office and our own Public Liaison Office, our own Research Office, our own—you name it. Security, Finance, everything. We had all of those because we were an independent agency.

The public affairs officer at an embassy was head of agency, not head of section. A significant and consequential distinction. PAOs were like a treasury attaché or somebody from Defense or some other department or independent part of the government. That gave them a lot more latitude to operate, and sometimes even to resist an ambassador. There were cases where an ambassador would request a list of people to be PAO in his or her country from which they would choose, as is often the case for a DCM. USIA rejected that. Ambassadors didn't pick PAOs. The Director of USIA picked PAOs. Sometimes, we even left positions vacant to make that point.

So, there are lots of inside baseball issues to be dealt with when you're an independent agency. The gravitational pull of all of Duffey's eight years are towards that merger. That's the historical event it all led to, for good or ill. My primary work was to help keep the wheels turning, to make things happen, to keep the operation going. But there was a whole raft of very senior people who worked on this. I was not a major player in the overall process.

There was the associate director for education, the associate director for management. There were people who worked on budget. There were people like Barry Fulton, who was the first head of the Bureau of Information when Programs was turned into the Bureau of Information. We can talk more about that. There were all the area directors who were serious figures in their own right. So, they were, like Kenton Keith and others, mostly responsible for the day-to-day work of trying to thrash out the merger. My job, at that point, for most of it was still keeping the director's office going and keeping things in touch. The wheels and gears just had to keep turning.

Q: No, but this is crucial, and that's a great summary. It does bring up four or five questions, though. The first one: As a relative outsider, I remember being told that Albright and Helms, who began in a very contentious relationship, in fact became very good friends. I don't know if this is true; maybe you know about this. I was told or, as our president would say, "people said," that in fact they ended up being very collaborative. Was that your impression?

RUTH: Largely, yes. That's right. The fate of USIA was not important to Secretary Albright. As far as she was concerned, it had a better fate. It became part of an integrated State Department under her authority. People who become secretaries of anything in a cabinet are like CEOs. They think everything in the world works better if they run it. So, I don't believe she thought for a moment that the merger of USIA into the State Department was any kind of loss for American foreign policy or American public diplomacy.

Q: So, in this, she agreed, maybe for different reasons.

RUTH: She caused Helms to loosen up on other things that she did really care about, like certain kinds of foreign treaties and UN budgets and so on and so forth.

Q: Not to criticize or trash Secretary Albright, but my understanding is that she seldom or never entered the USIA building until the day she gave a town hall saying, "We're closing down." Now, again, I was in the field, so I don't know, but that was what I was told.

RUTH: She did not visit USIA. She came there on October 1 or September 30, whatever that last day was. It was October 1, I guess, that the sign was taken down from the outside of the building, the one that said, "Telling America's story to the world."

Q: I don't mean this to sound bitter, but she didn't have time in eight years to visit that building? It seems unbelievable.

RUTH: It was turned over to then-Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy, who was head honcho for the merger at State, which at the same time was happening to USAID and ACDA. So, from the State Department perspective, they were absorbing three different outside agencies, not just USIA.

Q: Again, just a parting thought: my understanding is that Albright came in already convinced that USIA would benefit by being part of the State Department.

RUTH: Oh, sure.

Q: That said, she never really consulted with anyone in USIA to get their view of this, did she?

RUTH: Your point being, what? I mean—

Q: My point being that she put USIA out of existence without ever consulting anybody in USIA.

RUTH: Well, I mean, there were certainly a lot of contacts at the next couple of levels down between senior officials at USIA and State. That was ongoing. She did have a meeting with Dr. Duffey at that one point to discuss the large shape of the merger. But, I mean, I recall back at this time that Tom Friedman, who's someone I've always greatly admired, wrote an op-ed piece strongly endorsing the merger. He said, "We need a State Department that incorporates public diplomacy. We need a State Department that incorporates foreign assistance. These are important, and they should be part of the State Department so that it's all integrated."

One of the great siren songs of bureaucracy, in foreign affairs or elsewhere, is standardization and centralization. The "inertial drift" at State is always toward amalgamation. That tendency can be fatal for public diplomacy, especially for exchanges. When you're conducting public diplomacy—and this is one of the reasons the merger was a failure in many ways—a series of neighborhood grocery stores is probably better

for you than a single mammoth Amazon distribution warehouse somewhere. Sheer speed and efficiency are not always the answer. Sometimes you need that local, individual, personal touch. But again, as I said, any secretary of state would tell you—and this is nothing about Madeleine Albright in particular— If you asked them, "Would you be able to manage foreign affairs better if you also had foreign assistance and public diplomacy and arms control?", they would say, Of course I would. It's a foolish question.

So, it wasn't so much that Albright was conniving against USIA or USAID or anybody else. It was just fated. It was like magnetism. It came the secretary of state's way. Helms got what he wanted, she got what she wanted, and we didn't get what we wanted.

Q: That's a pretty good summary. I'm trying not to sound like the devil's advocate. Maybe I am the devil himself. In a parallel fashion, you mentioned Brian Atwood's great skill at preventing USAID from going through the same process at the same time. At a later time, Secretary Condoleezza Rice attempted to bring AID under the State Department by creating F for Foreign Assistance Bureau. My understanding, though, was that that was nothing more than a name change. It really did not change any of the functioning of the Agency for International Development.

RUTH: Yes, that's largely correct. Some of the internal bureaucracy was changed; some of the budgetary planning elements were fused a bit. But largely, AID has still retained a great deal of autonomy inside the State Department.

Q: Again, it is said that this is partly because Atwood was a more skillful advocate for his agency than Duffey was for his.

RUTH: Perhaps, in the Washington way. Atwood was prepared to make himself unpopular. He was prepared to receive criticism that he knew would be coming. He was prepared to lose his ambassadorship because Helms wouldn't have it because he was so irritated at Atwood. So, in that Washington way, he was willing to take that higher profile of opposition, which, of course, endeared him to the people at USAID.

Dr. Duffey took a different approach to it, although in a sense, it was going to happen no matter what he did. The correlation of forces, as the Soviets used to like to say, was arrayed against him. He did not see the need to be vocally oppositional to what the president, vice president, and secretary of state had already signed off on. He was certainly busy enough trying to defend the USIA budget year in and year out separate from that. So, yeah, they took very different approaches. They each took a classic Washington approach, and that led to different results. You and I have our opinions of whether they were successful or not.

Q: This will sound like a question outside of our lane, but I think it's inside. I think part of Atwood's success was in domesticating the AID programs, in the sense that he took on democracy, which was something that was new for AID and catered to a domestic

constituency. It also bled over into what used to be USIA's lane. So, in fact, was that not part of Atwood's test?

RUTH: You're absolutely right. You touch on two very important things, Dan. One is money. The magnitude of USAID's funding dwarfed USIA's, and it had a much bigger domestic footprint in terms of who in Congress, for example, cared about these things. Again, the sums of money were far more substantial. The second is that Atwood and his colleagues at AID were indeed entrepreneurial. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the cry was, We must cement the gains of democracy. We must advance democracy and civil society throughout the Warsaw Pact and the former Soviet Union. So, AID moved very adroitly and aggressively, with bigger funding, into areas that had been typically USIA areas, such as journalism and the media and so on.

Q: Education, too.

RUTH: Right. If someone wanted to establish the American University of X in the former Soviet Union or Warsaw Pact, that was USAID's job, not USIA's. So, they did move into some typically-USIA areas, because now they were bigger and sexier and had a higher profile in foreign policy.

Q: I'm guessing that must have caused some dyspepsia and stress among senior USIA officials.

RUTH: Oh, yeah. It pissed people off to no end. But, you know, money talks.

Q: Got it. You mentioned, in passing, libraries. In what I think of as the golden age of USIA/USIS, we had libraries and we had cultural centers. I believe it was a congressman from Michigan who saw a library in the field, at one point, during a codel [congressional delegation] and said, "How can we be financing libraries overseas when I don't have the funds to do that in my own district in Michigan?"

RUTH: I remember that quote.

Q: Why did the word library suddenly become a taboo word?

RUTH: It didn't become taboo. It was all a question of money. We began to have steadily shrinking budgets, and things had to go, so you looked at where the money was. My first position in the Foreign Service was as assistant cultural affairs officer at the American Cultural Center in Amman, Jordan, which was a three story, freestanding cultural center. It had an open-stack public library. It had exhibit space and so on and so forth. It was separate from the embassy.

Well, when you have that kind of operation, you not only have the program cost, but you have the maintenance. You have a building to pay for and maintain and so on. So, though there were some buildings that survived—like the center in New Delhi or the center in

Mexico City—most of them had to go primarily because of the cost. We just had to get the budget down. It eventually got to the point where we had cut so many programs, over the years, that we actually had to have a reduction in force of USIA personnel because there was no money to cover salaries.

Q: Of course, after 9/11, there was the additional pressure from security to get everything within a secure enclosure. That, of course, severely limited what public diplomacy officers could do.

RUTH: That's exactly right. There were the so-called Inman standards, after the bombings in East Africa. You had security fingering free-standing cultural centers and libraries as "unsustainable" from a security point of view. That applied to consulates, as well, but it often applied to our American Centers. We are still to this day talking with security and others about access to centers and public affairs operations that are contained behind embassy hardlines and so forth—who can come in, who can bring their cell phone in with them, that kind of thing.

But another thing is important to point out, Dan, which also led the change from the Bureau of Programs to the Bureau of Information. This is a decade, really, when the information and communications revolution is just rocketing forward. A lot of people said, We don't have to have books anymore. We don't have to buy shelves and rent space and have people putting hard copy books on shelves. That's old school and prehistoric. We've got the Internet.

For many people, that was an honest belief, that we could cut those costs, reduce those expenditures, reduce the security risk, and we would lose nothing in the exchange, because replacing it would be our tremendous ability to do things online, virtually, and electronically. Other people always thought that was bogus, but it could serve as a bit of a bandaid over the wound. You could try and convince yourself that, well, maybe we're not going to lose everything that's precious, because maybe some of this Internet or communications capability will help restore or maintain some of our ability to contact and engage other people. Many didn't really believe it but were willing to say it because it helped them feel a little bit better. That was part of the reason. So, you're right. There was the communications revolution, security pressure, budget pressure, and things began to fall.

Q: Yes. I've been IO [information officer] in several countries, and I would say that the functions that I performed at that time are no longer needed at all, because we were delivering through the wireless file and the Washington file things that, now, anybody can get on the Internet.

I will say, again— I'm not trying to trash anybody, but Joe Duffey did say in a WorldNet—I forget what year it was—"When I am sitting in my hammock in the summertime, thinking of intellectual stimulation, I just don't see myself with a floppy disc. I see myself with a hardcopy book." I believe that at the time he said that—which was

during a PAO conference—it ingratiated him to everybody on that WorldNet. But I think he had already decided to trash publications and books.

But that's me, not you. Let me just ask you: This was a very painful process for people who believed in public diplomacy. As you said, there were many who were willing to give it a try, and of course, there was no other option; we had to. You were the one maintaining the process as best you could. I must say that during that period, I never heard a negative word about you, Rick Ruth. But did you? I mean, you must have been a bit demoralized, and there must have been hard feelings.

RUTH: I don't think anybody felt any personal animosity. Certainly, there were people who were bitterly disappointed in Joe Duffey. Even if they conceded that the cards were stacked against him, even if they conceded the fact that Clinton and Gore and Albright and Helms were going to make this happen, people being people, they would have liked to have seen their leader speak out for them in public. They had the example in front of them every week of Brian Atwood. They, like men and women anywhere, because something that they valued was being taken from them—highly unwisely, in their opinion—really wanted to see their boss, their captain, their chief go public and say, "Goddammit, this is wrong. It may be inevitable, but it's wrong because—" That was not Joe Duffey's style, and he did not do that, and a lot of people, of course, held that and still hold that against him.

Some of that animosity was cemented when he departed USIA well before the final day. He went off to work for Sylvan Learning Systems several months before. It was probably about four or five months, something like that, before the merger. The joke or cynical remark going around was, "This is an example of the captain being the first to leave the sinking ship." People understandably held that against him, also.

Q: I will also mention that I remember clearly that USIS posts were promoting Sylvan Learning. I won't say any more than that, but you know what I'm thinking. So, this is a period of great trial and great test. Did some of the PD officers bail, at this time? Well, first of all, what time are we talking about? We're leading up to September 30, 1999, but—

RUTH: Nineteen ninety-eight was when President Clinton signed the merger. I think it was called the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998. Then, with that signature, the real nitty-gritty, day-to-day heavy lifting began, the so-called crosswalk. This was something that's worth pointing out. This is part of something Dr. Duffey argued for as well: no one would lose their job. This was not a downsizing; it was a merger. In fact, as part of this process, nobody in USIA lost their job or their federal Civil Service or Foreign Service status. Same for USAID and ACDA.

That was, obviously, hugely important. People were unhappy about where they went and how it went. People moved around during the RIF and responsibilities changed. Just because you didn't lose your job doesn't mean that the staff of *America Magazine,* who

had been proud to put out this publication in the Soviet Union for decades, weren't distraught at the loss of it and the fact that they now had to turn their attention to some other job, some other kind of work. Of course, it's better to not lose your job on top of all of that. Let's be realistic here.

So, there was a lot of disruption and upset with all of the changes, but the very complicated crosswalk was, in and of itself, a very heavy lift. People in USIA's Office of General Counsel, for example, were dispersed to five different bureaus in the State Department. So, it was the diametric opposite of what happened to USAID in that sense.

One of the most profound errors that the State Department made was in the blind assumption that offices like Security, Finance, Legal Counsel, Research, and so on were the same or identical in every department or agency. Therefore, whereas certain parts of USIA, like ECA or the Bureau of Information, had to be intact as they moved over to the State Department, all those other support bureaus, if you will, could just be merged directly into their State Department counterparts and disappear forever. What the State Department failed to know or didn't care to know was that every one of those offices was custom-designed to support public diplomacy.

Now, you may have examples from your own Foreign Service experience, but an example in my mind is our security officers, who were no less concerned with our safety than their State Department counterparts. But they simultaneously understood that the purpose of public diplomacy is to engage the citizens of other countries. You had to find ways to allow that kind of interaction face to face while maintaining security.

If you were a PAO—and this may have actually happened to you—and, let's say, you were working on a presidential visit, and you got a call at ten o'clock at night that the president had changed his mind and would do the press conference tomorrow morning, then you would need risers, stages, and so on. You would just do it, and then you would call back the next day to our Office of Finance, to the venerable Stan Silverman, who was a wonderful institution at USIA, and you would say, "I just committed ten thousand dollars to do this because the White House advance said they'd changed their minds."

He would say, "Okay, we've got it." You wouldn't do that in the State Department.

Q: It's a crime. What's it called? Committing U.S. funds without a—

RUTH: Anti-deficiency, yeah, that kind of thing. So, in USIA, everything, no matter how routine it may have sounded from outside, was in fact focused on the mission of public diplomacy. That was not true, of course, with the State Department.

Q: In fairness to DS [Bureau of Diplomatic Security], there was the added layer of the attacks of '98 and 9/11, which really did change the formula. We'll never know if the USIA security people would have had to adapt in the same way. Probably so, as DS did.

Let's mention also— You mentioned the magazine published for the Soviet Union. There's also Topic Magazine, which was the most popular publication on the African continent.

There was one junior PD class that was given a devil's deal. I forget when this was. They were told, "You can become consular officers, or you can take your chances, and maybe you'll make it as PD officers." AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] backed management in this. I don't know if you have any recollection of that, but there was a lot of bitterness of people believing they were being thrown to the dogs and not being told what their chances were. One in two? One in ten? One in a hundred? Were you involved or did you observe any of that?

RUTH: I was aware of that. I met with some of the junior officers who were in that class. I was not personally involved in any of it, but I was certainly aware of it. It was one of the more bitter moments, of course.

Q: Right. That was the one little flaw in the crosswalk. They were not exactly— Crosswalk took care of everyone except for them.

RUTH: No, they got caught up in— They were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Q: We don't want to prolong the agony, but this is an eight-year period. Do you remember phases? Were there plateaus of decisions? When did you know that Madeleine Albright and Joe Duffey had decided to move this forward? You must have been one of the first to know, I guess.

RUTH: There was never any particular doubt that it was going to happen. We argued against it, but there certainly was a sense, because we were surrounded every single day by the need to dismantle things and discontinue things. When you look at the last issue of a magazine— I think our Arts America office went from something like forty-three people to four people. Sports America was closed down. The exhibit service was closed down. Things were happening every day. So, the inevitability of the merger was all around us. We were making the best of a difficult situation, trying to keep everything going as well as possible, trying to keep morale as good as possible, and knowing that the overwhelming number of people at USIA were unhappy.

It wasn't everyone, though; there were people at USIA who thought this was a good idea. You may know people yourself. There were always Foreign Service officers in USIA who felt that they were second-class, that they were junior to the "real" Foreign Service officers at the State Department. They thought we should be over there with the big kids so that they could also be policy officers and get fast-tracked more easily to be DCMs and ambassadors and principal officers, which was very difficult if you came out of the Foreign Service information officer ranks.

Q: That reminds us of the Edward R. Murrow quote: "If you want me there during the crash landings, you have to have me there during the takeoffs." I know of one person who

must have been nagging you all the time. I'm thinking of one person. There must have been a number of them. You don't have to name them, but there must have been people nagging you, during that period.

RUTH: Nagging me, no. There were people who certainly came and wanted to speak, wanted to vent, wanted to just say their piece and have somebody sympathetic listen to them. That was perfectly understandable. I remember one particular colleague—a Civil War buff—who came to me and said, "Rick, Joe Duffey is Robert E. Lee. He is the commander in chief. He gives the orders. But, you, Rick, are Longstreet. You're the soldiers' general. People will do what you say just because it's you that says it."

I disagreed with him. I mean, I didn't argue with him on the spot, but I didn't agree with his analogy. But people did use me as a sounding board or a person to talk to or a place to have a sympathetic and understanding ear about all the difficulties. These people had spent their careers building these institutions, and now they were presiding over their demise. That's terribly painful, personally and professionally.

Q: I think I probably know who that person was who made the comment about the general and the colonel. But let's just say, as a sounding board— I'm not trying to flatter you, but I can't imagine a person better positioned or more sympathetic to serve that function. You are a real listener. You're not quick to judge. I believe—this is just an opinion; I was mainly in the field at that time—that you maintained morale much better than anyone else could have. I really do think that.

RUTH: Thank you.

Q: So, again, we're talking about an eight-year period. Were there plateaus? Were there periods of noticeable change, or was it just a gradual march towards death?

RUTH: It was a pretty steady drumbeat. I may be overdramatizing by calling it a death march, but it was grim.

Q: When you say death march, we now know which side you're on.

RUTH: Oh, it was a terrible mistake. Twenty years later, I can still say it was a terrible mistake.

Q: Oh, well, let's talk about that. Before we actually get to September 30, 1999, in what ways did this change reduce the functioning and the soft power of public diplomacy?

RUTH: There were a couple things. First of all, to give the devil his or her due, there is no enormously significant or consequential reason why a department of state, a ministry of foreign affairs, could not, in fact, run public diplomacy. The fact that we do not doesn't mean that we cannot. One of the things that we lost—and I felt this very keenly—is a professional community. We lost a community of expertise. I'm telling you something

you know, of course. People at USIA lived and breathed public diplomacy. We fought about it. We argued about it. We went to battle with each other about it.

Is this theory of communication more effective? Is this manner of engagement more effective or less effective? What do psychologists say? What do experts say? What is the real impact of the communications revolution? How do we use that? This is all we did. It was what we loved, and it was our profession.

I'll bring Joe Duffey back into this very quickly. One of the things he said once, which I took away with me and have repeated many times since, is his definition of a professional. He said that a professional always sees himself or herself as part of a continuum through time. They pay attention to what their predecessors did—doctors and lawyers and diplomats and so forth. They learn from their predecessors, and they feel like they are obliged to pass on knowledge and practice to their successors. They feel part of that important continuum. We broke that. We cut that thread. Like the fates, we cut that mortal thread. That was a huge loss.

The State Department, as I already noted, did not think that any of what they considered to be ancillary offices in USIA were any different than what they did at the State Department. So, they were just merged straight across. They were like a drop of water lost in the sea. They didn't understand what the difference was. So, we lost all of that.

There is such a thing as an appropriate, professional, or—if you'll forgive me for sounding woo-woo—"aesthetic" distance that matters to keep things like Fulbright, youth exchange, and libraries separate from policy. We don't just send books to libraries that support the president who's in the office at that moment. We don't send Fulbrighters abroad only if they're Republicans or Democrats. We don't do youth exchanges to indoctrinate anyone into any particular ideology. When you're part of the State Department, you can fight against that perception all you want, but most of the time, you're going to lose.

Then, of course, there's the obvious fact that broadcasting was taken out of public diplomacy. So, an enormous capability in radio, television, and other forms of communication was taken out of public diplomacy, never the twain to meet again—certainly not thus far, and probably never again. The political football that broadcasting has become just illustrates the complexities there.

So, a good deal was, in fact, lost, and then there were petty things, if you will. For example, you mentioned earlier how I had mentioned that I was in the Senior Executive Service, as were a number of senior career civil servants in USIA. To my knowledge, no one at USIA who was in the Senior Executive Service received a Senior Executive Service position at the State Department. Now, we all kept our rank, and we all kept our salary, but we were essentially made over complement. The State Department did not put USIA people into any of its own SES positions, its crown jewels.

I was added to the under secretary's office, and again, I kept my rank. I kept my salary. But it was over complement. There was no actual State Department position. When I left the office, the position went with me. A lot of very senior, very experienced people at USIA simply decided to retire. They weren't going to put up with that shit. So, off they went. That was a huge loss of institutional expertise and also a rather grievous back of the hand.

Q: You were domestic. Those of us who were overseas sensed—correctly or incorrectly—that what we used to call USIS used to be a very open platform. Any opinion went. Criticizing U.S. policy was tolerated. That was one reason why we had such an abundant and vigorous audience. We felt that we lost that when public diplomacy became part of a megaphone, so to speak. I don't know. Any thoughts about that? What did it seem like from Washington?

RUTH: One of the things that intrigues me about the Department of State, which is, of course, our ministry of foreign or external affairs, is that being an entity with a global mission, it nonetheless has an institutional culture that is inward-looking and is, if you'll pardon me, so constipated that it is often rigid and inflexible. It is often more concerned with maintaining and keeping information than releasing it, more concerned with who cleared on something than actually getting the information out.

I used to joke that if there was a motto that should be chiseled over the front doors of the main State Department building, it would be, "Now is not the time."

I recall, actually, some years later running into a very senior State Department officer who said, after I had mentioned some aggravating incident, "Oh, yeah, sure, you know the old State Department motto. 'The urgent before the important.'" Bingo!

Q: My own motto was, "We value information so highly that we never give it away."

RUTH: There you go. It's too precious to let go of.

Q: It never caught on, but that was mine.

RUTH: Yeah. It was just an entirely different mindset at the State Department than at USIA, and we lost that.

Q: Yeah. So, you mentioned earlier PD officers with a chip on their shoulder believing that they were second-class citizens. You've just, actually, substantiated that a little bit by pointing out the rigid culture of the State Department and then—I won't say inability, but they weren't inclined to have an open discussion overseas, which is what drew audiences to USIS centers. Some of us still have the feeling that the State Department never quite understood the value of public dissent in a public place.

RUTH: They still don't.

Q: That doesn't mean we're second-class citizens, but would you rank that as a loss? You were saying there was no professional community, aesthetic distance, petty things—

RUTH: Well, there was also a loss of that openness, and the ability to be open and critical and discursive and free-wheeling without your conversations or your film showings or your speaker programs being directly reflective of the secretary of state and U.S. foreign policy. In the same way, you could bring out speakers that were critical of the United States, because we weren't the State Department.

Q: Right. Now, in some cases— You mentioned films. Where we lost the actual office from USIA, we had other entities that picked up these tasks anecdotally like Africa Regional Services [ARS] as a film library, for example. There was what used to be a very robust book publication. The Spanish one was based in three different cities—Barcelona, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires. When that went away, as far as I know, the Spanish books are no longer part of the program at all. In the case of French, ARS has been able— Are there other instances of programs that sort of survived because other entities picked them up once they were removed from USIA?

RUTH: I'm sure there have been other cases, but the biggest change, of course, is that many people in the world have decided that we don't need books and libraries anymore. It's all online. The tremendous changes in access to information—good and bad, including the cocooning and selectivity of information—that has taken over the world dwarfs any discussion of what ARS Paris did or what the New Delhi library is managing to do in spite of the merger. The merger pales in comparison to the communications revolution.

One of the unfortunate things about that— I'm jumping too far ahead, so I'll just say it and stop, but that is that since the merger, every single R under secretary has been a communications professional. That has defined and, regrettably, drastically narrowed down the scope of public diplomacy. Now, twenty years later, most people think that public diplomacy is only communications. You can call it messaging, you can call it strategic information, you can call it what you will, but it's information. All the other aspects of public diplomacy, which were represented in USIA, are something else, but they're not public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is just information and communications. That's a terrible loss.

Q: The one exception to that is the only professional we've ever had, which is Bruce Wharton. He was the only one who—

RUTH: It was nice to see Bruce in the job, but like others before him, he was there as long as a mayfly.

Q: He expected to last three or four months, and he lasted nine or ten months because he had a personal— He got along with Tillerson well enough to be kept for quite a few more

months than he thought. Now, communications. We haven't talked about social media, which has become a major thing. I would confess to being one of those who never would have been good at making the transition. How do you see the growth of social media, in some cases actually taking over public diplomacy? I'm not saying I'm against it, I'm just saying I have no skills in that area.

RUTH: Any public diplomacy specialist, as the years and the decades roll by, has got to adapt what we do, what they do, to the changes in the world. The communications changes have been profound, and that's part of what we as professionals have to pay attention to. It's interesting; the United States has a number of natural, competitive advantages in the world, which would be true even if there never was a USIA or public diplomacy at all.

For example, there are our values. We can go into a longer discussion of this, but the enduring attractiveness of American values—by which I mean, essentially life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, rule of law, security in your person, worth and dignity of the individual—is because those are transcendent values that can prevail in any open competition. They were highly attractive two hundred-plus years ago, and they're highly attractive to the world now. We have the most open and attractive higher education system in the world. We have—love it or hate it—the most popular, influential popular culture in the world. We have a robust, entrepreneurial culture. You have to ask yourself what Steve Jobs might have done if his father hadn't moved to the United States. Then, the language that we're speaking right now, Dan, the English language. It hasn't always been so and likely won't always be so, but right now, English is the language that lets you go anywhere and do anything. It is the language that everybody wants to know.

These fundamental facts would be true regardless. So, to get back to your point, as public diplomacy professionals, we have to be aware of these tectonic plates that shift under our feet, including the communications revolution, and adapt those to our purpose, which is public diplomacy to advance our foreign policy, as well as the safety, security, and well-being of the United States and our society. So, that's all part of the game. But it's harder to do in the State Department, in some ways, and it's harder to do if you have an under secretary, when you have one, who doesn't understand that that's the full scope of it. It isn't just Facebook, Twitter, and social media and counterpunching with the bad guys online.

Q: We know that counterpunching often does more harm than good.

RUTH: Absolutely.

Q: It also often raises the profile of false narratives. In an earlier interview, Rick, we talked about this briefly, and I think I asked you if social media will ever really be effective in replacing Fulbright and IV and these other programs. You said, very decisively, that it won't.

RUTH: I was right.

Q: I used to say that delivering a message, which is what our colleagues think we do, is five percent, not 50 percent, of what a PAO really does. It's really 95 percent relationships. Would you see it that way, also?

RUTH: Oh, absolutely. I mean, that's part of the catastrophic narrowing of public diplomacy at the senior-most policy level. They don't know what it is, and they don't know what they've lost.

Q: Right. Well, we agree so much on this that this might be becoming a boring conversation. Thank you for stating this so clearly.

RUTH: I mean, just to add on, because this is my hobby horse, it isn't actually complicated. One doesn't have to have a degree from a university in public diplomacy to look at these things. There are only so many ways that human beings can interact with each other, and we know what most of them are. Every now and then, technology will introduce a new wrinkle into it, but there are basically only so many ways you can talk to a person, see a person, or interact with a person.

If there's somebody that's important to you—define that how you will; family member, new in-law, somebody on your team, classmate, somebody in your office, a colleague, it doesn't matter—there are only X number of ways that you can reach out to and engage that person. You could send them a text. You could send them an email. You could write them a letter. You could call them on the phone, or you could actually go see them in person. Does anybody on earth think that tweeting somebody is as effective as seeing them in person?

Q: There are many who think that.

RUTH: That is grievously unfortunate, and another casualty of this obsession with Internet and social media. Of course, part of the dirty little secret behind that is the belief that it's all going to be cheaper. They're praising the capacity and the ability of social media and the Internet to do the job because all they care about is not having to pay for what they think is a more expensive person-to-person kind of program.

Q: Let's emphasize that you say this not as an old fogie but, on the contrary, as somebody who really understands the various forms. You're not saying this as a resistor, which is what I would be, but as someone who really does understand the different forms PD can take. You mentioned, a little facetiously, not needing a degree in PD, and yet we see now a proliferation of exactly that at USC [University of Southern California], at Maxwell School. What do you think of these academic programs that purport to prepare PD analysts? What's that all about?

RUTH: On the one hand, certainly, public diplomacy is worthy of study, research, scrutiny, and examination, just as many human endeavors are. But there is a chasm between the practitioner and the academic. I have generally found that most academics in public diplomacy are close to worthless, if not counterproductive. They have no concept of how one actually conducts engagement in public diplomacy in the real world. There are, of course, exceptions to that, but by and large, I simply ignore them. Every time I look into their work or have an engagement with them, I walk away thinking that not only have they not helped me, but they're largely clueless about what really goes on in the world. I'm sure they think exactly the same about me.

Q: Well, how could they when you've done it and they have not? I've had the same experiences with people who are able academics, able to publish and gather facts and distill them, but who have never, even for ten minutes, experienced in the field what actually happens. The field is where everything happens, correct?

RUTH: Correct. When you talk about exchanges, the field includes foreign visitors and exchange students and IVs all around the United States. So, it happens out of the office and all around the world. Some years ago, I attended a conference in London on public diplomacy, put together by a guy now at USC who is quite admirable, Nick Cull.

Q: A good friend, yes.

RUTH: I think the world of Nick. He was kind enough to invite me to a conference he organized in London. It pretty much went as one expects these things to go, except that there was one surprise for me: there were a number of grad students, PhD candidates, there who were working on dissertations in public diplomacy. It was a little bit disconcerting to hear them talking about doing a study of a time when I was alive and working. It made me feel ancient. They were talking about USIA being this and that, and I kept thinking: Wait a minute! Have I become history?

Q: Well, that's the importance of this interview, getting it on the record. But sorry, I had interrupted.

RUTH: No, thank you, it's okay. I remember one very earnest young student talking about how USIA in the '90s had made a strategic policy decision to switch from mass audiences to elite audiences. We never did that. There was no decision to do that. It's the budget pressure we talked about. When you are in the field, you could, if you had to, go to the ambassador and say, "I don't know the youth leaders today, or I don't know this sports team or that student group," but you could never go to the ambassador and say, "I can't get through to the Ministry of Education. I can't get through to the Ministry of Culture."

If you're paring down your staff, cutting your budget, and slashing your programs, what do you end up with? You end up with the elite. You have to know the editor in chief. You have to be able to reach out to the president of the university. What you cut back is all the

broad scale, more popular, more general programs, because that's just inevitably what you're driven to do. That was not a policy decision. That was just the budget lash driving us down a road we didn't want to follow.

Q: Right. That brings up, possibly, another loss in the merger. Now, it's strictly forbidden for a PAO to be in touch with a minister. Ministers are reserved for ambassador front offices only. You can only see a minister if the ambassador permits you to do so.

RUTH: Well, this goes back to head of agency versus head of section.

Q: So that would be another loss. Now, you mentioned a conference in London. It's an interesting contrast, if you want to opine on this, between the British Council and USIA or PD. The British Council has a mission statement that is decidedly not what ours is. It's more to provide a meeting space. It believes that its— It is public-private, of course. It believes that it is not an instrument of British foreign policy. Any comments on that contrast?

RUTH: I mean, no, not in particular. The British Council is a most admirable organization, of course, much more like the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institute and others. We tend to focus on the British Council more because we speak roughly the same language. We're always envious of their real estate and scope and because they are not harnessed as tightly to the Foreign Office as we now are to the State Department. And, of course, they can turn a profit. The British Council is allowed to charge and make money for these things under their charter. So, they have a good deal more latitude to do things and experiment with things because of that longer leash, if you will, but also because they can generate income in a way that we cannot.

In many cases, of course, they benefit from the fact that they were an extensive colonial power, and they have deep roots in so many of these different countries. We don't have that kind of edge, and we're happy that we weren't a colonial power in those countries, but nonetheless, people in that country often have a longstanding personal relationship with England, with the UK [United Kingdom], that they don't have with us, and the British use that very sensibly.

Then there's another thing that comes up with the UK and other countries, and that is that we're number one, whether we like it or not. That means if you're going to be mad at somebody in the world for whatever your grievance is, you're going to be mad at America. You're not going to be mad at Denmark. You're not going to be mad at Belgium. You're going to be mad at us.

So, one of the ways we see this— We've spent years studying the effect of globalization, including communications, on conservative patriarchal societies around the world. We tend to think, Oh, that's Afghanistan or Baluchistan, and we talk about societies that tend to be based on very strict, patriarchal, hierarchical, often religious-based values.

As the world seems to crumble around them—as the young people go off to the cities and the women become insubordinate and TV and magazines show pornography, the old values are falling away—they're mad. But who are they mad at? There's nobody to be angry with, because it's not the neighboring village. You're not fighting with anybody in particular, and yet your power and your authority and your influence—in short, your way of life—is crumbling all around you.

Well, if you're going to be generally angry with somebody, it's always the United States. First, because we're the most powerful, and second, because we're responsible, if you will, for the computer and the Internet and all these other things that seem to be driving globalization. I'm saying this very quickly and very simplistically just to make the point. We bear a burden, and that means that we are going to be the target of accusations and anger and suspicion in a way that the British Council and others simply are not. It's a burden they don't have.

Q: That's a very intriguing point. Just to add, despite what we're talking about, both BBC and British Council are having severe budget problems themselves. In smaller third world countries, we have everything to gain through—and we do this—cooperating with the British Council in teaching English, for example. We know, on a flip note, why English is the universal language. We don't have declensions, and we don't have fifty different ways to use the word "to go." There's another language I'm thinking of that does that. Our words are much shorter, and there's only one form of them. That may be part of the reason. We think of it as cultural and political dominance, but English seems to be easier to learn for people who are not native English speakers than languages with complex declensions systems. There may be something to that.

RUTH: We could go around and around on whether English is easier or not or whether it looks easier to us because we're native speakers and we ignore the fact that we have so many strange pronunciations and forms and so on. But the point is that if you're an airline pilot for Air India flying into Brazil, you speak English with the tower. I saw a report once estimating that 90 percent of all the data stored in all the computers in the world is in English.

Everybody knows—you know this, I know this, every student around the world knows this—that if you want to make it in the world, you have to learn English. Again, that may not always be true, but it is true right now. Our English language programs are a rare example of what we want to give being exactly what others want to receive.

Q: That makes me very sad, also, because the English language programs are now a shadow of what they used to be.

RUTH: They are in terms of person to person, although the English Microscholarship program has done a wonderful job spreading around the world since its inception in Morocco. Here's a tip of the hat to Margaret Tutwiler for helping push that along when she was ambassador there, although it was ECA that made it into a professional program.

It's an area where the Internet, where virtual learning is extremely suitable and productive. We now have programs, webinars, and other professionalization programs, not just to teach English but to improve the English skills of English language teachers in order to have a multiplier effect around the world.

Relatively speaking, there's very little loss from not being in person when you can teach virtually. That's true in part because we are able to, and we do, reach audiences that would be extraordinarily difficult to reach otherwise. ECA, for example, makes tremendous efforts to reach individuals who are disabled and who would not, in most cases, ever physically be able to travel to the United States.

We're able to reach teachers who are in remote areas, and people in underdeveloped countries who may have access to something like Zoom, in this case, or a webinar, but might never be able to travel because of the economic conditions. We can reach women instructors in societies that are more socially conservative and put more restrictions on women's travel. So, English language instruction is an area where, right now, we are doing a great deal of really interesting work.

Q: Yeah, when I said shadow, I guess I was just referring to the number of ELOs. There are two per continent now where there used to be a dozen.

RUTH: One of the things that we lost at the time of the merger with the State Department was that the State Department decreed that we could no longer have the sort of contractual arrangement for overseas teaching instruction that we used to have. Most of the face-to-face English instruction went away, except peripherally or parallel in American Centers in Latin America.

Q: Yeah. Oh, you suddenly remind me of the American Centers, which were created for the Soviet Union. That would be a step back in time. You also mention Tutwiler, who was a very interesting and able spokesperson for Jim Baker. Maybe we should consider, if you're willing, talking about the proliferation of American Corners, which I think were created for the Soviet Union. Is that right?

RUTH: Yes. In fact, American Corners were invented in the Soviet Union. That's correct.

Q: That's a subject in and of itself. I would say let's note that for— Also, if you're willing, because Tutwiler was such an interesting and brilliant person and so loyal to James Baker, who we now know ran Washington because of the recent biography— It's true. There was, aside from his boss, President Bush senior, hardly any other mover and shaker as important as him. Tutwiler was very much a part of that. Maybe we could get into that, if you're willing, next time.

RUTH: Sure. I will say, though, that Tutwiler had very little impact on public diplomacy, because she was in the position very briefly. She never wanted it, and she got out of it as soon as she could. So, she was very influential as public affairs assistant secretary for Jim

Baker. She was influential in her way as ambassador to Morocco. But she flitted across the public diplomacy screen. I think she was there for six months or something like that.

Q: Oh, yes, I had forgotten that. She did say on one occasion, at a gathering for ambassadors and PAOs, that she had been to the Pentagon and been asked to put a better positive spin on the intervention in Iraq. She said that she said to the Pentagon, "I cannot do anything to help you as long as you have such a rotten policy." Now, I don't really believe that she did that, but she knew that that was the right thing to say on that occasion to ambassadors and PAOs, and we did love her, at that moment.

RUTH: She fits into that pantheon of under secretaries whose specialty was communications and messaging. Her specialty, of course, was mainstream government public affairs.

Q: Yeah. As you said earlier, that's basically the profile of every single one of them. Let me suggest— Have we made it to 1999? Are there other things to go back and revisit?

RUTH: I think the logical place to pick up next time, if you agree, is right after Dr. Duffey departed USIA. I then moved over to the State Department about six months ahead of the merger in order to be an advance person. That is where I connected with Evelyn Lieberman and so forth.

Q: Oh yes.

RUTH: I think we've pretty much covered the Joe Duffey part.

Q: Well, that's a perfect place to begin. You established a beachhead. You were the marines.

RUTH: I was one lone marine, yes.

Q: That could be another subtitle for the published version of this interview. This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. It's December 23. We're going to stop recording.

This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020. A brief moment. Normally, we would do this at the end of an interview, but I wanted to mention, Rick, in our last interview yesterday that you were very clear about the decline of USIA. You said it was a mistake and there were consequences. You resisted all of my attempts to vilify or demonize any individual as I do myself. I just want to comment that this implies that you're a very noble person, and you're also a very able administrator.

You're either both or one of those. You're either very able to see a situation in the abstract in the best sense without assigning blame to any person, or you're very skilled in dealing with an issue without emotions that would only confuse the situation. I pay honor to you for this. This is really a great quality. Also, we should— Since you mention Nick

Cull, we should mention his book of 2013, The Decline and Fall of the U.S. Information Agency. Nick Cull is often referred to as the honorable of USIA. While we both share some feelings about the limits of academia, I would say Nick is an exception to that. His book, The Decline and Fall of USIA, is a very heartfelt and substantive book that really contributes a lot to the type of history we're doing here.

Blah blah blah on my part. Now, if you're willing— You have said— This came to mind after our last interview. Things happen. Things come and go. The decline of the Soviet Union, USIA, it all goes up and down. You've made the point several times that these events do not depend on individuals. They just kind of happen. While we come and go, the events have their own dynamics. So, here's a Thomas Carlisle 1841 quote: "The history of the world is but the biography of great men." Our dear Leo Tolstoy, some twenty years later, when he was writing War and Peace, from 1865 to 1869, took on that notion, the so-called Great Man Theory of history. He took the opposite position. Do you have any comments on those two approaches to history?

RUTH: Well, two things, yes. But before that, I want to say that I consider your willingness to conduct these interviews to be more than heroic.

Q: It's totally self-serving but thank you very much.

RUTH: You're very kind. Well, two things. First of all, Carlisle versus Tolstoy— I don't believe in dichotomies. Anything that's a dichotomy that has to do with human beings is inherently mistaken. There are no dichotomies. Everything in human life is a spectrum. We all understand that being tall or short or small or large, light or dark, these are all shades and spectrums. We're all slowly coming to understand more and more, I'm pleased to say, that people are not black or white. It's a spectrum of color and race and multiculturalism. In fact, the whole issue of race is an artificial construct. We're now slowly, over a long and bitter time, coming to the understanding that sex and gender are not binary. You are not simply male or female. There is an entire spectrum, and you can be anywhere on that spectrum.

The same is true of the perfectly logical question you asked. The One Great Man Theory is neither right nor wrong. I tend to lean overall much more towards Tolstoy's belief that the so-called "great man" that we perceive is really just the top-most molecule on the wave of history. That man or woman is more visible, but in fact, they are carried to that top-most position by sources and forces that are well beyond their control and generally precede their lifetimes or certainly their time in power.

I love the way Tolstoy had Prince Andrei worshipping Napoleon, who of course exemplified for many people the quintessential "great man" who changed history, who grasped history by the lapels and shook it. Prince Andrei is wounded in the Battle of Austerlitz, and while he's lying wounded, barely conscious, staring at the enormous vault of the sky, Napoleon rides up and sees him lying there with the battle flag in one hand

and a sword in the other. Napoleon says something to the effect of, "Voila, a magnificent death."

Now, for Prince Andrei, this should have been the highest praise he could have imagined. But now Tolstoy describes Napoleon's voice in Prince Andrei's ear as the buzzing of a fly.

I tend to go much more with the Tolstoy theory.

But of course, there are no dichotomies, so no one is ever completely right or completely wrong. There is no question that there is a tremendous difference between Abraham Lincoln and James Buchanan. Had Lincoln not been shot, would things have been different? In the meta sense, no. These things happen. Would there still be racism? Would there still be prejudice? Would there still be class differences? Of course, all those things would have continued. Those are beyond the power of a man or a woman to alter. But can an individual who happens to be in a position of authority at precisely the right opportune moment make a tremendous difference in doing the right or the wrong thing? Of course, that's true as well.

I don't mean that to be a weaselly answer. I certainly come down much more on the Tolstoyan side of this idea.

Q: Not weaselly in the least, Rick. When John Kennedy addressed the UN General Assembly apropos of atomic warfare, he quoted a Greek philosopher. Archimedes? It was one of them. "Give me a fulcrum, and from there, I can move the world." So, I think that only reinforces what you're saying. An individual can be a fulcrum, but a fulcrum alone does not cause a historic— It's all the countervailing forces. Thank you for that. Pardon the brief departure. I think we're doing history or historiography here, and I think it's very valid and necessary to talk about historiography itself as you've just done.

Last time, we were talking about the British Council, BBC, and other entities that are comparable to USIA. You were saying, with all due respect to the other organizations—Goethe Institute, Alliance Française—that because of the United States being a superpower, which I think we would say it is even today, people in other countries are interested or obsessed with the U.S. and more liable to blame the U.S. for problems that exist in their countries. That is why you were implying USIA had a slightly different approach to public diplomacy than these other entities. It was more transactional. It was more the wish to project a positive image of the United States for political purposes, for getting political backing in the UN and so forth. As we move to that fateful day, September 30, 1999, let's keep that in mind, if you would, in recounting for us the last gasps of USIA in the late '90s.

RUTH: Sure, thank you. I double-checked after yesterday just to make sure I had it right. It was in June of '99 that the last confirmed director of USIA, Joseph Duffey, departed for the private sector. He was replaced by his deputy, Penn Kemble, a most able and

interesting individual. By the time Duffey departed, the Reform Act, the merger, had been signed by the president. Our shoelaces were caught in the escalator. Penn Kemble and the other senior people at USIA did an exceptionally good job of managing it—morale, expectations, everybody's jobs and responsibilities. But the hand had been dealt at that point.

So, the director departed. Penn Kemble as deputy director had his own staff. I therefore became a ronin, a masterless samurai. I was executive assistant to no one. So, that organizational fact, combined with my own sense of how this needed to go for me personally, meant that— Well, let's take a step to the side. I think it was from Lee Atwood that I first heard one of many cynical Washington sayings, all of which tend to be true. This was, "If it's going to happen, be for it."

As I said, the hand was dealt. I didn't like the merger. I bitterly disliked the merger. I thought it was a tremendous mistake, but it was done. I still intended to have a long and productive and happy career in the Foreign Service and public diplomacy. So, I talked to Penn Kemble and others, and it was decided that I would physically go over to the State Department. The State Department was very kind to make an office available for me and to actually provide me with a full-time State Department Foreign Service secretary. So, I could have a small office there, and I was a bit of an advance person.

But again, I want to stress that I was not a key player in the merger. As we've discussed, USIA had a great many senior authoritative people. All the regional bureaus and our associate directors for the different regions were all talking to each other. Penn Kemble was leading the merger. Henry Howard was our associate director for management working with Patrick Kennedy, who was under secretary for management at State. So, lots of people were working on this.

My little particular slice of this pie was working with the executive secretary of the State Department, the phenomenal Kristie Kenney. We were working to merge the two front offices, which was not a particular challenge. First of all, the USIA director's office simply went away. Poof. The OpCenter at USIA simply went away. There was no need for it. Jobs were found for people in various places. The people in our executive secretariat staff were merged into its State Department counterpart. So, that was pretty much straightforward in terms of how to do that part of the merger.

The far more interesting part was meeting with Evelyn Lieberman and starting a relationship with her that led to many consequential things. Because the legislation was passed a year before the merger, there was plenty of time to prepare for it. The late Evelyn Lieberman was a marvelous woman—the first woman to be a White House deputy chief of staff. She was also known popularly as the woman who fired Monica Lewinsky.

Q: Yes. Well, who hired or fired?

RUTH: Fired. She fired Monica Lewinsky.

Q: Was it DOD— Where was that?

RUTH: Monica Lewinsky was an intern at the White House. It came to Evelyn Lieberman's attention, as it came to many peoples' attention, that she was hanging around the Oval Office way too much. So, Lieberman called her in and fired her. She got a call that night from the president, demanding to know who fired Monica Lewinsky. She said, "I did, Mr. President."

He said, "Oh. Okay," and hung up.

Now, unbeknownst to Ms. Lieberman, other people in the White House took pity on Monica Lewinsky. Rather than just letting her be fired, which is what Evelyn thought had happened, they undercut her by arranging for Lewinsky to get a job elsewhere in the government. They chose the Pentagon, as you noted, where she encountered Linda Tripp. The rest of that is history.

Q: Oh, so I had it backwards. Okay. More than a salacious detail, that is actually an important part of what Evelyn Lieberman brought with her from the White House to State.

RUTH: Well, she was the director of the Voice of America. She went from the White House to be the director of Voice of America. She came to the State Department at the time of the merger directly from VOA. Now, what they did, as I was saying, is the Senate went ahead and confirmed her as the under secretary-designate. She was working at the State Department physically for Madeleine Albright as a special advisor, senior consultant, something like that. So, at the stroke of midnight, when the merger went into effect, she would wake up in the morning and come into the office already a confirmed, fully functioning, fully empowered under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs.

Q: So, that's October 1, '99.

RUTH: Right. A day that shall live in infamy.

Q: Well, or live in history, anyway. By the way, you mentioned deputy directors and the OpCenter. What about HR? Was that just very seamlessly pulled in?

RUTH: Well, none of it was quite seamless, but yes, it was one of those functions that the State Department considered to be identical between the two organizations, so yes, it was— Finances and General Administration and Security and HR were all merged straight across. I should mention, because she later on played a very positive role in the Under Secretary's Office and was a very good colleague, the head of Personnel at that time. It was Jan Brambilla. She was quite talented and professional.

Q: Right, and still very much part of the scene. She's a docent at the [National] Cathedral.

RUTH: Is that right? Excellent.

Q: She's a great docent.

RUTH: Do you still see her?

Q: I've seen her in the last few years, yes.

RUTH: Okay, well if you ever run across her, give her my regards.

Q: Of course.

RUTH: I remember her extraordinarily fondly.

Q: We all do. That's great. Now, I do remember a little ripple with HR. At least, we mid-level people were told that the State Department had found that promotion patterns in USIA had been profligate, and USIA had been advancing its own, in their view, excessively. They kind of wreaked vengeance in the year 2000 and held many back. I don't know how true that is or if you would know about that.

RUTH: I honestly don't know. I do recall in general that there was some grumbling. The State Department is a far vaster organization than USIA. Therefore, its policies towards promotions and assignments was vastly more rigid and dictated by rules whereas USIA was indeed more freewheeling. That could be good. Somebody with great talent could be promoted more quickly or given an opportunity that was above their pay grade, if you will, because they had the talent to do it, but it was also open to abuse.

I remember, once, that Charles Wick had a couple of PAOs he particularly liked. It so happened at one point that one was in London, and one was in Paris. He let each of them stay for five years, and then he let them swap for five more years. So, for ten years, two men—and I won't say their names; we know who they are—locked up two of the most desirable assignments in the world. That was for a decade, all because of Charles Wick's favoritism.

So, you know, the State Department probably did kvetch about that, but in a lot of ways, the State Department's just like a grumpy old person telling people to get off their lawn. It's their institutional calling. So, whether USIA was profligate or loose in its rules or not is a separate issue. Did the State Department grumble about it? Yeah, they did.

Q: I think that in the year 2000, very few USIA officers were promoted, but that's a matter of record outside what we're doing.

RUTH: I wouldn't be surprised. The selection of ambassadors was different, as well. Typically, under USIA, what would happen is that each year the director of USIA was asked to submit one, two, three names to the director general of the Foreign Service of individuals who he or she recommended—it was always he, of course—to be an ambassador. Sometimes somebody was, and sometimes no one was. It was the eye of the needle to get through. I was asked by a couple of directors if I wanted my name submitted. I did not.

Q: So, how did that change with the merger?

RUTH: Well, actually, at the time of the merger, one of the positive things from a PD office's professional point of view is that suddenly a lot of very good USIA Foreign Service officers had many more opportunities for advancement than they had had at USIA. Again, USIA people had to pass through this eye of the needle to become an ambassador or principal officer. But once they were merged into the Foreign Service with the State Department, where everyone kept their rank and grade. They were now more competitive for principal officer, consul general, ambassador, and DCM positions. They also had something that a great many political, econ, and other officers did not—they had management experience. They had managed money, people, and programs. So, a great many USIA officers did extremely well in terms of promotions and assignments following the merger.

Q: Yeah. I think that was one thing that the State Department proper quickly noticed. PAOs were managers. So, they made very strong candidates to be DCMs, for example. So, you mentioned the stroke of midnight on October 1, 1999. Evelyn Lieberman woke up that morning with a different identity. Let's think about her for a moment. She was under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. That later became what we now call R, I suppose. Did she physically move into the State Department on that day? How did that work?

RUTH: She was already in the State Department. I had moved ahead of time, as I mentioned. She had already started physically working in the State Department as an assistant to Albright, getting up to speed and getting ready for the stroke of midnight. I know you'll ask, so one of the tasks that she assigned to me was to write the *Foreign Affairs Manual* [FAM] entry for the new Under Secretary's Office.

Q: I wouldn't have had the imagination to ask that, but thank you for mentioning it.

RUTH: It makes everyone else's eyes glaze over, as it should, but the *Foreign Affairs Manual* is the so-called Bible of the State Department, or USIA in its day. Everything that the State Department said or did was supposed to be codified in there, memorialized in writing. There had never been an under secretary for public diplomacy before, and so there was no description of its authority or the scope of its functions. So, Evelyn asked me to write that.

This was back in the days of the Wang word processors with the slightly green-tinted screens. I engaged in one of my favorite activities, which is the spewing forth of Wilsonian rhetoric. I'm talking about high-flying bombast here. So, "The under secretary is the principal advisor to the secretary of state on international cultural—" and so on. It was all that kind of stuff. I basically went through all the different parts of USIA and said that now this person was the principal blah blah blah.

I also needed an office symbol. Sounds simple, but this is where it gets complicated. It was the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs—already an extraordinarily long title. I'm looking at the screen and after this title I have an open parenthesis. Okay, what letter or letters should go in there? I thought it was easy. I put in PD. Public diplomacy. Close paren. Slam dunk. I sent it off. Oh, the babe. Oh, the pure innocent child. I sent it off to the directives people in the Bureau of Administration in the Management empire. They sent it back and said it was unacceptable. They accepted, as I recall, every single syllable of my bombast, but they rejected the office symbol! Why? Because it had two characters instead of one.

Q: Oh, we didn't deserve two.

RUTH: This is when I learned that the State Department actually had—and still has—a regulation that if you are a seventh-floor principal—isn't that a wonderful piece of jargon?—meaning an under secretary, counselor, deputy secretary, or the secretary, your office symbol can only be one character.

Q: It's P or D or M. Right, I get it.

RUTH: So, I sat there looking at this at my desk, and you can expurgate this, but I basically said, "Well, fuck me. What kind of constipated organization have I just gotten myself into—by act of Congress—that has a policy on office symbols and the number of characters that can be in them?" Fine. I got that out of my system. After all, State was home now, and we all understood that the State Department did not have a welcome wagon. You were given a telephone and an elbow—or two elbows—and told to make your way.

So, I got out a yellow, legal-sized pad, and I wrote out the alphabet. Then I crossed out the letters that were already taken—S, D, P, M, E, they're gone. Now, the fun part—and Dan, I can only say that I think you would have thoroughly enjoyed this—was crossing out what I considered to be the "unacceptable" letters. For example, X. It couldn't possibly be X, the mystery spot. X marks the spot. Come on! As a public diplomacy professional, you know X is not the right character. It couldn't be Y. Why?! That's too easy to lampoon. It couldn't be Z. Snore. You're falling asleep. It couldn't be F—which was available at the time [This was before USAID became part of the department and the F Bureau was created.]—because the headline writes itself. "Public Diplomacy gets an F." You'd never live it down.

So, some of those things went out the window. Then there were things that were more idiosyncratic for me. It couldn't be O.

Q: O and zero are too easily confused.

RUTH: Exactly. Then there was *The Story of O,* which some people may remember. Anyway, then there were letters that just didn't look right to me. I apologize to people whose names start with these letters, but K? K just didn't seem to have any resonance. It didn't send the right message. Besides, I kept thinking about Kafka and "Amerika," with a K. I was trying to think about public diplomacy. It couldn't be I because that tilted things too heavily toward information. What are the downstream resonances of this letter, this one and only letter? So, we had B, N, and Q. Q was a no.

Q: I'm a little offended that you wouldn't take W. It was probably because of me.

RUTH: Yes, I looked at W and I thought, Dan Whitman would be so pleased, but—You're right. I confess. You got me. So, I looked at the remaining letters and I thought, Well, there's one letter that looks really nice and familiar. Look at that R! For some reason, I've always been attached to that letter. So, I left my office, went down the corridor and stuck my head into Evelyn Lieberman's office. She had a longish office. The door from the corridor was at one end and her desk was at the other.

I said, in a raised voice, "Hey, boss." She was working at her desk. I said, "I'm going to name the office after myself."

She looked up and said—and I quote exactly—"In your dreams, Ruth." But I did. She took it up to Secretary Albright, who approved it. I have no idea on earth whether the secretary and the under secretary discussed why it was R. I have no knowledge of that. But it came back approved. So, [the Office of] the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs became R.

Q: I have very mixed feelings at this very significant moment, Rick Ruth. There are many legends about how that letter was chosen, and none of them are anywhere close to the way you describe it. Plus, isn't R the letter of pirates?

RUTH: That's the first I've heard of it.

Q: Arr!

RUTH: Ah, yes. Of course.

Q: Anyway, that's a very wonderful story. I have mixed feelings because on the one hand, it solidifies a historic fact. On the other hand, it kind of kills a legend. But thank you. You will not be expurgated. You can expurgate yourself, but we will never do so. All

obscenities are welcome. This is a story many of us have longed to know. Thank you for the honor of telling it.

RUTH: I have to tell you that the initial T, for Arms Control, is also named after one of their early heads, Curtis Tarr. But you're talking to the only living person who has an under secretary's office symbol named after them. How's that for vanity?

Q: A second of silence in recognition of that massive feat. You wrote the FAM entry. Most FAM entries are a paragraph and then a subparagraph and then another subparagraph. What— This is of significance. You call it bombast, but I know that's not true. What was the— This is pretty important stuff, because this is a text that defines a function never before defined. The FAM is a legal document. What are the elements that went into that, and how many people had to agree with you for it to become adopted?

RUTH: Wonderful question. You're correct. It was not a lengthy document. It was meant to be cast at a very high level of generality, both because no one had any tolerance for anything much longer and because the more generalized the language is, the more flexibility you have going forward in the future. Your hands are not tied by specific limitations. So, to say that the under secretary is the principal advisor to the secretary of state in international educational matters is endless in its scope. You could put anything in there that you wanted to, which was the idea. So, basically, what I took was the organizational structure of USIA—information, education, culture, exhibits, sports, youth exchange—and I just put those in generalized language without a whole lot of detail, as I recall. I don't think I ever looked at it again. All anybody ever asked me about was the office symbol. Nobody ever asked me about the FAM entry again until now.

Q: Well, I'm here to dig this out of you. Yeah, the FAM is a legal document. For example, it talks about terms of grants. I guess the immigration and naturalization things are Congress, not FAM, but these are directives that people have to follow. Do you know whether your text was ever modified? It must have been.

RUTH: It has been over the years, absolutely. The most recent—and we'll get to this at another point—was when IIP, the Bureau of International Information Programs, was merged into Public Affairs. Two parts of IIP, of the Speaker's Bureau and the American Centers and libraries, were merged into ECA, where they should have been all this time anyway. So, as these things went along, when the Smith-Mundt Act was modified and other things were done, my understanding is that appropriate changes were made in the FAM as a matter of course.

Q: We mentioned last time— Let's get to it in a moment, the creation of American Corners in the Soviet Union. This was a pretty significant development. I guess this was commenced before the merger, I think. I don't know.

RUTH: I think so, but you know, my memory's not that great on exactly when it started. I remember Anne Chermak as PAO in Moscow and American Corners. What I remember

specifically is that they then caught on like wildfire across the globe. It was a burst of irrational exuberance, in many cases, by many PAOs, because—and you may remember this; I'd love to hear about it—when we lost our centers and our libraries, we knew what that had cost us in terms of public diplomacy value.

It suddenly looked like the State Department was going to be okay with something that kind of, sort of looked like an American Center or library if we called it an American Corner. What happened on the good side was that we opened a lot of very good places. The downside was that some PAOs had eyes bigger than their stomachs and they didn't plan any outyear costs or maintenance or support or staffing. They just grabbed everything they could and said, Yeah, I want one in every major city in the country. So, there were a lot of logistical headaches that came after that.

For me, as a Russia fan, what it revealed was how much we had in common with Russia in certain societal ways. American Corners in Russia were, by and large, in libraries, because the Soviet Union, like the United States, believed in free, open, accessible public libraries. Now, the books on the shelves were different. The magazines and newspapers they subscribed to were different. But the concept was identical. So, for example, I once visited the American Corner in downtown Yekaterinburg. It was in the downtown branch of the public library on a main street. There was lots of foot traffic, long evening hours, weekend hours, free of charge, and open to the public. That was perfect.

When the concept went to other parts of the world, suddenly there were countries asking for one, two, three, four, five American Corners where there were no public libraries at all. There was not even the concept of a public library. So, they began to be put in universities. Sometimes that was good, sometimes that caused tremendous headaches. Sometimes they were put in concert with the Commercial Service in a sort of— I forget the exact name, but the Commercial Service had American business commercial offices that were open to the public.

Q: Yeah, FCS [Foreign Commercial Service].

RUTH: Thank you. We would combine an American Center there. But they almost all had significant disadvantages relevant to the kind of public library network that was supported in Russia and the former Soviet Union. But it was still a positive program. People grabbed at it.

Q: I remember it exactly the same way. It was an enormous resource. It was more than a bandage covering the loss of American cultural centers. In Africa, for example, Nigeria got hold of this idea, and there was a proliferation of American Corners to the point that— I think it was John Campbell who gets credit for this, the ambassador. It got to the point where the African Bureau said, No more for Africa. Nigeria has overdone it. That is a funny and ironic way of saying, Hats off to Nigeria for seeing the value. In fact, the resources were kind of stretched by that one country, which is admittedly the most important country in that area.

Do names come to mind of people who get credit for this wonderful innovation? You mentioned Anne Chermak, but I think this preceded her, if I remember correctly.

RUTH: Yeah. I remember her name because she was a close friend of mine. I don't remember others. The able people in the European Bureau— My memory doesn't cough up who they are right now.

Q: That's fine. Let's just remember it as an absolutely marvelous innovation that took hold in the Soviet Union. I think it was before the end of the cold war.

RUTH: I think so, yeah. It had just started.

Q: It became an enormous resource and fulcrum where Americans and Russians could meet.

RUTH: And now they're all gone.

Q: Yeah. They also spread to the rest of the world. There were notable innovations, like the one in Jakarta, which was a huge place. So, some posts really jumped on this, but of course, the money was limited, so there was always that little bit of friction. Great.

Let's see. Smith-Mundt— Before we leave that subject, I remember the pain and the dissension and the anguish, and I will identify myself as one person who was opposed to that change, because I always thoughts it's perfectly proper to forbid the U.S. government from propagandizing its own people, which is what the Pentagon— It always seemed to me that the modification of Smith-Mundt, the impetus for that, came from the Pentagon. How do you remember it?

RUTH: Smith-Mundt remained and was unchanged by the merger. It was carried over into the State Department. Let's keep in mind that the Smith-Mundt Act, or as it was later called, the Smith-Mundt-Zorinsky Act— Senator Zorinsky added an important caveat to it in terms of having the act apply not just to staff and information but specifically to money so that the salary of someone who was doing a certain thing influenced whether the material or product that person produced could be disseminated domestically or internationally.

Be that as it may, the key thing to remember is that the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was not covered by Smith-Mundt. Its mandate is a mutual, two-way mandate. So, the Smith-Mundt-Zorinsky restrictions were, after the merger, on IIP, the Bureau of International Information Programs.

Q: Okay. That's an important decision. I do remember Mountain Runner and that whole thing.

RUTH: I've got to tell you, the theory may be interesting, but, with apologies, it's mostly bogus.

Q: Once again, I absolutely agree. My understanding is that much of that effort was funded by DOD. Again, I'll just leave that hanging. I believe that that effort was not an entirely transparent effort to make sure that DOD would never have prohibition. That gets to be very esoteric. But yes, it was a lot of jabber and a lot of discussion that did lead to a tweak. You can't restrict the Internet as you could restrict broadcasting.

RUTH: Right. Eventually, Smith-Mundt was, as you indicated, modified. The first modification basically took away the criminal penalties, if you would. It recognized the fact that it was no longer possible to restrict the spread of broadcasting or the Internet or social media and so forth. There had to be a realistic awareness of that. It focused more on intent and design rather than eventual spread and consequence. But we worked with the Legal Office day in and day out over the years, issue by issue and publication by publication. Did this or did this not violate Smith-Mundt?

Q: No fun at all. By the way, maybe we should mention that like the Hatch Act, I don't think anybody ever went to jail because of Smith-Mundt. These were laws, but I don't think the criminal penalties were severe at all for any of these.

RUTH: We were good soldiers. We went to see the marvelous Lorie Nierenberg or another lawyer in the Legal Office [L/PD], as it was called at State, and she would adjudicate. She would say yes or no, this could or could not be done because it would or would not violate Smith-Mundt.

Q: Right. Lorie was a great example of a professional who understood—you were talking about security the other day—the USIA mission and who, whenever she could, with her legal knowledge would interpret things in favor of greater freedom for USIA. She was very good at that.

RUTH: To my knowledge, she is working at her desk as we speak—well, remotely now, of course. She's still doing marvelous work.

Q: She may be taking a coffee break, but we'll let your point stand. Yeah, you've mentioned marvelous individuals such as Evelyn Lieberman. These are great people. Any other individuals come to mind as people who were formative at this crucial moment?

RUTH: Well, I would mention Brian Carlson, still very active in the PD world as a retiree and member of various associations and an amateur flying enthusiast. He was also part of Under Secretary Lieberman's office at the outset. We haven't talked about the office itself yet, but he was part of that, as well. He and I basically divvied up the world like Spain and Portugal did. I was sort of Mr. Inside, and he was Mr. Outside. That was, of course, his great expertise. He worked with the regional bureaus. Specifically, since he came from the European Area Office in USIA, he worked very closely with Mark Grossman,

who was assistant secretary for EUR [Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs] at State, to be essentially the first or pilot merger of the EU moving into EUR. Brian handled that very deftly and with hands-on attentiveness. That worked out very well and set the pattern for other mergers and regional offices.

He also worked with Evelyn. Again, he really handled that Foreign Service and international side of it, and I did more of the inside, ECA, IIP sorts of things. For example, one of the things that Evelyn Lieberman did not do was give the ECA assistant secretary at the time the delegated authority to sign grants. Now, in many ways, this is the key authority that the ECA assistant secretary has. Ms. Lieberman's argument was that she was new to all of this. This was an entire universe that she was new to in terms of who we gave grants to, how we advertised them, how we competed them, how we selected them, how we funded them, how we monitored them. It was the whole world of grants management and program management.

She wanted to understand it better. So, while all of the USIA director's relevant authorities were invested in the under secretary or the secretary of state, and then they cascaded down to the assistant secretaries, she specifically chose to retain the authority to sign grants. Therefore, for almost her entire tenure, the extremely able and wonderful Mike Weider from our grants office would get on the shuttle bus from Fourth and C Southwest with a cardboard box filled with grant folders and documents—sometimes a considerable number of them—and he would schlep them up the elevator and down the hall to my office. We would go through each of them one by one. Then, I would take them to Ms. Lieberman. Of course, I had no authority to approve them, but he brought them to me so he could explain to me what the issues were, the background, any questions that might come up that she might have. Then, I would walk through them with her and give them back to Mike.

Now, as a rule, she signed all of them. For her, it was a very educational process. It drove ECA Assistant Secretary Dr. William Bader to distraction, of course. That was not only because it would drive any assistant secretary to distraction to have their boss not delegate a key authority to them for a period of time, but because, if you will, the late Dr. Bader was Fulbright aristocracy. He himself was a Fulbrighter in 1953. He worked on the Hill for Senator Fulbright. This was a man who lived and breathed the Fulbright-Hays mission. So, it certainly was irksome to him that she chose to do that, but that was one of the facts of the time.

Q: So, that's counterintuitive. She said she did not know how to do this, but then she took the entire authority to do so. That's a bit illogical and paranoid.

RUTH: Well, she wanted to be educated on it. In other words, if she had signed off on the delegation she never would have seen any of this information. It would have gone straight up from Bill Bader's own staff to him and then out the door. There's no role in there for the under secretary. She wanted to be part of that process for a period of time so

that she could understand. This was hundreds of millions of dollars, hundreds of people, et cetera. It was all entirely novel to her. So, she wanted an education on it.

Q: That creates a very tight bottleneck, does it not?

RUTH: It did indeed, although everything went forward. Again, the marvelous Mike Weider did his job brilliantly, and he cheerfully schlepped this stuff over by the pound, day after day and week after week. We got it all out the door. Ms. Lieberman finally delegated the authority back to the assistant secretary after the election, when it was getting close to inauguration day and she was leaving. One of her favorite phrases when she first came on board was, "I die in fifteen months." She knew she had a very time-limited tenure as under secretary, so she was extremely focused on what she wanted to accomplish during that amount of time.

Q: Okay. I guess she modified that as the months went by. Sorry, that's facetious. You mentioned EUR as being the pilot merger under Mark Grossman. I do remember the issue at the time of embedding PD officers in the sixth-floor assistant secretary offices. I remember the controversy. I also remember— I think the first embedded position was the Nordic desk in EUR/PD [Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Office of Public Diplomacy]. It was not entirely successful. Tell us— This may seem very esoteric, but again, where people sit really does influence the nature of their work. Talk about embedding. The European area was the first to do it, and sooner or later, all of the others followed, some of them with resistance.

RUTH: I'm no expert on that. As I said, that was more Brian Carlson's brief. It rumbled on for quite some time, too, with issues about whether or not the head of the office should be at a deputy assistant secretary level or whether the deputy assistant secretary should, in fact, even be a PD coned officer or not. It was that kind of internal divisiveness and argumentation. What basically happened is that the USIA regional office was moved in total, after a little bit of experimentation here and there, into the regional offices and bureaus at the State Department. What we would have called the associate director for an area became the public diplomacy office director—the PDOD, as it was called. That was another one of the acronyms that I devised.

Q: Oh, thank you for that.

RUTH: One of the primary consequences of that was a radical change in the nature—the career profile, that is—of the individual who became a public diplomacy office director in the State Department versus who was an area director at USIA. To be an area director at USIA, as you know, was highly coveted and highly prestigious and a position of authority. You not only had money and policy chops, but you could wheel and deal in terms of personnel assignments. You could call somebody up and say, "Look, do this and your next assignment will be Paris." It was that kind of thing.

Now, the rank and the level of experience and background—and, if you will, the stature within the organization—took a drastic reduction when it moved to the State Department. I'm not saying if that's inherently a good or a bad thing. It's just a fact that the years in service and the rank of the individual changed significantly. Also, it was fed by the fact that at USIA, to be the area director for a Foreign Service officer was the pinnacle of your career, whereas being a public diplomacy office director was not the pinnacle of most people's careers. They were now pointing towards being a consul general or a DCM or an ambassador. So, people who might have headed up the NEA/PD [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Public Diplomacy] office in the regional bureau now would much rather be the ambassador in Tunisia.

Q: Right. I guess what was lost— As you say, this is not a qualitative judgement, but area office directors in USIA had money and controls over EERs [Employee Evaluation Review] and controlled assignments. They lost all three. Depending on the personality, they kept a stake in all these things, but they were not the ultimate authorities, right?

RUTH: Right. In the background was the fact that the under secretary provided the regional PD offices with their PD funding but had no direct organizational or bureaucratic control over them.

Q: Right. Yes. By the way, PDOD is like KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken]—we know what it is, but we don't always remember exactly what it stands for. Thank you. So, there's a significant shake up. I guess we should add that in the physical merger, not all areas— There wasn't enough space in the Harry S. Truman building to accommodate all the PD area offices. Some were in Navy Hill. EUR was, at the time. So, the idea of embedding actually was a serious matter, because once you embedded an officer—especially if it was a junior or a mid-level officer—you tended to lose the contact. So, there was a lot of legitimate back and forth about that. I think everybody was in it together and trying to make it work, but there were differences of opinion.

Oh, individuals. I'm sure you know Harriet Fulbright. What can we say about Harriet? We were mentioning individuals who stand out during this period of the merger and after. You mentioned Senator Fulbright. Should we take a moment and talk about the role that Harriet Fulbright played in the early 2000s? She did. She was very active.

RUTH: She played no practical role, but she played a very important inspirational and symbolic role. She was always very active. She was a delightful person. I remember staying, once, at the ambassador's residence in Rome. I stayed in the Fulbright bedroom. There was a framed, hand-written letter to the ambassador from Senator Fulbright when he had stayed there many years before. In the thank you note, he mentioned, "I have taken a young bride." That was a phrase of the time, and of course, that was Ms. Fulbright. She was an absolute delight. She would attend events. She would speak. She would lend her name, her prestige, and her enthusiasm to things, but she was not a player in any organizational or bureaucratic sense.

Q: Right. She was a symbolic and a very sympathetic and positive person. I guess— What was the story? Was it she who broke her leg, and Fulbright nursed her back to health? Was it the other way around? Somebody broke a leg, and that was the basis of that relationship.

RUTH: Can't remember.

Q: Let's move forward. So, we get to 9/11. Should we jump to 9/11?

RUTH: Well, not quite. Let me put a little human dimension on this. First of all, I adored Evelyn Lieberman. But she was also a tough customer. I once saw that when another under secretary of state had encroached on her turf, she reduced that under secretary to tears. Tears, mind you. How many times have any of us seen an under secretary cry? She was a tough customer, but all for a good cause. I also recall two things she told me. One is, she said, "Rick, I'm an under secretary now. I don't carry." That meant she kept her hands free. When she paid a call— For example, when she and I went to see Senator Clinton. I was her Man Friday. She did not carry a briefcase or papers or a folder, but she didn't carry a purse, either. So, I would keep her lipstick in one coat pocket and her compact in my other pocket. I thought that was delightful.

Also, I didn't travel with Evelyn, because she told me very plainly—like I said, she was a wonderful and plainspoken person—"I don't want to travel with men. I want a staffer who has an adjoining room. I get a lot of ideas late at night. If I want somebody to write it down or take some action on it, I want to be able to walk right in in my curlers and robe, and I can't do that with a man." She said, "I just want you to know that. I would take you otherwise."

Another example of how my bosses were human beings. This is about Henry Catto. You will recall that it was common, when a USIA director arrived at a foreign capital and would be greeted by the public affairs officer at the airport, that the PAO and the director would sit in the backseat of the vehicle. PAOs expected that and also looked forward to it. Smart PAOs prepped their initial "car" remarks to make the best first impression. Catto didn't allow that. He had me sit in the back with him. He said it was because, "I'm an older man. Sometimes we've been on a long flight, and I'm tired. When I get off the plane, through customs, and into the car, I don't want to have to be 'on.' I don't want to have to be charming. I don't want to have to even talk if I don't want to. If I want to fall asleep and drool out of the corner of my mouth, I want to be able to do that. So you will always sit with me."

Sometimes I had some pretty serious arguments with PAOs about who would sit in the back of the car with the director. I had to say, "I'm sorry, my friend. It's not you. It's me."

Q: This really is the underbelly of our profession: who gets to sit in the right rear. Oh my gosh.

RUTH: All that stuff, yeah.

Q: For the record, I'd like to thank you, Rick Ruth, for your selfless and venerable service in carrying Evelyn Lieberman's lipstick. This is not a trivial endeavor. This was done selflessly and, I think, with vigor and skill. Fantastic. Lieberman— You said we're not at 9/11 yet. We're now at what, the year 2000?

RUTH: Yeah, we're now '99 to 2001—early 2001. Of course, Lieberman worked right up until the day before inauguration day, so January 19.

Q: Okay. You did mention, previously, about deputy assistant secretaries [DASes]. We have seen, since that time, quite a confusion. Some DASes that oversee PD are PD officers, and some are not. That's not a very clean-cut function, is it? We have DASes who are political, and DASes who are professional but not PD, and we have PD DASes. Would it be preferable to have clarity in who gets to be the DAS overseeing PD? Does it matter?

RUTH: I think clarity is overrated. Clarity, as I was saying about writing the FAM entry for Public Diplomacy [R], also reduces your flexibility. It cuts down your running room. I like ambiguity. In fact, over my whole career—you can only imagine, because you had the same kind of career—every now and then, somebody would come in and say, We have no guidance on this. They want us to do X, Y, or Z, and there's no guidance.

My answer is that that's wonderful, because it means we get to make it up. We don't have to wait for somebody to tell us what the guidance is. We get to decide. So, I'm not a huge fan of clarity, but Evelyn Lieberman had a great deal of clarity in one thing, and that is what she wanted to do as her highest priority in those fifteen months she had as her tenure. That was, literally, to make the merger work. So, there were world events, of course, going their merry way. There was everything from Y2K to the attack on the *USS Cole* and so forth. The great world kept spinning.

Q: How could she possibly have done that without people at her side like you—I'm not trying to flatter you, I just mean people who were versed in the traditions, the mechanisms, the invisible linchpins that made Public Diplomacy work. There was you, and who else? Brian Carlson and—

RUTH: The others were all political appointees. They were all quite hardworking and quite able. They were good people. But the other thing Evelyn Lieberman did was, she picked her fights. For example, this whole issue that you very astutely brought up about how the USIA area offices were merged into State regional offices and at what level and in what way—she chose not to fight that fight. She said, "I can see this coming. I will do nothing else for fifteen months but argue with very senior, very influential, very strong regional assistant secretaries. They've got the under secretary for policy on their side. They've got the ear of the secretary. I'll just spend all my time fighting this bureaucratic,

wire-diagram issue, and I won't do other things." So, she said, "I'm letting them have that."

She wanted to make sure that the crosswalk was completed, that every single USIA person did in fact end up in a proper job at the State Department. She wanted to look at the policy coordination, how she and the regional assistant secretaries coordinated policies. She wanted to look at how Washington and the field coordinated policy, and she wanted to make sure that we were lashed together in the proper way with broadcasting. Because, at this point, the new broadcasting entity was just as new and in its infancy as the Under Secretary's Office was.

Secretary Powell had an offsite during his tenure and Evelyn's tenure. Her number one item going into this very high-level State Department offsite was, as I said, to make the merger work. So, she didn't have any grand or, as she might have said, highfalutin' notions about foreign policy and theories of public diplomacy and whatever the pundits thought we should have been working on. She wanted to make the nuts and bolts fit so that all the people came over and she would turn over a fully-functioning organization to her successor.

Q: Okay. With regard to area offices, the USIA area offices, as you said, were a pinnacle. These individuals were not known to be modest or self-effacing at all. They were giants in the good and the bad sense. They were kings. Maybe there was a queen or two; I don't remember. So, that may have been enormously wise on the part of Evelyn Lieberman not to poke that hornet's nest and to realize that this was going to happen, like it or not, so make it work. We're now spanning a Democratic administration and a Republican administration. Evelyn Lieberman is there during that changeover. Wow. Such a person would normally be asked to leave, right? But she actually extended— Did she go in—

RUTH: She actually left on January 19, the day before.

Q: Oh, she did, okay. So, she was President Clinton's last gasp in terms of determining how USIA would be merged into the State Department.

RUTH: Yes, I don't recall that President Clinton ever paid much attention to public diplomacy, but he did approve a very nice, high-profile event: the White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy. But the White House stipulated it would be after the election but before the inauguration—it was in November 2000—so that he didn't have to worry about the very delicate position that culture and the arts have in the American mind and in terms of taxpayer funding. Evelyn very much wanted to have a high-level White House event on the importance of culture and the arts. So, there was a White House conference, which had Meryl Streep, YoYo Ma, Wole Soyinka, Rita Dove, John Lithgow, and others. The president attended, and it was very prestigious and very nice. That was something that Evelyn wanted to do, also, to put that high-level stamp on the importance in foreign policy of arts and culture.

Q: That's significant. Also, I guess that since she was Senate-confirmed, she was White House-nominated. Is that right?

RUTH: Oh, yes.

Q: So, at least he— He either signed off on it or— She was a Clinton appointee. We're getting to— Maybe this is a natural stopping point. That cataclysmic year of 2000–2001, where George Bush junior comes in after a contentious election outcome. Then, painfully soon after that, there came 9/11. Today, let's try to conclude. I guess, let's say we end with the final days and months of the President Clinton period while you were with Evelyn Lieberman in the State Department. What more can we draw from those last weeks and months?

RUTH: I think you're absolutely right that that's a good and logical inflection point. Once President Clinton departed and Bush forty-three entered the Oval Office, looking back on public diplomacy, everything then orbits around 9/11. There was no under secretary on 9/11. The next under secretary, Charlotte Beers, had not been confirmed at that point. So, the next interesting interregnum there is from January 20 of 2001 up until October of 2001, when I was in charge of the Under Secretary's Office. I was the senior official. Then, we went into the Charlotte Beers period. We want to leave that for its own conversation.

Q: Right. So, you were the chargé d'affaires?

RUTH: In a sense. Now, of course, because the State Department is a bureaucracy, there's always somebody who has to sign off on things. There's always an adult in charge. So, Richard Boucher, who was the assistant secretary for public affairs, had to clear off on action memos and certain categories of documents because I couldn't sign off on them as a chief of staff. But in terms of running R on a day-to-day basis, yes, I was the senior person there. So, I had my focus as well, just like Evelyn had her focus for her fifteen months.

Q: Not surprisingly, Boucher, who was PA, was the person you reported to, and then years later—fifteen or twenty years later—we now see that PA has basically taken in IIP. So, PA, I guess notionally at that time, was a higher entity. It wasn't officially, but I guess it was, in this instance if you reported to the spokesperson.

RUTH: I mean, officially and bureaucratically, no, but as you well know, it's all about relationships and access. The Public Affairs Bureau had the spokesperson for the department. Sometimes that was also the assistant secretary. Very often it was an additional individual separate from the assistant secretary. But the PA Bureau always had daily, direct access to the secretary and his immediate staff. No other part of Public Diplomacy had that kind of relationship and access. So, in that sense, they always had a special entrée and communication ability and way to influence things, as they would in any bureaucracy where you have that kind of connection with the boss.

Q: Yeah. I would add facetiously that that was in the old days when they used to have briefings— But I'll just say that as a provocation.

RUTH: There you go.

Q: Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman are talking on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020. We'll say, temporarily, goodbye.

This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. It's Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, December 26, 2020. When we last spoke, only a couple days ago, we were talking about the crosswalk. USIA was being changed, modified, absorbed, merged. There are many words we use. There was a certain amount of pain and distress. Where did we leave this? We were getting you not quite up to 9/11, but—

RUTH: We ended with the departure of Evelyn Lieberman and the inauguration of George Bush. With the departure of Evelyn Lieberman, there was, at that point, no new under secretary, so I was trying to keep body and soul together in R until a new under secretary arrived.

Q: So, you were the acting under secretary. I don't know if that was your title—

RUTH: Oh no, that wasn't my title or my role. I was not so august. I remained the chief of staff. As they did in future incarnations, they did not attempt to put in someone on a temporary or acting basis. It worked out well, because one of my longtime, unwritten rules for staffers is to always remember that you are not your principal. You know, from your own experience, how often a relatively junior or mid-level officer working as an ambassador's assistant or a special assistant to an under secretary will arrogate to themselves all the power of their principal. They'll toss their name around freely and, often, falsely. "The boss wants this, the boss wants that right now. Chop chop," all that stuff. That's odious in the extreme, of course.

So, I had no intention of acting like I was acting R. My goal was simple. Evelyn Lieberman's goal for fifteen months was to make the merger work and not pick any new fights. My goal for however long it lasted—and it lasted nine months—was to simply keep the operation going and not let us be forgotten. It's very easy, when you don't have a principal, to be forgotten. People start holding meetings, and the State Department is very rank-conscious, as many places are, so you simply don't get invited to certain meetings, in many cases. You're not on the conference call or you're not in the room because you don't have the personal rank to be there. You're staff. So, I wanted to make sure people didn't forget that we existed and that nobody made a raid on our staff or our resources. Other than that, my goal was just letting the perfectly competent people who were running ECA and IIP and PA do their work.

Q: You make it sound so simple. How could you maintain a presence and prevent it from being raided without some kind of persona that had the authority to say, in a meeting, "But wait, there's PD." Did you do this just through good arguments or acting authority?

RUTH: That's an excellent point. There are a couple of good questions, because again, at the State Department, like any organization, if you're not going forward, you're actually going backwards. Secretary Powell was nominated and started being briefed at the State Department prior to inauguration day in January. Evelyn Lieberman did me a solid, as the saying goes. We were scheduled—the R family—to brief Secretary-Designate Powell. We drafted up, of course, what the scenario would be: there were remarks for Evelyn to make and how to introduce the other people and all that usual nonsense. As we were walking into this large room with a big, round table, she turned to me and said, "Rick, you take this."

So, rather than Evelyn chairing Powell's initial briefing, I did. I think it was a favor to me because she was leaving. She was keenly aware of that. She wanted me to have some little bit of facetime with the incoming secretary of state.

Q: That's good management, and slightly self-effacing in a way that many people could not even imagine being. She did this, you say, as a favor to you, but it sounds as if she did this to ensure a continuity under the new secretary, to have you be known from the very start.

RUTH: I think that's true.

Q: So, Powell was the secretary-designate when you first did this briefing?

RUTH: Yes.

Q: Oh my gosh. Had you met him before?

RUTH: I had not met him before. I opened the meeting with my typical bombast. I welcomed "Mr. Secretary-Designate" and said, "The most elegant definition of public diplomacy that I've ever encountered comes, not surprisingly, from the pen of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote in the very first sentence of the Declaration of Independence that we owe a decent respect to the opinions of mankind. That, to me, is public diplomacy." Then we went on from there.

Q: Did he react to that?

RUTH: Not especially. He was a marvelous man. I have the utmost respect for Secretary Powell. He was one of the most truly charismatic people that I've ever encountered. Lots of people are charming and delightful and pleasant, but charismatic leadership is something above and beyond that. I could see easily why someone would follow him into battle.

Q: So, that meeting continued. You gave a marvelous opener, there. Where did it go from there? Lieberman was in the room, right?

RUTH: Lieberman was in the room, yes. So, then we went around, and people did their little bit, as they say. They described their bureaus and their activities. I don't have any other particular memory of it. September 11 was so cataclysmic an event that it sort of swamps every other memory I have of that period of time. I do remember, however, that Secretary Powell was interested and trying to recruit Charlotte Beers to be the under secretary. He had encountered Charlotte Beers when they were both sitting on some corporate board.

Just very quickly, Charlotte Beers—for those who don't recall—was an absolute legend in advertising. She'd been on the cover of *Fortune.* She'd been listed as a "most powerful woman." She was the first woman CEO of a major global PR firm like Ogilvy & Mather. She was in the Advertising Hall of Fame. Martha Stewart and Charlotte were best friends and I think Stewart planned her wedding. She was a genuinely big deal. In fact, the Yale School of Management gave her their Legendary Leadership Award.

The interesting thing is, first of all, she was not at all familiar with public diplomacy. She wasn't aware of the term and didn't know quite what it was that Powell wanted her to do. He persuaded her to spend a day at the State Department getting briefed on it. It fell to me to plan that day for her. It was the usual dog-and-pony show around the different parts of PD. When it was all done, as I recall, she still wasn't especially interested in the job, but Secretary Powell was a man of enormous persuasive ability, and he eventually convinced her to take it.

What is the most interesting to me is that one reason that he focused on Beers, with her background and skills, is that he envisioned her number one task to be domestic. He wanted her to help build the ever-elusive domestic constituency for the Department of State. Obviously, she would have all of the international responsibilities, but he really wanted her to focus on the fact that the State Department is sort of an unknown, unappreciated—if you will—and unsupported part of the government. Many people in the United States don't seem to have any idea what State does. The name itself, after all, is opaque.

So, the term that she came up with, which is typical for someone as artful as Ms. Beers, was—as she told me—"The secretary wants me to throw a halo around all that the department does." She did not give examples, but you and I can think of many of them. If you adopt a baby from another country, the State Department helped. If your idiot brother-in-law gets lost hiking in Patagonia, who goes to find him? If your spouse gets a job because we brokered a telecommunications deal somewhere— All of these different things come through the State Department but are not known or appreciated. So, he wanted her to address that.

What happened, of course, between the time she was nominated and the time she was confirmed was 9/11. The world changed, and the interest Powell may or may not have had in her perfecting our domestic constituency was blown away, literally. She needed to be a wartime consigliere and that was the issue that dominated everything about her tenure.

Q: I do have a question about her approach prior to 9/11. We've always made the distinction, and to some of us it's clear while to others of us it's not. Public diplomacy is overseas while public affairs is domestic. Now, the under secretary—what we now call R—was thought to be both public affairs and public diplomacy. But those of us who served in the field were more involved in the public diplomacy side. Was she evenly balanced between those two? Was that ever a question, the relative importance of each? I guess it's a strange position, being the under secretary for both, because it looks outward and inward. Everyone that we've had has been stronger at one than at the other, right?

RUTH: She was, of course, more skilled in public affairs and in advertising and corporate communication and forms of persuasion. Much of that is universally applicable. One of her favorite sayings, which I have stolen on many occasions was, "It's not what you say; it's what they hear." That is certainly very true internationally, as well as it may be domestically. That's the human dimension that we all need to keep in mind. The firms that she led were global public relations communications firms with thousands of employees and multimillion dollar budgets, but after 9/11 there was no other issue than terrorism and U.S.-Muslim relations for her to engage on during her tenure.

Q: Just one last moment before we get to 9/11. Someone, I forget who— said—Beers is thought of as a salesperson, a person from the advertising world with the notion of selling. We used to use that expression "selling the U.S." I think that it was—who said, "The U.S. is not for sale." Your thoughts about that? I do remember the sense that some people had of being tarnished by this advertising approach towards an entity that seemed to be transcendent, which was the United States of America.

RUTH: Excellent point again, Dan. A couple of things. First, I personally don't recall anyone saying the U.S. is "not for sale." Charlotte Beers would never have thought along those lines. Skipping ahead to her departure, a phrase occasionally repeated was that, "Uncle Sam is not Uncle Ben." Now, I think that that's actually highly unkind and a disservice. It only caught on because it's waspishly Washington. She was a woman of formidable intellect, ability, and talent, and she put herself into the work. It did not work for a variety of reasons, which we can talk about.

There are a couple of reasons things didn't work as well for her as she had hoped, or as everyone would have liked. One is—and you'll hear me say this way too many times—the people who choose under secretaries, whoever those people are—secretaries of state, presidents, vice presidents, national security advisors—have all thought since day one, since October 1, 1999 to today, that public diplomacy equals communications.

As I've said before, you can call it messaging, you can call it information, you can call it strategic communication, you can call it shaping the narrative, whatever you like. There are all these different terms you can come up with, but it's all communications. That's what they think PD is, and they have no particular interest in, knowledge of, or appreciation for other parts of public diplomacy. So, as the second R under secretary, Charlotte started cementing that tradition, which has continued to this day. Under secretaries have come from publishing, journalism, broadcasting, advertising, et cetera.

The second thing is—and this has nothing to do with anyone's expertise—the persistent and pernicious notion that running the government is like running a business, or that the government should be run like a business. I think we've touched on this before. It is entirely understandable—and one can be, up to a point, sympathetic to these individuals—who think that the strengths that made them so successful in the private sector and that were so highly remunerative would stand them in good stead in the government. Why would they not take on this new task by doubling down on the same abilities and strengths and practices that had made them so successful in the private sector?

The unfortunate thing, and you know this as well as I do, is that the U.S. government is not a business. It cannot be run like a business, and it should not be run like a business. But what this translates into is, you have individuals, men and women, coming into the job of under secretary as people of stature and prominence. They're recruited for the job. People are flattering towards them. Secretary Powell courted Charlotte Beers because he wanted her and her considerable talents in this job.

But what it sometimes means is that the individual who comes into the job doesn't do their homework. These people are often legendary for doing their homework and knowing everything about their opponents, their clients, the business at hand, all the details. They immerse themselves in it. But most of them don't seem to do that when they come to the government. They don't seem to think that there's new information, new skills, or new practices that they need to learn. In fact, they may think that they can sweep in with their well-known talents and abilities and quickly make things happen. It's a shame, because as I've said, these are individuals, like Ms. Beers, of formidable ability. But you have to do your homework. The government is not the private sector. It doesn't work the same way, it isn't motivated the same way, and the results are measured differently.

Q: We can't not think of Rex Tillerson, in light of what you've just said. There was this repeated disappointment, I have to say, among those of us working in the system to see one person after the next make exactly the misjudgment that you've just described. When Beers left and said, "The U.S. is not Uncle Ben," was this said from an attitude of newly-found knowledge, or was she implying that she had always known this? It sounds like an expression of sad defeat. "I tried and I failed." That's what I read in that.

RUTH: Well, it wasn't Ms. Beers herself who said that. It was people who were analyzing her. Why did she have such a short tenure, and why did it seem to be largely unsuccessful?

Q: Right. You did the job of keeping the spirit and the budget and everything going. A lot of people, I think—including senior PD people—were very puzzled and frustrated by Beers' approach. Her strength was in selling products in the private sector. I don't doubt that she was very talented at doing that, but she never really made the transition. I don't know if she would be among those who didn't do the homework, but there was a lot of friction. But, as you say, 9/11 swept it all away. Maybe we should race to 9/11, which was such a huge event. So, let's see. September 11. She had been there over the summer?

RUTH: No, she hadn't arrived yet. She had been nominated but had not started working there. There was no under secretary on 9/11.

Q: Oh, so it was you running the whole shop.

RUTH: Well, lots of people were running the shop. I was the senior official in the Under Secretary's Office.

Q: Let's think of that day. We have to, because we all remember where we were, what we did, who we saw.

RUTH: It's interesting. It's regrettable, too, of course. Just as our parents would speak to us when we were growing up about exactly where they were when Pearl Harbor was attacked, you and I and others do that for 9/11. I was in my office on the seventh floor of the State Department. From my office, I could look out and see smoke from the Pentagon across the river. On TV we saw the coverage of the World Trade Center.

There were a number of false rumors—as often happens in these kinds of stressful situations—about bombs going off, about explosions near the State Department, about explosions near the White House. An announcement over the PA system ordered everyone to evacuate the building, so we all started heading out in interminable queues. There was lots of gallows humor, of course, about these expensive, sophisticated card-reading turnstiles that let us out one by one when the danger was an airplane crashing into you from the sky. These turnstiles weren't going to be a lot of help. Like I said, gallows humor.

We stood outside for a little bit, and I was preparing to start the walk home—which would have been about eight miles but seemed trivial at the time—when they announced that people who had their vehicles parked in the garage below the main State building, which I did, could go back during a thirty-minute window. You could go back in, get your car, and drive out. So, I drove home. My wife was still at work. My two children were locked down at their schools. So, I was home alone for a bit, and I made lasagna. It seemed like a positive, life-affirming thing to do.

The next day, we were back at work. The under secretary for political affairs was Mark Grossman. Of course, Secretary Powell was there, as well as Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage. Secretary Powell asked Mr. Grossman to put together a senior-level steering committee to handle the initial response, knowing that eventually it would be taken over by more formal mechanisms and probably the White House, which is what happened. I was asked to come to Mr. Grossman's office. I went down there, just down the hall a little bit, and he was sitting with his two Senior Foreign Service special assistants. They were sitting on either side of him.

He said, "I asked each of my people"—Bob Blake and Maura Harty—"who the best PD person is in the department, and they both independently said it was you. We need one public diplomacy person on this steering committee, and it's you." That was an honor, of course, as sad an honor as it may have been.

In the initial post-attack discussions it was clear that the top priority was to get the perpetrators, to get bin Laden. Bearing in mind the PD implications, I asked: "When you say, 'get bin Laden,' do you mean arrest him and take him to the International Court of Justice, or do you mean get him like Pablo Escobar and shoot him dead on sight?"

The question didn't get any traction at that time. I persist in thinking it was an important distinction, but I understand why it seemed less important at the time over the imperative of nailing that son of a bitch. The other thing is that Mr. Grossman asked me to prepare a Public Diplomacy action plan for post-9/11 for the secretary ASAP. So, I essentially pulled an all-nighter. I was there until three or four o'clock in the morning, and I wrote one up. It was just me. No clearances, no nothing. I took it, the next day, to Mr. Grossman, who took it to the secretary. He came back later that very same day and said, "This is exactly what the secretary is looking for. Please turn this into a formal action memorandum that he can sign off on." So, I did that, and it never got through the clearance process or saw the light of day.

Q: No way.

RUTH: That was the end of it. By the time anything—

Q: Well, wait, this was a task force! Formally, who other than Grossman could have not cleared the memo?

RUTH: Well, since it was an action memo to the secretary, it had to go through the Line. It had to be cleared by other assistant secretaries who were involved, regional assistant secretaries, et cetera. It never got back to the secretary.

Q: Well, Grossman couldn't have been happy about that, because he recognized it as just what was needed. Oh, my God. The Line—which we have mixed feelings about—got in the way, just as we think of the Line. They normally do that.

RUTH: The problem wasn't the Line. A lot of people would have had to agree to my proposals—both from a policy and a resource perspective. It might have been sorted out in a matter of days or so, but things were happening very quickly, and it wasn't long until the White House itself took over the day-to-day direction of what became the Global War on Terrorism, and then our task force didn't matter anymore.

Q: We don't need to know the names of these troublemakers, but what were their objections?

RUTH: I can't put words into their mouths or thoughts into their heads. They were looking at something that was unusual to them. It wasn't the customary list of briefings and speeches and so forth and so on. My main theme, which, of course, everyone recognizes as resonant of FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] was that we have nothing to hate but hate itself. I had statements about bringing people to justice and taking care of the victims and their families and that America remains strong. But I also said that in bringing these individuals to justice and engaging on this issue, we do not hate or stigmatize or make an enemy of any country, any religion, any ethnicity. We only hate hate.

Q: If only your noble idea had prevailed. It did not, and it's both a shame and a failure that this did not happen. Then, when it went to the White House, did this exclude the Department of State pretty thoroughly? We know that Rumsfeld, Cheney, and some other people sort of took over, and we also know that Powell had great disagreements with those people. Did this start on the very first day, this bifurcated process?

RUTH: Oh, I think it did. As you indicated, there were very strong individual interests. You had very strong institutional interests on which way to take this. Honestly, I don't think anybody lost any sleep over my errant memo, because things were happening too fast. They were too big and too quick. It was just onto the next thing very quickly.

Q: Understood, but this, along with the very usable and reasonable ideas that you proposed— The institutional bifurcation— The State Department was eclipsed by the White House entirely. That would include the NSC [National Security Council], I suppose. I mean, this must have made Colin Powell very unhappy, I'm guessing. I know it did in the long run, I'm just wondering if—

RUTH: In the long run, sure.

Q: Okay. So, we start on a cataclysmic note, and we go, from there, to a disappointing note.

RUTH: In the very next month, Charlotte Beers started her tenure.

Q: October?

RUTH: October.

Q: Okay. Beers. Now, you had briefed her when Powell was trying to persuade her to come over. So, you had a sense of who she was. Did her arrival cause ripples? Was it an easy transition?

RUTH: I can't say it was easy. Usually, no one who is unfamiliar with the U.S. government and how it operates has an easy introduction to it. I know no other part of the government other than the State Department, really, but the State Department has a very unusual corporate culture. It's very rank-conscious. It has its idiosyncrasies, like any organization. So, it's never an easy entry for someone from outside. Particularly when you're considered— Again, the word "legend" always attached itself to Charlotte Beers, and now here was the greatest foreign policy challenge of our time, in many ways. People looked to her to make magic. There's no magic any human being could have made there, no matter how capable.

She threw herself into it, though, with great attention and energy. One of the issues or projects she undertook was called the Shared Values Initiative. I don't know if you remember that. There were mini-documentaries about Muslim life in America, which she persuaded Deputy Secretary Armitage to provide additional funding for. That was a major effort of hers for quite some time. I should say, for the sake of clarity, that I stayed as chief of staff with Charlotte Beers for her first three months: October, November, December. At the start of January, I moved over to ECA to work for Assistant Secretary Pat Harrison. But for the first three months, I was there.

So, Charlotte Beers had the Shared Values Initiative, which was quite time-consuming and labor-intensive. She threw herself into that with a great deal of energy. She also worked very closely with a number of people from the Children's Television Workshop and Sesame Street. One of my favorite memories is the couple of trips I got to take up to New York to sit with the senior managers at Sesame Street, including the also-legendary Joan Ganz Cooney, who founded the Children's Television Theater. This was— Oh, go ahead, Dan.

Q: Did you toss them back with Big Bird?

RUTH: That was not allowed.

Q: You weren't besties with Big Bird? Aw, I'm so disappointed.

RUTH: Alas.

Q: You know, when I asked about the transition, you were very sympathetically thinking of Beers and her own trials. Actually, I wasn't thinking of that at all. I was thinking of the stress on our colleagues getting used to a person with a very different approach. As you

say, we had a corporate culture, and she did have sharp elbows. She certainly did. From that other point of view— I guess those who— I guess this would be the top tier of the PD officers. What was required of them in adapting to her?

RUTH: Well, it's interesting. I'll actually ping back, momentarily, to the folks at Sesame Street. Again, they were well aware of who Charlotte Beers was from the advertising world. This was New York. Now she was an under secretary, and she was talking about global initiatives and America in the world. That's one reason, I think, that Ms. Cooney herself showed up for one of the meetings. But it was very clear that she, Charlotte Beers, wanted a great deal more than it was possible for anyone to deliver. I think that's safe to say.

One of the senior managers at Sesame Street, at one point, sort of took a breath and said, after Ms. Beers had described what she was hoping for, "Every manager wants three things: they want their project or undertaking to be good, to be quick, and to be cheap. But you can only have two of those. Which two do you want?" Those were wise words, Dan. I have thought about them many times, because you and I both know, since PD people run projects, that yeah, you can make it really good and really quick, but it's going to cost you the moon. You can make it cheap and good, but it's going to take forever. You can only have two of those three things. I'd just never heard it formulated quite that pithily.

I think part of the issue is that nobody could have succeeded. I'm sure she did as well as anyone could have done, and she did some very good things. The Shared Values Initiative was ultimately deemed to be unsuccessful, but it was bold. She took action. She got extra funding. She made it happen. She assembled talent. She made something happen. She didn't dither or twiddle her thumbs; she made things happen.

Again, this work with Sesame Street, which unfortunately collapsed at one point— I don't mind saying why. One of the parts of USIA that came to the State Department, of course, was the Foreign Press Center. Ms. Beers was speaking at the Foreign Press Center after her latest round with the Children's Television Workshop, and she talked about how we, the State Department, were going to work with Sesame Street to promote American values around the world. Within one minute of her saying that, my phone rang, and a senior official at Sesame Workshop said, "Rick, you understand that we're through. Sesame Street is not an instrument of the United States government. We promote values, which we hope are universally understood and appreciated, but they're not branded American. We can't have that. It's over."

Q: In fact, Sesame Street was replicating itself in many of the countries in the Middle East and Southern Africa.

RUTH: Mostly because of USAID funding, yes.

Q: Exactly. There was a little bit of interlocking directorates there, and there were some husbands and wives working both sides of that, but— When Beers found this out, did she feel betrayed or puzzled or repentant or what?

RUTH: I honestly have to tell you that I don't know. She was very kind at her going away party to refer to me as her "absolute soulmate," but that doesn't mean I could read her mind. She was a formidably talented individual. But I only stayed for about three months for a couple of reasons. One is that—as you have surely gathered from the number of times I have said it—that I was uncomfortable with the exclusive focus on communication. I thought that was wrong. I really didn't like the kind of public diplomacy that was being run out of R.

This was a time when we started to get—partly because of 9/11, but partly because of the merger, as well—all kinds of what I would call tomfoolery about interagency coordination. There were policy coordinating committees, joint coordinating committees, senior strategic review committees. All of this was between DOD and State and NSC and so forth. All of them were a complete and utter waste of everybody's time. That held no attraction for me.

Now, on 9/11, we also didn't have an assistant secretary for ECA. Pat Harrison, the nominee, had not yet arrived on the job. She came very shortly afterwards, like Charlotte Beers. But I had begun to work with Pat Harrison during her confirmation process and was enormously impressed by her. From my USIA days and my field days, it was pretty clear that my heart belonged to exchanges and international education and culture. ECA was where Rick Ruth belonged. So, I began to talk to Pat—

Q: I'm trying not to have a personal reaction to that, but my reaction is absolutely, totally positive.

RUTH: So, I began talking to her, and I began talking to Charlotte Beers about leaving. She was not, initially, opposed to that, because I think that by that point, she was pretty frustrated by her inability to make the kinds of changes and run things at the State Department the way she wanted to and the way she thought needed to be done. So, the typical reaction for most new, senior people is to say, I need my own team. I need to clean house. She had inherited everybody. She was talking a little bit like that, which I don't object to at all. That's perfectly understandable.

But it got to be a little funny. We had a couple of conversations about me moving over to ECA. Ms. Beers seemed to be entirely on board. Then, apparently, she wasn't. She didn't really talk about it a whole lot, but she wouldn't clear off on my transfer request. So, time was passing, and time was passing. Finally, to get back to someone we mentioned a couple sessions ago, the marvelous Jan Brambilla, who was in R doing the HR stuff. Jan simply proceeded without any permission from the boss, to make arrangements, schedule a time, book a room, and send out flyers announcing my farewell party—without asking or telling Charlotte. She made it a *fait accompli*. Jan knew I wanted to move, and she

knew there was a job waiting for me in ECA and that Charlotte wasn't signing off on the paperwork. So, she just made it a done deal.

I must tell you that Charlotte was magnificent about it. She didn't complain. She joined right in. They held the event in that treaty room right outside the secretary's office on the seventh floor. It was a very nice event. Then, at the very start of January, right after New Year's Day, I moved over to ECA. My first day at ECA, the Monday, was spent in London with Pat Harrison. Pat had asked me to come with her, and I said, "You know what," being overly officious, "maybe both of us shouldn't be out of the bureau at the same time."

She said, "Okay, sure."

Then, maybe ten minutes later, I called her back and said, "I'm an idiot. Of course, I'm coming."

Q: It was like having one of the Supreme Court justices absent during the State of the Union message. Something like that.

Now, I have to take a slight step backwards. You're welcome to edit this out of the transcript, but I believe it was during your three months with Beers—again, you can edit this out—I was having coffee and reading a newspaper in the Foggy Bottom Cafe of the Harry S. Truman building. I was puzzled, and I think I was hostile to the Shared Values Initiative, because it did get a lot of ridicule, the idea being, "Look at our happy Muslims in greater Detroit." This fooled nobody. It was a little bit phony. Muslims, I think, took this as condescending.

Anyway, you very kindly stopped for a moment. You were walking down in the café area. As I tell this, you'll probably remember it. I looked at you, and I knew you were very busy, but you stopped, and you said hello. You saw that I was puzzled, and you said, "What's the issue?"

I said, "The Shared Values Initiative."

You said, and I've never forgotten it, because it was tremendous wisdom— You sat down, and you said, "Dan, you really don't understand this. There are the Muslims who don't care about us, there are the Muslims who want to kill us and are planning to do so, and there are Muslims who hate us but are not planning to kill us. We are aiming for that third category to encourage the ones who hate us not to kill us." Suddenly, I saw the light. Again, you were so generous, to me but also to a notion that ultimately did not prevail very well. You were so kind to that idea and to me. It's a great moment and it taught me a lot. You can edit this out, that's fine.

RUTH: I regret to say that I don't recall, but I'm happy for you to leave it in there. Most of our public affairs officers, particularly those in countries with significant Muslim

populations, were very critical of Shared Values from the get-go for the reasons that eventually prevailed, as you summarized. To Muslims in their home countries, these little mini-documentaries looked to them like their colleagues, their former countrymen and countrywomen, saying, "Hey, I got mine. I'm in America now and I'm doing great. Sucks for you."

So, ultimately, like I said, it has been deemed to have been unsuccessful. Maybe Charlotte Beers was somewhat deaf to the public affairs officers who had been cautioning her from the get-go that this was a possible outcome. But on the other hand— You, of course, remember 9/11 quite well. You know the State Department quite well. The pressure upon her as under secretary for public diplomacy to goddammit, do something, was enormous. There was inconceivable pressure for her to make things happen, and she was making things happen. I'm not sure that anybody could have made that work and made anything work, at that time, under that kind of pressure with that kind of tension. But there we were.

Q: So, of the three elements—good, quick, and cheap—she did money and quick.

RUTH: You could say that.

Q: She got those two of the three. Well, again, when I say you were loyal, I don't mean you were blindly loyal. You really saw the potential of this idea. You saw the pressures that we were all under and that she was under. I believe you served her very well. I think the story about the unannounced farewell party is a great anecdote. Thank you to Jan Brambilla for bringing Rick Ruth back to us. I do remember that we felt like, Oh, we've got him back now. We were all relieved.

So, the first day in London. Pretty good for a first day on the job with Pat Harrison. So, you were impressed with Pat Harrison, you liked her, you had met her before. What more should we know about Pat Harrison?

RUTH: Well, you know, Pat Harrison is a good lesson in not jumping to conclusions. She had been the co-chair of the Republican National Committee [RNC]. So she was an atypical selection to be the head of Educational and Cultural Affairs. We were accustomed to academic types, mostly, running things. Once again, we talked about Bill Bader, who had been one of the very first Fulbrighters in the early '50s. He had worked for Senator Fulbright on the Hill. He was Dr. William Bader. Separate from their abilities on the job, they came from an academic background frequently, or at least a think tank kind of background. She was very atypical in that sense. People were also a little bit concerned that she might "politicize" the bureau.

I actually had the foolish temerity to tell her that when I first met her. I said, "People are very interested in your selection because you don't fit the usual profile." She seemed a bit surprised at my saying it but took it extremely well. Maybe that helped. At the very least, we started off on a basis of candor. But like every senior official that I have really

liked—and I have to say it right here and now—I am madly in love with Pat Harrison. She was the best. She combined professionalism with humanity. That's not an easy thing. They're only two things, but a lot of people fail to get either of them. She succeeded, and that's all I ever asked of anybody, to be a decent human being and a professional. Of all the things I dislike, I most dislike amateurs. Pat was a pro, and she was a good human being, so the possibilities were endless.

Q: One difference between a good boss and a bad one is that the good one will welcome the truth, even if it's a little bit hard to take. You said you had temerity, but first of all, you had trust in yourself. That's a pattern throughout your whole career. Why not? I think that's a very good way to think of it. But you also took a chance and told her the truth, and you had a good reaction. This in itself gives her a great quality as a leader, as a boss. So, how quickly did she understand—ECA— It's not like you're born with this knowledge. It's not higher math, but it does normally take a lot of days in the field and meeting Fulbrighters and meeting exchange grantees before you really get the sense of it. How did she catch on, and did she catch on quickly?

RUTH: Yes. She did what I was bemoaning just a little bit ago that so few do. She did her homework. She read the papers, she talked to the people. She didn't presume she knew. She had her ideas. She was already a serious person of talent and ability. She was a published author and had worked on women's leadership in organizations. She applied those principles. She did her homework, buckled down, and got into the work, and she ended up being a very productive assistant secretary. For two stints of time, she was acting under secretary, before and after Margaret Tutwiler, but that's down the line. This is now a significant stretch of time.

When I moved over to ECA, I moved over as the director of policy and evaluation. That was the title. It actually comprised four units, eventually—Policy, Evaluation, Alumni, and Cultural Heritage. They weren't all there at the time I moved, but eventually, that was the scope of the job. I used to call it ECA/PEACH—Policy, Evaluation, Alumni, Cultural Heritage.

It was a highly interesting and, for me, extremely productive four years with Pat Harrison. As well as fun. She and I once stayed up till the very wee hours in a bar in Venice talking with Daniel Libeskind. You can't buy that kind of experience. Very quickly, I created the separate Evaluation Office for ECA, which was the first full-time evaluation office in the Department of State. I was responsible for creating the Alumni Office. I worked with the indomitable Maria Kouroupas to create the Cultural Heritage Center out of what had been the staff for the Cultural Property Advisory Committee. For better or for worse, I created the Mission Activity Tracker, much to the chagrin of many people like you. But nonetheless, it was a command performance.

Q: We knew why.

RUTH: I can tell you how it came about. There was a great deal of travel. Pat Harrison used to say, "If you don't go, you don't know." She wanted to go to the field, talk to PAOs, and talk to her counterparts. She wanted to see large posts and small posts. She wanted to see, on the ground, how it happened, so that she would understand what to do in Washington. She did her homework.

So, if we circle back just briefly, Dan, to when I was a young grad student desperate to travel around the world but with no resources, Pat Harrison pretty much took care of that problem.

We went to Baghdad on a couple of occasions. We went to Venice, Marrakech, Rome, Istanbul, Cairo, Moscow, St. Petersburg. We were in London, Tokyo, Bangkok. So, I really got to travel, which was great. Everybody in the Foreign Service, I hope, loves to travel and to see the world. This is an entirely selfish and personal note. By doing my job, I also got to scratch my itch to travel and see the world.

Q: Oh, absolutely. These days, there would not be the resources for that, would there?

RUTH: Hard to say. Usually, the assistant secretary gets whatever resources he or she needs, but—

Q: Does the assistant secretary get a whisperer to travel with that person? I guess they must. You were the Harrison whisperer is what you were. You were interpreting, on the road, what she was seeing.

RUTH: Pat Harrison didn't need a whisperer. She looked and she listened and drew her conclusions. We worked well together. At one point, Pat had everyone take the Myers-Briggs personality type inventory in the office. It turned out to be very helpful. I'm a big fan of Myers-Briggs. I'm an off the charts introvert, by the way, for those who are interested. INFJ [Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Judging]. But it turned out that Pat Harrison and I were on opposite ends of some of the spectrums. So, for example, she would say, "Rick, I want to travel."

I would say, "Yes, ma'am," and I would be back the very next morning with a five-page document and a calendar. Travel was broken down by quarters with both small posts and large posts and with all the regions adequately represented.

She would go, "Oh, hmm, well, thanks," and just sort of put it aside. Well, it turns out that in terms of approach, like lots of people, she liked to wait until the last possible minute to make decisions on the perfectly reasonable assumption that new information would continue to come in all the time. When she finally did make a decision, she would have the maximum amount of available information. That's perfectly legit. I'm the opposite. I want to put everything on the table immediately so that everyone has a framework to work against. Then, you simply make changes on the fly as necessary.

Eventually, we would laugh about it, because now I knew what she was doing and she knew what I was doing, and it all worked out fine. So, there was a kind of educational process. But like I said, she did the work. She did her homework. She gave me a long leash, if you will, to do things.

I don't know how you want to do this— There's so much that went on in these four years that I can just start talking and you can just jump in anywhere, or—

Q: I want the whole thing. Just a couple of— These aren't very important questions. Cultural Heritage, is that what became the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Heritage?

RUTH: The Ambassadors Fund is one of the programs of the Cultural Heritage Center. Back when USIA was independent, Congress created a cultural property advisory committee as part of the implementation of the U.S. ratification of the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] Treaty on Combating Trafficking in Cultural Heritage and Looting. Like every advisory committee—like the Fulbright committee, for example—it had a professional support staff. Initially, that's how Maria Kouroupas and her colleagues served. They were the secretariat, if you will, for the Cultural Property Advisory Committee, which was presidentially appointed and had certain functions to carry out in advising the assistant secretary on treaties with other countries under the UNESCO convention.

What Maria and I did was decide, unilaterally, to rename the office the Cultural Heritage Center so that it sounded like something more significant, which it was. It was her idea. I give her full credit for it. I then threw myself behind the idea. We decided that what we were essentially trying to do was plant the flag of cultural heritage and cultural preservation so that people who were elsewhere in the State Department, in other countries, in academia, in anthropology, in international trade and antiquities and cultural heritage, would see that the State Department cared about cultural heritage.

It worked, hugely successfully. We can talk about that down the line. We decided to do it ourselves, though, and we didn't ask permission. We didn't send a memo asking for a FAM entry or anything like that. I'd learned my lesson by trying to pick the office name for R. So, we just went ahead and renamed it. Like I said, I give all credit to Maria Kouroupas on that. I provided some top cover.

You asked about the Ambassador's Fund and I digressed. The Ambassador's Fund itself was a creation of Capitol Hill. That's a whole other story. The number of times that members of Congress or their staff have decided on things that they think are good and should be done, and worked with ECA to make them happen. So, the godfathers and godmothers of the Ambassador's Fund were all on the Hill. But we took it and we ran with it, and it is—I hope you agree—a spectacularly successful program.

Q: Absolutely. I wish it had five times more funding.

RUTH: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Having the word ambassador attached to it gives it real pizzazz. It means that ambassadors care. It has their name. That's a really brilliant thing. The other question, which is not a major one: the Foreign Service officers who seemed to hang around at ECA for many years, other than— Well, you were no longer an FSO, you were GS, but Miller Crouch— He was there all the time.

RUTH: Miller Crouch, yes! He was there for years. He was our longest-serving PDAS.

Q: Yes. He was my first boss, by the way. So, I'm interested in Miller Crouch stories. He was clever, he was inscrutable. He made it his business that you would never quite know what he was thinking, but he was quite married to the mission, as you were, though I think in a different way. Anyway, you must have interacted with him a lot, because you were both in ECA.

RUTH: Miller was irreplaceable. He was marvelous. We used to talk about his— You referred to never quite knowing what Miller was thinking. At his going away party, I made some remarks to the crowd. I said, "Who has not gone into Miller Crouch's office to get an answer about a program or a funding approval and not left knowing more about Oliver Cromwell or the Six Nations of the Iroquois?" You never knew what he was going to talk about with you. He was quite wedded to the bureau's mission. He is an artist himself, an accomplished one. He had a nimble and clever mind. He wasn't interested in taking credit for things, which is always a quality that allows people to actually get things done, if they're not trying to take credit for them and they make things happen.

Q: He lived across the street from the zoo, and many of those animals were embellished enormously in his sketchbook. I'm sure you've seen the sketchbook. A friend of mine went to art school with him and always had an animus about Miller because Miller decided to be working for the government rather than fulfilling himself as an artist, but that's an insignificant detail.

Okay. So, four years. Lots to go through. Let's go through it more or less chronologically. That's probably the best way to remember it.

RUTH: Okay. Well, I mentioned the Cultural Heritage program. It continues to this day and has expanded. What Maria Kouroupas and her team were able to do was create—she's retired now—a legacy. A lot of people make a lot of contributions. Very few people can claim a legacy. What Maria was instrumental in doing, without nearly enough recognition, was opening a new dimension of foreign policy, and that was through cultural heritage. She worked at it night and day with determination that often irritated people who didn't see the vision the same way she did or as being as important as she did. But she persisted. She made things happen.

This was when the Bamiyan Buddhas were destroyed in Afghanistan, and then with the growth of Middle East terrorism and deliberate destruction of monuments in Iraq and elsewhere. Then, there was the looting of historic cultural sites to fund terrorist activity. The government, Congress, and the executive branch, were scrambling around to get a hold on that issue, and lo and behold, here was the Cultural Heritage Center at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs that actually had people who knew about that and did things about that. The UNESCO convention was a convention against looting and pillaging. It's unfortunate, of course, that it took global terrorism to give cultural heritage preservation such a high profile and make it central to much of our discussion, but that's what it took, and there we were, ready to go, all because Maria and her colleagues had worked so hard against a lot of opposition to make this happen.

We had a wonderful man working with us, Dr. John Russell, from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design—MassArt, they called it—who was himself a Middle Eastern archaeologist. He'd done digs in Nineveh. He and I traveled to Baghdad a couple of different times. I don't want to get into the whole Iraq War and post-Iraq War part yet, but just the cultural heritage part.

Most recently, the Cultural Heritage Center began to get deeply involved in the protection of Native American culture. It began to be a higher profile issue, and people again began to cast about saying, Who knows about this? Who can help us with this? Here's the Cultural Heritage Center. Now, by rights, the Cultural Heritage Center was internationally focused and had, at that initial moment, no in-house expertise in Native American culture. They've now addressed that. But I had the privilege, along with others, of meeting with the governors of Native American tribes and reservations and talking about their issues in protecting their heritage.

The way we came into it was because there's such a demand for Native American artifacts and sacred objects overseas that Hopi and Navajo and other objects were being put on sale in Paris and Berlin and Tokyo. Our embassies would be drawn into a process of approaching the foreign government and saying, Can you take that off the market? That was looted. This was stolen. So, we took our expertise and put a reverse spin on it.

I'll just mention one more thing. Maria, again, and her team worked very hard to put cultural heritage preservation on the list of required issues that emergency action committees at embassies took cognizance of. We had a couple of cases that came fairly close together. First of all, there was a major earthquake in Haiti which caused tremendous destruction to Haiti's heritage, including its vernacular architecture and museums and galleries and so forth.

Also, there was a major earthquake in Italy.

Q: We remember, with sadness, DOD and all the confusion in Iraq meaning that DOD was not prepared to save cultural heritage sites. Exactly. I don't think anybody blames them. They were standing there. They didn't have a mission to save these objects, even in

Baghdad itself, I think. In some cases, they just watched the stuff being looted, which makes a bad image. But in fact, this was not their mission. They were unable—certainly willing, I think, but they didn't know what to do. So, the need for the Cultural Heritage Center was acute, at that time.

RUTH: But not everybody thought so, as you can well understand. In fact, to go back to the First World, there was a severe earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009. What the Italian government asked for in terms of international assistance was restoring the artworks, the frescoes, the architecture that had been damaged in palaces, cathedrals, and older buildings. They said, Look, we've got water, tents, and cots.We'd appreciate your help preserving our priceless cultural heritage.

It was the same with the Haitians who said, We need help to save our buildings and our lives, yes, but you have to help save our souls as well, and that means our culture. We offered to work with the Smithsonian to bring certain damaged works of art, sculpture, and painting, to the United States for restoration, and the Haitians refused. They said, There's a long history of things not coming back. So, we pivoted to sending expertise there and working with them on site.

But when Maria—and again, all credit to Maria Kouroupas—proposed to the executive secretariat management at the State Department that cultural heritage be added to the list of considerations for embassy emergency action committees, the tripwire list of things that had to be paid attention to, they practically laughed her out of the room. They said, Look, we're trying to save people's lives. Tents, water, medicine, food. Don't give us this crap about cultural heritage.

What happened is that the countries themselves—like Haiti, like Italy, like Iraq, like others—said, No, this is top priority. Their ministers, prime ministers, presidents came to us after natural disasters and said, You've got to help save our heritage. This is who we are. So, with Maria's insistence internally and continuing natural disasters, cultural heritage preservation was put officially into the emergency action committee list of issues.

So, it's just been a wonderful office since its inception, and I'm delighted to have been party to it.

Q: So, great. Baghdad and the looting of artifacts is important. The Africa Bureau, under USIA—actually pushed the U.S. government to sign a treaty with the government of Mali to prevent trafficking of items from Mali to the U.S. He did this very selflessly because he cared about West Africa. It was mainly for the benefit of Mali, I believe, but it was a good thing. It was in the spirit of UNESCO.

RUTH: One of the very first grants under the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation was sacred texts in Mali. You know, there's a wonderful book with a wonderful title: *The Badass Librarians of Timbuktu.*

Q: Oh, that story is amazing. Years later, it's amazing what they did. We did, also, a cultural preservation project in Haiti from the citadel, the famous citadel. We realized that there was line of sight from the citadel to the landing place where Columbus landed. There was an archaeological dig. Apparently there were some buildings. So, an observation deck was built.

RUTH: One of the things that worked out well, of course, is that skeptics didn't realize how cultural heritage could be so closely and usefully integrated into foreign policy. So, for example, Afghanistan. In the city of Herat, in the center of the city, dominating the skyline, is the ancient citadel of Alexander the Great, the Qala Iktyaruddin. It was the heart of ancient Herat and cultural pride for Heratis, but it had fallen into disrepair. It had been further damaged because it had been the site of an uprising against the Soviet occupation that had been brutally suppressed.

Well, working with the Germans and working with, I believe, the Aga Khan Foundation and others, it became a multi-year Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation project. From a foreign policy perspective, Herat is just about an hour and a half drive on a flat road from Iran. Iranian influence was so pervasive locally that you could spend Iranian currency in Herati markets.

So, what is it the U.S. could do to show its understanding and appreciation and support for Afghanistan that wasn't military, wasn't commercial, and wasn't political? What was something that wasn't for us, but clearly for them? The answer was restoring the citadel, which we did. It is now open. You can visit. Schools take bus tours there to show their children. We also helped create, working with the Afghans, a cadre of young people who could now do the restoration themselves. They could make tiles and other objects in the ancient ways and this strengthened the local economy and boosted the tourism industry.

So, it's been a very flexible tool for foreign policy, not just for the word culture, which for some years seemed to drown out every other part of the message. When they hear culture, it's like— There's an anecdote that Hermann Goering once said: "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun." Well, there have always been people like that. The word culture is a sensitive word. But it actually can very nimbly support foreign policy.

Q: Absolutely. We talked earlier about the importance of culture in Russia, the Soviet Union, and many countries in a way that's so— I don't know if it's more significant—it is, I think—than the American perception of culture as something akin to amusement. But culture is history. It's the soul. The U.S. does not have a thousand-year history, so it's just different. Tremendously, this is why this interview, and this type of interview is so valuable. It captures a history of what we have done and someday may cease to do because of political priorities. We hope that these things will always continue. But we need this on the record. As you've just explained, this actually, in an inadvertently

political way, creates good feelings for the U.S. It's a win-win-win. I'm so glad that you—I didn't realize that you expanded this while you were working with Pat Harrison.

How are we doing? It's four, almost. We have lots more to do during your four years at ECA.

RUTH: Oh, yes. We're not going to get through Pat Harrison quickly. There's a lot there.

Q: Yes, let's get all of it. What would be a natural bookend to this phase of the story? What would that be? You went on many trips. What took you to London that very first day? What was that all about?

RUTH: Oh, it was a forgettable conference with some European PAOs, and Charlotte Beers was there, also, so it was a little bit odd. We were talking about what to do next in terms of public diplomacy with regard to fighting global terrorism and getting the Europeans on our side and so on. It was pretty forgettable.

I think we can probably, if you agree, wrap this particular episode up with this cultural heritage issue. I would mention, because I can't resist and I love it so much, another example of cultural heritage as foreign policy. There's a church in eastern Turkey called the Church of the Redeemer. It's from the eleventh century, and it's been an Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Heritage project. What makes it interesting is, when the church was built—it's in present-day Turkey—it was in the Kingdom of Armenia. So, through the instrument of this project, both countries—Turkey and Armenia—bring together experts and scholars and researchers and cultural figures to jointly preserve this church. That's the kind of thing that you can do with culture. Thank you very much.

Q: This did not prevent the current conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, but it's a groundwork, a seed that's planted. We must plant seeds everywhere. Not every seed will give a plant or a tree. Well, thank you for this. Let's sign off. This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman. It's still December 26, 2020, and we'll stop recording.

Q: We've just started. This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman. It's a new year. It's 2021, and it's January 2. Rick, last time, just to pick up from where we were, you were talking about your admiration for Pat Harrison, her ability to do her homework, which is quite exceptional, I think, among people who have been in charge of us.

We talked briefly about Miller Crouch, and also about your legacy. It's not too early to talk about that. You created the Evaluation Office in ECA, the Alumni Office, Cultural Heritage, the Mission Activities Tracker—which everyone understands we need and nobody enjoys doing—and travel protocol changes. You said there was lots more to say about the Harrison regime. Let's get to that.

RUTH: Okay. I'm happy to launch in. Reflecting on the good questions you asked last time, clearly one of the things I like the best, or if someone were to ask me what I was the most proud of— That's sort of an obnoxious question, but a necessary one.

Q: What are you most proud of, Rick?

RUTH: Oh, good question, Dan. It would clearly be working with colleagues to create vehicles, institutions, programs—call them what you will—that last over time and have value over time. So, the Cultural Heritage Center we talked about. In creating the Evaluation Office, I had inspiration and help from a talented colleague named Ted Knicker, who eventually left the State Department for greener fields.

At the point that I moved over to ECA, there was no separate Evaluation Office. There were one or two people, and had been for some time since USIA days, who were evaluators. One of the things was, working with my colleagues, we were able to create the State Department's first ever full-time professional evaluation office. It has done ECA and Public Diplomacy and the State Department, I'm happy to say, quite a bit of good over the decades. It is impossible, now, to think that a member of Congress or someone higher up in the administration or OMB [Office of Management and Budget] would say, "So, do you evaluate your programs?" and that we would say, "Uh, no, we don't."

I remember the evaluation debate going all the way back into the 1980s and the GPRA Wars. The Government Performance Results Act, GPRA, as it was called. It first began to mandate government-wide evaluation. We talked earlier, Dan, about how one of the defining aspects of USIA was that it was a professional community of men and women consumed with the importance of public diplomacy. We made it an important thing to debate, discuss, and define. I remember the debates about evaluating public diplomacy, particularly educational and cultural programs. There were a lot of people who said that not only can it not be done or measured, but we shouldn't even try, because it's like pulling the petals off a blossom. You'd destroy it in the process. The process of influencing or changing people's thinking or attitudes is so quicksilver and ephemeral and ineffable and all those other good adjectives that to try and do it is simply ham-fisted, no matter how you go about it.

The answer to that was, well, you can't tell the American people to give us money and then butt out. We're professionals. We know what we're doing. Don't bother your pretty little heads about what we're doing with your taxpayer dollars.

Q: That does not work on the Hill at all, yeah.

RUTH: So, we went into evaluations, and remarkably enough, twenty or so years later, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, part of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, is still one of only a handful of bureaus in the State Department that have an evaluation office. It's a tough thing to get started and keep going, but ECA's done well at it over the years.

That's another thing. There was a brief period of time under Karen Hughes, when she was under secretary, when she asked me to be the head of both the ECA Evaluation Office and a separate R Evaluation Office. There were two streams of funding. There was the ECA appropriation and the Public Diplomacy appropriation. So, I did that for a while. Then Jim Glassman came in and separated them again, so there are two different evaluation offices in Public Diplomacy.

You mentioned a subset of evaluation, which was the Mission Activity Tracker. The reason that came about the way it did is that Karen Hughes went to Secretary Condoleezza Rice and asked her if it would be acceptable, from the secretary's perspective, for her to advocate for the first billion-dollar Public Diplomacy budget. That would be the total, overall. Now, of course, you and I and people from USIA rolled our eyes a bit at that, because USIA's budget had been over a billion dollars many years before that, before it was dismantled and starved of funding. Nonetheless, Karen Hughes' heart and brain were in the right place and she was looking for more assets for Public Diplomacy.

Rice said, "Sure, that's fine." Then, she asked Under Secretary Hughes the most ordinary, conversational sort of business-like question a secretary of state could ask: "What are you spending your money on now?" There was no answer, not because Karen Hughes didn't know the answer, but because no living human being knew the answer. It was not tracked.

Now, Public Diplomacy doesn't have to be like Walmart, where every time you scan the barcode on a pair of athletic socks anywhere it registers somewhere in Bentonville, Arkansas. We don't have to be quite like that. But if we want to be a profession and not a cottage industry, we have to have data. We have to not just evaluate, but also need to know where the money goes: which countries, which audiences, which themes, et cetera.

So, Under Secretary Hughes came back and said, "Rick, you have to make something happen, and you have to make it happen fast, and you don't have a lot of money." Everybody in the government is familiar with that predicament. Something is a high priority, but there are no resources.

So, we crashed into that, and in a very short amount of time, we came up with a rather balky initial system called MAT, Mission Activity Tracker, and launched that around the world to a lot of uproar, particularly in posts that had difficulty because of bandwidth and related issues. There were posts in Africa that even had to strip out the State Department logo when they faxed documents because there was just too little bandwidth. It was a very bumpy start, but it was a command performance. It had to be made to happen, and it continues on with many refinements to this day.

Another is, as you mentioned, the Alumni Office. I've often said that if I'm ever having a bad day at work, all I have to do is look at the Alumni Office, and then I become happy

again. It is one of those gifts that keeps on giving. It was created, in this case, with a little bit of bureaucratic sleight of hand. Without getting too wonky—I think we mentioned this before—after the fall of the Soviet Union, Congress created the Freedom Support Act [FSA] and the Support for Eastern European Democracy [SEED] Act, both intended to channel funding to the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries to cement progress towards democracy. This was a multi-billion-dollar initiative.

It was all overseen by the Office of the Coordinator of US Assistance to Europe and Eurasia. EUR/ACE, if I recall correctly. This was foreign assistance funding. I mention that because people involved with this understand that it comes from a different source and requires different reporting requirements and different standards for how you spend it and account for it. Every year, that office would poll eligible countries and say, "What do you want to spend money on next year?" They would then go through the incoming proposals, and they would approve some and disapprove others. If the approved programs involved exchanges, they would transfer that funding to ECA because we were the exchange experts, and we would run them. And we would, of course, report back for all the record-keeping.

I had a four-person unit under me that was responsible for overseeing, managing, and reporting back on those programs that were funded with transferred assistance money. Long story short, one day, the folks at OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, decided that it made no sense to give the money to EUR only to have them go through the protracted process of transferring the money to us. It was a sizable amount of money the last couple of years; it was over a hundred million dollars in transfer funding. So, what OMB did was they decided to make what's called a base transfer. They took roughly the amount of money that was transferred in the previous year to ECA and said, We're no longer giving this amount of money to EUR. We're just going to give it straight to ECA as part of their annual budget. They skimmed a bunch off the top in the process, but be that as it may—

Now back to the origin of the Alumni Office. Those four people that I had in the Liaison Office suddenly had no professional purpose. They no longer had to liaise with the other offices. So, before anybody got wind that there were free bodies floating around, I called them in and said, "Congratulations, you're now the ECA Alumni Office." They had done a little bit of alumni work, particularly a very talented colleague named Hilary Brandt. They had done some alumni work with just those programs and those countries in the FSA/SEED programs. I said, "We're going global. So, we need a global website community. We need a global database. We need global messaging and outreach." All the things you would want in an alumni office so that you know who your alumni are, what they're up to, how they're changing and making changes.

It dovetails perfectly, of course, with the Evaluation Office, particularly from an ECA perspective, because our most visible proof of success is what our alumni go on and do or think or advocate for or change. It has stood ECA in good stead over the years because not only can we affirmatively answer the question about whether we evaluate by bringing

in the factual and anecdotal evidence of our alumni, but it has given us some data points to use that tend to be very well accepted. For example, at the time I retired—I'm sure it's gone up by now—there were over 680 current and former world leaders, meaning heads of state or heads of government, who were ECA alumni. That's a phenomenal number. At any given moment, between a quarter and a third of all the world's leaders are ECA alumni.

That's an astonishing fact, and certainly of incalculable benefit to the American taxpayer and to American foreign policy. It proves that ECA and the field work very well together because most of those people, most of those six hundred-plus world leaders, are IVs—International Visitors. That means that they were selected by the post and programmed by ECA. So, it was a completely cooperative venture between the field and Washington. There are also a number of Nobel laureates there. They tend to be Fulbrighters, of course, but the political leaders are almost all IVs. Not entirely, but mostly.

I think a couple of sessions ago I mentioned a cynical Washington saying, which is, "If it's going to happen, be for it." Well, there's another cynical Washington phrase that is equally true, and that is, "If you're explaining, you're losing." So, what you want to show members of Congress, particularly if they're the least bit skeptical, that you're doing something sensible with their money, is to mention the statistic about world leaders. You didn't have to go on and explain why it mattered. If you're talking about English language instruction and high school exchanges and things that eventually have marvelous results, it takes you a while to talk about it. But when you say, "One third of all the leaders in the world today are our alumni," the recognition of the value is instantaneous. You don't have to go on and explain. You're done. So, it's been very helpful in that regard.

This is all roughly during the same period of time, and you might actually get to ask a question at some point. I haven't decided.

Q: Oh, no need.

RUTH: This is one that really might be the thing I'm the proudest or happiest about, and that is— This gets back to Pat Harrison's leadership, also. It was after 9/11. I moved over, as I mentioned, to ECA in January 2002, so just three months after 9/11. There was a day in early January, sitting in Pat Harrison's office—this was still at Fourth and C Southwest—and she was talking about how ECA was obliged in the most serious sense to do something about 9/11.

Now, this was a common conversation throughout the American government and American society, of course. Everybody wanted to know how they should respond and what they should do. She made the point that we were the mutual understanding bureau. If there ever was an affront to mutual understanding, it's terrorism. I don't mean to underplay that or overplay that. She said it was incumbent on ECA to respond, but we

had to respond in a way that was meaningful, lasting, and consequential. I suggested that we start the U.S. government's first high school exchange program for the Arab and Muslim world.

Now, we had a model for that already. Several years before, we had begun the FLEX Program, the Future Leaders Exchange Program, which was a high school exchange program with the countries of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. So, we had a model that we knew worked. We'd already evaluated it. [Note that we had the Evaluation Office now to do that.] We had alumni, too, because we had the Alumni Office to track them, so we knew what they were moving on to in society. All of these things dovetail with each other. Pat Harrison liked the idea immediately. So, I take credit for the idea, but I didn't make it happen. It was turned over to brilliant, able professionals in our Youth Exchange Office.

Q: Senator Fulbright didn't run the Fulbright program.

RUTH: Thank you very much, Dan. You're most kind. We also got excellent support on the Hill.

Q: Sorry, was this the YES Program [Youth Exchange and Study Program]?

RUTH: Yes.

Q: Okay, we haven't mentioned that. It's the best program ever, but let's— YES is Youth Educational something—

RUTH: Youth Exchange and Study. It is now the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program.

Q: It's an absolutely fabulous program, but don't let me interrupt. Go ahead.

RUTH: Thank you. It's gone on for over a decade now. I think it started in 2003. It's had over ten thousand participants. One of my highlight memories is that towards the end of my career, there was, as there always is, an annual gathering of YES students before they went back to their home countries. This was up on Capitol Hill in one of their big rooms. I was able to address that crowd and be introduced as the person who originated that program. I think I had selfies taken with every single one of them. So, that was a great thrill.

There's still more. Like I said, Pat Harrison helped make things happen. There was the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Very shortly after that—a matter of months after that—Pat Harrison and I and ECA senior staffers flew to Baghdad to do a number of things. We restarted engagement with the Iraqi government, the Iraqi people, and Iraqi universities. We restarted the Fulbright program, and we invited the Iraqi national symphony orchestra to come play in Washington at the Kennedy Center with our symphony orchestra.

Q: I remember that. That was you?

RUTH: That was Pat Harrison, but I was on that trip. She also brought Michael Kaiser, the president of the Kennedy Center. He came on that trip also, specifically to negotiate with the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and the director of the Iraqi symphony. That was wild, because it was still just the green zone around the embassy and some of the buildings there, and then the rest of the country was a red zone.

Q: That's kind of the way it is now.

RUTH: When we traveled, we didn't exactly do thunder runs, as the military calls them, but they were close, because we had convoys that, for security reasons, tried not to stop for anything. We were in armored vehicles. The vehicle itself was armored, plus there was a guard, or as they were colloquially called, shooters. These were contract guards up in the shotgun seat. Plus, we had armored Humvees with the swivel machine guns on the top when we traveled outside of the green zone. We weren't supposed to stop ever—not for red lights, not for anything. We were just supposed to keep moving and not be an easy target.

I remember that at one point, we came around a corner, and there was a square that was absolutely jammed with humanity. We came to a screeching halt. All of the contract guards, the shooters, jumped out. They were mostly Arabic language speakers. They began shouting at the crowd to get out of the way, back up. They were pointing their weapons at them. It turned out to be a market. It was market day. They were there selling their produce. We quickly moved on to our destination.

We stayed at the Al Rasheed Hotel. I'm sure this is tame stuff for military and security professionals, but it was a different world for ECA. Of course, it was a multinational force, so there were many different countries represented on the ground. The fashion award certainly went to the Italian special forces, who had sky-blue one-piece jumpsuits. The badass award goes to the Aussies. They had crossed bandoliers of weapons and big Crocodile Dundee knives. Every entrance at the hotel was guarded by a Nepalese Gurkha. This was the wild west—the wild Middle East, rather.

We restarted a number of exchange programs, met with administrative officials from universities, and met with the brave souls—the musicians in the symphony orchestra—who had almost no resources. Of course, many of their instruments had been damaged. Others hadn't been properly cared for. These were professional musicians with sophisticated instruments that required proper care. They rose to the occasion.

I will give myself only one pat on the back. I had nothing much to say in those talks, because again, Pat Harrison and Michael Kaiser were conducting the negotiations with the symphony leaders and ministry officials, but at one point, it was suggested that when the concert was done, for the very last number—both orchestras would play a John Philip

Sousa march, like "The Stars and Stripes Forever." At that point, I spoke up and said, "Please, no." I said, "That just makes it sound like we've made Iraq one of our client states. It's way too self-congratulatory to force them to play 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.' The point is that Iraq is now independent, not that Iraq belongs to the United States." That was my one tiny grace note. The joint concert eventually came off in Washington sometime later.

Q: Yes. I think they played the two national anthems. See, I actually think I remember that. Good point. Pat Harrison immediately saw the wisdom of your suggestion?

RUTH: There was no argument about it once I brought it up, yeah, but it was just one small thing. It was quite the trip. Expeditionary exchanges. Of course, there was still the issue of the Baghdad museum and the looting of the Baghdad museum. That would go on for a number of years. Like anything in that kind of difficult environment, there are plenty of stories to be told.

We flew in with the Nevada Air National Guard, known as the High Rollers. There was a leak from a bullet hole in one of their wing fuel tanks, so they flew at an angle the whole way, tilted to keep the fuel away from the hole in the tank. Anyway, that's public diplomacy on the front lines. As somebody said later, "Soft power in hard places."

Q: Oh, nice. Another subtitle to the publication of this interview. Soft power in hard places. Wow. I will say that I believed that you had a ton of fun when going to Baghdad. You're describing it very vividly. We know that war is not fun, but that particular trip must have been quite amazing. The invasion was in March. When was it that you went?

RUTH: I think it was April.

Q: The next month?

RUTH: I think it was pretty quick, yeah. It was within a couple of months. It was what they call expeditionary diplomacy.

Q: That's you. You're the marines. You're the non-weapon-carrying marine. Well, all of this is remarkable. Hats off to these many wonderful legacy ideas and programs. Going back a bit, I do have a few questions about this. I think I remember that, going back in order of the things that you mentioned, USIA was considered the poor cousin— I want to avoid offensive terms, but it was considered the disabled entity of the federal government that was never able to provide data.

My understanding is that the Congress was, at times, very tolerant of this, and said, Okay, you can't measure by the number of visas you issued. You can't measure by the trade balance, but at least you can give us anecdotes. As I remember it was an effort to embellish anecdotes and make them seem like data. The Congress understood, I think very nicely, that we weren't about quantities and figures. Any comments on that? MAT

was only the recent incarnation of previous efforts to get actual data that we could never have.

RUTH: Quite right. You remember it very well. It was easy to do data if you were showing miles of paved road, number of children inoculated. These are things any of us can count. We were doing something that's hard to count, in the same way that you can't measure the value of a college education by the number of graduate students or their GPAs [grade point average]. So, we used to rely, just as you said, on anecdotes. We've never given up the anecdote. People love stories. That's one of the primary ways that any human being in any society learns—through storytelling. Giving anecdotes about what alumni have done is storytelling.

But once GPRA came out and there was a great all-government need to have data to justify your budget, anecdotes weren't enough. When USIA was independent, one of our last research directors was the excellent Ann Pincus who used to say, "The plural of anecdote is not data." This is where Ted Knicker and other people started moving into more data-driven evaluation, which we've continued to this very day.

We even took some interesting initiatives, like trying to isolate the impact of exchanges on a single state. We chose the state of Iowa as an example, a number of years ago, and looked at all of the exchange programs—Sister Cities, International Visitors, Partners for the Americas—that operated in Iowa. We tried to see if we could come up with some kind of statistical indicators of their effect, like dollars spent versus dollars invested in the economy, as well as what the alumni went on to do and that sort of thing. The good people of Iowa, who kindly invited me there to give a talk in Des Moines when the results of the study came out, all sort of knew each other, because they generally traveled in the same circles, but they had never collaborated on anything. They were so impressed by what they all were doing in Iowa, without being entirely aware of each other, that they formed a united organization and presented our report to the governor of Iowa to say, Look what international exchanges do for the state of Iowa.

Q: If only the U.S. government could do something so coordinated.

RUTH: The people who handle ECA evaluations now are professional evaluators. They talk about things that I don't understand using mathematical equations. It's way beyond my anecdotal understanding. It's a highly professional operation. It has done a lot of good for ECA and certainly has helped sustain the growth of ECA's budget. It's important to note that every single evaluation that ECA has done is posted on its website. We believe that transparency is an important form of accountability to show the taxpayer and the world, "Here's what we can do. You can read it for yourself."

But it has served us in good stead, because sometimes, staffers who support what we do need ammunition to talk to the critics or the people who want to cut our budget. Congress is always considering cuts to someone's budget. Harsh as it sounds, you just want them to cut the other guy's budget, not yours. So, we've been able to use the evaluation data

multiple times over the years to say, "Look, ECA really has invested in and committed to the culture of measurement. We're believers."

Q: History will give credit to Rick Ruth for understanding that and for creating the MAT, which was an annoyance for the field, but everybody understood that that was our best hope to survive, entering data into the MAT. The data was not always numbers. There were estimates, but thanks to you, it was clear that the effort was being made. Other random questions— I think I mentioned this in a previous conversation. There was a PDAS in one of the area offices. When I said, "The new cabinet in X country, 50 percent of it are IVL [International Visitor Leadership Program] alumni," he said, "So what?"

So, I ask you, as devil's advocate, did people on the Hill ever give you this crap about being able to identify world leaders and saying, "So what?"

RUTH: No. On the Hill, they appreciated and understood this.

Q: Okay. So, we can say that that individual was misguided or worse. Let's see. Ghana— I have an anecdote after recording YES in Ghana. It's an absolutely charming, wonderful story, but it's one to be added just as conversation. Evaluation. The military talks about—and we can both maybe write this down—input, output, outcome, result. There are very few individuals or agencies in the federal government that have a clue about the difference in those terms. How did ECA, under your guidance, think of this input, output, outcome, results? These are all very different, and the Congress only wants to know the results. They don't care, and rightfully so. "How much money?" That's the wrong answer. They want to know what did we get as a result. What was the thinking process in that regard?

RUTH: Excellent question. This is where we get a little bit wonky, but I'll make it quick, and you can ask as many follow-up questions as you like. First of all, we're only interested in outcome evaluation. We're not interested in input or throughput. We're only interested in what has changed—what we would call the "delta." What's the difference between the time before the exchange experience and afterwards? What changed? What is different that can be specifically attributed to the exchange experience?

For example, that wonderful stat about world leaders is not actually that kind of evaluation data point. You can't prove anything by it. Margaret Thatcher was one of our alumni. She came in 1967 when she was a junior backbencher in parliament. We don't for one single nanosecond presume to think that we helped Margaret Thatcher become prime minister. What we think is that working with the embassy in London, we had a great eye for future talent. This was a person who was a comer who ought to have a direct American experience.

Q: Likewise, the recent prime minister before the current one was also an IVLP.

RUTH: Tony Blair was an IVLP.

Q: There was also the woman, who left after the Brexit vote. She was an IVLP.

RUTH: Here's the way we looked at it in terms of outcome evaluation. Basically, there are three levels of impact that we're looking for. The first is personal impact—what does this individual now know or understand that they did not know or understand before the exchange experience? Again, something that is attributable specifically to the exchange experience, not just the fact that they're smart, talented, ambitious people.

Second, professional change. This, of course, depends on their profession. If they're a teacher or a professor, did they introduce new material in the classroom? Did they introduce a new style of critical thinking specifically attributable to their exchange experience in the United States? If they're a journalist or an editor of a newspaper, did they introduce new practices in the newsroom? For example, we have a number of documented cases where editors of newspapers instituted the first code of journalistic ethics because they encountered them in the United States. They weren't unethical people, but it hadn't occurred to them that their news organization ought to have a formal code of journalistic ethics that all would follow. It was that kind of change.

Third, the gold standard, if you will, is institutional change. For example, if a parliamentarian—I'll pick a non-political subject—came to the United States and was impressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act, which many have been over the years, and went home and passed similar legislation in their own country for people with disabilities. Or, as often happened, someone would start the first NGO in a country against domestic violence or, back in its day, against discrimination against HIV people in the workplace. So, did they do something that was institutional as a result?

So, we looked at those three levels: personal, professional, and institutional change as a result of the exchange experience. That was the heart of it. The refinements go on from there. The thing we're in the middle of now—and that smarter people than I am are handling, thank goodness—is how do you track all of that in accordance with advancing particular American foreign policy goals? It's a tougher one, but we're on it. We're working on it.

Q: It does sound elusive. It sounds like the holy grail: often imagined, never seen.

RUTH: It is the holy grail, but you have to go after it.

Q: Yeah. In fact, you could say that anything the U.S. government does could be questionable if you're talking about policy advantage. You can talk about balance of trade, I guess, or votes in the UN, but there are very few standards better than any of the ones you were able to identify. This is really important. When I was an IO in the field in various places, I would argue with— Most countries have a press law, and I'm personally opposed to having that. The U.S. does not have that. It has the First Amendment. I would say to ministers, "I think it's better if you don't have a law. If you

have an industry that regulates itself through ethics protocols, you'd be better off." I never convinced anybody in any country that that was true. What do you think about ethics codes versus ethics laws? Do you have any personal feelings or opinions about that? I see it as a very stark division.

RUTH: Well, as you just indicated, I'm a big fan of the Bill of Rights. I think that as much freedom as possible should be accorded to the individual, not decreed by law. I like the American approach, if you will. But it's very fact-specific. Our great friends and allies, the British, have their Official Secrets Act, which is very different from what we have.

Is that an evil thing? No, but I prefer the approach where every individual is seen as having worth and dignity and has the greatest possible physical safety and freedom, and the greatest possible liberty of conscience. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As an American, I like that approach.

Talking about anecdotes versus data reminds me of what I think is a wonderful anecdote, which it's possible only Americans or people of our general line of thinking might quite understand. There was a FLEX student, a young woman, who came early on with the FLEX Program from Russia. She later went on and became extraordinarily successful. She was a very wealthy business executive. Somebody was doing an interview with her and asked, "Did you learn anything in America when you were there as a teenager that helped you become so successful in business?"

She said—and I think this is genius—"In America, I learned that when somebody throws you the ball, you're supposed to catch it." That's individual responsibility. It's not the other guy, him, or her, it's me. I have responsibility.

Q: That's great. I'm writing it down. This is a little bit removed from actually recounting what you've done, but— The notion of the free flow of information— This was an unquestionable part of American policy in the 1980s and the 1990s. I think it's a coincidence, but under the two Obama administrations, this term disappeared from the menu of priorities that PAOs could choose from. I doubt if Obama himself oversaw that, but this was tremendously disappointing to IOs and PAOs. What do you think about the importance of free flow of information? Where would you put it on the Biden agenda? Number 10? Number 75? What? That's very possibly an unfair question, but to me it would be number five.

RUTH: I happen to think that the free flow of information is absolutely vital. It is something that we're likely to get into later on, because one of the interesting things that happened not too long before I retired is that Congress gave ECA a special fund of money to create and run exchange programs that countered disinformation. They believed that exchanges were more valuable in countering disinformation than information and messaging programs.

Q: Absolutely true.

RUTH: It is true. It's the people, not the tweets. ECA got deeply into the whole free flow of information idea. Two things I will say. One is, I understood the importance of the free flow of information early on, because as we've discussed, I started off in the Soviet Union, which was the enemy of the free flow of information. They believed in the absolute rigid control of information, and they were highly successful at it, particularly in days before cell phones and satellite TV.

One of the things that is most important to me is this, and I don't think it gets nearly enough attention: I believe in the right of every individual to form and express their own opinion. We focus mostly, quite understandably, on their ability to express their own opinion. Can they write a letter to the editor? Can they do an editorial cartoon? Can they make a speech at Hyde Park without getting arrested or thrown in jail or shot? What we often neglect to point out is that if you don't have access to a free flow of information, how do you even form your opinions? How do you even come up with what you believe if you don't have access to all the data and all the conflicting views? So, I am always very careful to talk about the right of every individual to "form" and "express" their own opinion.

Q: There's this phrase we see twice a day. "You can have your own opinion but not your own facts." I think it's from Daniel Moynihan. It goes along with what you're saying. Brett Schaefer, who's an expert on disinformation with the German Marshall Fund, says that in thinking— I think he's quite well-informed and he's on this every day. He says, "When countering disinformation, do not imitate the style or the message delivery of the rival, because then you become like that other." So, when asked, "What do we do to defend ourselves?" he says, "Don't. Just live by example." What is your feeling about that?

RUTH: Oh, absolutely. We can certainly talk about this now or we can talk about it later. ECA did a lot in the area of freedom of expression and disinformation when we were given this special funding by Congress and asked to create a plan, which I was put in charge of. I hold that in a poisoned or corrupted communication or information environment, perhaps the most powerful antidote is human authenticity. If you can bring human beings together in a relationship that is broader than the exchange of nasty tweets, then you're going to make progress.

One of the reasons that it so distresses me to see every single under secretary thus far at the State Department be a communications guru is that they tend to think that's all that public diplomacy is, and they confine their thinking and their responses and their programming to what I call "counter-punching." "They tweet about me; I'll tweet about them." "You posted something on the media about me; I'll do something even nastier about you." I mean, this is bullshit. If you want to change people's attitudes, you talk to the person that's sending the tweet. You talk to the person who's reading the tweet. You don't just keep exchanging tweets.

So, you want it to be as open and free and voluntary and permissive as possible. We came up with a five-point strategic plan on how exchanges could be used, should be used, to counter disinformation. It was a ten-million-dollar fund, and it was recurring, so it was a significant amount of money and attracted quite a bit of attention in the disinformation community. There were a lot of skeptics who said, What have exchanges got to do with disinformation? In the same way that your former colleague said, "So what?" to the IVLPs becoming world leaders. But as soon as you mentioned it, they began to see it. Others were just personally or professionally hostile to the idea. In many cases, they saw it as a zero-sum game. If you said exchanges mattered more, then by definition, they mattered less.

So, it gets complicated, but I couldn't agree more. The other thing about exchanges—that was one of the five points—is to always be positive. Go positive. Most people prefer to rally around and join together for a positive cause, to be for something and not against something. The most effective way to be *against* the manipulation of media is to be *for* the free flow of information. This way we don't put our exchange participants and our exchange alumni at risk by putting them in the crosshairs of their own government. The disinformation may come mostly from Russia, China, or someplace like this, but many countries in Eastern Europe, South Asia, and elsewhere have illiberal regimes.

We want our partners to be able to say, "We want to have our own indigenous, independent media. Serbian media for Serbs. Egyptian media for Egyptians. Pakistani media for Pakistanis." Not to be like America, not to have the Western model, not to substitute our view of the world for the Russian or Chinese view of the world. We just want people to be free to make up their own minds.

Q: Absolutely. So, you think candor and transparency might be something to look towards? Something useful? I'm hoping for a renaissance in free flow, because we haven't seen it as a U.S. government policy in over twelve years. So, a couple of entities— I appreciate the wisdom and the pragmatic thinking that you're expressing. The Global Engagement Center [GEC] had never had anything to do with PD, but it does employ some former PD people. It has basically failed in its mission, because it does try to out-tweet. I think the GEC has been a troubled entity from the start. This is outside of your lane, Rick, but any comments on GEC and its many failures?

RUTH: I mean, I think that the GEC is ultimately on a fool's errand. I think that there are wonderful people there—people I admire, people I like, people who are excellent and knowledgeable professionals. They understand the evils and the dangers of disinformation and they want to do something about it. But the point is that countering disinformation is like education. It will take some time. It's not fast-moving. You have to educate generation after generation. The generations keep coming. Every new generation has to learn algebra. Every generation has to learn media and digital literacy, as well. There's no goal line. You never win. You never spike the ball.

This is another reason that exchange programs are so powerful in this regard. They bring people together; they form networks of like-minded people. So, at the most elementary level, if you have a friend in another country because of an exchange program, because you traveled there or they traveled here, and you read something in the paper or online that you think is interesting or even disturbing, you have someone—someone you know, who you trust, and that you've met who has a larger relationship with you than just a single issue anonymously online—who you can reach out to and say, "What's this I hear?" You can talk about it.

There are also the skills of digital literacy. For example, I was at a conference in Poland where we were discussing with Fulbright English teaching assistants various techniques for teaching digital or media literacy. One of the things I noted is that everybody understands certain aspects of being deceived online. So, for example, if somebody gets in touch with you online and says, "Congratulations, Dan, you just won the national lottery. If you send us ten thousand dollars, we'll send you a million dollars," you're not going to fall for it. Well, that's a form of digital literacy.

We all need to make the leap from our own natural protective instincts to more sophisticated, complicated areas where we don't instinctively protect ourselves from deception and manipulation.

From an exchanges point of view, you have to be positive to gather people together more effectively and to be for something. Then, you have to continue the educational process, not only because generations keep coming like waves on the shore, but because young people have to understand that technology is value-neutral. Whether you're splitting the atom or sending TikTok videos, that's value-neutral. Young people have to understand that along with their increasing digital dexterity, they have digital responsibility. It's up to them to decide whether the technology is used for good or evil. That's a moral choice they have to understand before they can make it. Hence, educational programs of the sort we're talking about.

The other good thing about exchanges is that they can change the larger context, the environment in which the exchanges take place. So, if you're Tweeting back and forth with somebody to try to rebut their arguments, we all know that that doesn't work. You only have to look at the comments section after any article in the newspaper to realize that it's time for the Earth to be destroyed by fire. [Joke] What you want to do is, through educational and other exchange programs, look at media laws and the free flow of information. You want to look not just at specialized education like digital literacy, but general education levels and access to it. Specifically, you want to look at levels of trust or distrust between different segments of a community, whether ethnic, linguistic or religious; whether that's Russians and Estonians, whatever it happens to be, you know and I know that any place in society where there's a potential fracture line is where disinformation activists will focus. They will put the wedge right in there between different languages, different ethnic groups, different religions, and try and drive that wedge in to separate them.

Q: Rick Ruth, you're a real radical. I don't know how such a person can exist. You believe in candor, transparency, trust, and personal relationships. I have no idea how you could have succeeded in the U.S. government with those ideals.

Here's an anecdote as a provocation. I forget if you were in the room. You mentioned James Glassman. I do remember the meeting. Maybe you were there. He said to PDODs or whatever the deputies are called— They were looking at the term "War on Terrorism." Everybody hated that term. Glassman said to us, "Well, I can't think of anything better. Can anybody here think of anything better?"

Within that room, there were maybe fifteen people who came up with about fifteen or twenty suggestions—maybe this rings a bell in your memory—so he pulled out a legal pad and he wrote them all down. Two days later, he published an op-ed in which he said, "I asked my colleagues if they could think of anything better, and they could not." Your comment? Did James Glassman not understand candor, trust, transparency, and personal relationships?

RUTH: I don't know.

Q: I know I'm never going to succeed in getting you to criticize any individual, but let's talk about the act rather than the actor.

RUTH: Well, as I said, it's always better to be for something and not against something. What I know is that, speaking of exchanges, there is nothing that the U.S. government does that is more effective in bringing about a world that is opposed to violence and extremism, fanaticism and hatred.

Q: I guess I'm thinking in terms of the pointless and meaningless tweets to try to counteract them. Was the term "War on Terrorism"— It was offensive to many. Did it matter what the U.S. government called it? There was so much discussion at the time.

RUTH: The Global War on Terrorism, the GWOT, was a terrible idea.

Q: So, we saw the under secretary not accept any other options. Might we have done better? No, that's too easy a question. How could we have done better? Who did this offend? How did this work against our interests pragmatically?

RUTH: Well, now we're veering off into the province of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. We're talking about psychology and millions of years of primate evolution. I believe that many things are far simpler than we like to let on, because if we don't complicate things, then we don't feel like we're earning our salaries. If they're easily understandable by everybody, then who are we? So, professionals always come up with jargon and lexicons, in part because they have to have precise terminology and they do indeed do difficult things. But in some cases, it's just to throw dust in people's eyes.

A lot of this comes down, in my mind, to the fact that so many world leaders are men. Men get pugnacious. Men like to counterpunch. Men like to be macho.

Now, here's a great anecdote, which comes from former President George Bush forty-three. I happened to have the privilege of seeing him be interviewed at the Sister Cities Conference a couple of years ago in Houston, Texas. Roger Mark De Souza, who was then the president of Sister Cities, interviewed him on stage. He told an anecdote about Vladimir Putin. Since the president told it in a public forum, I feel no harm telling it here. Early on in his administration, President Putin came to the White House and was in the Oval Office when President Bush's dog Barney came in. Now, I don't exactly remember what Barney is, but he's not a very imposing little dog.

Q: Floppy ears, I think.

RUTH: Yeah, he's a small dog. So, Putin sort of looked at him and said something like, "Ah, not much of a dog."

Bush said, "Who cares? Here I am, the president of the United States, talking to the president of Russia, and he doesn't like my dog. Big deal. On we go." He said, "I never thought about it again. A year or so later, I'm in Moscow. I'm at President Putin's *dacha*, his cottage out in the country, and Putin says to me, 'Would you like to see my dog?' Out bounds this enormous dog, a Russian wolfhound or something. Putin," he says, "looks at me"—this is President Bush talking—"and says, 'Bigger, stronger, faster than Barney.' I thought to myself, here's a world leader so insecure and fearful of the world around him that a year later, he has to deliberately concoct a way to insult my dog. Of all the things that we should be talking about, he's insulting my dog."

He added, "I was telling this to the Australian ambassador in Moscow later in the day, and he said, 'It's a good thing he only showed you his dog.'"

Q: Now, in defense of the X chromosome, Margaret Thatcher might have done the same.

RUTH: Of course, and lots of other people. There is no such thing as a true generalization. They're all false in some regard or other.

Q: Well, your wonderful story recalls the Russian joke about who was able to get their subordinate to jump out the window. I think you told that story in this interview. That one was funny.

RUTH: Well, to get back to your question, part of the Global War on Terrorism is a default mechanism amongst many people—and not just men, but many men, obviously—to want to be as muscular and vigorous and war-like and militaristic—all the things we attach to bold, brave leaders and chieftains. That's part of our emotional, cultural, sociological, psychological baggage. It's hard to get away from that. It's also

difficult because people are impatient. People want to see results right in front of them on the spot. They want the firing squad right now. Justice before their eyes right now! What I'm talking about is something that takes a long time. But the secret is that it always works. It always works, but you do have to be patient. We did win the cold war.

Q: Those who are muscular and macho—including women who are macho—do they see public diplomacy as feckless and effeminate?

RUTH: I don't know what words they use, but they obviously don't like the fact that it seems to have no ability for them to target directly. If they say, I want public diplomacy in a surgically precise way to make a strike on this issue, this country, this topic, that cannot really be done.

Q: A couple of the very effective military personalities in the U.S., Joseph Nye and Bob Gates, seem to really understand what you're saying. Some others don't, and that's okay, but we do have some people who visibly are able to encompass both. As—said, "You're going to have opposite ideas in your mind at the same time. That's what makes you smart."

RUTH: Secretary of Defense Mattis said, "If you don't fully fund the State Department, I have to buy more ammunition."

Q: Right. And Gates was very much, in his recent book The Exercise of Power, making that point. Nye also came from a military background. Well, let's go forward chronologically. We're still in the Pat Harrison period, and we're going through. Who's the— We have Glassman— I forget the sequence on the other side of that street.

RUTH: So, what happened is that Karen Hughes left, and then there was an interregnum in which Pat Harrison was made acting under secretary and sat across the street in the R office in the main State building. Then, there was a brief period—this is now 2003—when Margaret Tutwiler zoomed in, lasted as long as a mayfly, and zoomed out. She had been ambassador to Morocco. To give her a tip of the hat, she had the initial idea for the English Access Microscholarship Program, which has now proved hugely popular and essentially covers the world. It was her initial idea. It was ECA, and it was particularly Miller Crouch, who took the rough concept and turned it into a plausible, defensible, educationally sound program. Margaret Tutwiler was only in the job for six months, and then she went off to New York. Then, Pat Harrison was acting under secretary again.

What happened at that point is that I had an idea. It was implemented. I still like to think it was a good idea, but I have to admit that it has gone terribly wrong. That was R/PPR, the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources for R.

Q: Oh, but R/PPR is Mother Earth. R/PPR is where we get our money from, right?

RUTH: Yeah. The idea that I discussed with Pat Harrison was that the R under secretary simply did not have the horses to do the job properly. PD is too demanding, too complex an operation for a small office. This was no simple matter to accomplish. I think we may have touched on this before; the State Department, as a matter of policy and procedure, doesn't want Under Secretary's Offices to be large. They don't want under secretaries and their offices to be day-to-day, operational offices. That's the work of assistant secretaries. That's why assistant secretaries have the EX offices, the HR function, the budget function. It's so that program, policy, and execution are all united. Under secretaries are strategic, they oversee broad areas. They don't run things day-to-day.

So, the proposal that I wrote up, and which Pat Harrison presented, was to create an adjunct office for R. In the proposal, it was simply R/P—Office of Policy. The pattern, the model that I chose for selling this idea was an adjunct office in M [Management]. That offended a number of my PD colleagues who wanted me to make the argument based on "policy." But everyone at State can claim the policy mantle. Management may be considered by some to be just a support function, but try doing anything without it. By arguing that R needed an adjunct office because of the logistical and management challenges presented by PD, I was able to get approval. Many people still fail to appreciate how labor-intensive public diplomacy is, particularly the exchanges part. If you've got a Fulbright professor coming from Albania to the University of Ohio, not only do you have to have airline flights and rooms and housing, but somebody has to advertise to the student body that this class is going to be held, textbooks lined up, and much more. PD happens twenty-four hours a day. ECA, by itself, moves fifty thousand to sixty thousand people a year. So, there's a lot of work to be done.

So, I proposed an office of five people—one to do personnel, one to budget, three to do coordinating. That would be R/P. Just at that time, Margaret Tutwiler came in. She didn't like the idea, so it was tabled. When she left after six months, Pat Harrison revived the idea. The memo went to Deputy Secretary Armitage, who approved it. So, R/PPR was created. It has now, in my mind, become the poster child for mission creep. It has grown to monstrous proportions and does a bewildering number of things, all under the guise of centralized R leadership. There are wonderfully good people in R/PPR but, from my point of view, they're trapped in an illogical system that has long since lost its utility and lost its way.

Q: It all sounded good until they started doing it. I do remember one of the friction points. I was deputy in one of the area offices having to do with personnel assignments, and R/PPR said, You may not make handshakes until we allow you to do so. This really crippled the area offices.

I was able to get them to agree— I said, "If I tell you I'm going to make an offer or the area office will, I'll give you forty-eight hours to say otherwise. Is that okay?" They agreed. But it was a friction point, and I'm not sure that they ever usefully exercised that authority of being the ones to decide who gets an assignment in the field. How do you remember that part of it? Was that one of the problems?

RUTH: Not from my perspective. I was out of the Foreign Service, at that point, so the whole issue of assignments and career counseling and handshakes and air kisses and all that kind of stuff was not part of my world.

Q: Okay. But the authority to decide— The editorial authority over area offices, that was kind of a friction point.

RUTH: It's reflective of what they did everywhere. That is to say, "We are R." I think I mentioned earlier that one of my unwritten rules is that you are not your principal. Never confuse yourself with your principal. And yet, because their office symbol began with the letter R, they arrogated to themselves the power to say yay and nay over anything to do with Public Diplomacy, which is not only preposterous but has become a genuine obstacle.

Q: So, what sort of adult would bring them back in line? What would need to be done to bring R/PPR back to the R/P concept you had before it metastasized?

RUTH: You'd pretty much have to burn it down and start over.

Q: Okay. You're a radical. I never knew that.

RUTH: There are lots of things they do that need being done, but they shouldn't necessarily be done in R/PPR. For example, for years now, there's been a major global effort to rewrite the position descriptions of locally employed staff. For most people, this is eye-glazingly boring, but it's actually very important. But it should be done by the EX Office, not R/PPR.

Q: So, it's like the National Security Council. It was a good idea in 1947 when they created it, and then it went crazy and became a bureaucracy. That's very interesting. Well, at what point should we do a bookend here? We're getting to the end of Pat Harrison's presence.

RUTH: I think right about now. We're coming to the end of that administration, and we're about to transition from Patricia Harrison to Dina Habib Powell.

Q: Oh, yes. Wow, she was smart. What a character.

RUTH: Yes. To think that an ECA assistant secretary would go on to be the deputy national security advisor, as well as a power at Goldman-Sachs—

Q: For a while, I think she—

RUTH: Yes. She was one of those people who left on good terms with head held high. Again, we can get into Dina Powell next, but that's a good transition. Pat Harrison stayed for the first Bush term, and then Dina Powell came for the second Bush term.

Q: I'll just tell my Powell anecdote now because I'll forget it later. I remember in SA-44— We haven't talked about SA-44 yet, which was, you know, Third and C Street Southwest. She was running a meeting. I guess Miller Crouch was doing the paperwork. There must have been fifty people in the room, and she asked each person to state her name. I'm sure you've seen her do this. Then, after an hour of discussion, she went around the room and she said, "David, Patricia, Paul, Arnold," and she knew every person's name. She had an unbelievable memory, among other things. As for whether she had the wisdom to go on with those talents, we'll get into that next time.

RUTH: Alright. So, we're looking at calendars, right?

Q: Yes, we're going to put a marker here. It's January 2, 2021, with Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman.

This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. It is January 6, 2021. When we last talked, the name Dina Powell had come up. Are we ready to talk about—?

RUTH: We are ready to talk about Dina Habib Powell.

Q: Is that the word for "dear" in Arabic?

RUTH: It is, yes, it's the masculine form. But it's also a name, of course. It's also a surname.

Q: Okay. Like Philip Habib. Should we start with your remembrance of Dina Powell's arrival?

RUTH: Yes. We're back now into the second George Bush term. That is when Patricia Harrison was replaced by Dina Powell. At roughly the same time, Karen Hughes became the under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs. That made her probably or certainly the closest under secretary or USIA director to the president since Reagan-Wick. She was very close to President Bush.

I'm trying to think back on those couple of years, because they each stuck around a couple of years. It was interesting on the evaluation side. At that point, we did have an Evaluation Office in ECA, and there was one in R, as well. Karen Hughes asked me to head up both of them. Her thought was, "I just want one belly button to push. It should be yours." In the same way as we discussed last time, she asked me on a crash basis to come up with this Mission Activity Tracker.

Typically, one of the things that we set in motion at the very outset of the Evaluation Office in ECA was that we were not the Inspector General. We were not there to be like Caesar in the arena giving thumbs up and thumbs down to the viability and quality of programs. There was, of course, a lot of legitimate, understandable concern on the part of program managers that that's exactly what evaluators would be. Somebody would take the evaluation function and use it as a cudgel to beat people with, or it would simply be staffed by wonky people who had no understanding whatsoever of the reality of foreign policy and foreign affairs around the world. They would come up with some abstruse numbers and say, Your program doesn't deserve to be funded anymore, or vice versa.

We wanted to make sure that evaluation was a full bureau function, that everybody participated, and that everybody was on board with what we did. There was the all-important proviso that the chips would fall where they may. We would go to the deputy assistant secretaries, and we would ask them, What would you like to see evaluated? Which programs have not been evaluated? Which programs are growing rapidly in funding? Which programs are spreading most rapidly around the world? For example, there was the rapid spread of English Access Micro Scholarships. There was the rapid spread of FLEX and YES. What should we be looking at, and what do you want to learn? What would you, as the senior manager responsible for these programs, want to find out?

We would take all that on board, again with the proviso that the final decisions would all be made by the Evaluation Office, and the final results, once the evaluation was carried out, would be again the chips falling where they may. All the long-term evaluations were done by independent contractors. We didn't do them in house. We went to the Stanford Research Institute or other outside entities on contract, and they bid on who could do the kind of long-term, in-depth evaluation we were looking for. We wanted to add that external independence and credibility.

Now, by and large, no evaluation ever resulted in the discontinuation of a program, with one important exception. That was a product, really, not a program. There was a magazine, for a while, published by the Bureau of International Information Programs, called *Hi Magazine.* It was an Arabic-language magazine, and it was very popular in NEA and the Arab world. It had a very professional staff. They won a number of private design awards and so forth. Karen Hughes began to wonder, however, if *Hi* was worth the candle. It was about five million dollars, as I recall, and she wanted to know what she was getting for her money because you always need money for something, and there were a lot of priorities.

So, she asked us to do an evaluation of it, which we did. What we discovered was kind of curious. First of all, it was a very high-quality publication, as I mentioned. It had good writing, good production values. It had won some outside awards. PAOs and CAOs, IOs, loved it. It was a deliverable. It was something they could take with them to schools, to universities, to youth clubs, to all the kinds of outreach they did in Arabic-speaking countries. Not only was it a deliverable—a leave-behind, if you will— I'm not just

calling on you, shaking hands, having tea, and leaving, but here's *Hi Magazine,* and look, it's in Arabic. The American government cares. It's the same discussion you and I had earlier about how sad it was when our other foreign-language publications were turned off, like *America* magazine.

But once you went past that initial level of support from the embassy and the Public Affairs staff there and said, Okay, but who actually reads it? When you drop it off at the school or the university or the youth center, who then takes it? What do they read? Which articles do they care about or have impact? What do they think about what they read? Did it make any difference to them? Did they learn anything new or different that they didn't know? It was all those usual kinds of evaluation questions, and there was simply no answer to them from anybody anywhere. People were just happy to have it, certain that it must be doing some good.

I have no doubt, personally and professionally, that it was doing good. But no one could document it to the under secretary's satisfaction. No one could show any outcome, any measurable difference that we made with any audience or even any individual because of that publication. So Karen Hughes pulled the plug on it. It was a bitter moment for a lot of IIP, particularly those associated with *Hi Magazine,* which found the decision short-sighted. But it is the only case I'm aware of where you could specifically say that a Public Diplomacy program or product was terminated because of evaluation.

What we often have with exchange programs are modifications and improvements based on the results of our evaluations. So, program managers can take that information, modify the program, and make it better.

Q: So, that raises the question of second and third-level constituents. The constituency that was in favor of Hi Magazine, you said, was PAOs and CAOs. But, admittedly, it's very difficult to know or evaluate the usage of the local recipient. Wasn't that also the case with America and Topic and the others? How can you— You said these were private contractors. Were they able to establish any contact, at least, with the potential readers?

RUTH: The questions would be entirely fair to ask of any of the magazines, but the boss was different, and the times were different. Nobody questioned what it cost to produce *America Illustrated,* because you were penetrating the closed society of the Soviet Union. Everything made sense. In fact, people were less interested in evaluation when they were faced with the global godless Communist menace. You just threw everything you had into the fray.

This was a more strategic, surgical kind of question and product. The boss, the under secretary, asked the question.

Q: Perfectly legitimate. Looking back, of course, we know that five million dollars was a lot of money back then. It is not now. The IIP staff, you said, were disappointed and

maybe demoralized. Do you have any idea how many people were actually working directly on Hi Magazine?

RUTH: I do not. There was a sizable private sector contract contingent because we did not have the in-house capacity to produce that kind of glossy publication.

Q: Oh, I see. So, a disappointing moment for IIP. Did IIP already feel that they were on a downward trajectory, or is that a more recent thing?

RUTH: It's interesting. You know, to go back to the merger, Dan— I don't know what your recollection is, but the fact of the matter is that the Bureau of Information, the old Bureau of Programs, for whatever combination of reasons, had in it more firebrands, if you will, than ECA. They had more unionizers, more anarcho-syndicalists, more rabble rousers.

Q: We had anarcho-syndicalists in the USG? Oh my gosh.

RUTH: In fact, I remember at one point in the merger process, a delegation from IIP came to see me to say they would feel better and resist less the idea of merging into the State Department if they didn't have to have security clearances. That, of course, was dead on arrival. There's no way you can be a State Department employee and not have a security clearance. But that's the kind of issue they were grappling with.

IIP has always felt more put upon than other parts of Public Diplomacy, in part because they never had the legislative or other kind of constituency that other parts of Public Diplomacy had. No one ever questioned the need for Public Affairs. You have to have the spokesperson. You've got to get the word out. Done. Nobody ever questions that. Nobody ever questioned the need for ECA in those days, either. They have more recently. But again, ECA had enabling legislation. It had the Fulbright-Hays Act, which said, "There is established a Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs."

IIP, or the Bureau of Information, was a USIA creation and a State Department creation. It had no enabling legislation. That's one reason that IIP could be merged into PA with relatively less difficulty than one might have anticipated because Congress only had to say it was okay. It wasn't something that had to be legislated. So, the people in IIP always felt a little bit aggrieved, if you will. They did fabulous and necessary work, but they always felt a little bit orphaned. Their boss was never an assistant secretary. The coordinator for IIP was what the State Department, in its wonderful language-making, calls an assistant secretary-equivalent. But it was not a presidentially-nominated, Senate-confirmed assistant secretary like you had in ECA.

Q: Yeah. We used to call them ASEs.

RUTH: Yeah. So, they always had a little bit of an issue there.

Q: This is kind of ironic, because in the '80s and '90s, I think P had the more prestigious aura above ECA, even though, as you said, there was no written recognition of that. But if you were an ambitious FSO, you went to P, not to ECA.

RUTH: Yes. The head of the Bureau of Programs was always considered, in a way, one of the top four or five people in the entire USIA. You'd have the deputy director, the director, the counselor, and probably the head of the Bureau of Programs.

Q: Not to get too esoteric, but maybe one of the reasons for this reversal is the Internet. P before the Internet was providing the information that journalists and parliamentarians and ministries needed through the wireless file and the Washington file. Then, when that was no longer needed, suddenly the raison d'être [reason to exist] of P was in question, I guess. Does that sound right?

RUTH: That's exactly right. That's why the Bureau of Programs was transformed into the Bureau of Information. It was in part to take advantage of the Internet, but in part because other parts of the Bureau of Programs were falling away in the budget cuts. This was a chance to catch the wave, if you will, of the future. That might have worked well had USIA stayed independent. There was a tremendous effort— Barry Fulton, of course, was the first associate director of the Bureau of Information, I believe. He did marvelous work. He did the intellectual work, as well as the hard bureaucratic, organizational work. They won an Al Gore Reinvention hammer.

Q: I remember it on the sixth floor by the elevators.

RUTH: There you go. Good memory. They did a lot of innovative things like flattening their bureaucracy and having rotating teams rather than siloed offices. But all of that good work ran into the bureaucratic equivalent of a bridge abutment at freeway speed with the State Department merger. The State Department wasn't interested in any of that foolishness.

Q: Though I was not a part of it, I do remember people in IIP with the hammer on the sixth floor. They were quite demoralized. They felt that they were not being consulted. There was total quality management, which sort of made experience and non-experience equal. That seemed to be very hurtful to the more experienced people. So, there was a lot of distress, I remember, but that's a subjective thing.

RUTH: No, that's right.

Q: You mentioned working with DASes. You mean the DASes of the area bureaus, right?

RUTH: Yes.

Q: So, in doing that— We talked earlier about the mixture of DASes. Some were political cone; some were PD cone. How was it working with—? Are there five bureaus? There's

AF [Bureau of African Affairs], NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs], EUR [Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs], EAP [Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs], and WHA [Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs]. How was it, working with them individually and collectively? Was it routinized in any way, or was it conversational?

RUTH: Six. There's also a Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. Overall, the nature of the relationship depended on the level you were at. At the working level, at the desk officer level in the regional bureaus and at the program officer level in ECA, they talked to each other all the time. It was a network of conversations that never stopped. As we talked about earlier, the challenges are very labor-intensive, very fact-specific. Again, there are sixty thousand people moving around the world. Every single participant is a new individual and deserves to have a full and satisfactory program. It doesn't matter a hoot how happy the last participant was from Country X, the next participant from there is a different person and must have an equally satisfactory experience. Just one of those sixty thousand participants could be a fifteen-year-old woman from Egypt living in a small town in Kansas for a year. You have to make sure she's fine that whole year long and not having trouble in school, not having trouble at home. All those things. So, we were always talking—and still are, to this day. As you and I speak, our colleagues today are at their desks, still talking about all of these programs and participants.

But at the senior level, it was, as often it is in these situations, very personality-driven. Under secretaries of state, because they have all been communications people, have by and large not been particularly interested in ECA. Some of them have even been hostile. All they cared about was information, and from their perspective ECA had way too many people and way too much money for doing stuff that they didn't care about. They, on the other hand, had way too little money and way too few people doing the stuff they thought really mattered. So, sometimes there were ECA assistant secretaries that might see the under secretary every couple of weeks when there was a staff meeting, and that was about it. We just went our way. Others, of course, took a more hands-on role, so that was quite variable. But at the working level, it always went very well.

The proof of that is in the quality and the success of the programs. We were talking earlier about the IV program. It's the field that picks the IVs. We worked with the field to decide on the topics, what's necessary, what's useful. We set up the programs, which have proved to be successful throughout the United States. But the field, the embassies, they pick the individuals. So, it's entirely symbiotic. That cooperation has worked tremendously well. Same for the youth program, Fulbright, all of them. The quality of the program shows that we talk and work together all the time. But at the senior level, where it's more political, more bureaucratic, more personality-driven, there were ups and downs, of course.

Q: You mentioned budget cuts a moment ago. Let's trace that. They became more and more painful. Can you remember when they began, what the logic was? Were there arguments about better-investing USG funds in different sectors?

RUTH: There were two times, if we're talking about ECA. We've already gone through the USIA death march of the '90s, and we're well into the State Department. In terms of budget cuts, ECA in particular and Public Diplomacy in general did very well through all these years. It was not until the Trump administration that OMB proposed to abolish the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, root and branch.

Q: Did you say OMB? I thought it was the secretary of state who proposed it.

RUTH: Secretary Tillerson had a redesign proposal for the entire State Department, which would have cut the entire State Department by about a third and would have made similar cuts in ECA, but it was the first budget of the Trump administration out of OMB that proposed to abolish ECA entirely.

Q: And we know that we had friendly supporters on the Hill from both political parties to prevent that from happening. Was that due to the good work of the H Bureau [Bureau of Legislative Affairs], or was it just a long-standing belief on the Hill that these things were of value?

RUTH: Much more the latter. I would have to say that this was not an issue in which H played any role at all. This was much more of a high-stakes political struggle. You are exactly right that probably the single-greatest advantage that ECA had was the fact that it had years and years—decades—of strong, bipartisan, bicameral support for its programs. Obviously, it needs not be overstated that senators and representatives come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes and are their own bosses.

However those individuals in Congress define patriotism and love of country, they all love America. Almost all of them, regardless of where they are on the political spectrum, believe that exchanges show America putting its best foot forward and that these programs reflect American values around the world. That's a positive thing. So, we have support from Republicans, Democrats, House, Senate, left, right, liberal, conservative. A lot of other things had to happen as well, but that's the background against which ECA successfully staved off abolition and deep cuts.

Q: Are we on thin ice if we assume that this will always be the case? Year after year, we had good luck on the Hill. Was it luck? Was there some institutional solidity there, or was it just good luck, year after year?

RUTH: No, it certainly wasn't good luck. It was hard work. The generalized support for ECA was certainly the backdrop against which everything else took place. You also can look at the number of ECA programs that are named after former members of Congress. There's not just the august Senator Fulbright. There's a Muskie Program and a Mansfield Program and a Kennedy Lugar Program. So it goes. There are now McCain Programs.

It is, on the one hand, considered a great honor at ECA that distinguished public servants would think that naming one of our programs after a distinguished colleague is a fitting

way to recognize that colleague for a lifetime of service. We're delighted to serve that purpose. Some members of Congress would continue to meet with participants even after they retired from Congress. A highlight of the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study program for many years was a meeting on the Hill with the always gracious Senator Richard Lugar.

Q: That's pretty smart. This goes back to Fulbright, of course, but there's also Humphrey and you mentioned others. Was this a kind of ornate, organic knowledge in ECA, or did people discuss this in terms of strategy?

RUTH: Those were pretty sensitive, close-hold kinds of conversations, involving the relevant congressional offices. Now, as you and I speak, the Congress of the United States is certifying the electoral college vote for President Joseph Biden. ECA now has three different programs named after Senator McCain. But we didn't do any publicity rollout. It was deemed too sensitive, given the White House's view of Senator McCain.

Q: Oh. No comment. The animus of the White House against this decent man— Anyway. So, as you say, the electoral college outcome—not the vote, but the outcome—is supposed to be confirmed today, but we know there will be disruptions. As of 1:30, I don't think we actually know. It may be delayed. It probably will not be—

RUTH: It could go into the evening. But like the motion of a glacier, it is slow but inexorable.

Q: Until you get global warming. Anyway!

RUTH: I like your analogy. If you're keeping a chronological thread of this, we have now jumped far ahead of Dina Powell.

Q: Oh, that's fine. This is a crucial, abiding challenge, which is to get the funding needed to run these wonderful programs while understanding that the only way to ensure that is to have evaluations, which is what you did.

RUTH: Exactly. We touched on this briefly last time. These are all pillars that support the ECA Fulbright-Hays mandate. So, part of the rationale for creating the Alumni Office was so that we could demonstrate return on investment. We could say, look at Anwar Sadat, Indira Gandhi, Tony Blair. F.W. de Klerk. The first female president of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri. At one point, all three leaders of the Baltic states.

We do this because we're proud of it, but we also do this with an eye to Congress, to say that this is a return on investment. That's why we went so deeply into the culture of measurement with our own Evaluation Office. People are always skeptical. What do you mean you brought a high school student over here? You brought a seventeen-year-old kid from Pakistan over. So what? What happened? How did the world change?

Well, we want to say, "Let me show you. Here's how it changed. I can show you exactly." We were able to do that. So, these things reinforce each other. Plus, it's one of the reasons that ECA had its own congressional liaison person. That was me. It still has one. Now that I've gone, they have somebody else, because it's institutionally sensible.

You had one in ECA because, again, Congress pays attention to ECA. It's what I call the trifecta. First of all, there's enabling legislation, as we discussed earlier, where Congress declared that there shall be a Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Second, they gave ECA an independent appropriation. It's not the only such bureau in the department, but it's one of the bureaus that has an independent appropriation. Congress was very clear. They understood, all the way back to Senator Fulbright's time, that the motto of the State Department is, "The urgent before the important." If you let a secretary of state get away with it—it doesn't matter who it is, what party, or anything else—the crisis of the year would prompt them to take all the resources from everywhere that they could and throw them at the crisis. That would be the end of exchanges. You can't stop Fulbright for an entire year and then start it up again the next year. You can't do that. So, that independent appropriation was also meant to be a firewall from the rest of the department.

Then, thirdly, the ECA appropriation is what's called "no-year money." Most State Department funding, as you know, is for one year or two years. ECA's funding has to be approved every year by Congress, of course. They have to say, Yeah, okay, keep doing what you're doing, but the money can be carried over with their approval. We can carry it over year after year.

So, ECA has a very different rhythm and a very different structure, which Congress set up quite deliberately and purposefully, knowing that, as my good colleague David Plack always says, "We have to keep dancing like the music will never stop." Otherwise, exchanges don't work.

Q: Does "no year money" assure continuation during continuing resolutions? Is that one of the advantages?

RUTH: Yes, but they're two separate things. A continuing resolution, as we're under right now and have been under at the start of every fiscal year for the last twenty years, I think, just keeps the budget going without allowing for any new programming or new programs. The "no year" money means that each year, when we submit our budget to Congress, we have a separate line item in the budget that says, "We're carrying over thirty million dollars from last year to this year." We have to explain why we're doing it, and they have to say, Yeah, that's fine, go ahead.

For example, if we had funding for a youth initiative with Israeli and Palestinian sports teams, but there was too much unrest in that part of the world for us to carry out the program during that fiscal year, we would say to Congress, We've still got the money for

that program. We'll do it next year, as soon as the situation makes it feasible. They can allow it. We retain the money not as a slush fund, but rather, we carry over the money for its stated original purpose that just couldn't be carried out for some reason during that particular fiscal year.

Q: Were there any staffers, at the time, who stood out as being very understanding and skillful at helping ECA with this?

RUTH: Actually, it was interesting. We worked almost exclusively with the appropriators. Every bureau in the State Department has four oversight committees, authorizers and appropriators, House and Senate. But as you may know, the State Department hasn't had an authorization bill, I think, in twenty years. It almost had one this past year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, but it was stripped out.

Q: By the White House.

RUTH: Yes. So, there hasn't been an authorization. So much of the action has defaulted to the appropriations committees. I worked most closely with the staff of the House and Senate appropriations committees, and I would give them all high marks, majority and minority. They liked what we did. They appreciated what we did. They supported it. When the first OMB proposal came out to, again, abolish— When I say "abolish" ECA, they actually had language in their proposed budget that said that any residual funds from canceling programs would be used to pay the final salaries of all the employees as you let them go. Of course, that's not even legal under the Civil Service system, but that's how hard over they were on abolishing ECA as simply unnecessary.

Q: Very generously, you say "they." I believe it was Rex Tillerson.

RUTH: Well actually, no, this came out of OMB. The director of OMB at that time was Mick Mulvaney. Rex Tillerson was interested in reducing ECA, but it was OMB that wanted to abolish it.

Q: Okay. That's an important detail. Did you ever meet with Paul—? He was Senate Foreign Relations, not Appropriations, but he was a great friend.

RUTH: In those days, we worked a lot with Paul, but in more recent times, it was Senate and House Appropriations staff.

You know, obviously, like any other profession or activity, working with the Hill is both a skill and an art. They have their prerogatives, and they have their ways of doing business, which you have to know and respect. But for the most part, they're just folks. They like to know what's going on. They like to be kept informed, as we all do. They want you to have a relationship with them that goes beyond just calling them when you're in trouble or need money.

It's an interesting balance, because if you give them information when you have it early on, then they may be dissatisfied that you don't have more. On the other hand, they don't want to read about it in the newspaper. They want to hear it from you first, because that's respectful and that's the way the game is played. So, you're always going back and forth on that, and that's why we used to joke that any time you meet with Hill staffers, the first question from them is always, "How have you disappointed us lately?"

But in fact, I found during my tenure that they were extremely easy to work with. It doesn't mean they weren't tough. It doesn't mean they didn't ask tough questions and weren't demanding, but they were professional and straightforward. They'd tell you what they wanted and needed. You could work with them. They weren't up to any games. I would note that after OMB proposed to abolish ECA, ECA's budget actually went up every single year.

Q: I remember with great pleasure. This gets a bit wonky, but H, traditionally, likes to keep relations with the Hill to itself. Did you have some kind of blanket clearance to do this? Did they accept what you were doing easily?

RUTH: I'll say no. Since I'm retired and you're retired and who knows when they'll read this. We always kept H in the loop, and H was a necessary part of the process in all of our grant proposals and so forth that went to the Hill and letters back and forth. That all went through H. But there were times when Congress needed information faster than you could get it to them if you went through H.

One of the things that I tried to make a hallmark of ECA's relationship with the Hill was responsiveness. It wasn't that we rolled over for them, but if a member of Congress' office called, we would respond as quickly and fully as possible. Sometimes it was a constituent request, like "Why didn't my constituent get a Fulbright?" or "My constituent wants to bid on a cultural program. I've got a great dance group in my district. Why can't they ever get a grant?" But then it was also the more serious stuff about the budget and policy and programs.

Everybody knew that in ECA, if you got a question from the Hill, you had to refer it to me. It was understood that I was the congressional liaison. That was part of my job description. I always tried to make sure that we got back to them as quickly as possible, even if only to tell them we had to work a little bit longer on getting the answer. But you always answered instantaneously.

Q: Ah. Very good principle, which is decaying, these days. One always wants an email. I'm dealing with something right now that should have been done by someone else six weeks ago, and it's almost too late for this thing to be done. We who are more steeped in past procedures expect that an answer should come within forty-eight hours of any email, but that seems to be falling apart now.

RUTH: Well, I'm a big believer in interim responses. You have to at least acknowledge that you got it, you cared about it, you were on it, and you tried to get an answer. We also used a lot of phone calls. So, if we got a request, I'd say, "If it's alright with you," to whomever the staffer was, "I'll get the two or three people who are working on this, and we'll do a phone call as quick as possible, rather than—" Phone calls also obviated the need for drafting and clearances.

Now, a lot of those things left H out in the moment. We always informed them and were sure to tell them after the fact, but lots of times, the exchanges would take place directly within ECA and the Hill staff to get the job done.

Q: Maybe H was a bit grumpy, but I can't think of a better way to do it than what you did. They didn't have the expertise to answer specific questions about ECA, did they?

RUTH: Sure. H can't tell them why somebody did or did not get a Fulbright grant. But, you know, H was never particularly grumpy. We had a lot of good people rotate through in H. A lot of them were Foreign Service officers.

Going back to Henry Catto, one of my favorite USIA directors, he used to say in these kinds of situations, "Are there criminal penalties?" It's like, what was anybody going to do to me? At that point in my career, what was anybody going to do to me except get mad at me? There were no penalties. I always knew—and this may sound fantastically self-serving—that I was never up to anything nefarious. I was never bad mouthing anybody. I was never undercutting anybody's program. I was never trying to do anybody wrong. I was just trying to get the job done to the best of my ability for the preservation of what I truly believe are invaluable programs for our country.

If that meant I had to get on the phone call with some staffers and give them information right there on the spot, and talk to them and argue with them and remonstrate with them or give them ammo, as they like to say, to argue with their colleagues who were less like-minded— If I had to do that without H and bring in H later, I was going to do that. There was no way I was not going to do that.

Q: That makes perfect sense. So, advice to twenty-year-old people who are right now interested in this type of career: Number one, always answer an email, even if it's an interim response. And secondly—tell me if I'm right or not—there's the whole notion of the thing called "job." Jobs don't exist the way they used to. They say, Invent your own career. I'm telling people that it may be boring, but if you are able to do monitoring and evaluation, you will have a job. Am I correct in saying that?

RUTH: Yeah, you're correct.

Q: Just wanted to check. M and E, as we call it, is increasingly a necessary part of the world. It's not much fun, but it's so vital, and it does make sense for the donor or provider to know what they're getting. They are responsible to the people, whoever that is.

RUTH: Amen.

Q: Okay. So, the trifecta. Enabling legislation, ECA's independent appropriations and firewall, and this brilliant thing called "no-year money." Did that go way back in history, the no-year money idea?

RUTH: That goes way back. The technical term for no-year money is "available until expended."

Q: Like me! That's what I am.

RUTH: Very soon to be expended.

Q: I love it. Let's go— We got a little bit away from the chronology now. We were talking about Dina Powell. This takes us— It's been a bit zigzagged here. So, Dina Powell—

RUTH: Her appointment was big news in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, where her family was from. That was very exciting. Dina was an excellent assistant secretary. She was a little bit different than most other assistant secretaries of ECA, in that it was always clear she had bigger plans. Some ECA assistant secretaries looked upon the job as the culminating job of their careers.

It was clear that that was not the case for Dina Powell. She was a serious person who had serious plans. It does not mean for a moment that she neglected anything about ECA. She was a very good assistant secretary, but one only needs to look at her subsequent career. No one would have ever anticipated that an ECA assistant secretary would be deputy national security advisor to the president, and then go on to be a major figure at Goldman Sachs.

If Dina Powell was in charge of something, you didn't mess with it. She was the boss, and you didn't mess with ECA when she was the boss of it. That was a slightly different kind of mindset—not a better or worse one, just a different one—than a lot of other ECA assistant secretaries, who just had different personalities. So, she was very good.

An example of how she thought in a larger sense was she had herself made, formally, deputy under secretary. There's generally no such thing as deputy under secretaries, but she was able to arrange it. She instituted a marvelous program with the overly long name of the Fortune State Department Global Women's Mentoring Program. It's a marvelous program that has brought Fortune's top women leaders together with aspiring and successful business women from around the world for mentoring and so forth. It's still going on today, and still a very good program.

We were having programs with Iran during her tenure. We had archery teams come over. We had wrestling teams come and go. We were having IV and a little bit of some of our

academic programs, too, in those days. That took some skillful foreign policy chops. But, again, she was there for about two years. That was pretty much contiguous with Karen Hughes. I don't think I ever traveled anywhere with Dina Powell. I didn't have as close a relationship with her. I had a good relationship. She was a good boss, but not quite as close as with some of her predecessors and successors.

Q: You mention Iran, which is so intriguing because we don't have an embassy there. Greg Sullivan, you probably know him, kept these things going. They weren't clandestine, but they were below the radar, weren't they? I think they were so innovative and creative that they merit a bit of comment, if you have any. It was quite remarkable, and I guess they still are. I guess they go to Istanbul to get their visas or something like that.

RUTH: Or to the Gulf—

Q: It's remarkable. I don't like this low footprint stuff because there's no such thing as a low footprint. We have carried on these exchanges. We have not tried to hide it. And yet, imagine the difficulty. Any comment about the Iran exchanges?

RUTH: Well, I mean, I was excited they were doing them. To take a giant step backwards, I would say that if there was an Academy Award for the longest-running stupid U.S. foreign policy, it would be a tossup between Cuba and Iran.

Q: Agreed.

RUTH: Our public diplomacy policies with both of those countries has been utterly idiotic, administration after administration, decade after decade. I don't know how we got into the position where we think that having an American embassy in another country is some kind of big effing honor for them. We need to make these decisions in America's self-interest. A few discussions ago, Dan, we were talking about Reagan-Gorbachev summits. This was high drama. This was the best stuff in the world. Reagan and Gorbachev in Vienna and Iceland and Moscow. And yet they had thousands of nuclear-tipped missiles pointed at us.

Then, because Iran has X amount of enriched uranium, we can't even have an embassy. This is bullshit. Ditto for Cuba. If we had gotten over ourselves and started an embassy in Iran at any point—twenty years ago, fifteen years ago, ten years ago—and had ECA-style programs, as well as all other embassy activities, imagine the number of Iranians that we could talk to, the channels of communication we would have in academia, in business, in parliament, in law, in culture, in women's organizations, in youth organizations, in journalism. We would have people to talk to. We wouldn't just be tossing verbal bombs back and forth.

And yet, we just won't do it. So, long story short—or long story long—I was a huge fan of these kinds of initial, low-key programs. I mean, come on, it was wrestling. We're talking about wrestling, archery, soccer, these kinds of things. We tried to do endangered

species, AIDS [acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome] prevention. We had some IV programs going, a few scholarly programs. Eventually, they all had to stop, of course, for a variety of reasons. It was an interesting time while it was happening.

Q: You won't find any argument from me on that. The policy, which they call maximum pressure, what has it done? It's gotten Iran this week to declare a 20 percent increase in their enrichment program. Our current secretary of state is outraged that they are defying the agreement that we left. We dumped the agreement, so why should they— Anyway, it really doesn't make much sense. President Obama, of course, did bring an embassy to Havana, very emotionally using the same marines who had taken the flag down. It was— We don't like many things that that regime does, but there are plenty of regimes that are detestable. Communication is always the right thing, I believe.

RUTH: If we can have an embassy in China, we can have one in Teheran.

Q: Good point. Absolutely. Well, we won't speculate. We have fantasies of what a new administration might do with or with the broken relations with Cuba. The new president will have many things on the list and Covid will be at the top of it. So, Dina Powell, two years. You were still in SA-44, I think, as we used to call it.

RUTH: We were in SA-44. That's correct. We were about to move along to Goli Ameri.

Q: Oh, let's do that. By the way, when did ECA move over to the pharmacy building?

RUTH: It must have been around 2012 or something like that. So, we were still in SA-44. It's interesting that Dina Habib Powell, an Arab-American, was followed by Goli Ameri, an Iranian-American. In fact, Goli was born and raised in Tehran and came to the United States to go to Stanford as a student, and then was caught here by the Khomeini Revolution. Her family suffered, and she stayed here and made and is still making a very successful life here.

The driving issue—for me, at least—while Goli was assistant secretary was all about Iraq. We had invaded Iraq in 2003, so she came on board in early 2008, as we were approaching the fifth anniversary of the American invasion. She called me and Maria Kouroupas, who was the head of the Cultural Heritage Center, into her office to talk about the range of programs the CHC had with Iraq. It wasn't terribly robust, but there were some. She said, "Look, for the fifth anniversary coming up in 2008, we've got to up our game. We've got to do more. So, put your thinking caps on and figure out what we can do."

It was an example that we don't see a lot of, where the boss calls people in and says, "Here's the long-term goal I want. You tell me how to do it. Let's see what you come up with." One of the mistakes that a lot of bosses make is that they get overly specific. You can tell me if you agree or disagree, Dan. Usually, if the White House or Congress or the secretary of state says to whatever office you're in, Here's what I want to accomplish, and

lets you figure out how to do it, then there's usually ten different ways you can do everything. But if they say, I want you to do it, and you have to do it by this date with this money in this way with these people, then you're doomed.

Q: Totally agree.

RUTH: So, she just said, "We need to do more." So, we came up with the Iraq Cultural Heritage Initiative. It was a team effort and I must tell you, in all humbleness, it was a thing of beauty over the next few years.

First of all, we had to have money. You always have to have money. One of the things I learned in the government, early on, was that there's always money. It's just a question of who gets it. So if anybody ever says, "This would be a great program, but there's no money," the answer is, "Wrong." There is money. While they're telling you that they don't have five million dollars for what you want, they're spending a trillion dollars on the border wall or whatever else it might be. Plus, we all know those statistics. At one point—not today, perhaps, but at one point—the Department of Defense had more full-time musicians on its payroll than the State Department had Foreign Service officers. There's always money. It's a question of who gets that money.

So, we began looking, me and Maria and John Russell, who I mentioned before was a professional archaeologist with a Middle East specialty at MassArt. Then, one day, I spoke to a budget officer connected to Iraq. There was a lot of money going into Iraq, so there were entire offices that did nothing except have budget officers and admin officers managing the flow of the money. I talked to this guy and said, "I'm looking for moolah."

He mentioned a fund. I hope I don't get it wrong. It was something innocuous like the Trade Promotion Fund or something like that. He said, "It's about forty-something million dollars, and Congress has already authorized it and appropriated it." The interesting thing about it is that they put it at the discretion of the American ambassador in Baghdad. The ambassador did not have to come back to Congress or to Washington at all to ask for approval on how to spend those funds.

My antennae began quivering furiously. So, John Russell and I—as quick as we could—got on a plane and flew to Baghdad. We made an appointment with then-Ambassador Ryan Crocker—one of my heroes. We made an appointment to see him, and we made an appointment to see the budget officer in the financial section of the embassy who was handling that particular fund. Before we left Washington, we put together what we called, quite accurately—the Dream Team. It was the likes of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, the University of Delaware's Archaeology and Restoration Division, and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

We flew out to Baghdad. First of all, a sidebar note that every Foreign Service officer or international traveler will understand: this meeting we were going to have with Ambassador Crocker was, of course, a big deal. So, naturally, this was the flight where

they lost my luggage. Instead of sending it to Amman—everybody going to Iraq had to go to Amman first and then fly in from there—they sent it to Asmara. So, all my suits and ties went to Asmara, and I had to see Ambassador Crocker in jeans and tennis shoes. Fortunately, he could give a shit. He was all substance. I also didn't know that he was a personal aficionado of Middle Eastern history.

So, we went in to see him, and we made this pitch for thirteen million dollars, which we thought was a bodacious number and about a fourth of the whole fund. We would use it for a variety of purposes, for security and anti-looting and restoration in Baghdad and their museum and ancient Babylon and a number of different things. He liked it. He liked it so much that he instructed his staff that we were to get those thirteen million dollars off the top, and everybody else could compete for the rest of it.

I've never had anything like this happen before. We went straight to see the budget officer. By the time we got to the building where he was located, he'd already heard the news and was at his keyboard, typing up the grant document.

In the end, we did a great deal of restoration work on the Baghdad National Museum. Other countries were doing good work as well, the Italians in particular, but what we did is we funded the back-room operations. All the other countries wanted to fund the display cases that people would see when they came in. We funded heating and air conditioning and ventilation. We restored the study rooms where the objects were stored that weren't on display. We furnished the places where the archaeologists would actually work on restoration and repair of damaged objects. We put in the computer system. We put in desks and chairs—the things that make a museum work but aren't sexy. Nobody wants to donate for these backroom kinds of things. We worked on the roof where it leaked. That kind of absolutely necessary stuff.

We launched, in conjunction with the World Monuments Fund, the first-ever professional site survey of ancient Babylon. Babylon's been around a long time, but there had never been a professional site survey where they actually tried to define the precise borders of ancient Babylon to keep it from being encroached upon by palm tree growers and that kind of thing. It was also to see what had been disturbed by Saddam Hussein and his grandiose palace building and stuff like that.

Later, we managed to have the first-ever event by an American ambassador outside the Green Zone in Baghdad. Ryan Crocker and Goli Ameri, who had traveled to Baghdad for this purpose, had a joint press conference at the Baghdad National Museum to talk about some of the multinational restoration activities. On the Washington side, First Lady Laura Bush came to an event we arranged at the Iraqi embassy.

In one of the most long-term beneficial things, we, working again with the Dream Team and other organizations, put together an institute in Erbil for Iraqi conservation. I think it was called the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage. The Kurdish government gave us, free of charge, a large, centrally-located building and

dormitory space. This was right in the heart of old Erbil, just below the Citadel, which is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the entire world. We accepted aspiring and practicing archaeologists to learn how to study, repair, and preserve antiquities. It was the only entity of its kind in the region. All of these things came out of Goli Ameri calling us in and kicking our butts, if you will, and saying, "Come on, do more."

Q: Right. You were not resistant in the least, I think. That's a wonderful idea. That's great.

RUTH: That was in addition to the lots of other things that went on. We trained U.S. customs officials on how to recognize antiquities. We put out so-called Red Lists, which were done with the World Council of Museums. They were glossy publications that showed what are the kinds of objects that are most commonly being looted. What should you look for? What's being interdicted?

Q: It was partly the looting that inspired this and made it necessary. I believe something like more than half the objects in that museum were stolen, something like that.

RUTH: I don't know percentages, but yes, thousands of objects were looted. It was interesting. The late director of the museum, Donny George, who was a Christian Iraqi and a very fine individual— I mention only that he was a Christian Iraqi because it was unusual for someone in that society under Saddam Hussein to have a position of importance and prominence who wasn't Muslim. He was once asked about the looting of the museum, and he said that part of the problem was that after years and years under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, everyday Iraqis assumed that the museum was just like one of his palaces. It was just one of the boss's toys. It wasn't something that they felt any national pride in. It wasn't part of their heritage. When he was gone, some saw an opportunity to smash and grab.

Q: So, Ryan Crocker stands out as someone with the authority and the understanding to preserve things that had been trashed in previous years. I can't help but notice that Goli Ameri came in '08, which was the year of the election. Did she last into the Obama administration?

RUTH: She left on Inauguration Day of 2009.

Q: So, she had less than a year, I guess?

RUTH: She had less than a year, yes.

Q: Okay. Kind of a pity when people get started and— That's the pluralistic democratic system: painful but necessary. Would she have wanted— She probably would have wanted to stay on.

RUTH: She would have been happy to stay. She and I had a great trip to Ctesiphon. I went to Iraq with most of the ECA assistant secretaries. We went down to see the Great

Arch of Ctesiphon on the lower Tigris. It was an antique capital of the Persian Empire with one of the highest freestanding masonry arches in the world. We were going down there to see whether or not it made sense for it to be an undertaking for the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

But one of the parts that I remember best is the briefing we had from the U.S. military. The U.S. military controlled the territory jointly with the Iraqi military. The briefer went on at some great length about how the real threat in that area was not from insurgents or these Iraqis or those Iraqis. The real threat was the Iranians. I don't know if the irony occurred to him that he was talking to Goli Ameri, born in Tehran, but it amused me to no end, and it reminded me also of what a great country the United States is.

Q: That's a wonderful point. We do know that the Iranian Shiites did have enormous influence in Iraq. In fact, the briefer was not wrong, but what you're saying underscores the pluralism that we deal with, which we value. We love this pluralism. You were there as Americans, all three of you. Wonderful lesson. Well, I'm kind of sad that Goli Ameri didn't have more time, not even a year.

RUTH: I'm sure she would have been delighted to stay.

Q: So, if we're getting to the transition to the Obama administration, this would be a natural pause. I guess it would have been shortly after that that everybody moved from the rat-infested SA-44. I remember Miller Crouch starting every meeting with a report on the rat situation on the fourth floor.

RUTH: Yeah. We can start off next time with James Glassman and Ann Stock, although it took a while for Ann Stock to get there.

Q: Yeah. You already know some of my feelings about Glassman, but I'll try to suppress them. This is great. So, we've gotten to '08. We've gotten up to the point of the Obama inauguration. If there are any other observations going back from that, let's start with that next time. Otherwise, let's go into '09. We will stop recording.

This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman, and we're talking on January 9, 2021. An eventful week in Washington. We kind of have to change some of the things we were saying, maybe. I really do wonder and sympathize with people in the field who have to explain to those who may be asking— Maybe people don't even need an explanation. But enough of that. We were talking about Goli Ameri, who I believe you were saying was very skilled and very energetic and unfortunately didn't have many months in that position because of the change of administration. We're getting into the Obama inauguration in January '09, I think. If there's anything prior to that that you want to add—

RUTH: No, I think we sort of wrapped that up. I mean, Glassman was only around for six months, right, from the summer of '08 to inauguration day. Then, Ann Stock came on board as assistant secretary, which was the most important thing to me immediately.

Then, there was another one of those gaps as there often were in occupancy for the under secretary's job. In fact, there was a large gap in the ECA assistant secretary position. I think that's when I was acting principal deputy assistant secretary for sixteen months.

Q: You've been acting almost everything in this whole constellation.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: So, Ann Stock was ECA, not what we now call R?

RUTH: She was ECA's assistant secretary, so that was my most immediate interest, of course.

Q: Since you've mentioned it, what is it with the karma of the under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs? It seems that there are no survivors.

RUTH: Oh, I can tell you the answer to that. As I have said before, it all starts with the fact that the people who choose under secretaries—it doesn't matter which party they're from; doesn't matter what administration it is or whether they're liberal or conservative—all the folks at that level who have the authority to pick under secretaries of state for public diplomacy, all shared the same mistaken notion that public diplomacy is comms.

That is why, if you look at the history, from Evelyn Lieberman through Steve Goldstein or Michelle Giuda, who was acting, every single under secretary, without any planning or deliberate forethought, has nonetheless been drawn from some sector of the communications world. So, you have Rick Stengel from publishing. You have people like Glassman and Sonenshine from broadcasting and journalism. You've got Judith McHale from Discovery Television. You have Charlotte Beers from advertising. You have Karen Hughes who's campaign messaging. You have Margaret Tutwiler, who's mainstream State Department Public Affairs. It goes on.

This is because— I don't know if this is your experience, but ever since the merger in '99, the typical formulation for the PD world has been public diplomacy and exchanges, as if they were two separate things. By public diplomacy, they mean information. These men and women, with a couple of exceptions, are extremely successful, talented, smart people. But it's a game of bait and switch. Washington describes to them a job that is not the job they assume.

A reporter once asked Karen Hughes what her job was. She was obviously a big news item, being so close to President Bush. She said, "My job is to be responsible for America's conversation with the world." Well, there was an Orwellian aspect of that since nobody in the U.S. government should be responsible for America's conversation with the world. I know she didn't mean it that way, but it shows the prevailing mindset.

You know, they pitch them a job. They tell them that they're going to be pivotal in America's image and role in the world and how others see us and how we engage with all of it, and how we must win the global campaign for influence and all that kind of stuff. Then they come and take the job, and they discover that they don't have that kind of responsibility at all. They don't have the resources they think they need. They don't have the staff they think they need. They spend half their time arguing with the regional bureaus about whether or not the director in the Public Diplomacy Office in a regional bureau is going to be a PD officer or not. They get into that kind of thing, and they very quickly become exasperated with what seems, in their minds, as if they are all Gullivers being tied down by the Lilliputians.

In many cases, they just take a walk. They find a reason—"I've got to be with my family, I've got to do this, I've got to do that"—and off they go. So, the history of under secretaries is punctuated by long gaps when there isn't anyone or when there's somebody acting, as Michelle Giuda was acting. The point is that this is all because they misunderstand the job and thus misled the candidates about the job, and therefore new under secretaries quickly became dissatisfied. Being wealthy, prominent people for the most part, they could afford to just take a walk when they felt like it. There you go. That's my answer.

Q: Well, that's very fascinating, and kind of hilarious. I can imagine one administration giving inadequate information to their nominee, but over and over again by both parties?

RUTH: It's because it's not important enough to pay attention to. They just assume that they know.

Q: But how do they— This is a rhetorical question. How do both parties of different administrations arrive to the same misunderstanding every time? It's crazy.

RUTH: Yeah. They pick one of their own, and they think it is all about Facebook and Twitter and TikTok and all of that. They think that's what it is. That isn't what it is.

Q: I think it was Karen Hughes who actually verbally said, "Please use Facebook and Twitter." I think she started the Tweets, if I remember. I remember her saying, "Just do it first, and ask for forgiveness later if you do something wrong." That seems very weird in terms of speaking on behalf of a government. That sounded very strange.

RUTH: Karen Hughes was one of my favorite under secretaries, in terms of her human qualities and her native intellect and abilities. She was really smart, a really good person. What she was trying to do was loosen or put away what has often been described as the ten-thousand-mile-long screwdriver. State Public Affairs tells you when you're in the field, Dan, every little thing that you can and cannot say, no matter what the occasion.

She was trying to say, "Look, we have to stop that. We have to trust our people in the field. If every now and then they make a mistake or do something that we think is

off-message, I've got their backs. They're okay. Human beings make mistakes. But we've got to put an end to this micromanagement of our people in the field." So, she was trying to do a good thing with that.

Q: That sounds great, but all the more a pity that she lasted such a short time. Do you remember— Do all of the under secretaries get exasperated and then decide to leave? Is it always the same pattern? You mentioned, like, ten of them. Nine in a row all came with the same misperception.

RUTH: They each have individual specifics, but at the heart of it, they were not prepared for the job. They generally don't have any U.S. government experience. There are some exceptions, but by and large, they don't have diplomatic experience. They don't have government experience. They don't have government bureaucratic experience. They come from the private sector where they were formidable individuals. But business in the private sector is not the government.

Q: So, the appointment pattern seems consistent. Is the departure pattern also consistent? Is it mainly the people who get these jobs who say, This is not for me, I will leave?

RUTH: Not in every case. I mean, in the case of Evelyn Lieberman, for example, the clock simply ran out on the second Clinton administration. There have been a couple of other cases, too. Glassman's clock just ran out on the tail-end of George Bush. It isn't always that way. Sometimes they say it's health, sometimes they say it's family, sometimes they say it's one thing or another. But by and large, they have ended up being extremely exasperated by what they see as the constraints that are on them, the lack of resources, the lack of authority. There's the fact that the under secretary disburses funds to the regional bureaus and the embassies and consulates but does not control those people or that money once it's out of his or her hands. That makes no sense to someone who came from the CEO world.

Q: You may be the only person who was there throughout and who saw every one of these people struggling with a position that had been misrepresented to them. Looking back, do you see any of them who, number one, caught on quicker or better than the others? Number two, do you have a sense that the FSOs in the field had preferences for or against one or the other?

RUTH: I don't think FSOs in the field, by and large, cared who the under secretary was. Their primary allegiance, if one wants to talk in terms of allegiances, is to the regional bureau. It was the regional bureau that could offer or deny them the assignment they wanted next. Their promotions would come from their rating officers, who were not in the Public Diplomacy world. So, the nuts and bolts of an FSO's career were loosened or tightened by the regional bureaus and the people at the embassies—other political officers, DCMs, ambassadors—not by the Public Diplomacy apparatus. When I was in the field, I just wanted the money to keep coming. I didn't care what anybody's name was

or whether they were political or career or anything. I just wanted the resources to keep coming.

Q: Okay. Good point. So, we are generalizing. You mentioned nine, and then there was the last one, Steve—

RUTH: Goldstein.

Q: The one under Tillerson.

RUTH: Yeah. Steve Goldstein. He was dismissed when Tillerson departed.

Q: Right. I was there. I remember they left through the same door at the same time. Tillerson got a lot of attention, and Goldstein was expecting people to notice him, but nobody did. I remember it was a very strange scene. So, we're generalizing. We're saying that in general, the people who got these positions were talented, hardworking, but misguided in what they had been led to believe.

RUTH: Yeah. That's my personal take on it. I'm sort of like a *National Geographic* wildlife photographer. The elusive creature that I keep an eye on is the under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. It's my initials they're using after all. It's not an object of interest to most people, who would rather be looking at white rhinos or snow leopards—

Q: But under secretaries, without exception, we can say are all primates, is that correct?

RUTH: Okay, fine, I'll concede that.

Q: You can think that one over. I do remember, in the field, having a sense that there really was no anchor. Even if we didn't know who these people were, we just saw them leaving and leaving and leaving. It was a little bit demoralizing, the process of never having one stay very long.

RUTH: If you had an under secretary who had some basic understanding of how an embassy worked and how Public Diplomacy worked in the field— I mean, for example, if you took someone who was an excellent ambassador, like Jon Huntsman when he was in China and Russia, and made someone like that the R under secretary, then he would not have to go through the process of understanding what a PAO is and how all that works. You waste a lot of time with on-the-job training.

Q: Well, I can only hope that people making these decisions will read this interview pronto. It's really astonishing. Same shortcoming ten times in a row.

RUTH: It'll be interesting. Tony Blinken, who's going to be secretary of state, was deputy secretary of state. His wife, Evan Ryan, was the assistant secretary for

Educational and Cultural Affairs. She's now going to be the White House cabinet secretary. It'll be interesting. We shall see.

Q: Maybe this is the time we can finally break the pattern. That's great. Now, we started talking about Glassman. You reminded us that he was not there very long. Anything notable about that period of time?

RUTH: In terms of my career, the only notable thing was that Glassman undid what Hughes had done. Hughes had put me in charge of all evaluation for R, and Glassman separated that again so that I became responsible just for ECA again and somebody else was responsible for all other Public Diplomacy evaluation. Other than that, that's the only direct impact Glassman had on my work.

Q: Any idea why he did that?

RUTH: Well, first of all, the information people asked him to do that, because they thought it was insulting that somebody from ECA should be in charge of IIP evaluations. We all have our pride. Secondly, the people in IIP never wanted to do evaluation. If they worked for me, by God, they were going to do it. They didn't like that idea. Maybe it stemmed from bad taste over what happened to *Hi Magazine.* Hard to say.
Anyway, the ostensible reason was that he thought that the missions of exchanges and information were too different, and they each needed to be special.

Q: Let's talk about that. IIP and ECA, in an ideal world, complimented each other. In actuality, they did, many times. Yet, the bureaucracies were somewhat separate, weren't they? There were the IIP-type people and the ECA-type people, is that correct?

RUTH: Yeah, but there were crossovers. For example, just to skip up a few years, when IIP was merged recently—about a year and a half ago—with Public Affairs, the Speaker's Bureau and the Spaces Office—American Corners, American Spaces—were moved not to PA with the rest of IIP but to ECA, where they used to be and always belong. They rectified that prior error.

Q: They always belonged. I remember when they were studying putting those things in IIP. I remember they actually interviewed me, and I said, "Why would you do that? That's an ECA kind of thing." So, it's not a profound matter, but I'm glad that those programs found their true home.

RUTH: Yeah. There was a fight over it, but it worked out well.

Q: Good. So, you, prior to this, had been an FSO, and then you had been very much involved in the crosswalk and the merger and all of that. Now, you really had a new identity in ECA. It seems like that becomes more and more crystallized.

RUTH: It was clear to me, after a number of years in R, that ECA is where my heart was and where I thought the most important work was being done. It was during Ann Stock's tenure that my position as senior advisor began to take more solid shape. This isn't terribly interesting, necessarily, but some of the trends were—I became more involved in the confirmation hearings and preparation for confirmation hearings for assistant secretaries. It became more formalized that I was a liaison for various kinds of outside organizations.

So, for example, if the bureau was involved with the Inspector General's Office for any reason, I would be part of that. If we were part of a study by the General Accounting—now General Accountability—Office, GAO, I would be part of that. I was liaison with the U.S. Advisory Commission for Public Diplomacy. I was congressional liaison. I was liaison for anything that had to do with legal affairs, so with L/PD. So, I played that sort of external role. I began to do a lot more speaking on behalf of the bureau—at Sister Cities conferences, at National Council of International Visitors gatherings, at Global Ties meetings. I was speaking at the Ambassador's Seminar, at FSI, that kind of thing. So, those are some of the trends in the senior advisor job.

Q: Were there any minefields in dealing with outside entities? It sounds a little bit perilous, diddling with GAO, Congress, L. Did all of this just work perfectly harmoniously?

RUTH: Well, you know, no one ever wants to work with the OIG or the GAO or any of those folks. They have tough jobs. But it worked out fine. Again, they're people. They're professionals, we hope, for the most part. You operate on the basis of respect and plain dealing, and usually it works out fine. But you have to stand up for your organization. I remember one illustrative instance. At the start of a new study, GAO would have what they called an "entry meeting," where they would send the two or three people who were responsible for the upcoming study to explain the broad outlines. At the end of one "entry meeting," the lead person for GAO said, "Okay, now, are there any other pain points that I should know about?" That was the term he used—pain points. He added, "And don't say you need more money." I raised my hand, and he said, "Yes?"

I said, "We need more money." Everybody laughed. I said, "Look, you can't say that. You can't take that off the table. That's the whole point. We know what we're doing. We know how to do this. We know how to win this thing. You won't give us enough money to do it. We know the road, we've got the car, but you won't put the gas in the tank. So, you can't say 'other than more money.'"

Q: On behalf of the field, I thank you, Rick Ruth. You were quite right. What was I going to say? Oh, yeah. Was there an inspection of ECA while you were there?

RUTH: There was an OIG inspection of ECA, and by and large, it went fine.

Q: I guess it's like going to the oral surgeon. It's good for you—maybe not while you're sitting there, but in the long run it's good for you.

RUTH: It's a lot of work, but I respect the work of the OIG in the field. I respect their regular inspections in the field and in Washington. But it's a ton of work on top of everything else we were doing. It went alright, though.

Q: In fact, I gather it's less regular than it used to be because of lack of resources.

RUTH: That is correct. They're really stretching out the times between routine inspections, yes.

Q: Unfortunately, I think.

RUTH: It is unfortunate. Nobody really minds in the field or in Washington, but it is nonetheless unfortunate.

Q: So, we've gotten now to the inauguration of Obama.

RUTH: Ann Stock, that's right. I loved Ann Stock. She was an excellent assistant secretary. She was interesting for a couple of reasons. One is that she was our first assistant secretary with an actual background on the cultural and arts side. She'd been a senior official at the Kennedy Center. I remember one discussion about perhaps bringing a philharmonic orchestra to another country and fundraising and all that it would take to do that, and she sat at the table with a number of people from the department and the private sector and just ticked off: "Okay, you want to fly a symphony orchestra. There are this many members. Their instruments occupy this amount of space. They have to be insured for this amount of money. They weigh this much. So, you'll need this much aircraft space." She knew that kind of thing. We'd never had somebody who had that kind of expertise before.

She also stood up not just ECA's but the State Department's first social media site. We did it, in a sense, as a *fait accompli*. This was a site for our alumni. It was a global website where alumni could post and share stories and talk to each other and us. State's Legal Office got very concerned about its existence. I'll mention why in a second. Luckily, the secretary of state at that point, Hillary Clinton, stood up for us and said, "Social media is the way of the future. The State Department's got to be in that world. Let's find a way to make this work."

One of the issues that the lawyers brought up was intriguing to me, although perhaps it was a bit abstruse. They said, Look, if you've got a social media site for your alumni and they're posting things about their lives—and this includes Americans, of course, because we have tens of thousands of American citizens who are alumni of our programs—they might be posting things about family problems or cultural reentry difficulties or personal information about their lives. Well, you're a government agency, and you're maintaining

this social media site. You're not allowed to maintain personal information about American citizens without legal dispensation.

Anyway, we had to work through that, which we did, but thanks to Secretary Clinton we were able to keep the site going and it's continued for years and been hugely successful. Just like having the first Evaluation Office, ECA had the first social media site. So, there's a nice pioneering streak in ECA.

Perhaps my single most hilarious moment also came courtesy of Ann Stock. We were in Iraq. One day we were going to fly down from Baghdad to Basra, and then from Basra out to Kuwait. We flew around Iraq in military helicopters, often open-sided, so there wasn't any room for our luggage. As you're familiar with, we had "baggage call." You're allowed one purse or portfolio or attaché case for the helicopter. Everything else you put out in the corridor before you hit the hay for the night and they pick it up during the wee hours and put it on a separate plane and take it down to meet up with you later.

So, we came out in the morning and Ann Stock, who had the room next to me, said, "Oh, Rick, I just have my purse. I don't have room for my pajamas. Will they fit in your bag?"

I said, "Sure, that's fine." So, off we went. We flew down to Basra. We had a whole busy day, courtesy of the consulate in Basra. At the end of the day, we went back out to the airport, and of course, we're surrounded by these wonderful young men and women who are U.S. soldiers. They're drivers and security and helping us out and, very importantly, protecting us. We're reunited with our luggage, and everybody's doing a little repacking and whatnot.

At one point, Ann Stock is down on one knee with her suitcases behind one of the armored SUVs. She looks up and goes, "Oh, Rick, could I have my pajamas back?"

There was a short silence, and then this wonderful young man's voice, with just a slight southern twang to it, said, "Man, that's where I want to work." Everybody laughed until they cried.

Q: When you started this story, I thought this was going to be a Groucho Marx kind of thing, but that's much more charming. Did Ann— I'm sure if she said this loudly and indiscreetly, she must have meant this as a joke.

RUTH: No, she meant it perfectly innocently, perfectly matter-of-factly.

Q: That's a good one. I think that in the book that this will become, this will get a kind of insert, a frame on the page as a notable anecdote. That's a good one. So, you mentioned last time Lorie Nierenberg. She was L. She must have been caught in the middle with this question about social media and the Privacy Act and all of that.

RUTH: The splendid Lorie was caught in the middle of every single thing we did. We couldn't have had better counsel than to have her working with us. I won't say she was on "our" side, because she was on the side of the law—

Q: So, you're saying that ECA is an outlaw organization? Is that what you're saying?

RUTH: There are those who would say that, yes. She kept us on the straight and narrow. You know, probably one of the most underappreciated parts of working in the department—not just ECA, but anywhere in the department—is how often you, I, and others come across issues that have a legal aspect that requires us to go to some part of the Legal Advisor's Office, whether it's the Smith-Mundt Act or whether money can be spent for this or that or whether you're talking about AID money versus ECA money, there was always some legal aspect.

Q: Oh yeah. I mean, it's good that somebody's keeping track of this and not using it as a way to obstruct. That was the genius, and still is, of—

RUTH: That's exactly right. She was always looking for the solution, yes.

Q: So, where are those pajamas, Rick? Where are they right now?

RUTH: I gave them back. After that, I don't know.

Q: Typical bureaucratic answer. Not my problem. So, you liked Ann Stock. What else about her— She was very knowledgeable about the logistics involved in the performing arts. You realized that creating social media for alumni was a good way to kind of protect the future of exchanges. Wasn't that the idea?

RUTH: Sure. They all dovetailed, as we talked about before. Evaluation dovetails with alumni, because alumni are the living, breathing, physical evidence of your programming and your evaluation and what they go on and do in the world. Social media buttresses that as well. So, those all go together. Another significant thing I did, both professionally and in terms of personal impact on me, was elsewhere from all of that. It was in the slightly more obscure world, for most of us, of private sector exchanges. It was the Summer Work Travel Program.

I won't talk a lot about the program, because that's not the point of this. Feel free to ask anything. But just to set the framework, Summer Work Travel [SWT] is a part of ECA's mandate that does not receive any appropriated funds. It is a part of the bureau where we work with over a thousand different private sector organizations to authorize them to use the J visa, the exchange visitor visa, to bring young people in for a variety of purposes. There's the au pair program, seasonal work, camp counselors, those kinds of things. The sponsoring organizations pay a fee to the bureau for the right to use the J visa. They don't receive any appropriated funds. To help defray costs, the participants are employed and receive a salary.

Well, one of those programs—and by far the largest of all the programs in terms of number of participants—is the Summer Work Travel program. That's a bit of a misnomer, because it operates twelve months out of the year. But it had gotten out of control. It had drifted for a while, and there were some problems. Then, one day, in the summer of 2011—this is burned into my memory—there was an article on the front page of *The New York Times*: "America's Sweatshop Diplomacy."

Q: I remember. Was it in Pennsylvania?

RUTH: It was Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Q: What a terrible day that was. Yes sir.

RUTH: The seventh floor went batshit for all the right reasons. I was moved from my senior advisor job over to be the acting deputy assistant secretary for private sector exchanges. I was to be the troubleshooter and to fix this problem. Now, from the seventh floor's point of view, the problem was very easy to fix: just kill the program. It would have been very easy, from a bureau perspective and a personal career perspective, to do that. Congress might have had something else to say about it, but in terms of ECA saluting what the seventh floor wanted—Who will rid me of this meddlesome program?—we could have terminated the program and then dealt with the consequences.

Well, the problem was that I didn't think that SWT should be abolished. I decided that we needed to save the program. This got me into no end of trouble and work. At one point, I don't even quite know how to describe this— You'll understand it, but to somebody outside the department or the government it's hard to explain. There was a period of time when I was required—through Ann Stock or the PDAS, Adam Ereli—to send an update memo to the secretary's office three times a day. *Three times a day.* Morning, noon, and night. It was insane. The level of intensity and micromanaging and micro-interest of the seventh floor in this issue was just crazy.

So, I referred to the job as being the DAS from Hell. It was murderous. At one point, I went to see the counselor of the department, who was then Cheryl Mills, who had a reputation for being tough. I had never met her before. I found her eminently fair and professional. I liked working back and forth with her. She said to me, "Rick, if we're not going to shut this program down, you had better fix it fast."

Q: She was a lawyer.

RUTH: She was.

Q: She famously defended the secretary's husband.

RUTH: Yes, that's right. So, the pressure was on. I was doing on-the-record interviews with *The New York Times.* I was being hauled up onto the Hill at regular intervals by irate members of Congress, et cetera. We were being bedeviled by a group called the National Guestworker Alliance, which is an organization devoted to the rights of guestworkers of all kinds, which is highly admirable. I had no problem with what they were doing. They were doing the right thing, but they were making work for all of us. They were very inventive in their public relations. Since this came from Hershey, Pennsylvania and was in a Hershey distribution plant, the Alliance bussed some of the SWT students to Times Square, and they picketed the Hershey's candy store in Times Square. That's wonderful for news coverage, but it was just more work for me.

So, what eventually happened, to cut a long story short, is I did up a memo. The subject line was three short sentences: "Keep it. Cap it. Fix it." By that, I meant very simply, first to keep it. The Summer Work Travel program, while it had a lot of problems, at its heart was a good program that brought foreign policy value to the United States, and we should keep it. "Cap it" was to immediately—and in this case, unilaterally—freeze the number of participants and organizations using the program. That was to let folks know we were serious about it; it was a shot across the bow. But it was also to make sure that the program didn't continue to grow beyond our ability to manage it.

We even found SWT participants in highly dangerous jobs, including on crab boats in the Bering Sea, like the ones on the TV program "Deadliest Catch."

Then, "fix it" was everything else. So, we not only froze the number of participants and the number of organizations involved, but we radically increased the size of the Private Sector Office. We completely restructured it. We put in whole new layers of screening. We brought in a full-time law enforcement liaison officer from Diplomatic Security.

We issued a ton of new regulations. Again, for those who have this arcane knowledge of how the government works, we issued regulations as what are called "interim final." That meant that it was not for a period of public discussion. Usually, when the government's going to issue new regulations, it puts them out for discussion, accepts comments from the general public and affected parties, and then studies that and modifies regulations based on input. We put them out effective immediately with no conversation, no discussion, no nothing. On the one hand, that showed our serious attempt. On the other hand, Congress doesn't like interim final regulations, because it pisses off their constituents. It looks like you don't want to hear anybody's opinion. It's just the government running amok. But we felt it had to be done.

So, in the end, we kept SWT. The secretary signed off on my "Keep it. Cap it. Fix it" memo. We rewrote regulations like crazy. We got a grip on the numbers; we grew the office and so forth and so on. So, the program was going the way it should.

Then my problem was how to get *out* of that job. Everybody liked what I had done and would have been content to see me stay. But I had had enough. I actually had to go see

Counselor Cheryl Mills again to get out of it. I had made it clear that if they didn't find somebody else to put in that job and let me go back to being senior advisor, then I was going to quit the department. I was told that the issue of whether I stayed or went couldn't be decided below the Cheryl Mills level. As if it were a big deal.

So, like I said, I always found Cheryl Mills perfectly pleasant and straightforward to work with. The confusion was this: what Cheryl Mills wanted was for me to stay involved in the issue as it went forward. What I wanted was not to be the DAS for Private Sector Exchanges. Given the nature of the State Department, being a DAS is a big deal, and lots of people wanted to be a DAS. So, it didn't occur to Cheryl Mills at first that all I wanted was to not be a DAS. So, she said to me, "You're willing to stick with this issue, to keep working on this issue and doing whatever's necessary?"

I said, "Absolutely, ma'am. I'm yours on this issue. I just don't want to be the DAS."

"Well then this is easy," she replied. DASes are the easiest thing in the world to find at the State Department. Everybody wants to be a DAS, except for you, apparently." So, that was that. I got to go be senior advisor again, and they brought in a political appointee to be the DAS. Life went on.

Q: A couple of— Well, an observation and a question. It seems that in this very difficult question, in every case, you took the option that caused the most work and the most grief for you. I think that means that you really believed in the programs. At every stage that you've just described, there would have been an easier way out than the one that you did.

RUTH: Yep.

Q: That speaks for itself. Secondly, because Secretary Clinton was on the road a record number of days—I think no previous secretary had traveled that much—in a sense, Cheryl Mills really ran the department. Any comments about that? Is that proper? I'm not sure. With the many decisions that were made, we don't know how much consultation there was and to what depths and how many between those two. Cheryl Mills, as I think I remember, was running the department at least half the time.

RUTH: You know, using the jargon of our department, I have no visibility on that. She was a strong counselor, sure. I see nothing amiss in that. What I remember, in large part, about Secretary Clinton is that she was a huge supporter of exchanges. That endeared her to me. I remember one particular— Again, it's a little bit arcane for people who are not in this line of work, but to get the secretary of state to physically participate in a function is not an easy thing. They're busy and they travel, and they have a lot of competing demands and invitations. She almost always did everything we asked. I remember there was one week where she did three different events for us in a single week. She was a rock star, particularly for women's issues programs, as you well understand. She's still famous for her remark in Beijing about "women's rights are human rights."

Again, she was the secretary, and sometimes she'd be called away at the last moment for some urgent affair, so we typically wouldn't tell the participants that the secretary was going to attend. She would walk into the Ben Franklin Room or the Acheson Auditorium, and people would just go wild. It was just the most wonderful affirmation of the work that we did at the bureau, that we could get the secretary's attention and participation the way that we did.

Q: Okay, perfect. Am I remembering correctly— Secretary Clinton was on the road almost half the time?

RUTH: I don't remember. I think she traveled extensively.

Q: Okay. So, we've made it through Glassman. Your main counterpart or colleague was Ann Stock at ECA. You've really kind of changed your identity a few times, but always oriented towards ECA and not for the limelight. The limelight means "give me a DAS position," and that is the opposite of what you did.

RUTH: I don't like to run things.

Q: But you do.

RUTH: I really don't. I never wanted to be an ambassador. There were several occasions when I was offered ambassadorial posts; I turned them down. It would be a terrible job for me.

Q: I was going to ask you that at the end of the interview, because it's inconceivable to me that you never were an ambassador. Since you brought it up, what about that job— I also, not that I was offered any, certainly would have refused. Let's see if it's for the same reasons. What was it about that type of position that was not for you?

RUTH: There were two things. One is that I'm an off-the-charts introvert. Being an ambassador is way too social and public a job. I would not have liked it at all. I would have been miserable doing all of those things, like politicians kissing babies. I would have been miserable with all of that. The second is, as I said, I don't like to run things. I'm happy to decide things, but I don't want to run them. So, that was a deadly combination. As far back as Charles Wick, he offered to put me on the USIA ambassador roll. So did Henry Catto and, more recently, shortly before I left the State Department another opportunity arose.

Typically, they were countries in the former Soviet Union where I had legitimate background, particularly at that time after the fall of the Soviet Union when suddenly there were fifteen embassies instead of one. Many of my good friends became excellent ambassadors at that time with really good, solid, Soviet Russian studies backgrounds. But, you know, that would have made me unhappy.

Q: What wisdom. I must say that people in the field who knew of you or knew you a little bit thought you were running ECA. You say you don't like to run things, but the perception out there was certainly, through all the changes and the tumult and the different administrations and different parties, you were there all the time. We thought you were running the place. Is that not true?

RUTH: Of course not. I was just giving advice when somebody asked.

Q: What's involved in— The issue you just talked about, the private sector programs, how do you— Did you delegate? You had an intellectual awareness of how this program could and should be run. You quickly picked up the New York Times story and figured out what to do about it. What's the secret to not running something? Did you delegate?

RUTH: Oh, yes. I had wonderful colleagues in the Private Sector Office, and they saved my life every single day, running the Designation Office and the Security Office and Investigations and all the different parts of the office. These were really good people.

Q: These were Civil Service and Foreign Service?

RUTH: They were all Civil Service at that point.

Q: We know that who really does the work in the State Department is the civil servants. We know that.

RUTH: Of course, ECA is by and large a Civil Service bureau, and this part of the bureau was very much Civil Service. So, yeah, I certainly loved to be involved in important discussions, and I loved to have somebody ask my opinion when decisions are being made, but that's why being "senior advisor" was perfect for me. Somewhat anomalously, even though I was in the Senior Executive Service, no one worked for me. No one reported to me. I wrote no ratings. I didn't have a secretary or a staff assistant or anything. I kept my own calendar. I ran no programs of any kind, and I was responsible for zero dollars.

Q: That sounds great. So, a couple of lessons here, and I'm sure there are more that we get from these interviews. First, be true to yourself because if not, you're going to get tangled up sooner or later. This gave you the courage to speak truth to power, and it didn't lead you into conflict, but it made for consistency. Secondly, if you can imagine what you want, ask for it, and you might get it. That's a big lesson, I think. You went to Cheryl Mills, and you made it so easy for her. As you said, the climbers all want to be DAS. You did not want to. That was a simple matter of being able to visualize the way you wanted it and to articulate it. It sounds so simple, but it happens so seldom.

RUTH: We touched on this earlier. Political appointees, of course, are people. They're human beings. The greater the sense of normalcy you can introduce into your relationship with them, the better. Of course, you also have to stay calm. It's important to stay calm.

It's important, also, to be clearly even-handed, to be disinterested in that sense of the word. I might write a particular memo, but I didn't sign it. It went from the ECA Front Office, not me. I drafted it. I didn't approve it. The secretary approved it. It's not my name on the bottom line. It's not me at the microphone if I'm writing a speech.

I understand that I'm not my principal, and I have to serve that person in the most objective, disinterested way possible—no thumb on the scale—so that, when they make a decision, they know who's going to be happy, who's going to be unhappy. They need to know all the consequences of a decision. If they agree with what I recommend, terrific. If they don't agree with what I recommend, also fine. I don't see that as any reflection on me. I give my advice, and they take it, or they don't take it. That's the way the job works.

Q: Again, you make it sound so simple. So few people are able to achieve that balance, that equilibrium. Personally, I love clearances.

RUTH: I do, too.

Q: Especially if I'm the drafter. As you just said, I made a proposal. If somebody finds this to be a terrible idea, I will admit to writing it, but a person above me signed it. I love clearances.

RUTH: What I love about the clearance page, which is easy to mock when you're a newcomer because it looks like the most Kafkaesque thing imaginable—

Q: It looks like Deuteronomy.

RUTH: The fact is, we talked earlier about how when there's an issue that needs decision, I like to get all parties figuratively in the room, get everything on the table, thrash it all out, and come up with a way forward. Well, that's what the clearance page is. What people who mock the clearance page misunderstand is that once you have all those clearances, you've got green lights all the way down the road. Everybody agrees. You can go. So, you're having your fights first rather than making a snap decision and having all these naysayers and others come up and say, Well, what about this? What about that? We never thought about this or that. No. Get all that out of the way, and then go.

Q: Rick Ruth, you make it sound so simple. There's so much wisdom in that and in the idea of consensus, which is not really a strong suit in American culture, let's face it. But institutionally— A lot of what we've talked about are internal structures that make or break a policy in an institution. We've said before that consensus at the beginning, absolutely not, but at the end, yes. This is not a matter of an authority ganging up on people; it's a matter of actually getting to a solution that is acceptable. This is an important matter.

So, we've made it from Glassman to— Sorry, who was Ann Stock's boss?

RUTH: There was a huge gap in there, but McHale came in after Glassman.

Q: Oh, yes. Discovery Channel. She made a big deal of Discovery Channel. In fact, she never stopped referring to it. Was Discovery Channel really the type of background that made for a good R?

RUTH: Clearly not.

Q: Okay. We can move on to the next one. Actually, you don't need to get into this, but my recollection—and it's all rumors and gossip—is that she did a little bit of nepotism or whatever you call it and went to her "friends" on the Hill for protection, and they stopped being her friends. Now, I don't know. This was the story that was circulating, that she was actually double-dealing in terms of giving away plum assignments to personal friends. But let's just say, how long did she last? It wasn't a terribly long time, was it?

RUTH: She lasted for a while. She lasted almost two years. It was a year and a half, two years.

Q: Okay. It was a rough ride.

RUTH: Yeah. She was not a friend of exchanges. Most under secretaries were indifferent at best to exchanges. I hope I'm not repeating myself. The transcript will tell. It's always been a great puzzlement to the people at ECA that under secretaries don't seem to like us or care for us much. The way we look at it—and we admit to being parochial; we being ECA and myself and my colleagues—we think that if you're a new under secretary and you are getting your briefings to come on board and you discover that the single largest part of your empire, in terms of number of staff and dollar volume, is, first, dearly beloved of Congress on a bipartisan basis, and, second, it is one of the few parts of the Department of State that has a strong and positive domestic constituency, then you should be very pleased to hear that. You know what? They're not.

It's the funniest thing. It's like the under secretary is the second wife of a rich man. His kids by his first marriage have all the money and are in the will, but you've got children by your marriage, and you want them to have all the money. So it is with R under secretaries. All they care about is comms, info, shaping the narrative. They think they never get enough money, that they never get enough resources. Then they look over at ECA—in their view, all fat and apple-cheeked—with six hundred staff, hundreds of millions of dollars. To an U/S who doesn't think that ECA matters much, it's highly aggravating.

To be fair, I have to add that if you are the R U/S, then what the White House and the NSC and the seventh floor of the State Department are hammering you about all the time is, in fact, information and communications. No one in the White House is saying to R, We need more Fulbrighters in China, or, We need more youth exchange in Egypt. They're

saying, You've got to knock those terrorist fanboys off the Internet, or, You've got to stop that Russian disinformation. That's what they get hammered about.

It's understandable that they want all the resources they can commandeer, both to do the job that they're told to do and to get the White House and the State Department and the secretary off their backs. So, they see money at ECA, and they don't think, Thank goodness Congress and America like them. They think, Goddammit, why can't I have that money and all those people to do what I want? So, ECA gets kicked around a bit by the under secretary and the under secretary's staff. Honestly, some ECA people are angry about it, some are wounded, and some are just perpetually mystified.

Q: You said you would try to be fair, and I think you've been more than fair in going through this. Meanwhile, you were smart enough and lucky enough not to be in the front office of R. You were in ECA, where you belonged. It must have been pleasing to have your own efforts go to the one part of Public Diplomacy that you knew were wedded.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: That's terrific. Again, looking from the outside, we always thought Rick Ruth ran everything over there. That's because we never bothered to ask.

RUTH: The secret to my happy career is that I was doing and defending what I liked and what I thought was good.

Q: So, McHale. Then what?

RUTH: Then there was Kathleen Stephens, who was a career ambassador. She was ambassador to South Korea. She came in as acting for just a couple of months. Then, there was Tara Sonenshine as the next under secretary.

Q: She was, again, a perfect example of your comms person. She did news and the media. Her bio was a mile long. She'd worked in every news organization.

RUTH: Tara Sonenshine was very smart, very able, a very good person. She was as good of an under secretary as you were going to get. I did have to get starchy once with her speechwriter. He shared with me a draft speech that had Sonenshine saying that the office was called R because it was the middle initial of Edward R. Murrow. [Murrow's given name, by the way, was Egbert Roscoe Murrow.]

Q: We talked about Smith-Mundt a few interviews ago. It was during her time that Smith-Mundt, with her approval, was modified.

RUTH: That's right. There was legislation that modified Smith-Mundt.

Q: She was very much on board with that. But I guess that was a bit out of your lane, because again, you were ECA.

RUTH: Well, correct, the Smith-Mundt Act does not apply to ECA, but because of my institutional memory going back— I won't say how long—

Q: Well, we know how long now.

RUTH: You do. I admitted to it. There was what we often called Smith-Mundt-Zorinsky, because there was a Senator Zorinsky Amendment that made a very significant change to the original Smith-Mundt legislation covering money. So, it wasn't just appropriated program funds and how they were used, but it was the salaries of the people who did the work that are covered by Smith-Mundt as well. Anyway, yes, I was involved on the margins on that, but it wasn't central to ECA.

Q: I do remember one occasion where Sonenshine had a public meeting, I think with PAOs or PD people, and allowed only one other voice other than her own, and it was— I don't know if you were in the room that day.

RUTH: I don't remember.

Q: She was completely sold on the—agenda, which we've discussed before. We don't have to now. I don't know if she was obsessed with that, but it was during her period that the changes were made, which was a relief to many, I guess. Some of the restrictions were a bit silly in the Internet Age. So, let's see. Ann Stock remained at that time?

RUTH: Hold on. I wrote it down, because I never can remember. Ann Stock left in July of 2013. A couple of months later, we had the arrival of Evan Ryan.

Q: Okay. Shall we get into that today?

RUTH: I think this is a good place to pause.

Q: Great, we'll just sign off. This is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman on January 9, 2021. This is our eleventh go at it. Let's see. Stop recording.

This is Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. If yesterday was the ninth, today must be the tenth of January 2021. We're going along chronologically here, and we got up to the arrival of Tara Sonenshine, if that's where you want to jump in at this point. Let's do that.

RUTH: I have, actually, nothing in particular that I know that relates to Tara Sonenshine. As I said last time, I found her extremely able and agreeable to work with. She was smart, sensitive, and thoughtful. She was kind enough to have a one-on-one lunch with me before she started on the job, since somebody told her she was borrowing my initial. I had a good, candid conversation with her.

Q: That's very smart of her, to understand where the institutional memory was.

RUTH: I thought that was very kind of her. So, she wasn't there, again, all that long. The episodic leadership continued, from Judith McHale to Kathleen Stephens to Tara Sonenshine. I guess she was there for about fifteen months or something like that. It was not a long time.

Q: Fifteen months might make her the record holder.

RUTH: You know that you and I would have said, when we were in the field, that if you asked any officer on a new assignment how long it takes to really feel like they're up and running and productive, they would say it takes a year. The second and third years are the good ones. Well, that's true of Washington, too. So, not only do we have these gaps where there's no under secretary, but we have under secretaries who are there for eight months, twelve months, fifteen months, and that just doesn't work. The State Department's a bit like a sponge. You can squeeze it for a while, but if you don't squeeze it long enough, it just springs right back.

Q: Now or later, if you want to, you could comment on which of these many people caught on the quickest or were the quickest to catch on to the fact that you were their best source. Am I exaggerating?

RUTH: Probably. I don't know that I was any under secretary's best source. Some of them were kind enough to have an initial conversation like Tara Sonenshine did, but once they were in office, by and large, I didn't see them much anymore.

Q: Well, you're talking about a learning curve that in the field takes a year, and which most of the under secretaries did not have much more of. You don't have to be on the record, but did some of them do better than others in this steep learning curve?

RUTH: They each brought different talents. Some brought weaknesses. They all made various contributions. I think there's no way to actually rank them. It just doesn't work that way. The ECA perspective, as I mentioned last time, was an unusual one because, by and large, under secretaries were entirely consumed with the information side of the world—not just because that was their wheelhouse, as the current jargon goes, and their background and expertise, but because that's what Washington demanded of them. As I said, that's what the secretary and the NSC were hammering on them for. They wanted to seize that communications space. They wanted to shape that narrative. They are variations on the same theme.

So, by and large, they didn't pay a lot of attention to ECA. In some cases, that was benign. They knew everything was fine. ECA had an assistant secretary there who was presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed. It was doing well. The Hill liked it. The American people liked ECA. So, you could afford to turn your attention elsewhere to

where the trouble was, or the demand was. In other cases, as I mentioned last time, they sort of grimaced and grit their teeth—or gnashed their teeth—because we had resources they wished were somewhere else, but they couldn't lay their hands on them. They looked upon Congress as the big brother standing behind us with its arms folded saying, Don't you touch my little brother. A complete misrepresentation, but that's how they saw it.

It wasn't only the under secretary that sometimes felt that way. During one budget cycle when severe cuts were being proposed for ECA, I spoke to the head of State's Budget Office and let him know that we would, of course, submit all the proper paperwork but the cuts were not going to fly on the Hill. He bridled a bit and asked if that was because I was going to now conspire with Hill staff against the secretary's budget. I said that under no circumstances would I do that and asked him to think about it this way. You're driving your new convertible with the top down along a lovely road on a glorious summer day. You never want it to end. But then you see a sign that says: Pavement Ends Five Hundred Feet. You're upset, but would you get out of your car and go kick the sign? It's just giving you information. The pavement will end. That's all I'm doing, giving you information. The ECA cuts won't fly.

Q: You have talked about that, but let's recapitulate: who had the wisdom to give a firewall budget to ECA in '98 or '99?

RUTH: Firewall budget— Yeah, that came along— It was actually firewalled back in USIA days. Then, that carried over into the merger with the State Department.

Q: That has been a lifesaver, I think, at certain times.

RUTH: It has been. The various under secretaries have tried to breach that firewall. One of the more recent attempts was called the "One PD Budget." That was their phrase for it. So, all PD resources, ECA included, would be combined into a single package at the discretion of the under secretary. That didn't go anywhere.

Q: So, this would have been, basically, a raid for ECA money to be used for other purposes?

RUTH: Oh, of course. They could say anything they liked about it, but it was nothing less than an attempted smash and grab.

Q: You're very discreet about never assigning blame to individuals. Can you just say when that was? Then we'll find out later who it was.

RUTH: One of the first real attempts at ECA's budget actually came under Under Secretary McHale, who instructed us to provide her staff with a list of congressional "earmarks"—these are the programs often named after members of Congress or inspired by them or promoted by them. When we told her that we can't cut those programs

unilaterally, with impunity—one would have to have a serious conversation with Hill staff before taking that kind of action—she was skeptical. There's nothing wrong with skepticism. Her staff requested that we send them a list of programs that fit into that category. Then, they asked us to try and cut some of them. That blew up, as predicted, right in everybody's faces. Lesson learned, from our point of view, but by then, the under secretary had moved on, and there was someone new.

Now, Kathleen Stephens was only there briefly, and she was career, so she didn't attempt any foolishness like that, and neither did Tara Sonenshine, but every now and then—like under Rick Stengel, for example—somebody would think it. Sometimes it wasn't the under secretary. It was the R/PPR staff who would have these notions of self-aggrandizement and say, We just need to lay our hands upon these resources. One of the great weaknesses—and we've touched on this before, Dan—that I see in the State Department and other organizations is that it has this innate tendency towards centralization and standardization. It wants to combine everything it can under one umbrella, under one budget, under one authority. Sometimes, that's just a really bad idea.

Q: As you've mentioned, there's Congress as a kind of apparatus—not to impede, but to kind of keep things going in a coherent way. So, I guess Congress was helpful.

RUTH: Congress was very helpful. You know, there's a verse in the Bible that I cannot quote exactly, but it roughly goes, "I lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help." We used to talk about how we looked to the Hill from whence cometh our help.

Q: That's pretty good. That sounds better than "telling America's story to the world" as a logo at the door of the pharmacy building. Well, okay. So, with your help, ECA kept cruising. It was on cruise control, thank goodness, because everything it was doing, it was doing very well. By the way, you mentioned private sector something. This tiny little thing called Citizen Exchanges, whatever happened to that? It shrank and shrank.

RUTH: It's still there and quite robust now. Citizen Exchanges is under the deputy assistant secretary for professional and cultural exchanges. It's one of my favorite parts of ECA, and working with the very talented people there and people on the Hill, we've been able, over the last few years, to add a number of programs and some significant resources to that office. It's an office that has struggled a bit, over the years, in terms of its identity, because it seemed to be so diverse. It seemed to be a kaleidoscope, and that confuses people. If you say, "This is the IVLP program," they go, Got it, or, This is education and academics. Got it. But if it's sports and culture and youth and professional and all those things together, people can't quite get a grip on it.

I've always thought it was all about "civil society." It is all the various components of civil society. So, it could be journalists, it could be educators, it could be lawyers, it could be cultural figures, it could be community activists, it could be women's leaders, it could be parliamentarians. It goes on and on. To me, it's all the different component parts of a civil society. I think that's a very important growth area.

One of the last things that I was able to work on with congressional staff before I retired was on a program specifically to increase the size and scope of these kinds of civil society programs where individuals who were community or civil society activists from other countries would come to the United States for more substantive periods of time and do internships. It would not just be two- or three-week visits or tours, but substantive internships. It would be any kind of public service, civic-minded organization. They would learn not only how that organization operates and how it advocates for its issues and how the people speak to power, how they organize their collective interest, but also how one creates and runs a non-profit. A non-profit has to make money. It just doesn't make a profit in the usual sense.

These are complicated entities that in America are as common as tap water. We don't think about the fact that the Sierra Club is this and the NRA [National Rifle Association] is that. But in other countries, it's very often unusual to have these kinds of intermediary, advocacy, issue-based organizations. So, learning how to create an NGO or a non-profit is something that we think is important also.

Q: It is very important. Many of the countries that benefited from that program were poor countries. The idea of a cost share was always— Everybody understood that there had to be one, but it was unpleasant to draw water out of the stone, whatever the metaphor is. It was also— I think Citizen Exchanges could have had ten times more funding and everybody would have benefitted. It's a pity that they didn't get the financial— They could have done better with more support I think.

RUTH: Absolutely. In the last year and a half that I was there, we added at least ten million more dollars to Citizen Exchanges. One initiative was working with Hill staff on this civil society internship kind of program. The other was arranging additional funding for programs particularly focused on young women, like Tech Women, Tech Girls, those kinds of programs.

Q: Yeah, it's good to lubricate those relations. Under Wick, we had a pretty robust university linkage program. That was put to sleep.

RUTH: Yes, it was, and that was a huge mistake.

Q: Then AID did its version of it with much more money. I don't know if they had similar approaches, but that was a painful loss, I think.

RUTH: It was in my opinion, as well. I know the assistant secretary for academic programs, who personally disliked that program and personally saw to it that it was done away with. I thought it was a mistake. One of the points that critics made was that once the U.S. government provided the seed money and the startup for these academic or university linkages, they had a tendency to go off the rails. The universities would take

charge of them and do what they felt like with no regard to the priorities or policies of the U.S. government. Everything we do is supposed to have a foreign policy connection.

Anyway, one of the painful moments for me was at the time of the Arab Spring—back when the Arab Spring was still the Arab Spring, before it quickly turned to fall and then winter. But during the Arab Spring, when we were having first conversations with, let's say, Tunisia and other countries in the Arab Muslim world, one of the very first things they said in every single case to our ambassador or our envoy or the secretary was, We want to have more connections between our young people and your young people; between our universities and your universities. Let's do that.

That's the kind of thing that, on our side, we're going to say, Absolutely, let's do that. That sounds great. Why would we say no to more linkages with the next generation of leaders in another country? But we gave away that program, and we've never gotten it back.

Q: Painful. I believe the USIA linkages were two years. AID was five years with tons more money. I hope they did good things with it. I never really followed it. I guess part of the rationale was that we see the resources will shrink, and so we have to pick priorities. These are painful priorities. I guess that was part of the argument. Okay. So, Sonenshine comes and goes. Should we go chronologically, then?

RUTH: Sure, let's greet Evan Ryan, who was a marvelous assistant secretary. There was no one I enjoyed working with more. She was quite marvelous. I think it deserves to be mentioned, just as a grace note, that she was the spouse of the deputy secretary, Antony Blinken, but you never would have known. She was a consummate professional in and of herself.

Q: He, too, was relatively low-profile, I think. I never met him. People who did have the highest regard. He was not a showman.

RUTH: He was not.

Q: This is kind of important, since he's about to be secretary of state.

RUTH: I was thoroughly delighted to see his nomination to be secretary of state and for Evan Ryan to be cabinet secretary in the White House. They had both worked in Joe Biden's office during the Obama White House.

Q: Oh, so Evan Ryan will be doing what?

RUTH: White House cabinet secretary.

Q: Oh, great. Terrific. Okay. Let's hear more about Evan Ryan when she was in ECA.

RUTH: A number of things happened. She was there for a considerable period of time, from 2013 to 2017. We made a major push into disability inclusion in ECA. It had always been a factor in ECA outreach and activities, but we decided that we could do a great deal more. A lot of this came in collaboration with a marvelous woman named Judy Heumann, who was the secretary of state's special advisor on disability issues and inclusive diplomacy. We worked with her quite closely. Mobility International, which is a nationwide organization that specializes in bringing people with disabilities, both cognitive and physical, into exchange opportunities. We worked with them to arrange day-long training sessions not only for our own program officers, but for the program officers of our cooperating partners in private sector exchange organizations.

We were also able to accomplish one very wonky little thing that had caused us no end of trouble, and that is how to budget for disabilities. This is where the rubber meets the road. When we're advertising an exchange, you don't talk about disabilities, because that would seem exclusionary. You're not trying to filter out people with disabilities, quite the opposite. Once you've selected an individual for a program, however, if they have a disability, then there will likely be a cost for the accommodation.

Q: So, it's kind of like needs-blind admission in universities.

RUTH: Exactly. Suddenly the program manager discovers that he or she doesn't have the money for the accommodation. You get caught in this bind. Well, working with our very good EX people, our Executive Office, we were finally able to get past that and come up with a kind of strategically flexible funding where if you discovered that you needed additional funding to make sure you included the right people that you wanted on the program, and it was there and it was legitimate— This sounds wonky, it sounds small, but—

Q: No, it's a big— Money has ethical and moral values attached to it. This is not only a budget issue, but it's a concept of how far do you want to go? We take the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] very seriously. It's a novelty in other countries. I noticed that every group I met always had some disabilities. I know that that was a policy, and it was terrific. There were mobility issues and hearing and sight. In many cases, this was the very first opportunity that very smart young people had to do anything of meaning because their own countries couldn't accommodate them. That was a fantastic thing.

RUTH: We know how far we still have to go in the United States, but compared to most other countries in the world, it is profoundly moving to see what is done in the United States to accommodate people with various disabilities. A couple of very quick things. I remember a group of East European coaches that we brought over. These were tough guys. If you saw half a dozen of these guys walking down the sidewalk, you'd cross the street. We took them to a facility for individuals with disabilities, and one of them—a man in his forties—started crying. Not something we typically expect. He said, "I didn't even know these things existed." He said, "I have a brother who has this kind of

disability"—he pointed at somebody who was in the program—"and we just kept him at home. We wouldn't even let him go to school because we were so ashamed, and there was nothing for him to do."

I remember Ann Stock meeting in Istanbul with a young Turkish woman who was blind and was the first Turkish person allowed to apply to the university in mathematics who could not see. Previously, it had been forbidden because how can you study mathematics? You can't see. She came to the US on the YES program, and she went to a specialized academy in Utah where, guess what? You can, of course, teach math and physics and science and STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math] to people who are visually impaired.

But it's not an entirely happy story. She was allowed to take the entrance exam for the university in mathematics, and she was the first such person to do so in Turkey, but they wouldn't give her any accommodation on the time to complete the exam. She had to have all the questions read aloud to her, and then dictate it back, so of course she ran out of time before she could finish the questions.

Q: The ADA makes it legally obligatory.

RUTH: In the United States, yes, but this was Turkey.

Q: Right. The ADA is actually a great model that some countries have seen. They think of it as "requiring extraordinary resources." But I think many countries would like to do it, and they feel they can't. But it really does stand as a model.

RUTH: One of the most impressive things to visitors across the board who make that exact point about expense– is curbs. Slanted curbs on street corners. The inclined plane goes back as far as mankind does. It's not sophisticated technology. You just have to do it. So, those were wonderful programs to work with, and as I said, working with Judy Heumann and others in other parts of the department was great.

Sometimes working with Congress wasn't just about money. For example, with all the focus, as we talked about a while back, on terrorists and looting of antiquities to fund terrorist activities, Congress passed a law called the Protect and Preserve Act. When they were drafting the legislation, they got in touch with me, and it was all good legislation except for one part of it that said that there should be a U.S. government-wide coordinator for this effort at the White House. I said, "No, it should be the assistant secretary for educational and cultural affairs."

Now, they initially didn't like that idea. The member of Congress who was the sponsor of the legislation didn't like that idea because it seemed less grand. It wasn't a big enough idea. He wanted a White House coordinator to underscore the importance of the issue. Not entirely unreasonable. I was able to persuade them to assign the responsibility to the ECA assistant secretary. So, sometimes it wasn't always money. It could be about

authority. Basically, it was by convincing them that if they mandated a WH position then for a minimum of at least one year, absolutely nothing of any substance would happen while everybody sorted themselves out with who is who and what is what and who's in charge of whom. They would just waste all that time, and they needed to move.

Q: Absolutely. That would have been what, '04, '05, something like that? We can add it later.

RUTH: This was much later. The first issue was, again, back when you said, but this was around 2014 or something like that.

Q: Okay. Now, the looting started almost immediately in '03, right?

RUTH: Yes. There was work on it being done, but this was a new piece of legislation that came out of the foreign affairs side of the House and the Senate.

Q: Actually, one anecdote from me on the disabilities aspect. I met a YES program contingent in Ghana. One of the members was totally hearing impaired and gave a talk to a hundred people when I was there through an interpreter from her own group who had learned to sign because of her.

RUTH: There you go.

Q: They brought signing to Ghana. It was like, wow. It's quite something. The many benefits that ECA— As you say, you recognized IVLP and Fulbright, but there are all these many other things that just have tremendous benefits, too. Maybe I'm— I don't mean to be preaching, but I am so much in favor of these programs. Let me say, Bob Gates, the secretary of defense, has said many times that there needs to be more of this stuff. We're not culture wonks who understand the profound importance of this to something called U.S. interests, whatever that is. But U.S. interests and human interests need not be different, right?

RUTH: That's exactly right.

Q: So, what else of interest with Evan Ryan?

RUTH: There was a group down at the University of Virginia [UVA] that was considering creating a new private entity, a consortium, to be called the Presidential Precinct. They invited me down there to meet with them and ascertain if the State Department would be interested in there being such an entity and what we thought about it. With Evan's blessing I went. They were planning a consortium of the University of Virginia, William and Mary, and three presidential home foundations—Monticello for Thomas Jefferson, Montpelier for Madison, and Ash Lawn-Highland for Monroe.

They persisted over the years in thanking me for helping them organize. It was kind of them but foolish. I said, "I honestly don't know what you people are talking about. You invited me down there and said, 'Gee, do you think ECA would like to be associated with UVA, William and Mary, and Monticello?' Was that a hard question? Was that supposed to be difficult for me to answer?" It was like, "Duh, yeah, I think we'd like that."

So, they did come together. One of the things that we talked about and that they followed through on was they became an IVLP participating member. That's particularly interesting because there was none in the state of Virginia. Everything was just done out of Washington. There was no global ties community member of IVLP.

Q: You're kidding? Nothing in Richmond? Oh my gosh.

RUTH: Because of the proximity to Washington, it was all done there. They also became the hosts for the Young African Leadership Initiative. In fact, the people who run that program in academics would tell you that they were among the best. It had other interesting spinoffs, because UVA, which was generally the host location, is always very close to the elected leadership, both the governor and the senators and members of Congress from Virginia. So, when Evan Ryan would go down there to participate in a YALI [Young African Leadership Initiative] event, she might also have a meeting one-on-one with Tim Kaine.

My favorite, though, is always the little tangential things. I was down there for one of the YALI visits, and they had a shuttle bus assigned to them to take them around from place to place. It was for a couple dozen of them. While they were all at some reception at the Rotunda, I was talking to the driver. Well, the driver was a Congolese-American. He almost couldn't stand still. He was so excited, telling me, "Your country, America, is paying for these young people from my continent to come to America?" He was just like, "This is the most wonderful thing in the whole world." He was practically inarticulate with joy that we would do such a thing.

Q: Let's give proper credit to President Obama, who created a little something before YALI existed, bringing two people from each country. This was in 2010, I think. That was— Obama was very busy proving to America that he was not African, and he very purposefully did not publicly show much attention to Africa, because he had to be the president. But he and maybe Mel came up with this idea, and then it grew. I'm just delighted that it has survived into not only the eight years of Obama but beyond.

RUTH: We were very worried that the Trump administration would do away with it. But once again, it had tremendous support on Capitol Hill, and luckily, it survived. Of course, the president started not only the Young African Leadership Initiative but also the Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative.

Q: And there's a Latin America one, yeah.

RUTH: Yes. YLAI—Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative. If he had stayed in office for a third term, he probably would have gone on to all the other regions of the world and done the same thing. They're absolutely marvelous programs, and it's an example of what we call at ECA a "demand environment." ECA lives in a demand environment. Every now and then, you run across somebody who thinks that ECA is full of people who throw spaghetti against the wall to see what will stick. But in fact, our hands are full with everybody from the president of the United States to the secretary of state to members of Congress telling us, You will do this. We want a Young African Leadership Initiative. Or, in the case of Secretary Pompeo, "We want more programs on international religious freedom." In the case of Congress, of course, there are numerous directed programs. So, we don't have the leisure time just to sit around and drum up programs. We're bombarded by people who understand the value, who want the programs, and who put us in that kind of demand environment.

Q: So, that's the kind of earmark that you actually want, right?

RUTH: That's the kind you want. I mean, the term "demand environment" is a term that I coined. In my vanity of vanities, I like to coin phrases that then become part of the daily lexicon, and it gratifies me to hear them float back to me later on as normal.

Q: I've mentioned, I think, "elephant in the room" and "it ain't brain surgery," for me, but that's a separate discussion.

RUTH: You bet.

Q: Now, one of the ways that YALI survived was by bringing in the name Mandela. These are Mandela Fellows. Was that indeed pivotal in assuring the survival of YALI?

RUTH: I think it helped. I don't know if that was the crucial thing. By the time that President Obama left office, there had been several iterations of the YALI program, and it was widely respected and supported on the Hill and in the foreign policy community. Other than the Trump administration seeking to eliminate ECA and all of its programs entirely, no one went specifically head-hunting for these Obama initiatives.

Q: I remember that YALI had the invisible—that said Obama. According to people who loved YALI, they were concerned that this would have some kind of stigma, but maybe the new administration never even noticed. When you say, "If Obama had had a third term," are you advocating the elimination of term limits for presidents?

RUTH: I am not.

Q: Just wanted to do a little cross-examination there. We're from the government. We're here to help. Well, this is great. This is really inspirational. What else was there about the Evan Ryan period?

RUTH: We began to work more closely with the Alliance for International Exchange. That's a private organization that is the single largest group representing exchange organizations. Not every major exchange organization belongs to it, but they are one of the best represented and best organized exchanges advocacy organizations. They have a membership meeting every year for a couple of days in Washington. We always cooperated with them on a friendly *ad hoc* basis. Working with the leadership there, I was able to set up a template.

They would have a day and a half conference. The first opening lunch would always have the assistant secretary for ECA making remarks. Then there would be workshops throughout that day and into the next where they would bring together people from around the country who worked on specific programs—academic programs, civil society programs, youth programs—and match them up with our program officers to have real in depth, reedy conversations about how the programs work and any issues to thrash out. Then, it would culminate in what they called a leadership panel, where the principal DAS for ECA and the DASes would have a panel, and they would all take questions from the floor on things people were interested in. That turned out to be an extremely satisfactory kind of template for both parties. That has now continued for a number of years.

Q: That's great. So, Alliance was an umbrella organization that could include what, CIS [Center for Immigration Studies], IIE [Institute of International Education]?

RUTH: Oh, yes. Lots of them were private sector organizations, as well.

Q: I didn't really realize this. So, it's an umbrella organization, and it is an advocacy group, is that right?

RUTH: Absolutely. It advocates on the Hill. It hosts a Hill appreciation night every year. It does a lot of good work. It monitors issues, it puts out press releases and statements to the press on exchanges issues. It's quite activist, quite good, and very professionally run.

Q: My bad that I am not familiar with that. It would be nice to get PAOs in the field— I don't know how many people would even be aware that there is an umbrella organization. Anyway, that's great. They're based in DC, right?

RUTH: They are. This was also the time of the Ebola crisis.

Q: Fourteen, right.

RUTH: Again, we've talked repeatedly about the logistical side of exchanges, and of course, when you've got a dozen or two dozen journalists from West Africa who are scheduled to come on a program to travel around the United States and then the Ebola crisis breaks out— Regardless of where they were from in Africa, we had American institutions who simply said, Sorry, we bow out. We are not going to allow these people on our campus or in our building. So, there was lots of scrambling, lots of rearranging.

Luckily, everything was able to be done. There were other American organizations that would pick up where others declined. But the concern was understandable. Some things were canceled, of course, but it's nothing compared to what happened with the current pandemic. But it was an interesting precursor to show how these things do affect the flow of people around the world.

Q: Yeah. In defense of those organizations, we should add that the U.S. government asked three African heads of state not to come to the Senate. So, you could say it was irrational and inhospitable, but it's hard to make a moral judgment.

RUTH: Well, it's not only a moral judgment. What I really want to do is heap praise upon our program officers who scrambled and made the programs work so that the field wasn't disappointed, and the participants were not disappointed. This was also the time of President Obama thawing relations with Cuba. There is, on the educational and cultural side, an enormous pent-up appetite to work with Cuba. The moment that the president so much as breathed a word about it, we had everybody from Carnegie Hall Youth Orchestra to the University of Florida to you-name-it hitting us up saying, "When can we go? When are the programs going to start?"

So, our job was really to stay as close as possible to the regional bureau, Western Hemisphere Affairs, because ECA could not get out ahead of policy. There are two or three countries in the world where it is absolutely necessary that ECA not get one millimeter ahead of the policy people. Those three countries are Iran, Cuba, and North Korea.

So, part of my job in those cases was to tamp down the enthusiasm and say, "Everybody sit down and relax. Take a deep breath. We can't rush into this." I mean, Major League Baseball was ready to go for Cuba. But part of my job, along with others in ECA and the DASes and so forth, was to tell everybody to sit down and breathe easy. We were not going to rush into these countries—Cuba, in this case—until we got the definitive green light from the policy people saying, "Yes, this is okay."

Q: Bob—used to say, "We cannot open relations with Cuba, because if we did, their baseball teams would slaughter ours."

RUTH: Could be true.

Q: In light of what you've just said, there has been an ECA program ongoing, not clandestine, pretty consistent, with Iran. How is that not getting ahead of policy? How does that differ from Cuba and North Korea?

RUTH: We had the green light from the regional bureau and their chain of command to do that. We were told to proceed with certain exchanges with Iran. So, bringing sports teams to Los Angeles, which Iranians jokingly call Tehrangeles because there's such a

large Iranian population there— But now, that's done. Sometimes you do programs, with official permission, but you don't talk a lot about it.

Q: Yeah. That doesn't make it clandestine, it just is what it is. Maybe the other side of that coin— This may be an irrelevant thing, but in around 1982, I think, Charles Wick threatened to cut or reduce the budget of Fulbright and IV. There was an enormous domestic reaction, which forced him to do the opposite. I've always thought that he did it on purpose so as to increase the resources. Do you happen to know, was that a ploy or was he—

RUTH: It was not a ploy, no. He really intended to do it. In the same way, to bring it up to more modern times—we'll talk more about this later—when the Trump administration proposed to abolish ECA, we had Hill staffers who told us— if he had said, "Let's cut ECA 10 or 15 percent," we would have hated it, but we probably would have had to do it. But when he said, "Abolish it," that galvanized the opposition. That just made people rise up from all around and say, Are you insane?

Therefore, they increased our budget. When I asked the staffers, "Did you increase ECA's budget to send a message?" They said, "Hell yes."

Q: I remember they increased it by 5 or 6 percent.

RUTH: Yeah. They were trying to say, "Knock that shit off."

Q: That's an important institutional point. ECA does have a domestic constituency. The geographic bureaus, much less so. This may be, in a Machiavellian way but also in a very good way, why the Congress supports it. Their own voters support it.

RUTH: It's a symbiotic relationship. Members of Congress are wonderfully flexible and welcoming when we seek appointments for our exchange visitors and students. For example, as wonderful as I might be working with the Hill, I could hardly hope to get an assistant secretary an appointment with the two senators from Iowa, Grassley and Ernst, just to take an example. But when we bring FLEX students or YES students to Iowa and then bring them to the Hill before they return home, it's easy. Both senators sit down, chat like they have all the time in the world to talk to these wonderful young people. They are amazing emissaries and representatives. So, everybody sees how this is all mutually beneficial and mutually reinforcing. The Hill supports it because the people do; the people support it because the Hill supports it. It all works.

Q: Fantastic. Well, let's quintuple the budget. Why not? Since we're running on debt anyway, what the hell?

RUTH: Deficit spending! Oh, that's right. This falls into my job as utility infielder. I was also DAS for Policy for several months during this period of time, having previously been the acting PDAS for a while. But I also had the responsibility of reviewing for the

bureau all of Secretary Clinton's emails, the notorious email issue. Somebody from each bureau in the department had to go through every single one of them, looking for anything that might be classified or sensitive or bear upon that bureau's equities, as they say. That was me for ECA. So, I've read every single one of those emails.

Q: Well, don't ever try to take an airplane again. You'll have people who will identify you and call you out as they did to Lindsey Graham the other day.

RUTH: You don't want to be secretary of state. What a terrible job. Oh my goodness. One of the things that came through most clearly—and this is understandable when you say it—is that the secretary of state has no life. These emails were 24/7, and it's like, This head of state is furious and demands to speak to you immediately. This person at the White House says— Everybody wants to talk to the secretary of state, and everybody's torqued about something. Everybody wants something. They're not calling just to be nice.

Q: Well, this does remind us that being secretary of state does have sacrifices. Anybody, even the bad ones, spend a lot of energy doing this.

RUTH: You know and everyone in the State Department knows that there's a Foreign Service/Civil Service divide. There's friction.

Q: Unfortunately.

RUTH: It's inevitable, of course. Any time one organization has multiple personnel systems, the employees in the various systems will each think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. So, civil servants might envy Foreign Service officers because of what most civil servants considered to be the ultimate perk, which is the ability to live and work overseas. But civil servants don't necessarily want to do it for a living. Foreign Service officers often envy civil servants' stability and home life because they tend to work shorter hours and be at home in Washington. Civil servants can be present when weddings and birthdays happen and not off in foreign countries.

So, everybody has their argument, but it does create friction. I mention this because ECA is an overwhelmingly Civil Service bureau. So, you tend to see more sharply the divide and the friction that often happens between Foreign Service and Civil Service. It's inescapable, but the Foreign Service is the upper class in this relationship. It sees itself as that, and acts in many cases, unfortunately, as if that is the case. But the bottom line, as I think I said a couple of conversations ago, is that the quality and success of the program shows how well the Foreign Service and Civil Service do in fact cooperate with each other day in and day out on all the important things. But that doesn't mean there isn't friction and doesn't mean there aren't hard feelings.

One of the things that I desperately wanted to do at my time in ECA and was never able to pull off was I wanted one of the two DASes for Programs—the DAS for Academic and

the DAS for Professional and Cultural Exchanges—to be a civil servant. I was never able to do that. I just couldn't. Those positions were either political, and there's pressure to appoint politicals, which is understandable, or they were Foreign Service, and there's a lot of institutional pressure to put Foreign Service officers in those jobs. That's also understandable. Nobody was in the wrong, but there should be a rotation so that every now and then a civil servant could have that job. I regret that doesn't happen.

Q: Noted. By the same token, many of us have longed to have an R who was a professional, and we've never had one except for the brief tenure of Bruce Wharton. Wouldn't it make sense to have a person—

RUTH: Yeah. That was eight months.

Q: Again, as you have reminded me, it's not the fault of anybody who was R. All they did was accept an invitation. But it does demoralize people to see people coming in from the outside with the long learning curve. You pointed out that it takes about a year, and that's correct. So, it leads to a kind of rudderless feeling, I think, among people in the field, and maybe also civil servants. Well, that's an important point also. More on the Evan Ryan period?

RUTH: Those were some of the key things. There was one very nice thing. Well, there are a couple of things I wanted to mention. Evan Ryan had this idea that unfortunately didn't happen. She coined the phrase "exchange management oversight." She made that one of my work requirements. She, as every assistant secretary, had heard during her tenure many different complaints, if you will, or statements from the field that ECA was too complicated. ECA didn't play well with others. ECA was hard to figure out. Too many programs, too many deadlines. You don't know who to talk to.

Then you throw in the perfectly logical consequence of the fact that, by and large, the State Department is divided up or organized, either by geography—you work in the Africa Bureau—or by theme—we do women's issues. But ECA isn't like that. ECA is divided up by program. There is no Africa desk. There is no Asia desk. There is no women's issues desk. We are by program. So, how do you know whether you want Fulbright or Humphrey or Muskie? How do you know that when you're in the field?

So, she thought that perhaps I could be a sort of roving ambassador, and that if there was a post somewhere in the world or a PAO conference of that sort where they were having a particular kind of difficulty "working with ECA," then I could fly out there. I would work with the staff and FSNs [Foreign Service nationals] and others and talk about how one successfully collaborates with ECA. It never caught on, but it was an interesting idea. I liked the idea. I was charmed by it. I took one trip under that guise to New Delhi. That worked out fine. But it never really got traction. It was an interesting concept, though.

I started doing a lot of speaking at FSI at that time, and that continued until I retired. So, I pretty much spoke to every single PAO or CAO class that was passing through. That was

a lot of fun. I really enjoyed doing that. Of course, in good melodramatic fashion, the organizer at FSI would always say, "And at the end of the talk, you'll find out why R is called R!"

Q: By the way, that PD training—there's been a lot of discussion about how inadequate it is in time spent. Now that JOT rotations have been done away with, people were looking to FSI to try to bridge the gap in preparation. Generally, it does not seem to have worked as people wanted it to. Anyway, they got to meet you.

RUTH: Well, I got to meet them.

Q: The idea of having an—or whatever you want to call it is intriguing, because I do remember that there would be this blizzard of yearly cables from Washington: This is the Fulbright deadline coming up. This is the IVLP deadline. Here's our end of year money. It really was, now that you mention it, not easy to track. There was also the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. Thank you for at least trying, with Evan Ryan's encouragement, to make— Wouldn't it be nice to have a handbook on various deadlines?

RUTH: That actually does exist now. There's a unified online list of all the programs, all their deadlines, who the program officer is, what their phone number is, and where our Policy Office is. One of the things I should mention, going back to Ann Stock quickly, is that when she first came on board, she also heard these complaints that ECA is hard to work with. So, she did a couple of things. First of all, she expanded the Policy Office so that there would be at least one full-time policy officer for each regional bureau. That person would be one-stop shopping. If you couldn't figure out where in ECA to go, go to your policy officer. That person will figure it out for you.

Another thing she did was that she agreed that every two weeks she would meet with the PD office directors from the regional bureaus. When she announced this at a large gathering in the Acheson Auditorium, she said, "No one in the field ever has to wait more than two weeks before you can bring something up with the ECA assistant secretary directly, face to face." Now, those meetings only lasted a few months, and then they stopped. You know why? Of course you don't know why; I'm just being melodramatic.

Q: I can guess.

RUTH: The regional bureaus wouldn't show up. They started sending their deputies, and then, in some cases, desk officers.

Q: I'm shocked. That's a ridiculous confusion of priorities. That's not the highest priority, but— Incredible. What did they think they were doing that was more important? Answering to their own PDAS I guess.

RUTH: Ann Stock gave it a good shot. Oh, I almost forgot. My goodness. We're back to talking about me again. Another thing I owe Evan Ryan and other good colleagues is that

I was given the Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy. That was quite wonderful.

Q: Who else would be the perfect candidate for that? What year was that?

RUTH: This was 2016. I was informed about it while I was in Tucson, Arizona. I had gone back to the University of Arizona homecoming because I was being awarded the College of Humanities' Alumnus of the Year Award. So, all of a sudden, all these wonderful things were cascading down on me, and that was very nice.

Q: Was there no inkling? This is like selecting a pope. It's done, and then smoke comes out of the chimney. Were they very secretive about this?

RUTH: I had no idea it was coming.

Q: You had no idea. Well, that's grand. That's wonderful.

RUTH: It was just out of the blue.

Q: Editorial comment: they should have retired the whole thing, with you as the last recipient.

RUTH: Oh, there are a lot of good people out there. But that was very nice. Yeah, those were sort of the Evan Ryan years.

Q: Great. Well, again, we get to kind of a natural bookend, maybe. Ryan was until what years? '16, '17?

RUTH: Until Inauguration Day, January 2017.

Q: Okay. That brought Tillerson, eventually.

RUTH: Yes. Right about that time is when Bruce Wharton comes in at the very end of 2016 as acting under secretary. Then, Mark Taplin is recalled from retirement to be the acting ECA assistant secretary. Then, Rex Tillerson comes.

Q: We should note that these are two professionals. Taplin is a PD person. He had been DCM in Paris.

RUTH: Absolutely.

Q: Wharton was a DAS and then an ambassador, but thoroughly PD. In a sense, isn't it ironic that we had a PD-hostile—let's just say it—at a period— These two individuals get quite a bit of credit, I think, but maybe we can talk about that next time. I know they

both really did their best, and in their bones, they understood the importance of PD and ECA, I believe. Suddenly, there you were, working with them.

RUTH: It's exactly like you said. They were serious professionals.

Q: Again, this is out of our area, but I know that Bruce was expecting, as you said earlier, to have a mayfly lifespan. But he actually was able to create something of a relationship with Tillerson, partly because they're both from the same state. He survived, I think, two or three times longer than he expected to. I don't think he wanted to, but he did. Let's get into that next time. This gets to be on the level of gossip, and that's my thing. You, sir, are much more noble in seeing the bigger picture. Actually, I'm opposed to gossip, just for the record.

RUTH: We'll trash Rex Wayne next time. I guarantee it.

Q: Oh, I'll wear my t-shirt. Remember the logo of the dinosaur escaping out of the circle? If you don't, I'll wear it next time.

RUTH: Okay.

Q: So, this is Rick Ruth and Dan Whitman signing off. It's January 10, 2021.

Okay. So, marking the time: It's Rick Ruth talking to Dan Whitman. It is January 19. It is the day after Martin Luther King Day and the day before maybe inauguration in the U.S. So, Rick, if you want to, we could pause at this time and have your overview of PD legislation and other elements that affected the direction of PD over the years. It would be very valuable to get that from you.

RUTH: Alright, then away we go. This will take a few minutes. You can relax, but feel free to jump in anywhere. Two points. One is, it's my personal premise, my understanding, that one of the fundamental truths about exchanges is that they are born out of some sort of conflict, controversy, or injustice, and the attempts that good people make to limit or prevent these evils from happening again. We talked about the example of Senator Fulbright, along with many Americans, being horrified at the power of the atomic bomb and looking for some way to try and prevent that from ever having to happen again. This "call and response" model repeats over and over throughout the history of exchanges.

My second premise is that exchanges—outreach to the world—is a part of the American character. It's not something that is imposed on us. Paying taxes, for example, is not part of the American character; avoiding taxes is part of the American character. And yet we all do it because we understand what taxes pay for. But it isn't who we are. Exchanges, in my mind, and outreach to the world are, in fact, part of who we are. Going back to an earlier remark I made about the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which includes the phrase "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind."

I usually start this with World War I and the fact that Americans who were volunteers in the war, particularly in France in what was known as the American Field Service because they serviced field hospitals and drove ambulances and worked in what were called "ambulances" in French, came back and gathered together. They were horrified at the carnage that they saw and thought that they needed to do something to try and make the world a better place. That's still a valid goal. They began a youth exchange program that continues to this day, more than a hundred years later. It vastly predates the government's official activities.

Q: That's very historically important. Some say—and this is fitting with PD's development—that that phrase you quote from the Declaration of Independence is also one of the most effective citations of propaganda or persuasion. The audience of the Declaration of Independence was intended to be Europe. It was intended to explain to European citizens that what was happening in the U.S. was something that they might value. It was an act of persuasion. So, that same phrase does kind of imply the other side of PD. There are exchanges on the one hand, and persuasion on the other hand. So, even from that time—

RUTH: Absolutely. Excellent point. Of course, it reveals that at that point in time, America was not any kind of power in the world—not military, not naval, not political or diplomatic or economic. It was growing fast, and Europeans could see that, but it wasn't a power in its own right. What we had was values. That's generally my third point: what has remained consistent in American policy—or should have always remained consistent in American foreign policy and public diplomacy since the earliest days—is the importance of values. I don't need to dwell on that because many people have said that far more eloquently.

The next interesting date to me is 1919, when IIE, the Institute for International Education, was founded, also now more than a hundred years old. Interestingly, it was founded by two gentlemen—Elihu Root and Nicholas Murray Butler—both of whom went on to win the Nobel Prize for Peace. Root was a consummate diplomat. He served as secretary of various cabinets in various administrations. Nicholas Murray Butler was the head of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and president of Columbia University. So, this is a grand tradition we're seeing here from high school exchange to scholarly university exchanges going back a century or more.

Then, starting with World War II, we really begin to pick up the pace, if you will, for better and for worse. We have Franklin Roosevelt appointing the very young Nelson Rockefeller as coordinator for Inter-American Affairs. He began what we now call the International Visitor Leadership Program. The concern was that there was growing fascist influence in Latin America, and we needed to engage Latin America and what we today call thought leaders. So, we began bringing journalists and religious figures and others to the United States. Officially, in ECA, we date the start of the IVLP program with that

program. That's why when we talk about it being seventy, seventy-five years old, we're dating it back usually to 1940.

But in '46, at the end of the war, there was the Fulbright Program. In PD, of course, the war also brought us the Voice of America and so forth. It's interesting to me that at the start of the Fulbright Program, two of the first countries, in '47 and '48, to join the Fulbright Program were Cuba and Burma. We look at Cuba and Burma today and reflect on our long history with countries around the world.

Then, finally, in 1948, what are the two most important pieces of legislation? In this case, in 1948, it was what we call the Smith-Mundt Act. It's officially called the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948. Carl Mundt and H. Alexander Smith did that. That was about information. That was not about exchanges, per se, but it is the Information and Educational Exchange Act, and of course, all these activities at this point were in the Department of State. There was no U.S. Information Agency at that point.

That came fairly quickly, though, because in my mind, one of the most seminal figures in the history of public diplomacy and exchanges is President Dwight Eisenhower. I think that Eisenhower, as a general, as the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Europe, as someone who personally visited the liberated Holocaust concentration camps, is the quintessential example of someone who was so horrified by what he had seen that he vowed that in his personal and political life, he had to do something to try and prevent that from happening again or there being a World War III.

So, he created the U.S. Information Agency in 1953 by executive order. I generally associate that thinking that led to the creation of USIA with his famous statement that "Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace." USIA was very much a peace-making organization. An interesting small footnote: At one point, USIA Director Bruce Gelb seriously toyed with the idea of trying to make USIA's motto, "Waging peace." That is not a bad idea at all to replace "Telling America's story to the world," which seemed a little too one-way, shall we say.

Again, in the non-legislative category, I think that there was a fascinating moment in 1956 when President Eisenhower convened a White House conference on what he called the People-to-People Partnership. He had everybody there. He understood that this was the "whole of society," long before the term "whole of society" became trendy. There were government officials, there were union officials, religious and cultural leaders, business leaders, NGOs. He had the boxing commissioner from the state of New York there, along with Edward Stanton from CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] and the head of the American Legion. One of my favorites was William Faulkner, who on the official invitation list was simply listed as "Writer, Oxford, Mississippi." He was there. Eugene Ormandy was there. Bankers were there. All kinds of people were there.

When the president addressed them in person, he said—and I'll quote this—that they were gathered "for the most worthwhile purpose there is in the world today: to help build

the road to an enduring peace." That is still exactly how I think of exchanges and public diplomacy. It is still the most valuable purpose, the most worthwhile purpose, in the world. All good public diplomacy and all good exchanges are about peace and understanding. It may require us to prevail over our rivals, but the purpose of them is not simply to prevail over our rivals and then go home. The purpose is to establish lasting peace. It's also interesting that some of the well-known public diplomacy private sector organizations were founded at that 1956 conference, like Sister Cities International, People-to-People International, and the Business Council for International Understanding. They all date their origin to that conference.

Then, very quickly, the cold war— I won't spend a lot of time there, but the cold war gave us an explosion of public diplomacy tactics and options. There were exhibits, magazines, broadcasting, libraries, the arts. Nothing entranced people more than the arts—jazz ambassadors and so forth and so on. But finally, in 1959, Congress separated the cultural and exchange activities from the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs and created what was called CU, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Relations.

Then, in 1961, the second most important piece of legislation, along with the Smith-Mundt Act, was the Fulbright-Hays Act. Senator William Fulbright and Representative Wayne Hays, a Democrat of Ohio, made that one. That is the act that creates the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It says explicitly, "There is established a Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs." That's an important fact. Not too long ago, the department abolished, if you will, the Bureau of International Information Programs by merging it into the Bureau of Public Affairs. One of the reasons the department was able to do that without legislation was because IIP was not created by legislation. ECA would be a tougher nut to crack if you wanted to go after it because it is in fact specifically created in congressional legislation.

Q: Let's just get the chronology—USIA was 1953. CU was 1959. Fulbright-Hays created a bureau— Was that within State or USIA?

RUTH: That was in the State Department, that's right. Still within the State Department. It is the preamble to the Fulbright-Hays Act, which lays out all of the important, overarching considerations that we take when we conduct these affairs. First of all, it gives us ECA's unofficial motto, if you will, of "Mutual understanding." When people ask, in brief, What do you guys do?, mutual understanding is the answer. But it also states, in the Fulbright-Hays Act, very importantly, that exchanges under that act shall be non-political in character. It states that they will maintain the highest academic and artistic integrity, and that they shall be representative of the diversity of American society and opinion. Those are things we talk about to this day in ECA.

It was not until 1978, the year I joined the Foreign Service, that President Jimmy Carter moved ECA out of the department into USIA. Now, the reason, as we talked about earlier, that ECA was still in State and not made part of USIA in 1953 was opposition

from Senator Fulbright and others who thought that education and propaganda should not be cohabitating.

The way that President Carter—who was still, after all these decades, properly sensitive to the issue—tried to square the circle was, he turned the U.S. Information Agency into the United States International Communication Agency and gave it what was then called—you will remember this—the second mandate. The first mandate was telling America's story to the world. The second mandate, to be almost facetious, was telling the world's story to America. Hence, the mutuality of the Fulbright-Hays part of USICA.

Q: Was the second mandate part of legislation, or was that purely Carter?

RUTH: It was an executive order.

Q: Okay. We should note that the name USICA was a bad decision and created a lot of confusion. It was changed back to what it should have been, along with USIA. But we'll get to that, I'm sure.

RUTH: Yes. So, Jimmy Carter was swept out by Ronald Reagan, and Ronald Reagan and his hand-picked head of USIA, Charles Wick, detested the name USICA. They changed it right back to the U.S. Information Agency, but of course, ECA stayed, naturally. My favorite anecdote about USICA— Well, I have two favorite anecdotes about USICA. One is the story that I have heard from numerous people that have served in Cairo, and I believe it to be true. When they changed the name on the building—and this was in Arabic; U.S. International Communications Agency—a line of people around the block showed up with their malfunctioning telephones and so forth hoping to get them fixed. As you said, it's just a bizarre title, and it meant nothing to anybody. It sounds like IT [information technology] or AT&T or something like that.

Q: I can add to that. With a visiting group of African IVLP grantees, I do remember checking into a hotel in New Orleans where the reception desk most graciously said, "We welcome you, members of the CIA." They were very gracious, but that misunderstanding was weird.

RUTH: That was the problem. It was also the initials for the International Culinary Academy, but nobody cared about that. And here's my second anecdote. There was a group of young officers at USICA who had a softball team, and they had t-shirts made up that said on the front, "ICA, not CIA," and on the back it said, "Lies, not spies." That was pretty funny.

Q: That's a good one.

RUTH: So, anyway, that all got changed back, but again, ECA stayed in USIA. Then, the next major thing was the merger in 1999 of the whole shebang—except for broadcasting—into the State Department. We've talked about it already since that time.

But those are the key lily pads that the public diplomacy frog hopped on, from one to the other, over the decades.

Q: Yes. Let's point out that this was really the history of ECA. There were other things going on like BBG and USAGM and all that.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: We are recording again. It's still January 19. Rick Ruth, Dan Whitman. This is our second recording of the day. Let's pick up then, Rick, from— This is a great vade mecum that you have just provided. You were talking, last time, in the narrative of your own experience. There was a sense of crisis at certain times in ECA when, frankly, the politics did not favor it. You called it a group cohesion, like they have in the military. Can we pick up from that point?

RUTH: Absolutely. We said goodbye to that period of time when we had good, solid career people acting—Bruce Wharton in R and Mark Taplin in ECA. ECA continued to have Foreign Service career leadership because we still didn't have an assistant secretary appointed by the White House. We had a new career Foreign Service officer, Ambassador Jennifer Galt, who had been our ambassador in Mongolia. She took over in ECA as acting. Then, towards the very end of 2017, Steve Goldstein was named as under secretary for R.

Both of them have to be described as transitional figures. Jennifer Galt served for a very solid period of time, both as acting assistant secretary and then as principal deputy assistant secretary under Marie Royce. Steve Goldstein was truly transitional; he only lasted about three months. He went out along with Rex Tillerson. So, there's really nothing to say about Steve Goldstein.

The new, most interesting period of time began with Marie Royce being named and confirmed as assistant secretary for ECA. She was there for close to three years. Today's her last day, as it turns out. January 19. Most ECA assistant secretaries do not think of themselves as overtly "political." They are political appointees, of course. In some cases, as I mentioned previously, they've even thought they might stay on across administrations because of the apolitical nature of ECA. Of course, that never has happened and it's unlikely that it ever would; it's too desirable a job to not be given to somebody who's a supporter or associate of a new president.

Marie faced a lot of challenges, overcame them, and had a good number of accomplishments. I'll start just by mentioning that the battle with OMB over the budget continued. There could be no greater challenge, of course, than to meet this existential threat. OMB ceased its attempt to completely abolish ECA, but they continued to seek savage budget cuts. One third, one half, two thirds of the budget. This became almost a joke, but it was gallows humor. Every year, year after year, OMB would come right back, even after Congress smacked them around and increased ECA's budget. Every year,

OMB proposed to decrease it, Congress increased it. So, in that sense they perhaps did us a favor by galvanizing our support and galvanizing the opposition to those cuts.

Major kudos to Marie for steering ECA safely through these perilous waters. But it was an enormous headache for the bureau and an enormous challenge for Marie Royce because as public servants and State Department employees and federal government employees, we were obliged to support the president's budget. As I mentioned to you last time, when I went up on the Hill to meet with our oversight committees, which is something that happens every single year when a new budget is rolled out, I was obliged to defend the cuts, because that's what you do. You play it straight.

It often astounded people that I would go to the Hill and argue *in favor* of the cuts. [Accompanied, mind you, by representatives of the Budget Office, from H, and sometimes RPPR. I was also fortunate to be accompanied by the best budget officer I ever knew, the marvelous Yolanda Robinson.] But it was the president's budget and so it was the secretary of state's budget and so it was my budget. I would generally begin by saying something like: "The current ECA budget reflects the priorities of the administration—" At that point, a Hill staffer would kindly interrupt and say, and I quote, "Rick, you don't have to do this." Then the congressional staff would take over and they would tell the officials who accompanied me why cuts of this magnitude in ECA's budget were unacceptable.

It worked out very nicely in the end, but you have to play it straight. But that also means that you've got good, honest Foreign Service officers and civil servants who are laboriously preparing detailed narrative documents and spreadsheets for a horrifying two-thirds cut in the bureau's budget. The documents have to be submitted by the usual deadlines in the usual ways with all the usual templates. The Kafkaesque bureaucracy moves along, even though everybody up the food chain, all the way to the secretary's office, would say, We know this is not going to happen. But you have to go through all the effort anyway.

It always reminded me of a very seminal moment in Dostoyevsky's life, where as a young man he belonged to a radical reading club called the Petrashevsky Circle. They never did anything except talk about what were then considered radical ideas, but he was arrested, along with the others, and charged. He was sentenced to death, and they actually led him out to be shot by a firing squad before it was called off. It was all planned to be called off; they just wanted to scare the crap out of him, which they did, and then send him off to Siberia instead of shooting him.

You know, that's what they made us do every single year. They made us prepare a formal budget, which we saluted to, eviscerating ourselves. At the same time, everybody knew it wasn't going to happen. I remember one particularly effective presentation that Marie made to the under secretary for management. They had gone through first the PA budget and then the IIP budget, and then they got to ECA. She said, "Welcome to the other side

of the looking glass. Nothing I say will make any sense to you. I can go through it all, but it's not going to happen." And everybody knew that.

Q: So, we could call this interview "Notes from Underground," I guess.

RUTH: There you go. *Notes from Underground*. One of my favorite books. "I am not a well man," he says. "I am a sick man."

Q: So, you weren't quite in front of a firing squad, but the effort to intimidate was somewhat comparable, I guess.

RUTH: True. It made a writer out of him, I suppose. Anyway, Marie Royce handled all of this most adroitly over the years, although it was not without a great deal of anguish throughout the bureau. Of course, there was also a great deal of messaging and morale-building throughout the bureau to keep spirits up. Eventually, people got to realize that it wasn't going to happen. They began to believe that okay, we're going through the motions about a 50 percent cut, but it's not going to happen.

It was, nonetheless, a serious morale issue even so, because people understood that their president didn't care about their mission, and even the secretary of state didn't care about their mission, because the secretary of state was fine with huge cuts in ECA.

Q: You mentioned, I think in the last interview, your idea of having individual coffee with people, partly for explanation and partly for morale boosting. I'm guessing that must have been enormously positive to those who were lucky enough to be with you. Any comments about— Was it during this period— You said, "We said goodbye." When was that? Was it '17? When Wharton came, you left? Is that what you were saying?

RUTH: I'm sorry, when who came?

Q: You said something like, "We said goodbye." Does that mean that's when you retired, in '17?

RUTH: No, we haven't gotten there yet. I forget who I was saying we said goodbye to.

Q: Oh, okay. So, here you are—

RUTH: We said goodbye to the career assistant secretary and under secretary. Anyway—

Q: Oh, I see, you said goodbye to the previous ones. My misunderstanding. So, you were— There were the fictional firing squads, and you and Marie Royce somehow kept the morale going. How did you do that? Did you do it through individual conversations? There must have been a lot of chatter by email, and email is always quick to be distorted.

RUTH: There was a lot of chatter, of course. It was done in several ways. First of all, everybody had to do their part. This is not a one-person accomplishment in any way, shape or form, and Marie Royce, as assistant secretary, did her part. Our PDAS and DASes did, too. But it was part of that unit cohesion that I mentioned, and then part of it was also our history of support on Capitol Hill.

In terms of unit cohesion, one of the things I learned from those hundred-plus coffees that I mentioned—and I don't drink coffee; I always had iced tea—is that nobody was at ECA by accident. I asked every single person I spoke to, "How did you end up at ECA?"

In every single case, without exception, they said that at some point in their lives, they encountered the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. They may have been a Fulbrighter. They may have been an overseas teacher. They may have lived overseas because their family was internationally based. They may have worked for one of our exchange partners, for IIE or IREX or World Learning. They came to understand that, wow, there's a bureau that does nothing but educational and cultural exchanges. That's awesome. That's where I want to be. They set their sights on it. They applied multiple times. They went through USAJobs. They worked deliberately, purposefully, to end up at ECA.

Now, that meant a couple of things in terms of the stress you were talking about and the challenge. That is, nobody ran for the exits when they heard about OMB wanting to abolish us, because this was where they wanted to be. They had worked hard to get to ECA. They loved working at ECA, though with the usual complaints that everybody has about bureaucracy in any organization. They weren't going to be easily scared away. They were going to hold on to their jobs in the hopes that everything would in fact turn out alright.

It also meant going back to this cohesion idea— ECA employees, by and large, are people people, to use that tired old phrase. They like other people. They want to deal with other people. That's who they are; that's why they're in this business. So, it wasn't a lot of siloed, alienated men and women from the underground barely tolerating each other. These people knew how to pull together and work together. That's who they were by their very nature, as well as by their business. So, it was a good, solid group to work with.

The most important thing they did was that they did not panic. They didn't pick up the phones and frantically call all their friends in the exchange organizations. They didn't go up and lobby the Hill. They didn't panic. They stuck to their game. We talked, in our last conversation, about how I had asked people specifically to not be Paul Revere about the bad news. The word would get out quickly enough; they didn't have to do it. I didn't want them to give anybody in OMB or anybody on the Hill who might be in favor of cutting our budget—there always are some—any pretext, any excuse to say, "Hey, look, these people are defying their own administration. They're defying their own president. They're lobbying Congress, which is illegal." That never came up. There was never an issue.

I told people that the best thing they could do was to keep producing the best possible exchange programs every single day. I was absolutely not telling them to just go back to their desks and go to work and leave me alone. Don't bother your heads with all of this. I was saying the opposite. If you want to be effective, if you want to be powerful, if you want to influence the outcome towards the way you want it to be, go back to your desk and do your job as well as you know how, and you all know how to do it very well.

And they did it. There never was any negative ammunition. There was no blowback for any opponent of ECA to grab a hold of. It would have been counterproductive to panic. We just had to keep people informed and let them know that, oh, by the way, if we ever go away, then everything goes away. Even if we stay but they cut us by two thirds or by a half, there's no way we can sustain Fulbright, Mansfield, Humphrey, Gilman. We can't do that.

Well, that's all you have to say. You don't have to beat them over the head. They're going to be opposed to those cuts because they support those programs. So, part of it was what I would call bureaucratic jiu jitsu. You use your opponent's forward motion against them. You say, "Yes, the OMB proposes to cut us by half. That's the president's budget, so that's our budget. We support that. If that happens, the following things will happen." Nobody wants to hear what's going to happen. As you can imagine from the field, imagine being a public affairs officer with no Fulbright, no Youth Exchange, no IVLP, no English language programs, no nothing. Well, that's criminal with a capital C.

So, part of it was just making sure that we aligned ourselves with the right forward motion and didn't get in the way of people who wanted to help us. Make sense?

Q: Yes. You walked a very fine line. We know that panic is contagious. All signs normally would have been towards a contagion of panic, but through a combination of telling the truth, showing attention and respect to every individual in ECA, and not glossing over what was happening by instead explaining why it was in their interest not to lobby but to keep going— Looking back, this is really an enormous individual achievement by you. I'll just say that.

RUTH: Well, lots of it was an achievement by six hundred individuals and our assistant secretary and others. Everybody bought into it, and everybody played their part properly, and it worked.

Q: From my outsider's observation, there was lots of demoralization. I don't know about panic, but there was a real sense of a sinking ship. So, if the productivity was sustained in the interest of keeping the budget, I'm just saying— This is not a question, but I think this is a major achievement.

RUTH: Well, certainly, I would agree that it seemed like everything I had done in my career led up to that moment. That was the existential threat to ECA, and I was pleased—there's no other word for it—to be able to be there for that battle.

I also must insert here a paean to the exchange professionals who were my colleagues for years, and decades, at ECA. It's overdue for me to single them out. I've been talking about my bosses, mostly politicals. That's reasonable because they were the decision makers and because, for the last thirty-one years of my career, I reported directly to a political appointee. But to fail to mention the Civil Service exchange professionals who made it all possible would be unpardonable. These are the people who serve our nation so very well, who make the bureau hum, who hold our values high, who know and care for every sparrow that falls, and who made my life good. The limits of time and space prevent me from naming more than a few of them, which is, in and of itself, a crime. But to mention none of them at all would be a far more grievous offense. So here's to you: Marianne Craven, the rock upon which our academic programs stand;
Yolanda Robinson, the shrewd and masterful budget officer who keeps the bureau moving; and the incomparable Chris Miner, who is the heart and the soul of our professional and cultural exchanges.

Q: It's not an exaggeration to call it a battle. There weren't weapons, but the power of the purse says everything about U.S. policy, as we keep being reminded. Well, this is very dramatic. Do we get to the point where— You left in '19, is that what you said?

RUTH: I left on Halloween Day in 2019, that's right. So, that was just one thing Marie Royce had to deal with. I would mention that I participated in a video farewell for her a couple of days ago. The ECA budget, going into this coming fiscal year, is once again higher than it's ever been. She has overseen an historically high ECA budget every year of her tenure. That's just marvelous. ECA was, of course, part of the preposterous recission package that the Trump administration sent to the Hill just a couple of days ago where they tried to once again cut back on the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and all those things that are cultural, scholarly, and therefore of no value.

Q: This may sound political, but I guess the enormous tax cut passed a year ago may have left some gaps in the federal budget.

RUTH: Yes.

Q: —and will not be adequate to make up for those deficits.

RUTH: True. The flip side is that Marie didn't just maintain the budget or increase it, but she added programs steadily throughout her tenure. She worked very closely with Ivanka Trump's office on a program called Women's Global Development and Prosperity, WGDP. I had the unexpected opportunity of joining a meeting in the West Wing with Marie Royce and Ms. Trump. It was fascinating. It was entirely cordial and business-like.

Ivanka was delighted to learn of all the programs ECA already had for women entrepreneurs and economic leaders.

There was genuine irony in that while OMB kept trying to cut us, as we've just talked about exhaustively, we had extremely good relations with the White House itself. So, for example, Ivanka Trump spoke several times, personally and by video, to different groups that we brought over. H.R. McMaster, when he was national security advisor, spoke to our people. Dina Powell, former ECA assistant secretary, became deputy national security advisor and spoke to our people.

On a number of occasions, President Trump's remarks mentioned our programs, like when he met on Baltic Day with the Baltic presidents, all three of whom were ECA alumni. The First Lady would come over to the State Department for the Women of Courage awards. So, we had a very cordial and business-like, friendly relationship back and forth with the White House at the same time that OMB was trying to eliminate us. So, that was just part of the schizophrenia we had to deal with.

Q: Crazy. When was the meeting with Ivanka Trump? Was it in 2020?

RUTH: It was in 2019.

Q: Wow.

RUTH: We added national security programs in honor of Senator McCain. We added, most importantly, two offices at the time that IIP was merged with Public Affairs, becoming Global Public Affairs. But the Office of American Spaces—what was American Corners but is now American Spaces because they come in a variety of different forms—and the Office of U.S. Speakers moved to ECA. That was not easy. There was significant opposition to that. That turned out to be a real bureaucratic dogfight in which Marie Royce and ECA prevailed. The fight was internal because there were quite a number of people in the State Department in the greater R family who did not want those offices coming to ECA.

Q: What about the employees in those programs? Did they have—

RUTH: They mostly wanted to come to ECA. In the case of American Spaces, many always thought they should've been in ECA all along because these are your former information resource officers and your librarians and others. They always wanted to be in ECA. The people in Speakers also understood that while they were reversing the direction by sending American experts abroad, it was essentially like the IVLP program. It was a people-to-people program. They were sending human beings around to engage their counterparts and audiences. That's ECA's wheelhouse. That's what we do best.

Those two offices were not themselves resistant. But it was that old bureaucratic game of, "I want to grow my office. I want to be bigger, badder, stronger," whatever it is. There are

always those bureaucratic siren songs of centralization and standardization. So, a lot of people in R wanted those two offices to come to R/PPR, not to ECA. They even proposed creating a new bureau, the Bureau of Public Diplomacy, which would house all of those. They even went so far as to poison several Hill staffers against ECA so that we had to deal very frankly with the Hill about why those offices should come to ECA. When we talked to Hill staff, we could hear the R/PPR talking points coming back to us. But in the end, it worked out. That is an extremely significant change in the structure and overall history of ECA, that those two offices are now part of exchanges.

The other major item that I would mention is that the Hill, to our surprise, provided us with ten million dollars a couple of years ago, and they have continued it ever since, to use and develop exchanges specifically to combat disinformation, particularly Russian disinformation.

There were a number of Hill staffers, much to my delight, who believed that exchanges were the best antidote to disinformation, not information programs, for the simple reason that— We've touched on this earlier. In any conversation, in any relationship, in any dialogue, are you going to do better exchanging tweets and postings back and forth with somebody you've never met, or are you likely to do better if you go see that person, sit down with them face to face, talk, and spend time together? They focus so much on the tweet that they forget about the person sending and receiving it. ECA informs, educates, influences the people who send and receive.

It seems simple, to me, but apparently it's a hard sell in a lot of areas, because as you just mentioned very shrewdly a few minutes ago, there's the power of the purse. Every one of these programs comes with money and staff. So, if you want that money and staff, you invent reasons why you should be in charge of that program and not ECA. From my perspective, it's a slam dunk that they should belong to ECA.

Be that as it may, we were given these ten million dollars, but we were told to come up with a plan. So, starting with very helpful guidance from Marie, we worked very collegially throughout the department, particularly with EUR. This funding was focused on Russia and adjacent states, not globally. We came up with a list of eligible countries. We came up with topics. We met interagency and came up with the programs that we thought made the most sense.

We came up with five strategic principles to guide the use of exchanges. One was to build networks. Some of these things sound profoundly obvious to people who are in exchanges, but they're not obvious to people who are not familiar with exchanges. One is that you need to create that human authenticity, to build relationships among people that go beyond the Twitterverse.

The second was to be positive. We talked about this earlier as well, Dan. It sounds almost like something out of elementary school, but exchanges are always better if they are for something and not against something. So, if you are against censorship, the most

productive thing to do is to be for the free flow of information. Don't go crusading, "Down with censorship!" Just say, "Develop free flow of information," and then the problem goes away, and everybody's allowed to be positive and move forward. It keeps our participants and the people we engage with from getting in the crosshairs of their own, often illiberal governments. They're not saying, Down with the government of Hungary, or, Down with the policies of the Polish government. They're saying, Let's let Poland be open to the world. Let's let Poles speak for themselves. They're empowering themselves rather than opposing anything. So, always be positive.

Then, reach out to youth. Young people have to understand that with their increasing digital deftness comes responsibility. Technology, as we've talked about, is value neutral. Splitting the atom or posting things on the web: it's value neutral. You, as an individual, have a moral responsibility as a moral actor to decide how you're going to use your skill and how you're going to use that technology. That particularly applies to young people who now live and breathe this kind of online society.

Fourth, play the long game. I like to say that authoritarian regimes and dictatorships win sprints, but democracies win marathons. We won the cold war. Let's not forget that. Now, it can be aggravating to run a marathon when everyone else is running a sprint. That means that while you're going around the track for the five hundredth time, you can't help but notice that the guys running the hundred-yard dash are having their parties and getting celebrated and up on the medal stand and playing the national anthem, and you're still running the marathon. But that's a little bit like the tortoise and the hare. As the Russians themselves say: *Tishe edesh', dal'she budesh*. The quieter you go, the farther you get. So, exchanges play the long game, and they win the long game.

Finally, one of the incalculable benefits of exchanges is that they can address the root causes of disinformation and the reception and belief in disinformation. With exchanges, you can look at levels of education, both specialized in the sense of digital literacy programs but also general education. You can also look at media ownership and journalism practices. You can look at the levels of trust between different sectors of society.

You know and I know that anywhere in a society where there is a potential or existing fracture line—linguistically, religiously, ethnically—that's where outside disinformation is always going to drive the wedge. So, if it's Russians in Estonia, you know that's where it's going to drive the wedge. So with exchange programs, you can shape the context in which the entire society operates by working with the journalists, working with the educators, working with the parliamentarians, working with the cultural figures, and so forth and so on. It's much broader than, again, pinging back and forth in the information space.

So, we put together that kind of string of organizing principles and a set of programs and so on. Congress liked it, and it has continued, as far as I know, to this day. We're still

continuing to receive that additional funding to carry out those disinformation exchange programs.

Q: It seems to me that those five principles go along perfectly with any exchange, whether it's disinformation or any other topic, I think.

RUTH: That's true.

Q: Remarkable. So, that could be a vade mecum for public diplomacy. I see that this narrative began in Russia and has returned to Russia. We've got bookends for this narrative. Are we at the retirement point? I do have one last question, but what else in the narrative of the last year or two of your work comes to mind? There was Marie Royce, your ten million dollars. Is there anything else that we should remember to include here?

RUTH: You know, I sort of go back to the beginning and how we talked about the fact that exchanges are, in my mind, a natural or organic outgrowth of the American character. We've always been proud to be Americans. We've always had a story to tell the world. Sometimes we've told it more than the world wanted to hear it. That's a different issue. But we think we have an experience to share. We are the longest-running experiment in how men and women govern themselves freely. We have to do this humbly because one need only take the most cursory look at American history to know how far we have fallen short of the mark, and how we have fallen short of our ideals, our faith, our values.

But we never give up the struggle. We know the values are right, and we know the struggle is worth it. We just saw another horrifying example of it a few days ago on Capitol Hill. But those of us—you and I and others—who have seen this business for a while remember Vietnam and the bombing of Cambodia and those issues. We remember the Sandinistas in Central America. We remember proxy wars in the Congo and the death of Dag Hammarskjold. We remember 9/11. We remember the riots after Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were killed.

It isn't like America was Camelot, and suddenly we've fallen on hard times. America has always been a most tremendously difficult and complex country to explain. Every culture, every country, is complex, but there is an added burden on America because of our position of leadership in the world—militarily, economically, politically, culturally, socially. It is our responsibility, our duty, to get out around the world and explain who we are. To say what our values are. To say how what we do in the world supposedly reflects those values, and what it is we're up to.

Since you're studying Russian, I'll mention that there are two ways of saying "why": One is *pochemu*, which is just a neutral "why." The other is *za chem*, meaning, for what? It's a little bit more suspicious. When I used to give talks in Russia, people would often ask, with that little bit of edge, Why does the American government fund exchanges? Why do you want to bring our young people to your country? The question is not *pochemu*; it's *za*

chem. For what purpose are you doing this? We need to be candid about that. We do have a story to tell that we think is important to share.

But again, one of the beauties of exchanges is that exchanges show, they don't tell. When we bring over IVLPs, they see with their own eyes, they hear with their own ears, they ask questions with their own voices, and they make up their own minds. Because they come to their own conclusions, those conclusions are lasting. This is true of every exchange program. We don't have a party line to give anybody. We don't peddle any particular point of view. We just bring them to America. They may be a teenager spending a year in Nebraska at a high school. They may be a Fulbrighter spending a year at the University of Chicago. They may be an IVLP traveling around on Women in National Security. It doesn't matter. Other than having somebody escort them around to help them around the bureaucracies and so forth, they're on their own. They make up their own minds. They think what they think; they like what they like; they don't like what they don't like.

One thing I often say—and I don't know if I've said it in these conversations—that sometimes surprises my audience is that, as far as I am concerned, the purpose of exchanges is not to make people like us. I don't give a rat's ass whether they like us or not at the end of an exchange. What I want is for them to understand us accurately. I want them to have an accurate, genuine understanding of who we are. So, if they like us or don't like us, or they like this policy or don't like that policy, they're coming to these conclusions on the basis of facts and not because of misinformation or stereotypes or some other kind of falsehood. That, to me, is the beauty of exchanges.

Ta da. End of speech.

Q: I was going to say, Rick Ruth, I had some other thoughts, but I cannot break up this marvelous explanation that you've just given. We're still recording. I want to thank you for your years lashed to the mast, more than once, rescuing the whole endeavor from those who saw no value in it. I want to also thank you for explaining it with such erudition and such love for the field of public diplomacy. Thank you.

RUTH: Thank you.

End of interview