

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

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INTERVIEW

Nairobi and Hollywood

By late spring of 1982, my law practice had shifted completely to the fast growing, exciting world of communications policy. By that time, the Reagan-appointed Chairman of the FCC, a former broadcast attorney named Mark Fowler, was aggressively pushing for sweeping deregulation of the U.S. broadcasting industry. While I supported deregulation, I favored adherence to a basic recommendation of my FCC Transition Report - namely prudent deregulation. And prudent deregulation is what the Hollywood community wanted- thoughtful, incremental deregulation that would still prevent the three networks from abusing their collective, gatekeeper control over every program aired in primetime. This was an era before cables' and satellites' pay programming and digital services offered consumers nearly unlimited choices. So, Hollywood moguls, confronting a particularly determined deregulator with the Reagan Administration's FCC Chairman Fowler, knew they were especially vulnerable if the FCC eliminated three sister rules- the Prime Time Access Rule (PTAR), the Financial Interest Rule and the Syndication Rules (Fin-Syn.)

Adopted almost a decade earlier by the Nixon FCC and codified into consent decrees between the then three networks and the Justice Department, the PTAR and Fin-Syn rules had opened up prime time programming to creative independent producers who thrived because they produced and distributed diverse entertainment (and sometimes socially provocative) programming like The Cosby Show, All in the Family, Dallas, the Golden Girls, etc. The then three national television networks tenaciously sought the repeal of the PTAR and the Fin-Syn rules -- rules that deflected a \$5 billion annual revenue stream to Hollywood by restricting the three networks from producing or syndicating prime time television programming.

As it turned out, my first communications client after my FCC transition duties ended was a group of competitive Hollywood television programmers who were born under the shield of the PTAR. Fortunately, for me and my growing communications law practice, in spite of FCC Chairman Fowler's efforts to repeal the PTAR, my Coalition blocked this potentially precedent setting deregulation by one vote.

The three networks were stunned -- and the new FCC Chairman was furious. After all, this was supposed to be the era of total deregulation -- not prudent deregulation!

As my luck would have it, my successful defense of the Prime Time Access Rule made me the go-to guy for the Hollywood Studios when CBS, ABC and NBC turned their attention in 1982 to repealing the Fin-Syn Rules. From the networks perspective, the repeal of Fin-Syn was understandably a multi-billion dollar priority; in the networks view, it was time to let the networks once again produce and syndicate their own prime time schedule, not Hollywood's studios and independent producers. Billions in annual revenues were at stake, and with the Reagan Administration's and Chairman Fowler's deregulatory agenda, CBS, ABC and NBC had the stage set for victory.

But that's before the legendary Lew Wasserman, Chairman of MCA and its Universal Studio, determined that the Fin-Syn Rules should remain unchanged.

I got lucky; Lew Wasserman hired me to run a new Hollywood Coalition appropriately called "The Coalition for Prudent Deregulation." Wasserman told me years later that he decided to hire me because of my past success in 1981. If I could beat the networks' over repeal of the weakest of the three rules, I had the stuff to protect the Fin-Syn Rules. So I became the lead Counsel of a Coalition consisting of all the major Hollywood studios, and importantly, the 250 plus independent producers who created the television shows that aired Monday through Friday nights on the three networks.

As it turned out, I became Lew Wasserman's communications attorney for the next two decades. For twenty plus years, one of the most respected men in Hollywood mentored me, shared his incredible insights about all the Presidents he had been close to from JFK to Bill Clinton, named me to the Board of Directors of MCA's spinoff broadcast company when he sold MCA to the Japanese, and even gave me and Theresa the use of his Belgravia townhouse when we were in London. He would become a great force in my life -- but first we had to derail Chairman Fowler's number one priority: total repeal of the Fun-Syn rules.

And that's when Lew assembled the initial team: me as lead counsel, the pioneering female lobbyist and former aide to Governor Ronald Reagan, Nancy Reynolds; the legislative troops from Akin Gump; and MPAA's energetic CEO, Jack Valenti. While our ranks would grow to include dozens of other lawyers and lobbyists during the 10-year plus long Fin-Syn fight, Lew Wasserman's handpicked original team would keep the networks (that grew to include Fox) regulated until the Fin-Syn rules were finally repealed in the early 1990s.

While Hollywood's Coalition for Prudent Deregulation was starting in the spring of 1982 to engage Chairman Fowler and the three resourceful networks in battle at the FCC and on Capitol Hill, a totally unrelated thing happened. The Reagan White House, with the urging of some key GOP friends, asked me in June 1982 to head the U.S. delegation to a United Nation's Telecommunications Treaty Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. Scheduled to take place at Nairobi's huge Kenyatta Center from September through mid-November 1982, the U.N.'s International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference would require extensive bilateral

meetings around the world for the U.S. Ambassador if I accepted the job. Moreover, the job would require building a long-overdue consensus between warring officials from the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Commerce Department. Friction was so bad between the federal telecom policy experts that each Department put out separate, often differing, white papers on the key 76 issues to be addressed at the conference -- 152 different white papers in all.

But, as bad as things were between the federal members of the U.S. delegation, and as busy as I was organizing the Coalition for Prudent Deregulation, I was really intrigued: a six-month Ambassadorship with pre-conference travel around the world -- followed by 10 weeks in exotic Kenya.

And happily, Theresa, who had sometimes shown a strong antipathy toward ambassadors, was on board.

"Okay Mick, I'll do it -- as long as Courtney and Christine and I can share as much as possible in this experience -- and that means travel to Africa and phone calls from you every morning and every night." Theresa, a Montessorian, knew the great educational value of travel and exposure to varied cultures; in fact, when Courtney was just seven and Christine was five years old, Theresa chose a three-week family Christmas trip through Western and Central Europe, rather than buy drapes for our new house. So taking the girls now 10 and 8 to Kenya for a pre-conference bi-lateral was a priority.

However, there were two big hurdles yet to be scaled before I could accept:

- (1) I needed a free watts line to call home twice a day, as well as to stay in touch with clients as we built up the Coalition for Prudent Deregulation, and
- (2) I needed the FCC Chairman to delay, for at least six months while I was doing the Nairobi gig, the just commenced FCC rulemaking to repeal of the Fin-Syn rules.

How could I go off on this tempting assignment and leave Lew Wasserman and wonderful independent producers like Marian Rees and Marcy Carsey to the vagaries of the networks' legions of lawyers and lobbyists?

Miraculously, both of my needs were promptly met: I'd have the only secure watts phone line in Kenya and the Fin-Syn rulemaking would be put on the backburner, at least until I was permanently home from Nairobi.

So, I immediately started reading the 152 policy papers and began scheduling the "must do bilaterals" -- meetings intended to build consensus around major U.S. positions. And when consensus wasn't possible, I had to at least flush out the opposition so there were no big surprises when the U.S. delegation arrived in Nairobi.

One issue "you definitely don't have to worry about Ambassador Gardner", a senior State Department official confidently confirmed, was the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations due to Israel's devastating assault on Beirut, Lebanon. Earlier in 1982, Israel's massive invasion of Lebanon (the Beirut Massacre, as it was commonly called), resulted in harsh global anti-Israel

criticism with the promise of expelling Israel from the United Nations when the U.N.'s General Assembly took place in New York in late September. Even though the United States was privately angry at Israel for overreaching in Beirut, I was assured that issues related to Israel would not be addressed in Nairobi.

Confident that there would be no anti-Israel mischief in Nairobi, it was time for me to conduct pre-conference meetings with Ministers of Communications from all over the world. After the first few meetings with leaders in Europe, Scandinavia and the Caribbean Basin, I was told that it was "a priority" for me to meet the key Kenyans who were hosting the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Nairobi. So with Courtney and Christine out of school, the Gardner Family headed to Kenya with the exciting prospect of seeing lions, elephants, rhinos, monkeys and other wild animals in the bush.

On our arrival in Nairobi in late July, we were met by U.S. Embassy officials who quickly cleared us through customs and dropped us off at the Nairobi Hilton. Since Theresa's father was the respected President of the five-star Homestead Hotel in Hot Springs, Virginia, the head of the Hilton had arranged for us to have the huge Presidential suite for the cost of a single room. Luxurious as the hotel was, we all were struck by overwhelming poverty evident everywhere in Nairobi. When I told the Embassy driver that I would get myself to my meeting later that day with the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, he protested, "Not safe, Sir, not safe! Too many beggars; not safe!"

And an hour later after we enjoyed chicken sandwiches in the Presidential suite, I would find out how correct that driver was. As I tried to get into a cab in front of the Hilton, I was literally encircled by a mob of Kenyans -- children dressed in rags, disabled or handicapped beggars on makeshift roller boards, even elderly people frantically holding out their cups for a few coins. While I had seen firsthand some really poor Americans when working for Sarge Shriver at the Office of Economic Opportunity (AKA the War on Poverty), I had never seen such raw and pervasive poverty as I saw on my first outing in Nairobi.

When I mentioned my shock to the U.S. Ambassador at the U.S. Marine guarded U.S. Embassy, the Ambassador looked bemused. "What did you expect?" he said, "This is Africa."

Annoyed, I told this beleaguered Foreign Service Officer that I had seen a lot of poverty in the U.S., but nothing like this.

"It's explosive here," I said. "And when I return in September with my 28-person White House approved delegation I want Marine Corps protection for them, at the Hotel and at the Kenyatta Center," I declared. We clearly were off to a bad start.

"Mr. Gardner (not Ambassador), you're overreacting. Marine protection will not be necessary; moreover it would insult the Kenyan leadership." Ending our brief meeting so I could meet with Kenyan officials, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya offered an Embassy car and driver for our excursion the next day to the Salt Lick Game Reserve, followed by a two- night stay at Diani Reef on the Indian Ocean. "Thanks, but no thank you. I've made arrangements for a rental car."

That night, the four Gardners and a senior ICT official from the Commerce Department named Frank Urbany had dinner at a lobster restaurant highly recommended by Hilton Hotel's concierge. Once again, we were swarmed by beggars as we entered our cab at the Hilton. But after copious wine with dinner, world traveler Frank Urbany suggested we walk the two short blocks back to the Hilton. Theresa insisted we wait for a cab, but after a fruitless 15-minute wait and still no cab, we reluctantly took off on foot to the Hilton.

It was a foolish thing to do.

No sooner had we moved 50 yards from the restaurant, when a group of teenage boys appeared asking for "donations" as they encircled us. Fortunately, the doorman at the restaurant saw the menacing situation and ran towards us barking some harsh Swahili to the scattering teenagers. As he got to us, I finally realized that the big wooden staff that the doorman held while opening the restaurant's front door for patrons was not decorative; it was real and surely had scared away others in this crowded, impoverished city.

After profusely thanking the fearless doorman, we negotiated a deal: he would walk us the remaining 300 yards to the Hilton in exchange for \$10 U.S.

Safely back in the Hilton, we said a hasty good night to Frank and took the elevator to the Presidential suite.

Riding with us to the hotel's top floor were two smiling Japanese businessmen who promptly presented their cards. Since they didn't speak English and our Japanese was limited only to a rough version of "Happy New Year," we shook hands, and repeatedly said, "Good night, good night."

Once inside our suite, I opened a beer.

"Theresa, we're going to the bush tomorrow and not coming back to Nairobi. We can fly from Mombasa -- and never have to come back into the city. And believe me, when I come back, if the city doesn't blowup before the conference, I'll be coming back with Marine protection," I declared.

"Let's go to bed." Theresa urged. "We've got a big day tomorrow. And promise, you'll call the Ambassador first thing tomorrow morning and take him up on an Embassy car and driver."

No sooner had she repeated her wise plea for a driver, the phone rang. It was now midnight in Kenya.

To my total surprise, it was FCC Chairman Mark Fowler. "Hey, we just got through a Commission meeting and we wanted to see how you're doing in Kenya. Is it a fun place?"

Fatigued and stressed out, I made no attempt at civil conversation: "Mark, this place is the armpit of the world. Beggars everywhere, homeless people living in the streets -- it's ten times worst than anything I've seen in the United States."

Pausing, Mark interrupted: "Oh, come on, Mickey, you're just jetlagged. It can't be that bad. The ITU would not have selected Nairobi if it was unsafe."

I was now sitting on the side of my bed with Theresa urging me to calm down.

"Listen, Mark, this place is going to blow up. I can feel it. And if and when I come back to Nairobi, tell Kenny (our mutual friend Ken Cribb at the White House) and Bill Schneider (Under Secretary at the State Department) that there better be Marines with the Delegation!"

Feeling my stress, Mark used his most soothing, broadcaster's voice to end the call.

"Sorry old pal that you had a bad day but get a good night's sleep Mickey, and I'm sure things will get better."

In retrospect, the Chairman's call was very thoughtful and he was very positive while I wasn't. But as time would prove, my intuition was spot on.

Promptly, the next morning, the Gardner girls dressed in their safari outfits for our 9:00 am departure from the Hilton to the Salt Lick Game Reserve - a mere four-hour drive according to travel brochures. The high anxiety of the prior night was replaced with our collective excitement of going on Safari in the Bush! And even though I had agreed to call the Ambassador to take him up on his offer for an Embassy car and driver, I stubbornly insisted on driving the rental car. Unfortunately, while we had booked a solid four-door Mercedes for our drive through southern Kenya, the rental agent could only come up with a tiny, stick-shift Toyota.

This was a bad omen especially since I had never owned a stick shift car.

But my bi-lateral meetings with Kenyan officials had gone well, and our focus was on our family adventure in the Bush.

Two hours out of Nairobi, I began to realize that I had really made a huge error of judgment when I declined the offer of an Embassy car and driver. The main highway south was a bad joke: mostly one lane each way, the dusty road was literally riddled with gapping potholes. Worst of all, Kenya truck drivers heading to Nairobi loaded with imports that had arrived at Mombasa's ports, rarely stayed on their side of the road! It was like "dodge-em cars" at the amusement park - but this was deadly real.

After another hour of dodging potholes and wild truck drivers, we suddenly hit a roadblock. And the heavily armed soldiers who examined our four diplomatic passports were not kidding around. When I politely asked "Why the roadblock?" I got no response, only hostile stares.

Trying to break the ice, I asked "How much farther to Salt Lick...you know the Salt Lick Game Reserve?"

Silence! Then one toothless soldier grudgingly replied: "Many hours... many hours," as he pointed south.

In the seventh hour of our drive from Nairobi to Salt Lick, we ran into another heavily armed roadblock. Same drill -- same hostile attitude by the tense soldiers.

Theresa and I didn't want to upset the girls, but we were worried: what's going on with the roadblocks and the obvious ready alert of the Kenyan Army?

At 6:10 pm, four very weary Gardners entered the single lane, five mile long driveway to Salt Lick Lodge. Instantly the vagaries of our scary nine-hour drive were forgotten as we spotted zebra, a herd of elephants -- even warthogs that scattered as we pulled in the lodge's dirt parking lot. Rushing up the ramp to the Salt Lick Lodge which was oddly built on tall stilts, we quickly checked in and passed tourists enjoying high tea on the deck as we took our luggage to our two adjoining rooms.

"Hey," I proposed, "Let's forget tea -- and take a quick drive around the park!"

So down the ramp once again and into the tiny Toyota. While the Kenyan at the front desk gave us what he called a "map," it was just a piece of paper with four lines leaving the lodge like spokes on a bike wheel.

But no problem. We took the first single lane dirt road we came to as we circled the parking lot. About 50 yards later, we encountered a small stream bed with no more than a foot of water. Confident after my nine hours of experimenting with the stick shift, I glided the Toyota into the shallow crossing -- and promptly got stuck in the mud. Theresa, frustrated all day by my insanity in turning down the Embassy car and driver, erupted.

"Put it in first and then reverse. Rock it -- and if you can't do it, climb in the back and I'll drive." Theresa had had it.

Just then, a very awesome thing happened. The trees just 30 yards away started to move.

"My God, girls, they're not trees. It's a herd of giraffes," I exclaimed. And sure enough, there must have been 30 to 40 giraffes, some necking as they gently walked away from the noisy intruder, our Toyota.

And then something even stranger happened: the lights suddenly went out! And it was so dark we couldn't even see the giraffes. I then remembered that we were just south of the Equator and that's what happens. You go in a heartbeat from daylight to nighttime. We were now in total darkness in our rental Toyota.

Realizing that I had really misjudged things once again, I rocked the Toyota quickly out of the stream, put on the headlights, and started down that dirt path which represented one of the four lines on our bogus map. For the next 90 minutes we crisscrossed Salt Lick Game Reserve -- a huge patch of God's bush that I would later learn was 28,000 acres in size. Needless to say, the

tension in the car between the totally lost husband and the fuming wife (and concerned mother) had reached an all time high. And then our headlights shone on a small Kenyan farmer walking on the path in front of us. Responding to our collective pleas, the obviously amused young man who spoke excellent English said, "Go two more miles and you'll hit the main road leading to the lodge. Take a left -- and it's just another mile."

Profusely thanking our guide, I sped off, parking in the same spot in the lodge's make shift auto park. Once again, we were greeted by several startled warthogs as we ran for the ramp. But to our horror, there was no ramp. As night arrived, and the wild animals, including predators, gathered around the lodge's watering hole, the ramp was always pulled up and the lodge became an animal-free fortress.

So we hollered. And after a few minutes, a totally shocked bellboy lowered the ramp for our climb to safety. Once safely inside, the equally bewildered lodge manager with a twinge of disgust explained that "No one - no one - ever goes out for unescorted night drives. You Yanks are very lucky indeed."

Once safely inside the Salt Lick Lodge, we quickly ate dinner in the lodge's now empty dining room -- empty because everyone else had moved to the lodge's vast observation deck to watch the various wild animals' nocturnal visits to Salt Lick's huge watering hole.

Before long, the four Gardners joined the other tourists for hours of hushed game viewing. And the game viewing was spectacular -- everything from a female lion with her three cubs to a large family of elephants who playfully used their long trunks to give each other shower baths. We spent the next 48 hours savoring the nearly spiritual experience of seeing God's creatures as they have lived for thousands of years undisturbed in the African bush.

But as remarkable as the sights were at Salt Lick, unbeknownst to us bad things were happening in Nairobi. Just before midnight on August 1st, the Kenya People's Democratic Movement (KEPDEMO) launched its bloody coup against Kenya's corrupt President, Daniel arap Moi. Led by mid-level Kenyan Air Force officers, the anti-capitalist revolutionaries quickly seized control of several key assets including Kenya's International Airport, the state owned broadcasting system, key roadways, etc. Importantly, the fighting that would go on sporadically for several days, would trigger violent rioting, looting and widespread rape of tourists who had packed Nairobi's hotels. And it wasn't just tourists and Kenya's Indian merchants who were targeted; we would later learn that foreign businessmen were also targeted by the anti-capitalist soldiers, including our two smiling Japanese friends from the Hilton, one of whom apparently was shot to death in the Hilton lobby when he didn't understand the order to empty his pockets.

When we reached the Diani Reef Resort on the Indian Ocean we learned of the violence that was raging in Nairobi. And even though we thought it odd that the state owned television channel was dark, it wasn't until I tried to reconfirm our flight from Nairobi to Zurich that I found out that all flights in and out of Kenya were cancelled "until further notice." For two stressful days, I wasn't even able to reach the U.S. Ambassador. While Theresa and I were preoccupied with the uncertainty in Nairobi and our exit from Kenya's first and only attempted coup, Courtney and Christine were deliriously happy. The Indian Ocean was magnificent, the hotel had three pools,

and there were festive African cookouts each night with Maasai warriors performing colorful native dances.

On the third day of our now extended stay at the Diani Reef Resort, I finally got through to the U.S. Ambassador's secretary. "Ambassador Gardner," she excitedly said, "where have you been? We've contacted all the hotels in Mombasa and we couldn't locate you. Even the White House is involved."

Relieved that we finally got through to our Embassy, I found it incredulous that Theresa, the Gardner girls and I would warrant White House involvement. As I would later learn, FCC Chairman Fowler who called during our last night in Nairobi was also an enthusiastic ham radio operator. And over the weekend, as our luck would have it, Mark picked up a live broadcast by none other than members of the Kenya People's Democratic Movement, declaring their short-lived victory over President Moi. Whether it was guilt driven or inspired by my sober prediction to Mark a few nights earlier that "this place is going to blow up," Mark apparently spread the word that "Mickey Gardner and his family are stuck in a coup in Kenya." The alarm then went out.

When I finally talked to the U.S. Ambassador later that day, he sternly asked, "Do the people at your hotel know you're a U.S. Ambassador? There're still some Air Forces officers causing trouble and the looters are everywhere."

For the first time, I sensed that this Foreign Service officer was really concerned. "Ambassador Gardner, it could be a serious problem if you and your family were located. But don't worry, we have four seats for your family on a chartered Swiss Airlines flight tomorrow afternoon that will be the first flight out since this nonsense started."

"How about getting us out of Mombasa?" I asked.

"No problem, we lined up a private piper cub to pick you and your family up at 10:00 am tomorrow. The hotel will know the airstrip's location -- a little grass runway just south of Mombasa that's used by wealthy tourists." The Ambassador paused and then added. "And don't worry about paying the Indian pilot; he's one of our contractors."

And then another startling question from the top U.S. official in Kenya. "Oh, you never answered me when I asked if anyone there knows that you are a U.S. Ambassador? It's very important!"

"Mr. Ambassador, as you know, hotel guests in Kenya must surrender their passports when they check in. Of course the people at the front desk know -- they greeted me as Ambassador Gardner every time I asked them to call the Embassy!"

Ignoring my frustration, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya tensely concluded our call. "Remember 10:00 am tomorrow. And I'll have my key staffer with an Embassy driver and station wagon waiting for you at a private airport, Wilson Field."

I simply said. "Thank you" and hung up.

The next morning at 10:05 am, an open air single engine plane dropped out of the blue Kenyan sky and landed just feet away from us. A very slight Indian pilot jumped out.

"You're the Gardners, right? Okay, this trip will be rough, lots of going up and down cause they're still some crazy Air Force pilots flying around. Anybody get airsick?"

Silence. I managed to say, "Not normally."

The Indian shot back. "Well if you are going to be sick, just turn sideways and throw-up outside the plane, ok?"

"One more thing, I need \$1,100 U.S. dollars before we take off. This is hazardous duty -- so I hope you have \$1,100 -- cash or travelers' checks."

"Wait a minute. We were told by the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya that you were already paid. What's going on?" My temper was starting to act up and then Theresa gave me that look, and wisely said, "Just pay him."

Fortunately from my days as a Seaman's Apprentice in the United States Coast Guard Reserve, I had learned a valuable lesson after a fellow Seaman was robbed of every penny when on shore leave in grimy downtown Norfolk, Virginia: "Always keep your big bills in your socks, but leave some small bills in your pockets for the muggers who will at least feel good that they cleaned you out."

Without a word to our pilot, I pulled up my right leg pant, pulled down my long black sock, and took out a wad of 18 one hundred dollar bills. I peeled off 11 bills and handed \$1,100 to the creep, who quickly pocketed the ransom.

"Okay," he then said looking at Theresa, "You lady, get in the back seat and put one girl on each side or you. You mister, sit up front with me. I'll put the luggage in the storage pocket."

And that was that. We flew for almost an hour, at various altitudes, without another word spoken. And to their parents' great pride and joy, Courtney and Christine never budged, never got airsick, never expressed any fear.

When we got to Wilson Field, a small private terminal with an asphalt runway, our pilot taxied close to a large white van-station wagon. No sooner had he landed when gunshots were audible as the single engine plane shut down. A pale young embassy official ran from the van and together with the Kenyan driver, quickly grabbed our luggage and hustled us to the van. More gunshots off somewhere but we were in the Embassy van -- almost like reaching U.S. soil. Then the disturbing sights on our breakneck speed drive to Kenya's International Airport: shop windows broken everywhere; burned out cars deserted in the streets, debris everywhere; but no people in sight. It was eerie.

As our white Embassy van entered the airport circular driveway, I saw dozens of Kenyan soldiers lining the long driveway; they were all holding rifles and most were with large rows of bullets crisscrossing their chests.

Ignorant of the sacred Kenyan tribal requirement to get permission before taking the photo of a male Kenyan warrior, I exclaimed, "Courtney, quick, give me your camera." I leaned out of the window and quickly snapped a few shots of the war torn scene with Courtney's nine dollar Kodak instamatic.

All hell broke out. Soldiers weary from 24/7 combat duty during the prior six days suddenly came alive. Shouting madly to stop, the Embassy's white van was immediately surrounded by angry soldiers. Short and tall, the soldiers had one thing in common -- they all had red, blood shot eyes from their sleepless, non-stop military service, including regaining control of the bullet ridden, blood stained airport we were about to enter.

Not sensing the depth of the furor that my reckless photo taking had aroused, the soft-spoken U.S. Embassy staffer sitting in front of me said, "Please let us pass." Now surrounded by dozens of war weary Kenyan soldiers toting machine guns, the ashen Embassy staffer held up a white stenciled sign that read "Official USA Embassy Vehicle." Our Embassy guide pleaded once again, "Please let us pass. This is an official U.S. Embassy car and we're transporting Ambassador Michael Gardner and his family. Please let us pass."

That's when I felt the cold steel of a rifle's barrel pressed against my right temple.

"Get out...get out. You have insulted Kenya," were the angry first words from the short, muscular Kenya soldier. "Get out -- and we won't hurt your family," he was very matter of fact -- and very agitated.

Stunned, I knew I had no choice. The gun barrel that was pressed against my head could also injure or kill my wife and two daughters. I had a clarity that I never experienced before or since. I had to obey.

In a calm voice, I said, "I am getting out -- just don't do anything rash."

It was like I was speaking Latin; the gun barrel stayed firmly against my right temple, and the angry Swahili chatter continued.

As I went to open the van door, Theresa coldly said: "Don't move Mickey; don't move." She simultaneously reached over Courtney who was immediately to my left, and dug her nails into the inner thigh of my left leg. When I tried to move, she dug deeper.

Then something beautiful happened. A tall Maasai soldier standing next to the van saw tears streaming down little Courtney's face. With authority, this six foot six Maasai warrior firmly addressed my captor: "Stop! Don't make the little girl cry!"

I remember the Maasai's command as if it was uttered yesterday.

Suddenly, the rifle was pulled away and the angry soldiers entered a serious debate about my suitable punishment. After what seemed like an hour, the short soldier walked back to my open window to deliver the verdict.

"Say you're sorry Kenya" he yelled.

"I'm sorry Kenya, "I immediately called out.

"Louder...much louder!" the frustrated soldier screamed.

So I responded in kind, and with all the energy I could muster, I screamed.

"I'M SORRY KENYA!!!"

Satisfied, the unsmiling soldier stepped back, and our supportive Maasai warrior stepped forward.

"Give me the camera."

Picking up the camera that had fallen to the car floor, I reached out and handed it to this kind man.

The Kodak was thrown on the roadway and immediately hit by dozen rifles butts that shattered it into little plastic pieces.

When we reached the main entrance to the terminal, guards and disheveled tourists were everywhere. So was dried bloodshed in the battle by soldiers loyal to President Moi who regained control of the Airport.

Knowing that our four tickets for the chartered Swiss Air flight were precious and coveted by the more than 5,000 tourists who fled Nairobi and were gathered for days at the Airport, we huddled closely together as we fought our way to the Immigration check point. Once there, we showed the stern Kenyan official our four tickets and also gave him our passports.

After a long minute, this ramrod straight Kenyan held up Courtney's passport and coldly said in perfect English: "This girl cannot leave. Her passport does not have a stamp showing her lawful entry into Kenya!"

I started to argue but after the events of just 20 minutes earlier, I became a gentle but persistent advocate: "Sir, I'm a U.S. Ambassador and when all four of us were taken through customs last week, someone merely stamped three of our four diplomatic passports. I assure you that we all arrived together so obviously it's only a clerical error."

Unmoved, the unsmiling Immigration officer merely repeated his prior declaration: "The little girl's passport does not have an entry stamp. She cannot leave Kenya until this matter is worked out."

I knew it was either this flight -- or many more dangerous days in war-torn Nairobi.

Then Theresa had an inspired idea: she turned to Christine and whispered: "Take out your packet of chewing gum and give it to the man -- and smile."

And that's what eight-year-old Christine Lennon Gardner did. She gently pushed her half empty pack of Wrigley's spearmint chewing gum through the opening in the Immigration desk window and smiled broadly.

It was magic. The hard ass Kenyan melted, took the gum, smiled back at Christine and said: "Go-go; all four of you -- go."

Within 10 minutes of our clearing the Immigration check point, we were seated side-by-side on a shabby Swiss Air already filled with many German and Swedish victims of the rampages that devastated Nairobi for the prior five days. While the body odors were horrible in the plane's cabin full of tourists -- tourists who had spent three or four shower-less days at Kenya's International Airport, the worst part of the nine-hour flight to Zurich was hearing the horrendous stories from fellow passengers about the widespread rapes and unprovoked violence that was visited on "capitalist tourist." They also shared stories about assaults directed at industrious Indian merchants who had ably served the British colonialist who had abandoned Kenya in early 1960's when the corrupt dictator-President Jomo Kenyatta took control.

Passengers -- some sobbing -- needed desperately to compare their horrible stories -- to expiate themselves from the traumas that had just altered their lives. And while we tried to shield Courtney and Christine from the anguished stories, they heard and saw more than we wanted. But isn't that one of the risks and benefits of traveling the globe -- you see things that most American children were shielded from.

It would take eight months before Courtney's nightmares of the van incident were replaced by spectacular visual images of animals in the Bush; as far as Christine, she was quietly very proud of herself -- and that smile (with the chewing gum) that saved her very best friend, her sister Courtney.

Israel, the Vatican, the Soviet Union and the USTTI in Nairobi

On the first full day after my arrival in Nairobi in September 1982 with a White House approved 28-person delegation of corporate executives and senior government officials -- and a five-man contingent of young U.S. Marines, I received an urgent message from a Saudi Prince. The Prince, who was Head of the Saudi delegation, requested a meeting with me that afternoon either

in my suite at the Intercontinental Hotel, or at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Nairobi. "It was important," the note read with the green Saudi flag prominently embossed on the top.

Still jetlagged and juggling a lot of last minute issues before the formal opening of the ITU's Plenipotentiary Conference the next morning, I asked several of the State Department's members of the delegation what could be "so important." They too were puzzled since they had been assured, as I had, that the attempted expulsion of Israel from the United Nations would take place in New York when the General Assembly convened later in September. But regardless of what the "important matter" was on the mind of the Saudi Head of Delegation, I was strongly advised that I "had to meet with him" because of the Saudi's influence over all of the Arab delegations.

At a meeting later that afternoon, the Saudi Prince came to my Marine guarded-suite at the Intercontinental and handed me a two-page "demarche" officially notifying the Secretary of State, and me as his representative, of the Arab world's intent to expel the Zionist murderers -- Israel -- from the ITU, the specialized agency of the United Nations in charge of global communications. The Prince, a hugely obese man, was very quiet as I read the inflammable demarche, and then thanked me for my time and promptly left my suite.

As a novice diplomat, I was stunned at the radioactive tone and hate seeping through the demarche. And because there was so much hate during the heated debates of the next seven weeks, Kenyan officials would place machine gun toting police at the elevators on my floor. As the U.S. Ambassador to the ITU's Nairobi Plenipotentiary Conference, I was suddenly immersed in a diplomatic morass where the United States would daily be vilified as "Zionists loving pigs" by Iran, Algeria and other conference attendees. They were determined to punish Israel for the Beirut Massacre that took place earlier in the June 6, 1982 invasion of Lebanon by 60,000 PLO-seeking Israeli troops, and the September 16 "massacre" at PLO refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut.

Once the Israel Expulsion Resolution was formally introduced, the routine work of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference became a very secondary concern. For the U.S. Delegation, our top priority was to preserve the fundamental principle of the "Universality of the United Nations" and that meant keeping Israel in the ITU at any cost. So my secure WATTS line in my hotel suite became a vital link to my friend and strategic advisor, the shrewd and seasoned Under Secretary of State Bill Schneider. In daily calls -- several involving President Reagan's Ambassador to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick and Vice President George H. W. Bush, Bill and I would compare notes.

One thing quickly became apparent: the U.S. intel network was horribly unreliable. While the State Department analysts, working with the CIA, would advise us initially that we were just a few votes away from preventing Israel's expulsion from the ITU, the Israeli Ambassador would privately tell me with certainty that we would lose by 25 plus votes if the vote was taken.

We didn't know who to believe so my mission was to delay a vote on the Arab-backed Israel Expulsion Resolution until we had the votes to prevail. So, for the next seven weeks, the U.S. delegation used every trick we could to delay the vote while simultaneously dosing the huge 25 plus vote divide that Israeli intelligence confirmed.

One important target was the Soviet Union's Minister of Communications who effectively controlled 13 votes from Soviet-bloc countries. Nicknames "Big Paw" because of his huge bulky hands, the Russian Minister was constantly on the conference's microphone, vigorously supporting the Expulsion Resolution while repeatedly blasting "the Zionists' strongest allies, the greedy capitalists from the United States."

After several efforts at neutralizing -- or at least diminishing the Soviet tirades, I decided on a different approach: I would have my hand written note delivered to Big Paw inviting him for a one-on-one meeting in my suite. Delivered personally by the fearless Frank Urbany, Big Paw immediately responded with a note that said:

"Ambassador Gardner: Good idea. I bring the Vodka."

Well, if he brings the Vodka, I decided to share my huge supply of peanut M&M's that Theresa snuck into my luggage for the long trip to Nairobi. And so, in the midst of the ugly public fight over Israel's expulsion from the United Nations, we sat down with a liter bottle of lemon flavored Stolichnaya Vodka and two large yellow bags of M&M's.

So, it went: toe-to-toe shots of Vodka until the Minister's bottle was almost empty.

And then Big Paw got serious:

"Why does U.S. stand up for Israel? Everybody's mad at them for destroying Beirut, but you don't care"

Chewing on more M&M's, I shot back. "Israel is our trusted ally and we are not going to abandon them even if we are displeased with them about something. And, anyway, you certainly don't want the chaos in the global communication community that will happen if the U.S. withdraws from the ITU -- and Minister, we will do that the minute Israel is thrown out of the ITU."

During a very long pause, Big Paw helped himself once again to my M&M's.

"Okay. We don't like it if ITU breaks up -- and it will if USA no longer is member. But we still want to hurt Israel and embarrass USA for being only friend of Zionists. So here's my plan: USA gets Kenyans to do secret ballot on vote, and Soviet Union will split -- you know, divide its vote. But don't play around with me: you get your own votes -- and we will still attack USA for support of Israel."

At this point, I was still thinking straight -- straight enough to know that the United States had just won an enormous concession.

"Minister," I said with a smile, "We have a deal. We'll get a secret ballot, and you do all the shouting against the United States you want. The key is that we both will still be members of the ITU."

And so it was, we worked the tedious U.N. processes and finally got agreement for a secret ballot. The only trouble was the fact that, according to the Israeli intelligence wizards including the young Benjamin Netanyahu, who came to Nairobi to help, we were still short 11 votes, even with the presumed split of votes cast by the 13 Soviet-Bloc countries.

And that's when U.S. Ambassadors around the world really went to work.

In our daily strategy conference calls, I would learn how effective the United States could be when it really wanted something. Whether it was friend or foe, the USA had something to trade when it came to securing a vote for Israel's continued membership in the U.N.'s International Telecommunication Union (ITU). And every vote mattered -- even the vote of the Vatican, a full member of the ITU simply by virtue of the fact that the ITU was established many decades before the United Nations. So while the Vatican is not a voting member of the U.N., it is a voting member of the ITU.

So as votes were being gathered by U.S. Ambassadors all over the globe, I was assigned a special target -- the Papal Nuncio in Nairobi.

When I arrived for my first visit with the Papal Nuncio at his palatial gated residence, I was struck by the Italian Archbishop's demeanor: not only was he a frail little man physically, the Archbishop seemed very shy -- certainly not the typically outgoing Nuncios that were the Vatican's Ambassador to Washington, DC.

After introducing my advisor Frank Urbany to the Archbishop and his assistant, a young Monsignor, we sat down for some delicious Kenyan tea. Then some small talk about the Catholic schools I attended. Then I asked: "Archbishop, we need your vote to keep Israel in the ITU. It's very important."

In halting but very carefully chosen English, the Archbishop smiled and said.

"Oh, Mr. Ambassador, we never vote. We're not political, and this issue regarding Israel is, as you know, very political."

I knew all about the political antics of the Vatican. A week earlier on September 15, Pope John Paul angered Jews everywhere by welcoming the PLO's leader, Yasser Arafat, to the Vatican.

So I tried again. Polite but firm, I reiterated my main point:

"Archbishop, keeping Israel in the ITU is very important to the United States. We must have your vote. The integrity of the United Nations is at risk."

The shy Archbishop finally made eye contact, and firmly stated: "It's impossible. It's too political."

"Archbishop, could I speak to you privately, without Colonel Urbany or the Monsignor present?"

Looking puzzled, the Archbishop paused. Then in a brief burst of Italian, the Archbishop dismissed his assistant. Without a word from me, Frank followed the Monsignor out of the Nuncio's large living room.

"Archbishop, I'm a Catholic and know very well how the Vatican uses its leverage to advance political goals around the globe. The United States may not be able to keep Israel in the United Nations without your vote. Now do you want me to tell my Secretary of State and the Israeli Ambassador that the Vatican would not help Israel? Remember the outcry from Jewish leaders around the globe when the Pope greeted Yasser Arafat last week. If the word gets out that you wouldn't help keep Israel in the United Nations, the uproar will be ten times louder. Do you really want me to have to tell the truth about your vote -- that the Vatican wouldn't help Israel?"

The Archbishop was pissed.

"You, you Mr. Gardner should not threaten the Vatican. It's not a good thing. Anyway, I cannot decide alone. I must talk to Rome first."

"Okay Archbishop. How about tomorrow afternoon we meet again, right here?"

"Okay, tomorrow afternoon," the Archbishop answered.

Next day, I returned alone to the Apostolic Delegate's residence. When I banged the heavy brass knocker on the Nuncio's front door, the Monsignor immediately opened it. The Monsignor was smiling: a good sign.

"Come in Ambassador Gardner; the Archbishop is waiting for you."

Back in the Nuncio's large drawing room, I was warmly greeted by a smiling Archbishop.

"Greetings Ambassador Gardner."

"I have talked to very senior officials in Rome who have also talked to your Ambassador in Rome. And we know how important this matter is to your government. So I can say "yes" to your request if you promise me two things." The Archbishop was very animated.

"First, you must secure a secret ballot..."

"Let me stop you there, Archbishop. We've already got an agreement for a secret ballot from the Kenyans." In fact, we had gotten word that very morning that the Kenyan Minister of Communications -- the conference Chairman, had agreed. Now we would not only appease the Soviet Minister, we could also take care of the Vatican.

"Now, Archbishop, what is your second requirement?"

The little Italian Archbishop leaned close to me, like a co-conspirator and whispered:
"Ambassador Gardner, you must promise me that no one will know about our vote for Israel --"

no one except your Secretary of State and the Israel's Ambassador here in Nairobi. No one else. Do you promise me?" His smile was gone; he was all business and deadly serious.

"Archbishop, no problem. I give you my solemn vow that no one will know except my Secretary of State and the Israeli Ambassador. I promise you that, and I thank you for your vote two nights from now."

Two nights later, 157 nations gathered in the cone shaped Kenyatta Center to vote on the Arab world's resolution to expel Israel from this important part of the United Nations. Because the vote had become a hugely symbolic issue covered by the international press, the galleries were loaded with journalists and camera crews from the BBC, the U.S. networks, the Arab Street, Tokyo, etc.

After hours of procedural delays, the secret ballot vote was ready to commence with each delegation casting its vote by checking, "yea, nay or abstain" on a letter sized piece of white paper.

If we lost the vote, my instructions were very precise. If Israel was expelled, I was to immediately take the microphone and announce that the United States was formally withdrawing from the ITU. Then I was to lead members of the U.S. Delegation down the stairs and walk the full length of the conference floor, passing before the rowdy Iranian and Algerian delegations. I was then to issue a statement condemning the vote as an unacceptable assault on the U.N.'s cornerstone principle of universality.

Two or three minutes into the vote, there was some movement in the Vatican delegation's box, just nine rows below the large area set aside for the U.S. delegation. The young Monsignor was turning around, looking up at the U.S. Delegation. Then the Monsignor stood up and was handed the blank ballot by the Archbishop. They were both talking with some noticeable agitation, but were too far away for me or other U.S. delegates to understand.

And then an incredible thing happened: the young Monsignor turned and walked up the nine steps to where I was sitting. Sheepishly whispering as the global press corps watched, the cleric in his black cassock leaned over my shoulder, held the empty ballot in front me, and pleaded:

"Ambassador Gardner, the Archbishop and I are confused by the resolution; what box should we check off -- yea or nay?"

By now the hush that had hovered over the Kenyatta Center was replaced with chuckles and laughs. The press obviously was amused by the Vatican's very visible support of the United States in this critical vote. "Monsignor, the ballot is confusing. Tell Archbishop to check the "nay" box -- but also tell him that the press here from around the world now knows that you -- the Vatican -- are supporting United States' position on Israel."

And so it was: Israel and the United States won the secret ballot by four votes, and while the press would speculate about how some nations actually voted, one thing was certain: the 110-acre Vatican in the heart of Rome cast one of those four crucial votes.

While the U.S.'s four-vote victory to keep Israel in the ITU was important, the Nairobi conference produced an added and long-term benefit as it provided me the venue and opportunity to respond to the pleas from developing country leaders who were being left behind as cellular technology and innovation in satellite usage were being deployed throughout the developed world. In the early 1980s the harsh reality was that unless a developing country could buy equipment from the global communications companies, the developing countries communications leaders simply couldn't get the training that was critical to their progress in building a modern communications infrastructure. The problem was acute in the early 1980s where teledensity in most developing countries was a miserable ratio of less than one phone per every 100 citizen.

After countless bi-laterals where the U.S. Ambassador (me) was told that communications training for the poorest developing countries was their top priority, I complained -- repeatedly to my bride Theresa -- that the U.S. and the other G8 countries were going to be clobbered in Nairobi, at least budget wise. I felt strongly that the communications-rich countries had to come up with some credible response in Nairobi to this very legitimate request for free communications training.

Then one night after I had met earlier that day with several unhappy developing country Ministers of Communications, my wife Theresa blasted me.

"Mickey, do something! Don't just complain. These people should be able to understand their communications options, and the U.S. has always been a sharer. Focus on a way that you and your team can get some free communications training to these people."

And Theresa, as usual, was spot on. I would go to the leaders of AT&T, MCI, Comsat, etc. as well as my friends in government and ask them to finance and host tuition-free training for women and men from the developing world. But unlike the Peace Corps which sent its volunteers for year-long work around the world, we would use expert volunteer communications officials from industry and government who would conduct their intensive two or three weeks communications training in their offices and laboratories throughout the United States.

So as I and the 28 U.S. delegates to the Nairobi ITU Plenipotentiary prepared for the bellicose Nairobi conference, I together with a few daring friends including FCC Commissioner Henry Rivera and NTIA official Frank Urbany, legally established a non-profit joint venture between U.S. corporations and government officials called the United States Telecommunications Training Institute (USTTI).

And even though the Nairobi ITU conference would become a huge and nasty political battleground over Israel's right to remain a member of the ITU, the USTTI was launched to enthusiastic applause in Nairobi with the announcement of an initial 13 tuition-free course curriculum. I agreed to chair the USTTI for a year, but 30 plus years later, I still chair this non-profit that relies annually on hundreds of expert ICT volunteers from U.S. communications industry, academia, the federal government who each year conduct the USTTI's 80-plus annual curriculum. Importantly, since 1982, the USTTI has graduated 9,048 women and men working

today in 171 developing countries to make modern communications a reality for their fellow countrymen and women.

Theresa was right: the United States has a long tradition of sharing -- and the USTTI is a robust, living example of the Yankee spirit of volunteerism.

End of interview