

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

AMBASSADOR DONALD C. LEIDEL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Leidel]

Q: When and where were you born?

LEIDEL: I was born on August 31, 1927. I will be 89 at the end of this month. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin.

Q: To get a little bit of a family background, what do you know about the Leidels on your father's side?

LEIDEL: On my father – Both my mother and father's families immigrated from Germany, and my father was born in Berlin, and came over in the hull of a ship with bags of dates in the late 1880s. And, my mother was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Both families lived in Milwaukee with their brothers and sisters, and my parents were the only ones that moved away from Milwaukee to Madison, where I was born.

Q: Well, actually, my family on my mother's side came from Wisconsin. They were German.

LEIDEL: Oh, really? What part of Wisconsin?

Q: Well I think – Is there a place called Watertown?

LEIDEL: Oh, yes, I know it. It's just halfway between Madison and Milwaukee.

Q: Yeah, my grandfather as a young man was in the Civil War. But anyway, what was your family, your father and your mother and your maybe grandfather and up, do you know what sort of line of work they were in?

LEIDEL: My grandparents, I'm not sure. My dad apparently left school in the third grade to become an apprentice baker, and he had two professions. He was a very accomplished baker when we lived briefly in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He had a bakery shop. Then he had another profession, and this was special investigator and private detective, which he – I

assumed he worked for a lawyer and district attorneys and he used to take me along on investigative trips for cover.

Q: Well what sort of trips – What were you picking up about the trade?

LEIDEL: What was I picking up?

Q: Yeah, I mean, you know, as you were doing this, were you getting a feel for what was going on?

LEIDEL: Well, he took me along because they didn't think an investigator would have a young son with him, so he did this for sort of cover purposes. But he worked with – I have a brother who is 11 years older, who will be 100 in December, and he was an engineering professor at Wisconsin and I had to – my big debate early on was to be an engineer or a lawyer, and I decided when I was 13 that I would become a lawyer. So I took Latin in high school, and I went to law school.

Q: Well, let's go back a bit. How big was your family? Did you have many brothers and sisters?

LEIDEL: I have one brother, who's 11 years older than I am who will be 100 in December this year. And that's the only sibling I have.

Q: Well, did you grow up in Madison?

LEIDEL: Except for brief periods in Janesville and Oshkosh, I was born in Madison and went back to Madison when I was six, and then I spent the rest of my time in Wisconsin in Madison.

Q: How about on your mother's side? What do you know about her background?

LEIDEL: Very little. She was strictly a homemaker and was an excellent crocheter and housekeeper and strictly stayed at home. Unlike my father she got through the eighth grade. But I don't know much about their parents' backgrounds.

Q: Alright then. What was Madison like when you were a boy?

LEIDEL: What was Madison like? Well, I grew up in the Depression period, and despite the fact that my dad was unemployed for most of the time through the Depression, I don't – I look back upon my youth very positively. I enjoyed life in Madison. I went to good schools. I went to Emerson Grade School through sixth grade and then Madison East from seventh until twelfth grade. But I loved living in Madison, and I look back upon my childhood as a happy childhood, despite growing up in the Depression.

Q: Yeah, well, actually, we're – I'm 88 now, I'll be 89 in February.

LEIDEL: We're the same age. I'm a few months older.

Q: Yeah, so we both – The Depression was the thing probably that, I think for all us, that really formed our lives.

LEIDEL: Yes. Well, then my father did some investigative work for a businessman in Madison who owned a hotel in Sparta, Wisconsin, and my dad investigated the management of the hotel, which was corrupt, and the businessman hired my father to be the hotel manager. So I spent summers – this was during the War years – working as a desk clerk at the hotel for my dad, and got to know a lot of military personnel. It was close to Camp McCoy. So I spent summers and a lot of weekends in Sparta.

Q: Well, now, when you were in grade school, what were your favorite subjects?

LEIDEL: My favorite subjects were history and geography. I had an excellent second grade teacher. My other formative experience: when I was in sixth grade, the students there, ahead of me, gave me advice for going into junior high school. And they said, "Whatever you do, don't get Esther Stody for homeroom and English. She's awful." And I got Esther Stody. And it turned out, looking back, she was the best teacher that I had ever had. I learned English – she insisted on her students doing a lot of reading, and I learned to love reading, and I learned more English grammar and composition from her. She was tough but I learned from her and I look back upon her as the best teacher in my career, high school or college.

Q: What type of reading did you like?

LEIDEL: Well, a great variety. I remember getting a – reading a book on Argentina, on which we were tested, and I remember being praised for getting a 100 on my composition test. But it was more nonfiction than fiction that interested me.

Q: Did the world intrude much? Were you aware of what was happening in the world?

LEIDEL: Oh, I think so. I used to – I developed a habit in high school that I still have, and that is clipping from newspapers. And I used to get the *Chicago Tribune* and I used to get as many articles on the progress of World War II. So I did have an interest in what was going on in the world.

Q: Well I think for all of us of that generation, World War II was a great geography lesson for us.

LEIDEL: It certainly was.

Q: Did you – When you got to high school, what high school was this you went to?

LEIDEL: Madison East. I had the good fortune – my brother who was 11 years older was moved from school to school to school every two or three years, and I had the good

fortune of being six years in one grade school, six years in one high school, and six years in one university, all in Madison.

Q: Excuse me one second. I'll be back in about five minutes. ... Sorry. In high school, what sort of history did you find yourself taking?

LEIDEL: Not much. My favorite high school teacher was Burt Wells, who was my Civics teachers. They called the course Problems of Democracy. I thoroughly enjoyed that. But I don't recall history – I recall it in grade school a bit, but I don't recall it much in high school. But when I went to university I majored in political science and minored in history, and I should have done the reverse because I had the best history instructors. Mostly U.S. history at the university. We're nationally famous.

Q: Of course, the University of Wisconsin was world-renowned. Did you get much history of Wisconsin at school?

LEIDEL: The history of Wisconsin?

Q: Yeah, I mean often the state schools teach a lot of state history.

LEIDEL: Not in the University. I remember, however, in high school, I had to memorize the names of all of the counties in Wisconsin.

Q: You say you worked at the – while you were in high school, you worked as a desk clerk?

LEIDEL: I worked as a desk clerk in Sparta and then I worked in Madison at the Edgewater Hotel full time all the way through law school. I worked forty eight hours a week and one full semester, seventy two hours a week at the Edgewater.

Q: Well, we'll talk about that later. We'll stick to the high school period. First place, just to get a little bit more of the family background – was your family interested in politics and would you get involved, you know, in the various candidates and all?

LEIDEL: Yes. My father was a stark Republican, and he used to go around the state campaigning and he used to take me with him. And he ran one year for coroner because of his investigative experience, and he ran against a doctor, and the doctor won and he lost because most people thought a doctor was more important for a coroner. But he was very much in politics. He was a fan of Governor Julius Heil and he would take me around and introduce me to people running for office: Alexander Wiley, a U.S. senator. So he was very much into politics.

Q: Did that inspire you to be interested in politics?

LEIDEL: Well, not – It didn't persuade me to be a politician, but I followed politics very, very closely and I followed my father until college, when I heard and met Joel McCarthy

talking at the University law school, and that turned me around from being a Republican to favoring more democratic candidates.

Q: Well, Joel McCarthy was the Donald Trump of that era.

LEIDEL: It's a very good comparison.

Q: Yeah. Well, how about religion? Was your family, were you, very religious?

LEIDEL: Very religious. I grew up; I was baptized as an Evangelical Lutheran, and I remember going to Sunday School and church on Sundays, but my parents did not go, and since then I've not been very religious. We would go to church at Easter and maybe Christmastime, but religion has not been a major part of my life.

Q: What about in high school? What was the dating pattern? Did you date? What was social life like?

LEIDEL: That's a very good question, because I did very, very little dating. I belonged to DeMolay through high school and college; I was master counselor and won the DeMolay award. I remember we had an annual ball and I took a date to the annual ball. I think I had maybe two dates, all the way through high school, and I dated – I didn't have time to date in college because I was always working when – I had part-time jobs even in my undergraduate. So I never had the time to date. I started dating when I left college and moved to Washington, D.C.

Q: Could you explain what DeMolay is?

LEIDEL: Oh, DeMolay is a youth organization under the sponsorship of the Masonic Lodge. And we had ritual meetings and also we had master counselors. I was head for three or four years. There was a state newspaper and I wrote all the articles for the newspaper and when I was master counselor we organized softball teams and competed locally in basketball teams, and as a result of all of these activities, our chapter was voted the number one chapter in the state of Wisconsin. And I think that was my first experience in leadership, and I learned a lot through DeMolay. It was a major influence.

Q: Were you much in the field of sports? What sports did you go out for?

LEIDEL: I was handed a huge tennis racket by my brother at the age of thirteen, and I played tennis before the – On the high school tennis team I was the number one or number two on tennis and I tried out before, and I also played on a softball team for many years. And when I got into university I tried out for the tennis team but did not make it, and I became tennis manager and I earned my W as manager of the tennis team.

Q: Alright, well let's see, what year did you go to university? Where did you go, what did you – ?

LEIDEL: Oh, I also tried out for basketball in high school and did not make the team. I was too short. I think. I graduated from high school in 1945 and I went to university from '45 to '51. I got my bachelor's degree in '49 and then my senior year at university was my first year of law school.

Q: But what university did you go to?

LEIDEL: University of Wisconsin.

Q: Alright. Could you talk about it? It's a renowned university. What was it like when you went there?

LEIDEL: Well, I lived at home all the way through it, so I did not belong to a fraternity and was not much involved in extracurricular activities at the university. I worked part-time in graphotype machines. _____ graph and graphotype machines. Let's see. I majored in political science, and I minored in U.S. history and I wished I'd switched the majors around because the quality of the faculty was much higher. I had _____, who was the _____ chair, and Fred Harrington, who became president of the university. And I had Nate _____ who was one of the nation's renowned Civil War professors. So I thoroughly enjoyed my history classes.

Q: What was political science like when you took it? Political science has undergone some significant changes over the years. What was it like when you took it?

LEIDEL: Well, I didn't learn an awful lot. That's all I remember from my political science courses. I got decent grades, but I sort of blank out on what I learned. I don't recall really carrying anything away that I've used afterwards.

Q: Was the campus very politically active in those days?

LEIDEL: Was Madison politically active, and the University?

Q: Yeah.

LEIDEL: I don't recall the university being politically active, no, back then. I think this has changed. Where did you go to university?

Q: Williams College. And, of course, we were all part of the silent generation. We weren't out there beating the drums. When you were at college were you pointed towards something that you wanted to do?

LEIDEL: Well, from the time I started in college, my goal was to be a lawyer, and that's what I was to all the way through college.

Q: But why law? Why were you interested in law?

LEIDEL: I guess I started because of my father's working for lawyers and district attorneys and I met a lot of them and I thought that this would be – And I used to – We had a very colorful district attorney in Madison, and I used to go to hear the cases. And this is how I got interested, and as I said, when I was in high school I took Latin because I thought this would help me in law. So that's where I was pointed to, and I guess the interest in politics was sort of related. But that was my goal. And I'll have to tell you why I departed from it.

Q: Well, yeah, let's talk about your time in – What law school did you go to?

LEIDEL: The University of Wisconsin.

Q: So what happened? You went there, and then what?

LEIDEL: Well, I had, since I was working full time I didn't have sensational grades, but I passed and I graduated and I was interviewing at law firms, mostly in Wisconsin, a couple times in the Chicago area. And I had a friend whose name was Lecher and he sat next to me and we became good friends and we studied together and we did all of our studying at the Wisconsin Union, Rathskeller I remember, and he took copious notes. No, he attended all of the lectures and did all of the readings. I didn't have time to read my case studies but I took copious notes from all of the lectures and our means of preparing would be, I would ask him the questions, and I like to think that he saw the forest for the trees and he was so involved in the trees that my questions helped him put the courses into context. And we both graduated.

And during the course of our last semester, he noticed that it was on the bulletin board that there was somebody from a new agency in Washington coming to interview and he asked me a couple of times to join him in the interviews and the third time I finally gave in and he said, "It won't – You know, an interview experience won't hurt you."

So I went to the interview, and one thing the interviewee said to me was that – It turned out that the organization was Central Intelligence Agency, and he said, looking at my resume, that what interested him most was my hotel experience and that they would likely send me overseas under hotel cover. So that was that, and I went on being interviewed for law practices, and a month later, my friend and I and a third person, a third graduate, got telegrams offering us employment as GS9 and 4,800 dollars a year in Washington, D.C. And that was about 1,500 dollars more than the top law graduates were being offered in law firms. But my real incentive: I'd never been to Washington, D.C. And I said, "I'll try it, and I will keep my –", I was also admitted to the bar, "I'll keep my bar membership and if it doesn't work out, I'll go back. So that's how I got to Washington and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

Q: Well, you know, you were at that time, and as I recall, too, they were – The CIA was doing big recruiting at some of the universities and colleges.

LEIDEL: Yes, we were in the first junior officer class in '51, and 15 were all from the Ivy League, and one, I recall, I can't remember his name, was from Williams. And they were all – There was a token woman from Wellesley and they were all Harvard, Yale, Williams.

Q: Yeah, well, I know because a year later when I got out, I made an application to the CIA but then the Korean War came along and I went into the Airforce, but the CIA was making a big recruiting efforts at the universities as it was starting up.

LEIDEL: Well, I'll be darned, you went in the Airforce –

Q: Well, I was an enlisted man and they sent me to the Army Language School and I studied Russian.

LEIDEL: I'll be darned. Where did you train as an enlisted man?

Q: Well, I went to Lackland Airforce Base, and then I went over to Brookfield where I was with the Security Service.

LEIDEL: Okay, well, can I go on a little bit?

Q: Yes, go ahead.

LEIDEL: I'm still on 1951, and in the junior officer training course, and halfway through the course, they ask how many have had military service. When I turned 18 in 1945, I went for my physical, and I had a history of asthma and I was 4F.

But midway through our course they said that all of the trainees, CIA trainees, who were not in the military should select their service and take basic training and officer candidate school. And I opted for the Airforce, but I had to get – I still had asthma, and I had to get a waiver from the air surgeon general because of my medical history, which I did receive, and when I finished the course in October, I went to Lackland Airforce Base as a basic trainee and I continued in officer candidate school, and in officer candidate school I was scheduled to go to air intelligence training school in Lowry Airforce Base at Denver, which I was very pleased with, and then I got a telegram from CIA saying, "We want you to return to Washington."

And I answered, "I'd prefer to go to Lowry." I was an honor graduate of OCS (Officer Candidate School) and I was enjoying the Airforce and the CIA said, "You will follow orders and return to Washington." So I went as a second lieutenant in '51 back to Washington, and that was my experience.

Q: Well tell me a bit about the CIA training in that time. I'm sure it's no longer secretive. That's a different era. But what was it like?

LEIDEL: None of what I did I think is classified anymore.

Q: Yeah, so could you talk a bit about it? I'd like to get a –

LEIDEL: Yes. I went back to Washington as a second lieutenant and I was assigned where I was assigned, and they assigned me into the – Well, first to the – No, I was assigned to the European EE division, the European division, in the personnel office. And this was in '52 and '53. And in '53, I was called in and they said, "Would you like to go to Vienna, Austria?" And one reason – I'm getting ahead of myself. I accepted. And, working in European division, I met a girl named Beverly _____, and after I got the notice of going to Vienna, I asked her if she'd marry me, and, you talk about dating, and I had been dating a girl regularly – I'm losing names here.

Q: Well, you can always fill these in.

LEIDEL: Also, I dated a person who was a law graduate and then worked for a clerk on the Supreme Court, and she eventually told me, "We have to break up," because she'd decided to marry him, and I actually knew him quite well and we used to play tennis together. But he ended up as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This name will come to me. Why can't I think of it?

Q: It's no problem.

LEIDEL: At any rate, I married Beverly _____ and we're still married after almost 65 years, and we only had one date to a 3D movie, but I knew her very well for almost a year in the office, and she got to know me well.

Q: Well, could you give me a bit about her background?

LEIDEL: Yes. She was born in London. Her father was a consular officer, and she lived seven years in London. And then he was moved to Brussels, and when – They lived in Brussels when the Germans invaded, and he was the – The consulate general left and he was put in charge of the embassy. Or, the ambassador left and he was put in charge of the embassy. And then they were all evacuated when – during the war, and she came back to the States in I think 1942. And he was involved in an auto accident in Germany and he died later in Washington in his mid-fifties as a result of his injuries. But Bev's mother was very involved in politics, beginning with the Roosevelt administration. And she was nominated to be Roosevelt's ambassador to the Soviet Union, but there was a lot of opposition and she never got the assignment. But she was very involved politically, which she maintained until she passed away.

Q: So, I take it that your wife is very well informed about the political world and all?

LEIDEL: Yes. And she also had better knowledge of languages; she was fluent in French and learned German, Spanish a lot faster than I did.

Q: My wife used to do the same. Anyway, --

LEIDEL: Let's see, we're in Vienna.

Q: And what were you doing?

LEIDEL: I was personnel officer there.

Q: At the embassy technically, or what?

LEIDEL: No, at the CIA headquarters, which was on Mariahilfer Strasse, not in the embassy. We went back to Vienna this last Christmastime, and I tried to get close to our headquarters, and it was surrounded by security people, and I couldn't even get a picture of the exterior. But this was all Mariahilfer Strasse, in the downtown business area in Vienna.

Q: Vienna was very much the center of espionage.

LEIDEL: We were there during the four power occupation, and the – We were in four zones in the city, and four zones in the country, and to get out of Vienna, we had to travel 200 miles to the Russian zone and we weren't allowed to stop, including getting out. The reason I was supposed to have a three year tour there, but it ended after two years when the Molotov came and they signed a peace treaty with Russia, and the irony was that I was working for the CIA but I was an Airforce officer under Department of Army Civilian cover, so I had three organizations I was working for simultaneously. All military personnel had to leave, so my tour was cut short to two years, and I left because of the treaty being signed, and went back to CIA headquarters, where I worked from '55 to '58, primarily as the assistant to the director of personnel.

And in '58, I was asked to go back overseas to Frankfurt, where I was assigned from '58 to '61, and again I was assigned as a personnel officer, but the only other thing I did – I was asked to do a comprehensive study of universities, of German universities, with the purpose of identifying future leaders, and I remember doing that study. Other than that, it was strictly personnel work.

Q: Did you – Were you billeted in the _____?

LEIDEL: No, we were given an option of living there or living on the economy, and we lived in a private home. We worked at the _____ building, walking distance from the _____ building, but I didn't live in any of the Army housing. Were you in Frankfurt?

Q: My first tour was in Frankfurt, from '55 to '58.

LEIDEL: I'll be darned.

Q: I was in the consular section.

LEIDEL: I'll be darned. And you didn't – Wasn't the consular section separate?

Q: I was up in, you know, that glass building, the consular section, and I worked in non-immigrant visas for a while, and then eventually I became baby birth officer. We had an officer who did nothing but register American babies born. He became the 97th general.

LEIDEL: I'll be darned. Well, we were in the _____ building.

Q: Oh, yeah, those elevators there were something.

LEIDEL: Yes. Had to be sure to get on and off at the right second.

Q: What sort of – What were you finding out at the universities at that time? You were doing a study of –

LEIDEL: Well, I don't recall – Let's see. I did research and talk to people about the universities, but the study was on the structure and the kind of students that they enrolled. And I'm a little vague, but I gathered that the purpose was for the Agency to try to identify university students as future leaders for recruitment purposes, and they wanted to know which were the best universities to do that. This is all that I recall about it.

Q: Well, also it was -- _____ years I recall there was a great deal of interest in sort of making sure that we were going after the right people, a great interest in youth and identifying who was –

LEIDEL: That was part of it, identifying youth, yes.

Q: We were giving them visas to go to look at the United States and all, because, you know, for a long time, the United States wasn't really very well known in Europe. They'd seen our G.I's, but nothing else.

LEIDEL: Remind me if I don't forget to tell you about my meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, which relates to this, but this comes later.

Q: Well, did you get out and have much contact with Germans?

LEIDEL: Yes. We had good friends and neighbors who became the godparents of our youngest son, who was born in Frankfurt. Our daughter was born in Vienna. And then we became very close to a German lawyer who we kept in touch with afterwards, and our German friends visited us when we came to the States. It wasn't expensive, but living on the economy helped a little bit in getting to know more Germans.

Well then my father, who had had a heart attack in Madison at the age of 62, and was on doctor's _____, and we invited him to live with us when we returned from Vienna, and we took him with us to Frankfurt. And he was the only one – he'd found great pleasure in

writing his brothers and sister that he'd gotten back to the old country. He was the only one. He was born in Germany and he'd gotten back to Frankfurt. And where we lived, we were only a couple of blocks from the _____, which he attended regularly, and he was still fluent in German. He passed away when we were in Frankfurt, but that was a big event in his life.

Q: Was your second child born at the army hospital, the 97th General?

LEIDEL: Yes.

Q: Yeah, my first daughter was born there.

LEIDEL: Really. Well that's where he got medical attention; that's where he passed away. I'll be darned.

Q: You know, something I didn't ask you, I'd like to go back to it. When you were at law school, and actually at university, too, what sort of experiences do you recall that you had as a desk clerk? I would think that that period could be very eye opening.

LEIDEL: I had all kinds of experiences. Let's see, I met Frank Lloyd Wright, who used to come in. We had one of the top dining rooms, the _____ room, and he used to bring guests to eat there. When he came into the lobby, the white lobby, and he'd say, "Isn't this a monstrosity of architecture?" He would criticize the Edgewater to all of his guests, but he enjoyed the dining room.

And, let's see, what else do I remember about the Edgewater? I was also a night clerk and did the auditing of books for a year while working there, and we had all of the big bands that came to Madison that played on the roof of the Edgewater. And I had a great boss by the name of Auggie Faulkner, who taught me a lot about dealing with people and said, "You never argue with a guest, and if a guest causes trouble, never call the police. Call me and I'll straighten them out." He thought it was very bad for the police to show up at the hotel, and he usually resolved most of the disputes.

But he had an excellent way with people and we had guests returning time and time and time again, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Edgewater. And going to law school turned really the same as an extracurricular activity rather than a full time involvement in the university. But, I look back upon it all now as one of my better experiences.

Q: Well, what was sort of the state of the art of desk clerks and men coming in with women who were obviously not their wives? How did you treat people who would come in, who would register as husband and wife, but you were pretty sure they weren't?

LEIDEL: Oh, I was told to ignore that. I remember this was my – also my first. We had a half a dozen full-time, permanent people who lived full-time at the Edgewater, and they were usually the leading businessmen. And one was the manager of a bookstore, and I

was told by the manager that if he invites me to his apartment, to turn him down, and I later followed up that he was homosexual. So I never visited his apartment. I recall that.

But the experience with the heads of businesses there also taught me that rich people are the unhappiest people I've run into in my life, and that money didn't bring happiness. They were the ones who complained about everything, I recall, and were very unhappy. So that I was taught while working there. I was also taught to remember faces, and whenever guests came back for a second or third time and even while they were at the hotel, to remember their names and always to say, "How are you, Mr. So-and-so?" and, "How are you, Mrs. So-and-so?" And the manager was very good. He taught us desk clerks to follow that.

Q: Did you have much problems with complaints? With guests complaining about things?

LEIDEL: Not too many, no. And if they were problems that I couldn't resolve, that also then were easily taken care of, then I would ask the manager. And he would resolve them. But it was a pretty well-run hotel, and Faulkner was owned by the _____, they were doctors in Madison, and they were the famous _____ family. And the manager, Auggie, kept putting money – kept the hotel maintained.

And years later, when he moved on and then passed away, his son became manager, I talked to his son about – Oh, Auggie finally bought the hotel out and owned the hotel. And I said, the son said, "My father could do that because it wasn't his money, it was the, but they went along with it." He said, "I'm not the – Now that I'm the owner, I have to look at both sides of this." I recall this.

Well, this is sort of stretching my stories, but I became good friends with an American-French bellman. His name was _____. And he wanted to bring me to meet – He was a good friend of the managing editor of the *Wisconsin Day Journal*, and he wanted to have me meet him. So he set up a meeting for continentals, and this was while I was in law school, and I never even drank beer, but to – he was offering old-fashioneds, and the first drink of my life was an old-fashioned with the *Wisconsin Day Journal* editor. I still remember it today.

Q: It's a pretty powerful drink.

LEIDEL: Yeah, I could feel it a bit, but I didn't start drinking until I went to Washington, where everyone was drinking martinis.

Q: Yeah, I remember when I got to Washington, gin and tonics were the big new thing.

LEIDEL: Okay, well I'm back to Frankfurt, and here's where I told you that my first big career change was a colleague saying there was something on the bulletin board. Well...The Agency sends me to a nine-month program at the Civil Service Commission on a personnel management internship. And so from Frankfurt, I went to this nine month study, and we had to try and – We had experience with a number of agencies, and then

we had to choose a place to intern, and during the course of this, another colleague in the study said, “My senator’s a speaker at the Bookings Institute, and I think you might be interested in it.”

And I missed that notice but as a result I took his advice and went to hear this talk by Charlie Ellison, who was the head of the Career Development and Counseling at the State Department. And I was impressed with his talk and I went up to him afterwards and said, “Could you use an intern?” And he said, “I would be delighted.” So for three months, I interned at State, and I did a study on the relationship of state civil service to foreign service, and I sort of compared this with the Central Intelligence Agency. And I made some recommendations on what State should do. Then returned to my internship at the Civil Service Commission. I went back to State, I got the assignment in their planning staff that I wanted, and I was on the promotion list when I got a call from Charlie Ellison who said, “I’ve disseminated your study and there’s a lot of interest. We’d like you to join the State Department.” And the only person I consulted with was my wife.

I had no complaints with the CIA, but I figured out that if I went to State, I would have many more opportunities to work overseas than if I stayed in administrative work in the CIA. So I made a quick decision within a week, stunned most of my colleagues at CIA, and told Charlie Ellison I would come and work for him in Career Development and Counseling. So my two big career moves were a result of a friend pointing out a notice on a bulletin board, and that’s how I got to State Department.

Q: Alright. When did this happen, when did you move to the State Department?

LEIDEL: 1962. In the spring of 1962.

Q: What was your first job?

LEIDEL: Working for Charlie Ellison in Career Development and Counseling. And I was there for most of three years. Ellison moved on to Cultural Affairs. He wanted me to work for him there, but I said, “No, I’m going to stay because I want to serve overseas.” And he was replaced by Bill Crieg, and I continued to work for Career Development and Counseling until I got – I was on many lists, and I said yes to all of them. One was Cairo, and a couple of others, but I was not selected. But finally, 1965, I was selected to be personnel officer at the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. And I accepted and that’s where I went.

Q: Well, what was Argentina like when you went there? This would be what, 60 –

LEIDEL: ’65 to ’68.

Q: Okay, what was Argentina like at that time?

LEIDEL: Well, I thoroughly enjoyed living in BA (Buenos Aires), it was a wonderful city to live in. It had excellent music, an excellent opera, and it was easy to get around the

city. And I received one TDY (Temporary Duty) assignment, and this was to Punta Del Este, Uruguay, during the chiefs of mission, chiefs of state conference. Then I worked for _____, who was a consular for administration in Mexico City. So, I enjoyed that, and I enjoyed it, enjoyed my first State Department assignment.

Q: Well, what was the embassy in Buenos Aires like? Morale and –

LEIDEL: Well, it was in an office building on Desarmiento. Let's see, when my – hold on a minute. It was on the fifth or sixth floor of an office building, and when we were first there we lived in a hotel for many months, I could walk from the hotel. I'm trying to remember when they shifted to a regular embassy.

Q: Well, basically, what were you doing?

LEIDEL: Well, this goes back. I was the personnel officer and I remember that one of my responsibilities was the training of junior officers. And they worked for me, but at the time we had a number of junior officers coming, and at the time I assigned them to three months in administration, three months in consular, three months political, three months economic, where they got a full rounding of what the Foreign Service Officers do. And I understand that this practice had been stopped after I left the service, which I regret.

Q: I do too.

LEIDEL: But that's another story. And then I had the director general and – this is when State Department was first bringing in blacks. Let's see. And they assigned two to work for me in personnel and I tried my best, but he grew up in the slums of the Los Angeles area, and this was his first overseas assignment, and he couldn't believe how foreign service officers were so spoiled and what a great life they had. And he decided he wanted no part of the foreign service.

So I failed in my task, and he quit and resigned from the foreign service. And that task I did not succeed in. But, I don't know, this was many, many years ago. All I know is I enjoyed BA (Buenos Aires) and I enjoyed my job as personnel officer.

Q: Were you aware of the political situation there at that time?

LEIDEL: Yes. This was – Let me think, this was after Peron and before Mrs. Peron came back. This was between the military taking control. And we did have – let me recall. We did have a family with a Chinese restaurant, and there were explosions nearby, and demonstrations. And I went – let me think this through. And I went back to the embassy right away, and I have a story to tell but I'm trying to recall –

LEIDEL: There was a lot of unrest at the time, I recall.

Q: Well, you were there with what, your wife and two children?

LEIDEL: Three children.

Q: Did you feel uncomfortable because of – ?

LEIDEL: No, I – not really. There was always a question of whether, and our daughter in particular was moved around schools many times, was it good or bad for our children, and I thought in discussing this with them afterwards that they all felt that they benefitted from overseas. They all loved to travel and have continued to travel as adults raising their children to travel. So I think having children in the Foreign Service, children in the Foreign Service have a lot more to gain, and we didn't have any incidents which adversely affected them. So as far as children were concerned, it was all a plus.

Q: Well, the – by this time were you pretty well set on the foreign service being what you wanted to do?

LEIDEL: Absolutely.

Q: How was your Spanish?

LEIDEL: Not very good. One of the problems was – oh, and then I recall this. They enrolled me in a Spanish course before I went to BA (Buenos Aires) and my replacement left prematurely, and they pulled me out before – I only had about two weeks of it – before I got there. And the assumption was that administration officers don't really need it. And we started taking – my wife and I took training there and, as I said, she learned better than I did. And we got along on the streets, but I was far from fluent. And when we went to Mexico City directly from Argentina, I had no opportunity to get enrolled in language training then. So I had passable Spanish, but far from fluent.

Q: I know this is one of the difficulties. I was never very good in languages, and I struggled my entire career.

LEIDEL: What was your specialty?

Q: I was a consular officer. Look, I'm thinking this would be a good place to stop for now. We'll pick this up the next time, when you're off to Mexico City.

LEIDEL: That'd be great.

Q: So where are we now?

LEIDEL: 1971-72, senior seminar.

Q: Okay, which number? Do you remember what is was, which number?

LEIDEL: I think it was fourteenth.

Q: I was in the seventeenth. '77-'78.

LEIDEL: Oh, I think I was the fourteenth.

Q: How did you find that?

LEIDEL: It was the best year that I had in the government, for reasons I'll explain, despite the fact that the coordinator did not think administrative officers belonged in the senior seminar. He made it clear – I was in the carpool with his deputy, and I think he probably felt the same way about consular officers.

Q: I'm sure they did, yeah.

LEIDEL: "We're here to train ambassadors, not administrative officers." But despite that, I thought it was the best year for the most surprising reason. You know, you spend foreign service officers get detached from the United States, so half of the year is spent travelling around the United States. And I grew up in Madison, Wisconsin, and I used to go up every summer to watch the Cubs play in Chicago, and I made one trip to New York City, and that was the extent of my travel.

And this year, I went to every section of the country. Midwest, far west, deep south. And it was a great year of really getting to know the United States. In California, we met with Governor Reagan, in Georgia we met with Governor Carter. On the Hill, we met with Congressman _____, who became president. I thought with this record on who ran for president he'd probably be elected. We met with Jesse Jackson and his church in Chicago. So, to me, that was a very rich experience.

Then I did a – We had the choice of _____ of doing a case study overseas, we could pick any place in the world to do a case study, and I decided that the one continent that I probably wouldn't get to was Africa. So I picked – I went to five countries in Africa: Nigeria, Zaire (Republic of Congo), Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan. And the topic I picked, and I called my paper "Black to Black Images", in the States I interviewed black Americans who defined their preconception of Africa, and who had visited Africa, and how their preconceptions had changed. And when I visited Africa, I talked to Africans about their preconceptions of the United States, and how these had changed, if any, after visiting.

And to briefly summarize, the consensus of black Americans visiting Africa was that they were treated more like Americans than Africans, and if Americans were looked down upon in Africa so were they, which came as a surprise. And most of the Africans who visited the United States with the preconception that blacks were discriminated against, came back with the view of how fortunate they were, and how well they were treated, and, "They have a much better life than we do." So that was the sense of my case study, all in all. And then we had some great speakers. I thought it was a great year. However, when we went to the Sudan, do you know the name Cleo Noel?

Q: Oh yes.

LEIDEL: Well, I picked the Sudan primarily because I'd worked with Cleo in the Department. He was on assignment at the time. But about a month before I was scheduled to go there he was assassinated, and I didn't change my itinerary. I was friends with the chargé at the time. And when I took the medal off from the trip, we were seated with friends and he said, "I hate to tell you this, but you have a telegram from Washington. They want you to go to Vietnam with the administrative counselor. What's your answer?"

I turned to him and I told him, "The answer's yes." Third time, and each time I said yes.

And when I got back to Washington, they said, "Sorry. The ambassador, Graham Martin, has turned you down." Graham Martin had a son who was in the military in Vietnam who was killed, and the son's best friend was a political officer whose name escapes me at the moment, so he wanted to put him in that job. So I was turned down for a third time.

So that's the end of – Later, I should tell you that shortly after I was in the EOR, the admin counselor in London wanted me to come as his admin counselor, Kingman Brewster who was president of Yale. He used to come into my office for briefings, and I had just been – the _____ said he had asked for me and I didn't want to – I didn't think it was fair to leave after a year so I turned him down. The same thing happened. Brewster asked for me again when I went to Management Operations. I had just arrived there on a new job, and our children were beginning college, and multiple reasons, so I turned him down again. And I don't think you'll find that anybody in the Service volunteered three times for Vietnam and never got there, and was offered London twice and turned them down twice, but that's my assignment history.

So then, another thing about me that is probably unusual: I've never asked for an assignment. I know a lot of Foreign Service officers look to see who's leaving what post when they start bidding, and I just always accepted whatever assignment was offered. I turned down London twice, and once I turned down a – they wanted me to be the chief finance officer, and I turned that down because I thought they were mistaken in thinking I was qualified. But I never asked for an assignment, and I've always gone where they sent me, and I've never regretted that.

So my next three assignments were all in Washington, and this was Executive Director of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural affairs for almost four years, Director of the Executive European Bureau for three years, and Deputy Director of Management Operations for three years. And this is a long time in Washington, but again because of our children's education, other than the London assignments I was never offered any overseas assignments.

So I was happy to stay in Washington. I felt that the Bureau of Educational and Cultural affairs DEO was the best job I'd ever had in the Department, because I felt what they

were doing in the exchanges program, in the Fulbright program, so far was accomplishing more good than any place else I'd worked for.

Q: Would you talk about this job in some detail? What it was doing... You were there from when to when?

LEIDEL: I was there from '72 to '76. For almost four years.

Q: Well, you know, I've always – I think many of us in the Foreign Service think that the cultural exchange program was probably one of the most effective instruments we had in our foreign policy.

LEIDEL: Exactly. This is what I've always felt, and I continue to feel that. And I don't know what's happened to it today, they've reorganized and USIA, the cultural part, used to be separate and then it was merged with the Department, and then I was told it was somewhat known greater, but I haven't followed it. I had another good boss, John Richardson, who was a political appointee, but he was dedicated. He had exchange high school students living with him for years, and he continued to work in this field afterward, and I was very fortunate to work under somebody who was so dedicated to the program.

Q: What were some of the issues that you had to deal with?

LEIDEL: As executive director? Well, mostly finding and retaining the right officers. I think recruitment was a big part of my challenge in talking people into it. And another part – well, this is why one of my tasks was – Cultural Affairs had its own budget separate from the Department's budget. And I used to go accompany Richardson, sat at his side, at every Senate and House Appropriations meeting. And I think for that reason, somebody felt that I was really an expert budget fiscal officer, but that was a large part of my responsibilities, to understand it. That wasn't my cup of tea for an assignment.

But I guess the people that I worked with, I had good people – I had two secretaries, and this was another part of my story of interest, who were high school graduates, but they were extremely able and had good judgement and good communication skills, and before I left the job, I got both of them jobs outside the secretarial field. One as a training officer for _____ and another as a contract officer for _____. And I took great pleasure in arranging that. All in all, that was a good assignment.

And then I was – I received a call from the Far East Division, and why can't I think of the name of the assistant secretary who became very famous and infamous and went and negotiated the Balkan treaty and whatnot. Well, he was the assistant secretary of the Bureau. He was also a deputy – a DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) I think in Vietnam. I'll think of his name.

Q: Holbrook.

LEIDEL: Holbrook. Dick Holbrook. But I was interviewed for the executive director of East Asia, and I really wanted to go to – East Asia was always on top of my wish list, but the – I was interviewed by his staff assistant, and then a few weeks later before a decision was made, I got a call from Joan Clark, who was the Director General. And she said, “I’d like you to talk to George Vest, who is being assigned to assistant secretary of _____.”

And he interviewed me for an hour, and I decided that he was a real people’s person and everything I’ve heard about Holbrook, who’s an outstanding negotiator, is that he’s not a very good people’s person. Even Barack Obama, I read, didn’t care for him. So I accepted EUR. And I thought that was a very enjoyable assignment, and I thought the major task there was providing support to the overseas post. And because Western Europe had seasoned administrative counselors, I didn’t bother to visit Western Europe, but I visited all of the Eastern European posts: Turkey, Russia, and I found this very educational and productive.

Q: Well, I would’ve thought that that job – You must’ve been – Europe has always been, for a certain part of the Foreign Service, Europe has been considered the game. And getting assignments there, you, in a way, belonged to a club.

LEIDEL: The European Bureau.

Q: Yeah. And I would have thought that you would have been deluged with people who wanted you to get them in.

LEIDEL: Oh, that’s very true. That’s a very popular bureau. I got – Ron Spiers was ambassador to Turkey at the time, and I traveled all around Turkey, but the admin officer who drove me around covered all of the consulates and had a lot of recommendations for changes and improvements and received a complimentary letter from Ron Spiers who came up in my career subsequently.

Russia was – Moscow was very depressive when I visited there. Malcolm Toon was the ambassador, and I remember he held a reception at his famous residence, and he looked up at the chandelier, and said, “I don’t care if they listen to everything I’m going to tell you,” but he assumed everything was bugged there. When I visited a consulate in Kiev, there was a commotion outside, and a mother and son were trying to seek asylum, and police caught the son, broke his arm, put him in the van, the mother got into the consulate. And so these were all my negative experiences, except when I got to Leningrad it was relatively different. They had great music, ballet, concerts. I enjoyed that. I went to Prague.

Oh, all of the posts I visited, I wrote the ambassador saying, “I’d prefer to be quartered in a hotel downtown, if possible, walking distance from the embassy,” because I know that I’d get invitations to stay with the ambassador, DCM, so forth, and I wanted to get to know a little of the cities. So every post, except Prague, honored my request. And the ambassador in Prague was a political appointee, Thomas Byrne, and he insisted I stay at his residence, which was a mansion overtaken by the Americans after the war. I had to

walk a great distance in my bedroom to get to the bathroom, where everything was gold plated. It was where Shirley Temple stayed.

And so it was only about a good mile walk to the embassy, and he remembered my letter, so he let me walk, but he had his chauffeur follow me all the way to the embassy. Then another experience I had in Hungary. Philip Kaiser was the ambassador, and he had a great fondness for tennis. And he had me for dinner and his son was also visiting at the time, and the son at the time – he had three sons, and they were all writers. One ended up as managing editor of *The Washington Post*. A *New York Times* writer was there. And we talked about sports, and football, and I mentioned I was a Redskins fan, and the only way I could see a game – they were all sold out for years, and I ushered for years at a Redskins game – and Kaiser’s son thought this was amazing, a diplomat ushering, and he wanted to write a feature article on me in *The New York Times*, but I begged him not to do that. I didn’t think it was so unusual. But, let’s see.

Well, that was about _____. I was very fortunate in the people that I worked for and the people that worked for me, and I attribute my success to that. Not everyone is that fortunate in the Foreign Service, I know.

Next, I was assigned to MMO. Worked for Bob Miller, and I was there for almost three years. And I remember less about that job. I know that my primary – I had people working for me who were assigned as liaisons to the bureaus, and what we focused on was communications and coordination between State Department administration, the bureaus, and the post. And I thought that was what needed doing, but beyond that I don’t remember much. I worked for a boss, Bob Miller, who was a political officer who was a good boss, but he didn’t think the whole organization was needed. He thought it was superfluous. So, his heart really wasn’t in the assignment, and I don’t know whether it still exists or not, but that was my last Washington assignment.

Q: Then where did you go?

LEIDEL: Then I got a call from personnel. And they said, “We’d like to put you on a long list as the ambassador to Bahrain.”

And my response was, “But I don’t – When do you want me to go?”

And they said, “In two to three months, three months.”

And I said, “I don’t have the language.”

And the answer was, “For Bahrain, you don’t need the language. Don’t worry about it. But it’s a long list, and you’re on it.” And I did not tell Bev because I thought it was such a long shot. Next I knew, I was on a list of – there was an undersecretary’s committee, and they selected three names they sent to Secretary of State Shultz. And next I found out that I was one of the three names, and the other two were Arabists, so I dismissed that. And then I got a call that said, “Your name is going to the White House.”

So I said, “Oh, I’d better tell Bev my name’s going to the White House for assignment to Bahrain.” And then I knew that it was only if the White House had a political appointee would I not go, so I had time to prepare. And I knew the players, I knew the issues, and I was called by a congressional liaison for a briefing, and I told them how I had prepared.

And they said, “You won’t need any of that. Only two things you need to know: Jesse Helms is chairman of the committee, and he’s going to ask that if you’ve read the last GOP platform at the last GOP convention in which Reagan was selected. And two, this was October, and he’s going to ask you for the score of North Carolina’s last Saturday’s football tour. And if you have that down, you should do all right.”

So I went to the committee hearing, and Helms did not show up for the hearing. Rudy Boschwitz from Minnesota was acting, and I was at the end of the line of about five ambassador appointees. And the first person was Nick Veliotos, who was then the Assistant Secretary of NEA (Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs) who was scheduled to go to Egypt. And in his opening statement, he mentioned that Egypt was a good friend of the United States.

And Boschwitz said to him, “How could you possibly say this? Have you looked at Egypt’s voting record? They vote against the United States every turn.” And they figured out that this was related to Israel. And Veliotos didn’t back down, and Boschwitz didn’t back down, and at one time I thought Veliotos was going to say, “You can have the job,” and walk off. It became such a battle.

But, they finally got to me; I was the last person on the line. And I read my statement, and they had one question: “Are you going to follow Bahrain’s voting at the United Nations.” And I said, “Yes, sir.” And that was the end of my statement, and when I walked out, I was _____, by Graham Bannerman, who was the chief consul for the committee. And he said, “I read your bio, and I read that you went to the University of Wisconsin and worked at the Edgewater hotel.”

He said, “I went to the University of Wisconsin, and the Edgewater was my favorite watering hole. And anybody who was a Wisconsin grad who worked at the Edgewater had to be a great ambassador, and that’s why you didn’t get any more questions.” So I learned this is how things work in Washington.

So I passed, and that’s how I got to Bahrain. Our next problem was arranging our flight. We had two cabs, and we had some difficulty, but we finally got it arranged on a Friday. And on Tuesday of that week, I got a call from the White House, the president’s secretary, that, “If you’d like a meeting with the president, he can see you on Friday.”

And I said, “Thank you very much, but that’s the day I’m leaving, and I wouldn’t get out in time to make my flight.”

And she said, “That’s alright. Next time you’re in Washington, let us know and we’ll arrange a meeting then.”

So I went back to NEA (Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs) I casually mentioned this, and I was told, “You can’t do that! Call him back. You’ve got to tell the emir when you meet him what messages the president gave to you. Get back on the phone and make that appointment.” So I cancelled our air reservation and made the appointment, and my two sons flew in from New York. Our daughter was at Palm Beach and she couldn’t make it. And they joined Bev and me at the White House.

And the president greeted us, and one thing I had recalled and had anticipated, was when John F Kennedy would meet, they’d sit down for a half an hour conversation, and this didn’t happen. President Reagan had his photographer there, and went through a series of directing the photographer, and I tried to interrupt with questions, without much success, and I finally recalled the emir had just visited three months earlier, and I was invited to the dinner that the vice president was giving.

And I recall the vice president saying that he’d never seen so much of a rapport between the emir and President Reagan as any head of state. So I referred to Sheikh Isa, the emir, and he just went on. We got over a dozen wonderful eight by ten photographs, but that was it. And when I left the Oval Office, his aide handed me a five by eight card with the time print across the card.

“When you tell the emir of your visit to the president, you tell him that this is what he said to you.” Can you believe that? I guess, subsequently, I put this together. This was 1983, and he was in office for some time thereafter, but I’d read books about him that some people felt he was coming down with Alzheimer’s, even before it was acknowledged. So, that was it. Finally got to Bahrain, so now I’m in Bahrain.

Q: Could you tell us, what was the situation in Bahrain when you got there.

LEIDEL: Well, the political situation was – One, I found we had good people to people and government to government relationships, but the Iran-Iraq War was going on, and Bahrain was understandably nervous about the war. Iran had at one time claimed – Well, at one time Bahrain was part of Iran. And there was always concern that Iran would take over. But when I got there, and I found out about our policy – we were officially neutral during the Iran-Iraq War, but everything we did was in support of Iraq, because we felt Iran was winning, and we didn’t want Iran to win.

Every three months, we had briefers from State and Defense – the State Department briefer was Wayne White, and the Defense Department briefer was Paul Pilar, don’t know why I mention this now, and they gave intelligence briefings primarily from the aerial photography. And they went on from Bahrain to brief the foreign minister and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

And also, Rumsfeld was the Secretary of Defense, and he went from Bahrain to Iraq to present Texas cowboy boots to Saddam Hussein. So we were being far from neutral, and when people accuse the United States of not trusting, Iran had good reason not to trust the United States. We were supporting Iraq in the Iraq-Iran War, we had a hand in overthrowing constitutionally elected _____ for the Shah, and during George Bush's administration, we labelled Iran as part of the axis of evil. So, how could they trust us?

But at any rate, this was – My primary responsibility was in the political military area, in which Bahrain had hosted our Middle East force at the time. Middle East Naval Force, now the Fifth Fleet. And they had done this since they became independent. But the quid pro quo on their part was, “If we're helping you in defense, if anything happens to us, we expect the United States to defend us.” And also, we were important to them in terms of military equipment and armament. Airplanes and so forth, which I'll get into later. So, we had a quid pro quo relationship in political military.

I've lived in five countries, and I found Bahrain the friendliest and most hospitable of all five countries. And I had rapport with the emir, that was unlike a rapport with any of the other officials. I saw the emir more, at his request, than the foreign minister or the prime minister or the defense minister at the time. He had a beach, which was open only to Westerners, and we would go almost every weekend, and I met with him almost every weekend. And if there was a weekend we didn't show up, he would wonder why we weren't there. So this was very special. And I don't say this because it was my personality, it was because I was the U.S. ambassador.

I want to have an aside here, before I forget. Do you recall our second invasion of Iraq and weapons of mass destruction and the fact that Rumsfeld and Cheney held that all of the intelligence showed that they had weapons of mass destruction? Wayne White of the State Department and Paul Pillar of the Defense Department said that we would regret an invasion of Iraq. The intelligence doesn't indicate that they're an immediate threat, and the unforeseeable problems that will come up are legions. And news reports never have gotten to that at some point during the administration. Never talked to the Iraq desk people in the two intelligence agencies.

Let's see. Oh, then Rumsfeld visited. I met Rumsfeld twice. I was called to Oman with all of the ambassadors in the Gulf, and this was just a month or two. So it was in December, and I had arrived in November, and I was the new kid on the block. And these were all stationed ambassadors. So I said very little. But there were a lot of disputes between the field and Washington. Rumsfeld at the time was the Middle East negotiator, and when the ambassadors started questioning, Rumsfeld said, “I'm not here to listen to you, I'm here to tell you what to do.” I've never forgotten that.

Later on, he came to visit Bahrain on his way to Baghdad. And I just recall that it was generally a pleasant meeting, but on the way to meeting the Bahrain cabinet – this was time when again there was talk about moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in which there was prediction of a lot of bloodshed in the Arab world if we would do this –

and I, in the car, on the way to the meeting, I said to him, “Why doesn’t the White House educate Congress on the implications of moving our embassy?”

And his answer was, “That’s a dumb question.”

And I didn’t know what to say, and then he paused and he said, “That’s just one of a hundred issues that the White House has with Congress.” And he said, “You have no idea what it’s like in the White House.” Something like that. So that was Rumsfeld.

Then another visitor we had was astronaut Ron McNair. And I met him at the airport, and when I greeted him, I said, “I’m Don Leidel. Do you have any special requests you’d like to do during your stay here?”

And he said, “Yes, I’d like to meet the ambassador.”

And he’d been travelling – this was about his fifth, sixth good will tour. So I explained that I was the ambassador, and we had a great visit. We took him to the desert; he loved the desert. He loved following the animals around and it worked for him very well. Then, later, after his visit, I don’t know if it was several months or longer, we visited Oman, and I took my – our son, I don’t know if I mentioned this, when he visited Bahrain for the first time in the spring, he went back and quit his job in Atlanta and returned and got a job in Bahrain, so he was with us, which was a real plus for us during the rest of our tour in Bahrain.

And Bev and I and Michael went along to Oman, and the ambassador, Bram Montgomery, invited me to a meeting with the Bahrainis and a senior officer from Washington. And over the course of this meeting, he got a message and he excused himself. He had a telephone call. And then he called me and the other visitors from Washington, and he said, “Just got a call that the Challenger has crashed, and everyone was killed.” And we had just begun our meeting, and I mentioned this, and he said, no, he wouldn’t be able to get to any other subject. And we recommended that he not raise it at the meeting. Then, when I got back to the embassy, we were about to receive hundreds of messages of sympathy on Ron McNair’s passing.

Q: I might point out for people who might not be familiar with it, the Challenger was our space shuttle that lost some tiles and burned up coming back from a shuttle flight.

LEIDEL: Where were you then?

Q: I can’t remember; I was back in Washington.

LEIDEL: Oh, okay. I told you about my meetings with emir, and generally he had a great sense of humor, and one thing I was told by my DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) – I had two very good very DCMs – when I arrived is that, “What the emir tells you – his views aren’t always the official views of the government, so be careful in reporting his views or Washington will get very confused.”

But one Friday morning, which was their sabbath, he had a different look on his face. I said, “What’s the matter? Something troubling you?”

And he said, “Yes. Your president has just pulled your marines out of Lebanon, and what’s going to happen to Bahrain if we’re in trouble?” He said, “If I knew him better, I would give George Bush a call, but –” He went on and on. And Bev was with me, and it was a Friday, the sabbath, and we tried to recall the conversation word for word and I sent a telegram, and I put in there the, “If I knew him better, I would call the Secretary,” it got to the Secretary. It not only got to the Secretary; she’d send it to Reagan.

And about two weeks later, I got a two page letter signed by Reagan, which I delivered to the emir, assuring him of our continued and full support. And the emir liked to know that this really happened, because during the Iraq War One, Iraqis had sent rockets into Bahrain, and this was when George H.W. pushed them out of Kuwait. So the emir was forever grateful for that.

Another aspect which made Bahrain such a positive assignment: I had an admiral and a state chief, both of whom were first grade, and we saw eye-to-eye on just about every subject, and our differences were not with each other, but with Washington and the lack of coordination between State, DOD (Department of Defense) and CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) on many issues. But I had two outstanding DCMs (Deputy Chiefs of Mission) and good working relationships with the military and with CIA, and excellent staff. We also had an American school, which was very important. It was not an overseas school; it was a Defense Department school. But it had twenty-some nationalities attending, and the richness in terms of cross-cultural awareness and understanding, and the son of the crown prince, who is now the crown prince, who my son knew quite well attended the school. He went on to American University, and he is now the crown prince and in the news for giving millions of dollars to Hillary Clinton for her foundation.

Something else that was unique was the – I became dean of the Diplomatic Core, which was very unusual. I think I may be the only one in the Arab countries. And it just so happened that all the other ambassadors, when I arrived, their much longer tours had left. I ended up for my last year being dean. And then before I left, my replacement was nominated, and his name was Sam Zakhem, who would be the first political appointee, and he was the political director for _____. And also a state legislator and a heavy contributor to the Reagan administration. He was born and raised in Lebanon, and he was the nominee. And when Bahrain got the nomination, I was called in by the emir, the foreign minister, and the crown prince, all of whom urged me to stop the appointment. The emir said, “We can’t have a Lebanese as the ambassador. I can’t let him visit me in the beach. He’s Lebanese.” And I said, “He’s an American citizen.”

And I thought that I’d call George Vest and tell him of their concern. And George’s answer was, “Regulation’s law now is we can’t extend your tour for more than three years.” I said, “I’m not asking for a tour, I just wanted you to know of their attitude.” And eventually, Bahrain never did anything, and when he arrived, I was told, he told his staff,

“I’m more American than you are. I chose to be an American; you were just fortunate enough to be born there.” So, I went back to Washington in 1986.

Q: Before this, can you tell me a bit about life in Bahrain? Back in the late ‘50s, I was the vice counsel in Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), and that was before the causeway, and we covered Bahrain, but I used to come over and issue visas and things like that once a month. Go out to Wally House.

LEIDEL: Oh, really? Okay. When President Bush was – Did I mention his visit? I don’t know how I forgot that. Were you there when the bridge had been completed?

Q: No.

LEIDEL: Okay. The bridge was completed while we there. How I forgot the most important visitor. This was – I’ll be darned – when George Bush visited as vice president. When I’m asked what my greatest contribution – I kept this paragraph in my notes – what my greatest contribution as ambassador to Bahrain was, my answer was, “Arranging a tennis match.”

I knew Bush – George H.W. Bush – would be arriving, and I knew he was a tennis player, and I played regularly with the foreign minister and the interior minister, and I thought it would be great if I could arrange a tennis match. Both the foreign minister and the Bush’s advance people were initially negative, and I think the foreign minister who was really up on everything in the United States knew that Bush was an accomplished athlete, and an excellent tennis player, and for some reason the advance team didn’t think it was a good idea. But I pressed and I pressed, and finally they agreed, and Bush came along with Don Greg, who was his tennis partner.

And Bush arrived – my wife was in the States at the time, before the birth of our first grandson, and she was invited to return on Airforce Two with Bush and his staff. And they got off the airplane. Bush was taken to his residence at the palace, and immediately got into tennis clothes, and the first event on his three day tour was this tennis match. I played in the next court with assistant secretary of NEA, who was also against two top Bahraini young tennis players.

So, Greg and Bush played foreign minister and interior minister, and Greg and Bush won. Then Bush said, “Let’s change partners. I’ll play with the foreign minister.” And Bush and the foreign minister won. And then they played again and Bush and the interior minister won. So the two Bahrainis, all of them won, and it turns out it really set the visit off on a positive key, and the advance people – this was one of several visits later – told me Bahrain was the best of all their visits, which I attribute to the tennis match. And I’m really joking now, but I told people I had a role in Bush’s decision to push Iraqis back because he had to protect Bahrain. So that’s my story of Bush’s visit.

So now we’ve left Bahrain, and we went back to Washington, and on our trip back, we stayed a couple days in New York to see our son and so forth. One evening we went to

the Metropolitan Opera, and while we waited outside the door to get in, I was approached by Steve Lowe, who was director of the Foreign Service Institute, and he said, "Don, I wanted to get in touch with you. I'd like for you to serve as the dean of Foreign Service Institute for Training and Career Development." And that's how I got my next assignment at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: What was that job?

LEIDEL: This was now 1986. And then, two things happened during my time at the Foreign Service Institute, and I'll tell you about these and then I'll get back to the Foreign Service Institute. While I was in Bahrain I had sent a telegram to Spiers, who at the time was undersecretary for Management, that the processing and handling of information and paper needed to be given greater attention. And greater attention needed to be given to the views of Information Management Communications and communication. On one of my first assignments when I arrived in the State Department in Career Development and Counseling, I was told to visit all of the other foreign affairs agencies to figure out what they were doing on information management and computers, and I discovered that CIA and Defense Department were way ahead of the State Department, and the only one that compared in utility was FBI.

Then a couple of years later I was asked to chair a committee to try to do things to bring information management up to date, and then I got this call from Ron Spiers, who was head of Management, and he said, "I would like you to do a comprehensive study. I consider this more important than security." And I recall saying, "Well, jeez, I'm not sure if State Department needs another study. They usually just get filed away." And he said, "This won't get filed away, I assure you." So from November 1986 to May 1987, I had two good people on my staff working with me and I presented, after almost six months, presented a long paper giving a _____ for integrating five offices in the bureaus of administration responsible for information management activities.

And I presented this to the Management Council and it was approved, and then two things began to happen: the deputy assistant secretaries who would be losing turf were lobbying against Spiers doing this, and then someone pointed out they'd never get another assistant secretary _____ by Congress, and the result of this was that I was absolutely correct. My study got filed away. And it wasn't until two years later and two undersecretaries from Management, and this – I don't know the name but a woman political appointee said, "Hasn't anything been done about information management?"

And somebody said, "There's this Leidel study."

And she said, "Get it out." And two or three years later, I'm told my study was implemented. I think I had retired by then. So that was my first interruption.

Then, in 1989, Sam Zakhem's tour was to come to an end, and I was told that he had created a lot of problems – this was second hand – and that the assistant secretary left a year. He was told to report every week, telling him what was on his agenda and so forth.

But at the end of three years, he was due to leave, and he went to the Hill to see Helm – Jesse Helm – and he said, “There’s nobody at the post who can show their stuff,” and it was true: three DCMs had quit, and the station chief had left, and the administrative consular had left, and there was no senior officer left to act as chargé. And this really became a problem. So I got a call from personnel: “Would you help us out and go out for a few months in ’89 until we can process another ambassador?”

And I agreed and I went to spend three months back in Bahrain so they could relieve Ambassador Zakhem. He had gotten rid of our driver, apparently, who had said something to the inspectors he didn’t like. And I had the pleasure of getting my driver back. And the only other thing I remember from the letter that I got from Secretary of State Baker thanking me for the job I did, and he said, “Your knowledge and skill helped us to manage a particularly sensitive issue of the status of stinger missiles.”

So that’s all I recall, and I forget really what I had done, but I was glad to renew friendships with staff and the many Bahrainis which we knew. So that was another plus in my career. Let’s see. Well, at FSI (Foreign Service Institute), I also, before I went to FSI, I also did a study on the secretaries. I had been the one to complain about secretaries not being given the attention they needed in assignments and in promotions, and I’ve always had secretaries who were often smarter than a lot of officers I’ve served with, and I got several promoted to officer positions, so I was real pleased to work on the secretarial study and somewhat more attention was being given by the Department to that.

At FSI, I gave a lot of attention to Career Development and Training, trying to get people appointed as DCMs. Management and leadership training. We had an excellent head of department, Prudence Bushnell, and I thought we had a great program. And during the course of my tenure at FSI there was an inspection report that said that something like 80% of first tour DCMs weren’t up on their jobs, and it was primarily in the area of leadership and management. Consular and administrative officers had a great deal more supervisory in management and leadership experience with large staffs; political officers usually had a few reporting officers and not any proven management experience, so that’s why I devoted a lot of attention to it.

And I had nominated Prudence Bushnell for the top management award, and given her – she was a reserve officer – and given her laudatory performance ratings. And when she left FSI, she became a deputy assistant secretary in Latin America in African affairs, and became ambassador to Nairobi. She was there when Nairobi was bombed and received an award for that, and then she was ambassador in Central America. So that gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

Q: I interviewed Pru Bushnell, and I was struck by her analysis of administrative matters and personal matters.

LEIDEL: Yes. What did you interview her for?

Q: For the oral history, same as for you. I did about maybe ten hours or so.

LEIDEL: I'll be darned. So, she's writing a book about her experience; it hasn't come out yet, but I still stay in touch with her. And that's about it. I received, when I was at FSI, the John Jacob Rogers Award, and that's it as far as State Department. And then in the office that looks after retired officers, I had two assignments: one in Bratislava, but there was an executive in Boston, Massachusetts, that hired people to assist foreign embassies. And soon after – this would be 1970 – let's see, I retired in '72, this was 1972.

Czechoslovakia broke up into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Bratislava became an independent country of Slovakia, and I was asked to assist them in setting up administratively, and to develop a diplomatic training program for them. And I actually went there twice; I really enjoyed Bratislava.

And then two months later I was asked to do the same thing for the Omanis, for the Oman Foreign Service, to construct a training program for them. So those were two side assignments. And then my last call from this Office of Retirees was – I was offered a job at the Institute they had up in Iowa, and I turned that down. I said, "If it's Wisconsin, I'll take it."

And the next I knew, I got an offer to be a professor at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, a professor of political science and foreign relations, which I took and enjoyed for a year. I enjoyed it so much that I looked back and said, "Maybe I should have retired at age 50 and gone into teaching." But I really enjoyed the year with students, and I had mostly honors students.

And I had asked the head of the department if I could teach a course without giving tests, but I would ask them to write essays every week, and the final exam would be an essay, and they said, "Go ahead." Then I was told that some people when they found that out dropped out of the course, and my experience – these were high school graduates, and every week I would bring back their essays, and Bev and I would correct all their grammatical mistakes – I wouldn't grade them on that – and there was only one student, and this was 1972, I'm sure it's much worse now, that really knew how to write. And that was part of my experience at Lawrence. But I enjoyed the teaching, enjoyed being with students.

So then in '72 we sold our home in Washington – I didn't know how far retirement pay would go, and I didn't want to live way out in Vienna or someplace, and we found an area in Alexandria that we liked but we decided that the cost of housing would be beyond my retiree means. So I came to Sarasota primarily to be from a day's drive from two of our three children. Our daughter was in Palm Beach, Florida and our son in Marietta, Georgia. And that's why we decided to move to Sarasota, and I've never regretted it. I know _____ at the time, everything Sarasota had to offer, in terms of theater – there are about half a dozen gentleman's theaters – wonderful ballet, wonderful opera, wonderful concerts, and everything is ten to twelve minutes' drive from our home. And they had

also a Sarasota Institute of Lifetime Learning in which I was on their board and did a lot of recruitment, and whenever I'd go to Washington I'd stay at _____.

I still belonged to _____. And I did a lot of recruiting from the speakers recruited, and this worked out, and then I've been on boards of three condominiums, the Racket Club, and the Wisconsin Alumni Associates. But I vowed never to be president, because presidents of these organizations I've found out have a difficult time finding replacements. But I've kept busy, and I do a lot of reading, a lot of – well, I've finished 500 some pages of my memoir, and I've completed Bahrain. So I should finish this one in the next few months. So that's my story.

Q: It's been very interesting. You know Don, as you're interested in writing, I don't know if you've had a chance to look at our oral history program, but we've got over two thousand of these oral histories.

LEIDEL: Is that right? And how do you process these?

Q: We put them on the internet. They're available to everyone.

LEIDEL: Oh, you don't translate them into written?

Q: They're all typed up. What you'll get will be a typed transcript of what you've said, and we encourage you to make the normal grammatical corrections and that sort of thing, but beyond that, we hope you will add things, you know? You could say, "Gee, he forgot to ask me about this," or, "I just remembered this." You know?

LEIDEL: Working on my memoirs was somewhat helpful in doing this with you.

Q: Absolutely.

LEIDEL: But one irony, subsequent: my family and friends, particularly two grandkids, had a few communications, and my proposal on information management has been approved. He would have been assistant secretary. But the irony is – three times I was called upon because of my appreciation of the importance of computers and the internet and information management. But the irony is, I do not have a computer, and people do not understand this. My three children survive on it, and my two grandchildren can't believe it. What I planned to do was write a long essay, short book, explaining why I don't have a computer, and if you want me to take a few more minutes...

Q: Sure.

LEIDEL: We've had them twice, and we got rid of them, because we got messages that we didn't want, and my main reason – I told my family, "I'll get a computer as soon as I finish my memoir." But having everybody that I know have a computer, spends at least an hour a day, and I don't have this time. It will take away from writing, it will take away from reading or tennis or golf, and I at least want to get it written, and I vowed I'll get a

computer after I finish my memoirs. So, what does my older son Peter send me for my birthday, but an iPod. So, I'm guess I'm going to have to get converted and get with the times.

Q: Well, let me point out. All our oral histories— and yours will eventually — go to adst.org.

LEIDEL: And then what?

Q: You can look at the transcripts. As I say, we've got over a thousand, and some of these are very long. I've done Tom Pickering at 48 hours. And you'll find many people that you know who've been in all fields. With my background, we certainly aren't restricting ourselves to political officers. It pretty much across the board.

LEIDEL: That's great. As I said, I intended to let you know when I was next in Washington, but this has worked out just fine, and I hope it's been satisfactory from your point of view.

Q: Oh it has. But remember when you get this to expand on it.

LEIDEL: The transcript?

Q: Yes. And our transcripts and excerpts website, we get about 70,000 people looking at this a month, and this on a worldwide basis.

LEIDEL: My God. You have any assistants, or do you do it all by yourself?

Q: Oh, heavens, no. We've got a small — We're an association, and there are about six of us who have been working on this, and we've been working on this for about thirty years. I've been at it from the beginning. I sort of started the oral history program.

LEIDEL: And what year was this when you started?

Q: About '85 when I returned.

LEIDEL: Well, I'm glad I'm finally included. I'll look forward to the transcript, and if there's anything else, I'll get back to you.

Q: Okay, well I thank you. I really appreciate this. We're on the campus of the FSI.

LEIDEL: When I get to Washington I'll definitely look you up.

Q: Okay, very good. Thank you.

LEIDEL: Thank you.

End of interview