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

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM LUERS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 12th of May, 2011 with William, middle initial?

LUERS: H.

Q: H. Luers, L-U-E-R-S. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Bill.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: OK. Let's start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

LUERS: Born in Springfield, Illinois in 1929 and my father was a banker in Springfield and my mother came from a farming town nearby.

Q: OK, let's talk a little bit about the Luers. Where do they come from? It sounds German.

LUERS: They came from Germany, a town just south of Hamburg. My grandfather, Henry Luers, emigrated in the 1880s and married a German lady from the same area. They emigrated to Springfield, Illinois where my grandfather started a shoe store. He had no education, my father had no university education. He had five sons and one daughter who grew up in Springfield. They became prominent citizens of the small town – capital of Illinois. It has a population of about 70,000 which has been rather stable over these many years. Central Illinois had many German speaking citizens before and even after WW1. The Luers Shoe Store was right next door to Lincoln Herndon Law Offices when my grandfather bought it. The Lincoln family had bought shoes from that store. My cousin who ran the Shoe store for years still has the record of the shoe sizes of the Lincoln family.

The Luers Shoe Store was just off the corner of the Old Courthouse Square at the Center of the town. Indeed, when Barack Obama announced his candidacy for president from the steps of courthouse in Springfield Illinois, I watched the national TV coverage. The pictures taken from a helicopter showed corner near where my grandfather had the shoe

store. On another corner of the same square was the building of the former Illinois National Bank where my father began as a clerk after the First World War. He went into the army, became an officer, was wounded, was decorated for bravery and returned to the Bank as a clerk. 40 years later he became president of that bank. On another corner of the square was the building of the former Marine Bank where Uncle Ted, who also had started from scratch, became the Bank President. Uncle Arthur took over as head of the Luers Shoe Store, Uncle Harry become a leader in the Springfield City Council, and my Uncle George ran some farms outside of town. This German American family occupied some important pieces of Springfield. None were wealthy, they were all self-made and each of them remained in Springfield with their families for their entire life. Many of my generation of the large Luers clan left Springfield.

Q: Were there any problems during World War I about being German?

LUERS: Absolutely. WW1 profoundly affected the "German" culture in Central Illinois and indeed throughout the Middle West. My father was the only one of his brothers who went to war but many German Americans joined. As you recall they went to a bloody war against the Germans. My father became a Lt in the Army, fought in some of the most difficult battles and was awarded a Silver Star for bravery under fire and two Purple Hearts for injuries in combat. He returned to Springfield, where German culture and even language had played a large role, to realize that German Americans were less honored and their culture and language was not celebrated. The German language was spoken only in the family, if there, and the German language signs were taken down. I am unclear how that affected my father in the 1920's but what I am clear on is that WW1 made him a super American patriot. He and Mother still liked Europe and during the 1930's they took vacations in the UK, France, Italy and Germany as part of their cultural education and to have fun.

Super patriot that he was, on December 8, 1941, that Monday after Pearl Harbor, he signed up again to rejoin the Army. He had no hesitation at the age of about 50. "I must go into this," I remember him telling me, his 12 year old only son. Within a few months he received a commission as a Major in the U.S. Army Air Corps which was then part of the Army and not a separate branch of the armed forces. He was immediately assigned as Commanding CEO -- he was commanding officer of a new air base in Dyersburg, TN the Air Corps was building in the spring of 1942.

He was commanding officer there for about six months, and then he, to his surprise, was relieved of his command. He was transferred to Fort Benning, GA and interrogated. He then learned that someone had written a letter to the War Department claiming that my father was a Nazi spy. My parents liked travel and they had visited England, France and indeed Germany in the 1930's. This writer of the letter, who created a story that my father had been in Berlin when Mussolini went to visit Hitler, turned out to be a man my father fired from the bank. It was a devastating experience for him to learn that the U.S. government doubted his loyalty to the US and believed that somehow he was a Nazi spy. He had nearly lost his life fighting the Germans for his country in the First World War.

The USG eventually cleared him completely. Yet this episode took a toll on his life. I never knew how deeply it affected his life after WWII.

Q: Something like this can be devastating.

LUERS: He was a man I greatly admired. He was tall, straight, and handsome -- Rectitude was his strongest characteristic. In recent years I have looked through his papers and had a better sense of what actually happened, read the strong testimonials from friends and associates about my father's character and loyalty. It was an upsetting thing. I often used to talk with my friend Kurt Vonnegut, from a German American family, about those troubled years for German Americans and how after two world wars of fighting Germans, the German culture, once so strong in the Middle, fell under an almost permanent shadow.

Q: He wrote Slaughterhouse Five.

LUERS: Yes. You don't call yourself German-American today. You call yourself Irish-American, or Italian-American, but German-American is not description to be proud of.

Q: Well, I know my mother's family came from Chicago. And her father, named Lachner, was very, very German. Her father was in Wisconsin and was an officer with Sherman during the war. But they had rocks thrown at their house --

LUERS: There was nothing like that that I recall. I don't know whether my grandfather's shoe store was less frequented for example. I never have heard of any violence.

Q: But one forgets these things and --

LUERS: Yes

Q: And on your mother's side, what do you know about her family?

LUERS: Mother's father and mother were a mixture of Irish, English, and Scottish. My grandfather's family, the Lynds, trace their roots to the 17th century, maybe. The Lynds were part of a large clan called the Beggs. I have a volume, The Book of Beggs, that takes the family back several centuries and tells the genealogy of the clan, but the book was completed in 1929, the year I was born. My older sisters are in the book but not me. There was one Begg who fought the Revolutionary War. In the Book of Beggs there is one trace of a connection of one Begg to Benjamin Franklin.

My Mother was raised on a farm in Pleasant Plains outside of Springfield. And her father was William Lynd, who died before I was born. Grandfather Lynd had started to build the first grain elevators in Central Illinois. He had been a successful farmer and entrepreneur but the family lore is that his partner took his money. Mother was raised on a large farm. And the family had other farming properties in Illinois. During my childhood Mother had a tenant farmer managing her property in Northern Illinois. My

mother, Anna Zayne Lynd, attended a finishing school for women after graduating from high school, but she did not have a university education –nor did my father. They married after my father returned from the war. They lived in Springfield except during the Second World War. Mother did not like Springfield. She wanted to live in a larger city and they loved to travel. My father, after the Second World War, had an offer from one of his colleagues in the Air Corps to join a large bank in a senior position in Chicago. He thought about it. He was a strong midwestern conservative who believed that bankers should be the most trusted leaders in the community. Everybody trusted my father in Springfield-- you couldn't be a good banker unless you were trusted. When he was offered the Chicago job, toward the end of the war, he and Mother were living with me in Fairfield, Ohio at Wright-Patterson Air Base outside of Dayton. But my Pop, as I called him, still had set the goal of becoming the President of the bank where he had started as a clerk in the 1920's. For him that would be the crowning achievement of his life. So rather than accept the job in Chicago in a bigger bank, with greater responsibility and considerably more money, he chose to go back to Springfield to finish his narrative in his hometown. My mother resented that decision. She thought moving to Chicago would bring the family and her a broader life. But the rhythm to his life was to fulfill a destiny to be the President of Illinois National Bank. And he achieved that goal within the next decade.

Q: All right. You grew up in Springfield. Did you grow up in Springfield?

LUERS: Yes. Except during the Second World War. My childhood was in Springfield, in the same house in the same neighborhood.

Q: OK, let's talk about being a kid there.

LUERS: We lived on Douglas Avenue, in a small, nice house. I had two sisters.

Q: Named after Stephen?

LUERS: Probably. That neighborhood was just developing and had vacant lots everywhere. There were so many vacant lots and my friends and I would complain when yet another one surrendered to a new house being built on it. We used the lots for games and sports. As a kid, I grew up thinking mainly of playing games. My friends and I liked every kind of game. And I had friends who played every kind of game. We played football, basketball, baseball, and we biked. I became a reasonably good golfer. My golf instructor was a Scot, Mr. McGregor, who hardy talked to me but showed me everything. In the summer I made money caddying during the day and indeed made my first income during my many years of caddying. I would go to the course early in the morning, play nine holes, then caddy all day, and end the day at dusk playing another nine holes. I was highly focused on golf. It was clear that I did develop early on a talent or obsession with focus.

I did not grow up reading much. My father and mother both read a great deal but I was not brought up in an intellectual environment. My life was based on sports and game,

friendships and later many girlfriends. It was, to be trite, a happy life without great stress or instability. Everything was predictable and seemed in order. I road my bike every day to Butler Grade School. I was a small town innocent. It took me a long time to figure what that larger world was all about because my small world was so comfortable – and intoxicating.

Q: You were mentioning games. Correct me if I'm wrong, but these were games inspired by the kids. In other words, it wasn't little league or it wasn't this or that. It was, you know, a bunch of guys get together and you play pick-up baseball.

LUERS: We played in the streets, we played in vacant lots, we played against the backboards on our garages. On my block alone there were two or three vacant lots where we could we could build bike trails. And at night we played Kick the Can. In addition to the games outdoors I played practically every known board game, card game, and I learned how to shoot the bow and arrow. I even became good at mahjong and Go. Learning skills drove my life. I think my intellectual growth was rooted in the games I mastered.

Q: Was radio important?

LUERS: Yes. We had one radio in the little den/library in our small house. We listened to the great early radio shows: The Lone Ranger, The Shadow and so many more. My father was a Republican, as most people from Illinois were in those days. My father pretended to detest the whole idea of Franklin Roosevelt. But when FDR would give a fireside chat, the family would all assemble in the den to listen and my father would always insist on quiet. Roosevelt was, for all those years, the only president I knew and his name and voice were the US Government.

My father, whom I call Pops, fought in the First World War. He was a great patriot and he seemed to see the serious problems the threatening world from German and Japan ahead in the 1930's. Then, on December 7, 1941, I was playing mahjong with some friends at another house. I had spent the afternoon shooting a bow and arrow. I wanted to stay over that night in their house. It was Sunday night. My father called me on the phone and said, "Son you're coming home. The Japanese have attacked." That was Pearl Harbor. I couldn't figure out how to put that together. Why should that even interfere with my desire to stay for dinner with my friends? The Japanese were no problem for me. And that next day my father went to the Army recruiting office and signed up to go to war – again.

Q: Did movies, were these also --

LUERS: Most Saturday afternoons my father would take me to a matinee. I had a relationship with my father that was complex. I didn't see nearly as much of him as I would've liked. But film matinee had become a ritual. The Esquire Theater was only three blocks away up the back alley. So we would walk up those two alleys to the Esquire

Theater where he and I would spend an afternoon looking at the movies, sometimes even a double feature. My older sisters did not join and my father loved movies.

You those films. You know, they were the good guys versus the bad guys. So clear and simple. And my father always wept when the good guy won. And so did I – and still do on occasion. We saw a lot of movies. Despite the pleasure I took from those movies, I, to this day, do not recall the plots or the actors. Some people can remember the baseball scores of every game for the last 40 years, all the actors in the movies and lines from movies they have seen. That is not a skill I ever developed.

Q: Well, what about in Springfield, you were the state capital. Did the politics of Springfield intrude at all? I mean were you familiar with --

LUERS: I was not interested in politics growing up and my father was not very political, even though his brother was. My father would support Republican candidates for Congress. When I was a teenager I worked in campaign for Wilkie and Green who was the local candidate for the US Congress. My father knew the legendary Senator Dirksen. I would go out and deliver brochures door to door for Dirksen. During my teens at the Air base, my friends were mainly army brats and many of my political attitudes were shaped by that period. One of my closest friends, Eddie White, became an astronaut and was blown up in the Apollo capsule

Q: Oh yes.

LUERS: From the experience at Wright Patterson I wanted to go to West Point. So when I worked for Congressman Green who was Republican I hoped that he would give me an appointment to West Point. My grades were good and I passed the exam so Green gave me the appointment to West Point. I had no passion for politics at all and no interest, no knowledge of it. But Green helped me get what I wanted. I had thought my father agreed with my goal of a military career. Part of my thinking was candidly that West Point would not cost my father any money.

To my surprise my father said, “Look, are you sure you want to go to West Point? Why don’t you take one year off and go to college? You can visit your friends at West Point and find out if it’s something you’d like to do, because you’ll get the appointment in the next year as well if you decide you really want it.” I said I don’t know what college -- I hadn’t thought anything about college. All I had thought about was West Point. My father didn’t know anything about colleges either. So he went to his closest friend, Stu Robinson, who’d been to college. My father asked Uncle Stu, “Where should my son go to college?”

Stu said, “Well, go to my college,” which was Hamilton College in Upper New York State. Since it is in New York State it must be near West Point (which it isn’t). The criteria was the college has to be near West Point and a good school. I was accepted rather easily and it was the only school I applied to. And my father was absolutely right,

after a year it was perfectly clear to me. I visited my first year cadets at West Point and I wanted nothing to do with that place.

Q: Well, I'd like to go back to the grammar school and the high school. In grammar school, did you find an affinity for certain courses and a dis-affinity for others or?

LUERS: Yes, I guess I was quite a talented in math and science. I liked science, and I particularly liked chemistry. I was good at math and it became the backbone of my education. I graduated from college with honors in math and chemistry. It was the easy way for me. I didn't read a great deal. The first novel I read on my own was toward the end of college was Of Human Bondage, by Somerset Maugham. I liked the book so much that I became hooked on novels but that was long after I had graduated from college where many of my friends read literature all the time. As a teenager I read The Hardy Boys and all those books, but I didn't get serious about reading until I was in the Navy and beyond. The courses that required a lot of reading were never my best. I was a good student at college with honors in science and math but missed Phi Beta Kappa because of my lack of interest in writing and reading. But I did not much care. What I remember of grade school was the sports, the friendships, the competition that I developed, the groups that we formed, the social environment, more than the academic side. I was growing up in my way.

Q: Any teachers stick out in your mind?

LUERS: Yes my high school chemistry teacher, Mr. Hall, was exceptional and nurtured me. He and I were very close. I somehow always had good math teachers. When you're good at something and the teachers know it, the experience resonates for both. There was a woman named Miss Graham who was an English teacher. I never had taken to literature. But she had known Vachel Lindsay. And she would recite his poems, like the Congo. "Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo, Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you."
She had an unusually emphatic way of speaking, and I began mimic her to friends out of school. I exaggerated one of her favorite ways of reprimanding students beginning with "eeeeach time" over and over again. "Eeeeach time you do this you're in trouble." So I took pleasure in mimicking EEEEACH. All of my friends started calling me Each. And Each has been my nickname every since because of this teacher.

Q. Where did you go to High School?

LUERS: I went to Springfield High School.

Q: What was the dating pattern in those days?

LUERS: I did not go my freshman and sophomore years to Springfield High because I was in Dayton, where I went to Oakwood Middle School. We would bus there from the Air Base. I had my first close girlfriend there so when I left to go back to Springfield after the war it was a real problem for me. My father said, "Well, you can go back to

Dayton for Christmas." But by the time I'd been home in Springfield for over a month, I decided I didn't have to go back. I was moving on and I never saw that girlfriend again.

The move to Dayton or Wright Patterson Field in 1943 was an important event which shaped how I dealt with change for the rest of my life. It is fair to say that the setting I grew up in was stable, comforting, and largely helped me establish a certain confidence in who I was as a person. The move shook me and the beginnings were not without worries. But within a few months I had become a part of that new world and by the time I left three years later, I had become integrated into Oakwood High School class, the sports and the social life. My success in both Dayton and Springfield also helped me become a leader in school and among my various groups I identified with. I have adapted rather easily and very often throughout my life. I have had five distinct careers and enjoyed each of them. I learned early.

LUERS: Back in Springfield I had had a number of girlfriends. There were two dominant groups of girls -- the Wrens and the Pens. The Wrens were a year older than me and the Pens were my age. I had a number of different groups of friends but increasingly it was build around the basketball team and the golf team of which I had become a member We would decide whether we would go on Saturday night with the Wrens or the Pens. I haven't thought much about those two words. I didn't even know what they meant. And my cousin, Lucille Luers, was beautiful and she was a Wren. She became one of my closest friends. We were never "sweethearts" but she helped me navigate the social life when I returned to Springfield. These groups were beginning to form in grade school. Many of the Wrens were Catholic and had gone to Blessed Sacrament grade school, which was the big competitor of Butler School that I was going to. The Catholic kids would pass by Butler on their way to their school, and the Butler kids would heckle them. The only large minority in our town were the Irish Catholic. My mother did not like Catholics and of course all of her children married Catholics, and Irish Catholics at that.

When I was at Butler I spent a day of class at Blessed Sacrament to the amazement of all my friends. I had decided break out of the pattern of heckling the "catholics", we had a number of unpleasant names for them. I spent a day in classes with the nuns. I then reported to my friends, "It isn't bad. It's not, you know, enemy territory. They do much the same thing we do. The nuns dress funny but it is a good school." And when I returned to Springfield my girlfriends tended to be Irish Catholic which did not always appeal to my Mother.

Looking back on my decision to visit Blessed Sacrament High School in about 1942 I realize that I had developed at a young age a curiosity about "the other". How do assumed adversaries, enemies or just people I did not know think differently from me? Was their life and setting that much different? If so, in what ways? It is difficult to describe to people who did not live in a small American town or even a big American city (Boston?) how strongly divided the Catholics were from the Protestants. But I made my little discovery at about 12 years of age. It has worked for me throughout my life. Indeed I now teach a graduate seminar at Columbia University I call "Talking with the Enemy". It seems to have grown out of my childhood in Springfield.

I never drank in High School and there was not much drinking at our parties that I can recall. I danced a great deal and I still enjoy dancing to this day. Every night on the weekends there was some dancing. We discussed our sexual adventures among the boys, and most were exaggerating and did not have a clue what they were talking about. It was a macho world and misogynist governed male behavior. Women were highly conscious of it and disliked it – as I learned years later from my former girlfriends.

I usually had one or two girlfriends that I was dating, and would go to the movies with them at night. After we had cars we would go out to the drive-in movie theaters usually on double dates. I never drank until I graduated from high school and I never smoked, unlike most of my friends.

I worked every summer since the age of 13. I was a caddy for two or three years in Springfield and then at Wright Patterson Airfield Officers Club. I would play nine holes of golf at 6:30 AM, then caddy all day, and even try to get in another few holes before dusk. As a kid I spent most of my summers on the Golf course. I also worked two summers once at Wright Patterson in the PX warehouse and fueling aircraft on the airbase. I usually would work July and a good part of August. Then back in Springfield I spent two summers working at the local Coca Cola bottling company. My job was to feed dirty glass bottles from the wooden cases into a giant washing and scrubbing machine. I was guided in my work by three brothers who had been working on the bottling machine for years. Each of them drank between 20 and 30 Cokes a day. I found the work fascinating as an experience. I would go on the delivery truck to deliver cases to stores and I particularly remember the high demand at virtually every stand at the Illinois State Fair. I learned a great deal about the Woodruff family and the origins of Coke in Atlanta. My first public speeches in my speaking class at Hamilton was about the origins of Coca Cola.

My family would send me to a YMCA camp, Camp Anokijig on Little Lake Elkhart in Plymouth Wisconsin near Racine. Those times offered me my only real experience with the outdoors as a kid. I took to sailing, fishing and most of all canoe trips. The canoe became my favorite means of transportation and I went on two several night trips into the lakes in Canada beyond Ely, Minnesota. I had been a Boy Scout but never got beyond the first class. Camping has never been one of my major passions except for Camp Anokijig, I can still sing the camp song.

During my college years, my father got me a summer job in the chemical research laboratory of Sangamo Electric Company in Springfield, run by the Lanphier family. My father's plan was for me to be offered a job as an engineer at that company so that I could have job security for my life. That did not happen. I began to realize working in the laboratory those summers that I was probably not made to be an engineer but it took me one quarter of graduate school to realize that much later – it meant breaking with my father's vision of my career.

Q; What was your life like in Ohio

LUERS: My father was budget fiscal officer for the Wright-Patterson Air Base near Dayton.. We lived in one of the officers houses on the base. We were just next to the large airfield. My friends and I played many pranks which seemed fun and harmless at the time. But looking back we were bad actors.

Most of my companions in these ventures were army brats – meaning that their father was a career Army officer. I had become close to the military culture and world and learned from it – often not the best lessons. I caddied in the officers club and become one of the two caddies. I played golf before and after a full day of work. I rolled craps and played poker with the other caddies waiting in the caddy shack. I had some income and played a great deal of poker for small amounts of money with my friends. I was pretty good player and generally came out ahead. I played poker in my teens and liked to gamble on golf matches and in cards. But after college I lost all interest in gambling and rarely played poker, but began to play bridge in the Navy. I now play card games only with my grandchildren.

I also had my first full time paid jobs after the caddying in the summer of ’44 and ’45. I worked at the base, the PX (Post Exchange), and I would work in the store room as an employee. I remember the chewing tobacco. And we had so many varieties. And I was in charge of that side of this huge warehouse. In ’45 I was 16 and I was old enough to get a job on the airfield. So I got a job filling aircraft with fuel. My fellow workers were largely rough talking and acting from Kentucky. They would oversee my work and drive the jeeps to the airplane and they would have me scramble up on the wings of the aircraft to put the fuel house into the wing tanks.. It was fun. And I remember I was working on the 12th of August, 1945 when the Japanese surrendered. There was a big party that evening that I wanted to go to. General Gimbel was having a party at his place and he was my father’s boss. And I said, “Can I go?”

And he said, “No, you’ve got to work.”

And I said, “But I don’t have to work anymore. It’s all over. War’s over.” That was an indicator of my father’s work ethic. But also the war had become a part of my life. And the stories and pilots who we’d known who’d go off and be killed, it was certainly part of my life.

I become interested in the world. I was a big map person. As a kid I drew maps. It was probably the best thing I did. I drew lots of maps. And I was quite interested in geography of all types, of the United States and of the world.

Q: Oh absolutely.

LUERS: But I guess I become quite aware early on. World geography was on one my best courses, yes.

Q: Well, then let’s -- you went through Hamilton --

LUERS: 1947.

Q: '47. What was Hamilton like?

LUERS: Hamilton was a small men's college that provided me the opportunity to develop leadership skills which began to interest me during my three years outside of Springfield and then back in Springfield. I became president of the senior class at Springfield High School. And I liked speaking to people. I liked leading. Whether I was trusted or feared, leadership fascinated me. I kept being selected for leadership roles. Throughout my life I have been interested in what makes a leader and what responsibilities the leader has to those who selected him.

Q: You were a leader.

LUERS: Leader. And I guess that's one of the things I took to Hamilton, and which was a major factor in my Hamilton life.

Q: Question before we move to Hamilton. In your question, growing up in Springfield, was religion much of a factor?

LUERS: Yes. We were mainly Presbyterian. We went to Lincoln's Church, Presbyterian Church. What I remember most vividly about going to church with my father and mother was my father was such a beautiful singer. As a young man he'd sung -- they would pay to go up and sing in choirs. And he'd sing at the synagogue, he'd sing at the Catholic Church, he was prepared to go where they would pay him to sing. And so I liked going to churches as much to listen to my father sing as I did the church itself. I was automatically a Presbyterian. I believe in God and later became converted to an Episcopalian when I was at Northwestern after Hamilton. I went through a somewhat intense religious period at Northwestern and thought about becoming an Episcopal priest. It became part of my life. I'm not sure how conscious I was that this was happening to me, but religion was not a major part of my life, but all Luers family were Presbyterian. We would eat with my grandmother on Sundays and it would always be a memorable family and somewhat religious event. The Germans are not known for the religiosity, as you know, except perhaps for the Bavarians.

Q: All right. Hamilton. Was it all male at that time?

LUERS: It was indeed, all male. My train trip alone to Hamilton College in Clinton New York was the first time I had ever been out of my core area of Illinois, except for Dayton. I was in Springfield, I went to Chicago once I guess, and I'd been to St. Louis once. When I live in Springfield I travelled to Chicago once and to St. Louis several times to Pentwater Michigan for summer vacations always as a family. And I really was brought up in one town in one house , except for the period at Dayton. I had never had a beer, never had a glass of wine. My father had told me if I do not smoke of drink until the age of 18 he'd give me a gold watch. I never smoked, I never did anything like that. And I got

on the train going out and I had two beers and you know, I was liberated somehow, from Springfield and to my pledge to my father about drinking.

Q: No gold watch.

LUERS: No. But he gave me a silver watch that was his father's. So by the time I got to Hamilton I was already ready to grow. The first year was a real challenge for me because I came from public school. I continued to get straight A's in science and math but I was struggling in literature and history. I was certainly not a brilliant student, but a good one. And the adjustment to a different world most of the students had not come from public schools. I dressed like a small town boy. My one sports jacket I picked out. My mother wasn't sure it was the right one. It was a powder blue jacket with white stripes in it. And it was the worst looking coat ever. I never should have kept it. And I get there and found all these Easterners in blazers.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Looking like I'm looking now. Most of them had been to prep schools, far better intellectual preparation. And socially they all seemed alike. They were from families that were considerably wealthier than mine. And it was quite an adjustment to me socially too. When I wore this blue jacket to the fraternity rush week events, I was embarrassed by my stupid blue jacket and I thought, "Well, nobody ever will ask me to do anything." But I pledged Alpha Delta Phi and I ended up being president of the fraternity. But that first year was a trauma. Because I'd been to Dayton and I'd broken into a world there I wasn't quite as unprepared as my colleagues who'd never left Springfield. And many of them went to Yale and Harvard and Princeton. But I went to Hamilton because it's the only college I had thought about aside from West Point.

Q: Well, what was the fraternity like?

LUERS: It was again, a way to develop friendships and associations. And I had to work. So I waited tables and washed dishes for every meal. And I really liked it a lot. I found the people that I associated with very long, and there were people that became some of my closest friends. And that mix is a wonderful experience. But by my senior year, I'd been convinced that fraternities were a bad idea. And while I was president of the fraternity, the president of Hamilton College and the Dean of Hamilton were both Alpha Deltas. And they would come to all of our big meetings. I gave my last talk at Hamilton at the Alpha Delta Phi house up in our secret meeting room at the top of the building. I said that I thought we should get rid of all the mystical parts of the fraternity because -- I didn't say they were silly -- but I said they were not really pertaining to our learning experience. And the dean, who I was very close to, came up to me and said, "Never do that again. This is not something that we want to be your legacy." Two of my closest friends on campus were Jewish. Neither of them could get into a fraternity. And to this day both of them recall with some displeasure the discrimination and isolation they experienced at Hamilton. Yet both of them became extremely successful. One was a Nobel Prize winner and another was a prominent lawyer..

Q: Well, I was, as I say, a year ahead of you. I went to Williams. And you know, looking back on it, there was still a carryover of the prejudices. Things were really --

LUERS: Oh absolutely.

Q: -- because they no longer seem quite pertinent. And what's this Jewish business? I mean I knew Jews but I didn't come from a place of predominantly one way or -- it just didn't mean anything.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: And I thought it was kind of silly.

LUERS: Well, I had a number of people who were intellectuals, but they couldn't get into any clubs. And I thought, "Well, they just didn't want to," and they just didn't. I wasn't aware of it until my senior year and then afterwards it'd become more and more clear to me that was a bad way to go. But I was happy in the fraternity. I had a good friends. Alpha Delta was the most sports oriented of the fraternities, and I was a basketball player and a golfer which took up much of my time and energy.

Q: How'd you do academically there?

LUERS: Well, I didn't get Phi Beta. I graduated with honors in chemistry and math. I eventually did very well in history because of a man who will be my mentor forever. He was a major figure. His name was Digger Graves. He was a historian. He opened my eyes. I guess I was an A-. I was a pretty good student, not a great student. I was particularly good at chemistry. I set a record in terms of my grades over the years in chemistry and in math.

Paul Greengard who won the Nobel Prize neurosciences was two years ahead of me at Hamilton. He was taking math and science classes ahead of me. We had two of the same math teachers. And he was the top math student in his third year, and I was the top math student in my third year. We had both won the Root Prize in Mathematics. Paul went on to the Nobel Prize and I've been going downhill ever since. I did not know Paul at Hamilton but we have become good friends in recent years.

Q: Well, was there any spill over from -- at that point there was still veterans from World War II there. Was there -- I found that these -- I was not a veteran at that point.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: And -- but we sort of picked up veterans habits from the veterans.

LUERS: Right.

Q: Because they were older and we kind of followed their example.

LUERS: Exactly, you're right. The veterans often were the resident counselors in the dormitories. Before I lived at the fraternity house in my second year, my dormitory was overseen by a resident counselor who was also a senior and was married. His name was Roger Ferguson. His maturity was more important for me than the conversations. The veterans did tend to drink more than the rest but everybody drank at Hamilton. Those four years were crazy. And I think I had enough to drink during those four years, having not drunk anything before to instruct me pretty well on the need for restraint.

Q: Yes. Well, while you were at Hamilton, the Cold War was beginning to develop and all that. Did sort of the outside world intrude much?

LUERS: Not on me. I was not much interested in the news and did not have an understanding of the big picture. I took one course on the Soviet Union from Professor George Lenczowski who became a good writer on the Soviet bloc. He was a Pole, born in Leningrad and had a point of view. It was a one-semester course. I was amused by the course because he had such a wonderful accent. I remember him as a fascinating character. And it was about the Soviet Union. I remember he would often say, "cop-*it*-alist-prop-*a*gan-da," and he couldn't pronounce, "capitalist propaganda" very well, or anything else. So I remember being amused by this Polish Russian teaching me. But I didn't read the newspapers. I was into my schooling, and I was into my sports. I was into activities and not into deep thought about the world around me.

Q: Was there sort of a leftist element --

LUERS: No.

Q: Of school at all?

LUERS: Not that I knew about. The one sort of educational experience I had with the leftist intellectuals was Omar Pound, who was Ezra Pound's son, was in my class, and I got to know him. And I got to know a bit about Ezra Pound, his poetry and his association with Italian Fascism. Then there was a close friend Diego Del Vayo who was in my class. His father was Alvarez del Vayo who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Negrin government in Spain in the 1930's. Diego's father was associate with close relations with most of the Communist leaders in Europe from the 1930's to 1950's.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And he actually, Ezra Pound got an honorary degree 10 years ago from Hamilton.

Q: Uh-huh.

LUERS: He didn't say a word. He didn't speak. He had stopped speaking. Ezra did. And there was another friend, Diego Del Vayo. Diego was lazy, brilliant and gay. I had never knew much about the gay world or even that it existed. It never affected my relationship to him in the least. He become one of my closest friends.

Q: No.

LUERS: I knew that he appeared with girls as much as I did. Later in 1957 he introduced me to my first wife, Jane Fuller, in New York. And as I say his father was Alvarez de Vayo who probably had been a communist. He was close to the communist leaders of Europe. He was very close to Tito. And I guess I learned more from that experience and from talking to Diego about his father, and I knew his father later when I got out of Hamilton. I traveled with his father a bit. And I learned a lot about the word "Communism", which became a fascination to me. But I never took any other courses in world affairs, in the arts or in literature, and I was a terrible and disinterested student of French. Yet later life would take me to the Metropolitan Museum to learn three languages relatively well such as Italian, Spanish and Russian. I came to have a passionate interest in art and literature and I spent a lot of time learning languages after I left, and of course I spent my career dealing with foreign affairs, none of which I had studied in college. And so my Hamilton experience didn't help me in any academic way in terms of preparing me for what I did in life. But it did gradually open my eyes to a much larger world.

Q: Well, now you graduated in '51.

LUERS: Right.

Q: Korean War was going hot and heavy at the time.

LUERS: Right.

Q: You weren't there. What happened to you?

LUERS: I went to Northwestern. My father convinced me that since I was good at math and chemistry I should be a chemical engineer and make some money. And of course they don't go together. There's no logic to it; you're either an engineer or you're a chemist and mathematician. You're not both but I went to Northwestern. I got a scholarship there and I had some savings from my summer work since I was 14 years old. I took chemical engineering there. After the first semester I realized this was not for me. So I transferred to philosophy. Philosophy was about ideas. Math had led me to philosophy. My major interest was in ethical philosophy. And my second term in philosophy I realized that I was going to be drafted into the army for the Korean War. So I signed up for the Navy. I signed up for Navy OCS (Officer Candidate School) in the summer of '52. I did reasonably well in OCS and got my preference for assignments. I signed up for an aircraft carrier out of New York City. I thought that would be a good thing. A few days after reporting aboard the jeep aircraft carrier, the USS Tripoli, we set off for Korea for duty.

Q: What carrier was it?

LUERS: The Tripoli was a jeep carrier. We were not a fighting carrier, we were a transport carrier. We would transport the new fighter aircraft, the F-86, to Korea and to Japan. The F-86 entered the war in 1951 and was clearly the fighter aircraft in the world. The Tripoli spent two years delivering hundreds of these new aircraft to Japan and then to Europe. I was on that ship for two years.

Q: What was your position?

LUERS: I was a deck officer as a new Ensign. I became officer of the deck (OOD) and, and stood a watch every day for four hours. Were you in the Navy?

Q: No.

LUERS: I was the deck officer in charge of the after part (rear) of the ship. And I had two chief petty officers and several first class petty officers. I learned most of what I came to know about ships, the Navy and military leadership from them. They were impressive and dedicated people. We lost a few sailors at sea in of this turbulent Pacific. I was on the Tripoli for the two years after OCS at Newport. I liked the Navy and but wanted to have a different experience. In my tours we left the Pacific and began delivering the F-86s to the UK and Italy. When were in port in Naples I would travel around Italy when we had shore leave. So as I was looking for my next assignment I found that there was one opening for a lieutenant JG (junior grade) – my grade then, and I signed up for another two years to be shore patrol officer in Naples. And so I was based on shore in Naples for two years. I was the shore patrol officer there. Great fun, and life transforming.

Q: Well, let's talk about that. I was consul general in Naples.

LUERS: Oh, you were?

Q: Yeah, back in the '70s.

LUERS: Really?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Isn't that interesting. Yes. Well, I went there in the Navy and then I went back in the Foreign Service. My first Foreign Service assignment was in Naples.

Q: OK, talk about Naples. This is during the '50s.

LUERS: Exactly. It was --

Q: What was Naples like at the time?

LUERS: I first visited Naples in ’53 when my ship was transferred and we started delivering the new F-86 fighter aircraft to the Mediterranean and to the northern part of Europe. I became more and more aware of world politics and conflict. During the Korean War I really didn’t know much about why exactly we were fighting a war, and had little perspective on the Cold War, on China, or on Russia. When my ship went to Naples in ’53, it was a still rundown following the war. It was a poor city, lively, filled with humor. I loved it. I extended my Navy service in 1954 to take a two year assignment as a shore patrol officer. I was there for two years. With all its problems, I love that city like very few others I’ve ever known. And I had a Neapolitan girlfriend. I learned Italian as well, helped greatly by my teacher, the unforgettable Signora Colucci. I developed considerable fluency in speaking and began to read novels in Italian.

I came to know the lively, sometimes violent, and always surprising port area well because my job was there. My office as shore patrol officer was in the main police headquarters – Questura Centrale - near the port. I would manage the dozens of shore patrol that would come off the visiting naval ships to manage sailors on shore leave. Thousands of sailors would come ashore. There were two of us on full time duty. There was one other LtJG who was assigned to the job, so we would split the week to be the shore patrol officer on duty. I would have to go the landing area and brief the incoming shore patrol from the ships (sometimes as many as 200) with commanders in charge to prepare them for their day and evening, before the sailors had to return their ships (usually by 10PM). My office was in the central police headquarters and we were right next to the Italian head of the vice squad. We worked closely together on a daily basis to monitor and try to keep the peace among the hundreds and, on occasion, thousands of American sailors on shore in one evening.

Two of the key issues were drinking and prostitution. There were whorehouses everywhere. Prostitution was legal in Italy during those years. The US military had an agreement with the Italian government that we would not arrest people for going to whorehouses because it was legal. So we would not raid the whorehouses unless there was violence or other troubles that would cause the Madame to call me or the Vice Squad head. We would make the rounds of the bars the same way. As long as people were behaving, there was no problem. I would usually travel around in jeep with the head of the vice squad, Giovanni --- one of those unforgettable Italians who shaped my admiration for that country. Giovanni knew by name virtually every regular prostitute in town -- at least those who worked the bar area. He also knew whether the prostitute had had the medical check-up provided by and required by the Italian authorities. He would warn them to get their check-up lest they lose their right to walk the streets. When the madams would have trouble they would call Giovanni, and I would jump in the jeep and go to the house. There usually were not serious problems but we would clear the house and send the sailors back to the ship. There was rarely the type of assault that would require us to file a case against the sailor.

Q: And Lucky Luciano?

LUERS: Yes, Lucky Luciano was there when I lived in Naples. I would see him at some of the restaurants along the Riviera Di Chiaia, often at Zi Teresa. But I never met him or tried to meet him. Oddly, I did not take a great interest in the Mafia in those days, even though it was certainly running most of the world I was dealing with on a daily basis.

Q: This is even past my time. There's a book called Gomorrah, by an Italian writer who talks about the Naples now. It just sounds ghastly.

LUERS: I revisited Naples this past year and still find it the city that shaped my life. I am probably too tolerant of Naples and look past its corrupt and dirty side, because I loved the rich diversity of the worlds I frequented there -- from the close personal relationships I developed there to the way that city helped me develop my senses to food, to music, to art and frankly to love. I went regularly to the San Fernando, which is the Neapolitan dialect theater.

Another important learning experience for me was that I came to know several Foreign Service officers who were in the Consulate General on their first tours of duty.

Q: Well, there is something about being shore patrol and a military policeman. It gives you a certain amount of authority, which you can use later on.

LUERS: I know, exactly, because I was known all over Naples in certain sectors as they say.

Q: Well, you're tall.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: And I'm sure in uniform you stood out.

LUERS: Yes. Flash forward after I entered the Foreign Service and was sent back to Naples on my first assignment because I spoke Italian and knew Naples. I had an experience that illustrates how that shore patrol work impacted my career. When I went back in the consul, I was a vice consul and visa officer. The consul general then was Jim Henderson, who had been there when I was serving in the shore patrol. I even went out with his daughter Katy, who became a friend of mine for life. Jim knew me when I reported for duty as a new vice consul.

Jim Henderson would often take me on his travels throughout his consular district, which was most of southern Italy, and on his visits in Naples because of my Italian and knowledge of the region. One of my most memorable times was when he assigned me, despite my very junior rank, to be in charge of a visiting CODEL (congressional delegation). And we took them all out. The CODEL was led by the legendary Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Wilbur Mills. That committee was the most important committee, and Mills was the most important person for the budget of the Department of State.

Q: That's where your money comes from.

LUERS: Yes indeed. And so we took him and his substantial delegation around the city during the day, and then for a long dinner. We were using money to entertain CODELS from PL 480 funds, which had been generated in Lira from the food and other assistance that the USG had been sending to Italy after the War, as part of the Marshall Plan. We used these counterpart funds generously, as was expected by the visiting delegation. We could pay for their hotel rooms at the Excelsior and take them to the best restaurants and make certain we left a bottle of bourbon or scotch in each room. One night after a particularly sumptuous and alcoholic dinner, I took them back to the hotel. In his room the chairman, in front of a few of his male colleagues, said, "Bill, you've been wonderful tonight and now we want to get laid."

"Oh." I said, "That's interesting. What would you like?" I began to tell them about the many houses just near the hotel and what I understood as their specialties. I stressed that I had not personally tested them but know all about them. They were absolutely stunned. This was not the expected response from this lanky pin striped, wet behind the ears, naive Foreign Service officer. I added, "You know, there are all sorts of alternatives and I know how to get there." I gave him more and better information than he might have gotten from a Neapolitan taxi driver. That evening put me in good stead with him for the rest of my career and it helped change his bias against what he saw as the arrogance and innocence of the typical foreign service officer. As far as I know, he never took my advice. He was testing me.

He would subsequently refer to me as that FSO in Naples who was going to show us around.

Q: Did you run across political demonstrations or things of that period?

LUERS: I recall one important political event that was not quite a "demonstration" that happened frequently and for many different reasons, because Naples was still recovering from the destructive and demoralizing war experience. When I was there in the Navy, I was taken (without anyone in the USG knowing) by Alvarez del Vayo to the a major Congress of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). Del Vayo had been the Foreign Minister of Spain under the Negrin government and after Franco took power, he had become one of the darlings of the European left, both communist and socialist. He knew them all well from Tito, the Soviet Leadership, the leaders of the communist parties of most of Europe. I knew him because I had been a close friend of his son, Diego del Vayo, at Hamilton College. Diego lived in Greenwich Village with his father and mother. Del Vayo introduced me to the then head of the party, Pietro Nenni. I think, by the way, that the US government had helped finance some demonstrations against the PSI Congress since we had been working actively against them, as well as against the PCI, the Italian Communist Party. The US officially had determined that both parties were working together to defeat the Christian Democratic government and bring a Communist government to Italy, which was probably true. On the other hand, in retrospect I think US

policy toward the PSI was flawed at that time in not taking into account the value of the PSI as an alternative and non-communist haven for the Italian left. In years later Pietro Nenni became Prime Minister of a center–left government that the US supported.

Q: Oh, '48, my God.

LUERS: This Congress took place in 1954 or 55.

Q: Yeah, we were --

LUERS: The US was still against Nenni, and there were demonstrations against this congress. I went to the congress with del Vayo and, and if anybody ever knew, I would be in real trouble. And there were demonstrations by supporters of the Fascisti, the monarchist party, a quasi-fascist party. Foschini was then the Neapolitan senator for the monarchist party, whom I came to know quite well. He, like most of them on the left and right, was an opportunist. Many of the communists had been fascists in southern Italy at least. And it was a neo-fascist party in a certain sense. I knew many of these people through contacts I had made at the Istituto di Studi Storici that had been founded by Benedetto Croce before he died. I particularly recall Achille Lauro, the monarchist who was the mayor of Naples for many years.

Q: Well, I remember the Lauro name, of course.

LUERS: Achille Lauro was mayor for many years. He really ran the city. He was corrupt, wealthy, and very much in charge. And there were frequent demonstrations against him by the left because he was such a prominent right-wing leader. There were communist demonstrations quite regularly in Naples, often organized by the large communist labor union.

Q: Well, I know the name.

LUERS: You recall Benedetto Croce had a house in Spaccanapoli (the street in the old town dividing the city from the old Spanish quarter). That area had some of the greatest examples of Neapolitan baroque architecture and there have been books written about the many baroque houses, and particularly the staircases, in that part of Naples. Croce, who had already died when I arrived in Naples, had left his wonderful old house. When I was in the Navy, I applied to take lectures there and began to study the history of the left in the Istituto Di Studi Storici that Croce had set up. It was there that my Italian improved greatly. There I came to know the great scholar of Machiavelli, Professor Chabod, who would visit periodically from the University of Rome to lecture. I also came to know and admire the philosopher Ugo Parente. Having read Croce's first great critique of Marx, I had become more convinced than ever of the deep flaws in the teachings of Marx. Croce had been a Marxist in the late 1890's at the University of Naples with Giovanni Gentile and Giorgio Amendola. Gentile became one the core ideologist for Fascism and Amendola founded the Communist Party of Italy. Croce broke permanently with Marx and became the most dependable liberal voice during the Mussolini era. I began doing

research on the Italian Communist Party. And I finally wrote my master's at Columbia on the Italian Communist Party and the crisis it faced following Khrushchev's secret speech against Stalin in 1956. I was in Italy at the time and followed closely as Palmiro Togliatti, the legendary leader of the PCI, tried to hold the party together and begin to recast its own approach to Stalin and the Soviet relationship. I came to know a number of socialists.

Q: No. Well, then you left the Navy after what, four years?

LUERS: Yes. The Navy experience and particularly my time in Italy had transformed my life. I realized that I could learn to speak a foreign language, after having been a miserable and frankly unmotivated student of French for four years at Hamilton. The college required that each student become proficient in a foreign language. Students who did not achieve a certain level had to continue to take classes. I never achieved that level, and the only low grades I had at Hamilton were in French. I majored in math and chemistry which came easy, had no interest in foreign languages and had become convinced I would never speak one. It turns out I learned to speak Italian quite well after only two years living in Naples. My interest in the world took off and after the Navy I enrolled in Columbia on the GI Bill. Because of my growing interest in the flaws of Marx and Communist parties, I chose to begin studying Russian. The Cold War had begun in earnest and I had decided to become a player through some form of government service, probably the Foreign Service.

Q: You said you'd been dating the consul general's daughter.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: So did you have a chance to find out what the Foreign Service was like?

LUERS: Yes, I came to know Sam Lewis and his great wife Sally. Sam was extremely intelligent and motivated on his first assignment as FSO to Naples, and we came to be good friends. I admired Sam and worked with him for decades after I entered the Foreign Service. I also came to know Nick Veliotes, also on his first tour in Naples as a consular officer. We also remained friends.

Sam subsequently became one of our top experts on Italy and then went Israel to serve, where he became a legendary friend of Israel and a valuable adviser to Presidents on managing that relationship. He ended up ambassador to Israel.

Q: He was ambassador to Israel for years.

LUERS: Sam was a close. I also became close to another FSO, Alan Campbell, with whom I rented a sail boat for over a year. Alan was a bachelor like I was and we shared the cost of the sailboat, including the marinaio, Luigi, who helped us sail, took after the boat and cooked excellent Neapolitan meals on board. The boat was moored in front of the Zi Teresa restaurant on Santa Lucia, a small land extension opposite the Excelsior

Hotel. Alan and I alternated the use of the sailboat, which slept two. I would frequently sail to Capri or Ischia with friends, or with one of the women I was seeing at the time. I knew probably four or five of the young diplomats there who helped me think about this as a career.

Q: When did you take the written exam?

LUERS: Well, I came back and as I told you, I knew little about foreign affairs and had never studied in college. At Columbia I started studying Russian. I took a crash course on international relations and read intensely to get a masters in a little over a year, having had virtually no prior academic training in foreign relations. I took the exam in the winter of '56-57. I still am amazed that I could pass it given my lack of prior interest in foreign affairs. In my years in Naples I had become intensely focused on reading literature, looking at art, learning about opera, going to concerts and most of all learning about Italy, food and love. I went in the Foreign Service in the fall of '57.

Q: Do you recall anything -- any of the questions asked during the oral exam?

LUERS: Yes, I do. An initial and core question dealt with the history of Socialism in the US. The questioner presumably knew of my special interest in Marx, the Communist movement and Russia. He wanted to know whether I had any knowledge of the evolution of the socialist and utopian ideas in the United States. It just so happened that I had just that week finished reading Edmund Wilson's masterpiece, To the Finland Station, about the origins of the socialist idea and the communist movement. It takes you from the French Revolution through the 19th century, to the moment when Lenin arrives at the Finland Station in St. Petersburg in 1917 to begin the revolution, which led to the Bolshevik revolution, the establishment of Communist Russia and eventually the Soviet Union. It tracks the evolution of socialism and then communism from before the French Revolution to 1917. And much of the book is about the history of utopian socialism in the United States. It is a compelling book about the growth of socialism from ideas to communal socialism, particularly as experimented in communities throughout the United States. It discusses the type of people who led the many communal developments in the US and the people who entered the communes and what they learned. I completed the book because it interested me; I did not consider it at all as preparation for the foreign service exam. I loved the book since it had clarified so many issues that had come to interest me in my studies of philosophy that had continued throughout my naval career.

Then in the oral exam after the panel asked me a couple things about myself, one of them said, "We know you are studying Russian and you would like to work in Moscow to measure the Russian communist challenges to the US. Tell us what you know about the history of the socialism in the United States." Well, I nailed it and went on for a long time spilling out the freshly digested To the Finland Station. The panel was impressed by my knowledge of the American experience. But in fact I was simply very lucky.
Then I botched a later question. One of them said, "I am a German farmer and I have the following question —". I naively interrupted him to ask, "You are a German farmer?" He was setting up a question and I, confident about how well I was already doing, jumped in

with that quite stupid question. I had not done brilliantly in the written exam but seemed to do reasonably well in the oral. I had been lucky, however, since 1957 was the year when State had begun recruiting again in large numbers. So they not only accepted me but took me into the A-100 course in the fall of 1957 only a few months after I had been accepted.

Q: I came in '55 and it was one class, because there'd been this hiatus --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- because of -- and only about 20 of us.

LUERS: Yes, in 1957 there were several classes.

Q: Well, let's talk --

LUERS: In my class there were 28 of us including one woman, Phyllis Oakley (not yet married to Bob Oakley, another FSO). I found most interesting that over half of our class had either lived or spent a lot of time in Chicago. The number of people from Illinois was surprising but also indicative of the new trend in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, you know, I was born in Chicago.

LUERS: Most of my class was far better prepared and spent a lot of time thinking about foreign affairs and studying it. But I was also one of the four in the class of 28 who passed the language exam. My Italian was quite good and I think my grade was high. Those who had a language had first choice of where we were going to be assigned. The class had many very bright people but it was interesting how few had a foreign language. One of them was Ronald Steel, who became an excellent journalist, but who found early on that the Foreign Service was not for him. Most of the our group were from middle class backgrounds. They were all white males (except for Phyllis).

Q: Mostly vets (veterans)?

LUERS: Maybe half. Since I had been in the Navy four years I was probably a little older than the average. I was 27.

Q: I mean was there a feeling that you were on a mission as Foreign Service officers or was this a job? How did you or your colleagues feel about this at the time?

LUERS: For me it was a combination of a sense of public service and my high interest in dealing with the Soviet Union. My father was a patriotic and conservative German American who loved our country and whose experience in two World Wars had an impact on me. Public service abroad clearly was what I wanted to do. I had developed a strong distaste for Marx and his legacy. I had studied Marx during my courses on ethical and moral philosophy. Then in the process of writing my Master's thesis at Columbia on

the Italian Communist Party it became clear to me that Marxism had become the big challenge to the U.S and to the American view of political organization. I did not mention that I had begun studying philosophy my last year at Hamilton and did some graduate work in philosophy at Northwestern University before enlisting in the Navy. I also took a number of correspondence courses in philosophy when I was servicing on the aircraft carrier. After having been interested in some of the early ideas of the German philosophers, I had become convinced that Marxism was a fatally flawed way to think about human behavior and government policy. I had come to this conclusion not from reading a lot of anti-communist literature, but from reading philosophy and learning about the structure of communist parties. So I decided to place myself in the middle of the Cold War. And I thought that was my mission. I wanted to become a Russian speaker and a Soviet specialist and spend time in the USSR to see how it worked.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: And I'd already convinced myself that was the most important work at the time. I did not think being an FSO was just a job. I had applied to USIA (United States Information Agency) and I'd applied to CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). I wanted to get into government, go to Moscow and deal with the Soviet problem. And I was quite motivated. I knew the only way you get to Moscow in those days was to join a government agency.

Q: Speaking of CIA, at Williams and -- well, '50 when I was graduating, the CIA was extremely active. I think about three of my fraternity brothers went into the CIA.

LUERS: Right.

Q: They were sort of replicating the British thing of going after the --

LUERS: I know.

Q: Did you feel their hand whether they were at the --

LUERS: Not at Hamilton, but at Columbia. I interviewed there and I actually went and took an exam. And again, my motivation was to get into the government to deal with this problem. Interviewed both for the CIA and USIA. The USIA person who interviewed with me at Columbia was wearing a cowboy hat. He was a weird person. He was a Texan and could not forget it. He finally rejected me without even a written exam, in part because he and I just did not mesh, but basically because he looked at my shifting interests and considered that I was a young person who had no idea what I wanted to. In fact he sent me a letter of rejection and included attached to the letter, presumably by mistake, a report to USIA personnel, clearly an internal document, that explained his view that I was unresolved and flitted from one interest to another.

The CIA interview was more serious. I went to DC to take a battery of tests in one of those wooden temporary buildings across from the State Department on the mall.

Q: Oh I remember that, yes.

LUERS: Before they built Langley, and the CIA was all through those buildings. And I went there for my written exam. There was a psychological written and an exam testing my knowledge and thinking abilities. The psychological one was long, repetitive and odd. I'd never taken one like that. After the exam I went into an office for the interview with a psychologist. It was a large office with a bare wooden floor and the interviewer sitting on a swivel chair with rollers at a high desk. I was told to sit in a very low leather cushioned arm chair. He did not pay any attention to me when I came in and sat down. After a while of making me sweat in anticipation, he pushed from his high desk and rolled himself right to where I was sitting and peered down at me. He asked me with a sneer, "Why do you hate your father so much?"

This scene was absurd, almost laughably so, but I did not laugh. I replied, "I don't hate my father. I love my father!"

And he replied sternly, "Well, you said the following things in your exam," and proceeded to interrogate me in a way I had never been challenged before. Even though I guess in retrospect he was probably trying to test my "cool" under stress, I quickly decided this was the type of work that would not be interesting to me. The whole process with the CIA was a curious experience but simply was not interesting. Over the years I worked with many highly intelligent and competent CIA colleagues, and I often encountered a point of view that differed significantly from mine on what our mission was. That is self-evident.

Q: Well, I didn't get quite that far because when I came to -- I had applied for the CIA back when I graduated, 1950. The Korean War started and I enlisted..

So four years later I came back and by that time I had one more year in grad school and I went to go to the State Department, but I thought I'll drop by the CIA as an alternative. And they start after me and say, "Well, let's see. Have you had any medical problems?"

And I said, "Not really."

"So what about your appendix?"

And I said, "I don't know. I mean I got my appendix, I never had them out, you know." And the guy hammered at me on having my appendix out. You know, he didn't pull my shirt up, but I said, you know --

LUERS: Well, I don't know what it's all about. I really don't. The guy who interviewed me at Columbia, the guy with the cowboy hat, returned to me a slip saying they wanted me to come down to have my exam. And in it he attached his notes that he'd taken from the interview with me at Columbia. And he said, "I don't know what this guy's all about. He'd started in math and chemistry and then he went to philosophy and then he went to

Italy and he doesn't seem to have a clue where he's headed. But we should interview him because he's fairly bright and he might be of help." It was the weirdest note. And why he sent it to me, he was just screwed up. Every experience I had with him had been a bad one.

Q: I mean this is also, you know -- I suppose we go through these all the time, but there are an awful lot of fads.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: T-groups and all sort of things. And I suspect that they were in the forefront of this psychological --

LUERS: I guess, but I told them that I would just leave the interview and that I was not interested in their approach.

Q: OK.

LUERS: So --

Q: Well, I'll tell you, this is a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up in 1957?

LUERS: '57.

Q: We haven't really talked about your experiences of the early training and your Foreign Service class and then where you go and all that.

LUERS: OK, good.

Q: Great.

Today is the 19th of May 2011 with Bill Luers. Bill, we really haven't had a chance outside of your wonderful story about the House Ways & Means Committee.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: And frankly, matters, recreational matters. Let's talk about your job in Naples. You were in Naples from when to when?

LUERS: I was in the shore patrol from '54 to '56.

Q: And then you were in Naples as your first --

LUERS: Later, after the Navy.

Q: That was your first job.

LUERS: My first time in Naples was as a naval officer.

Q: I know. But your first --

LUERS: Yeah, exactly.

Q: -- in the Foreign Service.

LUERS: Yes, I returned to Naples about 16 months after I left as a naval officer. During that period, I had gotten my Masters from Columbia, learned some Russian, entered the Foreign Service and married Jane Fuller from New York City.

Q: When were you there?

LUERS: I was there --

Q: In the Foreign Service.

LUERS: -- from late ’57 to the middle of ’59.

Q: Who was the counselor general?

LUERS. Jim Henderson.

Q: Jim Henderson, mm-hmm. What was your job?

LUERS: I was a visa officer in the consulate. And because I knew Naples so well, as I told you — and I spoke even some Neapolitan, and my Italian was really quite good — In addition to being the best consul, I was sort of the translator traveler with Jim Henderson.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: Jim Henderson was still consul general. I dated his daughter when I was a naval officer. I traveled with him all over his Consular District which was most of Southern Italy. He spoke very little Italian. So in addition to doing my consular work and seeing the many people I knew from my Navy years in Naples, I would travel with him as note taker and interpreter. We went all over Southern Italy. He liked travel and food. He would invariably bring elaborate and delicious picnics. As a consular officer I wrote a number of papers for the political section, including one very long paper on Achille Lauro, the mayor of Naples. I had fun doing the research but it was clearly completely irrelevant to Washington DC.

Q: OK, well let’s talk a bit about how you saw the political situation in Naples at the time?

LUERS: I began as a quasi-dissident in this subject. From my dealings with some of the moderate left during my time as a Naval officer in Naples, I had come to believe that U.S. policy in Italy was flawed by failing to have some relations with the political forces of the non-communist left. I thought a better US strategy would have been to try to divide the Italian Left rather than try to isolate it as a large influential group from the Italian political system. In my occasional writing when I was serving in the Consulate General I did reflect a bias that we were making a mistake by not talking to the other side. But the CIA and State Department had a mandate to isolate all of the Left. We would not give any room to the socialist party (PSI) or to smaller non-communist parties on the Left.

Before returning to Naples in the Foreign Service, I had written my master's at Columbia University about the impact of Khrushchev's secret 1956 speech against Stalin in the Italian Communist Party. Senator Terracini, a leading communist senator, broke with the party and with Moscow. The crisis within the PCI reflected the special vulnerability of the party that was more Italian than communist. And over the years, first PSI leader Pietro Nenni became prime minister and then much later, the leader of the communist party became prime minister. That period helped shaped my career, including informing the course I have been teaching at Columbia and other universities I call "Talking with the Enemy", which is likely to be the title of the book I might write about my professional life. I have generally held that a flaw of American policy: that we make a serious mistake by excluding from our range of contacts people who would not agree with us, whether they be communists or right-wing governments. We as a nation should be secure enough to deal with all nations.

LUERS: You ask about the role of prominent immigrants in driving a U.S. policy of refusing to "talk with the enemy." It is no surprise to me that Madeleine Albright, when she was Secretary of State, drove the policy on bombing Serbia. Madeleine is a Czech Jew whose family had to leave Prague because Hitler had convinced the Western democracies to sell Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany. She grew up in Serbia, learned about the violence in the Balkans and about the excesses of the Serbs. I think in Milosevic, the Serbian leader in the 1990's, she saw a mini-Hitler. She took a leadership role in trying to defeat Milosevic, since much of her earlier experience had convinced her that he was wrong for the former Yugoslavia and for Europe. Her experience and intimate knowledge of the region pointed her toward a war against Milosevic.

LUERS: My father was a first generation German American. Even though he fought against the Germans in the two World Wars, my father's ethnic German roots no longer gave him stature in the U.S. after the two bloody wars with Germany. I was brought up with the understanding from my father's experience that Germans somehow had lost the stature they had before WWI, in the Middle West and around the US.

Q: Yeah. Well now, in the Naples counselor district at the time, Lauro — They were the dominant political party.

LUERS: Well --

Q: Lauro and Democrats.

LUERS: The dominant political party was the Christian Democrats. Lauro essentially was his own party. To get to a position of authority in the Italian Government you generally needed to be Christian Democrat. Lauro was a powerful ship owner, with a large family. He built ships and had shipping lines. Lauro was his own party and ran the city as his own. He was a combination of a monarch and Mayor Daley from Chicago; he ran the city government with reasonable effectiveness but with great corruption. Naples was governed very different from the rest of Italy because of his power and his authority. There weren't many mayors in Italy at the time who had the sort of power and longevity that Lauro had, and he determined the peculiar political environment I was trying to understand. I was still obsessed by the fact that the U.S. was so committed to the Christian Democrat Party. There was a liberal party which we liked, and a few others. But we put all of our money and all of our CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) operations into these centrist parties, thereby contributing in a certain sense to the eventual dysfunctionality of the modern Italian political system.

Q: Well was the Camorra, the local mafia establishment, very powerful?

LUERS: I frankly knew very little about the workings of the Mafia. As you know they generally did not talk much about their use of power. I understood that the US was still grateful for the role they played in helping us invade Southern Italy during the opening of the second front in 1943. I don't know whether Lucky Luciano played the role that he's alleged to have played with regard to that invasion. That may have been the reason US authorities didn't lay a glove on him while he was living openly in Naples during those years. I also do not know what role, if any, the mafia played in the anti-communist effort after the war. Many fascists converted easily to become communists in Southern Italy.

Q: Were you involved in visa work at the time?

LUERS: I did a great deal of visa work. My favorite stories are about visa applicants who come in hardly speaking Italian. Each had a special local dialect from a small town in Southern Italy. Many of my colleagues didn't speak Italian very well. I sat in our large office next to a young visa officer who was new and had not learned much Italian. Before asking questions, the visa officer had to ask the applicant to swear that she would tell the truth, "Giurate de dire la verita." The young consular officer did not speak Italian well at all. He would say "Girate," which means turn around, rather than "Giurate" (to swear). Throughout the day I would see applicants spinning around in front of the visa officer.

One time after concluding an interview I told the applicant, "Venite con me." I wanted her to follow me to the visa window where you handed the documents that I had approved to a clerk who would ask for payment for the visa. I then headed back to my desk and popped into the men's bathroom that was right next to the visa window. While standing at the urinal I looked back and saw the small woman who was my visa applicant standing right behind me. She would obey any order to get that visa.

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: The bureaucratic process for requesting some visas was maddening in dealing with the consular services in State. I wrote many letters trying the get approval for a final visa authorization for a complicated case I had been working on for months. I finally got back a letter in response to my request for a waiver which said, "The Department of State would not be disinclined to disagree with the proposal of the consul." I had to spend more time thinking about what I should do next than it took me to request the waiver. I learned much about guarded and obtuse language when I was in Naples. At that time a man named Outerbridge Horsey was the Deputy Chief of Mission in Rome**.** Because some people, any one of the 10 consulates in Italy, had written messages that had occasionally been criticism of a member of Congress, Outerbridge decided that he wanted a copy of every letter that came out of the consulate in Naples sent to him in Rome. He wanted to spot review himself all the correspondence from all the consulates. You can imagine the number of letters that would go out of the consulate, particularly regarding visa problems. In the 1950's a large percentage of the immigrants to the United States came from Italy. It was rumored that within a few months we had filled several storage rooms in the Embassy in Rome with letters that would pour in every day. As far as I know, he never rescinded that mad effort to control all correspondence. For the whole time I was in Naples, we would send a copy of every one of my hard copy letters. That experience soured me early on in my career on the excesses of bureaucratic behavior in the State Department.

Q: How would you describe the immigrants that you were seeing at the time? I mean were they going over to any particular place? Were they peasantry, were they city folk, who were they?

LUERS: Most of them were from small towns in Southern Italy. They were being invited under the Nation of Origins provision of our law. American citizens would invite their mothers and extended families. Our job was to verify the relationship of the applicant to inviting family member in the United States. We spent our time period trying to verify that relationship. I frankly came to enjoy my interviews to practice my Italian, to try to decipher different dialects and to find out about the village lives of the applicants.

We also had a large number of refugees from Hungary and other parts of Eastern Europe who were in camps throughout Southern Italy. The refugees were often the most interesting. Their lives and frustrations with the communist world contributed to my growing interest in devoting my career to dealing with Soviet Union.

Q: Well now, on your trips with the consul general, what was your impression of what he was doing, what our interests were in the area?

LUERS: It is a good question. After the war, we felt a certain patronage of what happened within Italy. The US also felt patronage toward the Germans, but there was less hostility toward the Italians. The U.S. sought to help the Italian government to pay

attention to the deep poverty and underdevelopment in much of Southern Italy. The US actively encouraged and supported a development program, called, CASSA PER IL MEZZOGIORNO, to bring them up to the level. The Consul General placed the success of that program at the top of his agenda. The differences between the economies of the North and the economies of the South were significant. When we traveled around we were doing reports of the attitudes of the mayors and the governors and the people we'd see, and I would do elaborate reports on what people were saying. I don't know where the hell they ever went because literally no one in Washington would or should have cared about this stuff. Yet it did help me polish my skills on reporting accurately what I heard and trying to be analytical, a new professional need. We went from one little town to the next, talk to the mayor and see citizens of the town, and find out what their attitudes were toward the state of their economy, the political environment. Jim Henderson was a sweet man and very tidy, anal even, and precise, which have never been my outstanding qualities. He liked to have very thorough reports, well written, about these rather meaningless little towns in terms of U.S. interest. He wanted to show to the State Department that he was doing his job well and he did have a lot of interest in Southern Italy.

My greatest experience with him was meeting former President Harry Truman. Mr. Henderson had developed a considerable respect for my fluency in Italian. We had become friends even though I was the most junior person in the consulate for that first year. One afternoon I was on a cruise ship seeing a couple that was returning to the US from their tour in Naples – we got to travel by ship in those days.

Henderson found me and in a more breathless way than I had seen him, said, "Bill. I need your help right now. Harry Truman is traveling on this ship and former Italian President De Nicola is making a call on him just now. Truman of course speaks no Italian and De Nicola speaks no English." De Nicola had been the first president of Italy after the war, and was Neapolitan and also an historian. So I became the interpreter for their meeting for almost two hours.

Q: Oh, wonderful.

LUERS: This is 1958 -- it was my first and only encounter with Harry Truman.

Q: Did --

LUERS: It must have been 1958. In one of Dean Acheson's books he has some correspondence with Truman, who writes to Acheson about his trip to Naples. He unfortunately did not write in the letter, "I had this brilliant translator named Bill Luers," but I remained impressed by him, and not only because he was the first American President I had met.

Q: Did the two men, were they able to settle down into two politicians talking to each other?

LUERS: Truman asked De Nicola about the history of Naples, Herculaneum and Pompeii, and he was most interested in the period of the Regno Delle Due Sicilie and the role of the Bourbons. Truman was impressively informed down to much detail. He was always known as a reader of history. I saw how deep his interest and knowledge was. De Nicola, unfortunately, was not well informed on the Bourbon rule. He must not have specialized in that period but he couldn't answer Truman's multiple questions. They talked a little bit about the current political situation. This was during the second Eisenhower administration and Truman still had quite a different view of the world than his successor. I sadly found myself interpreting for two hours straight and it is extremely difficult to take notes or even recall conversations under those circumstances. I regret that I did not keep more accurate records on my various conversations with American Presidents after that first surprise encounter.

Q: Did you find that there was much interest in Naples from sort of congressional people coming through and all?

LUERS: Yes, because Naples was base for the NATO Southern Command, high ranking Americans would visit, but also because Naples had always been an attractive, glorious city. An American Admiral was stationed there as The Commander and Chief of Southern Command for NATO (CINCSOUTH). I dated Joan Fechteler. the daughter of CINCSOUTH Admiral Fechteler. I traveled with the admiral on several occasions, again, because I spoke Italian well. The Admiral tried to speak it but he couldn't make it work. Famously, at one of his parties in his residence he told guests proudly "Ho otto Filipini en la mia cugina." He wanted to say, "I have eight Filipinos working in my kitchen" but he said, "I have eight Filipinos in my cousin."

Naples was important because so many Italians in our country came from Southern Italy, and because of the concern over the slow pace of its economic and political development after the war. The Marshall Plan and the Cold War made Italy a center piece for American attention in view of its perceived vulnerability to Communism.

Q: When you came into the Foreign Service, were you picking up any consequences of the McCarthy times, or was this pretty well past?

LUERS: I very much experienced the McCarthy period, first at Columbia University which I attended after I left the Navy. I needed to go to Columbia to learn something about the world since in college I had concentrated almost exclusively on science and math. I had never taken any courses in history, political science, or American foreign policy and before the Navy I had no interest in foreign affairs.

I had decided to go into the Foreign Service because of my travels, my time in Naples, the fact that I had learned Italian and because I began to think about the world. And I decided to go to Columbia to get a master's degree in foreign affairs. When I first spoke with my adviser at the Columbia School of International Relations I told him that I wanted to learn two new languages, Russian and Marxism-Leninism, because without those two languages I would not be able to understand life and politics in the Soviet

Union. I explained that Marxism-Leninism is not only an ideology but a language and vocabulary that is completely unlike the language we use in democracies, and that "language" actually shapes the way people talk and what their words mean.

So asked to be signed up for the course on Marxism-Leninism during the year I planned to spend getting my Masters Degree. My advisor said flatly that Columbia does not have any courses on Marxism-Leninism. I asked why. He replied that it was because of Senator McCarthy. He said, "the last thing Columbia needs now would be for McCarthy's people to find out that Columbia has a course on Marxism-Leninism. Many of his people believe Columbia is a hotbed of communism and such a course would suggest to them that we are running a communist cell.

I explained my view that it is important to know as much as possible about our adversaries and enemies, including becoming an expert in their language, culture and ideology.

Then in a lowered voice he said, "We do have a course that you might find interesting. And it's taught off campus in the basement of a building on Broadway below 112th St. We will let you sign up for the course and it will only be shown as a numbered course on your transcript." I appeared for the first class and realized it was a course dealing with Marxist and Leninist ideology taught for some Columbia students by the legendary Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse. It was one of the most important courses I took at Columbia and prepared me for my long career dealing with the Soviet Union as much as my years trying to learn Russian did.

My second encounter with McCarthyism at Columbia University was related to Philip Jessup, my distinguished international law professor at Columbia. Jessup had been tainted by his affiliation with Alger Hiss. Senator McCarthy had included Jessup in his attack on the State Department. I had taken Jessup's excellent course on International Law at Columbia. I came to know him personally, in part because he had graduated from Hamilton College, as had I. He had been President of Hamilton's Senior Honorary Society, Pentagon, as was I. We had seen each other over the years because of this affiliation to both Hamilton and Columbia.

When I was applying to enter the Foreign Service, I asked him, "Would you write me a letter recommending me to the State Department?" He laughed and said, "Bill, the last thing you need is a letter from Philip Jessup in your files." This was my first real appreciation on what McCarthyism was about and how deeply it still penetrated thinking about the Department of State and diplomacy. I realized that I may already have been tainted, since I had already spoken out about the deep flaws in our policy toward Italy that had been shaped and dominated by the CIA, and the policy of keeping not only the Communist Party but the Socialist Party out of the Italian government. That policy led to an unflinching and frankly corrupting policy toward the Christian Democratic Party that the US gave strong financial support. I also came to believe that my deep interest in going to work in the Soviet Union would not be seen as a patriotic objective of a public servant but more as a reflection of a secret attraction to Communism.

Q: Yeah. I mean there really was a very tight-knit group. An awful lot of people came back to Italy and served again and again and there was an Italian club, almost.

LUERS: Yes. I never got into that group of Italian specialists, even though I lived in Naples for four years and had written my Master's Degree thesis at Columbia on "The Italian Communist Party in 1957". Half of my experience in Italy was in the Navy and I was never a political officer in Naples, but a consular officer writing about Neapolitan politics.

Q: You left Naples in '59? Where'd you go?

LUERS: I took an assignment in Washington DC as the first young FSO in the newly established Office of Soviet Union Affairs. Jack McSweeney, a senior FSO, had been assigned as senior political advisor to the American Admiral who was Commander in Chief of the NATO Southern Command (CINCSOUTH). I had gotten to know him during my FSO tour in Naples. He knew I was an aspiring Russian language FSO and that I had specialized in Soviet Studies at the Russian Institute at Columbia. He returned to the Department to be the first head of a new Office of Soviet Union Affairs. I applied for the new junior job in that office and McSweeney welcomed me to the assignment in late '59. The new office of Soviet Union Affairs had been created out the Office of Eastern European Affairs. After Khrushchev's fall 1959 visit to the US, the decision was made to create a separate and large office the dealt with the Soviet Union exclusively.

This new assignment was exciting for a variety of reasons. For example, as the junior officer I was given a number of interesting assignments such as following Cuba shortly after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. McSweeney assigned me to track Fidel Castro, not knowing how that revolution might turn out. So I began to follow the Soviet relationship with Castro, which in those first few months hardly existed. But there was a worry in the USG, an obsession, even, that a Soviet-Castro relationship would happen.

Secondly, I was assigned to follow the CIA work with the youth movements around the world, such as the Helsinki Youth Festival. I first met Gloria Steinem during my work in Soviet Affairs. I heard her stories about her leadership in countering Soviet propaganda at the Helsinki Festival. Later, while in SOV, I also got to know Cord Meyer who was running the covert CIA operations to counter Soviet propaganda and front organizations around the world. I also wrote several papers and action memoranda on steps that could be taken to counter Soviet activities in and among youth and cultural groups, particularly in Europe.

One of those memoranda led to a meeting with the new Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, in mid 1961 after the new administration had come in. Robert Kennedy, after the Bay of Pigs in spring 1961, had become President Kennedy's special overseer for US policy toward Cuba and Latin America. I had continued to follow the evolving Soviet Relations with Cuba, which by the early summer of 1961 had become significant and growing, certainly sparked by the US failure of the Bay of Pigs.

Thirdly, I had entered the Soviet Affairs office during Eisenhower's short honeymoon with Khrushchev, who had visited the United States in the fall of 1959. Eisenhower's policy toward the USSR had been dominated by Secretary John Foster Dulles from the beginning of his Presidency. When Dulles stepped down as Secretary in early '59, Eisenhower decided to try to move toward building a new relationship with Khrushchev -- mainly because he became ever more concerned about of the danger of nuclear war and the growing tension between two countries. Without Dulles he felt liberated to carry out his new mission, which he had wanted to get started before he had to leave the Presidency in 1961.

As a follow up to Khrushchev's US visit, Eisenhower had been invited to visit Moscow in the spring of 1960. He would be the first American President to visit Moscow – certainly a paradox given Dulles' well known preferences against any dealings with the USSR. McSweeney recommended that, since I been a naval officer, spoke some Russian, and had some knowledge of the USSR, I would go on board a cruiser that was going to dock in Leningrad to serve as the communication vessel for Eisenhower. He was also planning a visit to Leningrad. This cruiser was to serve the communications center and the backup for Eisenhower. I was assigned to this Defense Department team that was preparing with the White House for this historic visit. I attended multiple planning meetings at the Pentagon.

That tour in Soviet Affairs allowed me quickly to get into the guts of the Foreign Service and the Cold War. In addition to my full-day work, I spent an hour every morning before going to the office studying Russian at the Foreign Service Institute.

Then came the shoot down of the U-2 in April of 1960. One of the most memorable mornings was in our morning staff meeting with McSweeney just after we learned that the U-2 had not been lost, but had actually been shot down. We had just learned, sitting around the table, that Khrushchev had announced on TV from the Supreme Soviet that a Soviet missile had shot down a U-2 spy plane over Soviet territory, and that they had captured Francis Gary Powers, who was the pilot. Following the earlier reports that a US plane had been lost, perhaps over Soviet territory, the US had denied it was a US aircraft. Internally at State I knew little or nothing about the U-2 missions and I had assumed that neither the plane nor the pilot would be recovered. Khrushchev's revelations were surprising and worrisome for all of us. This had been a covert operation little known in State, and I am not certain that McSweeney even knew about the overflights.

At the staff meeting we were discussing what this might mean for the US-Soviet relationship, for the President's planned trip to Moscow, and for the strategy on managing this issue for the public. We knew little about what had actually happened or about all the plans already underway to keep the President's hands clean of the U-2 affair.

I was sitting that morning next to the Director of the Soviet Affairs Office, Jack McSweeney, at the staff meeting. He was always elegantly dressed but this morning I noticed he was wearing one brown shoe and one black shoe. Trying to amuse him and

relieve the tension in the room, I said, “Before we have this conversation you might explain to the staff the significance of you wearing one black shoe and one brown shoe on this particular morning.” As an Irish-American, he was usually responsive to my efforts at humor and would enjoy my comments, which is one of the reasons we had a close relationship. Instead he replied bluntly, “We have a war facing us and you’re talking about a black shoe and a brown shoe?” I got it.

After a few days, the real story of the U2 began to unravel and discredit the US cover story that the plane had been a NSA plane to monitor weather and had been lost over Turkey. After several more days, President Eisenhower finally came out publicly with his statement that this had been a spy mission and that he knew all about it. As a result Soviet leader Khrushchev was even more offended even more since he thought that Eisenhower had not approved the overflight. Khrushchev then caused the breakdown of the Paris Summit of the four great powers and the USSR a week later. The other impact of this event was that Khrushchev withdrew his invitation for the President to visit Moscow, which of course ended my chance to go on the cruiser to Leningrad. Eisenhower's great hope of beginning serious talks with Khrushchev about nuclear weapons was dead. I still do not understand why the President failed to acknowledge immediately that he knew of the overflights. This even undermined his reputation as a honorable American statesman/general.

After President Kennedy came into office in 1961 there were new problems and opportunities. Relations were still tense with the USSR and of course Kennedy had run a campaign falsely complaining that there was a “missile gap” with the Soviets that threatened US security. During the transition period even before the inauguration we had heard that someone on Kennedy’s transition team had suggested that one new, creative approach that would annoy the USSR would be to seek to open diplomatic relations with Outer Mongolia – an ostensibly independent country that had been considered virtually a part of the USSR, but not a “satellite”, such as the nations of Eastern Europe. The argument went that if the leaders of Outer Mongolia would agree to establish diplomatic relations with the US then the US could highlight and perhaps undermine Soviet authority in East Asia and drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union.

I was assigned to do an analysis of the idea. I did a typically balanced State Department review of the pros and cons of seeking relations with Outer Mongolia for Ambassador Tommy Thompson, who had been called back from Moscow to help with the transition. I did a great deal of research for the paper, and had not learned yet whether the Departments should recommend for or against exploring the diplomatic relationship. My boss said that we should recommend against the establishment of relations. Then, shortly after I wrote the memo against recognition, I was told to change the recommendation to support recognition since the WH had expressed interest. I took it at the time as a credit to the State Department artful drafting and even handedness that my draft memorandum could have come out either way. Critics of State and the Foreign Service would most probably allege that this is proof of the bureaucratic nature of State that never has a point of view and will not try to take policy positions that might be controversial. In the end, I

simply changed the recommendation at the end of my memorandum without having to touch the basic document which was written to go either way.

After we let the Embassy in Moscow know of the US interests in opening talks with Outer Mongolia, the Embassy learned that the Outer Mongolian Ambassador in Moscow responded that Ulan Bator would be interested in starting negotiations. So I was assigned to Ambassador Thompson to help prepare for the negotiations. The plan was that he would conduct talks in Bucharest with Outer Mongolia. We prepared papers with the Office of the Legal Advisor for these negotiations. The lawyers provided a very long list of requirements that Outer Mongolia would have to agree to in the negotiations, including details that went deeply into US concerns about their political system, rule of law, and diplomatic practices. They seemed unusually complicated to negotiate and far too demanding if we wanted to have relations for our own strategic objectives.

Ambassador Thompson flatly rejected the list from the Legal Advisor. He said that we want to have a simple agreement to open diplomatic relations without either side having to make extensive commitments on a range of largely side issues. He said we should instead seek certain assurances for the operation of the Embassy and staff and administrative details for running the Embassy, but we do not need extensive other commitments from Ulan Bator to change their political system. (I later used his suggestions on how to reach minimalist agreements that we had decided were in our interest when I negotiated with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Cuba the opening of the US Interests Section in Cuba in 1997).

This effort at new creative, strategic diplomacy was discontinued after news of the planned talks became public and the US became concerned that the political fallout could lead to the People's Republic of China getting Taiwan’s seat in the UN, which was unacceptable at the time.

Q: What was your, the people you were talking to on your own side, impression of Khrushchev?

LUERS: We had an impressive group of experts in Soviet Affairs when I was there and we talked a great deal about Khrushchev and the role he was playing. Jack McSweeney left as Director and was replaced by Robert Service who was the brother of John Service, one of the old China hands who had been run out of the Foreign Service by Senator McCarthy for having contributed to “losing China” to the communists. Bob Service was born in China and he was the son of an American missionary. He spoke Chinese and also spoke Russian well. There was another officer in the office who had also been born in China to missionary parents, Culver Gleysteen, who also spoke Chinese and Russian. I was impressed to hear excellent Chinese being spoken by two senior officers in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs.

We also had two other talented FSO’s who had served in Germany during the occupation and spoke excellent German. One was Spike Dubs, who was later killed while he was American Ambassador in Kabul. Another Germanist was Jock Dean, who was one of the

most brilliant writers and policy analysts I knew in the Foreign Service. His major expertise was Berlin and nuclear weapons. Most discussions about Khrushchev during that period dealt with trying to determine what would happen with the confrontation over Berlin. The Germanists who also spoke Russian were focused heavily on the combination of the nuclear weapons issue, but principally the threat to Berlin.

Q: The Berlin threat being signing the treaty with East Germany, which would cut off communications with Berlin.

LUERS: US policy was firmly directed toward assuring that West Berlin was not incorporated into East Germany. The Soviets wanted to sign a peace treaty and that would have essentially recognized the. division of Germany including Berlin in the Eastern sector. A Soviet occupation of West Berlin was completely unacceptable to the US and Western Europe was seen by many as a Khrushchev grab at all of Germany, or neutralizing it at least, if not absorbing it. So a lot of the work was done about Germany. Khrushchev was the center focus of these periodic threats to the United States on Germany. The US government's understandings about Khrushchev were shaped largely by the combative approach he took to Germany. Even after the visit to the United States, Khrushchev was seen as sort of a bumbling but interesting Soviet leader who was going to be a problem.

After the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev became empowered, thinking of Kennedy as a weak and indecisive President. Then in the early summer the US received a threatening letter from Khrushchev on the Berlin Wall. The State Department took about a month to get an answer, and it drove Kennedy crazy. Kennedy was thinking he could make a deal with Khrushchev if they could just meet and talk out the issues. I thought at the time that Kennedy hoped to deal with Khrushchev as another politician. He imagined him like a southern Senator like Senator Eastland with whom he disagreed profoundly but with whom he could deal with. You could sit down with him talk things through and find areas of agreement. Kennedy still seemed to have no sense of how Khrushchev was going to be. Then, of course, the Soviets built the Berlin Wall that summer, to the surprise of the world. This bold act seemed to set the stage for further movements on Germany. Kennedy was severely criticized for failure to stop that wall from being built. He famously said after the wall was built that not one person in the USG ever suggested to him that he mount an effort to stop the building of the wall.

Kennedy met Khrushchev in Vienna in early fall. Khrushchev just was convinced, because of the Bay of Pigs and the behavior that he had seen, that Kennedy was no match and was uncertain about how to deal with his new responsibilities. The worry during the Eisenhower period about Khrushchev over Berlin took a giant step forward. Kennedy personally thought he could deal with Khrushchev and change the negative dynamic but he found out he couldn't. So that whole period was a tough period in terms of our attitude toward Khrushchev. I was just learning and immature about how to think about my own attitude. I was still just in awe of the people around me, but I still hadn't thought it through. The more experienced diplomats in our office talked incessantly about what to do but the main conclusion was to hang tough against Khrushchev, whatever that meant.

It was only during my tour in Moscow that I began to develop a different and more personal opinion of Khrushchev.

Q: I've talked to people who were in Berlin when Kennedy came in, and they were very nervous because -- I mean, these are Americans who've been dealing with the Berlin crisis and things were pretty well encased in cement. I think even Harriman and Bobby Kennedy and others were all talking about well, maybe we can come to some sort of understanding. And in the context, any understanding meant we give away something and the Soviets accept it.

LUERS: Yes, it was a period of uncertainty. I have been reading recently about that period. Some in the USG seemed to have been prepared to go a long way in conceding at some points to Khrushchev and I am glad those recommendations were not followed.

A shift toward accommodating to Khrushchev at that moment could have created a major shift in the whole history of the Cold War era. I don't know whether Kennedy was prepared to make a few concessions because he wanted to get a broader deal on other issues such as nuclear arms. But there was no deal on the table really. So that period in the Kennedy era was a tough one and I left the office feeling unclear in my own mind how to deal with the Soviet Union.

Then in the spring of 1962, I got my next dream assignment to spend a year at Detachment R in Oberammergau where the Defense Department had a year long total immersion Russian language school. All the classes are taught in the Russian language, all written or oral final exams were in Russian. I came to love the language and culture and got deeply into it. I threw myself into relationships with the Russian emigre teachers and prepared myself for a two year tour in the Embassy in Moscow.

Q: Where were the teachers from?

LUERS: My most important professor went under the Communist Party name Kunta. He was a Chechen who had been a leader of the Georgian Communist Party. His real name was Aftrakhanov as one of the top leaders of the Communist Party in Georgia during the '30s. He broke with Stalin and he came to Germany as a fairly young man. And he was the master professor. He'd written a book on the Soviet system which was one of the best I have read. Most of the other professors were Russians who had left the USSR in the late 1920's after WWI. Kunta was an important source of knowledge, because the others did not experience the Soviet system and were very anti-Soviet. And you had to take it for what it was, but by the time I went to Moscow I had a much better preparation, both linguistically and culturally, about how to approach this menacing yet appealing world.

Q: Well, then you went to Moscow and you served there from when to when?

LUERS: I was in Oberammergau from the summer of 1962 to the spring of 63. During that year we had several long trips through Eastern Europe and one to the Soviet Union to get a reality. We traveled by bus. We traveled all over Eastern Europe. There were four

FSO's in the school and the rest were all Army officers, except for one Naval officer who I became close to. My closest friend of the Army officers was probably William Odom, who later became a Lt General, worked for Brzezinski in the National Security Council (NSC) and then became Head of the NSA (National Security Agency). The military officers remained in Detachment R for two years after having taken a year of intensive Russian language training at big Army Language School in Monterey California. The State Department could only afford to send FSO's for one year.

Q: When did you get married?

LUERS: I got married in '57. I went to Columbia in '56 and I was living in New York while going to school. I met Jane Fuller, who was then an artist and native New Yorker. She was smart, we shared many interests and she had a profound interest in the arts. She was also quite pretty. We married in the spring of '57. Her family lived in Greenwich Village. Dan Fuller had a large textile fabric company and Virginia Fuller, who had a left bias from her time in the Village during the 1930's, also had become deeply involved in The Little Red School house where Jane started school very near her house on Sullivan Street.

Jane had been a close friend of two of my friends from Hamilton and they both had admired Jane. I heard about her frequently but had never met her, but I came to know a lot about her. When we first met we had many common friends, we fell in love quickly, and became engaged within weeks after we met. We were both ready for marriage and we got married in the spring. She joined me on my State Department venture. We had a very close relationship in a sense, but she was not interested in the world out there and found foreign languages impossible to learn. She was essentially a shy, introspective artist.

We were married for 20 years and had four wonderful children -- two, Mark and David, were born in Naples. They were both redheaded. And you know in Naples, if you're a redhead you're called "capelli rossi." And a person who has "capelli rossi" is distrusted and difficult. The myth in many cultures is that redheads are often more prickly and difficult to deal with. Southern Italians believed that Judas was a redhead. In Russia there is a similar myth. Redheads are "riggi", which is a word they use for someone who gets hot under the collar and is difficult to deal with. It's funny that the term in Europe tends to be negative – except in Ireland, the UK and Scandinavia. So these two kids were born there at the naval hospital when I was there in the consulate.

I drove with Jane and the two small boys into Moscow through Helsinki when we went on assignment in June of 1963. I had visited the Soviet Union twice during my tour at Oberammergau. I was prepared for the depressing sensation of entering Soviet Russia from Europe. You suddenly realize you have entered into a different and miserable world. We drove in from Helsinki into St. Petersburg, which had already become one of my favorite cities, but Jane had never been there. We had a young woman who was going to join us in Moscow to take care of the boys. After three stops once we had entered the Soviet Union, even before we got to St. Petersburg, I looked at our young companion –

her face had literally dropped, her color was gone, and she seemed to enter into shock at the site of those Russian towns.

Q: Where was she from?

LUERS: She was from England. And she was an unusually upbeat person, and was greatly looking forward to living in Moscow. She had stayed with us for a year in Garmisch, but her experience in the Soviet Union shook her badly and she was miserable the whole time she was there. She only stayed about six months. My wife also had a similar reaction. She kept asking me how we were going to live in this desperate, drab, and unhappy country?

Poverty and sadness were everywhere, particularly outside of Moscow and Leningrad. We drove through dozens of small villages between Leningrad and Moscow. The stops for coffee or gas were distressing for my car of family. It had an immediate impact on them all. I found the same experience exhilarating since I had been preparing for this time in Russia for many years. I found the challenge of dealing with Soviet Union important, exotic, and frankly compelling. I was excited during my years in Moscow, as I tried to learn everything I could about the society in just a couple of years. I was probably the first American diplomat to visit all of the Soviet Republics during my time in Moscow. Every place I went I could speak with dozens of people who were anxious to speak to somebody in Russian who was not a Soviet official.

My two boys were probably impacted the most by the combination of this new depressing world, the absence of friends, and the not-always harmonious relationship I had with their Mother. I bear a large sense of guilt for what we put them through in their early years. They were born in Naples, then lived in DC, then lived in Germany, then off to Moscow. Within their first five years they lived in four different countries. And it was disruptive. They both had some learning disabilities that took years to overcome, but each has worked hard to build their own lives. It has taken me years to rebuild my relationship with them, which now we have happily accomplished together.

Q: They take care of this and then all of a sudden there they are with antiquated or unfamiliar equipment, dealing with either servants or somebody they don't understand. It's two different worlds.

LUERS: On one hand I was so energized by being in this Russia that I did not take the time I should have to help my family adjust and learn about the Soviet Union. I traveled incessantly, went out at night to the theater, visited new Russian friends and was driven to meet as many people as I could. But Jane could not take part, usually because she had no knowledge of Russian nor any interest in learning it. I very quickly got involved with the underground, art and dissident world in Moscow.

In my first year I was the Assistant General Service Officer, which is the junior job in the Embassy. The Embassy gave me that assignment because my Russian was pretty good and I had to oversee all of our 160 Russian employees, Soviet employees, most of whom

were informers to trained spies of some order. But my Russian improved because, unlike other Embassy staff, during much of my workday I was speaking Russian.

The summer of 1963, Secretary Rusk arrived at the head of a large US delegation to the signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that Averell Harriman had negotiated with the Soviets. This event marked a major shift in US-Soviet relationships. Less than a year after the Cuban Missile crisis had almost led to a nuclear war. Following that most dangerous confrontation during the Cold War, Kennedy and Khrushchev, both sobered by the experience, set out to change the political environment. Among many new developments, the US and USSR had signed a cultural exchange agreement that was to begin in the summer of 1963. I arrived as relations were just beginning to "thaw." I could feel the new sense in the Embassy that things could be different for the diplomats in Moscow.

The Rusk delegation included Senator Hubert Humphrey and Adlai Stevenson, who was then the American Ambassador to the UN. At the large reception in Spaso House, within less than two weeks after I arrived at post, I saw many of the senior Soviet officials, including Khrushchev. It seemed to be a unique moment in the Cold War. I had known Adlai Stevenson from the time he was Governor of Illinois, since my home was in Springfield, Illinois, the capital. His son, Adlai III, had become a friend. Standing in the grand central hall in Spaso House, Ambassador Stevenson told me that only Averell Harriman could have negotiated this deal, since the Soviets considered Harriman at the epitome of the "ruling circle". That was the classic communist term for the capitalists who ran the US and all capitalist countries. Stevenson said that Harriman epitomized the "ruling circle" unity of railroads, Wall Street, Government, and money. He said the Soviets always took Harriman seriously. Whereas they never took him (Stevenson) seriously, even when he ran for President twice. They thought he was a liberal who had no power.

Senator Humphrey and Stevenson were the stars of the visit for the staff. Each of them went into Moscow to shake hands with people in parks, railroad stations, and on the main streets. With FSO's functioning as interpreters, they went to different Moscow sites and even stood on benches to announce the arrival of a new US Soviet era and proclaim the peaceful intentions of the US. They were asking like typical American politicians who wanted to touch the people. As appealing as they were, our sense was that Soviet citizens were quite befuddled by these two Americans disrupting their daily routines. Politicking of that type was simply unheard of in Soviet society.

The day that the Treaty was signed in Moscow by Rusk and Gromyko, President Kennedy gave the most important foreign policy speech of his presidency at American University. That speech was an important new call for peaceful pursuit of US objectives that was a powerful endorsement of the new relationship with the Soviet Union. It had meant a lot to me since I had missed the opportunity to travel with President Eisenhower in 1960 because of the U-2 incident. Many of us had hoped that Eisenhower was about to begin the new relationship but that effort failed badly. The Kennedy American University speech was echoed in the summer of 2015 when President Obama, on the anniversary of

the Kennedy's speech, gave a strong endorsement of the recent agreement with Iran and other nations to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. Because of my groups role in helping to bring that agreement about, I had been invited to meet President Obama before his speech. I told him that I had been present at the signing of the Test Ban Treaty at the time of President Kennedy's American University speech.

In August, shortly after I arrived in the Embassy, the Cultural Section offered me an opportunity that became transformational in my career and my life. Kennedy and Khrushchev had just concluded a new cultural exchange program and the first two American writers had been selected for a two week visit to the Soviet Union. They would invite me to go with the writers who were coming on the early exchanges between the United States and Soviet Union. John Steinbeck was to be the first writer, for some obvious reasons. A good friend Peter Bridges, an excellent Russian speaker who was already in his second year at the Embassy, was invited to accompany Steinbeck. Steinbeck had recommended to the State Department that he be accompanied by a new, young playwright, Edward Albee. So I was asked to accompany Edward during his visit in November of that year.

Q: Yes.

LUERS: Edward and I became friends, which lasted until his death in 2016, in part because we experienced several indelibly marked events together around the killing of President Kennedy during his stay. It was his first trip of this type and he had never visited the Soviet Union. I was immediately struck by his intense commitment to answer every question from any Russian writer or student or other citizen. On November 23 were in Odessa to visit the famous steps that were the setting for Eisenstein's movie Potemkin, where a baby carriage, portrayed with a baby inside, wildly sped down the steps into the revolutionaries. Edward has been riveted by that scene and wanted to see the steps and to see Odessa.

On the evening of November 23, we had attended at the Odessa opera house, Khovanshchina, the Mussorgsky and Shostakovich Opera, that ends with the Old Believers committing suicide in a massive fire. Following the five act opera, we walked back to the Hotel on dark and almost deserted streets. When we arrived at the long staircase leading up to Hotel, we saw about 15 members of the staff of the Hotel waiting for us at the entrance. I was surprised and worried. As we approached, one of them announced, "Your president has been killed." We and this crowd of Soviet citizens listened together to Voice of America broadcasting information about the death of Kennedy. Just as Edward and I were shocked, the Soviet citizens were remorseful but mostly fearful. They were deeply worried that the Soviet leadership had killed Kennedy and what that might mean for them, for the opening to the West, and most importantly whether it could lead to conflict with the US.

This event became a bonding moment for each of us. We stayed up late with the Soviets and then the two of us talked. Edward talked mainly about death and how he dealt with his worries about it and how he kept coming back to the theme in thinking about his plays

and earlier his poetry. I began to ponder in more serious terms my thinking about how to deal with Soviet citizens, and more importantly about the relationship of my hostility to the Soviet political system and to its people. What would I do during my time in the USSR to help make these competing views compatible? How should I, and by extension the US Government, deal with the Soviet Union as our principal "enemy" and as a nation with which we were ensnared in a struggle that could end up in a massive conflagration? That evening began my long search of answers on how to "Talk with the Enemy", which became the name of a course I taught much later in life at Columbia University. My travels with American writers in the USSR shaped greatly the way I thought about Russia, the Soviet system and about the central role of culture and the arts in "talking with the enemy" or anyone. Traveling with these major American writers and artists over my two years in Moscow (Albee, Steinbeck, Cheever, Updike and Diebenkorn) helped me meet dozens of Soviet intellectuals and underground writers and artists, enter places and homes throughout the USSR that few diplomats could ever reach, and opened my mind to realities of the cultural, intellectual and political lives of that world that transformed my thinking about the role of diplomats and my particularly interest in my profession. I still have hundreds of memories about those riveting experiences.

Q: Well, do you want to tell some of them?

LUERS: The next year I traveled with John Updike and John Cheever, who were the second group of American writers on the cultural exchange. During my first year in the Embassy as the junior officer, when I was supposed to be spending all my time as Assistant GSO in the General Services section, I was often traveling with cultural visitors, improving my Russian, and learning about that vast country. That did not make my immediate boss, the General Service Officer, feel better about me.

I have two particular stories about John Steinbeck during my first year. John was no admirer of the Soviet Union or of Communism. Because of his writing about the injustices in American society, the Soviets considered him one of the icons, the American intellectual who saw the depravity of capitalism. All of his books are about the poor and their struggle to survive. On one of our trips in Moscow, we went to the legendary MXAT (Moscow Art Theater), which is the most admired theater in the country. The theater director has adapted a play from the Steinbeck novel, The Winter of Our Discontent. They were just going into production with the recently selected cast. The actors talked through some of their scenes with John and his wife, Elaine Steinbeck, who was a woman of the theater. John had married later in life. They made a most appealing couple and his respect for her seemed to grow with every year. As the actors were reading their lines, John and Elaine were getting simultaneous translations into English. About a third of the way through said, Elaine said, "John, they have turned your book into a communist propaganda track." She whispered it to him at first. John realized how the Soviet director had distorted his novel for ideological purpose, turning it into an anti-American and anti-capitalist diatribe including an implicit endorsement of a Marxist/Leninist doctrine. John had been having an interesting time up to that moment. He had been wary but engaged. This moment turned him in a different direction. His son by then was fighting in the US Army in Vietnam. He had more or less approved of the

war in Vietnam, which became ever clearer his trip continued. This event at the MXAT set him on edge and that made him become somewhere between hostile and very bothered by this visit.

Next we all traveled to St. Petersburg, including Edward Albee and Peter Bridges, who was accompanying John. John and Edward had been invited to a welcoming dinner by the Leningrad Writer's Union in the Soviet Union, one of the last remaining almost Stalinist groups in the USSR. Peter Bridges and I were not included in the dinner. We learned from their Soviet interpreter that both John and Edward drank a lot of vodka. They may not have yet realized the power of vodka, but they were also each becoming increasingly intolerant of the use that some of their hosts were putting them to as supporters of the Soviet system. According to the interpreter, John stood up and responded to his host's — a well known Stalinist, absolute Stalinist — welcoming toast by saying, "Look, I've been in this country now for three weeks. I have listened to all of you and I have thought about history." He added, "The only leader in the modern era who did more damage and killed more of his own people than Hitler was Stalin." As you can imagine, that ended the part. As you recall, the Nazi's laid siege on Leningrad during WWII for nearly 1000 days and millions of Leningraders died or fled from famine and military strikes. The Soviets did not react with favor on the comparison of Hitler to Stalin. They were shocked, which was well worth the event. Such exchanges must be part of any cultural program. It emboldened John and Edward to be candid yet to appreciate the privilege of being the first American writers to have an opportunity to help shape the Soviet appreciation of some of the genuine views of American writers about their nation.

In Moscow, my wife and I had John and Elaine over a number of times for dinner. Elaine remained a friend long after John died just a few years later.

After the death of Kennedy, Edward had to stand down on his cultural exchange activities that had been suspended during the official mourning period of five days. I offered to drive him to two medieval Russian cities outside of Moscow: Vladimir and Suzdal. While leaving Moscow we began facing heavy snowfall. I was driving our station wagon in what had become an almost blinding snowstorm, so I was driving slowly as we approached Suzdal. I was driving very slowly and suddenly on the road ahead I saw a bicycle in the middle of the road without lights. My car hit the man and knocked him off his bicycle. We stopped the car and went to see the man who had been knocked out. My wife, Jane, flagged down another car while Edward and I tried to find out what we could do about the condition of the man. The Soviet driver in the car my wife had flagged said, "We'll take him to the next town where there's a hospital." I followed the Soviet car to the hospital. I went into the hospital but the doctors would not tell me about his condition and they asked me to leave when they found out I was an American diplomat. I gave them all my contact information in Russian and explained to them what had happened. I told them we would be staying in a hotel in Vladimir that evening. I took their phone number so I could call them and check on his condition. I was concerned about his health. So we drove onto Vladimir, considerably shaken by the event. Edward and I had another long discussion about death. I was most concerned about the Soviet I had struck but even if it turned out he would not have permanent damage, I was worried about what this

would all mean for the rest of my tour in Moscow. This was another experience that brought us together. I called the hospital the following morning but they would tell me nothing about the injured Soviet citizen. I called the Embassy and I was told to return to Moscow. That day the sky was completely clear and the domes of those medieval towns were glistening from the bright winter sun. The highways had been cleared so the drive was easy, but we were all shaken. That experience shook me up but also matured me in how to deal with crises. I worried for months about the man I had left in the hospital. I kept trying to get some information from the hospital about his condition. The only official news I ever received was from diplomatic message from the Soviet Foreign Ministry that I should pay $10,000 for the man's recovery. My insurance company paid the money.

Then, the following fall, I was offered the opportunity to accompany two other visiting writers: John Cheever and then John Updike.

Q: How'd you find them?

LUERS: The relationships with Albee, Updike and Cheever all endured. I kept in touch with all of them in the U.S. and they visited me when I was Ambassador in Venezuela and Czechoslovakia.

Cheever was amusing and a sublime storyteller. He was always charming and decent to others. He was more of a loner than Albee and Updike. He also drank a great deal. I could often not track his interests. He engaged some Soviets. I did not know until years later, after he died, that Cheever was gay. This was described in some detail by his daughter, Susan Cheever, after John died. She drew on his diaries which include some pages on his trip to the Soviet Union. I am still not certain how well I thought about Susan outing her father. This knowledge now casts a somewhat different light. Cheever drank quite heavily but he was never mean. He never disputed schedules and was always kind to his hosts. He never told the same story in all of the interviews and conversations I heard him have.

I was struck by the honesty of each of these writers who formulated a new answer to the same questions over and over again. It was always an answer that felt right to them at the moment but gave the same sense of the truth. When Edward would be asked questions, and very often the same ones over and over again about his writing, about the United States, about how he thought about Russia, and about what his childhood was like, he hated to repeat himself. That's one thing I found out about writers: they don't like to repeat. They avoid past answers while trying to remain true to their memory. Albee was an impeccably honest human being, about both himself and others. He made no effort to conceal the fact that he was gay, even at a time when it still was not fully accepted outside the world of the arts. In fact, that year several of my colleagues had to leave the Foreign Service from Moscow, because the Department of State learned from a Soviet defector that they were being followed by the KGB. Edward was on the phone frequently with his partner who had remained back in New York. During that period Albee also

drank a great deal and he could be an angry drunk. Years later he gave up drinking entirely.

Because Cheever was so independent, he met and talked to more people. I didn't go with him on some of these trips, which was good. Other writers and translators or literary critics befriended him easily and would invite him to stay with them at their homes.

John Updike was the most interesting, open and compelling of the writers that I dealt with in those years. He was always intensely involved since most of what he experienced would ultimately reappear in some form in a later story, particularly in his Bech series of short stories. Most of his travels abroad were touched on through a writer he had created named Bech. John seemed to want to reinterpret artistically practically every moment of his life, every venture. One of his stories about his trip to the Soviet Union, which he later published as one of his early Bech stories called The Bulgarian Poetess, was drawn directly from his Moscow experience. It was a short story that happened to him when I was with him in Moscow. He changed the location to Bulgaria rather than in the USSR. In the episode he did not portray me in a flattering way, but that story was the first of a number of stories where a description of a person playing the role I had played in real life was less than flattering.

Flash forward two decades, Updike came and visited me and my new wife, Wendy, in Prague. He was with us in Venezuela a couple of times before. After he visited us in Prague, he published a book of his short stories called Beck is Back and the story in that book about Prague was called Beck in Czech. All of his Beck books have a Jewish writer as the central character, perhaps modeled after Philip Roth or Bernard Malamud. He used to jock that he and Cheever were the last of the non-Jewish American writers who were of any significance. He had a complex relationship with Philip Roth at the time. He would write these stories about Beck, about his adventures abroad, as this prominent American Jewish writer.

In Prague he wanted to visit Kafka's grave in the new Jewish cemetery. Since our driver was off on that Sunday I drove the car. I rang the bell at the gate since the cemetery was closed that day. Finally, out come two young men who are obviously working on pottery or sculpture in one of the buildings inside the gate because they had aprons covered in a white substance. I took the American flag from the car and waved it at them, saying in Czech, "I'm the American ambassador and I would like to visit Kafka's grave." They were both unimpressed and turned to walk back to their building. I then shouted, "But I have John Updike here who wants to see the grave."

They spun around and shouted, "John Updike?"

They ran to the gate, welcomed him in and took him to Kafka's grave. My wife, Wendy, and I tagged behind. Here was the American ambassador who they cared nothing about, and John Updike who was their hero. I was not struck by their low interest in me but that they so quickly knew who Updike was.

In Prague we had many events over the next few days, including a book signing at the American Embassy – hundreds of Czechs lined up outside the Embassy with Czech translations of Updike novels, braving the watchful eyes of the Czech police who were stationed permanently across the street, monitoring all people who entered the Embassy. On the last night in Prague he gave a reading at the Residence for about 150 English-speaking writers, translators, professors and artists in Prague in our big dining room. They all came out of admiration for Updike and enormous curiosity about America. They all had translations and copies of his book that he signed. Then after returning to the US he wrote the story Beck in Czech that was published in The New Yorker. The central figure with Beck was described as a somewhat dense American ambassador who was a short, bald, political appointee from Toledo, Ohio who was a friend of the president Reagan. But the wife was described as a long-legged beauty that he found particularly appealing.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: When I first read the story a few months later in The New Yorker, I realized that he covered much of his visit with us quite accurately, always with added humor or poetic license, including the episode at Kafka's grave up to the reading at the Residence on the last night. In the story, as Beck was reading, he could not take his eyes of ambassador's beautiful wife who was sitting in the front row with her legs crossed. All the time he was speaking he was looking at her and lusting. I began to worry that after the event he would describe a relationship with the Ambassador's wife. Instead he talked of returning to his bedroom where he had a troubled night (unrelated to my wife). That is one of the most insightful passages in Updike's writing about his worries and torments.

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: The story vividly and quite accurately conveyed the experiences he had been through. He visited me twice in Venezuela. Afterward he wrote stories that recreated with his fresh literary view his experiences that were not so much travel stories, but stories of events that shaped his thinking and life. It never bothered me that I appeared often as ridiculous, since the story was about his inner thoughts and sensitivity to events, smells, sounds, and setting. I know that many of his friends became fed up with his portrayal of them in the retelling of real episodes. I talked to him about this as part of the experience of many writers. I do believe that in some way Updike put into writing, in literature, poetry, essays, or criticism, most of his conscious and unconscious thoughts during his lifetime. He was probably the most prolific and versatile writers of his generation. I got to know him quite well.

Let's get back to Moscow.

Q: Did the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)) you any problems?

LUERS: Yes. I had come to know a Russian dissident named Andrei Amalrik in the first week after I arrived for my Moscow tour. A FSO friend Jack Matlock (later American Ambassador in Moscow) introduced us, before Jack left post on reassignment. Andrei was a playwright who knew the vast Moscow underground of writers, painters and intellectuals. During my two years in Moscow, he introduced me to many painters and writers. No one else in the Embassy knew or spent time learning about this world – even though Matlock had begun to penetrate it before he left. I got to know a whole group of painters and became a collector of Soviet underground paintings.

Through Andrei, I got to know painters and a number of the more controversial dissidents who were tracked, as Andrei was regularly by the KGB. Andrei knew the KGB and they obviously knew him, even though I do not believe he ever worked as an agent, as you will see when I tell you this story. Andrei explained that the KGB division that followed him and his dissident colleagues was an entirely different division from the one that tracked diplomats or other foreigners. Andrei believed that in the large KGB organizations those two parts probably did not talk to each other.

Andrei also told me to never try to be secretive about my contacts with him or with any Soviet citizen. He said, "always ring the bell." By that he meant call from the Embassy phone and speak clearly about what I want and where we should meet. He said that staffs in some Embassies have the habit of going to a nearby public phone to call, which of course is closely monitored and the KGB just concludes the diplomat is trying to conceal something which, as Andrei knew, was not easy to accomplish in that police state.

I did come to know this underground world better than any of the other diplomats, including American, in Moscow at the time. My extensive travel with visiting American writers and painters also gave me added insights into Moscow's vibrant intellectual life that had not yet been fully appreciated outside of the USSR.

I spent a great deal of time during my tour trying to explain to select American correspondents about this Moscow underworld, and few of them were interested. One close friend, Bud Korengold, the intelligent Newsweek Bureau Chief, was interested. Bud and I began to think about ways to get this story out without compromising my diplomatic status and without getting him kicked out of the Soviet Union. In the early 1960's the perception of the Soviet Union was that it was a monolithic passive communist state in which most dissidents were in Siberia or under tight control. The Western media was not aware of this substantial underground world of painters, playwrights, musicians and political dissidents. For the many reasons I have explained, I had gotten to know some of the key intellectual and dissident players in Leningrad and in Moscow. There were shades of different "opposition" intellectuals from some of the "bold poets" (like Yevtushenko and Voznesensky) who were officially accepted but always pushing the edges of approved literature. At the other end were dissidents like Ginsberg and eventually Amalrik who came openly to oppose the system. I subsequently wrote a long article about Moscow's underground world of culture in Problems of Communism, a USIA publication.

The opportunity came to get this story public when a young Soviet painter, named Zverev (meaning wild one), had an exhibition of his paintings in Paris. I knew him quite well and he had done a portrait of me and my wife and others that I brought to him. He was in his 20's, looked "wild" and drank a great deal of vodka. He drew brilliantly and did semi-abstract paintings with a flourish that was unique. A group of his friends, probably from the French Embassy, were able to sneak out some of his paintings to an exhibition in Paris. News of the exhibition became known internationally when Picasso visited it, praised the artist, and bought a couple of paintings. I told Korengold, "This is an opportunity. We will get you a picture of Zverev's dramatic self-portraits that you can put on the cover of Newsweek Magazine. You can use that and the exhibition as a vehicle for talking about the underground art world in Moscow." I told Korengold that Andrei could arrange for Zverev to meet us at Andrei's apartment for a brief meeting on Thursday at noon (all times and locations were always exact in Moscow and you were never to be late). When Korengold agreed with this plan, I called Andrei from my office in the Embassy to "ring the bell" for the KGB. Andrei always said to let them know what you are doing. If they want to stop it from happening they will stop it.

Korengold and I arrived right on time at Andrei's apartment. In the Soviet Union if you are not there on time you can assume there must be a problem. We rang the door of his communal apartment that he shared with his father. Since the communal apartments meant two small rooms in a larger apartment, someone else in the apartment actually came to the door. We went to Andrei's door nearby and entered. Andrei was there but Zverev was not. I said to myself, this is not good news.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: I said, "Oops, there's a problem. Where's Anatoly (Zverev)?"

Andrei said, "He's apparently a little delayed." I thought to myself that I never felt good about a delay.

Then within minutes there was a knock on the door and two KGB agents and a local policeman entered Andrei's apartment. The top guy knew Andrei, you could tell. He called him Andrushka (the often-affectionate diminutive for Andrei). He asked "What are you doing now?" They believed that Andrei was trading in hard currency (dollars) and violating the law. I had no impression that he was making any money on the paintings he arranged for me to buy from other painters. In any case, the amount of cash was very small and we would always pay in the Soviet equivalent of hard currency. I never gave him dollars. Rather than linger to talk to the KGB I took Bud Korengold, who did not have diplomatic immunity, with me out of the apartment within minutes after the KGB had arrived. We took off and we went back to the Embassy where I immediately reported to the Embassy security officer and to my boss, Malcolm Toon, who was then Political Counselor (later Ambassador).

The next morning after I had gone to the Embassy from my apartment outside of the Embassy, my wife called to ask me to come home at once. I returned back to the

apartment many blocks away to Andrei, who had come to talk about what happened. Andrei said, "They're going to send me to Siberia because I'm a parasite." The Soviet term in Russian for someone who does not have a full time job is "tunyadetz" or parasite. If you are not working you are a parasite, sucking off of the society. After much talk I asked Andrei, "Well, why don't you just get a job?" Mind you all of this was in the living room of my apartment.

Andrei replied, "I'm not going to accept their charge that I am a parasite. I'm a playwright, I do what I do, and I'm not going to conform to their view of what work is in our society." I couldn't talk him out of accepting his being sent to the "camps" in Siberia. Every room in my apartment was bugged. (The Embassy security did not even try to find out how many ways, since technology was changing all the time and we had Soviet citizens living all around us in the building. We had just come to live with that reality in a conversation.) We had this candid conversation during which I came to understand that Andrei had decided it would be a banner of courage as a Russian dissident in the centuries old tradition of "sitting" in Siberia. He had decided that he wanted to define himself clearly in opposition to the Soviet regime. He subsequently was tried and was sent to Siberia.

When I returned to the Embassy after my conversation with Andrei, my boss, Mac Toon, said angrily, "Luers, you are going to get yourself kicked out of here by the KGB. You have been traveling around Moscow and the rest of this country for over two years, meeting with all these Soviets, most of whom are KGB. I have told you to stop seeing these people since they are all the same and will be turning you in."

Q: Mm-hmm.

Mac Toon was extremely intelligent, a strong leader, and he hated the Soviets — not just the government and party officials. He really disliked the entire society, and the Soviets reciprocated since they knew well his point of view. Mac did not like to be in the presence of Soviets except when required by ceremony or process. He spoke Russian well, but was on edge any time a Soviet was around. He was convinced that all these people I was seeing were KGB agents. I was certain that some of them were, some of them were not, but most of them were passing on information on me. But I had gotten into a world that I knew had a large element of authenticity such as Andrei: people who struggled to be apart from the system, deal with it yet detest.

My job was to report regularly back to the Department of State and the broader intelligence community on my experiences. People who followed the Soviet system and society in the American intelligence community, mainly the analytical side, took great interest in my reporting since I was getting aspects of Soviet society we had not reached before. I identified individuals and issues that demonstrated that even at the height of the Cold War, after the shoot down of the U-2 under Khrushchev, there had emerged intellectual life that showed that the society was coming alive.

The irony of my differences with Mac Toom was that the Soviets never gave me any difficulties, despite Mac's warnings, nor did they make any public attacks on my work as a junior American diplomat. Yet the popular Soviet weekly, Ogonyok, carried a strong full page article attack on Mac Toon just before he left Moscow that summer. It outlined his personal animosity toward the Soviet Union and toward Russian culture and language. The article alleged that Mac was actually the CIA stations chief (which was not true). Because of his tough, uncompromising approach toward every aspect of the Soviet Union, he became an important figure among political leaders in the U.S. The Hill responded well to his hostility toward the Soviets and frankly his tone and attitudes helped develop enough trust that he was appointed as Ambassador later at a critical time in the relationship. Frankly, Mac's approach worked better for the Foreign Service since he was not ever seen as "soft" on Moscow. Those of us who got into the society to learn about what was really going on became more suspect.

I left Moscow that summer and Andrei was in Siberia for over a year. In Siberia, in the great Russian tradition, he had written a book, the manuscript of which was smuggled out of the USSR. It was shortly thereafter published under his name as An Involuntary Trip to Siberia. The book recounted how he got to Siberia and what his life was like there. The first two chapters dealt in part with his relationship with a new American diplomat in Moscow but he never mentioned my name. He discussed our relationship including our final conversation in which I tried to convince him to find a way not to go to Siberia.

Q: Well, did they ever harass you or do anything like that?

LUERS: Over a decade later when I had become Deputy Asst Secretary for Europe, dealing with Soviet and Eastern Europe affairs, I took several trips to Moscow. During my first trip back to Moscow in 1977, I was tailed closely and obtrusively everywhere from the moment I got off the plane at Sheremetyevo Airport. I know from my years traveling in Communist nations the difference between surveillance and harassment. This time the KGB was being obvious and offensive. My first visit to the Soviet Foreign Ministry during that trip was to call on Deputy Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh, whom I had known well when he served as Ambassador Dobrynin's Deputy in Washington (he later became Yeltsin's Foreign Minister). I had great respect for his professionalism and his intelligence so I just opened with a complaint about being followed so closely. I said, "Look, these guys are following me very closely." I told him that I suspected that the KGB wanted to check me out because of my new, more important job and they may also be concerned about my extensive travels and relationships during my first tour in Moscow. I told him candidly and directly that this close and offensive surveillance served no purpose to his government or mine as we begin to have a new era under the Carter presidency. I said, "Why don't you have it stopped?" And they did. I didn't see them after that, even though I was certain they were following me.

There were many times when I knew I was dealing directly with a KGB agent undercover. I knew one person in the Soviet Embassy in Washington who subsequently became a prominent KGB leader. A young Soviet "diplomat", Oleg Kalugin, whom I met during my time in Soviet Affairs, was clearly a well educated and trained KGB agent. He

wore button down shirts, rep ties and spoke almost perfect American English. That was the trademark of those trained by the KGB, which invested enormous sums to get them ready. I suspect that a number of the people who I enjoyed being with in the Soviet Union were informants at least. I was invited into many homes in Moscow and Leningrad during my travels. Some were most certainly agents but some were simply required to inform on me. I just never bothered to worry about that since I never could have figured it out. Frankly, the KGB officers were usually quite intelligent and well informed. I made clear that I told them nothing of importance and frankly, I knew that their major interest was to identify my personal vulnerabilities or the weaknesses of my colleagues so that they would have opportunities to recruit to their work or embarrass.

Q: Well, as you traveled around the Soviet Union, did you find that you were either picked up or followed or something?

LUERS: Yes, I went to Leningrad frequently. I almost always stayed in the same hotel and in a similar room on the same floor. All the rooms where diplomats and foreign visitors stayed were heavily bugged. That was life in the USSR. In most places I would notice people following me and it never bothered me, since I had no secret agenda and was just trying to learn about the Soviet Union.

My most memorable time in Leningrad happened during my trip there to accompany one of America's greatest painters, Richard Diebenkorn, who, with his wife, Phyllis, was the first painter to visit the USSR under the new cultural exchange agreement. I had accompanied several writers, as I mentioned, but Dick was the first painter. We spent much time in Moscow mixing visits to many studios of official painters of heroic "socialist realism" with visits to the many underground painters I had gotten to know. Dick and his wife, Phyllis, enjoyed much of their visit but they were quite clearly frightened by the drab Soviet police state. Dick's major objectives were to visit the Hermitage in Leningrad and see the many Matisse paintings in that museum, most of which were not on display. Diebenkorn had been profoundly influenced by Matisse and was on a mission to see more. Since I knew the then Hermitage Director Piotrovsky (who is the father of the current Director Piotrovsky), I had been able to arrange for Dick to see all the Matisse.

The morning in Leningrad when we were driving from the hotel to the Hermitage to meet Director Piotrovsky, I read in Pravda that Khrushchev had resigned from office for health reasons. By then I had become obsessed by tracking the criticism and opposition to Khrushchev by others in the Politburo. When we met with Piotrovsky, his first question to me was what Khrushchev's departure would mean for the new cultural exchanges and for US-Soviet relations. I told him that I did not believe Khrushchev had retired and that more likely he had been removed by his colleagues, who had become fed up with his dramatic shifts of policy and direction. As I proceeded to give my political assessment to the clearly shaken director, Dick was getting nervous. He cared little about Khrushchev but a great deal about seeing the Matisse paintings. So I asked whether we could go ahead with our visit to the Museum and particularly to see the Matisse. We spent the next three hours seeing the museum and most importantly going into the storage to see dozens

of beautiful Matisse paintings, most of which had been collected by the sugar merchants, Shchukin and Morozov, before the Revolution. I remember quite clearly which paintings had most attracted Dick.

After Dick left Leningrad he returned to his home in San Francisco and then two years later moved to Ocean Park, a part of Los Angeles. Dick was looking for new light to paint by and most importantly he was looking for a new approach to his painting. Within those two years he painted a couple of paintings on the theme of homage to Matisse in Leningrad. Those first paintings led into Dick's decade long series of major works of art called the "Ocean Park" series, which has become one of the most important works of art by any American painter. Over the years I saw a great deal of Dick until he died a few years ago. He always attributed his visit to Leningrad and his prolonged visit to Matisse as having been critical in shaping the rest of his life's work as an artist. In 2016, the new SFMOMA in San Francisco held a unique exhibition on Matisse Diebenkorn that told the story of how much Dick had drawn from Matisse and how similar they were as painters and drawers. We went to the opening of the exhibition and the catalogue had an extensive interview with me about Dick's formative visit to the Hermitage to see the Matisse.

In the afternoon of October 16, 1964, after our visit to the Hermitage, I had to return to Moscow to help understand the leadership change since Soviet internal politics was my beat as the most junior political officer in the Embassy. The following morning on October 17, which was a Saturday, I set out to prove to myself and then to the Department my conviction that Khrushchev had not retired for health reasons but had been ousted for political reasons. Since there was no official who would discuss these events, I chose to visit the major political and historic museums in Moscow, which I tracked carefully since they often revealed current political thinking of the Party and who is up and who is down. I first visited the museum of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism which I knew had a new exhibition of showing Khrushchev's recent visit to Egypt, which had become controversial in political circles. I went there and was told that the exhibition had been closed the afternoon before. Seeing I was on to something I went to the Museum of History in Red Square and could not find a single mention or photo of Khrushchev in the entire museum. I knew how many times he had been shown and discussed but the museum had been completely cleaned up without a trace of K. After looking in vain all over Moscow for any mention or photo of K, I realized that the Soviet authorities must have decided on the eve of Thursday, October 15 that Khrushchev's identity would be eliminated overnight from all public places. Since K was everywhere, the success of the clean up was impressive and total. My final visit was to the large Exhibit of National Economic Achievements that I had visited just a few months earlier. This is a large area in which there were literally dozens of pavilions dedicated to individual sectors of the economy or regions. I was astounded to find that in space after space, Khrushchev was gone – literally obliterated. There is one pavilion on Corn, which had become Khrushchev's pet project since his visit with Eisenhower to the corn farm of Garth in Iowa in 1959. Indeed one of the nicknames for Khrushchev was "Kukuruznik", meaning "corn ball", because of his conviction that corn was a big part of the answer to the improvement of Soviet agriculture. The Corn (or Kukuruza) pavilion was shut down completely.

It was scary to realize how thorough and total the government had been in achieving, within less than 24 hours, the disappearance of the image or name of the man who had been the leader for over a decade.

LUERS: I recall my visit to Osh in Kyrgyzstan at the eastern end of the Fergana Valley. I wanted to send a postcard from Osh because of the happy language play from that word – you go to voshu, you are in voshe and you leave from vashi. Our Embassy always required that I travel with another diplomat since you were more vulnerable traveling alone. On my monthly travels I would usually be accompanied by another American diplomat. On this visit, I was traveling with a red bearded British diplomat who was a leading Soviet specialist from MI6 operative. He was probably the head of the intelligence of the British Embassy. He was a most amusing, and very bright man from whom I learned a great deal. Since I was a friend of this British spy I'm sure they began to consider me a conspirator. But also Osh is not far from the border with China. The KGB followed us very closely.

When we went to the small grass covered airport in Osh to fly back to Tashkent, I went in to the post office desk in the small building and sent about a dozen postcards to friends about my trip to Osh. I bought Soviet stamps and I bought some picture postcards from Osh, which I posted to my family in Moscow but also to many friends in the US. After we had boarded the small plane and the engines had started, the pilot suddenly turned off the engines. A young woman boarded the plane. I had given the cards to her. She said, "I am told that we will not mail these cards until you translate them into Russian." The "they" wanted to make certain I did not say anything subversive. My UK colleague immediately shouted at her that this request is a violation of international postal regulations.

I replied to her, "OK. You can't read the postcards so you want me to translate them into Russian. How do you know I am going to give you an accurate translation?"

And she said, "That's a good point."

Then I added, "Since you have people who understand English, they can translate them for you." She agreed and took the postcards with her. One of the cards arrived in Washington, but I heard nothing from the others. This was one of hundreds of anecdotes about how the Soviet system worked in the mid-1960's. Over the years I became increasingly familiar with how the KGB operated. At this level of activity, they use money or sex to take advantage of vulnerabilities. Once an American diplomat indicates weak spots, the KGB will pounce.

My boldest challenge to the KGB happened on May 1, 1965 when I decided to experience with Soviet citizens the May Day parade. I dressed as much like a Soviet as possible and walked out to join the crowd that was planning to walk from my area (on Kutuzovsky Prospekt) to Red Square. It was a long walk, but as I had watched people make the outing, I had the impression that they enjoyed it – even though I knew that they

were obliged by their local union or party officials to participate. I walked for nearly 2-3 hours to Red Square, talking occasionally to other participants, until we arrived at the entrance to Red Square. I heard the loud speaker instructing all of us to smile and look happy during the walk through the square in front of the entire Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party, including the new General Secretary Brezhnev, since there were television cameras that would carry our happy looks around the world. Upon entering that massive square, I realized that we were kept in a relatively narrow path of about 20 people across, that police were controlling the crowds on both sides of the human path, and outside those walking, the square was completely empty. As we came closer to the point where we had have to pass before the Soviet leadership, I became quite disgusted by the entire affair and particularly by the possibility that I would be paying respect to those Soviet leaders standing on top of Lenin's Mausoleum, one of my least favorite places in the world. So, impetuously, I broke ranks and walked directly toward the GUM Department Store through the completely empty, vast space of Red Square. To say the least, I stood out to all the police. When I arrived at a street next to GUM, I saw someone who was clearly a Soviet military officer who said with some alarm as I left the square and went up the road, "what do you think you are doing?" I hastily told him that I was a diplomat and had to leave the parade. I proceeded to walk quickly and thein ran along the back deserted street. He never chased me and was clearly left confused by who I was and why I had been there.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

LUERS: Foy D. Kohler.

Q: What was sort of the spirit of the embassy?

LUERS: I think those staff members who did not speak Russian found life in Moscow difficult. For most, it was a sad and dreary city and their social life was limited to the American and broader diplomatic community. Foy Kohler was not one of our great Russian experts and was not an intellectually stimulating one. Over the years I knew George Kennan, Tommy Thompson, Chip Bohlen and many others. Kohler was not of that stature, but he was good to me and supportive of my approach to the Soviets and to my job in the Embassy.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Kohler liked what I was doing in the cultural area and I would always bring the writers to see him. One time he hosted a large reception at his residence Spaso House for the visiting New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He worried that the Russians and Americans would not have a common language.

I assured him that they would most likely communicate in Yiddish. I added that for some, Italian was the language of music. So many of the musicians in both orchestras were Ashkenazi Jews from Russia or Central Europe.

I have a more positive story about Kohler. Several years after I left Moscow I was allowed to read a confidential part of a fitness report that Mac Toon had written on me. It was quite negative because he was bothered by my persistence in meeting Soviets and traveling. He said that I never obeyed his orders, I never did what he asked me to do, and that I was going to be that way throughout his career. He said, "He is going to do his own thing and he's not going to listen to any of us." None of this was in the report he had to show me.

Years after reading Mac Toon's highly critical evaluation of my approach, I asked Kohler on one occasion about Toon's concerns. I said to Kohler, "You knew that Mac felt this way and was criticizing me for all that I was doing. Did you support Mac's critique of me?" Kohler replied, "I knew what you were doing. I found it very interesting. I enjoyed reading your reports and learned from them." And he knew the community in Washington DC shared his view on my reporting. "And by the way it was your career, not mine, not Mac Toon's. If you blew it and were caught and kicked out or you somehow embarrassed us, it would be you who were embarrassed." He said he was taking no risk.

Q: Uh-huh.

LUERS: When I returned back to State Dept I had the impression that there were a certain number of people who followed Soviet issues who had come to learn from my reporting. So I told the State Department Security office that I would be willing to brief them on what I had learned about the Soviet system and some individuals during my tour. We had several long sessions about my contacts and thoughts about the operations of the KGB and other intelligence operations. But the questioners kept asking me about this one Sunday evening in Leningrad, which was about six months before leaving Moscow. I remained late on that evening since I had been there to arrange a special event for the Ambassador. I stayed longer than originally planned, so I took the overnight train back to Moscow. I had been working on the event with a Russian woman called Lydia Goriva, who had been a valuable contact at the Hermitage Museum over the years. She was a curator at the Hermitage Museum. She got me into the museum easily and introduced me to the Director of the Museum, whom I got to know. She also had introduced me to several of artists in Leningrad. She had become my Andrei Amalrik like contact in Leningrad. In their interrogations of me, the Security people finally said that they doubted my story about what I was doing before returning late at night and not keeping with my original plans. I suddenly realized what they were after, "I know. You think I was sleeping with Lydia Goriva." They said yes. And I replied in shock but with a little amusement, "Have you ever seen Lydia?" Lydia was one of the most physically unattractive human beings I had known. Goriva She was slightly deformed and she was certainly not sexually appealing. Indeed, I was comfortable that the Soviets would never be so stupid as to deploy Lydia to entrap me. So it became clear that my entire effort to illuminate the Security people about what I learned was for the purpose of getting me to admit to a sexual entrapment. There was nothing and they found nothing. That experienced revealed to me the low level of interest in understanding the Soviet system and what diplomats in Moscow were dealing with. They had no further interest in my

reporting. It became ever clearer to me over the years that the mentality and mode of operations of the KGB and CIA/FBI were very similar.

By the way, Andrei Amalrik was sent back to Siberia after Involuntary Trip to Siberia was published in the West. During his "second tour" there he wrote a book that was later published in the West called Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984, drawing directly from the title of George Orwell's classic book on the totalitarian experience. Andrei addressed in this book his serious doubts about the durability of the Soviet. He outlined the qualities of the system that were decadent, ineffective and self-destructive that raised for him almost a certainty that it would not survive. As you recall, the Soviet Union began to collapse in 1989, so Andrei was only about 5 years off in his prediction.

I basically got the core argument of why it collapsed. During our hours of discussing his contempt for the Soviet system I was not convinced that it would not survive. Yet he planted the seed that made me think over the years, even before 1989, that Soviet communism would die. Indeed I wrote a "My Turn" opinion article in Newsweek in 1987 I called "The End of Communism". I mentioned earlier my conviction that the Marxist idea had profoundly misunderstood the nature of the humankind. Andrei in his book adds in the additional ingredient of Tsarist Russia. Andrei's book never received the type of attention that it deserved, since it was perceived as just another one of those hundreds of anti-Soviet diatribes that were published in the English language regularly. Had it come out in '87 or '88 it might have been more interesting.

Q: Yeah, where'd you go after you left Moscow?

LUERS: I went back to work at INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) in the State Department from the summer of 1965 to the summer of 1967.

Q: But what about the children? Sometimes Foreign Service not necessarily recruits people, but they like their experience and they use it in later life and others sort of rebelled against it. How did it go with your family?

LUERS: It is hard to distinguish the Foreign Service experience from my experience with my wife. They are closely meshed. Jane was a loving mother and I loved her. We had four wonderful children together. She was shy and not very verbal. She had no interest in languages and without Russian could not get into Russian culture. Her resistance or reluctance contributed to making a disconnection between my children and my career. My two older boys lived in five different places during their first 7 years of life. As a result they had some learning problems. Despite these stresses and my differences with Jane, we had a close family. I am blessed with four children and their four wonderful spouses, two step daughters and their husbands and ten grandchildren. We all get together at least once a year for happy gatherings, usually on Martha's Vineyard and often at Christmas.

Q: You were dealing with Russia here?

LUERS: I was. My job within INR was one of the internal analysts because I knew so much about the country. I'd just come back, I'd traveled everywhere. And so I worked in the Soviet research side, specializing in analyzing internal political developments. The head of INR was Tom Hughes – a very intelligent with an unusual wit and energy. We would arrive before 7 each morning, review all the intelligence and media reports from overnight, and select the major issues that should be briefed. Then we would put the Morning Briefing Intelligence report into final for the Secretary and other senior officials, and check 7AM CBS morning radio news to see whether there were any recent developments that needed to be included. developments. We would then meet with Tom or the Secretary's briefer, if it was not to be Tom Hughes. I would always be one of briefers for Hughes, since the material I was covering was generally of high interest to the Secretary and the intelligence community. Hughes would make the final decision on which of the many items would be included in his 15- 20 minute briefing of the Secretary. Secretary Rusk seemed to take more interest in the briefings that many other Secretaries and he did make us feel that INR was making an important contribution. By 1965, however, the U.S. was already beginning to Americanize the Vietnam War, which had become the most important focus of most of our work.

Q: What did you bring with you to INR in terms of a picture of the Soviet Union internally?

LUERS: I brought several assets to INR even though I was not a polished writer and lacked long term experience in selecting sources. First, I had been following the Soviet leadership closely for over two years. I knew the names and jobs of most of the top party, government, and military leaders. I had followed the internal debates and power struggles and, of course, had been in Moscow when Khrushchev was thrown out. I was the core Kremlinologist. My tour in INR introduced me for the first time the wide range of materials from intercepts and covert sources that I had never known existed. The electronic sources of communications were an eye opener. I had not been pleased by my assignment to INR and tried to get another job, but I quickly learned after only weeks on the job I was learning about a dimension of US foreign policy I never would have known about. That was a very important moment for me.

Secondly, the politburo and Khrushchev had become an obsessive interest of mine in Moscow. I had been in Moscow when K was kicked out and had tracked his fate over the past decade. After Khrushchev, there had begun a serious debate over whether Brezhnev (new head of the Party) or Kosygin (head of the government) was really running the country. The WH wanted to know who was at the other end of the "hotline". That debate continued in '65 and '66 over this issue because Kosygin was traveling all over the world, being very public, and Brezhnev was staying in Moscow with a lower profile. I was convinced that because he was head of the party, he was head of the whole operation. But Kosygin was the public figure and, you know, many people still believe that he was running the show. And we had an intercept one time of Kosygin's conversation with

Brezhnev from London in 1967. While we listened to the tape, we knew immediately that Brezhnev was top man, because Brezhnev used the familiar form of Russian to Kosygin and Kosygin in turn used the formal form with Brezhnev. Kosygin was clearly deferential to Brezhnev, which nailed that issue. This was important to the WH and others in the national security apparatus, to know who in Moscow was at the end of the hotline. We had maintained it was Brezhnev. This phone was clear proof. We recalled how important it had been during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that JFK knew that Khrushchev was at the other end. Ambassador Thompson was working on a special committee that President Kennedy had set up to manage the crisis. Because of his personal experience with Khrushchev from his time as Ambassador to Moscow, Thompson was able to advise Kennedy at the critical moment in the crisis how to handle Khrushchev.

It was during that period, in late 1965, that a small group of FSO's founded what became known as the Open Forum Panel which still exists in the Department of State.

In 1966, Secretary Rusk told Henry Owen, who had just become Director of the Policy Planning, that he thought there were "no new ideas on foreign policy" in the Department of State. Owen picked up the challenge and replied that he would ask the Department staff to send their "new ideas for U.S. foreign policy". Owen sent out a cable to the Department and to all US missions explaining the challenge and asking for new ideas the he would send to the Secretary. This was an important step toward opening up debates that the Vietnam war had begun to shut down. By 1966, the US was fully engaged on the ground in South Vietnam. There was very little discussion inside the Department about US strategy in Vietnam, since President Johnson and Rusk were so committed to following the Americanization of the war in 1965 that debate was discouraged. Indeed the Vietnam war policy overshadowed other policies so that internal debate on other policy issues was becoming more difficult. So shortly after Owen's solicitation of "new ideas" cables began coming in from around the world. To vet the incoming "ideas", Owen set up a select group of FSO's from around the USG to review the suggestions in order to prepare them for a review by Henry Owen and then Secretary Rusk. About eight or ten were selected and met periodically in a staff room of Policy Planning to read the proposals.

Sam Lewis (an old friend from Naples) and David Arron were two of the originals. Only about seven or eight of us made the meetings to whittle down the list. At the beginning a senior member of the Policy Planning staff, Lee Stahl, coordinated the decisions of these relatively junior FSO's. Lee worked with us until about 1967 or 68 when the group chose me to serve as Chairman of The Open Forum Panel, a name our group had suggested to Henry Owen. I was the chairman until I went to my new post in Venezuela in 1969.

The Open Forum Panel's founding and approach was a unique personal and professional experience. We began to appreciate the intelligence, conceptual thinking and willingness of many of our colleagues around the world who seemed eager to think in new ways. On the other hand there were no really big ideas except for those that suggested dramatically different approaches to Southeast Asia. Most the passionate FSO's at the time, particularly those not directly related to the Vietnam war, had already begun to talk about

and think about changing policies. We chose to pass only a few of the broad and often quite passionate proposals on Vietnam unless they had some specific proposals for action. We had concluded if the Open Forum Panel turned into a channel for regular complaints to the Secretary on Vietnam, his encouragement of "new ideas" would be shut down. We were later criticized by some for not being more aggressive on the Vietnam issues which I came to understand. There were other interesting aspects to this exercise. Particularly, FSO's very often became more bold in suggesting changes in policy in other areas of the world than where they were stationed at the time. It was far easier to propose changes in areas where they were not currently directly involved than suggest criticism of existing policies where they were then working.

One most memorable exception to our informal reluctance to pass along strong arguments against the Vietnam war, was our decision to suggest the Secretary Rusk to find a better metaphor than "Munich" to explain, particularly to young people, why the U.S. was in Vietnam. Our position to the Secretary was that for most young people, the word "Munich" seemed more like a city where they could drink beer than a city where "appeasement" had been that fundamental reason for "negotiating" with Hitler. Dean Rusk was consistent throughout his life after Vietnam that the U.S. was fighting there to assure that we sent a message to Europe and others that the US would comply with its commitment on "collective security" and that the U.S. would not seek to "appease" the North Vietnamese (and by extension the Chinese and Russians).

More broadly, the Open Forum Panel became a new place for officially sanctioned but carefully channeled dissent from FSO's. It also became an important vehicle for openness to outside thinking and criticism of State and US actions around the world. The work we did lead to some new approaches taken by our group and the American Foreign Service Association to establish a formal and approved dissent channel. In a 1969 AFSA book on State Department reforms, I contributed the chapter on Openness that proposed, inter alia, a dissent channel which was based on the idea originally floated by Secretary Rusk to welcome "new ideas" from career diplomats.

The "openness" side of the Panel's work became another long lasting legacy. After I became chairman we began holding lunches for the occasional member of Congress, senior staffers from the Hill, journalists and other dissenters from U.S. policy to meet with an enlarged Open Forum Panel. This was an innovation that was virtually never either encouraged or even permitted in State, particularly during the Vietnam War. The Panel had now become sufficiently active and operational that Policy Planning assigned a new junior officer to staff our work. The first FSO was Ned Walker, who was very bright and supportive of our new approach. (Ned had an extremely successful career and served as Ambassador to Egypt and Israel). With Ned's support with Lee Stuhl and others we were able to spend some money from the Policy Planning Staff budget to hold periodic lunches with outside speakers in a dining room at State. This program became so popular that more and more FSO's were prepared to pay for their lunches and Policy Planning would cover the cost of speakers. It is difficult to imagine today how unusual and even radical this approach was in State. It was refreshing for us and colleagues and allowed outsiders to get a sense of what the experts inside State were thinking. We would have

real debates often dealing by then with Vietnam, particularly the critique of US policy from the Hill. The positive consequences of these lunches and meetings with "outsiders" lead to two new programs. First, Tom Hughes, my former boss in INR had left State after the election of Nixon to become President of, who left INR, the Carnegie International Endowment for Peace in DC. Tom invited my successor as Chairman of the OFP (**get name which I have forgotten**) to move full time to work at Carnegie to set up, among other things, a program they called Face-to-Face which built on the positive impact of the OFP effort to bring together staffs from government with outside critics of USG policies to gather in large groups in the early evening after work. Carnegie could offer an appropriate neutral space and the money for evening receptions to build a program that eventually became very popular in DC and led most certainly to similar events offered by CFR and other think-tanks in DC. Face-to-Face could invite members of Congress and former cabinet or senior officials to encourage a open debate on U.S. policy and foreign affairs. Also the Open Forum Panel continued to prosper in the State Department and it still offers talks with outside speakers to talk to State staff during lunch hour near the cafeteria.

The most interesting and revealing OFP took place in the transition period between Nixon's election in 1968 and his inauguration in January,1969. Elliot Richardson was the Deputy Secretary of State designate. Through Policy Planning contacts about 12 of us were able to have two long evening meetings with Richardson, as you might recall. Our broadly based group by then included FSO's in Defense and connected with the analytical side of CIA. We had been clear by then that there had emerged wide differences within the US Executive Branch on how to look at the future of the Vietnam War which had been the major issue in the 1968 elections. Indeed the 1968 electoral campaign was one of the few times in our history when a foreign policy was a determining factor in the elections. Many of us were hopeful, if not yet convinced, that Nixon would adopt a new policy toward the war. Our group had decided to demonstrate to Richardson that there were widely ranging estimates on what could be expected from current policies in Vietnam. Because of our wide access in the USG, the influence of Policy Planning and the dogged work of Ned Walker we were able to assemble the Executive Summaries of five year end reports from The Vietnam Task Force in State, The American Embassy in Saigon, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Office of Systems Analysis in DOD, and the National Intelligence Estimate, which usually fairly represented the carefully worded consensus of the various intelligence agencies in the USG. During my time in INR I had worked on several estimates on the USSR and had come to have a high respect for the care and professionalism of the process and the high value of the final NIE's. We were able to demonstrate to Richardson and his staff that the three reports that were most closely in line with current policy (that we were winning if we stay with the current strategy) were those that were making policy – The Vietnam Task Force, The Embassy in Saigon, and the Joint Chiefs. The reports of the two entities that were furthest from the formulation and execution of policy – Systems Analysis and the NIE – were far more skeptical about how winnable the war was without considerably greater commitment of US forces. I have simplified the differences but they were striking, thus leading to one of my first principles of US policy – those elements that are most closely engaged in policy formulation are the least likely to criticize it. I was

convinced that my OFP that is a truism of policy making and is also the greatest handicap to policy revision. Richardson was interested and appeared impressed. We kept at this theme with our contacts through the first half of 1969. History would suggest that we had not impact on the Nixon/Kissinger policy toward Vietnam -- and neither did Richardson.

The INR experience drew me in to another world and helped me grow professionally. I improved my writing skills (although not enough). I received a basic grounding in the sources and evaluation of "intelligence". I began to learn the value of being succinct in writing even though it took many years before I began to put that lesson into practice.

Q: Did you find that your views got pretty much bubbled right up to the top relatively quickly, as opposed to large bureaucracy where everybody knew

LUERS: Yes, at some level. Secretary Rusk respected and listened to Tom Hughes, who was the Director of INR. In the morning briefings he would often brief Rusk and often the subject dealt with Soviet internal developments. The group of us who dealt with the Soviet Union felt we had ready access to senior level of State and we circulated our briefings to other agencies. Of course after another decade of experience in the Department including my time in the Secretariat under Henry Kissinger, I developed more skepticism about the value of those morning briefings and particularly on whether what we wrote every morning got to decision makers. We had a small but serious group of professionals dealing with all aspects of the USSR. I was the only FSO among the civil service professionals. One advantage I had was that I had just returned from a Moscow tour with much travel and many relationships. Yes we did have an opportunity to get directly to the Secretary, who was singularly minded on the subject of Vietnam, but on the Soviet Union he was more open.

Q: Well, you know, as an example, sometime later when the secretary was Madeline Albright and the head of INR was Phyllis Oakley --

LUERS: Yes.

Q: -- Phyllis was told not to brief the Secretary who had always been briefed by the Central Intelligence Agency, which was a significant change.

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: In other words, she abrogated her department for somebody else and it --

LUERS: Which is very often -- I mean INR has been by and large more correct in analysis. It tends to be more moderate, but it's also, I think, had a better record.

Q: Yeah. I think it was more a matter of personalities.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: And I'm not sure if it was Albright, but I don't think Phyllis -- some of the coterie around Madeleine Albright --

LUERS: Didn't want Phyllis around.

Q: Didn't want Phyllis around.

LUERS: Yeah. Phyllis was one of my classmates. I'm very fond of her.

Q: Yeah. I am too.

LUERS: Fabulous person.

Q: Outstanding person.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: But it shows --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- what can happen.

LUERS: Powell did listen to INR to some degree. But many secretaries of state have not paid that much attention to it.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And I think it's seen as maybe too homogenized.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: It's probably less sensational than the newspaper headlines and it's not handpicked raw intelligence, but it tends to hold up over time.

Q: Well, if you rely on, as often happens, sensational newspaper accounts, these newspaper people really often don't know the territory.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: Whereas --

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: -- you know, somebody who's giving an analysis of what was happening, I recall when I was in there -- this was back early when the Congo was falling apart -- you were getting

the person who was doing the Congo, Owen Roberts, had been there, and could say well, this probably is happening and that's probably happening and showing much more

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- knowledge of the area.

LUERS: I think that's right. But what I brought to INR is an interesting question. When I went to Moscow I really was quite a traditional Cold Warrior and I had a profound dislike for the system and the communist ideology. I wasn't for bombing them, but I was negative on the structure of society. But because I had gotten to know more of the Russian language, become close to some native Russian teachers in Oberammergau and traveled so broadly in the Soviet Union, I got to know the political diversity and opposition within the country to the Soviet regime and came to appreciate the real distinction between the Soviet population and the Communist Party. I became ever clearer on the impact that these Soviet popular attitudes were having on the productivity of the country and even its stability.

In 1966 I published in a USIA magazine, Problems of Communism, edited by my good friend Abe Brumberg, under a pseudonym Timothy McClure. I summed up my analysis of the wide variety of political/cultural trends that were forming in Moscow during my time there. The article received wide readership because it was unique and it was subsequently published in several books of essays on contemporary USSR. Looking at the human side of Soviet diversity allowed me the opportunity to help paint the picture of a nation that was not a monolith but a vast diverse collection of ideas, frustrations and dreams that eventually began to become obvious to all following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I don't know how INR has evolved over the years and I couldn't make a generality. I think the people we had during the time were excellent. Hal Sonnenfeldt was the Deputy in INR and oversaw much of our output. Hal was very sharp and ambitious. I later worked with him more closely when he had been made the special adviser to Secretary Kissinger. That is another story.

Q: Well, maybe you and also a convergence with other people in dealing with Russia and INR. What was the feeling about one system of governance of the Politburo and all? And what was it after? I mean, what did they want?

LUERS: Above all they wanted to stay in power. None of my readings and learning about the Soviet system quite prepared me for the reality of the Soviet system. I was frankly surprised -- even shocked -- by the extent of the autocratic reach of the Party, the secret police underpinnings of the structure, and the environment of fear that pervaded all levels of the society. I could go on for hours with anecdotes about the inefficiencies and stupidities of the system despite the high intelligence and even brilliance of so many Soviet citizens I had come to know.

Q: General Services.

LUERS: While I was General Services officer, I had to make contact with a Soviet construction team that did not work normally for the Embassy to help us install a new elevator on the side of the building. The structural challenge was to lift the engine and pulley for the elevator to the top of the building. We asked the Soviet engineers to build a structure on the roof that would be strong enough to hold it suspended. I remember we were trying to get some equipment up to the top floor to begin the structure and the Russian came in and he took this big steel beam and he put it out over the edge and we were going to start hauling equipment up with a pulley. This was up 14 floors, 13 floors. He had to pull it so he hammered it into the roof or locked into a roof board.

As you know, I studied engineering. I said that's not going to do it. And he said, "I'm contractor to this and I'll do the job." And I said, "No. I just think this is no way to do it." I got the administrative officer and we argued with him and he did it. And of course it pulled out immediately and the steel beam fell to the ground. It was the type of thing that on one hand you say well, he did this because he was just trying to screw us up. But I think the guy was dumb. I don't think he knew what he was doing.

I found over and over this almost primitive knowledge of basic concepts combined with a certain brilliance about abstract thought. And when you go back to what the ministries were really up to, what did we think they were doing? I guess our bias was that the Ministry of Defense had attracted all the good people. They could launch missiles, go into space early, had built a nuclear force so rapidly and presumably had some very good aircraft, some better than ours. There was a sector of society that was rather more efficient than the rest.

But many of us believe that probably they weren't nearly as efficient as they like to portray. You travel around the country and you'd see outside of Moscow -- I mean five miles outside -- even in Moscow itself, that there were people living in the 19th Century. The diversity within the country was not only from a point of view, but also the access they had to water, to plumbing, to electric lights. So I guess all of us had various degrees of distaste and disrespect for what the government was able to do. But the issue was built not around that, but around the fact that here, they had all these nuclear weapons and they were getting more, and what would it mean if they became inefficient in thinking through that. I think most of us felt that they were not prone to big mistakes. They were not crazy. Anyway, I don't know if that answers your questions.

Q: No, that does. Did you feel that there were elements aching to go through the fold or gap and all, or was it basically a system that was essentially content with the borders but wanted to make sure that nothing disturbed the borders?

LUERS: You mean the physical borders of the country?

Q: Yeah. Was this a beast wanting to lunge or was it a beast wanting to --

LUERS: Well, I think that was the big debate. I think there were many people in INR and in the Soviet thinking group and certainly in the government more broadly who were convinced that the Soviets were looking for opportunities, whether it was in Berlin or someplace else, in Asia or in Africa or some place, that they were looking for a way to extend -- expand their power, to extend it beyond the empire's borders, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Some of us believed they were tending to be non-expansionist. Their expansion --many people saw -- was through the third world effort to get more client states and use their party structure, particularly their military structure and their economic assistance, to get more and more clients. That was what the Cold War was to some degree all about. Who were our guys and who were their guys. My view was that the Soviet regime was terrible regime but the country was populated by many brilliant and fascinating people. And I do believe that my association with Amalrik and his book, Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984, and that whole philosophy, gave me real skepticism about how long they can endure. Others in the INR and in our community believe that we have to be ready for aggression at all times, which is important, but they believed there was going to be a conflict with these people. But the debate over whether they were expansionist or not was the core, core debate.

Q: Well, you had a broader vision because you were dealing with the open form.

LUERS: Right.

Q: How'd you feel about the Vietnam War at that time?

LUERS: Terrible. We started The Open Forum Panel because of spirit and the depression over the Vietnam War. Could we focus the debate on other issues and open up the capacity of Foreign Service officers, of insiders, to say what they feel without going public? Because several had resigned, there was an underlying dissidence in the State Department, I think, over the war starting early on, particularly '65 when they decided to fight the war with American troops. That was the big decision. I think probably I would say a third of the ideas had something to do with Vietnam, and the secretary would read them. But they had no sort of teeth in them. It was very easy for a Foreign Service officer to say you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't continue this war for the following reasons, but would never say, you know, this is the way you can phase our military presence out, this is the way you begin to think about discussions with them. It's sort of one of the problems of an outside view of what insiders are talking about and how they're thinking and how you would put together a recommendation that could say, "try this route". You know, when George Ball, who was then very much an insider in the discussion of the issue, but very much an anti, was very much opposed to the escalation. In that period he was the undersecretary of political affairs and the historic documents show the memorandum he sent to the president. People kept him on because he was the only dissident in the whole government on this subject. I read his biography and I read a lot of the books about this because of my teaching and my own articles and writings.

Q: McNamara?

LUERS: What?

Q: McNamara.

LUERS: McNamara. He was with McNamara, and they were talking and they'd all read his long memorandum that had been written in '65. And they said, "OK, you want us to talk to the North Vietnamese. How would you do this? You know, what would you talk about? How would you open the discussion? What is the agenda? And what are we prepared to give up?" And he didn't have any answer. They had a lot of questions, he didn't have any answers. He'd been able to put together a really structured --

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: -- recommendation, to which they could say OK, let's look at it. But that never happens. These ideas were all opinion rather than recommendations on what you do. Very rarely did we have specific recommendations saying this is what you do and this is how you do it. That's the way you have to enter the debate. So that was the weakness of this effort.

Q: I remember, I think it was probably a little later, but for me Open Forum was interesting because I recall two people came and talked to us. One was Petra Kelly --

LUERS: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- who was the head of the Green Party --

LUERS: That's right.

Q: -- or one of the heads of the Green Party in Germany. Actually --

LUERS: Somewhat a radical at the time.

Q: Very much, you know --

LUERS: Sort of the first real green movement was --

Q: Yeah. But you know, this is sort of an anathema, an awful lot of people.

LUERS: Oh yeah.

Q: But the --

LUERS: It was refreshing, right?

Q: Yeah. And then the other one was Kim Dae-jung.

LUERS: Oh really?

Q: Yeah. Who was I think --

LUERS: He'd just gotten out of jail or something?

Q: I think got out of jail and was up at Harvard at the time.

LUERS: Yeah. Wonderful man. I knew him, yeah.

Q: Yeah. So I mean it did give a sense of --

LUERS: Sure, of "there's another world out there".

Q: Of openness.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Well, then you went -- where'd you go?

LUERS: When I wanted to get out of the Soviet universe I began to think that the world was like the Soviet Union. There was a job opening of Guyana desk officer and so I became the Guyana desk officer. I had Suriname Guyana, British Guyana, and I had Trinidad.

Q: Well, here you were. I mean you've sort of set your sights on the Soviet Union.

LUERS: Right.

Q: And most people who went to Oberammergau, I mean did a whole thing as you did, can hardly wait to get back and they ended up spending practically their entire --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- career.

LUERS: Yes, trying to get back. And I just felt that I was getting stuck in a mindset that wasn't working for me. I didn't think I was being very helpful because I'd had some tough experiences there and I frankly found the Kremlinology a little bit unreal because we didn't know what's going on, we could only guess.

So I get the job. I decided I'd go into the developing world direction and I'd go to part of the world where you have development issues as opposed to hardware issues, the soft power. Guyana wasn't my first choice -- it was an opening.

Q: Was Jagan doing his thing there?

LUERS: Well, we got into that. I'm really not sure how much I can talk about it, but I didn't realize when I got into it that this was one of the places where the CIA and the State Department with blessing and participation was of MI6 were trying to make sure Cheddi Jagan did not get into office. So our job was to support Forbes Burnham, who was then the prime minister. In a country that was increasingly Indian and less and less black, we kept making sure that he kept being elected. It was my first real look at some of the hardcore Cold War efforts that we were undertaking and how we kept Cheddi from taking office. When I'd go down to Guyana, ironically, at the time my uncle was building a hydroelectric dam. He was an engineer and built a lot of dams; he'd build a lot of electro facilities in Korea under the UN and with USAID. He was contracted by AID to do this in Guyana. He was a big deal down there. I was very fond of this uncle. So I went down many times. I went down to Guyana. I went to Trinidad. Guyana was the core issue because the Cheddi and his wife were staying around.

Q: She was an American.

LUERS: Yeah, she was. She was from Chicago. She wouldn't talk to me, but Cheddi was sort of an amusing guy and a charming person and I don't think for a minute that he was a communist, but he did want power and was opposed to the US. We had our own way. That period opened my eyes again to what the real world was like for US policy in the Western Hemisphere. I didn't much like it, frankly. But I did the job. Then I decided I wanted to go to Latin America. But there are a lot of stories about the Guyana period.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Guyana, just take our time.

LUERS: OK.

Q: In Guyana, Forbes ran the country for a long time.

LUERS: Yeah, yeah. Thanks to MI6 and ourselves, yeah.

Q: Well, what'd he do, I mean?

LUERS: Well, Forbes Burnham was a big, articulate, smart, power man. Ironically, in Guyana, the black community is in the urban section whereas in most of Latin America, the blacks are in the rural. It was the Indians who were the rice growers who lived in the countryside. They had increasingly become the majority of the country, and like many countries of that type, the elections are very carefully on racial lines, even though Burnham had a number of Indians in his cabinet who were urban Indians. It didn't diminish the fact that Cheddi had a natural majority by the time I got into this job. This is probably all classified stuff, I don't know if I can --

Q: Well, you don't have to --

LUERS: I don't have to worry about it.

Q: I'm pretty sure that this stuff is --

LUERS: Probably. But anyway, the key was to make sure in elections we got enough votes for Burnham. We got Burnham to change the laws to make sure that people living overseas got to vote. There were far more black Guyanese living overseas than there were Indians. They'd have access to the public, to the cities. That was their instinct anyway. So we'd make sure a lot of votes were cast in Canada, England, and the United States. Most of the Guyanese were in the United States, Canada, or U.K. We would work hard to get them heavy voting. He stayed in office for the whole time I was there and quite a bit longer afterwards by this joined enterprise. With my boss who was country director for the Caribbean, I would go to London or they would come to Washington every six months and we'd review the progress of our work. It was, you know, here I was suddenly involved in a covert operation. They didn't want Cheddi in there at all. I would go down and spend time with Burnham and I found him a captivating but slightly frightening character in the sense that he's one of the autocrats I've known reasonably well. He would always invite me for breakfast and he would serve raw eggs and port. He drank a lot.

Q: Uh-huh.

LUERS: The raw egg gave him a choice, because it's a British habit, raw eggs and port. We would have those for breakfast and I'd just sort of gag afterward, but that's what he did. He spoke well; he had all the instincts for power and he knew how to exercise it. But I think he became increasingly personally decadent and run down, physically and mentally, the longer he stayed in power. He's another example of how power corrupts. Because he became corrupt, I think, as many people do in that situation. And he knew he wasn't going to lose the election.

I traveled a lot in the country, and I got to do a lot of dancing. I loved to dance. They have these jump up dances and it's quite a Caribbean dance that you do in both Trinidad and Guyana. In that period I got much more aware of Latin America, of the Caribbean, and it became part of my growth as a Foreign Service officer. It just became one of my expert areas. I visited a lot of the islands. When I eventually became deputy assistant secretary for Latin America, I knew most of the leaders by then.

Q: Well, I was wondering about Suriname at that time. I've talked to somebody who was ambassador there. I think she was visited by a team to look at it because of Jagan and all. They were concerned that the Cubans might try to take it over. They took a look at it and said it wasn't worth it --

LUERS: You got it, yeah. I do want to tell you one story when I was Guyana desk officer which was sort of interesting. It must have been in '68, it was just before the Venezuelan elections. The Venezuelans had always claimed Essequibo territory, which is a third of Guyana in the West. It's this big chunk in the jungle that allegedly had been Venezuelan

territory until the British came along and usurped it and took it over. There's a big debate historically and legally over this issue.

Q: That goes back to --

LUERS: 19th century, yeah.

Q: Teddy Roosevelt's time?

LUERS: Yeah, that's right.

Q: Wasn't that the Roosevelt corollary?

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: I can't even pronounce the word.

LUERS: Corollary.

Q: Corollary. Yeah, corollary.

LUERS: Anyway, we knew that Venezuelans wanted it back, and every president kept saying that's his goal, "I'm going to get the Essequibo back because we own it, because it's ours and because the British have taken it from us", which was a problem for the Brits because this was a pain for them. One time after the elections and before the Venezuelan president had taken office, the Minister of Interior, Leandro Mora -- I remember his name, and I knew him later when I went to Venezuela -- proposed to the president of Venezuela, "Look, now is the time when we can make our grab for Essequibo." So their intelligence group had organized a group of Essequibo Indians to form a group that would declare themselves an independent state. It wasn't populated by many Guyanese. It was really mainly Indians. Their scheme was to call for Venezuela to liberate them from this independent state of Essequibo from Guyana. I read this in a couple of reports that had been coming in from the CIA, who knew what was going on with the Ministry of Interior. So what they did is they took the paper and -- what are you looking at?

Q: I'm looking at the map.

LUERS: Yeah, it's this bit up here. It's the whole section. Up above Georgetown and all the way down to where Guyana and Venezuela meet. So they had this all set up: they had the people who were going to get together, they were going to announce that they'd formed the independent state of Essequibo, and they would call the Venezuelans in to make them free. I said to my boss, "This is bad news," and I said, "I think we should send a cable down to our Ambassador to talk to President Leone of Venezuela." I drafted this message that went to our ambassador called Bernbaum. I don't know if you ever knew who he was, but Maurice Bernbaum.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: He was the ambassador, and we sent him a message. And he didn't respond. I called him on an open line and I said, "Ambassador Bernbaum," I didn't know him and I was being very respectful, "You know, you've got this message. Are you going to do anything about it?"

He said, "No, because it's all rubbish." The president's name was Leoni. He would be outraged if I went and said something like this to him. We were sort of guarded, but it was clear he had no intention of doing this.

Then we got the Secretary of State to say, "Do it."

So he went in to President Leoni and said, "We have these reports that in the next couple days you are going to send your forces in at the request of the independent state and get Essequibo to liberate."

He wrote back in a notice cable to the secretary that he'd thought that Leoni knew nothing about it, but as soon as he said this to Leoni he went white. He realized that he'd been caught and he didn't do it. But they had every intention of doing it.

Q: So you've changed geography.

LUERS: I know. Well, the U.S. government did intervene.

Q: Yes.

LUERS: And that's the kind of intervention I think is well worthwhile.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Yeah. Anyway, I guess there are a number of stories we had about that. One of my more amusing stories is about my boss -- I guess I shouldn't mention his name. But we'd go to England and he drank a lot, as many of my bosses did. We had this meeting with the MI6, a very elegant dinner, at which a lot of wine was served and a lot of booze. He was the old Foreign Service. He was quite elegant and dressed very well. He thought that you should have martinis for lunch and that you should have a nice lunch, that you should take good time at it. He was very high on me and I performed well, according to him. The only thing he pointed out was that "Luers is a very smart young man. He does extremely well in his work and he writes well, but he doesn't dress well." He could approve that the pants should be ironed before you went to work. That was sort of an early exposure to the elegant side.

Q: Absolutely (laughs).

LUERS: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: OK, well then you did this for how long?

LUERS: Two years.

Q: So this brings us up to what?

LUERS: '69.

Q: '69. So Nixon is just in.

LUERS: Yeah. It was that beginning. Kissinger started his GLOP policy.

Q: Global Outlook Policy.

LUERS: Yes. So I chose the moment to get out of Soviet affairs for quite a while. I saw the job opening in Venezuela and I applied for it.

Q: What job was this?

LUERS: Political counselor. What happened was I applied for the job, they said I had it, and then Bernbaum, who'd been pissed off at me from what I did and the fact that I didn't speak any Spanish, said, "Why are we going to have this kid down there? He doesn't know what he's talking about. And by the way, he embarrassed me with the Secretary of State with this whole issue of Guyana and the Essequibo." And he persuaded the then political counselor to stay on a year to see if he could work with me. I arrived having planned to be political counselor and I was told on my way down that, "this is not going to happen; you're going to be number two," which made me feel not great, but anyway, there we were. Because I spoke Italian, they gave me three months to convert my Italian to Spanish. By the time I got there I was speaking it and then within a year I was speaking it very well. I got along with Bernbaum and he finally appointed me. But then he had a DCM who was there who I didn't get along with.

Q: Who was that?

LUERS: What was his name? I can't remember now. Off the cuff I can't remember it. He and Bernbaum were great pals, and like many DCMs he was totally captivated by his ambassador and continued the same policies, which was to keep Luers at an arm's length. But anyway, there I was. He was replaced by a career diplomat named Rob McClintock. You ever heard of him?

Q: Oh yeah.

LUERS: Amazing man. Again, he drank more than any human being I've ever seen.

Q: Hadn't he been ambassador in Lebanon?

LUERS: Yeah, he had been.

Q: Did he have a poodle with him?

LUERS: He had his dog with him. He took the poodle to his presentation of credentials, which made him famous and offensive his entire tour there. It's good you remember this story. He had a way of doing that. He's smart as a whip, particularly if you got him before 11:00 in the morning. He'd start drinking at noon before he had lunch, then he'd have a lot for lunch and he'd have some brandy afterward. He'd take a 15-minute nap and he was stronger than an ox all afternoon. I've never seen anything like it. I traveled with him everywhere and we went all over Venezuela. It wasn't just that he'd drink a lot of gin or a lot of vodka or something. He would drink in a day practically every form, from rum and whiskey to wine and brandy, and I don't know how he ever did it, I don't know how his body took it. But he was strong as an ox and he just had a red face. He had the Irish disease --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I found him an absolutely remarkable man to work with. He helped me a lot, I think, on writing and on how I spoke about things. He was against exaggeration, he was opposed to certain words. I knew that I was learning a good deal from him about how to have an impact on people and how not to have an impact on people.

Q: OK. You get there in 1969.

LUERS: Right.

Q: What was the situation in Venezuela?

LUERS: It was in the last year of the President Leoni. In 1968 Leoni lost election and Caldera came in. He was the president who stopped the invasion of the Essequibo. He was replaced by a man named Rafael Caldera who was the first Christian Democrat to be president of Venezuela. He adopted this line of pacification and he wanted to get all the guerillas out of the mountains. He promised amnesty for the residue of Castro's various insurgent groups. There were several of them who were in the mountains of Venezuela. The Christian Democrats (Caldera's party) and Acción Democrática (Democratic Action of Leone had followed a policy of hard line against the guerillas, we'll kill them, we'll seek them out and do them in. Caldera came in and said, "We're going to change this. We're going to pacify this country." And frankly it was a Christian democratic approach, or rather social democratic, radically anti-communist approach. And it sort of worked. I watched it happen and I was there as it was beginning. I was sort of new to the game. I wasn't sold on the Acción Democrática position, so I thought this was interesting. And the economy was beginning to be stronger. The oil was still not producing what it was today, but it had become of the major players. Particularly then, it became a source of the

beginning of the building of middle class. You use the money to hire government people or fund activities that develop an educated sort of quasi-middle class that became part of the growing sophistication of this country that was always the backwater of the Spanish era. I found that first year I got to know politicians from every part of the country and every political party. Then my Spanish got good and I met one man named Teodoro Petkoff.

Teodoro Petkoff had been one of Fidel's most promising insurgents in Venezuela. I got to know him because he wrote a book in 1969. This is after the Soviet invasion of Prague. The book was called Czechoslovakia, of all things. I had no idea I'd ever be going there. It was written by Teodoro Petkoff who'd come out of the mountains, who'd been one of the more radical insurgents in the country. I read the book. It was in Spanish and I thought, this is an interesting book. This isn't about Czechoslovakia at all, it's about the corruption of the Soviet Union. Of course that appealed to me a lot because he got it. And he's an insider -- he'd been a Communist Party member. He said a country that could invade Czechoslovakia the way they did was corrupt, lead by a false ideology and seriously flawed in carrying out their policies. It was such a damning book against Soviet communism that I said I wanted to meet him. So I went and met him and he and I became friends, which offended the business community a great deal.

Later, when I went back as ambassador within a week after I got back, Petkoff was launching his candidacy for presidency. He'd become a real player in the country. He was still remembered as being this leader of the insurgent movement. I became ambassador in '78. He invited me to come to his launch of his presidency candidacy in the Tamanaco Hotel. He said, "Bill, I want you to come." We spoke in familiar form and he knew that I respected him a lot for his change and virulent attacks on Soviet communism. I went and I walked in the door and I'd just presented my credentials to President Caldera a few days before. I was a new ambassador. Petkoff gave me this big abrazo (hug). And I gave one to him; we were together. The next day every newspaper has a picture of the new American ambassador embracing this dreadful, former communist. So it established me pretty well within the Venezuelan environment, but it established me very badly within the American business community because they thought, "who's this commie diplomat who's come down here to head us?" The whole time I was there, many of the American community were very critical of me for having a relationship with Petkoff. My argument was, "look, if he's running for president and he wants to be hugged by the American ambassador, he wants in."

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: He's not going to get many votes from his group by being my friend. He wants to be a player.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: He didn't win the election. He didn't do badly, but he did OK. Years later in the second Caldera administration, Petkoff became the minister of Caldera and the only one

that the American financial community would talk to. He became minister of planning in a government that was really corrupt and unprofessional. Caldera's second government became discredited completely in Washington, but they would always talk to Petkoff because he was so smart. So the irony was giving that hug set me back with the business community and yet enabled Petkoff to become a real player. Ten years later when I was ambassador when Reagan was elected president, Jean Kirkpatrick, the new Reagan Ambassador the UN, came to visit me in Caracas. I had known her. Reagan made her ambassador to the UN. She came and sat next to me and she said, "Bill, I want you to know that I don't agree with many of my colleagues in Washington that you're a communist. I don't believe that's true." She said, "I will assure you that according to what I know from the White House, no person who is an ambassador of Carter in Latin America will ever serve in Latin America again as ambassador." So it was an ideological problem.

Q: How was the discrepancy between the wealthy class and the rest of the folks in Venezuela at this time in '69?

LUERS: Big. Big. Much of the big industries were owned by a relatively small group of oligarchs. During the Caldera era there was an increasing effort to build this middle class, but it was done with oil money. It didn't narrow the gap, but it did create a sense that all over the country, there were the haves and a very large group of have-nots. When Chavez came in and he made his revolt against Carlos Andrés Pérez a few years after I left, the available oil money was running out and the inefficient had been reduced. The inefficiency of the government increased and the population increased. The result was that the people who'd been built into a middle class began to drop out. They had what they called group A, B, C, and D. C is entering poverty and D is poverty. B is lower middle class and A is upper middle class. So the idea was to get more and more people into B, or at least into C from the D level. By the mid-'70s the group coming into the C level was increasing. But by the mid-'80s many were beginning to fall back into the D category, into lower middle class and poverty. There'd been a crossing point where there was not enough money to keep these people out of poverty and not enough will to do it. They had no institutional base. And since there was very little private sector growth except through the larger families, there was an incapacity to save the middle class from going into poverty.

Q: Mm. Were we concerned?

LUERS: Yes. It became a source of some anxiety. We didn't know the details and we learned later was going on. Our main concern was oil and it was the fact that there was a two-party political system, a Christian Democratic and a Social Democratic party, both of which had strong leadership. I think in retrospect I wish I'd been more conscious of this other side, but I don't think we could have done anything about it because we weren't internally focused on how to get them to shape their economy. Both Caldera and Carlos Andrés Pérez and the president when I was there, Luis Campins, were all pretty much part of the oligarchs. They were paid. Their elections were really covered. So you didn't find any big instinct on the part of the presidents during that period to change.

Q: Wasn't there some sort of action or attempt on our part to do something? Because obviously we were concerned about Cuba. Venezuela is giving us a hell of a lot of oil.

LUERS: Mm-mm.

Q: And you know, it sounds to me like a recipe for disaster.

LUERS: I don't want to exaggerate this because you would go to Caracas and you'd see a huge middle class and you'd travel around the country and the cities would have a thriving middle class. The data didn't tell you that things were getting worse. The data told you the population was increasing. Like every Latin American country, there wasn't a large differential between the wealthy and the poor. Our interest was sustaining a dual party political system that could keep the communists out and could make sure we get the oil. This was during a strained period for oil and we wanted to make sure we got plenty. We invested a lot in encouraging their industry to expand their awareness of what oil they had. And they did it significantly during the time I was there. They found this heavy oil, which became a source of huge wealth for them and oil for us. We were also attracted to the two-party system that seemed to be functioning in Venzuela9. It was at that point when I went as ambassador to probably the only country in Latin America that really had a healthy democratic system.

Q: We're talking now about when you were there as political counselor.

LUERS: Yeah. When I was there as political counselor it was more equal. They had deep poverty, but the fact is by then there was enough money to build the beginning of a middle class. It was sort of a quasi-social, socialism system because they didn't have to deal with private sector business. There were a lot of private sector, but it was owned quite generally by the large families and people who'd come in from Europe and were entrepreneurs. They'd put a lot of money into universities to try to generate a sense of entrepreneurship. When I arrived there first in '69 the population was 15 million. Today it's over 30 million. This was not long ago.

Q: No.

LUERS: They almost doubled from the beginning of my first tour to the end of my period as Ambassador. That's huge.

Q: How stood relations with Colombia?

LUERS: Always bad.

Q: Why?

LUERS: Border countries. It's almost like Colombia was loved by the Spaniards and Venezuela was a poor sister of Colombia. The Conquistadores favored Colombia over

Venezuela. Venezuela's rich, Colombia's poor. Colombia had the guerilla movement. Venezuela got rid of theirs. So the difference in the wealth level caused huge numbers of Colombians to emigrate. A major source of relief of Colombia's population growth was to have them immigrate to Venezuela and Venezuelans didn't like to have Colombians everywhere. They were just doing the low level jobs, but in a 15 million population in the early days there were probably a million of them who were Colombians. So there were a lot of historic and current reasons why they didn't get along. Colombians speak better Spanish, their capital was in the mountains, and their education level tended to be higher. They were always favored by the Spaniards; it was the preferred place for the Spaniards. So many of them have good educations in Spain whereas Venezuela had these dictatorships; up to the post-war period Venezuela really had dictatorship. Pérez Jiménez, of course, was most famous. There were many historical reasons why Colombia and Venezuela were such troubled neighbors. There were moments when presidents would get together and swear brotherhood, but it was not very convincing. They never went to war.

Q: Was Castro messing around in this time as you were there as political counselor?

LUERS: No. As I told you, when I arrived, Caldera had just become president. He was following a policy of pacification. The residue of the guerilla movement that had been launched by Castro and had been supported by Castro was drying up, both because the economy was improving in Venezuela and there wasn't a base for a violent rebellion against the government, and because the policies of the government were to absorb them into the system. So there was no reason for that. Meanwhile, in Colombia, the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).* The revolutionary movements had been promoted by Fidel.

Q: Well, then were we on good terms with both political parties?

LUERS: Yes, absolutely. Very good terms. I mean I think we were a little more leery of the Christian Democrats because the Christian Democrats were seen as occasional allies of the communist. They had a different agenda. They were more socially committed, which turned out not to be the case when Caldera became president, but they had an agenda which looked to Washington like less trustworthy than the Social Democrats in terms of our objective. The social Democrats, when I was there, were run by the party itself, not the presidency, but the party was run by a man named Carlos Andrés Pérez who I got to know very well when I was political counselor. He was a fascinating man. But he also was very much taken care of by the oligarchs, I think. Although he had a sort of radical voice, he went along and he later became president. And Caldera, who came with a social agenda, never fulfilled it. But over the time I was very close to all the leaders in both parties and believed that they changed every other time. One time the Christian Democrats would win, another time the Social Democrats would win. They continued that exchange, and they would each come in and steal as much as they could when they were in. I guess I wasn't as aware of this at the time. What I did know mainly was that the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats didn't train their party people like the Mexicans did. The PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional

Revolutionary Party)) in Mexico always had good technocrats. They had some of the best technocrats in Latin America. Even though they were sort of a dictatorial party and remained control of that country for 40 years, they trained their people well. When you met a Mexican minister of finance or minister of petroleum, he was usually well trained in England or in the United States and had had a first class education and understood better what their jobs were. In Venezuela that never took place. Everybody wanted to stay in Venezuela. They didn't want to go out and lose their internal political structure and political role and go off to Harvard and spend some time learning something. That was something I realized was a real weakness of these two parties. There was no country in Latin America that had this two party structure.

Q: Did you develop this feel for art at that time?

LUERS: Well, I think I told you, my feel for art began during my life in Italy.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I spent a lot of time looking at paintings. And my first wife was a painter.

Q: I was asking about your feel for art?

LUERS: Oh, yeah. I guess that it began on my own before I married my first wife and it really crashed on top of me when I was Italy and I visited all over Italy. I saw most of the museums, I learned a lot about paintings, I read a lot and I wrote a few things about paintings early on. It became a very influential player in how I was attracted to Italy. Then when I was in Moscow I got to know a lot of painters there, which I think I talked about. Then we came back to Washington and I worked hard during that time, but we were regulars at the various museums and I was particularly close to the Phillips Gallery. When I went to Venezuela there wasn't a great deal of painting there at that time, but we did collect a few of the primitive artists. I got to learn about a whole group of painters of "kinetic art" led by Jesus Sota. You probably don't know any of these people.

Q: No, I don't.

LUERS: They were painters who were quite remarkable for Latin America. There was a woman named Sofia Imber deRangel and her husband Carlos who became good friends. She was the major art critic in the newspapers and she started a museum when I was there and I helped her a little bit. She was really quite brilliant. She was a Bessarabian Jew who'd become very much a Venezuelan. She was one of their leading lights. And her husband was just a remarkable man. He wrote a book called From the Good Savage to the Good Revolutionary. So I guess I did get quite involved in the art world there in my travels I would see a lot of the primitive artists.

Q: How'd you find the press there? Or the media?

LUERS: I spent a lot of time with them. They were weak in investigative reporting. They tended to be quite ideological. Many of them had a sort of Marxist framework to the way they thought. It's true all over Latin America. It was sort of a black and white thinking about who we were and what we stood for. It's my inclination, but I spent a good deal of time with some of the major writers, one of which was Teodoro Petkoff who I told you about. I guess I found them really weak in good investigative reporting, in telling a story that was not just one that was told to them, but dug into what this issue was all about.

Q: Mm-hmm. What about the universities? So often the universities in Latin America are bastions of Marxism — not the Catholic ones but the public ones. How was it in Venezuela?

LUERS: Same. The Central University in Caracas, the largest university, was a public university and there were quite often demonstrations there that had nothing to do with what was going on in the rest of the city. They sort of kept it boxed up in a certain sense and you always saw a lot in the paper about them because there was a leftist bias to the whole thing. It wasn't good for an American diplomat to go there. It was not thought to be a safe place to be. And yet I did get very much involved in some of the private universities. We were building a couple of business schools, which the Ford Foundation and others were funding. They were very helpful in developing the beginnings of an entrepreneurial class. Then there was the Mendoza family who started a large private university. The Mendozas are sort of the mini equivalents of the Rockefellers. They were a wonderful family of philanthropists. They put a lot of money into education. They were players and their university was one of the best ones.

Q: You left there when?

LUERS: As political counselor?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I left in 1973.

Q: What was your impression when you left Venezuela? Where was it going?

LUERS: I guess my impression was that there's a country that is unique in South America and that it does not have a lot of elegant pretensions. There's wealth, but it's not regal wealthy. It's not like you saw at Colombia, which I'd been to many times during that period. It was sort of down to earth and open and easily accessible in that it had the gifts of practically any mineral you want. They had iron, they had oil, and probably a great more wealth underneath. They were going to be for the foreseeable future not only a democracy but a democracy which would be friendly toward the United States. It was my first Latin American country to live in and I may have had an overdose of hope and belief, but I was quite optimistic about the country.

Q: OK, well I think this is probably a good place to stop.

LUERS: Sure, OK.

Q: And we'll pick this up in 1973?

LUERS: '73, yeah.

Q: Where did you go?

LUERS: I went back to be deputy head of Soviet Affairs. I was going to be the director of Soviet Affairs.

Q: So you couldn't get out of it?

LUERS: Well, I didn't get out of it, but then I was there for about six months, maybe it was a year, and Tom Pickering, who was Executive Secretary of Henry Kissinger who had just been appointed Secretary of State, asked me to be the Deputy Executive Secretary.

LUERS: Yeah. Petkoff was a Venezuelan whose mother was the first female doctor in Venezuela. His father was Bulgarian. Petkoff was very left and he was probably a communist at the time. After the revolution in Cuba he went to Cuba. Fidel put him and his brother, Luben Petkoff, on a little boat and sent them off in 1960 or '61 to start the revolution in Venezuela. He thought that was the most obvious place to begin; it was close to Cuba and he thought there was a possibility of pulling this off. I spent four or five hours just the two of us, Fidel and myself talking about his interventions in the world. It's quite a story itself. But I told him I'd known that he launched the two of them to begin the revolution in Venezuela. I told him Teodoro had become my friend. He said, "you went for the wrong man," because Luben, the other brother, continued to be a strong leftist and loyal to Fidel, whereas Teodoro converted.
of the various dimensions.

Q: Well, let's go back to Venezuela and --

LUERS: When I was there, the first issue was democracy. The second was pacification. The third was oil, it was always oil. Venezuela was then, and always has been, a major exporter in oil to the United States. The oil company, Pedeveza, had just been established. It was a corporate company that the Venezuelans were trying to beef up and strengthen. So during the time I was there the oil company had become a big issue for the United States. How do we help them professionally, how could it be managed better? U.S. oil companies were there still. They all had concessions and were all making their own money. So the relations between the oil companies and the new state oil company were complicated. In fact, the Venezuelans were hiring away some of the best of the private international companies to work in their new office.

Q: We're talking about the first time.

LUERS: That's right. This is all the first time. Caldera was an independent thinking Christian Democrat. The United States, particularly the CIA, had grave concerns that behind every Christian Democrat was a commie. They had not been as friendly to the United States as the Social Democrats had been, particularly in places like Chile. So in places where there was a Social Democratic Party, a Christian Democratic Party. The language of the Christian Democrats sounded more like they were left and undermining private capital and more idealistic in terms of how society should be managed, which I sort of took to. The agency didn't. The agency still felt a grave distrust of Caldera and his group.

Anyway, I got to know all the political parties. The leader of the Social Democratic Party was then Carlos Andrés Pérez who became a very close friend. He'd been Minister of Interior under the previous Acción Democratic parties. I found him just one of the most fascinating political animals I've ever met. He just knew more than any other political about the political life of Venezuela. He was all over the country. He talked on the phone, went to leaders and his colleagues all over the hemisphere. And, in fact, the reason I was sent back by Carter as ambassador was because everybody knew about my very close relationship with Carlos Andrés Pérez, and they sent me back as ambassador when Carter was trying to work with Carlos Andrés Pérez to urge Somoza to leave Nicaragua. They wanted to work out a deal to persuade him -- very much like we're trying to do in Libya but without using armed forces -- that he should leave with his family. They said he'd be taken care of, that he didn't have to worry about the security and that we would find an interim government that would prepare for elections. So I was sent there principally because of my relationship with then President Carlos Andrés Pérez. What I came to know in Venezuela were things that later played an important role in my relationship with Venezuela.

Q: This is your first period there, which was in the '70s?

LUERS: It was '69 to '73.

Q: '69 to '73. Were we concerned about the political climate there regarding Castro?

LUERS: No, as I say, the residual of the insurgency was still around in these Petkoffs. And there were about three or four unconnected groups in the mountains who claimed to be insurgents. But by the time Caldera came in, I think we'd overcome our concerns about whether Castro would make any significant inroads. One is the fact that Venezuela's so much richer than all the other countries in the region. They were buying themselves the middle class by employing the government. And they'd begun a process of trying to distribute money mainly through hiring people into the government, which could afford it. So I think the agency and some people in the United States still felt that Venezuela was vulnerable because they'd been a target of Fidel early on. We were conscious of that. But as a major political issue it was not a problem. Indeed, we felt that Venezuela was sort of the bulwark of how Latin American political systems could develop.

Q: Well, was -- I'm going to get my term wrong -- revolutionary theology --

LUERS: No, revolution theology, that was sort of a Colombian phenomena. It never really took hold in Venezuela. One is Venezuela doesn't have the religious traditions. Plus, in Colombia there'd been 20 years of what they called the Violencia. And because of the violence that had been ideological and social, Colombia went through just a terrible time after the Second World War, and they still are. It's the same sort of factor that is routed into the system. It was there that the priests developed this revolutionary theology, which was trying to compensate in a certain sense the violence with the religion. Some of those priests became quite radical, as you know.

And I think Ecuador had a little bit, and Peru. The intellectuals retained this at some level as a justification for overthrowing the dependency. This is a time when the dependency theory was involved among intellectuals. Of course the American intellectuals in Latin America were always very much on the left. The theory of dependency was that the whole hemisphere was going to become dependent on U.S. trade and economics assistance, and their economies were shaped not independently by their needs, but as dependents of the U.S. economy. So the sort of revolutionary theology combined with theory of dependence became sort of the player in our relations with Latin America.

Q: You've got Christian Democrats and you've got socialists and all. Did these parties have ties to European Party?

LUERS: Oh yeah. The Social Democrat Party in Venezuela, Acción Democrática, is one of the major Social Democratic parties in the world that was founded by Raul Betancourt, whom I knew quite well and who was the first president of democratic Venezuela. They had relations with the Social Democratic parties of Scandinavia and Sweden. They had relations with the Labor Party in England. There was a Social Democratic Party in France and Italy and particularly the Social Democratic Party in Spain, which Felipe Gonzalez eventually headed, was a strong supporter of Acción Democrática in Venezuela. They were throughout the Caribbean, and particularly in the Dominican Republic there was a strong Social Democratic Party. Chile had one and Peru had one, so the socialist internationals was a very strong player in global politics. There was nothing quite like it with any other movement, except for the communist movement.

The Christian Democrats had several strong points. First, there was a Christian Democratic Party in Italy, of course, that ran Italy from 1946 to the mid-'80s or late '70s. Their relationship was good with the Christian Democratic Party. There was a Chilean Christian Democratic Party, which was the second strongest of the Christian Democrats in the Western Hemisphere. There was never a Brazilian Christian Democratic Party, I don't think. There were some in Central America. There was an international group of Christian Democratic Parties, but they weren't nearly as strong as the Social Democrats. Each of the Christian Democrats has a different sort of ideological approach. The Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy were far more establishmentarian. The

Christian Democrats in Latin America tried to develop strong grassroots in sort of liberation theology idea.

Q: Was it easy in this first period of being a political officer? Could you go out and meet people?

LUERS: Everywhere. I saw everybody. I knew these former communists, I knew members of the Communist Party. I knew most of the journalists on the left. I knew a lot of the businessmen. I knew the leaders in both political parties and I traveled all over the country and got to know governors and incoming political leaders who were working in the interior.

Q: You did find yourself under constraints the way our political officers did in Italy when they couldn't talk to the communists?

LUERS: No, no, no. I never felt any constraint. When I was in Moscow I saw everybody and my boss at the time, Mac Toon, criticized me for seeing people. My mode of operations was not to resist seeing everybody. Anybody who'd see me, I'd want to talk to them.

Q: Who was your ambassador in Venezuela the first time you were there?

LUERS: McClintock.

Q: That's right.

LUERS: Yeah. This was his last post, I think. He's the one you mentioned in Lebanon who had the poodle.

Q: How was he as an ambassador?

LUERS: I was extremely fond of him, brilliant man. Spoke Spanish well, had a wife who spoke Spanish well. He loved his booze and he loved to travel with a lot of booze. He's quite elegant, dressed well and was a gentleman. He was really an old guard, at least in those guys. He was sort of a social dissident. When he felt like saying something he would do it. He liked to project an image of a person who was his own man and offend people a little bit, like he did with the dog. We were traveling together a lot, and we went to the jungle one time where you have the Yanomami Indians who I became very close to. They were an amazing group in the Amazonas in the southern part of Venezuela. There was one picture I took in which one of the Indians was shooting a bow and arrow next to our little tiny plane we were flown in on. It's a STOL (short take-off and landing), one of those planes that lands on short runways. When we were in the jungle, the two of us saw a totally nude Yanomami Indian shooting an arrow straight into the sky standing by our aircraft . McClintock asked me if I could give him a copy of the photo for his Christmas card, because he sent this Christmas card (which he called "Ad Astrum")all

over, which was typical to the way he did things. He drank so much that he would occasionally do and say things that were offensive.

Q: Did you find yourself trying to smooth things over when he did --

LUERS: Oh yeah. Part of my job, you know.

Q: Did you get any presidential or big congressional visits or anything like that while you were in Venezuela?

LUERS: I had a number when I was ambassador. But the first time the Parliamentary Union would come.

Q: IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union), yeah.

LUERS: Yeah. International Parliamentary Union. You'd get to meet a lot of people at those. I was sort of in charge of those visits and one of the first times I met Lee Hamilton -- remember Lee Hamilton?

Q: Oh yes, yeah, from Indiana?

LUERS: Yeah, he's from Columbus, Indiana. This was in the early, early '70s and he and I became very close friends. One of the reasons I went to Wilson Center now is because he asked me to come. He stepped down as director. He was there for 20 or 30 years. So I met a lot of congressmen during that period and parliamentarians from other parts of the world. The secretary of energy or the head of energy would come periodically. I think Frank Zarr came down. I should remember this. There were a lot of people that I generally was in charge of taking care of.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: Senators I guess -- Adlai Stevenson, who was a friend of mine, came, Adlai Junior, Adlai III.

Q: Was there really much interest or things were going well so we were concerned elsewhere?

LUERS: The first principle is there's very little interest in general in Latin America. It's more of a tourist experience than a substantive one. Even after Kennedy formed the Alliance for Progress there was supposedly a lot of government energy in South America, but the Congress and the cabinet members went down there only because they had to. So I would say that the first principle of U.S. government, both Congress and executive branch, is there's very little interest in Latin America. But they had to go. And the most important issue in Venezuela was first, oil and second, the Democratic system. A lot of Venezuelans went to school in the United States, very close relationships. So the cultural programs we ran were fairly active and educational program --

Q: In that period of time was Miami the shopping center for the --

LUERS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: I've talked to, I think it's Alexander or something in Ecuador, stopped Ecuadorian, you know, pushing too hard militarily by threatening to cut off the visas for the family of the military if they messed around. You can imagine what that did.

LUERS: Well, I'll give you an example of this. When I was ambassador again I was there during the Argentine British struggle over the Falkland Islands. The Argentines called them Malvinas and the British called them the Falklands, and there was a war. For a whole variety of reasons, particularly the Venezuelan concern about the British occupation of the Essequibo territory, which I told you about before, the Venezuelans almost took it back from the British. They have fury at the British Empire for taking that land presumably for them. So when the Argentines tried to get the Falklands back and sent their navy up there and got destroyed, the Venezuelans were energetic supporters of the Argentines. As a matter of fact, I've written a long article called "More Gaucho Than The Gauchos" because they became super patriots for Argentina.

During this time -- this is toward the end of my tour as ambassador -- things weren't going very well and you couldn't have many public demonstrations of support for the friendship between the United States and Venezuela. We're starting to see that. And at the same time I was trying to get Venezuela to have a Venezuelan pavilion in the new Epcot Center in Disney World in Florida. So long before the war started I'd set up this evening where Disney World was going to come in and make a presentation to the major figures in Venezuela. There were probably 100 people there. These are private sector people, some government people, social leaders and entertainers and everything. Disney came and they brought all these figures up, so here in the middle of this we go to this big auditorium and we're trying to persuade this group of people that they should support a Venezuelan pavilion at Epcot Center. It costs tens of millions of dollars. I thought there was a good chance of doing it. They came and they sang all the Walt Disney tunes, and everybody in the room was singing these tunes in English and they were jumping and hopping around. This is at a time when our relations ostensibly were at their bottom. But particularly in the upper class, the people who could travel to Florida, it didn't have any effect whatsoever on their attitude toward us.

Q: What was Castro doing in this time vis a vie Venezuela?

LUERS: Both after the Cuban Missile Crisis and during the late '60s as Castro began to take his revolution other places, he had made a deal with the Soviets that no Soviet weapons would appear in Central America or other parts of the hemisphere when he was supporting revolutionary movement. Even then, he was pretty clearly involved in Central America. He was close to the two big groups in Colombia. There was always something small in Ecuador and Peru. I think they'd failed in Bolivia. But there were the Tupamaros

who were all over the Southern Cone. They were in Uruguay and then they had offshoots of the revolutionary movement. They were a fairly widespread revolutionary activity.

When I met with Fidel we talked a lot about that period. He was very proud of the fact that nobody in Latin America really was as good a revolutionary as he was, and they couldn't pull off a deal. He was sort of guiding all these revolutionary efforts. He's quite open about it and I think he was telling me the truth to the extent that I knew from the time. But in Venezuela, Castro was not a significant problem.

Q: Was there any hangover --

LUERS: Let me say one thing. The Alliance for Progress had been founded in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis as a means of making sure that Fidel didn't become infectious throughout the hemisphere. So the whole pitch of the Alliance for Progress was to build institutions that could resist the left or insurgency movement. And the fact is, Venezuela was so rich we didn't have an AID program. We had an active CIA program, but not an active AID program. We did do some things with them, though, in their agriculture areas.

Q: Did we have a policy of keeping the Colombian and Venezuelan armies, military one -- pretty far down the line on the types of weapons they could purchase?
LUERS: Good point. I think I missed the point in my first talk about what the issues were. Military-to-military issues with Venezuela were a key component to U.S. relations, as they were in many Latin American countries, with the theory that if we have close relations with the military, the potential for the left taking over is reduced considerably. You saw that play out in the early '70s in Chile. It was really the military, U.S. military working with the Chilean Military, that overthrew the Allende government. Strong military relationships, strong intelligence relations and the Alliance for Progress were the core elements of US policy in Latin America during the cold war

Q: Yeah. What about our intervention -- it was early on, but we had a rather major intervention in the Dominican Republic in, was it '64?

LUERS: Johnson, yeah.

Q: Was that still rankling or was that a problem when you got to Venezuela the first time?

LUERS: You know, I think the U.S. interventionism decreased considerably during the '70s and '80s and, and did it rankle. Historically the U.S. attitude toward Latin America has always been one of sort of the Monroe Doctrine plus. By the '20s we were intervening repeatedly in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean particularly. I mean we had several interventions in the Dominican Republic. I guess I'd say it rankled as part of the general rankling that was in the nature of U.S. relations with Latin America. But that's mixed with also the fact that most people who wanted to study in universities went to the

United States, people still wanted to go to Florida, to Miami. It was always a mixed bag and it still is today, the sort of respect and admiration for the United States, and its fear.

Q: Was the pattern there that the public universities were often, at least the kids in them and a lot of the faculty, were pretty much to the left, the Catholic universities were to the right, and when they all graduated they all ended up kind of --

LUERS: In the same bag.

Q: In the same bag, yeah.

LUERS: Yeah. Well, we talked about that again before. I think, that's probably a good characterization.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: National University in Caracas was the hotbed of communist activity, insurgency activity, and in fact was the one place I rarely went. It wouldn't be good to see an American out there. Not because I was worried personably, I just didn't think it was a good thing to be seen out there. But there were some private universities and the Catholic university was strong. Not so much conservative, because students of Latin America generally are not very conservative, unlike the United States.

Q: Well, you left there in --

LUERS: '73.

Q: '73. And then what?

LUERS: I came back to be Deputy Head of the Office of Soviet Union Affairs because my goal was to be ambassador to the Soviet Union, and this was going to be part of the way to go. I was invited to be deputy director of a growing office of Soviet Union Affairs, and then I was going to be director of it. I was there for almost a year. As soon as I got back I worked on the Brezhnev/Nixon Summit in the spring of 1973. I left Venezuela early to do that, with Jack Matlock who later became ambassador to Moscow. He was head of the office and I was going to replace him. One class of the course that I'm teaching at Columbia is about that period of Nixon's relations with Brezhnev that was after investigations about Watergate and while he was really under the gun as a president. He decided that his relationship with Brezhnev was going to restore American belief that only he can manage the Soviets. That was an interesting summit. Then Kissinger, who was made secretary of state that summer, came in in September. They have a position called the executive secretary, which is the head of the staff of the secretary. The head of that invited me to come be his deputy. So I left Soviet Union Affairs rather quickly and in December I went to be deputy head of Kissinger's Executive Secretariat. I was there for two years.

Q: Kissinger at this point was the secretary of state.

LUERS: He became secretary of state in the late summer of ’73, just before the ’73 war.

Q: You want to talk about Henry Kissinger?

LUERS: If you’d like, sure.

Q: Yeah, please.

LUERS: Well, the executive secretariat is a position that supplies the basic staff support for all the principles in department of state, most particularly the secretary of state. It’s not his private staff, it’s the way Kissinger relates with the department. We had something called the line and then we had the operations center, both of which I helped oversee. The line was the young officers who would work to prepare to go with the secretariat on these trips. They would make sure all the briefing books and papers were prepared, and actually the assignment of what papers should be sent were through the line. The operations center was a 24-hour center at which you’d always have a staff by a Foreign Service officer with a military officer in the room. They had a large staff of people who would always be available no matter where the secretary was or where we were to pass messages back and forth. It was sort of unique in the sense that it was manned full time. The situation room in the White House, which is where a lot of decisions are taken, is not staffed like the operation center is. I guess there’s one in the Pentagon. But at that point it was the key central focus of current activity. So my relationship was not direct with the Secretary, I didn’t deal with him directly very often. He had Eagleburger and Jerry Bremer as his staff. They were sitting between me and the secretary’s office. The generalities I’d make about Kissinger as secretary of state were, first, that he was probably strategically the most able person I dealt with in my years with dealing with secretaries of state, from John Foster Dulles on. He probably was the best in terms of pulling the most out of the State Department. He liked professionals. He didn’t trust the department very much because of his time in the White House, and his general view was not to trust a lot of people. What he did was he had his own group around him and he would select the best of our group of the Foreign Service. Many of this group of Foreign Service officers Kissinger got to know and trust.

I watched him in the Middle East negotiations in ’73 to seek the disengagement of Israeli forces from the Sinai, and he was brilliant. One of my theories on him is that he’s best when he goes in with a subject he doesn’t know much about. On Europe and arms control in the Soviet Union he had a lot of biases, which he couldn’t overcome. He kept blinding himself by his German upbringing and his sort of perpetual anger at the Soviets. But on the Middle East, he went with very little knowledge. I mean he had instincts about the region and he had a lot of friends who knew about Israel, but he didn’t have a sort of structured knowledge of the region. He took the best of our Middle Eastern specialists, and there were some really first class diplomats there, and he would take them on his shuttles. He pumped them all the time, he’d always try to get information. That’s the scholarly side of him, the side that said, “I want to be successful.” He had all the assistant

secretaries and ambassadors learn how to take shorthand. So when he would have somebody go with him on a meeting, whether it was with Sadat or Golda Meir, Assad, the father of Assad, King Faisal or whoever, he would have an ambassador or an assistant secretary with him who took almost verbatim notes, including his jokes.

Amongst other things I was custodian of all these memoranda, because he didn't want anyone to see them. I would just be amazed to read the detailed reports and the humor he had and the way he, some would say conned, others would say charmed, but engaged each of these leaders to achieve our goals in the Middle East. He did it a lot with the professional help of people we had. I was quite proud of Foreign Service, whether it was in dealing with the Soviets, dealing with the Middle East, even dealing with Latin America on helping educate Henry on the details. He wanted to be educated. He knew that we weren't probably great policy formulators, but interacting with him, the Foreign Service could produce with him some good approaches.

The downside of Henry Kissinger is that I disagree with a lot of the things he stood for. He, he was very much supportive of the agency's work of covert operations. I think he managed the press in an odd way. He tried to manipulate them, so did everyone else did, but he was probably better at it than anybody else.

And he's very funny. He's a very funny man.

Q: Did you run afoul of him at all?

LUERS: At that time I didn't have many close dealings with him. My running afoul of him took place later. But I have run afoul.

That job is not a policy job. That job is a staff job. It's the only staff job I ever had. So you don't have many choices. I would arrive at six in the morning. I would work with the line to prepare a briefing for the Secretary when he came in, and we'd pull together the agency briefings and defense briefings in our own intelligence briefing. We would make sure that he had them when he came in at 7:30 or 8:00 or whenever it was. And we'd move the papers. We would brief him, make sure that people were paying attention and getting him information for his activities. My office was also for a while right next to the Deputy Secretary so we had to spend a lot of time talking to them — those jobs of the secretariat. There are three of them, the two deputies and executive secretary, and many of the senior people in the State Department would come to us because theoretically we knew everything and everything had to go through us, and we could brief them on what was going on. The specific story is probably not a story that has moments that are particularly surprising other than some of the things I'm going to write about, which are classified until I get them declassified.

The head of Soviet affairs, which I would later be, would come up to me and I would quietly show him the conversations that Kissinger had been having with Dobrynin or with Brezhnev. The memoranda of conversations would contain important background for senior policy officers in the Department. He'd meet with Arthur Hartman who was

then assistant secretary for Europe. And Arthur would do the notes, send them to Henry but not keep the copies. I believed that an important part of my job was to try to secretly keep the key people informed about what was being said in policy being made on the spot. Of course Kissinger feared we were doing that but it was also a helpful service to provide policy continuity.

Q: I've heard people say that Kissinger didn't really keep his ambassador in certain countries well informed of what was agreed upon. He has these notes and all. Where are they? Did he stick them in a file somewhere or how did he use these?

LUERS: Well, he, he used them for himself, for his close staff. He was a record keeper, he has tapes of virtually every conversation he had during the period. He approved that I was going to be assistant secretary for Latin America. I was told I would be by the assistant secretary who was then moving up to work as his undersecretary, Bill Rogers. From a phone call that Kissinger had with Brent Scowcroft, who was then national security advisor, Scowcroft said to Kissinger that I couldn't be, that the CIA wouldn't accept me as assistant secretary. They couldn't work with me because I had had several disagreements with the Agency in Latin America. A friend of mine was listening to the phone as they always did. There was always one of his staff people on the phone. Years later I confirmed with Brent Scowcroft that I had been blackballed by the CIA to become assistant secretary for Latin America.

Kissinger kept elaborate records and wanted them as accurate as possible. Henry is somewhat like Churchill, writing the history of the '70s, '80s, and '90s. It will be the best histories of those periods and it will play him in a very good light and he can throw out a lot of his memorandum. It's an art. I think he had the intention of defining what the issues were during his period as secretary of state, national security advisor, and even subsequently. So the narrative of the '60s, '70s, and '80s will be written by one of the great masters of history and policy. And he can draw on all these records.

Q: Well, the problem is you draw on the records, but that's after the — after the game is over.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: I was wondering, I mean, did you feel that he was holding his cards too close to his chest, or were others around you thinking this?

LUERS: I think it was part of the Nixon/Kissinger paranoia, distrust to everybody. The studies show that the way he handled the China opening is a metaphor for how little he wanted anybody to know what they were doing. When I was working on the summit meeting with Brezhnev in 1973 before I went to the Secretariat, I had a relatively big position in terms of department. I didn't have a clue what Kissinger intended to do. This was all worked out with Kissinger, the White House. Kissinger's Kissinger (as we called him) Helmut Sonnenfeld was the only one in the State Department who was really informed because he was the secretary's special assistant on the Soviet Union. As the

policy was being formulated you know very little, and then you learn about it. And then you don't have much input. I think generally that's what he did. In the case of the Middle East the record was kept mainly by these ambassadors and special advisors to him on the Middle East. They were people who knew it because they wrote those memoranda. Knowing my colleagues, they probably shared a lot with others. Henry wanted the exact record, and he has it. And how much of those have been used — I think, I think most of it now is available, but at the time his network knew.

Q: Well, I think there's something in my interviews that comes across. The principal, secretary of state or somebody, will say, or the president will say, "I don't want anybody to know about this, but we're going to do this."

And then that principal at a certain point will go and say to somebody, "Look, you really shouldn't know about this."

LUERS: They selectively choose who they're going to tell.

Q: Because the system doesn't work with just the people at the top having great ideas, but to make the damn thing work you got to get people to do certain things.

LUERS: I hope to write about the issue of how people come to decisions, how presidents come to core decisions they need to make, that they want to make with regard to an adversary. And transparency is one factor, you know, how many people do you let in. I would say that the record shows that most secretaries of state have not been very strong players in big policy. State Department's not been a big player. Most presidents have either depended on themselves or one or two close advisors in and around them. These are generalities and, of course, Kissinger's an exception. In a certain sense Baker is an exception. Dulles was an exception, but of course he just tied Eisenhower down, and once Dulles died Eisenhower was liberated. I have quotes from every president about their secretary of state and Department of State that show a level of paranoia about not trusting them, not wanting them to know. And so it, secrecy governs the way the White House works. And so it's not particularly Kissinger, although they took it to a high arch.

Q: I have a quote from an oral history, which we have in our collection. Norman Achilles was DCM. He was assigned during — Berlin maybe — this is '48 or so, when Jimmy Byrnes was secretary of state. They had a meeting with the Soviets and all. And Achilles, as a good Foreign Service officer, went back and had the notes of what was discussed and all typed up and all, and brought it to Burns. And Burns said, "What's this?"

He said, "Well, this is the note I'm sending back to the Department."

And Burns very carefully put it in his pocket and said, "I don't want those sons of bitches at the State Department to know what I'm doing."

LUERS: A lot of those quotes, I have a lot of them *(laughs).*

Q: What's always bothered me is that for many of our presidents, the people who often talk about Foreign Affairs and the head of CIA would come and talk to the president. Now, this is not the best person to do this because often there's the case of they come and say, for example, Chavez is a son of a bitch. Day after day the president is hearing what Chavez is doing. At a certain point it's like can't we do something about this? This sort of goes back to, "Won't somebody rid me of this troublesome priest?" or something. It can cause action, but the head of intelligence is not really always the most balanced person. Because their intelligence is—

LUERS: Well, Tenet was the one who used that famous expression, "It's a slam-dunk." And it turned out not to be 10 years later. But I think you're right. The problem now is that the role of intelligence has been increasing in covert operations rather than analysis. To the extent that I understand what's happened over the years, the CIA briefings of the president are less and less valid opportunities to discuss what's out there, what's happening, what's going on, rather than what are we going to do about it.

It's what are we going to do about it that's bothered me over the years. When you talk what are we going to do about it with the head of intelligence or with the secretary of defense or the chairman of joint chiefs, the option's usually covert operations or military action. The secretary — the subtitle of my book is going to be "Our Diplomatic Deficit" — we don't really have a way to get presidents to look first at the diplomatic option, rather than at the quick fix. Get rid of this guy or go in and take him out. This is an exaggeration, but it happens to be a supported fact — that it's easier to use military force and covert operations than it is to have patience and work it out diplomatically. Because most Americans see that as a powerless way to use the great American power. When Madeline Albright said, as we were going to Kosovo — she had decided we'd go into Kosovo with Clinton — she said, "Why do we have this military here if they're not going to be used?"

It's a mentality. The reason the Cold War was as successful as it was because we never used the Armed Forces against the Soviets. They were sitting in Europe, not being used. And it's precisely because it didn't get used that the Cold War ended.

Q: Yes. Now, going back a bit, when you were setting up these meetings between Nixon and Brezhnev, how did you -- how did we see Brezhnev at the time? Later on Brezhnev is seen as one of the many people in —

LUERS: Stagnation.

Q: Stagnation. He wasn't at the top of his form, but by the early '70s he was still going.

LUERS: Well, I think the good news and bad news about Brezhnev — after Khrushchev left and Brezhnev finally emerged as the person in charge, it took a couple of years to be convinced that he was really running the show — the good news was he wasn't probably going to be as volatile and unpredictable as Khrushchev. Khrushchev's approach to Berlin, Khrushchev's bold action that brought about the result of the Cuban Missile

Crisis, and some of the other steps he took which were crazy at a certain level, had left us feeling that you have an unpredictable player running the Soviet Union with thousands of nuclear weapons. Brezhnev was more or less the reflection of the bureaucratic immobility of the Soviet system to do anything really bold or stupid. And so during the Brezhnev period we began to get accustomed to the fact that you could more or less count on the fact that Brezhnev and his group would not take any crazy action against us. And so he was seen as — I hate to use the term dependable — but at least a viable interlocutor on managing our problems.

Our relationships with the Soviets were terrible during the Vietnam War, and Johnson's relations were bad with them. Johnson had tried to start talks with the Soviets. After he decided not to run again he made this effort with Kosygin at Glassboro when he still thought Kosygin was running the show. A group of us proved that wasn't true. I think I told you that story.

When Nixon and Kissinger came in, their priorities in dealing with the Soviet Union were to get to know Brezhnev and start this détente approach, which was to integrate everything. We had relations across the board with them. We tried to get more and more joint commissions in which we would have enough institutional relationships that you'd build into the nature of U.S./Soviet relations a plan by which we're dealing with agriculture, we're dealing with science, we're dealing with space, we're dealing with all these things. The theory of détente was that this would tie us both down and reduce the chance of conflict. Brezhnev at a certain level was a good partner for that, because I think that he was a bureaucrat and we wanted a bureaucratic way to approach détente.

The second priority was arms control. Not arms reduction, because arms control during the whole Kissinger period was based on mutual assured destruction, which meant you had to have more and more good offensive weapons, and as long as you both had very good offensive weapons you wouldn't go to war. So for Nixon, Brezhnev was a solid, unimaginative and responsive counterpart. Now it's interesting, Brezhnev had diaries. I've looked at some of the early versions of what he's written, transcripts of what he's written, and, and he seems to be far more interesting a leader and, and more powerful a thinker than, than any of us ever imagined. But we'll have to see how authentic these diaries are, but they're going to be published in the next couple years, I think.

Q: You're working on supervising the line and all that. What did you do after that?

LUERS: Well, then I was made deputy assistant secretary for Latin America. I served two years.

Q: How did that come about though. I mean if the CIA —

LUERS: The difference between assistant secretaries and deputy assistant secretaries for Latin America is that the assistant secretary gets daily briefings from the agency on what they're doing together in Latin America. And if you're in the group, you're invited in. If you're not, you're not. I was already a hot item, because my problems had been not in the

Eastern Europe or Soviet Union, but they'd been in Venezuela when I was political counselor. So the issue of my being a deputy assistant secretary never came up. It's not a presidential appointment so the CIA theoretically should not have a voice. It's an internal thing. Kissinger really knew nothing about that problem I had. Nobody needed to know about it. So I could be appointed to deputy. It was when I was going to be a presidential appointee, which is the assistant secretaries are I would have to go before Senate. That's when it became a problem.

When I was in Venezuela as political counselor I suddenly realized that the agency was quite a bit larger and more active in Venezuela than I had imagined. In fact, there were many political officers who were in my section who didn't work for me. It became clearer and clearer that there were more and more of them who, even though they weren't listed, would tell people outside that they worked for me.

It was driven home to me one time. The ambassador was having his Fourth of July, our big reception. The Italian consul, Gianni, was a very good friend of mine. He's as tall as I am and we played tennis together. We were quite close and he walked up to me with his guy with him at the embassy and said, "Do you know George something something?"

I said, "No, I never met him." And he was American clearly.

Gianni said to me, "Well, it's funny you don't know him because he works for you." And he laughed and so I let that go by. And then later Gianni told me that this guy works for the CIA and he's been trying to recruit him. Gianni was the number two person in the Italian embassy, of a NATO ally. I went and said to the station chief that I didn't think this is a good idea. Matter of fact, this is a very dumb idea.

Well, I get a call from Gianni about a month later. Gianni had had great fun sucking this inexperienced CIA operative in. He found it amusing to see whether this guy would try to recruit him. He called me up a few weeks later and said, "Look, I was asked last week if I'd become informant for the CIA." I told them no and we immediately prepared a protest from the Italian foreign minister to the secretary of state that this is completely unacceptable. This was a vulgar and unnecessary approach to a diplomat in the Italian service and we want an explanation. It became a mini-issue. Obviously this was the type of thing that wouldn't disrupt U.S./Italian relations, but it soured our working relationship in Venezuela. It was an unnecessary and stupid act, and I told the ambassador about it.

Ambassador McClintock called the station chief, Tom Flores, who was sort of a rough guy — a bit of a cowboy, I'd say a lot of a cowboy. He thought he was defending U.S. interests. He seemed to believe that whatever he did, if he did something serious it was for the good of the American government. I don't doubt that that's true, that he was convinced that was what he should do. But I doubt that he had the type of judgment that would understand the downside of making this kind of stupid mistake. The ambassador called Flores in with me sitting there and he had a piece of paper on his desk and he said, "This is a one-way ticket for you to get out of here. If I ever hear anything even close to

this, you're gone." I always knew that, so if there was something I wanted to do firmly I would go to the Ambassador after lunch. And he was firm.

We had several other run-ins with them due to actions that were taken by members of the CIA staff, which were just stupid. I need not relate them here. They were embarrassing and stupid. There were several shoot-outs that I had with the agency. I told them just don't do this, it's not going to get you anywhere, it's not going to add to our knowledge of what's going on in this country, and it, it's going to backfire big time with, with the political party.

Q: You're having a large CIA staff in Venezuela at the time. Seems to be a misuse of its resources.

LUERS: After the Cuban Missile Crisis — I guess I should write about this sometime — the Agency was given a big role.

Q: Have you read A Legacy of Ashes by Tim Weiner, which talks about the intelligence analysis that comes out of an organization which is so damn big.

LUERS: For me it's not the intelligence analysis. I think they do a fairly good job. They overweight very often with sources that are not really dependable. This whole situation in Iraq — the Iraqi the Germans had picked up. He was the basis for much of our conclusion. They just misjudged him, badly. After the invasion, we found out immediately that the guy was — what's his name? Crown? Cuball? Not Screwball. Was it Screwball? Curveball. It's Curveball. And so stupid. And that's the problem, is when they depend on —

Q: Well, the problem too was that it fit beautifully into the mindset of the president, the vice president who wanted to do something. And so they got something. And the CIA didn't have either the guts or the intelligence to go against the conventional wisdom by the people at the top.

Q: OK, so you're assistant deputy.

LUERS: I was deputy assistant secretary and my position covered Cuba, Mexico, the Caribbean, Venezuela, and Colombia. And the other deputy assistant secretary had Central America and the Southern Cone.

Q: OK, well I suppose let's talk about Cuba. Was this when you talked to Castro?

LUERS: No. I talked to Castro ten years ago, because it was when I went to Cuba. But I had a lot of dealings with Cubans. When I was in Venezuela I'd known several of the Cuban ambassadors and I talked to them. As I told you I'd talk to anybody if they would talk to me. I had dealt with Cuba when I was the junior officer at the Soviet desk just after the Cuban Revolution in '59. I was named the sort of Cuban desk officer in the

Office of Soviet Union Affairs. I'd had a lot of dealings with his "revolution" over the years, even when I was in the Soviet Union.

One of the first assignments as deputy assistant secretary in 1975 was to begin to set up an interagency task force. Bill Rogers, the assistant secretary, said, "We'd like you to have an interagency task force to look into how we would approach Cuba on diplomatic relations, I mean for a relationship." So I headed a group with the Treasury Department, the CIA, Defense Department, and Commerce. It was a group that was not talked about. We would meet and pose questions about the range of issues that you have to address if Kissinger were to decide that now's the time to make yet another and serious approach to Castro about relations. It was fascinating moment. We prepared our briefing books and they got bigger and bigger and more and more complicated. You know how bureaucrats are. We did uncover many important issues and opportunities since no one had ever tried this before.

The core issue that I tried to get at was — and I believe to this day — that you couldn't do this piecemeal. You had to go to Fidel and you had to say, "Look, do you want to regularize our relationship or not? If you do, we do. We've got to work together to change the sanctions and the restrictions on trade with you. And to get there we have to do a lot of it; you have to help us. Let's build a strategy. If you want to, if this is in your interest, we'll follow through." Castro always had a big mouth about the absence of relations being because of us, but that position was essential to keeping him in power. And that's the way I wrote it.

Then on Cuba, probably in early '76, unbeknownst to me, the assistant secretary, Bill Rogers, was using these suggestions. He and Larry Eagleburger who was then working directly with Kissinger, were meeting periodically with representatives of Cuba, Alarcón, and several other people who were Cuban representatives. I was never included in those talks. Again, partially they didn't trust me, I'm sure, because I was a Foreign Service officer. I felt OK about that. Historically, I read a lot about it, and I went to a conference just the other day in which I learned things I never knew at the time. I'm not hung up by the fact that I was doing --

Q: It's not that these things sometimes get personal when they didn't include me. You know, the feeling — how could they exist without my knowing? But the point is if somebody is working on something and they are not told what is going on — this is Kissinger again and again, going to the Soviet Union and not telling the ambassador! This is bad stuff.

LUERS: Whether it's bad or not, I don't know. I've been over and over in my mind on this. I do believe that they wouldn't have made the mistakes with Castro had they asked me, but they didn't. I gave them my thinking and they went ahead anyway on their own terms. I'm convinced that the China opening, which was done without — I mean Kissinger went to China without even telling the secretary of state, which is unbelievable, right? But it worked. They pulled it off, they pulled it off brilliantly.

Q: Part of the thing was that the Chinese wanted it. It's not the manipulation of a canny secretary of state. It's canny Chinese and canny Americans —

LUERS: Who wanted to get a deal done. Nonetheless, it's a model. Whether they could have included Secretary Rogers — the State Department was opposed to it, you know. Most State Department people thought the opening to China was outrageous. Historically, the State Department's view has often been wrong.

The first chapter of this book I'm writing is about Roosevelt. Roosevelt, when he said I want to open relations with the Soviet Union in 1933, the State Department — Cordell Hull was then secretary of state — knew nothing about it. He asked Kelly, who was the deputy secretary or undersecretary, to write him a memorandum. This memorandum was a classic case of you shouldn't do this, Mr. President, with the Soviet Union until they agree to the following things, which is basically until they've unraveled communism and made themselves a democratic country, which has freedom and religion and everything else, we won't have relations with them. Roosevelt said, "Rubbish." He got so fed up with the State Department for being negative about this that he eventually arranged for himself to see the Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov in the White House and he arranged for this meeting at a time when Cordell Hull would be in Montevideo at an OAS (Organization of American States) meeting. Cordell Hull didn't miss the snub that he'd received. This is in the first year of his being secretary of state. He was secretary of state for Roosevelt for longer than any man has ever been secretary of state. He kept being cut out, and Roosevelt wanted it that way. He wanted to run his own show and I bet that our foreign policy during the Roosevelt years were better because of it. I wish he'd had somebody in office that would have been capable of helping him, but he had something short of disinterest and contempt at certain levels for the role the State Department played.

I am very interested in the issue of presidents and secretaries of state. At one point in 1942, Hull goes to Roosevelt and says, "Mr. President, why don't you include me in the War Committee? You have a war committee and you have people from the White House, you have your friends there and you meet with the head of the Air Corps of the Army and with Navy, and you meet with the secretary of war, and you meet with the OSS (Office of Strategic Studies), but you do not include me in these meetings. I can't go to those meetings."

He said, "Well, you're not involved, right? This is not your issue. We're fighting a war."

And Hull made the argument, "Wait a minute. The political implications of the war we're fighting, which will end someday, are profoundly important for U.S. interests." He said, "For instance, the UK foreign secretary gets to join Churchill."

Roosevelt responded, "But that's a different structure of government." Roosevelt kept Hull out the whole time and Hull did not attend any of the high meetings with Churchill and Stalin. That's sort of the way things have gone ever since.

Q: An interesting thing is the Military had everything in its control because of the war and what had captured and all, and then in '38 all of a sudden it turned to the Foreign Service and said, "Here it is." Luckily, we did have some pretty good people.

LUERS: But the politics following the Second World War were established in Yalta, in, you know, in --

Q: '45.

LUERS: -- created, created the agenda that really gave birth to the Cold War. And, they didn't have diplomats for them. One career diplomat, Chip Bohlen, joined because he spoke Russian and most importantly because he was a friend of Harry Hopkins

Q: An interpreter I think more.

LUERS: Anyway, so let's go back to -- you've heard enough of my stories.

Q: OK, well let's see --

LUERS: So, so when I'm assistant secretary, that's one of the main things I have. I'm managing relations with Venezuela because I know it so well. And at one point there was a, an allegation when, when President Carlos Andrés Pérez, this friend of mine, becomes president of Venezuela for the first time. It's alleged by somebody that he'd been an informant for the CIA. And I have to state as -- as acting assistant secretary for Latin America the press wants a statement from me as to whether he had been or not been employed by the Agency. And I suspected that he had had a relationship with the Agency but had no proof, so I had to deny the allegations. I found a wording that, that, you know, made it comfortable to me that I wasn't outright lying, but it was -- it was one of the more memorable moments, because I try never to sort of do that in my business.

Q: Panamericana.

LUERS: Yes. I dealt with clearing the way through Panama and Colombia for the Panamericana Highway that was to stretch along the West coast and we needed the stretch between Panama and Colombia, which is --

Q: Still not finished.

LUERS: No, it's the fact that Colombia has the aftosa, the hoof and mouth disease. And at least in those days there was concern a highway that would allow cattle to go north without infecting all the cattle of Central America and North America with this disease. That's at least ostensibly the reason.

Q: Well, what about Mexico? I mean this is a big problem, I mean lots of issues with Mexico.

LUERS: Well, again, I, I got to know Mexico quite well and I spent a lot of time on the border. I went to Mexico City many times and it was probably the biggest issue I was dealing with. But it wasn't only immigration. It was the beginning of the drug war, it was the whole -- the whole question of our relations, because in those days the Foreign Ministry was the hot bed of anti-American sentiment and -- which changed dramatically under Salinas. But during that time there was just a built in hostility at a certain --

Q: The way I've seen it from people I've talked to is that almost all the agencies of both sides, the police, the law enforcement, get along swimmingly on both sides of the border --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- and they've allowed the Foreign Ministry --

LUERS: To be --

Q: -- to be sort of the playpen of the left.

LUERS: Yes. And that is a truth, that's exactly true. But anyway, I spent a lot of time there and I, I've gotten to know -- I've known most of their presidents over many years, even after I left I still got to know them. I never was very big on tourism. I'd go to Mexico City and I'd go to the border. I'd meet Mexican officials at the border.

Q: But OK, what were the, the issues that you were particularly concerned with in Mexico during this time?

LUERS: Well, when I -- I like to say that I would -- I would testify at subcommittees at the House of Senate on issues related to Mexico. And I would hear the chairman of the committee saying, "Mr. Assistant Secretary, you must admit to this committee that drugs is the single most important issue we have in Mexico." Then you go to another committee, "Mr. Secretary, you must admit before this committee that immigration is the most issue." Then I would hear from another committee that you must admit that petroleum and energy is the most important issue.

So each of the committees had its own important issue. We had immigration, drugs, border management, water, energy. And depending on which subcommittee you were on you thought that was the single most important issue and you've got to do something about it now. And the, the overall structure of our relations is so complicated and there's so many intimate issues that depending on where you are in the Congress that you think that intimate issue is the most important. So -- and I saw it at the time. I said, "The only way we're going to deal with this is to have an overall relationship because Mexico/U.S. relations are so complex and so unnerving for individual politicians that we have to have a way to think about it overall." And of course I, I never would have thought about the North American Free Trade Agreement that came so much later., you know, idea, but that was sort of there, it was sort of what I thought you had to deal with. And it, it helped by

looking at the relationship as a whole rather than piecing it. But still today, the division -- each of the members of Congress and really the, the media pick their issue as overriding. And it's difficult to see it as a, as an integrated relationship, which is problematic, going to give us all sorts of different problems. But unless you have the capacity to deal with the government and the private sector in an integrated way and live with the fact that we're going to have this complex, interdependent relationship, you can't deal with each of them piecemeal. And so the relationship with Mexico for me was a series of, of managing individual committees that had their obsession, you had to get out and do something about this, this or that or some -- and frankly, there was a very bright man on Carter's domestic council in the WH -- Stu Eizenstat was, was the new policy person for Carter. And he and I actually worked a lot on looking at an integrated way to think about Mexico and in fact it grew, it eventually grew into NAFTA many years later..

Q: Central America's pretty well off the radar?

LUERS: I didn't have Central America. The Southern Cone DAS had Central America since he'd served in two or three – it was Hugh Ryan.
Q: Did you have the islands?

LUERS: I had the islands,.

Q: Did they play much of a role or? I guess Jamaica must have been a --

LUERS: Jamaica was --

Q: -- a pain in the neck once --

Q: Yeah, the --

LUERS: Jamaica had a charming, brilliant and a real problem from the Left, Prime Minister, Michael Manley.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Manley had become the spokesperson for the third world complaints about the United States. And I did get to know him pretty well. The US aluminum companies (ALCOA) managed bauxite there in those days. Jamaica was running out of bauxite I guess because it was a big -- it was a big exporter, bauxite, which is helpful for them and for us. But there was this, this radical movement there, which was supporting Michael, but not really part of his political. And I went down to see Manley one time and he said -- and I knew him reasonably well and I, and I -- he's just a fascinating human being and dreadful prime minister, you know, he just screwed up the country terribly, until his last -- the last time he's prime -- I think he was prime minister three times. But last time he, he -- I think he, he began to understand what he'd done wrong. But one time he said go out and meet this group, and it was outside of -- it was outside of Kingston and I went out to

see them. And he knew that I was a sucker to that type of thing, and I went out and I met with this radical group.. And I we had a meeting and we were all sort of longhaired --- dreadlocks. And they were all heavily into drugs I think and they were almost the epitome of the reggae extreme example in those early days. And really at a certain level amusing, but quite hostile, you know, toward why was I coming to see them. I said, "Because Michael asked me to come see you." And, and we had a fairly candid conversation, to say the least, about U.S. relations with Jamaica.

And I went to see the American Ambassador after my meeting and the ambassador said, "Don't you dare do this," but I had already done it. And the next morning all the conversation comes out in the press. And it's not -- it turns out not to be very flattering toward me, and you know, it had been a -- it'd been a mistake that I'd made and, and Manley sort of apologized to me for putting me into that situation, but the ambassador was furious. The ambassador was a very conservative political appointee who, you know, who would never talk to any of these people. But I, I'd had -- it was, it was a fascinating moment.

I also knew Trinidad and the -- we would go there and they had a lot of oil and they felt that they were -- that they'd always been one of the strongest of the countries in South America. I'd been Guyana desk officer, I knew them. I came to know -- I didn't know -- I didn't do much with Haiti, but I was sort of -- Jamaica was the big one, and Cuba.

Q: Did --

LUERS: And Puerto Rico.

Q: Well, Camp _____, Puerto Rico, but --

LUERS: But I went there. I was sent there several times to represent the U.S. government on --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: -- when we shut down one of our big Navy bases.

Q: Yeah. In fact, I talked to somebody who had the Caribbean and was also made Puerto Rico desk officer. Now what the hell -- I mean Puerto Rico's part of the United States. You'd think --

LUERS: Well, it's a complicated part of the United States.

Q: But nobody else is looking at it.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Nobody --

LUERS: No, we spent a lot of time on this issue.

Q: And somebody's --

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: -- it's yours.

LUERS: No, absolutely. No, we -- the Puerto Rican issue, because they -- the Hispanic dignity of the Puerto Ricans keeps them from being a state, but Muñoz Marín established this unique relationship we have with them, and we continue to sort of be -- want to be separate, but with us, you know the Commonwealth.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Well, I'm looking t the time and this is probably a good place to stop.

LUERS: Good, all right.

Q: And we can pick this up the next time. You're where? You're off to the Soviet Union or, or -- where did you -- I mean after you finished a year of assistant secretary?

LUERS: No, I went -- I, I was two years as deputy assistant secretary. And then when Cater came in -- and there's some interesting stories then -- and I, I then was assigned deputy assistant secretary for Europe, which got me back on my Soviet track because I still wanted to go to Moscow as ambassador.

Q: OK, so we'll pick this up in '78?

LUERS: This is --

Q: '77.

LUERS: Well, it was Spring, '77.

Q: '77.

LUERS: I went to be --

Q: When Carter came in.

LUERS: Deputy assistant secretary for --

Q: You're deputy assistant secretary for --

LUERS: For Europe.

Q: For Europe.

LUERS: I managed U.S./Soviet relations and Eastern Europe and I've got some crazy stories.

Q: OK, well we'll --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: We'll get those.

LUERS: OK.

Q: Today is the 21st of October, 2011 with Bill Luers. And we're 1976, Carter administration comes in and you're what? And you take the job of what?

LUERS: I came in as, as, as Deputy Assistant Secretary -- I was acting Assistant Secretary for Latin America when Carter came in. And I had -- I'd been deputy and then when the Carter administration came in Harry Shlaudeman was the Assistant Secretary. And Harry was -- been involved with some, some issues on human rights that at least they thought he was involved with, so they wouldn't talk to him. So I -- they -- I just -- they told me to be in charge of Latin America, and then Harry went down to an office in the bowels of the building. Although still theoretically the Assistant Secretary, he didn't function as that. And then when the Carter administration actually came in I think they made me the acting, the acting Assistant Secretary, and I had that job for about six months.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: And it was a period of turmoil because Carter came in and, and with a quite strong bias with regard to human rights and changed really quite dramatically our relations with some of the countries in Latin America.

Q: Well, did we -- because I'm trying to capture the -- not only what we did, but sort of the culture of the State Department. Could you talk about how you felt about the human rights thing? I mean this is big stuff. I mean, I was in Seoul, Korea and we thought, you know, this is all very nice, but we've got the North Korean city there with a million men about 25 miles away, could do something and don't mess around with this human rights stuff. This was happening all over. How did you and maybe your colleagues feel when this came? Was this a --

LUERS: Well, I think in a -- in a funny way I was a little different from my colleagues, because I had been interested in this issue and, and, you know, I think I mentioned to you that I met Wendy in early '76. And she worked for Amnesty International.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: And this was during the time of, Pinochet still was around, and the, the public attitude toward the government was very negative, toward Pinochet on the part of the American people was very negative, and on my part because I never had to deal with him. And I felt we were doing the wrong thing. So when I came in I had a -- on the one hand, let's not overdue it. On the other hand, we needed, we needed better balance. And I think when, when the Carter administration came in I was -- I'd been thought of as the sort of liberal in the Republican administration of Gerald Ford, and slightly distrusted for that. And then when the Carter administration, I was, I was seen as, as Henry Kissinger's right-hand hatchet man, you know. And so the perception of me was a difficult one. I basically was the same person, but was as too conservative for the Democrats and too liberal for the Republican administration.

Q: Pat Derian?

LUERS: Pat Derian came in, and she -- I was there that first meeting of Assistant Secretaries when the new Secretary of State Cy Vance had a meeting in the State Department. And I was representing Latin America. And I'd been to a number over the years when I was in the Executive Secretariat. And this is the morning Assistant Secretaries' meeting. And for the first time, I think there were four women at the table. And it was a -- immediately it was a different culture. You could see that it was a different culture. And Pat was there. And Cy gave her a lot of room to talk. And the message was quite clear at the -- Warren Christopher was the Deputy Secretary, and Chris was determined that the human rights policy would be installed and it would be implemented thoroughly and radically. And I guess one of the things that sort of struck me as interesting was that the ambassador in Paraguay, George Landau, who later became -- replaced me in Venezuela immediately got the word on the new policy. He began to send in messages about being tough on Paraguay. Whereas he had been advocating getting them some helicopters to fight their, their counterinsurgency work. Immediately, he, he came in and he was opposed to it. And so he, he picked it up very quickly.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: And Landau. And it was interesting how many ambassadors got the word and how many didn't *(laughs)*. And the fact is that some were really ready to go, whether it was -- whether it was opportunism or something they'd been waiting to do anyway, I don't know.

Q: Well, you know, one of the -- I think a prime example of that period in Latin America was in Argentina, where you had -- I think the ambassador was Terry Todman, I think.

LUERS: No -- yes, he was.

Q: And you have -- I've interviewed Tex Harris.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Who was down there on the, sort of on the, you know, meeting the mothers of the disappeared and all. And he would go down and take names and get --

LUERS: Right.

Q: And he was, you might say with a policy, but the embassy didn't like this. I mean the problem, as I noted in Seoul too, you know, it sounds great, but sometimes you've got somebody else to consider. I mean we in Seoul had a real thing. We had, you know, close to, you know, a catastrophe if the North Koreans decided to, to strike. And so we were concerned about that. But the -- there were human rights problems, probably not as bad as in a lot of countries, but we had human rights problems.

LUERS: Well, I, I, you know, I understand exactly what you're saying. And I was -- from my standpoint, for example, of the Soviet Union, which, which I went. I went to be Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe from Latin America, and I was in charge of Soviet and Eastern Europe. And for me the primary issue was to avoid nuclear war. And if the -- if human rights in the Soviet Union were going to -- if our concern over that was going to obstruct relations with, with the Soviet Union on arms control, which it was doing, you know, because of the Jackson-Vanik and lot of other congressional biases. Then I thought this was, you know, it was an overdone policy. The fact is, there is something to it, because first it was clear to me that the American people felt that a -- the language of human rights was important. So I think many presidents have made human rights a pillar of their foreign policy, in part to get the American people to stand with them on difficult decisions. But it all -- it has also carried too far in a number of cases that I experienced. In Latin America, I mean -- and yet, the -- ironically, early on President Carter didn't take into account this human rights issue with regard to Somoza, with regard to the Shah of Iran. I mean he, he completely neglected to pay attention, in cases where it could have made a difference. I mean our policy toward the Shah was, you know, up, up until the time he was overthrown was he was our pillar of strength and democracy in the Middle East. And, and of course he wasn't, and we just didn't read the problems that he, that he had on it. So I -- my own sense is that, having been through many transitions at that time, I did what I could to be who I was and deal with the policy as it was stated. And many times I just said to Chris, Warren Christopher, and to Pat, that I just disagreed with their proposal to turn around policies with countries that were important to us. Yet I did think many policies in Southern Cone had to be changed because of repressive governments who seemed out of control in killing their people. Argentina was one of worse. I mean there was a terrible period in Argentina. I did feel that US policy toward Pinochet's Chile

had been and still was a major blot on American foreign policy. I believed that correcting U.S. policy toward these two countries where the US had been complicit in the repressive military governments was essential I think that was one of the first things that was done.

Q: Did you feel the heavy hand of Congress on you while you were doing this in this very early period?

LUERS: Yes. There was one case. I don't know if I've told you about this case. Jaime Lavin Farina had been a colonel in the Chilean Air Force and had then been named Deputy Foreign Minister. He came on a leader grant from the US Embassy in Santiago on Chile's Tall Ship that entered NY harbor in January 1977 just before Carter came in. And he was on leader grant. The embassy had said they wanted to come up here. And the Congress and some of the human rights organizations had become convinced that Lavin Farina had been one of the leaders of the torturing element in the Air Force Academy in Santiago. And during the earlier part of the Pinochet regime he had been upgraded from being an Air Force Officer to being a Deputy Foreign Minister. And the Congress sort of wanted him out, didn't want him to be on a leader grant. And I said, "Well, we don't have proof of this." And this little case study is sort of for me the first real awareness I had of the problem we were going to be facing. And I said, "We have no evidence, and if anybody can give me evidence that he actually had been a torturer," but the embassy assures me, the American embassy in, in Santiago assures me he wasn't. And they know it. And this is all a bunch of propaganda from the U.S. Congress and from the left-wing congressmen and from -- and from the human rights groups. Particularly Amnesty International. And so we, you know, I stood my ground. I said, you know, unless, unless he's guilty in some proven way -- I mean this is all reports that people were saying was the case.

And I got in a very difficult time with the ambassador, Popper, who was then ambassador in Santiago. And he had and I had some really heated exchanges over his saying, "You cannot judge this man. I assure you, Bill, he was, he was -- he's clean. He isn't what he's alleged to be. And it's important for the embassy to have a good relationship with him."

Well, finally it became so hot and we did get some real supporting evidence. And every place he went the press and the Congress and the human rights groups would attack him. I sent -- I sent a message to him that, "It'd be better for you and for U.S.-Chile relations for you to leave," and he left. And years later I've learned that key members of the Embassy staff knew he had been a torturer, which, which I find bothersome, that the embassy knew it and wouldn't tell me. Years later I was in Chile and spoke with one of the people who had been tortured by Lavin Farina who was still walking around as a free citizen in Santiago

Q: Yeah. Now, that's when you run --

LUERS: And I just feel it's been something that has, that has bugged me ever since, you know, that moment in which the embassy in Chile still hadn't gotten with the new policy,

they're also, I think, being unfair to the State Department and to the Secretary of State and to me by not acknowledging something they knew.

Q: No. No. I mean, you know, in this manner of, of fact and all that, and they -- I mean they're not doing their job.

LUERS: I know. Well, it was -- but it was their inability to get with, to get with a new policy and more importantly to do the right thing. Because Popper had been there during the visit to -- famous visit to -- Kissinger made to, to Chile for the OAS *(Organization of American States)* meeting in June of '76, before the US elections. And when, when, when he met with Pinochet the, the, the memorandum conversation sort of says that Kissinger basically told Pinochet something to the effect of, "If you got to do things do them quickly, because it's not going down well with the American people." Now, I -- I mean that summer, I don't know if I told you, that summer I was, I was still working on Latin America -- the summer of '76, the summer of the elections, I went to hear Solzhenitsyn, who was taking a travel across the United States. And he was, he was being carted around by the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) was portraying himself as the hero of the human rights in the Soviet Union. And I went to hear him, and I went to hear him at the Hilton Hotel here in in D.C. And it was an incredible speech, and the place was packed. And I called up Larry Eagleburger -- have we gone into this story? I called up Larry Eagleburger.

Q: You may have, but tell it.

LUERS: I called up Larry Eagleburger that -- the night after I heard it. I said, "Larry, Pres -- President Ford should see Solzhenitsyn. It's important. The Soviet -- Brezhnev won't like it, but the fact is, if Ford wants to get reelected it's important he do this."

And Larry said, "Where were you?"

I said I was at the Hilton Hotel and I heard Solzhenitsyn's incredibly moving speech on human rights

Said, "Why?'

I said, "Because I was invited. And I, you know, I'm a Soviet specialist and a Russian speaker and that's where I wanted to be."

"But you're a Latin Americanist."

I said -- I said, "Yes. But I," --

And he said, "Luers, the word went out to everybody not to go to that meeting."

And I said, "It didn't go to me."

And he said, “Luers, you never get the word.” You know, he was sort of -- he’s joking. But I was upbraided for the fact that I went to that historic event.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And I said, “Larry, OK, whatever -- whatever happened, I was there, I heard it. And my strong recommendation is that for -- if the president wants to be reelected, he should go -- he should receive him at the White House.” And of course he refused. And because he wanted -- he wanted to appeal to the -- to Brezhnev. And so it was, it was a case in point where the tension was between his relation -- Congress and the American people, who had become increasingly agitated over the human rights policies of the Kissinger era, and a couple -- a couple of steps like seeing Solzhenitsyn, which could have made a difference. I mean I think that that was one of the big mistakes he made in the elections, because those -- the human rights issues were so big in those elections.

Q: Yeah. How did you feel about Pat Derian and your --

LUERS: I, I guess I would say I tried to work with her. The thing that bothered me is she -- she was so self-righteous and she thought she knew everything. She didn’t -- she came in with a firm commitment to the fact that all of us were a bunch of fascists who had been participating somehow, at least passively if not actively, in the violations of human rights in Latin America. And, and the, the sort of general attitude toward me and toward my colleagues was the assumption that we were sort of the bad guys, and they were going to convert us before they got rid of us. And I think that period was a very tough one for many of us. Maybe a little less tough for me, but the fact is I was in charge of Latin American affairs for about five months. Terry -- Terry Todman was appointed to replace me, but he didn’t get confirmed for five months. And so he, he was the one they felt they could interface with. And, and he, he got with the new policy rather well. But I, I found that we had a number of, of difficult conversations, and when I was trying to tell her what I thought would make sense for U.S. policy, for U.S. relations with this country, and not what necessarily was -- showing the flags for human rights and lecturing them every time. Remember, when Carter came in, the, the night before he was inaugurated, I went to see the new Secretary of State Cy Vance. This was -- I don’t know, it was a Sunday night or a Monday night, and the inauguration was the 20th of January, ’77. And I went to see Cy. And Cy said, you know, “We’re going to do a number of things in Latin America. And the first thing we’re going to do is to stop Brazil from getting a nuclear weapon.” And so he said that Mondale was on the plane as we speak to go to Germany to tell the Germans not to provide technology for enrichment of uranium to Brazil. So I said, “That’s crazy. You go to Brazilians, you don’t go to Germans. The, the Brazilians will be really angry at this new president if,” -- and we -- and Cy said, “Don’t worry, Mondale has been told not to say anything. He’s going to do it quietly.” Well, of course the first thing Mondale did when got on the plane is he told the press what -- why he was going to Germany. And the Brazilians were furious, right? So I recommended that, that the president go to Brazil, because Brazil was going to be important for the United States. And when -- and the worst thing was the president not only didn’t go himself, but he sent

Rosalynn. And, and sending your wife in those days, it was just such a put down for the Brazilians.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But they treated her well. And when she got there she sat with the President of Brazil and lectured him on human rights. And it, it, it really, you know, the ambassador who -- I can't remember his name. One of our top people. The ambassador in 19 -- 1977, he was there. It must have been February of '77. And I had to brief Mrs. Carter for this trip. And the president was sitting in on the briefing, you know.

Q: Was it Hugh Crimmins?

LUERS: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Uh-huh.

LUERS: Yeah, it was. The President of Brazil had to sit there and listen to, listen to -- being -- sitting with the president, listening to Mrs. Carter lecturing him directly practically the whole dinner. And it, it became such a battle cry that it, I think in -- historically Carter is highly respected in Latin America to this day. But at the time, it was, you know, I just -- I'm -- I find lecturing other countries about what they should be doing or not doing difficult anyway. But on this issue, I mean Brazil, was an offender, as most of the countries in the Southern Cone were. But it should have been done by other people. And, and so the radical -- the radical approach, the radical shift, the effort of Carter to implant the flag of human rights on U.S. policy, particularly in Latin America, was something that I, I found a little difficult at times. And I had my arguments with people, particularly with Warren Christopher and Pat Derian. Because Warren -- Chris was, was completely in line with Pat. Pat really ran that operation, and Warren would back her -- Chris would back her time and time again. And I guess I should -- there were a number of issues having to do with military relations we had with Latin America and how they should be reduced and -- and I think the sale of military supplies is probably a worthwhile way to go in some cases, particularly with Chile.

Q: Well, you know, in all of these, the sales of military supplies do not come without you might say attachments.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: I mean, you know, and good attachments.

LUERS: Yeah. You, you, you build relationship with --

Q: You build, you build relations. This is the way we do it. And you don't go, you don't burn villages and you don't do this, you don't do that. Doesn't always work, but the, but

the point being that you're adding a different element. You're not just, you know, dumping the arms in somebody's country and leaving.

LUERS: Well, you know, this -- the relations with the military of Latin America were an important player in my learning about Latin America. Because I, I served in Venezuela where we had virtually none of these issues. I mean Venezuela was a democracy. It didn't have human rights violations when I'd served there. And I was, I was really Deputy Assistant Secretary because of my long experience in Venezuela and the work I did there. So when I became -- when I came into the bureau I began to know more about the broader Latin America. Because I wasn't basically a Latin Americanist, I was a Sovietologist. So I began to learn more and more. And, and again, the issue -- how I met Wendy was that I was out representing Kissinger -- there were four of us that were sent out to listen to the people. There was Sam Lewis, myself, Jack Armitage, and somebody from Africa, the Assistant Secretary of Africa. And the four of us went out as Senior State Department officials, and our job was to listen. This was in the spring of '76. A program that we designed recognizing that, that the Kissinger-Ford administration had problems with many aspects of our foreign policy. Let's hear what they have to say. So we went out. And I was the human rights person, listening on human rights. And there was -- Sam was on the Middle East, I guess, and they had the African person on Africa, and then we had the arms control person. We went to San Francisco and spent a whole day -- the interest was huge. I went into the Hastings Law Center and listened. The place was packed. I mean there must have been 300, 500, 400 people there, and I just listened. And I took notes. And then I -- my last half hour I would try to wrap it up and tell 'em, give them the reaction we had to all their concerns. And one of the concerns was from Wendy. She worked for Amnesty International. She stood up and she said, you know, "The School of the Americas has been the focus of U.S. Military relations with," --

Q: This is a training school.

LUERS: Pardon?

Q: This is a training school we had --

LUERS: In, in Panama.

Q: In Panama.

LUERS: Yeah. Training school.

Q: For, for, for Latin American military.

LUERS: Military. And the School of the Americas was one that one had heard about. I didn't know a lot about it, but -- and I knew that it was, it had been a positive aspect of our relationship that many Latin American military officers who hadn't studied the states or hadn't gone to West Point or something, they had gone to the school. And I thought on balance it was a positive, had a positive impact. She apparently had interrogated or asked

questions, not interrogated, but done reports, of military officers who'd been there who alleged that we had helped in training methodology in regard to dealing with leftist group _____ actually picked up to get information, allegedly torturing them. And some of the methodology, she said, was something that now was becoming public.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: Well, I talked to her about it. And I learned a lot during that listening session, but that was one of the most interesting and eye opening for me. And I, and I think history would suggest that there was a positive aspect to our relationship with military, but there was this negative aspect. The agency and the military played a role in the beginning of the -- I don't know if you have that impression, but I have a very strong impression that that was the downside of our military relations. In, in Venezuela, I think our relationship were very good and, and they, there was no reason -- there was no record of human rights violations in Venezuela and I, and I learned there the value of, of not only selling military equipment, but having a sort of trusted military and having them train with us and having them think -- because that was still -- it was still very Cold War period. It was still that --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Well, it would have been '77 when Carter came in.

LUERS: Right.

Q: So what happened to you?

LUERS: Well, it was clear that I was not going to stay on. I was going to be the acting Assistant Secretary, and I worked with, with Cy. And in fact, I negotiated relations with Cuba. I'd been working for two years under Ford and Bill Rogers who was the Assistant Secretary, preparing for negotiations with Cuba. Because I think that Kissinger was determined to do with Cuba what he'd done with China and be the sort of in the next administration or at the end of the Ford administration, open relations with Cuba. And we prepared a lot of work to do that. I'm writing about this now. And we had -- and so they made some efforts. Eagleburger and Rogers, at the end of the Ford administration, saw the Cubans several times and tried to see what could happen. And I think it was the first serious opening that had been made for many years to Fidel, and it was done not adroitly and I think with the wrong approach, but whatever. And the Ford administration hadn't told me they were doing it. I was preparing all the papers for them to plan to do it. But Rogers, who -- I was his principal deputy -- didn't tell me he actually saw the Cubans several times. And I learned about this long afterward. But then when Cy and I talked about it and the White House had suggested that we open U.S. Interest Section. So I worked for several weeks with the Cuban Ambassador at the United Nations to set up a meeting. And in the spring of, of my -- one of my last official acts as acting Assistant

Secretary was I went up to the, to a hotel, I think it was the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, and I negotiated for three days with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Juan Pelegrin Torres , the opening of our U.S. Interest Section, which became our, de facto embassy. It was the first real breakthrough we'd had in relations. And I, I -- it was an easy deal. We didn't have a lot of preconditions with the Cubans. And we decided we wanted to have relations. We wanted to have a vehicle by which we could discuss issues. And, and so it wasn't anything that would be required that -- because it wasn't diplomatic relations -- required Congressional sort of OK. And I enjoyed that. We, we had fascinating meeting. At one point I was making some small points from the Legal Department in State. I did not have a lawyer with me. I had, I had -- I did it in Spanish. I did it with an administrative person and a Junior Officer. And we did have an interpreter there that, that we used if we needed to. And nobody else. And he had -- Juan Pelegrin Torres had only three people. And we sat there for a couple days and did it. At one point I was -- I had called back to the legal department about language. And one time they got a little nitpicky on -- and he said to me, in Spanish, he said, "Bill, look, I have the complete authority from Fidel to get this deal done. If you want it that way, you got it." It was so funny. I didn't have -- he had -- he had the authority just to do the deal, they wanted to do it, you know. And so that was my last act in that. And then they offered me the job of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe to do Soviet and Eastern Europe, because that was my real interest.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: My real area of --

Q: Well, back to this Cuban thing.

LUERS: And the records will show that this was an agreement between me and Juan Pelegrin Torres.

Q: Did you feel that in a way you were being left exposed out there?

LUERS: Well, it's interesting, Todman -- while I was doing this, Todman I learned later was seeing a Cuban in Mexico on a, on a particular -- on a problem we had at the time with Cuba. And I never knew this. He -- they never told me this. So it's possible that, you know, I was going to be the fall guy with Congress.

Q: If things didn't go right.

LUERS: If things didn't go right, yeah. And -- well, on the other hand, we were talking with Pelegrin Torres that the idea would be we would have diplomatic relations within six months if things worked out. And that was Carter's intention, was by September, October to have diplomatic relations. And then typically, we had a big episode in the summer of --

Q: This the shoot down --

LUERS: Yeah, yeah, the planes, yeah.

Q: Yeah, the --

LUERS: And, and so it was something that we didn't -- and I was out of it by then, and I never -- I never took much of a hit on it. But, but I think it's possible -- Todman couldn't do it because he didn't have the official -- he wasn't official. I was, I was an official of the State Department. He was not yet confirmed by the Senate. Now, whether he would have done it, I don't know.

Q: What about the issue of access to dissidents to others in Cuba? Was that on your agenda?

LUERS: For the purposes of our policies, yes. And I mean the year 2000 I went to Cuba and I've got to get to this discussion I had with Fidel, and he told me so many things that did not get out. And when we were there on a trip, I went down with Bill Styron, Arthur Miller, and we spent a lot of time with Castro, and I spent personal time with him. And some of the group didn't want to go see the human rights people, but I said we had to. And we went and saw them. And it went out on the television in the United States and Fidel sort of made a joke of it. But for the purposes of opening the U.S. Interest Section, it was just do it. There were no preconditions, we didn't talk about human rights. It was just the business of having relations. This has always been my concern that somehow the United States believes that diplomatic relations or talking to a country somehow indicates approval of that country or Friendship.

Q: Yeah. We've gotten into this --

LUERS: And it's --

Q: I think it was --

LUERS: -- gotten even worse now with Iran.

Q: Yeah, I think it was President Wilson got us into this thing.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Particularly.

LUERS: The value judgment of every country we deal with, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And, and we had that bias anyway. I mean we didn't believe much in diplomatic relations, as you know, during the 19th century. And it wasn't until the --

Q: Well, and there's something in diplomatic practice that has all struck me as being really nonsensical and dangerous, and that is if relations really get bad between two countries you withdraw your ambassadors.

LUERS: I know, it's stupid. It's the opposite.

Q: You take your most knowledgeably, supposedly and put it in the hands of juniors.

LUERS: *(laughs)* Who don't have any experience.

Q: Yeah, right.

LUERS: I mean the decision to keep that ambassador in Syria --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: -- was important.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Even though he got -- I guess he was finally booted out, but he -- they -- I mean I think that during times of trouble that's when you need somebody who's really experienced.

Q: Really, yes. You don't -- but playing the -- I mean these are sort of diplomatic games designed by protocol people at the -- who really don't know what's going on.

LUERS: You know, when in '61 after, after Kennedy came in, the White House decided we should open relations with outer Mongolia. And so Tommy Thompson was assigned to the task of, of dealing with a, an official of the outer Mongolian government. Because outer Mongolia was literally a republic of the Soviet Union.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But we heard that they might want to have relations with us, and we thought that was good geopolitics, right? So I worked with Ambassador Thompson on that. And the legal people, and some of the political people, wanted to have all these preconditions for -- they would have to make all sorts of guarantees to us that -- about their behavior. And Tommy said, "Throw it all out. We want -- we want to talk to them. We want to have the capacity to talk to them." How they behaved toward their people, how they behaved with regards to the Soviets, that's there business. We for our reasons want to be able to have relations with the -- and they were political, sort of tweaking the Soviet-Chinese relationship and, you know, it was, it was a good move. Finally, we didn't do it, but Tommy's approach was make it simple. If we've decided it's important to have conversations with this country, you don't want to put a lot of -- you don't want to load it

down with a lot of judgments about what they should and shouldn't be doing. And I -- that's sort of where I come out.

Q: I agree with you.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: The opening of relations in Cuba -- you can't even call them relations, could you?

LUERS: Well, we had, we had a staff -- we have an actual embassy there really. We don't call it that. We call it the U.S. Interest Section. But it's a huge building right where it used to be. It's -- we have a staff, a substantial staff, and we moved in a lot of CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), a lot of other people under cover. And so it functions as a, as a fairly -- but the trouble is once they got there the human rights dimension of their work became so dominant that they really had limited relations with the Cuban government. So the object of getting in there to be able to solve some bilateral problems when we had them, and we had a lot of problems with Cuba -- little human rights -- I mean individual civil liberties questions with regard to American citizens and protection of American citizens. And it became so much a profile of the person who was stationed there to see frequently all the human rights movement and trying to go out and find them where they weren't, that it, it, it made it very difficult for them to have the type of official relationships that they should have been having. I -- it was a dynamic of domestic politics and hostility toward that job. And then Fidel's behavior was never great with regard to either shooting down planes or letting prisoners out and sending them across to Florida.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: -- the Mariel, Mariel, famous -- so I, I guess I'd say it was a missed, it didn't produce what one would have hoped it'd produce. It didn't become a channel for good communications.

Q: Yeah. Because one has to ask on both sides whether it was really desirable. I'm not talking about for us in the, sort of the diplomatic business --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- which is open communication.

LUERS: Sure.

Q: We're talking about internal politics in Cuba and internal politics in the United States. Each has their own reason for keeping this thing on the boil.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: No, I think you're right. And I -- I mean, to this day it's still going on.

LUERS: Yeah. It's an impossible situation. It's so absurd, but it's -- whether Raúl Castro will do it differently -- but when I met with Fidel, because this has been one of my obsessions in the Foreign Service during my entire post-diplomatic life is relations with Cuba. And when we went down to Cuba, and I'd never been there before, after several meetings that we'd had and dinners we'd had with him, we, we -- he joined us at lunch to our surprise up in the mountains outside of Havana. And he said, "I want you to come back with me," he told me. So I sat in the back of his car. And he and I sat in the back of this car with machine guns on the floor and, and there were three -- he had three Mercedes, the front car, back car, and then the one he rides in. And we talked for almost three hours. Driving back, and then we sat in front of the Santa Isabel Hotel and in the middle of that big square. And we just talked. And basically I asked him to tell me about his involvement in revolutions around the world. And he told me -- I mean I followed his work really since he came in. I was in Soviet Affairs and I was made the sort of Cuban Desk Officer within the Soviet Office. From the very first day he became -- and then both in my Latin American and in my Soviet work and then in Venezuela, Cuba was always center stage. And when, when I went there I knew a lot -- I remembered a lot of the intelligence reports we had about Fidel's involvement with revolutions around the world.

And I said, "Tell me about this. Tell me -- tell me what, what I should have." And he, he would -- he went through virtually every one of his involvements, from the beginning in in 1960, when he sent the Petkoffs to Cuba to start -- to Venezuela to start the revolution of Venezuela, to the recent years when he'd been involved in Central America. Including, he was involved with Syria, he was involved with Algeria, and of course Angola and, and he gave me a lot of details that I -- and then Nicaragua. He almost claims the -- being the commander in charge of the Sandinistas moving in Nicaragua, then to take Managua. And he provided them the military equivalent to make it possible. And so this was a long conversation. I think he was -- from what I remember he's fairly accurate about what he told me. And at the end of this meeting, I said to him, "Look, Comandante, you have been involved with these revolutions around the world for 35, 40 years. And a lot of Cubans have been killed, many more citizens around the world have been killed, and in virtually none of these countries in which you became involved in did the revolution produce any, any improvement in the condition of the people of the country. And how do you feel about that?" And, and he said -- and I said, "Why -- do you feel any guilt?"

And he said, "No."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Por la doctrina," you know, because of the ideology, of the doctrine that, that you -- when there's a problem you create revolution. And even though none of them really delivered much for the people of the country, he believed that when there is injustice a revolution must be made even if it does not help the nation. We handled Cuba badly but Fidel never really wanted improved relations. Even after the Soviets left in 1990 we could have made a major effort but I doubt that Fidel was even ready then while his people were going hungry.

Q: Well, then in '77 you went to Soviet Affairs.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Who was the chief -- well, this was --

LUERS: I was in charge of the whole area, but the Assistant Secretary of Europe was Vest, George Vest.

Q: George Vest.

LUERS: And he hired me. He knew me and he hired me. And I replaced Jack Armitage, who used to have been my boss. And the person who was close the secretary was Marshall Shulman. And so Marshall had been my professor and close friends for years. So Marshall and I would meet every morning on U.S.-Soviet relations, and there were a lot of issues at the time, most particularly nuclear and, and then of course eventually the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But when -- the real tension during that period was between Zbig and Brzezinski, who was the NSC (National Safety Council) advisor, and Cy. And I, you know, I had some fascinating experiences with Marshall, but I was only there for a year and a half and then I went as ambassador to Venezuela.

Q: Now, Marshall Shulman, what was -- his name crops up quite often. What was his background and influence?

LUERS: Marshall had been the head of the, of the Russian Institute at Columbia. And the year I went to Russian Institute of Columbia, he was not there. He'd gone to Harvard for a year. So I didn't know him there, but I got to know him immediately after. And I got to know his wife, Colette, when I was in Moscow. And she was a Russian specialist too. And she -- and so he and I became good friends afterward, and he was a scholar, and one of the most admired Sovietologists, Russian historians in the business. And he was the master. The trouble with Marshall is he was so balanced, measured, and I think had been so long, he didn't write anything. He didn't write books. He wrote one book called Beyond the Cold War, which is a good book and an important book. But he was a man who was able to sum up and impress people with his wisdom, but he couldn't -- I mean he -- it was so difficult for him to take a stand on things. And Brzezinski kept taking positions on dealing with the Soviets, and he wanted to send messages to them, frighten them, go on alert. And, and in many moments Zbig had the dramatic gesture that he thought was important to send the Soviets a message about Jimmy Carter's strength. And, Cy and Marshall didn't. They weren't interested in the grand gesture. They were interested in working out a deal always. Cy as a lawyer just wanted to make a deal. And by and large, the sort of spasmodic gestures that Zbig wanted on some very critical issues were probably the right way to go. And Marshall always really wanted to say no to Zbig. It was a tough time for Marshall and, and a tough time for Cy. Of course eventually Cy left over -- having threatened to leave on a number of occasions he finally left over the operation against Iran, you know. But he -- so Marshall was more of a background

person. He wasn't like many of the Sovietologists, like Hal Sonnenfeldt, who always had strong views on things. Marshall was an intellectual who weighed all issues carefully. Zbig on the other hand was quick to have ideas and act.

Q: Did you find, you know, it's often been claimed that Brzezinski, by being the son of a Polish diplomat --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- had this anti-Russian, really more than Soviet, this anti-Russian --

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: -- attitude. But was this -- did you see this as a destructive element or as a -- or what, in our relations? When he had an official position?

LUERS: I guess by and large -- I have a couple responses to that. First, I think Zbig was a -- is brilliant, he's very smart.

Q: It's very obvious. When I hear him analyze almost any situation --

LUERS: He's the best.

Q: -- boy, has he got --

LUERS: He's the best. And he -- and, and he was a scholar in that sense, but he had -- Zbig has an idea a day. And he always had a new conceptual way of thinking about issues. And he was so persuasive with Carter, because Carter was just charmed by him, that as a NSC advisor he was an idea person. NSC advisors, probably by definition, shouldn't be too much on ideas, they should be --

Q: No, operational.

LUERS: Operational. They should pull a thing together. And so as Zbig became the idea man -- and he did some good things, no question about it -- but he was really quite frequently all over the map. But he was one of the big idea people that was good in the Carter White House. And many of the things that he came up with, I mean the returning the crown of St. Stephens to Hungary, the working out the New Deal with Poland. His whole strategy was to diversify our approach to Eastern Europe in order to make life difficult for the Soviets. And it sort of worked. I mean it was, it was a good concept and, and he did a good job in thinking about it. And he was very conceptual like that. And in dealing with the Soviets I think he was negative on, on many arms control issue. Zbig was Polish which determined much of his approach to Russia which I think limited and severely shaped his capacity to think creatively how to make relations work on the major issues we had with the Soviet Union during the years of détente. On balance, however, I was on his side during much of this era.

Q: OK, well you were -- you had the Soviet job --

LUERS: I mean the one thing he did, which I think he did unwisely, was to back the Military operation that was to seek to liberate the American hostages in Iran. The Defense Department had prepared and elaborate plan to rescue the Americans. Zbig was sold a bill of goods on the operation . In retrospect there were so many things that could go wrong. Fortunately they started to go wrong at the outset so fewer people were killed and the international scandal somewhat less.

Q: I think this is one of the problems with the Military, because if you task them with something they will always say they can do it.

LUERS: Right.

Q: I mean that's part of their training, which is admirable. But sometimes it takes -- somebody has to judge this very skeptically.

LUERS: Mm-hmm.

Q: Because they usually --

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: -- ideas are built on assumptions, as with the Bay of Pigs.

LUERS: Well, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I mean had he gone with his military we'd been at war.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And he didn't go as military, and he didn't go because of the, of <u>The Guns of August</u>, which he -- the book he was reading while this was going on.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Which said exactly that.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: You know, it's -- you give the Military their head and they will make decisions that will take us to war when you haven't made the decision to do it.

Q: Yeah. Well, you were dealing with the Soviet Union from when to when?

LUERS: From May - June of ’77, until September of, of ’78, when I went to Venezuela.

Q: How did you view the Soviet Union at that time? Both the leadership, how the country was being run, and what in the world -- how was it -- what were its goals?

LUERS: I guess my view was shaped by the change by Brezhnev and the strategy that the Soviet Union pursued since ’73. The ’73 War, Soviets for the first time really deployed military force far beyond their borders. And it was during the mid-‘70s --

Q: We’re talking about ’73.

LUERS: I know. What I’m saying -- you asked me how it shaped.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And my view was shaped by the thought in the mid-‘70s, particularly when they went into Angola with Fidel and they began to be involved with Africa as well as in the Middle East, that they were prepared to send military force into areas where they never would before. We were the primary -- they didn’t go into Korea, they -- you know, they didn’t, they didn’t go into Vietnam. They hadn’t used military force actively beyond their borders. And I thought the ‘70s, as we went into decline domestically, because of the whole -- the impact of the civil rights debate, which had been the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, the, the Vietnam War, which had so -- I think weakened our position in the world, and the Nixon departure. The mid-‘70s was sort of an era in which I think we were weakened internationally and -- even though -- and people in Washington realized that, and Carter realized that. He came in and had to restore the decay in American foreign policy and domestic spirit that had taken place after the Vietnam, after Nixon, all these other issues. So it was during that period that the Soviets began to become more and more aggressive in their international posture around the world. And they went in there for -- they went into Middle East. And that, I had questioned whether that would happen. It did happen. And I thought that was one indicator. And plus the fact that the, the arms control questions, their weapons were getting bigger and bigger. Their intercontinental missiles were by far larger. They were aggressively building their military force. And I guess I would say that from the standpoint of their military posture, I was worried that we were -- that Brezhnev had really given into the military the way that Khrushchev never did and that we had a problem. On the other hand, I always held that their domestic, economic, political situation was so severe, so grave that there was going to be a reckoning for them if they couldn’t sustain this. And I think most -- many of the Soviet specialists who lived there and who traveled all over the country -- I visited every republic when I was there and I lived in, in Moscow. And you know, you couldn’t go anywhere that you didn’t see a decaying country. So I, I was many close to many of the Soviets -- leaders. I was close to -- I visited there several times during the year I was there. I knew the Deputy Foreign Minister quite well, Bessmertnykh. I’d, I’d known Gromyko. I’d known Dobrynin. And I, I guess I had a, an underlying belief this was a country that we would work with and we

could work with. So my -- I guess my attitude is -- was complex, that we had to make a deal with them, we had to work with them carefully, we had to avoid war, and yet, with regard to their behavior internationally, outside of their borders, this was a moment of, of concern. And I -- when the Soviets finally invaded Afghanistan, there were those of us who thought that they would do it. Carter never believed it. You know, he couldn't believe it, because he had -- remember, he met Brezhnev on the, on the terrace and that first meeting that had, the first summon, he famously kissed Brezhnev on the balcony of the White House. And he will always regret that to this day, that little act, spontaneity.

But I, I must say, Carter was naive, but Zbig wasn't. I think he was -- he was always innocent. Carter never really got it, about what power was all about. But Zbig did. I -- but I guess during -- increasingly became over the years concern about the military-only aspect of Soviet power and how that would -- where that would lead them, as opposed to the internal decay, which wouldn't be able to sustain that military power.

Q: Well, did you have much input from our military people at your level about dealing with the Soviets?

LUERS: You know, you're right. I had, I really had very little relations to the Military. I think I was aware, as all of us were, that the repeated effort to increase U.S. Military spending was routed rather deeply in the, in the Military taking a more anguished view of Soviet Military power than probably was true, that they always had the argument that the Soviets were growing in power everywhere, and therefore, the United States should get much higher expenditures for our, particularly our nuclear, but also our air, air forces.

Q: Well, later --

LUERS: But I didn't have a lot of interactions with the Military at that period.

Q; Well, later -- I mean it's not just the Military, of course it's the CIA and all. But in our view of the Soviet Union, I mean basically here was a country that was getting far too ambitious for its capabilities.

LUERS: Exactly.

Q: I mean, you know --

LUERS: Exactly.

Q: Our colleagues, you know, would come back from the Soviet Union, say, "God, the damn place doesn't work." I mean --

LUERS: It's a mess. It's an absolute mess.

Q: Yeah. It was a real, real mess.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: And you know, when you think about it as a mess then you wonder, you know, how capable it is. I'm right now reading about Germany in the 1930's, and things worked in Germany. I mean this, this is a country with --

LUERS: Which book are you reading?

Q: This is <u>In the Garden of the Beast</u>.

LUERS: Isn't that an amazing book?

Q: It really is.

LUERS: I just -- and this woman, Martha Dodd.

Q: Sleeping with the head of the Gestapo.

LUERS: And the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security).

Q: And the KGB.

LUERS: At least in Berlin.

Q: Yeah, the ambassador's daughter. But the point being --

LUERS: It's an amazing book.

Q: I mean you could look at Germany and say, you know, these are people who've got their act together.

LUERS: Right. And they, they are a threat.

Q: They are a threat. But, but you go to the Soviet Union and I mean just tourists coming back --

LUERS: I know.

Q: And I was wondering whether any of this permeated our thinking or --

LUERS: Well, it permeated the experts' thinking, but I mean those who'd been there. There were conservatives who just hated the Soviets. I mean Mac Toon just hated them, and he spoke reasonably good Russian. He'd been my boss when I was there in Moscow. He was Political Counselor, and then he became ambassador. And he was of the group that thought, this system that's so bad and these people are so bad, and making the

connection between that intellectually, ideologically rather, and the realization that the country's just all screwed up, they can't get their act together, and realizing that those two things are incompatible, that there is a problem that they have in exerting the type of power that they say they have. He couldn't do that, because he found they're the enemy, and he thought of them that way. And, so these details were, I don't think, nearly as important as they were to some people like myself. Matlock I think very much agreed with me, that this was a country that had -- I mean he and I lived worked together there and we worked together over the years. And I think there was an understanding that eventually they will be unable to sustain their ambitions with regard to military force.

And, and I'll tell you this when we get to it, but in 1980 -- '85, I was in Prague, in Czechoslovakia. And I had these secret meetings with the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, because they wouldn't see me officially. But I got to know him through meeting him at the Soviet -- Eastern European National Days, and we talked and he said come over. And one day I went over to see him at night, and we would speak Russian. And he spoke beautiful Russian. And I said, "What's this about Gorbachev? Tell me about Gorbachev?" I'd just seen him on television a couple nights before, and I thought he was different. He'd been General Secretary for about a month or two months, I saw him speaking. And I said, "This is an unusual man." And I said to the Prime Minister, Strougal was his name, to tell me about Gorbachev.

He said, "Well, here's the story. When Andropov was dying in 83', he called in Gorbachev and said, 'You will be the next General Secretary who has to change policy.' He said, 'Chernenko will come in for about a year, but he's sicker than I am and he'll die, and then you're going to take over and between now and then your job is to find the reformers in this society. We can never again compete with the United States and the West on -- in the arms race. We don't have the technology. They're way ahead of us in every element of technology. We have got to have access to their technology. And your job is to find a way to reform the system so that we can develop the type of relationship that can give us complete access to what they know, because we don't know it and we can't find out.'"

And indeed Gorbachev went off and he put together a group of Khrushchev reformers who'd left and actually they'd gone to Prague. Many of them had been stationed in Prague with the front organizations. And years later I had to introduce Gorbachev after he'd left office. I had to introduce Gorbachev to a group of Russian specialists up in Columbia. I was Chairman of the Harriman Institute at the time. And so I introduced him and I said -- my introduction was, "I want to tell a story," to all the people, and he was standing out there, "about the fact that Andropov had really selected him as the reformer who would change the Soviet system." And he smiled after I finished telling the story. I said, "Is it true?"

He smiled and he said, "All I can say is Andropov was my great patron," And I believe that's true. I believe Andropov, who'd been head of the KGB, knew well from his access to intelligence on American -- American science, American development. He'd been conditioned. As dreadful as this man was, he knew what we were talking about, that they

couldn't sustain this. They couldn't go through another arms race. And this was happening just the time the good President Reagan was proposing the Star Wars, remember? They believed it. The Soviets believed it. They were the only people in the world who believed it. They believed it.

Q: Well, tell me, when you were -- of course you're dealing with Carter. Did you find -- I remember talking briefly when I was Counselor General in Naples with Bill

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- in Naples, and I sat next to -- was it Watson? Alec --

LUERS: Alec Watson, yeah.

Q: Was our ambassador to the Soviet Union at the time.

LUERS: No, not Alec. That was -- what was his first name? He was the IBM guy.

Q: He was the IBM guy. But anyway, you've been sent there to the Soviet Union to kind of make better almost industrial connections and, you know, you had the feeling that Carter really didn't know the -- I mean he had almost naive ideas about the, the Soviet Union. You really could deal with them at the time. How did you feel?

LUERS: Oh, absolutely. Every American president when they came to office came with a sort of hostility toward this country, whether it was Truman or Eisenhower or Kennedy. They all did. I mean Kennedy thought he could make a deal, but he was on his edge. And certainly Reagan. I mean Regan came in ready for -- and Nixon had his own idea of manipulating them. Carter came in thinking, you know, nobody understands them. They're good people, we can work with them. Everybody's a good person. For Carter, everybody was a good person. And all we do is just get to know to them and talk to them and we'll work it out. And that's why this -- he began with this very close relationship, with the assumption that he and Brezhnev would be able to make a deal, which was the spirit of that early first year.

Q: Well, this advanced when he got rebuffed, didn't he?

LUERS: Yeah, because they didn't take him seriously. But anyway, then by the end of Carter's administration he'd been so disappointed by many of his initiatives that he thought just by his being a good guy he could -- they could work it out. He ended the relationship -- very difficult relationship with the Soviet Union. And he's the only president in our modern history who ended up that way. Every other president ended up -- including Johnson -- wanting to make a deal with the Soviets.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: But Carter got it backwards. He didn't start skeptically and try to find out what could work. He started with that sort of Christian belief that we're all good and we can work it out. And I think this has been written about, and I think it's true. I mean there was Zbig. He did some good things in Eastern Europe, but tweaked the Soviets and upset them. And it was probably smart what he did. But Carter still believed until they went to Afghanistan that they could work this out.

Q: Well, prior to --

LUERS: And he got mad, he got really mad.

Q: Yeah, well this is the problem. Sometimes people take these things personally.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: But I mean was there the feeling on your part, and when I say you I'm talking about some of our --

LUERS: Group.

Q: -- a cadre of people who are dealing with this --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- that God, we got a president who's got it wrong? Or did this permeate farther into, you might say, the thinking of our people dealing with the Soviet Union? Or maybe it should have?

LUERS: Well, I guess I would say that I was more inclined to be with Zbig on being tough toward them during his period, because I was bothered by the stagnation of the Brezhnev leadership, the fact that they were doing nothing to change their own society, and that they were getting more aggressive as we seemed to be getting less so, less capable. And so I don't think during the first two years Carter deviated much from his belief that all we need to do is work with him to make a deal. Now, he did good things with China, he did good things in the Middle East, and he was affirmed in his belief that we can -- if I'm earnest enough and if I'm persistent enough I can work out a deal. And he did good things. He's not given credit, as he should be, for the deal between Sadat and Rabin

Q: Oh yeah, in the Middle East.

LUERS: And the Middle East and I think China.

Q: China, and with the Panama Canal.

LUERS: All these things were really --

Q: I mean these are --

LUERS: And there were as a result of his, of his earnestness and his belief that if you just put your head into it and you work it and you are sincere about it you can get the deal done. And it just wasn't the way to go with the Soviets.

Q: Well now, I mean I realize this is away from your -- well, I mean you were involved too in this. What about, I mean the other thing that was sort of rankling was the Cuban relationship. Did he -- he was interested in trying to do this, or?

LUERS: Oh, I think he and Bob Pastor, but Pastor was new at this stuff. Pastor knew very little about it. And Bob, I've grown to have a great deal of respect for, and he's written something on the subject and what was Carter's -- and Carter was very earnest. He wanted to make a deal. And as I say, when I negotiated this deal in the spring, he was all for it. And then he wanted to have a diplomatic relationship by the end of the year, by the end of '77. And he just -- part of his whole attitude was to change the sort of spirit of the relationships that had been developed around the world by Nixon and Ford, and, particularly Henry. And so I think that belief that he could deliver, whereas others couldn't, because he was honest, he believed in the right issues, and because he was intelligently committed to personally being involved. And he was very involved with China, he was very involved with the Soviets. And I may have told you, but I've gotten to know him better after his presidency, as many of us have. I saw a lot of him during his presidency, but on this one occasion we were sitting, discussing the '77 -- no, the '78/'79 period, when we were organizing -- I was Ambassador to Venezuela at the time, and we were organizing a method of getting Somoza out of Nicaragua. And Bill Bowdler, one our best Latin Americanist had developed this plan that he would go to Somoza -- and there were several of us involved -- and he would go to Somoza and say, "Look, if you leave the country and you go to Florida with your family and make it possible for you to live in our country.," Then we would help put in a government made up of some of his better people. We called it Somocismo sin Somoza of establishing a, a government made up of people who'd been with him but with Somoza out. And then you begin the phase into a new type of government. And this was something that President Carter really wanted to do with Carlos Andrés Pérez, who was the President of Venezuela. Which was the reason I was sent down there in a certain sense, was to work out this deal. Because I was close to Carlos Andrés.

When I returned to DC to discuss the Somoza issue I had a related experience. Since Venezuela was an OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) country I got to see a lot of messages from all of the other OPEC countries, one of which was Iran. And I would read this stuff from Iran, and everything's fine, the country's going on great. Then in December I go back and I read that -- in December of '78 I read that in The Economist there's this religious leader named Ayatollah Khomeini who's sitting off in Paris, mouthing off about the revolution that's going to happen. And I went into the INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) people and I said -- I said, "What's this all about? I never heard of Ayatollah Khomeini in all the messages I received from Tehran. Who is

he?" Oh, he's a loony, he's sitting in Paris. Nobody took him seriously. And so then you have '79, the beginning of the revolution, the Shah leaves. In a conversation I had with Carter just 10 years ago. I said, "Look, what happened to our deal with Somoza? We made an approach to him in December of '78. He wasn't going to take it. And, we had a new deal we were going to offer him in January and February. And had we been able to get him out of there, the War of Central America never would have happened." And I said, "The Sandinistas were really getting more powerful and then they took over Managua in April or May of '79."

And Carter said, "Bill, you can't do everything." He said, "I was doing the Shah of Iran problem. I was doing new relationships with China. And I was working on a new arms control agreement with the Soviet Union. How can you expect me to do everything?" He got quite defensive about it. I mean it's right, how many things can a President do? And of those, the deal with Anastasio Somoza could have been a very important deal, because the whole Central American War shaped so much of our policy in the region and around the world.

Q: When you were dealing with the Soviet Union, what about the Helsinki Accords? Did we at that time realize how important these things were for the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union?

LUERS: It was driven by us. I think Kissinger -- when the negotiations began, Kissinger was not convinced that the basket on human rights had to be in there. He thought that was a bad idea. And he didn't take Helsinki very seriously. I think he saw it as something that the Europeans wanted. It was a building of the alliance, if we were going to do this. It was coming at a time when the Soviets were feeling more confident about themselves than they had for a long time.

Q: I've interviewed George Vest --

LUERS: Oh yeah?

Q: -- who was dealing with that.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Talking about how Kissinger was talking to the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin, saying, "Nah, that doesn't mean anything." He's kind of -- I mean here was our own negotiator and he was cutting them off at the knees.

LUERS: Yeah. He was against it, he just didn't think it was very important. I think when I was there I think we thought it was important. And it was, it was an effort that could ease European tensions. I don't think any of us felt it would ever have the impact it had on Eastern Europe and, and Russia. I don't think we saw that. I think we saw it as a way to get the European relationships managed in a different and better way.

Q: It's to set up a permanent division and sort of controlled military --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- exercises and all. And it wasn't -- it had -- you know, it wasn't considered revolutionary.

LUERS: No, I don't think anybody realized how big a deal the Helsinki Accord would actually become.

Q: But I was wondering when you were there did you see the --

LUERS: The implementation of it started in '77. And Ford assigned it in what, I guess middle of '76, late '76. And I think because of the human rights dimension, Carter made a big deal of it. But it wasn't for quite a while before we realized how this dimension would change, and I had very little to do with CSCE. He was the Europeanist who put this together. And George was, you know, he was Assistant Secretary. Wonderful man. Is he alive still?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I think he's a great guy. I could see him again.

Q: You might want to read an oral history I did with him, some hilarious ones I did.

LUERS: Really?

Q: I did, but it's on our website.

LUERS: Oh, he's great. I like him very much. I'll do that. Well, should we break up or?

Q: Yeah, this might be a good time. But before we leave the Soviet Union, you left there when to go to Venezuela?

LUERS: I left the job in the fall of 1978. So I was there for just over a year. And there are stories about Ceausescu, about Tito, about -- and about the Soviet thinking, I mean our belief that we had -- that the Soviets had penetrated the Romanians, and the Soviets had penetrated our government, the State Department, which actually I need to tell you about.

Q: All right, would you like to stop at this point?

LUERS: I think so.

Q: OK, so we'll put --

LUERS: OK.

Q: -- make note for yourself and we'll pick this up again when you're -- all those things and then we'll move to Venezuela.

LUERS: I might be on the 2nd of --

Q: OK, today is the -- what is -- it's the 14th of December, 2011 with Bill Luers, and so we're still talking about -- what, what was your job before you moved to Venezuela?

LUERS: I was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe.

Q: OK.

LUERS: And I was in charge of the Soviet and Eastern European Affairs.

Q: All right.
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Q: All right, and you'd mentioned at the very end you wanted to talk about Tito and Ceausescu.

LUERS: Yes

Q: So I'll let you -- you haven't said anything about them.

LUERS: Romania was one of the countries that I was responsible for covering. And Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. And in the spring of '78, Carter had invited Ceausescu to come to the state for one of his state visits. And he was, you know, he was "our friend" in the sense that he was opposing the Soviets and had difference of opinion. He didn't join in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. And because he was sort of a dissident with regard -- in the Eastern block, we found that a good idea for us to be close to him. So we became over the years quite connected to Ceausescu and we had him to the States and we had -- and Carter decided to have this big visit. And I negotiated preliminaries of the visit and where he would go, what we would sign when he was there and what sort of would be the themes of this visit. And, I'd gone out to Bucharest and I talked to the Foreign Minister and we had meetings --

Q: You mean to --

LUERS: To --

Q: Bucharest.

LUERS: Bucharest, yes. And we had a good Ambassador there who was helpful in organizing everything with us. And then, the advanced team came to the United States and included a man named Pacepa. Pacepa was the Head of the Romanian Secret Service,

very close to the KGB, but he was the Head of the Romanian Secret Service. He came with a team from the Foreign Ministry and they went on a trip throughout the areas -- they were going to go to Chattanooga and I think we went to some place in Texas. I guess we might have gone to Houston or Dallas. And then we went to New Orleans. And then I was to go with him on this trip with Ceausescu. But I didn't go with him on their advanced trip. And we sent people with protocol already. And of course, Pacepa was responsible for making sure that he would get a lot of gifts in all these places. I mean he wanted a fur coat for his wife and he wanted a gun for himself, lot of demands on what each place would give him in the way of gifts. Which became offensive, but anyway. Then the team came back and then Ceausescu arrived and I was his escort, I was with him. And he had a state visit, President Carter had a lunch for him, and we were -- so funny, we were in the White House and they had a greeting on the lawn. And we'd had all sorts of negotiations about which national anthem would be played, and it turns out the Romanians had changed their national anthem. And in the middle of the national anthem that was being played, the Foreign Minister looked at me and said, "Wrong one."

Q: Oh God.

LUERS: We left it there, but anyway, I mean everything went really according to schedule in Washington. And there weren't any dreadful mistakes made by either side. We went through programs planned and I had decided early on -- I'd met Ceausescu couple times before, but he's really one of the horrors I've met in my diplomatic career. And his wife, Elena, is even worse. So then we took off to Chattanooga and we went on this plane and I was sitting behind and Chief of Protocol was flying with me, and the two of us were sitting right behind Ceausescu and his wife. We had very little communications with them. During the flight his Chief of Staff, who was an army equivalent of a three-star general, would come up and periodically wash his hands in formaldehyde, or whatever it is he had, alcohol. It would go on to the rug or the carpet of the airplane we were flying in. And he was paranoid about, about disease and efforts to poison him or something. And indeed, before he ate any meals on the plane, the Chief of Staff had to eat them first, you know, taste them for him. And he stayed, he played cards with his wife most of the time on the trip. Rarely read any memoranda or took any interest in anything other than his next visit. And we went out, I guess he gave a speech, several speeches in Chattanooga. Finally, we get to New Orleans. The first night there's a banquet for him and Moon Landrieu was the mayor and he invited the cardinal. And we went to this big dinner in the New Orleans trade center. The Foreign Minister read the schedule of what was happening, and there was a greeting by the mayor and then the cardinal would give an invocation. And the Foreign Minister said, "The President will not accept the invocation. You'll have to ask the Cardinal not to do it."

And I said, "Well, we're in New Orleans, arguably the most Catholic city in the United States, and it wouldn't be smart for you to deny this opportunity." And, if he's an atheist he doesn't care anyway, does he? And so we talked about it and I said, "I promise you" --

And then he said, “The plan is that you will have the invocation and we will all leave. Once you’ve announced it all the Romanians will get up and walk out until you’re finished with this, and then they’ll come back.”

And I said, “That’s what the headlines will be. Tomorrow morning in the paper, the whole information about Romania will be the President of Romania walked out of an invocation. And all of your effort to get good will here is gone.”

And he said, “We’re going to do it. The President wants to do it and that’s what we’re going to do.”

So indeed, it was announced by the mayor that the Cardinal was to give his invocation, and I think the mayor said, “Anybody who wants to leave can leave,” and every member of the Romanian delegation left while the invocation was given. And they came back and of course flashbulbs were going as they walked out. And that was the story the next day in the paper and for the next three days. Anyway, so we went through, we went out to an oil drilling rig off of the shore out in the Gulf but the tone had already been set by the walkout. And then we left. And it was, that trip -- New Orleans nailed it for me that he was such a dreadful person and you could see the way he had all these thugs with him and he frightened people, the whole team was frightened and the people in the hotel.

We get back to New York and I’ve had it with this trip. And I went out that evening. My wife wasn’t with me and I was in New York and I went out with some friends and I had a few drinks, right? And we were in the Waldorf-Astoria and Ceausescu had said, “You’re free tonight because I’m going to the Romanian mission to the U.N. and I don’t need you, you know, so you can,” -- so I went off.

And I come back to the hotel about 11:30 and I have these notes-- my box, my mailbox is stuffed with, with phone calls from Cy Vance and Brzezinski, said, “You know, what the hell’s going on?” you know.

Turns out that Ceausescu, coming back from the mission, had come into the Waldorf-Astoria surrounded by Hungarians who walked in from all over northern New York State, and from other states, New Jersey, and they had sealed off the entire Waldorf-Astoria so that he couldn’t get in. They finally went through and a number of eggs were thrown at his car. And Ceausescu’s argument was they could have been bombs and I would have been dead, you know. And so he was furious. And he announced to me the next morning that he was going to leave immediately. And I said, “Well, we’ve got Mayor Koch who’s going to come with the Chief of Police and he will explain to you what happened. I think he’ll apologize to you and tell you he’s sorry this happened.

And so the Foreign Minister and I and Ceausescu, plus an interpreter, waited for Koch to come and he came with the Chief of Police, Rob McGuire and just the two of them. And there’s this group of five or six in the room.

Q: I met him once, but not for long.

LUERS The Mayor sat down and he said, “Mr. President, welcome to New York, we’re pleased that you’re here. I want you to know that those people were demonstrating last night. Many of them are good friends in that group.” And he said that, you know, no apology was coming you could see. And he said, “We want you to know that many of the Hungarians there last night maintained that you are violating the human rights of Hungarian minority in Romania. You won’t let them study their own language, you won’t let them practice their own religion, and you deprive them to the rights of schools and is that true? Do you do that to the Hungarians?”

And Ceausescu turned to me and said, “What is -- what does he think he’s asking me and what does the U.S. government think about this?”

And I said, “Well, you know, there’s a city government, there’s a state government, there’s a federal government. We don’t have any say about -- mayors they do what they want and I -- U.S. government doesn’t agree with the mayor on this subject, but we have no affect on what he believes.” And I sort of babbled on. And he got furious.

And Koch left and of course as Koch was leaving, Koch said, “Come back -- next time you come back, Mr. President, well, I’ll treat you to a great Hungarian meal,” of course which is just, rubs -- I mean Koch was unbelievable. And really, in retrospect, very funny, the whole situation.

And the Chief of Police said nothing, you know, about what they tried to do or what they didn’t try to do. And you were left with the impression that they had gone with full approval of the city of New York. So Ceausescu told me that he was going to leave, the way he’s been treated, he’s going to leave early. He says he has one thing to do and the thing he had to do was he had to take Elena, his dreadful wife, off to Cartier. They had a bag of money. And so he went off and bought her a lot of diamonds. And it took -- the time it took him to buy all the things that he wanted for his wife took us right on time. We went to the airport and left all at once. And I wrote a memorandum after that to the Secretary of State. I said, “We should never invite this man back here again.”

Then I found out subsequently that during the trip, the advanced trip, Pacepa, the Head of Secret Police, was provided (presumably by the FBI) fun with females and booze in New Orleans. And he liked it a lot. He came back the second time, he wasn’t supposed to join the President on the trip, but he came back again and they did the same thing for him in New Orleans. And he found it very appealing. And he then defected. He left -- he went to Berlin, was about a month after they returned to Romania. And he went to Germany, he defected, he came to the States, and he began to talk about what he knew. And I know a lot of what he said and I’m not going to -- a lot of it was really bad news in terms of what they knew about us. But one of the things he said was he -- they have a mole, the Romanians have a -- Secret Service has a mole in the State Department and they’re getting information. So the Secretary asked me to delay my departure for Venezuela as ambassador and the -- and the Secretary asked me to stay and work for the security people to talk to Pacepa about -- try to find out where this mole was. And so I spent a

month and a half preparing for my trip to Venezuela, basically trying to pursue this alleged mole. And I had several direct conversations with Pacepa and he was a hot source, because he was so knowledgeable of the KGB. And he had defected for money and sex, which is what most of the defections were.

Q: Well, of course!

LUERS: What other reason would you --

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: There's certainly no ideological reason.

Q: No.

LUERS: And, he -- we finally determined that the local Romanian agent who was fairly young had wanted to get some credit and so he started having lunch with a young lawyer in the legal department. And the interesting thing is they were interested in knowing what we were doing with the Poles with regard to the Polish commercial relations. And you know, they were very jealous of the fact that the Poles were being treated better than they were on, on important things. And so it was, it was a minor issue, it was -- and as far as I can see everything we've learned is -- the young lawyer had basically just told them what he knew, and none of it was really very classified, it was just sort of chatting about Poland. And I don't think anybody who felt that he was ever a paid agent or that he'd been -- or even whether he'd said anything inappropriate. So the process of working with Pacepa, and he ultimately became a source of considerable information for us, so it was probably the only benefit that we got out of this whole trip was --

Q: I've been told -- actually, this came from somebody who served in our embassy in London --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- saying that when Ceausescu and Madame Ceausescu appeared you had to be very -- as official guests -- you had to be careful because they would strip whatever apartments they had of things. Was that a problem or?

LUERS: I don't know if they took anything from the hotel. I mean they were dreadful in terms of the -- I never heard in the hotels on the trip that they'd done anything, whether they'd taken out towels and whatever you might have taken from their rooms. But they were you know, he had a manner of speaking, sort of a manner of a lot of dictators. They, when they're speaking to their underlings, people working for them, they speak very softly and you can hardly hear them, so you have to pay attention. And he, generally when he spoke to audiences, you had to have a very loud speaker because he had such high regard for himself that anything he said to you obviously you would listen to. And even if you couldn't hear him -- I mean I saw him on television a couple times afterward

and he would speak rather loudly when he was given a political speech, but in, in his own environment, people -- you could hardly hear him. And he was a -- I mean, I didn't really want to get to know him, he was just so disagreeable. And he and his wife were always together. Nobody -- as far as I know he never talked to anybody other than about work. Strange man. But I was convinced after that we should never have anything more to do with this man. Not ever have anything more to do with him. He played a political role for us. But I don't think it was necessary to have him back in the United States. Of course he was killed before we had a chance to get him back.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Tito was another case. He, I guess he was in his eighties when he came, and it was his last visit to the United States. He was even more that Ceausescu was sort of our darling for the US. We had our problems with him and we'd had difficult times with his relationships with Soviets. But I just remember I went out to pick him up. I think the Vice President -- this was again under Carter -- I think Mondale went out. And, I went out. And we greeted him. And we came in the first night -- he was staying at Blair House. And the first night he came in and he'd asked for one on one dinner companion, with Averell Harriman, whom he respected so much. And the two of them -- I, I knew Harriman and I took Tito into see Harriman. But the governor arrived after Tito was there. And you could see that they really had a rapport and I -- Tito was a, a remarkably fit, sturdy, and strong 85 or 82-year-old, whatever he was. And the next day when he marched on the lawn -- we played the right national anthem by the way -- and he was -- he strutted, I mean he was sturdy, and you could see that he was a man of physical and, and mental strength. And when we arrived at Blair House I was riding in the second car with the Foreign Minister and I got out and slammed the door behind me as we raced up. And I of course slammed it on the fingers of, of his major security guard.

Q: Ooh.

LUERS: And the door -- I think it probably broke the door he was so strong. And I don't think it even broke the fingers, he was just incredible. But I liked that visit. I mean to meet this man, as dreadful as he was as a dictator, he was just the opposite of Ceausescu. He had a presence.

Q: Well, I spent five years in Yugoslavia. And I realized he was bad, but you know, there are different levels of badness.

LUERS: Yeah, I know.

Q: And he probably put fewer people in jail than most. And of course he had this horrible opposition.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: Of all these different -- particularly the Croats, but the -- there were others.

LUERS: And he held them together, you know, you've seen what's happened afterward and it's curious.

Q: All of us who were serving in the embassy, which included Larry Eagleburger and --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: And there's, you know, we have a great deal of respect for the man, for -- in a very difficult neighborhood --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- he held things together. And at least I had the feeling, and I think my colleagues did too, that --

LUERS: When was this?

Q: This was '67. I was there five years.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: I was Chief of the Consular Section. But I had the feeling that if Tito went, this was the key to that whole area. That things could fall apart very quickly --

LUERS: And you were right.

Q: And at that time we were really concerned about if Tito went the Soviets might --

LUERS: Move in
Q: Move in.

LUERS: Particularly with Serbia.

Q; Yeah. And you know, anything could happen. So you know, he was -- we have to think from American policy, he was a positive factor from keeping us from going to war maybe.

Q: Well, Kennan was there and then Burke Elbrick.

LUERS: Were you there with Kennan?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Well, I remember, I was in Soviet Affairs at the time, and this was a moment with Kennan when -- you remember in the Non-Aligned Treaty, was meeting in Belgrade in --

Q: I think '61.

LUERS: It must have been '61. It was September '61.

Q: This was before I got there, but I --

LUERS: It was September '61 and the Non-Aligned Leaders were meeting in Belgrade. And Kennan had sent in all these cables saying he's quite sure that he had established a type of relationship with Tito, and that Tito on the tough issues would be with us. And he thought that he had a deal with Tito. And at -- just before the Non-Aligned Conference, on the eve of it, the Soviets tested a hydrogen bomb in Siberia

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And Tito in the opening of the conference said he supported Soviet test because they had to fight imperialism. And he really endorsed, or didn't criticize, the Soviet decision to blow this bomb on the eve of the --

Q: I remember that, yeah.

LUERS: And Kennan totally lost it. And I admire him very much. But he got very emotional. Of course the problem, Kennan took things very personally, and he felt personally affronted that this had been done. He thought he had been given assurances that it wouldn't happen and we couldn't quite figure out what might happen. But he -- Kennan thought he had a deal that Tito wouldn't do this type of thing, wouldn't support the Soviets on such a big issue. So he began to write these cables, eloquently as he is, and that the US should cut way back on its special relationship with Tito. We had to diminish our military support, we've got to tell them -- we've got to show these people that -- this man that he can't treat us this way, and he protested for several months wanting to change dramatically a policy that had evolved rather well since the beginning of the Cold War. And everybody to some degree benefited from it, as complicated as it was. And finally, I don't know if you remember a senior official in State named Harold Vedeler?

Q: I remember the name, yes.

LUERS: Harold was head of the Eastern European Affairs and --

Q: I think actually we interviewed him I think.

LUERS: Yes, wonderful guy. He was bureaucratic. He wasn't a Foreign Service Officer. He was, a civil servant who dealt with Yugoslavia for decades. And the Secretary asked Harold to write a letter to Kennan basically saying, "George, we appreciate your being upset with Tito, and we think you're right, he really blew it this time. But on the balance we think that our policy is solid and it serves U.S. interests. He is a source of considerable strength against the Soviet incursions admitted." And here was this

bureaucrat who wrote this letter. And the Secretary signed it virtually as it was written, and it was a well-crafted letter to probably our most brilliant diplomat. And, to this day, I mean -- I knew Kennan reasonably well, I had a very great fondness for him -- I asked him once what he was biggest disappointment about in his life. He replied he had not been a success at his profession as a diplomat. He was successful in a lot of things, but in terms of a diplomat, as an ambassador, you know, he's PNGed out of Moscow shortly after he went there. And, and then -- because of what he said about Stalin. And this Tito thing was, was a very big setback for him, because he thought that personally he'd done the job, and he didn't, you know, and he -- it was difficult for him to feel there was something larger outside of foreign policy than his relationship with Tito. And I think it was, it was a sad moment for him. He finally left rather disappointed. He left when you were there?

Q: Yeah. You know, I mean I have to put my impression of Kennan. Obviously I was down the line. I was Chief of his Consular Section so I was at all the staff meetings and all. And I never -- he would consult me from time-to-time on consular matter, but it was always, "Shall I call Bobby Kennedy because this guy's not getting a visa?"

And I said, "I think we can work it out."

LUERS: *(laughs)*

Q: You know, I mean this is not the sort of thing -- but there was something that did bother me. You may recall that at one point we were doing a trade negotiation of some kind, mega trade, Kennedy. And thrown into this thing was whether the Neanderthals in the Republican party had talked about taking away most favored nations from Yugoslavia. And as I was told by people who knew what was happening, this is some raw meat that they let the Republicans have, but nothing would happen. It was just a gesture, an OK, if we needed to get the votes or something. Kennan went ballistic is my understanding. And _____ was pushing for Kennedy, who was the president of course, to practically go around on the back of a train making speeches about --

LUERS: About the folly of --

Q: About the folly of doing this and all. But we're told that this is a gesture and would have no, no real impact. I mean the thing was he -- I don't think he really understood America and the system.

LUERS: Well, he didn't. And he said he didn't. He didn't like the system particularly the intrusion of Congress.

Q: And to top things off, back when I was just starting this oral history program and was trying to get support, I thought well here's my old ambassador, I'll write to him and say, "Look, I want to do this thing and I'd appreciate a letter of support."

Took a long time, but I finally got a letter, which is no good at all, which said essentially, "Well, there may be some merit to this, but you got to make sure you only interview the right people."

LUERS: *(laughs)*

Q: You know, and, and, and you know, I mean --

LUERS: Believable.

Q: -- what I'm of course doing is I'm very deliberately picking people off the margins as well as from the center. I want somebody reading these things in the future to get the diversity of opinion --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- the diversity of people all going into the mix. And you know, so that's my take on George Kennan. I also join with you, looking at it as an ambassador, he got PNG-ed for saying what he did not have had to have said at the airport about --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- Stalin. And this is what an ambassador does. I mean --

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: -- he's a very intellectual than he was frankly a diplomat.

LUERS: Yes. And he knew that. That was his complaint, that why couldn't he do it better? And he couldn't do it better because he's so, he's so emotional.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: He doesn't have a cool. And yet --

Q: Somebody said one time that he actually has some suicide pills in case he got kidnapped by the KGB's. I don't know if that's true or not, but he was a very delightful person to work for.

LUERS: Wonderful man. Anyway, so those are my -- the period in Soviet Affairs -- the other one story that I didn't tell you was when I was dealing a lot with the Soviets, and I went to Moscow a number of times and negotiations we were doing. Bessmertnykh was the number two in the embassy -- in then, in the Foreign Ministry. He was the Vice Minister. And he later became Foreign Minister under Gorbachev, by the way. But he was -- had been a friend of mine from the time he was in the embassy. He was Dobrynin's number two in Washington. And I knew him pretty well I visited Moscow in

1977 after I had become the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe. And because I think I told you my episode in Moscow with this writer who I was entrapped with the KGB and the KGB came and arrested him and sent him off to Siberia, Andre Amalrik. So when I left Moscow, presumably the KGB had an active file on me. And there was probably a little tag saying, "If he ever comes back we'll follow him." So I came back a lot during that period and the first time I came back I was followed very closely. The KGB was right on my tail. And every place I came they were quite obviously with me. And so I went to Bessmertnykh the next time they were following me again and I said, "You know, let me tell you that this happened, because of the one thing that happened when I was here before. It's something that I feel was OK that I did, I did everything openly. But why are they following me? You know my view and my desire to have a good relationship with the Soviet Union. Stop it." The close tailing stopped. And they didn't follow so offensively after that. I am certain they still followed. And so it was interesting that I would have thought the KGB would have had their own authority to make these decisions, but Bessmertnykh apparently called them up and said don't do it and they became more subtle, so we go to Venezuela?

Q: Absolutely. So how did this come about? I mean here you are, you're a PDAS for European Affairs?

LUERS: Yes

Q: Dealing with that. From when-to-when were you doing this?

LUERS: I left Latin American Affairs where I was the Acting Assistant Secretary in the spring of 1977. Carter was sworn in in '77. In the first four months, five months, I was the Acting Assistant Secretary because the Assistant Secretary couldn't get confirmed. And then immediately I went to be -- George Vest, who was Assistant Secretary, asked me to come be his Deputy for Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. And I think I've told you that I was at one point going to be Head of Soviet Affairs, the office, which is under -- but that didn't work out because I went and worked for Kissinger. But I went and I took the job and I had about a year from the spring of '77 until the summer of '78. I still was in touch with contacts and friends, but I had not thought a lot about Venezuela. I hadn't -- I get a call from The White House. I don't get a call from the Director General, I get a call from The White House. And they said, "Would you consider going as the president's ambassador to Venezuela?" And the reason was the president then was a man named Carlos Andrés Perez who, who when I was Political Counselor there several years before, he'd become a very good friend of mine and I saw a lot of him and I was known to be quite close to him, and we had a good and funny relationship. And he and I joked a lot and he was a very bright, not very well educated, but extremely bright street-smart guy. So when he was president, President Carter wanted to get somebody to work with him because they had one serious project, which was to work with Venezuela and Carlos Andrés Perez in particular to find a way to get Somoza to leave Nicaragua. And the idea was that, you know, one would put together a package of opportunities for Somoza to leave, his family would leave, he could take his money with him. And there would be an interim government that would come in that would not allow the Sandinistas to take over,

because the Sandinista Movement had already begun seriously challenging the regime. So in terms of human rights and the objectives of both Carlos Andrés Perez and Carter, Somoza was a target of considerable interest and they wanted to get him. So they wanted me to go down, among other things because I knew Carlos Andrés Perez, but also to see whether I could help work on a joint Somoza project, which didn't mean violence, it meant persuading Somoza to leave. And they had some plans for that.

So I said, "Absolutely, I'd love to," because it was a number of years before I thought I'd be eligible for an embassy. And I was looking to go to Eastern Europe, and Moscow eventually was my own trajectory as designed by Bill Luers. But this came up in June 1978. It was probably Bob Pastor and the President. Pastor was his advisor on Latin America and Carter knew -- had already gotten to know Carlos Andrés Perez, who had a very high regard for me.

And so I suspect that Carlos, without me having anything to do with it, said, "Send Luers back here because I know him and," -- but whatever happened, The White House asked me to do it and let the State Department know. And since I wasn't going as a White House candidate they put me up as a State Department candidate. And I went really quite soon, except for this little deviation. I'm talking to Pacepa about his, his work as Head of the Secret Service, Secret Police of Romania. So I went there in, in the fall of 1978.

Q: Before we --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any problem with the Senate?

LUERS: No, my first appointment, no. The second one I did, but the first appointment I had no problem. I think, what was his name? It was Chairman of the Committee.

Q: Helms still or?

LUERS: No, no, no, no. This was the Senate, I mean it was the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Helms was, was Chairman of the Subcommittee for Latin America. But it was Pell, Claiborne Pell.

Q: Claiborne Pell.

LUERS: "Feel Good" Pell. And I went in to, -- I remember I was briefed on my hearing. And actually, Adlai Stevenson was my childhood friend, young Adlai, and he was the Senator at the time. He came over and presented me to the Senate, which didn't hurt. And he gave me his personal endorsement. And Pell, there are about three or four Senators at the hearing, and I was told -- Pell would say to me in the hearings, three or four times he'd say, "I feel good about this or I feel good about that. They call him "Feel Good Pell". And he's a nice man. Did you ever know him?

Q: Yes, we had -- he was in Italy during an earthquake.

LUERS: Uh-huh.

Q: I came and I had him for Thanksgiving dinner.

LUERS: Did you? Yeah. He's a gent. You know, he's really --

Q: Yeah. We helicoptered around.

LUERS: Yes. But he didn't ask me many questions and I think they knew my background there and they knew I knew Venezuela and that I spoke Spanish. And there was no problem whatsoever and, and I went through really quickly and went off to the post. Later, when I was going up for the Czechoslovak job, there was one guy who I had asked to leave the embassy who's Head of the USIA Office there, who was really bad news. He just didn't do the job. And, and one of the things I kept saying, you know, I call and you're always in the office. Your job should be outside the office. But he was not good. And he wrote a letter to the Senate and alleged that I had been unfair to him and personnel issues, and basically the attitude that I had toward him. And that took a few conversations before we went beyond that. But that's the only thing that ever happened to me.

Q: OK, you went to Venezuela when?

LUERS: I went to Venezuela fall of '78.

Q: How stood relations between the United States and Venezuela and then what was the situation within Venezuela?

LUERS: Our relations were excellent with Venezuela in terms of Carter's relationship with Carlos Andrés Perez who's the president. The human rights agenda Carlos Andrés Perez fully agreed with. It was a democracy, it was our largest provider of oil in the Western Hemisphere, one of the largest in the world. Most things we agreed on, and the one mandate I was told to do when I got to Venezuela, was to try to increase their production of oil for us. Could they take it up from 1.8 million to maybe two million barrels a day? During that time there was an oil shortage and we were having trouble in the States with lines for the gas stations in 1974-5. But the shortage of available oil and the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) effort to sort of squeeze us was still very strong. So they wanted me to help enlarge the exports in Venezuela to diminish the pressure from other OPEC countries. Everything else, our relations were really excellent. We had, we had good commercial relations, we had good military relations, we had no conceptual problems. Somoza was one issue. We differed on whether to do this. And I think Carlos Andrés Perez really wanted him out and Carter sort of went along with it. And you know, there was also the threat -- the concern that the Venezuelans want to take too big a bite out of the oil company benefits for profit, which was a problem at some level because the embassy, I mean the commercial, the

companies, particularly oil companies, thought that I should be down there defending their interests and that's what my job was. I didn't quite see it that way, but you know, I had good relations with all the big oil companies and I kept them. The one thing when I arrived there, internally the country was run politically to two political parties: the Copeyanos (the Christian Democrats) and the Adecos, the social democrats which are Carlos Andrés Perez. And they had changed every five years, one party with one year and since Betancourt they had rotated back and forth and they exchanged running the country. It was partially because that was the deal they made, but mainly because one government would be in so long and be so corrupt that they'd want to throw the bums out and give a try to the other party. And -- which is exactly what happened in the case of Carlos Andrés Perez. He was elected out in -- later in '78 and, and Luis Herrera Campins, a Copeyano came in. But the parties worked together and there was -- given the scale of problems in the rest of Latin America, there wasn't much there. When I came -- I'd been there about two weeks. I presented my credentials and everything was fine. And Teodoro Petkoff who had been a, a communist, he'd been a, he'd been a guerrero. As I told you before when I had been there before I'd gotten to know him because he'd written a book ironically called Czechoslovakia, which was a statement of why the Soviets moved in '68. And his book was amazing, because it really was basically a criticism by this Communist of the Soviet system. And it was devastating criticism, it was the best I've read. So I went -- I got to know him. And he was then trying to pacify himself, getting out. He left the mountains and was no longer killing people. And people were outraged that I would have anything to do with it. And then when I came there -- back as ambassador, two weeks after I'm there I hear -- I get a call from Teodoro saying, "Bill, come over to the Tamanaco Hotel and I'm going to launch my candidacy for president this morning, or tomorrow morning. I'd like you to come be there."

And I said, "Sure, I'll be there."

And so I went and I hadn't seen him since I'd arrived back and I walked in and he, as always happened in a Latin country, he gave me a big abrazo (hug). And of course every front page of every newspaper the next day had this abrazo being given to the American ambassador by Petkoff and furious people were, the anger at me already was heavy with the business community because I would hug this guy. And my argument with him was, and I gave him -- I had a speech about it. I had them over to the house they were so angry and I said, "Look, if this leftist wants to become President of Venezuela and he wants in the political system. You want him in the system rather than be an outsider. And if he's going to give an abrazo to the American ambassador that doesn't mean he wants to overthrow this government. He wants in and I know he wants in. And the fact is we should help him become part of the system. It's better he become part of the system than not. As the United States can shove it along, fine." And many of them didn't buy it. Matter of fact, years later when, when Reagan came to office and Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was the -- Reagan's ambassador to the UN was the first official to visit Venezuela on the way to Argentina, because she was -- considered herself a great Latin Americanist. And I had this dinner party for her, and I had known her before really quite well and I was fond of her. She's very right wing, very conservative.

And we sat at dinner that night with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and she was sitting next to me and she said, "Bill, we're probably going to keep you here for a while at post, because I've convinced many people in Reagan's staff that you're not a Communist."

I said, you know, "because of this stupid thing, this hugging Petkoff?" And, she said "I don't think you're a Communist and I'm not worried about that, so," -- and that came up. A Communist, it's ridiculous.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Anyway. So during that first couple of years, our effort was to sort of expand the relations at an official level, even though -- I mean Latin America was still a minor player in our global view. Venezuela and Brazil was a player, Mexico was big, but even Venezuela, the issue was oil, that's all it was. And we had no problem with the country that was significant. And so I really ran the policy. I mean there was nobody up there hanging over me. And so I would fly up and I'd have people who were in charge send me instructions to do things that I wanted to be able to do. And so really I was running both ends of policy on Venezuela.

Q: How did we view and deal with what I understand is a disparity in Venezuela between the wealthy and the non-wealthy? Or was that an issue?

LUERS: It was an issue at some level, but all of Latin America had this division. Venezuela had the highest per capita income in Latin America at the time, so the data were bad for all the region. And when I was there, there was so much money in the system that the government was bringing more and more people out of lower class, and they were building a middle class, slowly, with oil money. There wasn't much opportunity in the private sector even thought there was a -- it wasn't a robust, but there did exist a private sector that was growing. So the way we dealt with it was that this was a -- the way we addressed it was that this was a problem that was being managed at some level because of the wealth of the country, and it was improving the distance. I think in retrospect, we thought it was going in the right direction and it wasn't really. I mean the data said it was in terms of -- but it's not clear to me what we could have done about it, you know. I don't know --

Q: I mean this is --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- an internal thing.

LUERS: Yeah, I don't know what you -- I mean how you approach it. I mean the wealthy families were a source of anxiety, particularly by the academics and the journalists, because they were so powerful and they were these big families that did a lot of things. And my approach was I knew Petkoff, I knew the Head of the Communist Party, I knew all the left, the left-wing journalists and the center left political activities, and I saw the

wealthy. You know, I saw the business community, I saw the big families, and as far as I was concerned I didn't, I tried not to make any, any --

Q: Was there any type of guerilla movement going on? Because of course the neighbor was Colombia --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- where they'd had this --

LUERS: Well, the last guerillos theoretically were brought out of the mountains and Teodoro Petkoff was the last of them in the late '60s. And, he didn't have anything left. They had one case of an American, William Niehous who was head of a glass company, Owen's Glass. He was an American executive. And he was kidnapped when I was there, before I left to go back and before I went as ambassador. And so the whole three years that I was out of Venezuela, this guy who'd been kidnapped, nobody found him. And when I arrived in Venezuela I went to the Minister of Interior and I asked him about Bill Niehous I'd known him while I was there and he was kidnapped. And I went to the Minister of Interior, said, "Look, I know Bill's around, I know he's alive, I'm convinced of it, and all I want to make a deal with you is that if we find him or if he ever surfaces, you'll let me get him out of Venezuela within 12 hours, because the last thing that he will want to do is sit here and be interrogated be questioned and become a political football."

So he said, "Deal."

And about a year after I was there I get a call from the Embassy "They've found Niehous near Ciudad Bolívar and he has escaped from his captures." And so I sent a DCM down immediately to bring him back to Caracas. And then it turns out that the Owen's, the Owen's Glass Company had their airplane all ready in Jamaica waiting to fly in, which made me think that money had been paid for Bill to be released.

But I -- nobody ever proved that and nobody ever -- so we picked him up and I took him to the hospital and the Minister of Interior said, "All we want to do is give him a full health review so that we're -- when he leaves he will -- we know that he's not some, in some grave illness." So that's what he did. And, and he was -- he'd been kept in captivity. He didn't ever see his captures. He was blindfolded all the time they were around.

I talked to him during his short stay in Caracas. As we were driving down to the airport and earlier while sitting around waiting for his physical, he said that he survived through all this because he was religious, he prayed a lot. He also said he had played baseball as a young man. And he was able to recall over time of concentrating he found he was able to replay all the baseball games. He said he was able to recall, the more he worked at it, the more he could pull back, what happened almost in every play. Can you imagine that? This is the type of thing that apparently you do in captivity, particularly when you see nobody. And he wasn't -- he was allowed some reading, but very little. And he -- it was

all in his head. And he exercised, he prayed, and he remembered details, particularly in baseball games. And he was -- seemed fine. He became quite survivor and he went back to Ohio, to Toledo, where his company was.

But that's the type of thing, they had kidnapping and they had crime, but they had no guerilla movement. They had several on the border in Colombia.

Q: Were the drug people in Colombia reaching out and using Venezuela at all?

LUERS: The only time -- the drug -- in those days the drug trafficking was almost exclusively through Colombia, but there was a part of the Peninsula Paraguaná, there's a part of the peninsula in Venezuela where you did have them landing planes and it was, it was --

Q: We're looking at a map.

LUERS: It was, right here between Lake Maracaibo and the border of Colombia. They would land planes there and they would, they would use that as an area. And I think the Venezuelans tried to stop it, but the, the fabric of that time I was there -- I mean I, I got to know really all the governors. I traveled all over the country. I saw, it was, it was an opportunity. It was an open country. We had great relations. And you know, there's the natural level of hostility toward Americans, toward the Gringo. But --

Q: The colossus to the north.

LUERS: Yeah, yeah. But I, I just -- we got into so many -- I got into the culture, we bought a lot of the local art. I said to our press attaché, "I don't want to appear on the social pages, I don't want to appear on the front pages. All I want to do is appear on the culture pages. And I want to make sure that people don't see the American ambassadors here either because he's socially prominent, or because he's with the military or pushing companies." And, and so my whole strategy was to -- from a public diplomacy standpoint was to stretch the association I had with Venezuelan culture, with the language, with their literature. And so it was a strategic positioning of the American ambassador. It became fairly effective. We had artists -- I had practically -- I mean I had probably seven of the top American writers come and stay with me. We had Updike and Cheever and Styron and Miller and, you know.

Q: OK, this sounds good, but what difference does this make in a country such as Venezuela to have a strong foot -- that's a good example -- in the cultural field?

LUERS: American ambassadors have been seen in Latin America as either interested in military, business, or oil. And I didn't want to be perceived as representing a government that had a narrow interest only having to do with the U.S. And it was -- remember one time I had a number of the painters down who were painters in the collection that I put up in the embassy. And they came down and the entire Cabinet came to the vernissage_ to the opening. And the president was there and the Cabinet came to the opening. And here

were these seven American artists, painters' names, you know. And the Latins place a high value on culture. They think their language and their art is the core of who they are. They're wrong at some level, but that's what they think. And they place a very high regard to culture in the press, particularly that covers cultural activity. And that night when the President came and he gave a speech and the Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a talk. This is a big deal. We were displaying modern American paintings in the embassy. That's all we were doing. And, the top petroleum journalist in the major newspaper who I knew who was -- who had a lot of edge to him -- said, "Ambassador, after tonight you can do anything you want with oil. You can get away with anything, you know. But I could say publicly that I want them to raise, to increase their production." And that's sort of what I wanted, that's sort of the symbol, to get things accomplished there you want to have not an assumption that you're only asking for them to increase their production of oil. And I think it worked.

Q: Well, on the other side where you didn't want to get a name for yourself but it had to come up, and that's the military. First place, how would you describe the military, particularly the Officer Corps in Venezuela?

LUERS: The military had a lot of money, they got their cut from the petroleum industry. They were sort of a middle to lower middle class group of people, except for some of the Senior Officers had had good educations. Not a very functional military, they had no task. They were there in case they were needed. But the military didn't have any challenges. Colombia was the biggest concern they had. We had a military attaché, we had a group with them. We weren't as actively supporting the Venezuelan Military as we were some of the other countries. I guess my one -- the Air Force wanted the F-16's and I helped arrange for it. And they finally got their aircraft. How well they ever flew them, what they use them for, I don't know. But I, I did do what I could to get them what they needed, what they said they needed. And the president of Venezuela wanted me to do this, the president -- and the military, U.S. Military wanted to have this relationship. And then I went -- I used to go to all the military days at the bases and I would always be there as a presence. And one time to my surprise, they gave me a medal, which I -- I hate medals and I don't really -- I never really accepted them. And I was trapped. And I let people know that I didn't want to get a lot of medals while I was in Venezuela. It got so funny that when I left, the president, Luis Herrera Campins, who I knew quite well, had heard that I didn't want to get, you know, I didn't want a big ceremony, giving me a medal. And he had a dinner party for me. This was during the Malvinas issue, which is another fascinating story.

Q: The Falklands.

LUERS: The Falklands. And he -- the going away dinner party which I had, and he gave me -- it was all the Cabinet there and my wife, and at the table he took the order of _Simon Bolivar in the first category it was the highest award they give to anybody from abroad. And he said, "I know you don't want any public displays," and he passed it under the table to me.

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: Which I don't think I ever opened, because I don't feel that's something that's appropriate for ambassadors to do. But I guess, the most complicated thing for me was, was making that we didn't appear to be overwhelming in this government that was very close to us, that we didn't seem to be dominant and pro-counsel.

Q: Well, I would think that if I was a Venezuelan Military man, I'd be a bit concerned about Colombia because OK, they had a guerilla war and they were fighting it and this meant, you know, possible opponent is busy, but the same time there's nothing like a little war in a, in a rather peaceful continent to hone an army and to turn, you know --

LUERS: You're right.

Q: Rather effective --

LUERS: On another level, it's probably one of those typical border issues where countries right next to each other, which -- with all the history that Colombia and Venezuela have had, and all the Colombian immigrants are coming into Venezuela. And, and there were border issues. There were a lot of guerillas who came across the borders, a lot of crime in the border. There was never a real worry that there'd be a military attack, I don't think. At least during the time I was there. There were always -- I mean when the Venezuelan Military trained, they trained thinking they're fighting Colombians, and vice versa. Actually, communists had so many guerillas they were fighting inside they had their own battles inside of Colombia.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But the Venezuelans have to -- you have -- military has to have a principle and a protagonist. In this case it happened to be Colombia. But this wasn't an issue during the time I was there. The one thing I think I told you, the one issue was Venezuela's relationship to Guyana, because the Essequibo area, which is here --

Q: Pointing to a map.

LUERS: Two-thirds -- I mean a third of Guyana bordering on Venezuela. The Venezuelans claim it's their land. And when I was Desk Officer for Guyana, I don't know if I told you this, but they - we had an intelligence report at -- as the Venezuelan President, Leoni, was leaving office. Between the time he was elected out and the time he'd be replaced, the Minister of Interior of Venezuela at the time had planned to do what all presidents had pledged to get that land back. And so they -- do you remember me telling you this?

Q: I'm not sure, but why don't you tell me again?

LUERS: And what happens is they had planned to have the Amer-Indian group, the American Indian -- the Indians that -- they call them Amer-Indians in Guyana, gather together and declare an independent state of Essequibo, that they wanted. And they would invite the Venezuelan Army to come in and protect them because they were being oppressed by the government of Guyana. And so it's all set up and in this way the Venezuelans would be invited in by an ostensible government in the Essequibo, to defend their interests and help them become independent. And this was the plan they were going to do. And we had this intelligence report. And I think I told you, I went to my boss and I said, "You know, we've got to call our ambassador and tell him to -- tell the government, tell the President that we know that's being planned and they shouldn't do it." And we, we argued a little bit.

I finally wrote a cable, he sent it off. He said this is ridiculous, they're not going to do this. And I -- and the ambassador, Bernbaum was his name, said, "I'm not going to do this." And, and I got approval from the Undersecretary I guess to call him.

And without saying specifically what it was, I said, "We want you to do this. We want you to go to the President and do, follow your instructions," which he did.

And he said, "As soon as I said that we know you're going to do this," he said the President went white. And he said, "It's clear that we caught him and we stopped him." And he admitted that probably that action had probably stopped him from doing this crazy thing. And over the years this Essequibo thing had been important, and when the Falklands issue came up, the one country that was more supportive of the Argentineans getting the Falklands back were the Venezuelans, because they had an almost identical issues with the British. And they've never had great relations with the British, and this residue, pain of this piece of territory that they feel was stolen from them by the British Empire, so, so they found themselves super Argentinean over getting the Argentineans to get the Falklands back. And the Argentinean ambassador I saw a lot of, and the British ambassador at that time, and actually the Argentinean ambassador in Venezuela went back in the middle of the war and became Foreign Minister of Argentina. And, and the British, I knew from my contacts that they were about to kick the British ambassador out.

And so I went to the British ambassador and I said, "Look, we've got to find so that the Government does not declare you PNG." I told him, "What you should do is on Monday morning, you call on the Head of COPEI, the ruling party," he wasn't the president but he was the person who headed the party in charge, and his name was Eduardo Fernandez, he was a good friend of mine. And I called him up and said, "Would you receive the British ambassador because he has something he wants to tell you tomorrow morning."

So the British ambassador went there at 11:00 in the morning on Monday morning, and because he was going to see the head of the party there was a lot of press interest in him. And he said, "And when you leave that meeting you give Eduardo an abrazo, just hug him." And of course, he did. Now, this is a true story. He did it. And it came out in the press that Eduardo Fernandez was hugging him and they didn't, they didn't PNG him, they didn't kick him out of the country. I knew they were going to kick him out of the

country, because they wanted this act of -- and so then we put -- I was worried about the Brit and we had put him on our security phone line from the cars, because they had general low level threats against my life. And so we had, we had a circuit connection between our headquarters. And I put him on our circuit, you know, so he would be able to call in and let me know what he was -- let the, let the Marines know what he was doing. And so for almost three weeks, I guess, during that war he was, he was hooked into our circuit. And the, the most wonderful moment for me was when in the middle of the war Americans were sort of snubbed at a certain level by the Venezuelans. They had to go through. And even the wealthy Venezuelans would say, "I can't go out with you tonight, Bill." And but I organized a big event with Disney. And Disney wanted to have an event there urging Venezuelans to buy a pavilion in the Epcot Center, which was being built. And they thought Venezuela was -- because so many Venezuelans go there that Venezuelans would like to have a pavilion there. And they thought there was enough private money and government interest that they could get one built. So we had this evening that was set up right in the middle of it, this is a Falklands issue. And there was thought, "Well, we should cancel this." I said no. So we had it. And Disney had flown in this group of entertainers, Mickey Mouse and all the classic characters came. And they had this show they put on. And we'd invited government officials, as well as about 60 or 70 of the top families who had the money.

Q: And the children?

LUERS: No, this is serious. This is not for the children, this is for the grown-ups to put money in. Which is the interesting thing about it. And they came, and you know, all of them came in sort of dour and pissed off at the United States for its position with the British against, against their friends, the Argentineans, and why are we standing with the British anyway? And I tell you, you would have thought it was the closest relationship in the world. They loved Disneyworld, they dance, they sung, they all knew all the songs and, it is symptomatic of the, of this ambivalence that goes on in Latin American countries toward, toward the United States. The issues I dealt with were not earth shattering, they were management of a relationship. And when we had difficult problems because I knew Venezuela-- I had already lived there for nearly 8 years. And it came as second nature. In retrospect, if I had to do it over again, I probably wouldn't have been as, as sold on Venezuela as I was at the time. I mean I thought it was -- I traveled in much of Latin America, but it was the country I knew and it was the country that we were closest to, it was the country that for a whole variety of reasons was close to us. And, and I guess I had too much faith in the capacity of a country like this, with two strong parties rotating and no military threat that they were bringing. They were our largest provider of oil. What's not to like? And I think over time I've said things about them and believed publicly in their strength, as well as their affinity to us. And I wish in retrospect I'd been more measured. Because I think they -- just for my own purposes. I mean I don't think I affected policy very much or affected how their development went. But underneath it, these two parties were very corrupt, as most parties are in Latin America. But these were parties -- unlike Mexico, the Venezuelans didn't send their party leaders off to learn the business of government. I mean the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)) in Mexico, the ruling party of Mexico for 50 years,

really trained a core of, of technocrats in finance and in management of oil and, and all the important things. So when the party came in, they had people in the party who could fill jobs in ministries and they knew what they were doing. Venezuela never took the time to educate their party people.

Q: I'm told by people who dealt with that area, Americans, but I think they obviously pick up some of the prejudices of the area, that Venezuelans are kind of lazy.

LUERS: Lazy is probably not quite it. It's undisciplined, it's weak on follow through, on management. I mean they work hard and they spend a lot of time at it. But I think they don't know how to use their time effectively and, their educational and technical skills are weaker than most of the other countries that I dealt with subsequently in Latin America. And the comparison with Mexico is what's so striking. Because as bad as Mexico is, they have some of the really top ministers, because there are people who are in the party, all -- most of whom have advanced degrees from Oxford or Harvard or, you know, some place, and they've honed their skills, they know what they're doing. And these people you find appealing. The Venezuelan leaders were appealing but they were not prepared to run a government and that they were, that was their business, you know. Lazy, I'm not sure.

Q: OK, that might not be. One of the problem was, of course, at the certain level if you get a lot of oil coming in, I mean this is a curse.

LUERS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Saudi Arabia or anywhere else.

LUERS: Absolutely.

Q: You know, because it just kind of flows. And then --

LUERS: Yes, in that sense they didn't have the drive to really build a really strong private sector. There was a private sector, it was a good private at a certain level, but they still imported much of their food. They didn't really work hard at developing another way to deal with this expanding population. When I went there, the population of Venezuela was about 15 million. Today it's nearly 30 million. That's double in a very short period of time.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I mean it over doubled. And, the stretch of the money available through oil didn't stretch to include that broader population.

Q: Well, obviously we're talking in 2011 now and Hugo Chavez has been a figure for some time. But was he or the forces that promoted him appear evident during the time you were there?

LUERS: I don't think so. I guess in retrospect some people might have said it, but I never heard it. I mean one might have imagined a military coup at some point, but one would have imagined it at a higher level, but for some major or colonel to pull it off. The interesting thing about him is that Chavez made that assault on Carlos Andrés Perez in his second term. I wasn't there; I'd already left. But Chavez attacked with his military group Miraflores, which is the palace of the President, and tried to capture the President and capitate the government. But they failed and he was sent to jail for life apparently. And the people who look back on that period argue that Chavez's family were part of that lower class, which had been pulled into the middle class because of government employment. And Chavez was a young, poor officer and he got some pay. And I think there was another member of the family who got some money, which allowed the family to come out of poverty and function at a lower middle class level. And a lot of that happened in Venezuela during the boom period where the population wasn't so large that the oil could really build the middle class, small middle class. And so houses were being built. But in that year, when this happened it was the beginning of the reversal, that they'd proven that in that year the middle class had been built over the past generation or two that was continuing to increase, stopped, and it started turning the other way. Because the money didn't extend and the way the corruption was so great that it -- and it was true that the Chavez family were in that zone. I think it is an interesting phenomena that the despair element among the poor had gotten to a point where a person like Chavez could emerge. And now, the situation's so bad in the country I don't know how it's going to end -- bad news. Bad news.

Q: How was crime during the period you were there?

LUERS: You could walk in the streets most places. When I was there as ambassador I had all this protection. When I was there before not as ambassador it was fine. I think while I was there it began to get bad. And there were certain parts of the country, of the city where some of my friends would go outside of Caracas, which was not a problem. I think there were parts of Caracas where people didn't want to go where there was likely to be -- it wasn't so much homicide as there was robbery -- but very few people from the embassy ever had any problems. Now it's terrible, it's the worst in Latin America.

Q: How did you find the embassy? Was it a happy embassy or what?

LUERS: I guess I thought it was good, since I was running it.

Q: (laughs) Yeah.

LUERS: I did feel that we had some rapport and some good staff. I feel like, like much of Latin America we don't get the top of the Foreign Service, you know, people in Latin America are not the types of people you find in Asia or Central Europe, Western Europe. But I thought it was a good group and I had two DCM's who were first class and I had -- the Political Officers were great and, and I had this one USIA officer who was not good. And -- but generally speaking I've kept up with many of the people I was with and I --

Q: Why would you say -- you know, I've noticed this, but I'm speaking with prejudice, I've never served in Latin America. I've served in Europe, slightly in the Middle East, and in Asia.

LUERS: Right.

Q: But Latin America's always been sort of a black hole. People disappear, they learn Spanish and they --

LUERS: I know.

Q: And that's kind of where they are. But it just doesn't seem to have the attraction. For one thing, you don't have the Middle East conflict or what to do about china.

LUERS: It's a scale of problems -- a lot of them are the internal problems of how the societies are going to function. You don't have any wars in Latin America.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And, you don't even have any potential wars really. I mean there are border issues everywhere.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And what was so exciting about the Falklands was there was a little, tiny war going.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: *(laughs)*

Q: And I just talked to --

LUERS: And there's Cuba. Cuba is --

Q: Yeah, I was going to ask about Cuba, because Venezuela actually was sort of invaded by Cuba at one point.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Did that play any factor?

LUERS: I haven't told you about my meetings with Fidel yet, but I, I spent a long time with Castro, just me, just the two of us. And I was in Havana in the year 2000 and I'd taken Arthur Miller and William Styron and Garcia Márquez --

Q: We're talking about the authors.

LUERS: Yeah. And we were down there invited by the Ministry of Culture and I got approval of this -- of the Department of Treasury, and I was Head of the Cultural Delegation there and we had a lot of time. Fidel saw us many times. And the last time, he came up to see us when we were having lunch out in the field. They took us out to their show place in the mountains of environmental protection. And, and he arrived. And then he asked me to drive back with him. And we ride -- we -- I rode in the back of his car with all his machine guns and every -- and we -- I said, "Look, I, you know, would you go along with my agenda for this ride? I would like to ask you about all the interventions that you've made, you know, in, in Latin America and in, in, in Africa, and in the Middle East. I mean, would you tell me what you can remember? I'd just be interested in knowing." And I took notes. I've got about 40 pages of notes, which I typed up, and we went through one after the other. And the first was Venezuela. I said, you know, how -- what, what happened there, because he had, he said he remembers personally, he took my friend Teodoro Petkoff and Rubin, his brother. He took them to the boat himself and put them on the boat and sent them off to Venezuela in probably 1960, very shortly after the --

Q: I was going to say, very shortly after.

LUERS: And he sent them off and said he would support them and they would go into the mountains and they went in -- I think they started really fighting in '62, '63. And, that period for Venezuela was a period when they were sort of the first to fall to Fidel. And Rómulo Ernesto Betancourt was President and Carlos Andrés Perez was the Minister of Interior. And they made damn sure that didn't happen and they -- the guerilla movement never got anything more than just a minor player, even though they get a lot of media. And Fidel, I told Castro that I knew Teodoro and I liked him very much. I never met Rubin. And he said, "Well, then you knew the wrong one?" And he knew that Teodoro had become an anti-Communist and a public figure opposing Castro, and never mind the Soviet Union. And by the way, I just saw the other day, Foreign Policy Magazine has a list of the 100 top prominent people in the world. And in Latin America, Teodoro Petkoff, my friend, is one of them.

Q: Ah.

LUERS: Yeah. Castro talked to me about Central America, about Nicaragua. He would have me believe that he managed the whole Sandinista march into Managua. And he was at Command Central and he had his own people there as well as the Sandinistas. And he told them how to go in, including on a map how to go, which streets to go on because his people knew where the Somoza Army was waiting to ambush them. And we also knew that he had supplied some arms to the Sandinistas. And, Carlos Andrés Perez when he got upset with the inability to get rid of Somoza -- between Carter and him in a peaceful way decided he was going to supply weapons to the Sandinistas and have them overthrow him. And so he -- we knew from intercepts that he talked to Fidel in September of '78

and asked him, you know, what, how does he get weapons to the Sandinistas and could, could Fidel help this happen and could, could he get the weapons? And he said, "I have the money," Carlos Andrés Perez had the money to buy the weapons when he wanted to get them there. And, and I knew this. I knew a lot of it. And, and what he did was he told Carlos Andrés Perez, "You got it all wrong about what they need. I know what they need. You don't -- Carlos Andrés Perez, you know nothing about revolutions." And, he said he had friends on the border of Costa Rica, the southern border of Costa Rica on the northern border of Nicaragua. And he was going to fly these weapons in. And he said that, "I told Carlos Andrés Perez I can't give them Soviet weapons because my deal with the Soviet Union is no Soviet weapons will be found in Central America. They don't want to annoy the United States by having me passing Soviet weapons. So, I'll buy them for you." And of course he bought Israeli weapons, and that's what they sent into the Sandinistas. But he told him about flying -- about sending pilots to Syria during the, during the '73 war. And how he was involved with Algeria. I didn't even know that. He -- they flew some aircraft for the Algerians. He told about Angola, about his work in Somalia and Yemen and, you know, he just gave me a lot of data about what he did.

And I think there's no reason he would lie about it. I mean he does tend to exaggerate himself. I said, "Señor Comandante, do you have any regrets?" I said, you know, "All these revolutions you've been describing to me took place at your urging, at least with your support if not leadership. And firstly, none of these countries that we've talked about is better off as a result. How do you feel about that?" And he looked at me and I said, "Do you feel any guilt?"

And he said, "No."

And I said, "Why?

And he said, "Por la doctrina," because of the ideology, because of the doctrine. Where there's a situation that's revolution, you're going to have a revolution, pre-revolution. So, he believed that where there's injustice, you have revolutions. And that was his belief. And, I think it's still there, but he can't do it anymore. And I don't think he has any regrets.

Q: It's interesting that Americans are -- mainly we kid ourselves, or I kid myself, but ideology just does not strike a cord with --

LUERS: I know.

Q: You know, I mean we have people talking about professors and all that. We don't have -- I mean there -- a practical, sometimes they're screwy, but ideology just doesn't set Americans off. I think it's hard for Americans to appreciate how ideology motivates.

LUERS: A lot of people, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well then, you left Venezuela when?

LUERS: I left in the fall -- in the summer of 1982. I had never had a year off since I was -- well, I was in the Navy. I never had one year where I did anything after the Navy except work. And I'd never had a year off in the Foreign Service. And so they gave me a year off and I went to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton where Einstein was and where George Kennan was working.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And I was there for a year and I wrote, among other things I wrote a long essay on the Falkland's War and that ludicrous situation. I called it, "More Gaucho Than The Gauchos" and it's about how Venezuelans reacted to --

Q: I think we're going to stop shortly, but why don't we talk about the institute.

LUERS: OK.

Q: And talk about the Malvinas/Falklands business. How did you view this and I mean, it struck me as --

LUERS: Well, I dealt with it. I dealt with this issue when we were dealing with Guyana and the operation that MI-6 and the CIA were operating to keep Cheddi Jagan out of office. Cheddi Jagan. And, over the years we got -- I got involved with the Brits on the hemisphere, and we used to meet with them on the Falklands. And I think, our view was that why don't you work this out and find a way to make a deal with the Argentineans? And, we participated as friendly observers of both sides to try to get them to find a way to get to the solution on the Falklands issue. And the fact is that these were British farmers that they were ignored by London. They were colonial outposts that the Brits cared little about, except it was theirs and they didn't want to give it up because of the sea rights and because of the possibilities that there'd be oil out there.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And so they kept to it. And they came close to a solution a couple times. I guess I was so torn because on the one hand, our position on anti-imperialism would argue that the British should not have more territory in the Western Hemisphere, and yet, why do anything for the Videla government of the Argentineans, the generals, this dreadful gang of thugs? When the war began, my instinct was that we should help defeat the Argentine effort, because you don't want to be in a situation where you approve of military force used against any man, whether he's justified in getting it or not. It's not correct to allow for us -- so I think, the U.S. government was divided there. Jeane Kirkpatrick wanted to support the Argentineans and, and Larry Eagleburger wanted to support the Brits. And so, they got our support for that long trek of a significant force of the British Navy down the African Coast and across to have the naval force arrive there and to kick the Argentineans, which I think was exactly the way I thought it should happen. I didn't think we should get involved militarily, but if the Brits were able to do it and wanted to

do it, it's something that would help establish the principle that you don't take territory by force. And, the advantage of what happened is that it was so humiliated for the Videla/Galtieri governments that it was the end of military rule. And, I still believe that the greatest benefit of that stupid war was the fact that Argentina got rid of the military junta.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And that was the positive. I was sympathetic to the Argentineans at a certain level because the British colonial presence in South America, I mean there is some in the Caribbean.

Q: But to cut to the point, OK, but the point was that you had a population there with some longevity was 100% British.

LUERS: Oh yeah, they had no relationship to the coastline.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: It's true. And what they've done now is they've poured money into that place now as a result of this war, which has made it even less likely they're going to find some deal with Argentina. Anyway, and the oil is a problem now because they think they've got some indication that there's oil off the coast.

Q: Well, how did you find the Institute for Advanced Studies?

LUERS: Oh, it was wonderful. I never had the situation where I'm sitting in my office all by myself and I want to write something and that was the first thing. The not having an in basket and out basket, and not having a sort of functioning secretary, not having any staff.

Q: Did you have an intern to do research?

LUERS: No, it was all me. And they gave me nothing. They -- George Kennan let me use his assistant occasionally to write something. He was right below me. This was for a year. And we had lunch together a lot. I'm very fond of him. Anyway, I got to know -- I mean, you know, most of the people there are scientists, hard scientists. They're not, they're not political scientists. They're not diplomats except for George. And, I was invited by the director, who I'd gotten to know, and he just invited me to come for a year as director's visitor. So I got to participate in the activities of science there and every Thursday they'd have a lecture. And they -- these are these brilliant people and I just loved being in this environment. And I got to know a number of them and, you know, I -- I think I told you, I began my education as a mathematician and I wanted to be a chemist, and so I had a little bit of an instinct of what this was like and I guess I had some of the vocabulary. And it was a time when I felt about as happy and at peace as I've ever felt. There was no pressure. I didn't feel the absence of all the support. I left this huge embassy with all this support with cars everywhere taking care of me. And, we lived in a little house. Have you

ever been to the institute? It is completely separate from Princeton university. They have these little Marcel Breuer houses that were built in the '30s, very efficient little -- and we had two children, a nanny, two dogs, and Wendy and me. And, we had five knives and forks and five glasses and a tiny living room, kitchen, and we just loved it. And I rode my bike everywhere. It was a different life. And intellectually, it was important for me because I did have so much free time to think about and talk to other people. And then, at the end of that, I still hadn't gotten my next assignment. So I taught at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University for a semester, I taught a course, a seminar, because I always teach as you know wherever I go. Wendy and I had fun at Princeton. I got to know a lot of the professors at Princeton University.

Q: You were there from when?

LUERS: I was there from the summer of '82 to the December of '83, when I went to Prague.

Q: OK, well then --

LUERS: But the one other thing that I should tell you is when I was there, the Chairman of the Board of the Institute for Advanced Study was a man named Jay Richardson Dilworth, who lived in Princeton. And he was very close to the Rockefellers. He worked as Nelson's and David's back room person, but he was a very distinguished banker and lawyer who'd gone with the Rockefeller family. And at the same time, he was becoming President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And so it was then that he got to know me pretty well and we became good friends. He was a generation beyond me in a certain sense. He and I talked a lot about a lot of our interests and passions. When I went off to Prague he came and visited us as friends, they came and stayed some time. On one visit, he said, "Would you ever like to be President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art?" He said, "I can make that happen if you'd like it, and it's going to be fairly soon." So he finally came back and told me that I was his candidate and he would like me to come back and visit the staff, I mean the board and get approved, which I did and they approved me. They accepted me over a couple other candidates.

And I said, "How should we deal with this?"

And he said, "Well, we want you next spring and you'll have been in Prague two years and so we suggest that in January you write the Secretary of State and say you're resigning, you would like to step down as Ambassador of Czechoslovakia and from the Foreign Service." And I said OK and I did it all on his word. I never got a contract, I didn't have any idea how much money I'd be making. I just did it. And, he stuck with his word and I worked for 14 years at the Met.

Q: OK, well we're going to cover that period.

LUERS: OK.

Q: We're going to start now in '80, what '83?

LUERS: '83.

Q: '83 when you got to Prague.

LUERS: OK.

Q: And we'll cover next time how you got the assignment and all. And also, if you remember anything or something comes up to mind about either Venezuela or the institute, sort of tuck it away and we can cover it.

LUERS: OK, good.

Q: OK, today is the 26th of January, 2012 with Bill Luers. And Bill, we've covered a number of things, but really we're basically -- when did you go to Czechoslovakia.

LUERS: I went in December of '83.

Q: And how long were you there?

LUERS: I was there until the spring of '86.

Q: OK. All right, well how did this appointment come about? You were at the Institute of Advanced Studies.

LUERS: I was called by Joan Clark, who was then Director General in April of '83, and told that I'd been assigned ambassador to Spain. And I was pleased. I spoke Spanish, I knew Spain, my wife lived there for a while. We knew Felipe Gonzalez who was the Prime Minister and we thought it was just the perfect thing for us. And it's a big post for a career diplomat, as you know. So we got ready and we began to plan on it and we were excited, and I had selected a DCM and I went through all my clearances and I did my work and preparation for it. And then, Joan Clark called me about a month and a half later and said -- I thought I was about to go for my hearings. And Joan said, "Bill, you're not going to Spain. You're going to Peru."

And I said, "No, I'm not."

And she said, "Well, why?"

And I said, "Because I want to go to Spain." I said, "What's going on?"

A colleague Frank Ortiz who had been ambassador to Peru and I knew had gone to The White House and told the Meeses and the ladies of The White House, of the Reagan White House that Bill Luers is a left wing liberal. It's not appropriate for Reagan to

appoint him. Now, he believes that because when I was in my year off he was ambassador to Peru. And Larry Eagleburger called me up and said, "Luers, we have a problem with the Socialist International," this group of parties around the world mainly in Europe and Latin America. "They think we're opposed to them and we want to keep in touch with them. Now, we know you were in Venezuela, you know many of the leaders of the Social Democratic Parties, of which Carlos Andrés Perez was one and there are several other -- so we'd like you to go out and be the Secretary of State's," this is George Schultz, "special emissary, to find out what they would like, how do we reestablish relationships with these political parties," many of which were in office, Norway, Sweden, Venezuela, Demonical Republic.

And so I said OK. It was a part time job I had consulting with the State Department. Larry asked me to do it. I didn't offer to do it. Larry Eagleburger, he was the Deputy Secretary, said, "We want you to do this."

So I did it. I went to Peru. And, I stayed with Frank. And I was there to see Alan Garcia, the Head of the Social Democratic Party of Peru who was going to be the next President, and Frank wouldn't talk to him. Larry wanted me to talk to him since the US would have to be working with him if he was going to be the next President. Frank, you know, was a very conservative guy and he would have nothing to do with this socialist Alan Garcia who was about to be the elected President of Peru. Frank didn't go with me. And I stayed with Frank and I spent quite a bit of time with him. And we had a good conversation and I gave the message, "U.S. government is interested in keeping in touch with you even though the ambassador wasn't keeping in touch." But I went there under instructions from the Deputy Secretary of State, Eagleburger. And so I left and then that was in early '83, just before I heard about Spain. And so Ortiz knew I was under instructions, but he chose to make this a cause for him to go denounce me to The White House.

Q: I mean this is, of course Ortiz is a professional --

LUERS: He's a career diplomat, yeah.

Q: Career diplomat, I mean highly irregular to do something of that nature.

LUERS: Well, he was close to The White House and he had a very conservative background, and he knew Mrs. Meese and apparently through her he got to know her husband and a few others and passed his word around. So I got upset. I went to Ray Sites, who was then the assistant to George Schultz. And Schultz and I had been good friends. Matter fact, he had offered me a couple jobs at one point. And I thought he had been the one who had actually promoted the idea of me going to Spain, and I still think he was. And I was told by Ray that The White House didn't think I was loyal enough. And I sent this letter I wrote to Schultz saying that after five years in the navy and some 30 years in the Foreign Service the thought that I'm not loyal is a little shocking to me. And what he meant is loyal enough to The White House, to the Reagan administration. And so it was the excuse they had and Ortiz even went to Spain and started measuring the curtains and all and went off on his own because he knew he was going to get the job rather than me

and I was going to replace him in Peru. And then, The White House decided to have another agenda, but Tom Enders, who was then Assistant Secretary for Latin America, had been uncooperative with The White House on the Central American issues, including Iran Contra and other things. And they saw him as being a problem. So they wanted to get him out of that job, they wanted a loyalist in there. And of course Tom was very conservative. And he said he wanted to go to Spain. And so he preempted the Ortiz appointment and he went off indeed to Spain.

And so then Larry knew what had gone on, and had an understanding of why it happened. Larry never felt guilty of anything, but some sense of responsibility to try to find me another post. And he called me up and said, "We want to send you to Nigeria."

And I said, "I don't know anything about Nigeria. I've never served in Africa. I don't, I don't," -- he said it was the largest post in Africa, it's one of the most important posts and you, after Venezuela, you should have a class one post. And I said I, you know, "I don't want to go to, to Nigeria. You can't use my best experience by sending me to Nigeria."

So then they offered me a couple of jobs, I can't remember what they were. And then he called me up one day and he said, "Bill, there's a class 3 Embassy that we could offer you, but you're too senior for this. Would you go to Czechoslovakia.

And I said, "I'd go."

And he said, "That's interesting. I hadn't expected it, but."

And I said, "Look Larry, I want to go to Moscow as ambassador and Czech -- and Prague is on the way to Moscow."

And Larry quickly said, "Luers, for you, Prague is on the way to Sofia."

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: A typical Eagleburgerism and so I accepted the post and they appointed me and there wasn't much difficulty in my getting approved, and I started studying Czech while I was still teaching at Princeton.

Q: What happened to Ortiz just for somebody --

LUERS: I don't know what happened. I think he may have gone to Argentina eventually, I don't know. He went somewhere. I don't think he's alive anymore. I think he --

Q: No, he's not. He --

LUERS: Did you know him?

Q: I knew him vaguely. I served on a promotion panel with him.

LUERS: Yeah. I didn't -- I found him a bit arrogant. He was politically more conservative than I was, and most people I knew. Rather more ideological than most of us in the Career Service. But I paid very little attention after that.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Because I mean, I think that kind of back channeling of political biases, but the fact is --

Q: Very bad form.

LUERS: But you know, when I think back of the fortunes of my life, Prague turned out to be the best post and the one that best drew on my strongest qualities. I was lucky with the timing.

Q: Wow.

LUERS: Spain I would have just been another --

Q: Yes --

LUERS: -- another elegant ambassador courting a wonderful country and having a good time. But in Czechoslovakia, I think my wife and I made a difference.

Q: How did you find Czech? The language?

LUERS: I didn't get any real emersion course because I was teaching at Princeton. I couldn't leave until after I finished my course, so that was in early December. And so I would go to a Berlitz course that they paid for me to take in Princeton. They didn't have a native Czech speaker. They had I think a Polish speaker who spoke Czech pretty well. And my Russian was quite good. But Russian is a powerfully spoken language. It is spoken with a forceful voice. And Czech is a sung language. It's sweeter, it's softer, and it's got more cases in it. It's more complicated. And I found Czech tough. There are a lot of cognates, a lot of false cognates between Czech and Russian. They have a rich vocabulary and I liked languages by then and I had fun with it. But I kept slipping into Russian, which of course isn't what you wanted to do in Prague. And I got to the point that I could give speeches. I gave a number of speeches, particularly on VOA (Voice of America) and RFE (Radio Free Europe) in Czech. I would do work from a written script in Czech with a native speaker and work hard on getting pronunciation right. And I could give toasts at dinners and I could give introductory speeches too on occasion. And when I would converse with Czech officials, and there were some interesting cases where I was able to do that, all of them spoke perfect Russian, and they had no problem doing that. So I spoke very often either English or Russian. I could not conduct business in Czech. The only business I ever conducted in Czech was one time I had an automobile accident there after I was ambassador, and the police took me off, and this was a year after I'd left the

post and I'd left the service, and I was driving through with a friend of mine and I hit a, another car. It was an understandable mistake, but it was a mistake and I didn't kill anybody, I just destroyed a car. And I went and the police wanted me to give a testimony, you know, wanted me to say what happened and then sign it in Czech. Because I think clearly they just wanted something in written form so they could get me out of there. I think they were very sympathetic to me. So I told them more or less what I thought happened in Czech and I read it, felt I got it, but I had to sign this document in Czech, a police document that -- I mean it -- I knew enough to say that you agree now to go to jail for the rest of your life and it wasn't quite that bad, but.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But it was in a nuanced understanding of Czech.

Q: Well, then before you went out there what were the significant elements of our relations that you felt you had to work on? I mean, you know, this is as you're reading your way into the post?

LUERS: Czechoslovakia was at the bottom of the heap of countries of interest to the United States. At that time, our approach to Central Europe, which we called Eastern Europe then, was the degree to which they are developing some independence from Moscow, they would get extra benefits from us. I mean Romania was number one, Ceausescu kept distance from the Soviets on many issues important to the U.S. And he had not joined in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. And he had retained a certain level of independence. Poland, because of Poland, has always had its own support from the United States and it had Solidarnost, which was already established. By then Hungary Goulash Communism had begun to ease up Hungary even though Kadar was still in power. They were changing, they were reforming internally already. So of the countries -- Bulgaria was thought to be basically a quasi-Russian country in terms of the language is so close to Russian and had not shown much interest in breaking that historic relationship. East Germany (GDR) always was sort of the toddy of the Soviets, but East Germany was important because of West Germany. We had no reason to take much interest in the Czechoslovakia. No Assistant Secretary had been there for decades. The highest level their Ambassador could see in the State Department was a Deputy Assistant Secretary or on very important occasions, maybe an Assistant Secretary, but nothing -- so we had them downplayed. And I guess I would say that for me, Czechoslovakia, because of our history with it, because of the invasion, I'd been there before when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary for that part of the world, and I just liked the history of the place and I knew that you could only go up in terms of relations. So I guess, I went there with the objective under the CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) under the Helsinki Accords to try to find out how could we begin the process of discussing with them trade and economic relations, and human rights, and political and security issues. I didn't have high hopes for what I could achieve, but high motivation to find out what's possible. I didn't feel that there was nothing to be done there. And you know, the trade relations were very low, this Czechoslovak Communist Party was the most loyal to Moscow under every circumstance. And, they were very close as I found out when I got

there, the leadership was very close to the Soviet Politburo and there was no reform at all ever since 1968 But there was indeed Charter 77, which is the model for the human rights organizations which came out of the Helsinki Accord. It was a small band of dissidents who didn't even portray themselves as the opposition. They portrayed themselves as independents who wanted human rights in Czechoslovakia. There were no big bilateral issues, I had to learn about the language, the history, who were the key players in the government, and who were all those dissidents out there.

Q: Were there any outstanding cases of lack of reunification of families and that sort of thing or?

LUERS: There was a reparations issue, which was being dealt with by the Treasury Department.

Q: Czech gold, was that --

LUERS: Yes

Q: Czech gold sort of when you thought about Czechoslovakia for a long time --

LUERS: That was what Washington thought about.

Q: Like Hungary was the Crown of St. Stephens.

LUERS: Yes

Q: And Czech gold, you know.

LUERS: We returned the Crown of St. Stephen to Hungary when I was DAS in EUR

Q: Yeah, I talked to Phil Kaiser and --

LUERS: Yeah, Phil was ambassador there and he's a great pal.

Q: All right, well let's -- you got there when?

LUERS: Did I tell you about returning the Crown of St. Stephens?

Q: Yes, I think you did.

LUERS: So I arrived in Prague in December of '83 having not had extensive consultations in Washington, mainly because it wasn't perceived that this is a very important post. And there weren't many issues except these obedient Czechoslovaks, who obeyed Soviet orders. And I presented credentials to President Husák when I got there who was a Slovak and the President of Czechoslovakia. Because after '68, you know, they -- the Soviets made sure -- the Slovaks were in charge.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: The Czechs were the problem. Czech -- in ’68. And so the, the Slovaks tended to be the dominant players in the government after that. And in the police, in the party and the president of the country was Husák. And when I presented my credentials, which I did in Czech, and he had an interpreter there to have me understand his Czech, and he said that -- first thing he said to me was, “You come at the worst time in the history of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.”

And I said something like, “And that’s saying something.”

When I arrived the US had just begun installing Pershing intermediate range missiles in West Germany, which is the first intermediate range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads that we installed in Europe.

Q: This is in response to SS-20

LUERS: So Reagan decided that we were going to place the Pershings. It was coming anyway, but it was Reagan’s response to the SS-20. The Soviets were saying, “We’re on the verge of a Third World War.” And I had in preparation for it learned a lot about the Pershing Missile and the importance that it was to the response to the Soviet intermediate range missiles in defending Europe. Husák repeated several times the Soviet line that were close to a Third World War. And I said I didn’t think that was the case, I thought this was a defensive response that we had to Soviet actions, deployment of missiles. But he was perfectly nice, as Czechoslovaks tend to be when they meet you, but he did make it very clear that I probably wouldn’t see any officials, any senior officials, except for the Foreign Minister and I probably wouldn’t see him again, except at formal occasions where I would run into him, when they had to invite me as ambassador. But it was -- you had very little access, if any. And then one of the first people I met privately through friends really, cousins, was Michael Zantovsky who was then a dissident. His mother had been a signer of Charter 77. And we had dinner with him within ten days after I arrived. And Michael turned out to be the interpreter for Václav Havel and he was a writer and an amusing intellectual who we became very fond of. His network turned out to be much of the Charter 77 group. And so early on we began to realize from him that appreciation of how broad and interesting that group was. And so Michael was a key intermediary in the beginning of our relationship with that whole world of dissidents. Meanwhile, when I presented my credentials to the Foreign Minister, his name was Bohuslav Chnoupek who was a Slovak from Eastern Slovakia. And he spoke English quite well. He spoke about five or six languages well. And he had a certain charm and great sense of humor. He was corrupt and he was, you know, thought to be quite dreadful. But he was a person that I got to know. And he said, “Look you -- we will not let you see any officials in their offices. But if you learn how to shoot birds and boar you can join me in the shoots, I’ll introduce you to everybody.” That is the way we began our first conversation.

And so I said OK I said, “What do I do? I’ve never shot before?”

He said, “Go buy yourself a Brno shotgun and maybe two and I’ll invite you to a shoot this winter and I’ll help you learn how to shoot pheasant.” This is the Foreign Minister whom I did know. And we had good informal and surprising conversation instead of a formal meeting, but I saw him that evening at a reception. So I bought a Brno shotgun, not a great shotgun but made in Czechoslovakia. I didn’t have much money anyway, I couldn’t import one. Not knowing much about all this, I began to shoot with him. And, and that winter I went on several pheasant shoots, including the one at Lány, which is the annual diplomatic shoot. But I eventually went with him on a number shoots where the only other diplomat was the Soviet ambassador whom I came to know rather quickly. We spoke Russian, so during the whole time I was there, Chnoupek was amused to be my shooting instructor and taking me on shoots with other ambassadors. And it got to the point where I was the only Ambassador not from the Soviet Block who went on many shoots for boar because my Russian was so good, and all of them spoke Russian. And the East German ambassador, the Polish ambassador, and they would spend -- all the time would be spent in the Russian language. And so I entered that world and I think it sort of amused Chnoupek that I would go along with him on all these shoots. And I met the Head of Secret Police, I met the Minister of Interior, I met, you know, a number of other party senior officials who would go on these shoots, which turned out to be a major source of my access to that close government.

Q: I know when I was in Yugoslavia, and this goes way back, Tito used to have shoots.

LUERS: Right.

Q: And these were considered -- diplomatic shoots -- and these were considered dangerous as hell because you’d have ambassadors --

LUERS: Like me! Who didn’t know what they were doing, yeah.

Q: You know, it sort -- basically you watched your back not because of any threat from the host government, but it’s just a bunch of --

LUERS: No, exactly.

Q: -- amateur --

LUERS: There was that problem.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But mostly Eastern Europeans shot pretty well because that was their culture. Dubček was invited to the Soviet Union before the Soviet invasion in 1968. Then after the invasion when Brezhnev flew Dubcek to Moscow to talk about his future. Hen if became clear that Dubček was being kicked out, Dubcek said to Brezhnev, “But how could this happen we shot boar together. We shot together so many times, how could you

do this to me?" as Brezhnev booted him out the door. And but I found I got to be quite good at it, and I still shoot as a result of that experience. I met a group of political leaders in Czechoslovakia that I would never have met otherwise. Apparently very few of my predecessors shot.

Q: Well, then let's talk a little about the embassy. How did you find the embassy?

LUERS: Bill Farrand was DCM who I really am very fond of him. He was terrific. He was energetic smart and knew the country. He just wrote a book on his experience in Brčko. Do you know Bill?

Q: I've interviewed Bill, yes.

LUERS: I like him a lot.

Q: Very, very fine man.

LUERS: He was bright as hell, he's got a lot of energy. And so he was an important professional who helped me learn the politics of the embassy and its role in the diplomatic community. He was also very amusing and I enjoy having him around. And he and his wife became good friends. And, then there was a, Bill Kiehl, who was the USIA officer probably the best PAO I've dealt with in the Foreign Service. He had a sort of, a straightforward approach to pushing as far as we could to get to know the society, the underbelly of the intellectual life of Prague and the whole country. And at a time when I was wondering, early on whether I should be more measured in the push back we gave to our hosts in Prague in terms of seeing this individual or making this comment on VOA, he gave me encouragement and said, you know, you don't have to be offensive, you just have to be factual and straightforward. And he was, he was just an ideal PAO.

Q: I've interviewed Bill and his account is in our collection.

LUERS: Yeah. I just think he's fabulous and he and I -- did he talk much about Prague?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Yeah. Because he and I did a lot in Prague. And he was a valuable, advisor and access person for the Embassy

Q: How did, particularly the Political Economic Officers, were they able to get out and around or were they circumscribed by Secret Police or what?
LUERS: They were all circumscribed by Secret Police at some level, the senior people particularly. And, I think the Agency was almost boxed in. I don't think they did much. I don't know. I told them I wanted to know everything that they were doing that was going to be any embarrassment to the United States at any possible way, and the station chief lived in the residence right above me. And I dealt with him regularly. I think they were information gathering, I don't think they were doing much, nor did they get any major

source that I know of. And the, the Political Section usually had one or two Czech speakers that got out, and I have forgotten the names of all of them right now, but there were some really good ones. I saw one woman who had been in the political section the other day. I spoke at a memorial for Havel here in Washington and -- oh, what's her name? She was loved by the dissidents.

Then there was Marie Campello who had been with me when I was DAS in EUR, who went with me for four years in Venezuela and joined me in Prague. She had become literally a member of our family. All our children knew here. She was smart, caring, always ready to alert me when I seemed to be on a track she did not think was right. I still see her and talk to her. She was special and without her I would not have been so efficient or effective. She also kept her ear to the ground in the Embassy which was important for me.

Q: If her name occurs to you later let me know. Is she still around here?

LUERS: Yeah, she is.

Q: Still in service or?

LUERS: No, she's out of the Service, she's --

Q: I'd like to maybe interview her.

LUERS: Would you?

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: She's really good. And let's see. And she's one of the ones that the Czech still remember. I go back there so much now. And by and large the embassy was embattled though and I think most people felt that Prague was an interesting post to stay in because it's such a beautiful city and the country is some place you could travel, you know, there was no problem getting your car, you could park it anywhere. Marie Campello loved it. She is going to help me, she's helping me with a book I'm writing, I think. And she has an excellent sense of humor which I value greatly. I was with her and she said that she loved the city but the life was rather tough, you know, it was a small rather inbred with some interpersonal tensions and some drinking.

Q: Particularly those Eastern European posts, especially for single women, American women --

LUERS: Very tough.

Q: -- there have a very hard time --

LUERS: Very tough,

Q: -- because they really can't -- I mean one, women aren't treated that well and two, you got the security problem.

LUERS: Yes but we took her on a number of our travels because she's such a great person and we were sensitive to that problems for someone like Marie. Because in Venezuela, it was such an open country, she knew a lot of people. But she let it be known that -- particularly for the single women in some of the families, the environment was difficult. So it was a mixed bag, and I must say, the Marines, you know, we had our we had parties for the staff and we had the Marine Ball and we always did our Christmas and Fourth of July and all the parties, we all chipped in. But I don't have a strong sense of how, except for a few very bright people, how affective it was. There was the Economic Officer who spoke Romanian. He'd served in Bucharest and we were very close to him and his wife. He's smart. And he and I did some traveling looking at economic situations and industry in Czechoslovakia. But he and I also went with our wives to Romania and we drove through Northern Romania, and had a remarkable time together. Because his Romanian was still very good. I guess I just can't withdraw all the names of people. I mean we were surrounded by staff in the residence who were all spies of course.

Q: Yeah. Well, let's talk about some of the aspects. I realize that you were cut off except when you were shooting with them -- not at them, but with them, the government -- how did you find the caliber of the Czech government at that time?

LUERS: There practically had been no changes, they were stagnant, they were Brezhnev clones. We would find a change in mid or even top level jobs now and then in who was going to be the Minister of Trade, but we had the same Foreign Minister, we had the same Head of Interior, same Head of the Secret Police. And, what happened interestingly enough, which I'll tell you about, is the number of people we invited over, what gave us access oddly enough to much of the world is that we had, for instance, I had Ken Galbraith in Prague for several days. Dozens of economist hidden away probably since the Prague Spring came out to hear Ken who wrote about and symbolized the possible coming together of the two economic systems.

Q: John Kenneth Galbraith, yeah.

LUERS: Yes, His idea of "convergence" between capitalism and communism, which was still a book that they all appreciated. He was seen as a left-wing American economist and, he was admired. So when he came, I had access to a huge number of members of the Ministries of Economics and the Institutes of Economics, and Politics. So through these visitors I got to know a lot of people. When Rabbi Arthur Schneier, founder and head of the Appeal for Conscience Foundation came, I got to meet Cardinal Tomasek for the first time early on and I got to know the Jewish community pretty well. And as American ambassador, I was invited to most Eastern European and Soviet events. I would always go to events, National Days, of the Soviet block Embassies, I recognize people's faces of government and party leaders, I would go up to them at parties and introduce myself.

And although they couldn't see me in their office they would always talk to me at these parties.

And I got to know the Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal, who'd been there a long time and who was the Senior Czech Official in the Czechoslovak government. We developed an informal to meet at night in his official office when no staff were around. And he on several occasions invited me to his office at night. He would often send a car to pick me up to bring me there so that nobody would know who was coming. And it would be after, after hours, the offices were closed. And we sat there and we would talk about what if in terms of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. And he portrayed himself often as the reformer within this extremely conservative government. In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king. He was probably a bit more reformist than the others, but not enough to want to lose his job. One important bit of information came out at home.
I would exercise in the evening at about 6:00 PM when Soviet television broadcast live broadcasts to Prague. I'd get direct feed from Moscow because you'd get it all over Prague. You could get the evening news. One evening in March of 1985 I was on my stationary bicycle and I saw Gorbachev on TV. This was -- he'd been in office for about a month. And he was speaking to a party meeting in Leningrad. He was leaning on the podium. He was speaking without notes, not reading a lecture. And he was calling on people in the audience, he'd point, he'd, "What, what -- you have your hand up, what is it you want?" And they would answer. And they would ask questions.

I had never seen anything like that in the Soviet Union where all meetings were formal, organized and no innovation. I said to myself, "This is something unheard of in the Soviet system." A week or so later I saw Strougal at the opening of an industrial fair in Brno. I went up to him and I said, "It's time to talk again. Would you invite me?"

And he said, "Sure." So I was told -- I was informed that three days later I should be at such and such a point and I would be picked up and taken to his office.

So I asked Strougal that evening, "What's going on?"

Q: No.

LUERS: "What is going on with this new leader Gorbachev?" I don't know what to make of it. It's new, it's… In all of my experience, I have never seen a Soviet leader with such an informal styles. He is not another Brezhnev clone. Strougal replied, "Here's the story." Strougal was probably closer to the Politburo than anybody in Central Europe. He had a long history of relationship and he knew, he knew all the Politburo members. He went there frequently, he shot with Soviet leaders. He said, "This is what's happening and I know this to be true".

In 1983 as Andropov was very sick and near the end, Andropov invited Gorbachev to come to his bedside. He was sick and they knew he was going to die. Andropov told Gorbachev "You will be the next General Secretary of the party. You will head this place. Chernenko is still alive and will be the interim party leader, but he's sicker than I

am and he'll probably die shortly after I die. And then, the deal is in, you will be the General Secretary, and I've fixed it. Your job between now and the time you become General Secretary is to put together a team of reformers. We have to change this system." This is almost verbatim what Strougal was telling me. "We know that the USSR can never again compete with the United States in technology, particularly in military capacity. America's advanced technology and their use of computers is so far beyond anything we're about to get to that we need to have access to that information and that technology. So you must find a way to reform our society so that we can deal with the United States and the western countries on all of these issues that we're weak at."

Andropov told Gorbachev to find about ten of Khrushchev's top reformers who were with him before he left office in 1964. Because Khrushchev was the last reformer, Brezhnev didn't even think about it. I don't think he even used the term. But Khrushchev is doing it all the time and he had all these people, many whom I knew, who ironically had been people who after Khrushchev fell had been his top team. And they were all sent out of the country. And many of them went to Prague as involved in the international front organizations. You know, most of the International Labor Organization, all the student groups, they had their headquarters in Prague. That was the one thing Prague was used for because they had complete confidence that nothing would go wrong. But this move of the Soviet reformers was on the eve of the Prague Spring. They left in '64 after Khrushchev was thrown out. And these reformers were all sent to Prague. And so they were there in the lead up to the 1967-8revolution, to the Prague Spring. So many of them were impacted not only by their work with Khrushchev, but by their work in Prague. And this group became Gorbachev's advisors. And for the first couple of years, I knew them, I knew a lot of them, because I had been there during the Khrushchev period and I'd gotten to know some of them. Strougal said that Gorbachev is different. He's got a different agenda and he's determined to make the relationship change and reform the society. And so I sent some messages back to Washington, I told them what I'd heard, and they were still in the spring of '85 very skeptical about Gorbachev being anything but the same old Politburo hack

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: I had a couple more conversations with Strougal and others about this from people in the Czech party leadership who believed knew that Gorbachev was different.

Q: On the Czech side, were they looking to their own camp about to be, maybe to fit a little better with a Gorbachev era at that point?

LUERS: Strougal maybe, but basically the party obeyed orders, whether they were anticipating change and figuring out how to relate to this new era, I don't know. I think they were slow to do it and the reason they felt the way they did was they really hadn't been able to get with it. And because they felt correctly that for them reform meant the end of them. They didn't have the kind of control over their society that the Soviets had over theirs, and they were Czechs, they were western. So anyway, years later, I was Chairman of the Board of the Harriman Institute of Columbia and we had Gorbachev

speak. After his speech we had a dinner and he was going to speak to these dinner guests, there were about 100 people there. And I stood up and introduced him and I told this story. Afterwards I said "Tell me, Mr. Gorbachev, is this story a reflection of what actually happened?"

And he stood at that podium -- I never will forget it. He looked out at the audience, he smiled and he said, "I want everybody to know that Andropov was my great patron."

Q: Uh-huh.

LUERS: I loved that moment.

Q: Oh yes.

LUERS: Anyway, I got to know through various devices of finagling I got to know a number of the people. And my great joy was getting drunk with the Minister of Interior and the Head of Security on a boar shoot in Slovakia when I was the only westerner there. The Soviet ambassador was always around with me. I got to know through hook and crook a number of the officials. I always had an opportunity to try to call on them and virtually never was accepted unless I had some visiting businessman or something wanting to come through but I kept at it with Chnoupek. And over the two years, two and a half years I was there, I really tried to get them to agree on a Helsinki structure of agreements. And in fact, about a month and a half before I left, we finally -- I'd negotiated with Chnoupek and his Deputy, a first time ever set of agreements with the Czechoslovak government. And they were so pleased with this agreement that we had been negotiating over several months that I was able to persuade Roz Ridgway, then the Assistant Secretary for Europe to visit Prague to sign the agreement.

Q: Or Rozanne.

LUERS: Rozanne Ridgway. And Roz I convinced that we got this agreement come out and --

Q: She was -- she was --

LUERS: Assistant Secretary.

Q: For European Affairs.

LUERS: For Europe. A senior official or that rank had come to come to that country since'68. And they were all excited about it and so Roz flew to Prague for the signing. And that morning that she was to arrive we heard on the radio that the U.S. had bomb Libya. Libya was one of the closest allies of Czechoslovakia. The timing of that bombing was not great for my purposes. Czechoslovakia were very close to them and they had sold them plied them weapons

Q: And they'd done a very good job of setting up the Secret Police.

LUERS: Absolutely. And, and --

Q: -- the horrors that came out of later Libya had a Czech hand.

LUERS: We heard this news just before Roz was to land in Prague. The Deputy Foreign Minister, Jakesh was there to welcome her. He said to me, "This is not going to be good, you know, I don't know how we're going to sign this agreement because you have just attacked one of our closest allies in the world."

And I said, "Oh no, this should stand above that. This is an important and historic event between our two nations. This event shouldn't be allowed to interfere at all."

And then she came and they ask her the same thing. Of course, she knew nothing about the bombing because she got off the plane and was not dealing with that part of the world. This all happened while she was on the plane coming over. So she's totally befuddled by the whole thing. And that night we were going to have dinner at the Foreign Ministry. And the Foreign Minister Chnoupek was there and the Deputy Foreign Minister and it was going to be a big deal for the Assistant Secretary of State to be coming. Before the signing dinner -- I took Roz back to the Residence and I listened to VOA. And VOA announced that the Soviets had suspended all cultural and political exchanges with the United States. I said, "Oh my God. We've had it." And so I arrive at the -- this is a true story. I arrive at the Foreign Ministry with Roz and the Foreign Minister comes up to meet her. By that time, I had developed a good rapport him and other senior FM officials. The Foreign Minister asked "What do you think the Soviets will do?"

He clearly had not been informed, he didn't know. I replied, "I have no idea, but I think it'll be fine." I realize this is a difficult moment, but it'll go away. And it'll be understood for what it was. Clearly neither he nor anybody had listened to Soviet radio/television, or certainly not VOA, because it was out there. And so we signed the agreement that night and had a dinner and celebrated it. And the next morning the papers were filled with reports that the Soviets had cut off all cultural and commercial relations with the United States. This is a metaphor for how difficult official relations were a struggle. I think that despite everything, I felt good about the fact that we ended up where we did, a little -- maybe an inch above where we were before in terms of relationship. But the real -- I think the important work that my wife and I did was developing such a close relationship with Havel and all of his group.

Q: Before we turn --

LUERS: Yeah?

Q: Before we turn to that, did the Helsinki Accords -- was it a topic that you discussed with the Czech government?

LUERS: Only when we started on this -- down this official path. And they had to abide by it. They didn't like the human rights basket at all. And the requirement for them in terms of getting an agreement was that in order to get the US to discuss trade and commerce they had to accept the human rights discussion in it. And there's three "baskets" to the Helsinki accords -- security, trade/commerce, and human rights. And we were fine on the first two, they just didn't like the last one. So the breakthrough was when they agreed to a working group on human rights.

Q: Well, now while you were there -- because I'm an old counselor hand and I know that the Czechs have -- or Czechoslovaks have a substantial number of pensioners in their country -- American pensioners getting --

LUERS: They do.

Q: -- social security.

LUERS: and they were getting -- yeah.

Q: Black lung and all this. Was this ever an issue for you?

LUERS: It was never an issue that I had to deal with. I think the Consular Section spent a deal of time on these issues because they were always questions of people dying and the Czechs still arriving and, sort of having to follow up on, on guarantees that these weren't going into some deep pockets. We had a good consular section and only occasionally did I have to get involved.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: We had a typical consular section but did not have any big issues.

Q: So I mean they weren't putting screws on --

LUERS: I don't think so.

Q: -- that. It only would cut their nose off in spite --

LUERS: Yeah, they need the money.

Q: Yes, I mean --

LUERS: They need the hard currency.

Q: What about the Soviet ambassador and the Soviet presence? Was there much contact between you two or not?

LUERS: I saw a lot of the Soviet Ambassador. The Soviet Embassy was enormous and you felt as though the Ambassador was a pro consul. And actually I -- we would -- he and I organized lunches, Russian speaking lunches with all the Central Europeans. And so we had -- there were a couple of Western Europeans who spoke Russian and so they got included. And so we did, and I saw him at shoots. And we had a reasonably good relationship. He was strong and senior. When he left Prague he was appointed as governor in Vladivostok in Far Eastern Siberia where I learned later he became quite a potentate, he ran that part of the world really. Tough guy. The embassy, you know, as you probably know about Prague, there are three big Pecek palaces.

Q: Did you get that account with John --

LUERS: I did, I got it. He does -- you know, Wendy wrote a long piece on it and he drew on it heavily. He didn't ever give her any credit for it of course. And, I think she got him to do that, so I think -- I don't know how she reacts to it, but it's an interesting story. But she wrote an article published in House and Garden, a shorter version, but a lot of the same material. And so the biggest Pecek palace was the Soviet palace, and that was huge. And then they added to it and buildings in -- I mean they were all over the place. They just had their military, they had, you know -- I mean they were the colonial power and they were everywhere. The only Soviet I saw very often was, was him, was the ambassador. I don't think we had much other contact with the mission because they were into the country so deeply. The Chinese I saw occasionally and he had the other Pecek palace down the street from us. So I don't know, I think Soviets were very much present and I don't think the Czechs liked it very much. There is a hockey match, which I eventually spoke about as a metaphor. They had the international hockey tournament there in what must have been the early winter of '85. And a friend of mine who owns one of the US hockey teams was there recruiting from Eastern Europe. But this is the international hockey finals. And the last four teams were the Soviets, the Czechs, the Canadians, and the Americans. And the Americans were not in that league, but for some reason they'd gotten to the quarter finals. And, in the quarter final match, the U.S. had to play the Soviet team. It was toward the end because we lost in the quarter finals so we were in the semi-finals I guess. And then Canada and Soviets played the finals. And then, in the semi-finals when we played the Soviets and the crowd would cheer, "Go, go U.S.A." It was a huge crowd of audience. And it was a roar, you know, against the Soviets *(laughs).* And then we played the Czechs for third place while just before the Soviets played the Canadians for the first place. And the same thing, "Go, go U.S.A."

And they say that, that Husák, this is a story that I think was pretty well around, that Husák went to Moscow after that when the event infuriated the Soviets and they were complaining that how did this happen, how is it that when we play the Americans you find the Czech audience cheering for the Americans?" And Husák is reported to have replied said, "I just can't figure it out. We picked the audience."

And Brezhnev said, "That makes it even worse!"

Q: (laughs)

LUERS: I told this story because I was there, I was in there and I just couldn't resist all of these meetings. And it was -- every time we were out there the Czechs just -- it was a response, it was an automatic response that they had. So, it was some exciting moments. But the other side of it was really what made that such a fascinating moment, because I mean I had, in addition to Galbraith and some of the others, I had Soros come and Soros went out and met with Havel and I think that first meeting --

Q: Soros is a --

LUERS: George Soros.

Q: -- it was a Hungarian refugee financer who --

LUERS: Of all good causes for civil society.

Q: And made wonderful contributions at the -- when the Soviet Union collapsed.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: He supported many good causes.

LUERS: But he came as my guest early on. This was in the spring of '84. And I knew him pretty well and I invited him to come meet Vaclav Havel -- and I didn't say this over the phone to come, come meet a guy. So Soros stayed at the Residence, we had dinner for him with several officials and then that night after dinner he went out to meet Havel and I didn't go with him for obvious reasons. Soros and Havel made their deal and I think he started funding Havel through Charter 77 cut-out in Stockholm and they would get money into Charter 77. And I think Soros became one of his biggest supporters. And I'd already met Vaclav and found him most impressive. I'll send you what I spoke about about him and how we began this relationship, because he'd gotten out of jail just before I arrived at post in Prague in 1983, he'd gotten out of five years prison. So he started when I was there to rebuild his network within Czechoslovakia. And the network was already there, he just was a natural figure. My wife, Wendy and I began inviting a lot of artists and writers and we brought Styron, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, John Updike, and there was a list of about ten prominent American intellectuals that we had come. And a couple of them came twice. Styron came a couple times. And we would, we would introduce them and we would get them to sign books in the local bookstore that we worked with. And at a couple of points they would sign actually in the USIA office in the embassy and the Czechs would line up for blocks waiting to get their books signed, Czech translations of Updike's books or Styron's books or Vonnegut came and, you know, a lot of them came. And that gave us our role there, a different caliber of importance in terms of the intellectual world. And a lot of the people who were non-political basically loved literature. Czechs during the communist period were screwed and they read books, and listened to music. They were detached from the government.

But books were major. And, they knew American writers that had never been translated. Some of them read it in English and --

Q: How were the books translated? Because I would have thought the Czech government would try to stop American books.

LUERS: No. The Soviet "contract" with the Czechs after '68 was no political uprisings, no protest movements, and we'll permit you to have a reasonably comfortable life. It was a deal. So there were no demonstrations, no political opposition, and yet, the social morays and particularly the intellectual life was allowed to grow. And, during the '80s -- during the '70s, there were a lot of publications that were allowed to be translated into Czech. And, so most of the writers we brought there were well known. And then we had George Kennan who was a very close friend of mine, and George came and everybody wanted to see George. And there were -- I don't know, Henry Grunwald came, head of Time/Life. Kay Graham came. And, the Czech dissidents and intellectuals were greatly nurtured and encouraged by these contacts. Kay, you know, who was head of The Washington Post, and she spent a couple days there. And, they gave her good access because they just -- these were powerful people that they felt they should talk to. So the combination of internal maneuvering and the luster of the guests we had that many of them had never had a chance to talk to, including some of the officials, enabled us to get access to part of the society that didn't really -- I mean previous ambassadors had contact, but several things worked under my watch. One thing is Havel had returned and Charter 77 was getting stronger. Gorbachev came in and they were getting stronger. And frankly, the support we gave them was beginning to be more and more pronounced. And we invited them to our Fourth of July parties -- and we were the only embassy that invited the dissidents, the Charter 77 people.

Q: The British didn't?

LUERS: No. The British did two things. The British would have them after. They would have two phase -- the first reception would be for the people invited from the government and from other embassies at twelve noon. And then at one thirty they would invite this other group. We invited them all to come at twelve or whenever we had it, four, whenever it was the day. And one time, the Deputy Foreign Minister who was the most senior official to ever come to a reception, the Deputy Foreign Minister came and he saw Havel standing out in the yard. And, he spun around and said, "I'm leaving," and he took all the officials with him. And they protested that. I was back in DC on a promotion panel in the summer of '85 and while I was back, the Assistant Secretary George Vest called to tell me that the Czechoslovak ambassador's coming to see me and I understand it has something to do with you. He said, "Would you like to be there?"

And I said, "Sure."

So I came in, and the protest was about the fact that I was seeing so much of these dissidents, of Havel and company in particular. And he said, "Ambassador Luers was

sent as, as a representative -- , he presented his credentials to the President of Slovakia, not to this other group."

And the Assistant Secretary said, "Well, what do you have to say to that?"

And I said, "Please don't ask him to choose." Because by that time I'd become convinced that this was the most important thing to be done. I had this good relationship with some key officials, so I just kept at it. I hosted meetings of all the NATO ambassadors in our large secure room every month. And we would rotate among the embassies that have secure rooms and the Brits and ourselves and the French, maybe the Germans had secure rooms, but ours was sort of the largest. And so we had the meetings in our secure room.

And, most of them complained to me, "You're making life difficult for the rest of us by doing what you're doing with the dissidents and particularly with Havel." And they didn't say, don't do it, but they just wanted me to know that it was raising problems for them. And in retrospect, I think this was the way I thought we should deal with that country and how it was so important.

I want to tell about Albee who visited Prague from Vienna on a Sunday and gave a play and Bill Kiehl the PAO worked it out with the official organization for theater.

Q: This is Edward Albee.

LUERS: Edward Albee, he brought a play -- he'd been in Vienna where he was producing three plays that he'd directed in an English-speaking theater in Vienna. And, I'd been in touch with him because he'd visited me . He'd been in Moscow and Venezuela -- and I said, "Come up and bring your group." So they were dark on Sunday night. So on early Sunday morning they left Vienna, they drove to Prague in a big van that we got for them and they brought their lighting, you know, and they brought their actors and they all stayed at the residence. I could put them all up. And I said, "We'll give you a day and then you do a production that night at the theater," so we got the Theater Club, which is a bunch of thugs, and they ran the theater.

They said, "Sure, you -- the embassy can invite its people and we can invite our people and we will have a small audience, but we'd love to have this happen." So rather than invite this embassy, we invited many of our less well known dissident friends from the theater and literature, these theater people who we knew who were Czechs. And the establishment's Theater group invited a very controlled group of official theater people. And we went to the theater through a courtyard. I had invited Havel to come to the gathering before going to the theater and Edward knew him. And so he and Edward talked in the courtyard. When the time came, most of the people in the courtyard entered the theater up a long staircase. All the invited guests went in. We had known it was too risky to invite Havel, and he agreed, so he remained back in the courtyard.

Before the production of three short plays, I was going to stand up and introduce Edward, and then Edward would introduce these three one-act plays by Sam Shepard that Edward

had directed. And I stood up. I said in Czech, “I was planning on introducing Edward, but Edward is out in the courtyard where he’s been locked out and so he can’t get in.”

When everyone had left the courtyard, Havel was still out there, an the key lady had locked the door and locked Havel out so he couldn’t come into the production. And Edward was still talking to him. So the lady with the keys had to go open the door, it was sort of a fun moment. And then they -- Edward came in and announced it and made some sarcastic remark about why he wasn’t able to be there at the beginning.

After the theater, I’d invited all the theater thugs who hosted the event over to dinner and we had also invited Havel and some of his group. I was sitting at one end of the very long corridor in the Residence with the authorities and Edward, and my wife was sitting at the other end with theater people whom we knew and with Havel. Havel came to dinner that night. At my end were all the thugs I was talking to, and it was an increasingly interesting phenomena to watch the mixture of dissidents and officials in our residence

We had also begun a tradition of inviting a large group of Havel’s closest colleagues to an annual dinner at a Restaurant near Old Town Square called, At The Seven Angels. And that first summer in ’84, we took the whole place and we invited all these people at Havel’s to have dinner with us. And they were then about 20 mainly from the Charter 77 and others who had become people we knew regularly and we would invite them to this dinner. And Bill Keel and Bill Farrand, and the later DCM Carl Schmidt (who had replaced Farrand). Carl became even close to this group. He was an excellent replacement for Farrand. I was always lucky with good FSO staff. And so we would give these annual dinners that continued for a couple of years even after I had left the Foreign Service and was running the Metropolitan Museum in New York. And it turned out that after I left, I’d come back and I’d still give these dinners. This was ’87, ’88, and the summer of ’89, we gave one of those dinners. And Havel came to each of our annual dinners that were always built around him. And when the Velvet Revolution began in November 1989, the Washington Post called to ask me to write an OPED two days after the beginning. I called Havel on phone and asked him what was going to happen. He replied that is was interesting but we will not know for several months what this all means. Well within a week it seemed clear that the communist rule in Czechoslovakia and most of Central Europe was probably about to be over.

Within six weeks it was clear Havel was going to become president. And I called him and I said, “We’re going to come to your inauguration.” And so, the day after Christmas, we flew to Prague.

And that night we got to the hotel and he left word to “Come immediately to the apartment.” So I went with my wife Wendy to the apartment. Since, I knew Havel had never worn ties, I brought him a handful of presidential looking ties and Wendy brought some blouses for Olga, his wife. Because she was from the working class, she never had any first lady type dresses and blouses. Olga wore one silk blouse to the inauguration and Václav wore one of my ties.

And we had arranged for another dinner At The Seven Angels that week when we were going to be there. And, it turned out the dinner was the night before his inauguration. So we gave his inaugural dinner. And we invited his dissident group who had already been named to his new cabinet or to other senior government positions. One was the Mayor of Prague, one was Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, and the new Foreign Minister had been a regular at our dinners. We also invited Shirley Temple Black who was the American Ambassador and many American journalists and political junkies who had been following Havel.

Q: Well, to go back to when you were ambassador and early on, can you talk about your relations with the Charter 77 people and what you talk about and what you do? I mean was this -- I mean was anybody else participating in this?

LUERS: Oh yes, we had an extremely talented FSO in the political section who was close to them. She kept in regular touch, as did Bill Kiehl.

Q: Yeah. But she's an officer of the embassy.

LUERS: Yes. Bill Farrand -- I mean, and then, Carl Schmidt were also close. Kiehl was always there. My wife, Wendy, who had worked for Amnesty International before we married was very active and close to most of the dissidents. Wendy was particularly close to Havel and his wife, Olga. There were probably four or five of us who, and I wasn't always there, had these relations that they built.

Q: I mean but what, outside of contact --

LUERS: What was the discussion?

Q: -- what was the discussion?

LUERS: We were not trying to promote rebellion. We were listening and trying to understand their aspirations and stories about attitudes of other Czechs. They made it very clear they were not trying to create a political "opposition". They were human rights groups. They were promoting theater, the arts, and access to literature and thinking. A lot of it was about what painters are interesting, what writers are coming up, what is being done in samizdat. We learned how the Government was treating them and their concerns about their own situation. Since microphones were everywhere we never wanted to discuss issues that would get them in serious difficulty. The arts and life were part of the vocabulary and the metaphorical language of those close contacts.

Q: This is self-publication.

LUERS: Yes.

Q: It's almost like --

LUERS: And we would ask them, what is the most current thinking about the leadership, the Communist Party, is there any let up on your life, you're a stoker, but can you get out anymore, is it easy for you to function with us? We brought in from the US many books of literature, poetry and books of painting. We discussed with them what they did in their lives, we met their spouses and very often their children. At that point, we could not even have imagined that this group might one day be called on to run the country. There are a couple friends for whom Wendy would buy drugs from the West- mainly from Germany when we traveled across the border by car. We never gave them money since that could have been a criminal offense for them. But we arranged for others to give them money indirectly for their work and lives.

Q: Well, these meetings, were they -- were you harassed? Was there pressure put on them, or what?

LUERS: I was never harassed before or after meetings with these Czechoslovak dissidents. I am quite convinced that virtually all of our contacts were asked for reporting on the meetings after they'd come to the embassy. On the street outside they'd be stopped by the STB (Státní bezpečnost (State security)) and asked, "What did you talk about?" or they'd be called in the next day. I've never reviewed this in details with everyone, but enough of the people that Wendy and I were close enough to have told us that they would respond in general terms, "We were there, we were having dinner with John Updike or William Styron was there. We talked to William Styron about his literature." They would explain what the evening had been. Probably not too inaccurately.

It is hard to imagine what our contacts could say that would be damaging to us or to US interests. The STB (like the KGB and all of the communist secret police were primarily interested in identifying vulnerabilities in American officials so that they might get ways to compromise or "blackmail" us into working for them. The major "secrets" they wanted to know about -- were we having serious money problems, were we having affairs with others, was one of us gay or lesbian, were we hiding some issue that might make us somewhat vulnerable.

Q: No. Well, I understand that the --

LUERS: And I don't think any of those contacts were throne into jail because they were with us.

Q: Did you ever make an attempt to get a hold of --

LUERS: I did.

Q: -- your police record.

LUERS: We both got them. My wife got hers first. And she was very active. And she would go see people that I wouldn't see. She went with Bill Kiehl or others. And she would, she would go out and see some of the Charter 77 people or writers who were in

trouble in places where we knew it wouldn't be good for me to arrive. But, she was interested in seeing her files. And we have this young Czech friend who was able to get the files out from the STB records after the Velvet Revolution. From what we could read, it was all such petty stuff. If you were prepared to read the whole damn thing you'd find some nuggets of the approach they took, and what they thought they had discovered about you. But it was such boring trash about our daily lives and attitudes that to pay for the whole thing to be translated from Czech into English, we decided just to forgo the cost and bother. We just never went through the process. I canceled the translation of my files. I had no intention to dedicate a lifetime to reading this crap.

Q: Oh, I know.

LUERS: It's just not worth it.

Q: Well then, did --

LUERS: And frankly, I would have liked it to be more interesting than it was since it would have indicated how important they thought we were. But it's petty stuff and we seemed not to have had the enormous impact we thought we were having.

Q: Well, I mean sort of at the time were you keeping -- did you feel you were sort of keeping the candle burning, and I mean I guess that was about it, of intellectual --

LUERS: Yes and no. We watched them grow as a group, we watched them become more coherent and bold. When Havel came back there were several components to Charter 77. There was the social democratic group, the former communists who proposed "communism of the human face" in 1968; there was the Catholic group including the underground priests who were trying to revive the Catholic alternative to communism and who were constantly trying to improve the environment for Catholics to practice the religion; and there were the intellectuals, the writers, the economists, the playwrights, and the painters. Each had different agendas but all wanted more freedom to practice their professionals and think and write what they wanted. The social democrats wanted to pick up where Dubček left off. The Christians were prepared to live with a system as long as they were allowed to practice their religion. Cardinal Tomasek, who was the Cardinal of Prague, was an ally of the Catholic dissidents but also supportive indirectly of the rest of the movement. I would call on the Cardinal particularly whenever there was a wealthy American catholic visiting. Invariably, they would pass him some cash. He was an interesting man who was constantly walking the line between doing what was necessary to stay involved and doing what he could to expand opportunities for the faithful.

And then, there were all those other people who basically wanted the end of communism but knew they could not develop such a platform. Havel himself wrote a great deal about the broad human rights agenda of Charter 77. He repeated that he and his group were not the opposition to the Communist Party. His issue was much larger than just the despicable Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He was arguing for the end of the totalitarian rule and talked about post-totalitarian thinking. He call on people to think for

themselves and not be limited to one ideology or one way of thinking – to find a better way to express themselves more freely. He was an intellectual idealist who disliked politics and political parties and he never thought about plotting against the Communist Party. This small band of Czechoslovaks were less confrontational than their Polish colleagues, in part because of their very different culture and history. They made an important series of advances during that period that brought them together more. Once Havel had returned from prison in 1983, he became the unspoken leader because he was not politically ambitious, because his thinking was clear and consistent, and because they all trusted him. He had no ego. He had no command or control interest. He wasn't a revolutionary. And so each of them could find comfort in their agendas with Václav. This genius of Havel became clearer and clearer to me by the time I left. I began writing things about the end of communism in '87. I wrote a full page "My Turn" article in Newsweek about in '88 under the headline "The End of Communism". But by the time I left, I sensed there was something more to this group than any of the other dissident groups I had come to know over my years in Central Europe and the USSR. Most dissident groups were not so broadly focused, except for Solidarnosc, that's an exception. I mean there's no question that the opposition in Poland was unique and was built around the Catholic Church. It was unified. But in the case of Czechoslovakia, most Czechs -- the Christian religion, Catholic Church was important to them, but it had been imposed on them by the Habsburgers back in the 17th century, and it wasn't in their blood the way it was in Poland. It wasn't their whole life. So the Poles -- Solidarnosc was a very important group that was together. In the case of Prague, it was the Czechoslovaks that had these disparate organizations. But because Havel was so non-egocentric, so much of a spiritual -- not even -- spiritual's not right, that he was an instinctual leader without imposing himself. And because of that fact, we watched during that three years, the group begin to hang together better and be able to mix with each other better, and come to have a common purpose. By the time we left Prague in 1986, I realized this was a group that was different.

Q: Well, did you have any pressure put on you, particularly from the States, but maybe elsewhere, but basically like Czech groups that say, "We got to get out," you know, anti-communists who were trying to take advantage, having no particular feel for the Czech situation except they just were, you know, right-wing agitators or whatever you want to call it. In other words, people trying from outside to use the Charter 77 as an instrument to get rid of the Communists.

LUERS: Yes, I think there were. There were a number of people outside of the country who felt that Havel's group was not being active enough -- they were not being anti-communist enough. I don't think these groups ever became a problem for Charter 77. I don't think they were ever -- whether in the public media outside of Czechoslovakia, in English language media that the Czechs weren't being as aggressive as Solidarnosc. And they weren't. They were being very Czech. Reserved in action but extremely active intellectually. Czechoslovakia has never been known for that type of power and forceful defense of their interests and cities, which is why the revolution was Velvet the way it was. It was an almost completely non-violent event. But when American veterans came back to visit Southern Bohemia that had been liberated by US forces at the end of WWII,

a number of Czechoslovak organizations would join and want to go to the sites of their homeland. The American veterans often wished the Czechs were more assertive. But I, just didn't feel that they were a problem.

Q: By this time I take it the, the Sudeten issue was pretty dead.

LUERS: On the contrary, in the fall of 1989 before the Velvet Revolution, Havel as a dissident wrote to Richard Von Weizsäcker, who was then President of Germany, that he thought that two things should happen. Germany should be unified and that Czechoslovakia should apologize to the Germans, who they had -- many of whom they'd killed and injured in the expulsion the Sudeten Germans out of the Sudeten lands after the Second World War. Now, this letter coming from the intellectual, Havel, was not forgotten by the German government after Havel became President in late 1989. Ironically, the German Ambassador in Prague came to see Havel at the party that Wendy and I gave for Havel the night before his inauguration. As we were greeting people at the door, in walks the German ambassador who had not been invited. He said to me "Look, I've got to talk to the future President of Czechoslovakia urgently." So I saw Havel in the corner talking with, Sasha Vondra, who later became the Minister of Defense, he became Minister of Foreign Affairs for Havel. The German Ambassador introduced himself to Sasha and Havel and the three of them went off alone to talk. Havel told me afterward that what happened was, "Shortly after my inauguration I will fly to Munich and then to Berlin to appeal for reconciliation with Germany and for all of Europe." Only Havel would set reconciliation as his top priority, and particularly with Germany. Munich of course was the symbol of Hitler's rape of Czechoslovakia and Berlin was the base for Hitler's Germany.

Q: Yeah, because Munich was where Czechoslovakia was sold out.

LUERS: Exactly, it was sold out. So the fact that he would there symbolically --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: The German Ambassador came to discuss with Havel his arrival ceremony in Munich. According to Havel, the German Ambassador said, "We would like you to announce just after you get off the plane in Munich exactly what you wrote Von Weizsäcker three months ago." who was still President of West Germany. "We would like you to announce that you want to see the unification of Germany and we would like you to apologize in the name of Czechoslovakia to the German people, many of whom were killed and treated roughly at the end of the Second World War as they were expelled from the Sudeten land."

And Havel did not tell me what he responded to the German Ambassador. He was clearly pondering it. I added my two bits. I said, "You will be President tomorrow. You will be President of this country and you have to think very seriously whether you as President want to apologize to the Germans, given the history of World War II. You are now a

political leader of your country and how would your people react to such an apology from you.

And he found a formulation, which was typically Havelian. The unification of Germany was also an issue. As a new independent nation it would not be clear yet what the role of Czechoslovakia was regard to anything else, NATO or the Warsaw Pact, or anything. He ultimately did not mention either one of those issues when he arrived in Germany. But the Sudeten issue dragged on during almost his entire first two years as president. He sought reconciliation but did not race to offer an "apology" which would have been politically unacceptable at home. He appointed a commission to try to bring an agreeable solution for the Sudeten Germans who were living in Bavaria and other areas in German across the border who still had outstanding claims for the property that was taken from them after WWII. But how to deal with land with title to land and other matters continued to be considered by the commission for several years went on. And I'm not sure that even to this day the Sudeten Germans are satisfied that they've been sufficiently recognized as victims of what happened. And the Sudeten area never again became an area of rich economic development. The bad feeling remained against the German by Czechs who remembered well the help that the Sudeten Germans gave to Hitler at the time of the Nazi invasion of their country in 1938.

Q: Well looking at it, I mean this is an example of what today we would call "ethnic cleansing." The Sudeten Dutch had been there for a long time.

LUERS: Right.

Q: I mean this was not a bunch of people who'd been settled in Czechoslovakia or Czech -- in Czech, you know, during World War II.

LUERS: Absolutely. And I think Havel understood that.

Q: Yeah. But they also you might say behaved rather badly as citizens of --

LUERS: Well, they were the Trojan Horse.

Q: Yeah, I mean --

LUERS: That allowed the Nazis to take over Bohemia.

Q: Yeah. So I mean, it's a mixed bag.

LUERS: I know. And that's what, that's what Havel precisely had to think about. And different from a dissident, he can say, "We should apologize and Germany should unify."

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But as a President of the State speaking for the people, the German unification became a more complicated issue, and certainly most Europeans in the beginning of ’90 still hadn’t addressed the subject of unification in Germany. It was a difficult issue. The Italians didn’t want it, the French didn’t want it, you know, the Italians were quite outspoken against it. So what is Havel going to do? So, he decided to punt on that issue.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And, within six months, the unification issue became much more viable since others had put it on the table, and it happened.

Q: At the beginning it was --

LUERS: I think he recognized the fact that as difficult as the German presence in Bohemia had been over the years, and as troubling as it was particularly in the ‘30s when, as German Nationalism was rising and most of the big families of Sudetenland strongly supported the new Germany, it became difficult to be President of Czechoslovakia before the --

Q: Did you have a chance before Havel became president, when you were ambassador, to sit with Havel or his colleagues and talk about some of these issues? Or was it pretty well restricted to freedom of the arts --

LUERS: Oh we talked about a lot of things. I think you might have misunderstood my earlier point about the nature of our discussions. For the purposes of the microphones and our relations, the overall cover story was that it was all about the arts and philosophy. But we talked in fact a great deal about U.S., we talked about Europe a lot. Havel was very interested in Europe. I had seen Havel the summer before the Velvet Revolution in his Hradecek where he and Olga had a small country house, and he’d been out of jail again -- they put him in prison in the spring of ’89. Havel was put in prison because of some student demonstrations and they had devised that he was responsible. And I, as a private citizen, had a big bilateral conference on US/Czech commercial relations that I was organizing in Prague that I had a counterpart group that I’d been working with. And, I took over a program of following through on the structure of the Helsinki Accord Agreement that we had signed while I was still Ambassador three years earlier. And I’d taken on the commercial trade relationships part, and I had a large number of really important people who were going to go with me to Prague and we were going to have this conference there, and they were very excited about it. And then when they arrested Havel, I went to their ambassadors in DC and at the UN (I had known them both) and I said, “Deals off,” you know, “until you release Havel we’re not going to even think about pursuing these commercial talks.”

And eventually, because a number of people opposed the arrest, after a few weeks the government did release him. That summer, I went to see him and I went to Hradicek. I

asked him, “tell me what you think of all these students demonstrating? What is your reaction? Is this a sign of things changing?
And he said, “You ask me what I think about it? I don’t like it because every time the students demonstrate the government throws me in jail.” He said it in his usual amusing way. He always had double meanings. And he’d been in jail a couple times that year already. In Hradicek we talked about the German issue then. I remember because East Germany had already become a phenomenon and Hungary as well. East Germans were going to Hungary to West German Embassy to seek transit to West Germany since all Germans living in East Germany had German citizenship by law.

Q: You’re talking about an exodus.

LUERS: Poland -- an exodus.

Q: An exodus.

LUERS: ’89 was already a year of activity in the exodus -- East Germans would go down into Poland and into Hungary and those governments began to let them transit to West Germany.

Q: And then Hungarians, this sort of set -- borders open.

LUERS: I know, go. Yeah. And, that phenomena was going on already and so with Havel, we talked about what all that meant. What he thought was going to happen in East Germany, and we talked about German unification. It was stimulated by the events of that summer, and the early part of that year is when he wrote to Von Weizsäcker about his view of the future of Germany and Czechoslovakia’s role in that. Havel was always a forward looking thinker on those issues. He thought strategically. We talked a lot about it over the years. The embassy’s interest was to find out what’s going on inside and how are they doing and what can we do to give you more visibility outside your country. We believed that by “shinning the international light on them they would have increased protection from being thrown into jail. Havel and a couple of others – Jiri Dienstbier, who eventually became his Foreign Minister was a stoker at the time. He was in the social democrat group within Charter 77. He was one of the leaders of the charter of the Prague Spring. He and I talk a lot about the world and Europe, and the role of the United States in it, and he was interested in the broad issues of the Cold War. They were mostly interested in what was happening in the Soviet Union, and most of them detested the Soviets beyond imagination.

Q: Do you gather that you were reporting, and I mean basically not just reporting, but the events that were happening and the growing importance of Charter 77 and others was raising Czechoslovakia to a higher level --

LUERS: No.

Q: -- in the department?

LUERS: No. I did my own thing. I don't think anybody began to pay attention except possibly when we signed the bilateral agreement under the Helsinki accord -- the habits were too deeply engrained.

Q: But this is --

LUERS: The fact that Germany was already bubbling, Poland was bubbling, Hungary was boiling, "What's going on?" But still nothing seemed to be happening in Czechoslovakia. In Charter 77 was -- it's an interesting human rights organization.

Q: Well, one of the things that I've noted, I think it's true of political life in any almost country, but the so-called experts were a -- tend to straight-line think.

LUERS: Oh, I know.

Q: I mean in other words --

LUERS: It was this before --

Q: It was this way and it will always be this way and how do we deal with it? And the idea that all of a sudden Germany would unite, I mean for God's sakes.

LUERS: And the book on unification is that. I mean the experts saying this is not good for Europe, it's not good for Germany, it's not good for us. It's ridiculous.

Q: I mean, so --

LUERS: And Bush, to his credit, it was his vision. He really took --

Q: This was George --

LUERS: H.W. Bush.

Q: Herbert Walker Bush would give great credit for --

LUERS: Oh, you bet.

Q: Just the right person to deal -- to deal with this, particularly when you look at the present we're going through a selection of Republican candidates to run for president, and some of the pronounces on foreign affairs show that they have no concept of what they're saying.

LUERS: No, none.

Q: I mean it's, it's frightening.

LUERS: And they don't care.

Q: Yeah. But at the time Czechoslovakia, I mean in a way you were doing your way --

LUERS: And nobody really knew what we were saying. The desk officer may have read what I was writing, but even though some of it was interesting, the biases against Gorbachev had been conditioned by decades of thinking that the leadership will never change in the USSR. I took literally years before Washington began to realize how significant Gorbachev was as a change agent in that part of the world.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And, the biases against Czechoslovakia were profound. And, everything was going on around them; nothing was happening in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And I think it was the biggest surprise of all when suddenly these kids have this demonstration on November 19th and then the lid blew off, and it was all over within weeks. The Velvet Revolution surprised all the doubters. Suddenly, Czechoslovakia became the model for change in that former Communist world

Q: Keys jangling and --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. I mean you, you run across -- Washington tends to fix on, on people and all. For example, I'm talking to Jim Collins about his time in --

LUERS: In Moscow.

Q: In Moscow. And how Yeltsin had been denigrated by everyone in -- I mean it's true, he was a drunk and he had all sorts of problems, but it still, he was a major --

LUERS: He was our drunk. He was our guy.

Q: He was a major figure and he was being dismissed --

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- by the --

LUERS: Experts.

Q: By the experts, yes. You know, and this happens again and again.

LUERS: This is some of what my book is going to be about and what my course is about. When Roosevelt became president he has decided that because Japan is on the rise, Germany's on the rise, Hitler's already in by the time he becomes president in 1933, Hitler had already become chancellor.

Q: Yeah, chancellor.

LUERS: FDR concluded that we had to have relations with the Soviet Union. You look at the map and you look at Germany, Japan, who was in the middle. And so for really basically geopolitical reasons he thought that we had to go there. And the experts, including George Kennan, said, "Don't do that, you know, unless they agree to the following 12 conditions. Don't have the relationship with the Soviets. They're dreadful people, they won't change," and, and Roosevelt became so fed up with the experts and the State Department in general that he went forward without State. And he used none of the experts on the whole negotiation. Bill Bullet was his principle advisor who was certainly not a professional diplomat, but he'd been to Russia several times. And Cordell Hull was so tarnished with the nastiness of his feelings about the State Department that he sent Hull on a trip to Latin America while Roosevelt negotiated in The White House the opening of diplomatic relations with the USSR through direct negotiations of FDR as President with Litvinov who was only the Soviet Foreign Minister.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: It was the Foreign Minister negotiating with the President of the United States without the Secretary of State that brought that deal about. And, that shaped the entire Roosevelt period. He had a very low regard for the State Department. When, the war started after Pearl Harbor, and he established the War Committee I guess he called it, which he was head of it but he didn't include Hull. And Hull went to him one time and said, "You know, I don't understand, the British include their Foreign Secretary in, in all these meetings. Why don't you include me?"

Roosevelt replied didactically how the British system is different than US system. Cordell Hull accepted it. But during the war you look at Yalta and other summit meetings of the big you never see Cordell Hull going to these meetings. The one diplomat who went was Chip Bohlen who also spoke Russian. For some reason, partially because he was so elegant, partially because he was so wise, and he didn't fall into the trap of the Soviet specialists he was trusted by Roosevelt. He was trusted by FDR mainly because Henry Hopkins knew him well. And he played an important role.

Q: One of the, the things that I didn't do, but somebody else did in part of our collection -

LUERS: I'm going to have to go.

Q: -- an interview with Theodore Achilles.

LUERS: Ted Achilles, yeah.

Q: Ted Achilles. Who was assistant to Jimmy Burns, who was then our Secretary of State

LUERS: Right.

Q: -- during the _____thing. And after agreement between -- after discussion at _____, this is right at the end of the war, critical time, Achilles types up a summary of what was discussed and all and to send to the department. And he presents it to Burns and Burns said, "What's this?" And he explains it to him. Says, "I'm not going to let those sons of bitches know what I'm doing."

LUERS: *(laughs)* I know, I know. That was Burns attitude towards them.

Q: You know, but I think one of the most interesting things when one looks at our collection and looks at American foreign policy is about 1948 the military, our military opts out, you know, you've got diplomats and all. And we had a very small Foreign Service and all of a sudden they were handed the world and say, "Here it is," and they really hadn't been at the helm.

LUERS: No.

Q: They did a very good job, but it's -- it's an --

LUERS: Well, it's a mixed bag because the Foreign Service didn't get along well with many presidents. Dean Acheson was a major player and ironically, so was Henry Kissinger in terms of bringing the Foreign Service in to do what they do well. I mean Kissinger used us better than any Secretary of State in my memory. Acheson was first class. I'm going to have to leave, I'm sorry.

Q: Well OK, we'll stop at this point. And we'll pick up at the sort of the end game at Czechoslovakia.

LUERS: Sure.

Q: We've covered -- if you want to think of anything to talk about, and then I do want to talk about your time in the Metropolitan.

LUERS: And at the UNA (United Nations Association). A decade in UNA.

Q: All right. Today is the 12th of March, 2012 with Bill Luers. And Bill, we left this off, we were leaving Czechoslovakia. Do you recall anything that you might want to say about Czechoslovakia more than -- I don't know if I asked you, but how did you feel about -- well, it's not really -- was it Czechoslovakia when you left or was it the Czech Republic?

LUERS: It was Czechoslovakia. Because the Czech Republic wasn't until the early '90s.

Q: How'd you feel about the future of it?

LUERS: I left so high on Havel --

Q: This is one of our interns.

LUERS: Hello, how are you?

RACHEL: Good morning.

Q: Do you want to introduce yourself?

RACHEL: Hello, my name is Rachel Recolcolin.

LUERS: How are you? Good to see you.

RACHEL: Good to see you.

LUERS: I'll tell you. I had such a rich memory of my relationship with Havel and his group. And you know, it wasn't long after I left Prague that I started writing my articles on the end of communism. I wouldn't say that I thought that Havel would ever become President of Czechoslovakia, but I thought this phenomena of Charter 77 and Havel were so refreshing for me to find out how they were managing their relationship. And the government was so stagnant and evidently going nowhere. But, it was probably one of the most stimulating and optimistic periods of my Foreign Service career.

Q: You left there when?

LUERS: I left in May of '86.

Q: For our intern here, Ambassador Luers was Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. And this is before the so-called Velvet Revolution and then the change, about three years before.

LUERS: Right.

Q: Well, where'd you go?

LUERS: I had been invited to be the President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I had wanted to be assigned Ambassador to Moscow. In the middle of my negotiations of my appointment to the Metropolitan the Director General offered me the job of Ambassador to Brazil which I found most appealing. Brazil I considered a cosmos. But I was so convinced that the President at the Met was the right job for me because I had this special relationship to art, I had a great fascination with New York since I had gotten a Masters

Degree at Columbia, and I had been living in the world as a Naval officer and Foreign Service officer for 33 years. It was the right time for me to come home.

Q: Well, you know, looking at it I think all of us who heard that you'd got an appointment said oh, my God, because we thought this would go to some society academic New Yorker, you know.

LUER: Yes.

Q: I mean it just didn't seem to be the sort of thing that a Foreign Service, unless they came from the right family in New York would aspire to.

LUERS: I understand. I didn't come from the right family in New York or the right background.

Q: Well, that's what I'm saying.

LUERS: But I'll tell you why. I think I mentioned to you my patron J. Richardson Dilworth --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: -When I was at the Institute for Advanced Study Dick Dilworth who was Chairman of the Board of the Institute, had figured that I might be a good person to work with Philippe de Montebello who was then the director. I was initially hired to be the CEO to oversee him. Phillipe insisted he'd leave if I didn't share the leadership. So we became the two-headed leaders of the Met. And it worked very well basically. I mean there were some tensions off and on, but I managed the museum and he managed the art. And we had an extremely successful 14 years together.

Q: All right, well let's talk about this. Because while we're doing these oral histories we want to suck in as much information --

LUERS: Yes

Q: -- as we can. And here's an organization that is extremely well known, but first place, what was your view of the Met and then what did you find that running the Met involved?

LUERS: My view of the Met was conditioned by the time I went to Columbia University in 1956-7. I had shared an apartment with a curator at the Met, Jack McGregor, one of the people whom I'd known in Naples and who had been at Harvard when I began studying Russian there. He and I found an apartment on the West side. And he introduced me to the Met. I'd known it before while I was going to Hamilton College but he got me to know curators and the wonderful aspects of the Met. I would go regularly. Jack would get me tickets to the concert series. So I began to frequent it. We lived right across the park. We lived on Central Park West, quite far up. And so I was pretty well knowledgeable

about the Met. I told you I'd introduced myself to art when I lived in Italy a lot. And so the combination of the fascination of art, and I began collecting some minor graphics and drawings. Because of my experience during my earlier years at Columbia, I was ready to commit.

When I went to the Met as President, I had an apartment on Fifth Avenue just across the street from the MET where I didn't have to pay any rent, and my salary doubled. Then it ultimately quadrupled. And so the appreciation combination of having not a cent of money and finally getting some, and my previous experience of the Met, just made it a logical thing for me. So what I got in this new career much of what would I was seeking. But I quickly found that the Met is a closed institution and outsiders are not welcomed easily. The non-art people were more receptive to me because I was their boss. The curators were more questioning who I --

Q: What I a curator?

LUERS: Curator is an art professional who looks after the works of art. There are chief curators who run departments. For example, there was a Chief Curator of the Classical Art Department, of the European Paintings Department and another, of the American -- American Wing. And, in each department there's something between two and ten curators. So it's a large group. The Met had 18 curatorial departments. And these are the people who look after the works of art, acquire works of art, who play the role of educator of the scholarly approach to the art. They help our educational people prepare materials and programs for the children and excite our visitors. They write catalogues, organize special exhibitions. Most of them have doctorates. They're scholars. I think there were about 120 curators and there were about a 1,200 employees.

Q: You know, I've talked to many Foreign Service Officers who when they left the Foreign Service have gone into the academic world.

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: And almost to a person they talk about the, the, the problems of --

LUERS: Academia.

Q: -- academia. And this, the enclosed, the narrow vision, the fighting over money -- the intense fighting over money -- and then, which combines not only money, but with outlook, you know, my field is more important than your field --

LUERS: Yeah, there is that.

Q: And I would think that you getting into this thing, this sounds like the problems of academia would be --

LUERS: Miniscule.

Q: Yes, compared to this. I mean --

LUERS: Well, the interesting thing is my overall responsibility did not deal with the academic side. That was Philippe's job. And there was infighting. And the interesting thing is that Philippe didn't have a PhD. All of them had a PhD. So he felt somewhat intimidated. And he was extremely supportive of them. My job really was fundraising and managing the institution. It turned out when I arrived there I didn't know how good a fundraiser I would be. And I had a patron who, one of the people who got me the job, I went to him and I said, "We were building a new wing" and this was in '86, and he's the first person I asked, "Would you give me ten million dollars to start this new wing?" And he said he would. And then I went to another wealthy younger man I met about a ten million dollar grant. I was into the job for about four months, and I got to meet this guy Henry Kravis. I don't know if you've heard about him. He's a big leverage buyout guy in New York. And I went to Henry and I said, "Would you give me ten million dollars?"

He said, "Yes."

And then I went to a third person. And so I got 30 million dollars in my first six months. I realized I had a talent as a fundraiser. And I spent a lot of time organizing a capital campaign in that first two or three years. The board Chairman did not want to do it. But I found a new board member that we got on the board who helped me run a campaign. And we raised, during the time I was there, I guess close to half a billion dollars. We raised 500 million dollars.

Q: Well, let's talk about --

LUERS: That was a big chunk of what I did.

Q: Let's talk a bit about fundraising. I say this for anybody -- one, for the history of the organization, but also for almost abstract -- I'm in a small organization, which has survived now for over --

LUERS: This thing fundraising

Q: Yeah, over 25 years. Which has done miserably in --

LUERS: In fundraising.

Q: Yeah. I mean, you know, we, we had -- everything is done on the cheap. Actually, it's been very successful as far as product is concerned, but what -- do you have any -- did you find that it was just, these were people who had lots of money in New York and say gee, this is nice? Or are there tricks or --

LUERS: First, you've got to have a saleable product. The Met is the most saleable product practically in New York. There's nothing quite like it, both because it's the social

center of New York, it has been for over 125 years, and because people love association with that institution. It's just been such a star performer. And the main thing I learned, and it became clear that I had a certain interest in it and talent at fundraising, is you have to have a professional staff that helps you. There is no question that training as a diplomat was perhaps my most important asset. And we had -- there are now probably 100 people who work in the Development Department in the Met, 100, maybe 80.

Q: Wow. Good God.

LUERS: And that includes the membership part. And they -- we have three or four -- we have a unit doing research on people who we'd learned about, and you can find out online a lot of information about every potential donor. You can find out what they've given to before, you can find out their interests, and the art of fundraising is identifying somebody who's got a load of money who wants to give it away to the needs you have. And very often you adjust the needs to what they want to give to, but that can be a slippery slope if you carry it too far.

Q: Mm-hmm.

LUERS: And that's when you do too much of that you're in trouble. But that, the following up, the organizing the meetings, the following up, the cultivation, I guess my most successful venture in my early days of fundraising started in '87. And I knew Walter Annenberg who had been Ambassador to England and I knew him then and I knew him subsequently, I knew his wife, Lee, who'd been Chief of Protocol during a time when I'd managed a Chief of State visit there. So my wife Wendy, who was close to Lee and I knew them both when I came in the Met. Within the first year, I asked him for his collection. I don't know if you know about Walter Annenberg's collection. He had one of the great collections of impressionist paintings and post-impressionist paintings in private hands. I met him in May, 1987 at the Cloisters during that first year when we had our annual Cloisters meeting of the board at the Cloisters, which is a building up north in Northern Manhattan.

Q: Beautiful place.

LUERS: You've been there? Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Is that part of the Metropolitan?

LUERS: Oh yes. And so, we had our spring board meetings up there and I said, "Meet me at the board meeting." So we went with Lee, his wife. He was on the board and he came up and picked her up and then he and I went off and talked.

Now, he knew I was going to ask him for money, but I decided I was going to ask him for the collection. And we went in to one of the Cloisters chapels and he said, "Bill, if you're going to ask me for money let's not do it in a Catholic chapel."

So we went out on the rampart, which overlooked the river. And so we sat out there and he was expecting the big ask, and I said, "Look, I'm not going to ask you for money. I'm going to ask you what you've thought about doing with your collection. The Met would like to have your collection."

And I looked at his face. Clearly nobody had asked him the question before. The National Gallery wanted it, Los Angeles County wanted it, the Philadelphia Museum -- he's from Philadelphia. He's a great national patriot having served as ambassador. And he has his house in Sunland, near Los Angeles. So there were a combination of museums, and I'm convinced none of them had the courage to ask him yet. So I asked him. And, we started talking and he said that he hadn't decided what to do with his paintings yet. Now, mind you, the value of that collection was about a billion dollars. It's an unbelievable collection. And it's probably worth much more than that now. And so we began to talk about it. And the talking went on for about three years. Philippe was off again and on again. He just didn't have the patience to deal with him nor was he convinced it would ever happen. We had several weeks when we did not hear from Walter, and Philippe thought he'd given up. And I kept at it. And I'd see him whenever I could. We wouldn't always talk about this collection, we would talk about other things. And over time, he agreed to give us the collection. It was really the persistence, the patience, and the fact that he became convinced that his paintings would be seen by more people more often at the Met than any other museum in the world including the National Gallery. So he finally made the deal, based on his own judgment. And most of the good gifts, the big gifts, are gifts that people come to themselves with a little help. So it's a question of how long you are prepared to wait and how you're prepared to strategize dealing with them. And I didn't pester him, I just kept in touch.

Q: Well, did you find --

LUERS: And, he not only gave us the collection, but he gave us almost 15 million dollars to redo the galleries where they were being shown.

Q: Well, did you find that having been an ambassador opened up --

LUERS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: I mean, you can talk ambassadorial things.

LUERS: I hardly ever used the term ambassador title. I used it for reservations at restaurants and to get in doors. But I found that at the Met, Ambassador Luers was very useful and essential. Wealthy women were charmed to sit sitting next to Ambassador Luers. It was much more about my title than about me. So I found that was useful in terms of raising money and in terms of having relationships in New York.

Q: Well, sort of skipping around, but what about wealthy women? One always thinks of the widow of somebody or something that's got a lot of money and often the women outlive the men and --

LUERS: Oh sure.

Q: -- so she's going around with this money and I think would be sort of a prime target. But is there a problem with this, or how does this seem to work?

LUERS: Well, there's no problem. Three of the wealthiest women in New York really were the power on the board on certain things. Brooke Astor was on our board and gave us in her lifetime over 100 million dollars. And Douglas Dillon gave us an equal amount over decades of giving. The three strong women on the Board were Jayne Wrightsman, Brooke Astor, and Anette de la Renta. And Jayne was a very wealthy widow and she'd given us an unequaled collection for French decorative arts, many paintings and a great deal of money. In fact, Jack McGregor with whom I had shared an apartment in NYC in 1956-57 was the curator in the Met who had been assigned to the Wrightsman collection. I never was close to the three of them, but they were always supportive and hospitable when it was necessary. I proved more successful with the new donors. There were several excellent people on the staff who were particularly good at cultivating Brooke Astor, for example, Ashton Hawkins who really knew everyone in NYC, so my job was finding new donors and working with people like Walter Annenberg. But I found that the deal making in fundraising was very much like diplomacy. You find out what the donor wants, you know what you want, and you find out how to put it together so that each gets some satisfaction in the deal -- that's the essence of diplomacy.

Q: Well, what have you got to give? I mean obviously, you know, to me it sounds like well OK, you give me your pictures, for example, and I'll -- there's a wall there and I'll hang it. I mean it must be a hell of a lot more to it than that.

LUERS: The premiere location for of a collection for a painting in the world is the Met, and people know that. And people in New York imagine how the Met is the pinnacle of social achievement in New York to be on that board. So giving money to the Met is a way to get into the high establishment. I think I told you that a friend of mine who got me on the board, who got me the presidency, said, "There are three things in New York when people come and make a lot of money. First, they want to get on. Then they want to get honest. Then they want to get honor." He said, "You find them between the honest and the honor thing." The velocity in passing through those three phases has increased. People come to New York, young, aggressive people. They don't have a lot of money. Low and behold, in ten years they're a billionaire. And then they realize that they've established themselves, then how do you get on a board? How do you get accepted by the community? You've been a brash, young upstart who's turning companies over and turning a lot of old, old guard over, and you're taking over. And one of the things to be that helps you become more acceptable is to buy a wing at the Met or give us the largest gift we've had or, or buy you a name on a gallery. And you find those people at the right moment. Among others I found Henry Kravis at the right moment.

Q: What's his background?

LUERS: Henry was from Oklahoma, and he came to New York and he worked with a man called Kohlberg. Kohlberg designed a system of buying companies with junk bonds that was sort of a new way of thinking about acquisitions. Today it's common cause -- it's commonplace. Then it was called Kohlberg Kravis and Roberts --KKR. Roberts was Henry's cousin who lives in California, and Kohlberg was the genius behind it. And KKR, which you may have heard about it, began to do some of the biggest deals. And Henry was a nouveau in New York but became wealthy and he wanted "on". He became a good friend. Today he is one of the giant business leaders in NYC and still on the Board of the MET. And I got to know him early on in his climb to become a player in New York and ask him for that first ten million and got him on the board of the Met. We helped him and he helped us. Everybody won. And he's a terrific guy. His wife is now President of the Museum of Art.

Q: Well, I would think there would be a certain amount of, as you talk about this, all the novels and movies and all about the nouveau riche moving in and all.

LUERS: Yes

Q: Did you almost have a -- I don't want to sound condescending, because I don't mean it to be, but it's just a new way of life in a different culture or something -- sort of a civilizing team at the museum or something?

LUERS: At the quarterly board meetings of the Met, all of these diverse individuals would come together. There were several different in groups and they were clearly impressed by the presence of the famous and the celebrities. Henry Kissinger was on the board and would often come. Brooke Astor would always join. The many board members found the experience educational in different ways and being in the room gave them social status. They developed a certain quality of behavior over the years sitting interacting with the rich and powerful while they themselves were becoming the rich and powerful. The school of New York society has evolved through the social life at places like the Met. And people come in and learn from their peers what it's like to be at the peek of New York society. But I never felt any personal affiliation with that society or hostility toward it. I was not a part of it, nor was I put off by it. I always felt myself from Springfield, Illinois, and I was doing my job the best I could and I was able to charm people and do what I should do to raise the money and run the institution. And I never felt either that they were superior morally because they were making all this money, nor was I intimidated by them and felt comfortable doing my job – which was certainly one of the most interesting of my long career.

Q: Well, did you ever find yourself caught up -- you probably remember there was a short piece by Tom Wolfe called "Radical Chic".

LUERS: Oh yes in the --

Q: Which was I think the Bernsteins had a -- this is Leonard Bernstein had a cocktail party or a fundraiser or something for some of the sort of outrageous black power people. This is during the --

LUERS: No, I remember that. I remember that.

Q: -- '60s.

LUERS: I knew Tom Wolfe.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Very well.

Q: And it was very funny. But you know, society people --

LUERS: It's what really put Wolfe on the map.

Q: Yeah, I know. But I was wondering whether you ran across sort of -- I have to always be very careful, because I'm not trying to put too much of a value judgment, but basically outrageous causes that catch the imagination of, of, of the fancy people or something like that? You know --

LUERS: No, the Met is not given to that. There may have been some that I didn't know about, but by and large the people at the Met were compelled to think about the Museum as an institution and about art. Each of the Board members had other interests and philanthropies but most were serious. I met radical chic basically through the writers I knew. There was another element in New York, which perhaps had certain characteristics of radical chic. Many wealthy New Yorkers put a great deal of money into the public educational system which was broken. Others provide great support for human rights organizations. The biggest funders of human rights organizations are extremely wealthy people who made their money in finance or real estate. But I didn't. Certainly the Met was not a radical chic world. It was a world of people who wanted in.

Q: Well, now --

LUERS: And the Met was where they'd get in.

Q: You're talking about Annenberg and others donating their collections. Did you see -- I mean one of the concerns about people who are involved in art is an awful lot of wealthy people have got, you know, their private rooms with masterpieces tucked away. But is there sort of a, almost a, a process where they might do that, but their kids are probably going to give it to somebody. Or in other words, is the great art going to find its way into the public view?

LUERS: Ultimately, we think that most of the great works of art will be on walls in museums. At some point a large collector is going to want to sell that or give it to the museum. And you know, when the Met was founded in the 1870's it did not have any original works of art. They assumed that much of the museum's collection would be copies of great works of art. The Met was founded at the Union League Club by a group of men who believed that if New York was going to be the greatest city in the world it had to have a museum comparable to the Prado in Madrid, or the Louvre. And so they decided they'd build one and they'd make copies of all the great works. The organizers originally wanted to build the museum midtown roughly where the NY Public Library is today. They commissioned dozens of copies of the great Greek and Roman sculptures. The Met's first real collection was of Greek and Roman sculptures that had been copied with full approval in Rome and Greece. Over the years we took them down and began to substitute real works of art. And there were a couple of early collections that were given to us from archeological sites. At the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, with the collapse of Europe and the First World War, the robber barons from New York acquired huge quantities of high quality works of art. J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie and Hearst and all these people bought these enormous collections. Carnegie and Morgan gave most of his art to the Met. Those collections remain at the core of the Met. And so you have it -- you had us anticipating that we'd never have any real art, but because, for the same reason I say that the great works of art will eventually appear in museums, most of them, we never anticipated would ever be in our museum. But because of the economic conditions of Europe, the tragedy of Europe after the First World War, the wealth of the American industrial class, a lot of it came to the Met. It is a phenomena that's taken place really during the 20th century as the transfer of art from private ownership to museums. That's what's happening every day.

Q: But there's another trend that seems to be going on, and that is countries demanding back their heritage. You know, the Elgin Marbles, I served four years in Greece and of course, you know, I mean the big thing between Britain and --

LUERS: It still is. To this day in places where we'd take most of the work for ourselves. You don't -- you couldn't do that anymore, you know, and if you're excavating in Egypt you're excavating with a partner who was Egyptian. And the question of whether you're getting those options is subject to negotiation. Anyway, I'm going to have to go. No, I can stare a little longer.

Q: OK, well -- but this is such an interesting subject here and so important. Were you sort of presiding over a whole change in practically a dismembering of the collection?

LUERS: I have this one story that I'll tell you about Walter Annenberg. That summer after he gave his collection to the Met he came up to the Vineyard where we spend our summers. He and Lee came on his enormous yacht, just the two of them, and he took Wendy and me out. He had wanted to meet David McCullough who lives near us up there.

Q: The author historian.

LUERS: He wanted to ask McCullough to write his biography. McCullough wouldn't do that, but he gave Walter some advice on what to do about his biography. So that night we had dinner with them on their yacht and he was glowing with pleasure at what his gift had meant to us and him. And he said, "Bill, I've set aside a little money to buy the Met a couple more paintings." And I, of course I couldn't imagine what a little money was for Walter, because he was a multi-billionaire.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: And, and I said OK. So I called up the head of -- the key person in the curatorial department and said, "Walter wants to buy us another painting. Go find a Van Gogh."

The curator, Gary Tinterow went to Switzerland, found a great Van Gogh called Cypresses and Wheat Fields, it's an important painting. And brought it back from Switzerland. We showed it to Walter, it wasn't well shown. He said, "How much is it?"

We said, "73 million dollars."

And he didn't like the painting suddenly. And then we, we thought about it, looked about it, he thought about it. And then we talked to the owner. We invited Walter back for another look. We hung it in one of the more elegant galleries well lit, and we told him it was 47 million dollars. And he said, "We'll take it."

So he bought the painting for us and it's one of the best of the post-impressionist paintings anywhere, and we have it in the middle of his collection.

Then years later, in the late '90s when the world became more conscious of the large number of paintings that Nazi officials had taken from Jewish families in German, an enterprising NY Times journalist called the curator to tell him that the Van Gogh, had a provenance dating back to the late 1920's. It had been owned by a Mendelson family living in Berlin. The next time the painting appeared was after WWII in Zurich where it was sold at auction in the early 1950's. The New York Times journalist said "This looks like a painting that was taken from the Mendelson family in the 1930's and then sold by someone after the Holocaust and WWII."

And what more could I say, "We don't know," I said. Find out what you can.

She proceeded to begin her search. She finally found a relative of the Mendelson family who lived up in Maine who I think was a piano teacher. She said to the Mendelson "Look, I'm trying to find out about a Van Gogh painting that was sold in Zurich in 1954, which was initially owned by some of your family. Do you know anything about it?"

He said, "I know exactly about it." He said, "It was owned by my father. In 1938 we thought it was time to get out of Germany. So we took the family painting collection from our house, packed all the paintings well, and left them next door with a Christian

who were good friends. My father told them, 'May we store these paintings in your basement? And if this is ever over we might come back to reclaim them.'"

And sure enough, the war was over. In the mid '50s his father decided to return to Berlin and went to see his old house. Their house had been destroyed during the war. The house next door owned by the Christian family was still standing. His father went to the family and said, "Remember those paintings we left with you in the 1930's? Where might they be now?"

They said, "In the basement."

The father went into the basement and found every one of the paintings sitting where they had put them. The father took them out and sold them in Zurich. And this Swiss collector bought this painting from the original owner. The Nazis had not stolen the paintings. The correspondent told me on the phone, he said, "I thought this would be a certain Holocaust story. Now I don't have a story."

I said, "What do you mean you don't have a story? You have a fascinating story." She was hoping to find that it had been taking from this family by the Nazis.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: But it had remained stored in the Christian's house. And I said, "You have a sensational story, it's a lovely story." There is a perfect track of provenance. We now know where it was, what it was doing during the war, and how it got out.

Q: These things are remarkable. How did you find your dealing with your curators on these things? Were they with you or were they sort of glowering?

LUERS: Some of the curators I had good relationships with. Fundamentally, most of the curators felt that Philippe should be CEO of the museum.

Q: Philippe being --

LUERS: Philippe de Montebello, he's French born, very elegant and smart.

LUERS: During this period, I remained very much involved with Czechoslovakia, and I kept my involvement with foreign policy issues, particularly the changes happening in the USSR and then Russia.

Q: So we'll talk about that the next time too.

LUERS: OK, all right.

Q: Great.

LUERS: And then of course I went to be the President of the United Nations Association of USA after the Met in 1999.

Q: Oh yeah, we'll --

LUERS: Another decade.

Q: OK, so we'll --

LUERS: So anyway, OK.

Q: OK, so you let me know when you have some time.

LUERS: All right, I'll keep in touch. You haven't heard the last of me.

Q: Good.

All right, let me turn this on. OK. Today is the 4th of April, 2012 with Bill Luers. Bill, we've decided -- of course more about sort of operations with the Met, but we're going to talk about putting your interview, the oral history, your dealing with the Met, and we'll just meld that into this one. But you wanted to talk about your experience, sort of the foreign affairs side of the Met and of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, perhaps other countries.

LUERS: When I left the Foreign Service, I retired and became President of the Met, I still had this residual active relationship with Vaclav Havel and the Charter 77 group and with the Communist government, because as I mentioned we had signed an agreement before I left, just a month before I took up the Met job, I signed an agreement under the Helsinki Accords. We had signed one with the Czechoslovak government dealing with trade/economic relations, human rights, and political relations, bilateral relations. And I got working with IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) --

Q: IREX being?

LUERS: IREX meaning International Relations Exchanges. IREX was an NGO that was developed principally for promoting exchanges for scholars and students with the Soviet Union and the Eastern block. And so I became a member of the board, actually was chairman for a while. Allen Kassof, who was then running it, asked me to initiate a series of meetings with the Czechoslovak authorities and American economists and businessmen on what the economic dimension of our relations might be with Czechoslovakia as communists. It was an interesting access to the thinking when I left as ambassador to meet with a lot of people who would talk to me now in ways they wouldn't talk while I was there as ambassador. In the period from '86 to '89, we had several meetings of this group. And they were a group of Czechs and Slovaks on their side who were quite interesting. And, one of them was the wife of the current president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Klaus. A couple of other economists who I found extremely

interesting whom I got to know in this way, and I hadn't known them very well before. Wendy and I began returning once or twice year to Prague to maintain our bond to Havel and his group, and because we had a lot of friends there who were non-governmental. Each time we returned, we would have this dinner party, which I think I described to you, where we would have Havel and all of his gang together. And we'd have it At the Seven Angels restaurant. I would call Havel in advance and say, "We're going to arrive on such and such a date, let's have the dinner on -- for a Friday night, and we'll reserve the table -- we'll reserve the restaurant." And so we would have 15 or 20 of his dissident group to dinner. The combination of the regular contact through conferences with government level and our visits to Prague where we would meet with the dissidents, gave us a perspective of what was going on that was unusual.

Q: Was there much contact between the two during this period?

LUERS: Practically none. We went back the summer of 1989. We were scheduled to have a conference in Prague of a large segment of the economic group. We had a good team of Americans who were going to join. And we had a quite large number of Czechs and Slovaks who wanted to be part of it. And there were a couple of institutes who were very active. There was the Institute of Economics, the Academy of Sciences, and there was this institute called the Institute of Prognostication, which Václav Klaus was a part of. And so, there was a number of people that spring in 1989 before our conference who demonstrated in Prague. And, the government arrested Havel because the student demonstrations were beginning and he was thrown in jail for about four months. And I went to the Czechoslovak ambassadors in DC and at the UN and said, "We're canceling this meeting. We can have no meetings while you have Havel in jail. It's outrageous that you'd do this." And so we canceled our meeting and I protested personally, the ambassador who I knew quite well.

Q: This is a Czech ambassador.

LUERS: Czech ambassador in Washington, and the one in the UN. And you know, I had no official status. They still respected me at some level thinking I might help get them out of isolation on trade. We went to Prague that summer, August. And we visited Havel in Hradicek in the hills. It's the place where he spent much of his exile. After he got out of prison, he would go there and people would come up to see him. And he had become an oracle. He also always received foreign guests there whom he knew with his wife Olga. I said to him that summer about all these demonstrations, "Václav, what do you think of these students demonstrating? It seems to me that it's becoming really unusually interesting from the standpoint of the boldness of the opposition to the Communist Party."

And he said, "What do I think about it? I don't like it at all. Because every time the students demonstrate, the authorities throw me in jail," you know. And he said -- he's blamed for everything that happens. He'd just indeed gotten out of jail. So then we had a good conversation then and we had our dinner then in Prague. Wendy and I returned to

NYC. On November 16th 1989 only a few months after our visit, the Velvet Revolution began, with serious demonstration of students.

And The Washington Post called me up and said, you know, "Would you do an op-ed piece on what's going on in Prague?"

And so this is on a Sunday and I called Václav on the phone and I said, "What's happening?" And his brother Ivan, who spoke better English than he did and my Czech wasn't quite subtle enough, got on the phone too. And I said, "Is this about to really change the nature of your opposition and is there going to be an overthrow of this government?" because change was well underway throughout Eastern Europe. Hungary and Poland had already been through changes but the Berlin wall had not come down yet.

Vaclav replied " I think we'll know in about three or four months whether this is serious or not, but I don't think we'll know anything for quite a while."

By the next Wednesday when I wrote the op-ed it was clear that this was something that was serious, it was happening very quickly, because the Soviets were not going to intervene as we knew that from Gorbachev. And the Czechoslovak military was holding back, they weren't shooting people. And there was resistance to putting down the uprising. So it went on and I wrote my op-ed, but I wrote a couple of op-eds later for The Times. I really thought things had happened. And by mid-December it was clear that Václav and his gang was going replace the communists. Václav had a very close friend who was a jazz musician, Kotzab was his name. Kotzab knew Russian. He had played jazz and rock music all over the Soviet Union. Because he was from Czechoslovakia they would accept him. And he got to know a large number of Soviets including some political leaders. He was a smart, astute guy. Early on as the revolution began Havel set up their operations center in a theater called "The Magic Lantern," and all the opposition group began to gather there. And they would meet day in and day out and plan strategy. And one strategy that Havel had was to get Kotzab to go to the Soviet ambassador, who really thought he was running the country until this all happened. They had this huge embassy and probably tens of thousands of Soviets including military were living there. He told Kotzab, the jazz musician to contact with the Soviet ambassador and assure him that we have no intention of breaking with the Warsaw Pact and if we form a government we will maintain our good relations with the Soviet Union. Václav wanted to give them assurances so that they would not think they had to intervene.

Even though Václav thought they weren't going to intervene, he never could tell, given his experience with the Soviets. It was clear by December 20th that there was going to be a new government and the communists were going to step down. In one meeting in preparation for the new government, Havel argued, reportedly, that Dubcek (the President who was thrown out by the Soviets in 1968) should become President of the new nation.

Q: We'll fill this in later?

LUERS: Kotzab said to Havel, "No, it will be you, Václav. This is a new post-communist era, you must become the president. Dubcek represents the past." He probably did not think of himself as President, but he accepted it. When Wendy and I learned that, we called up Havel and said we would plan to be there after Christmas 1989 and attend his inauguration. We arrived on the afternoon of the 26th of December. The day we arrived Havel had left a note at the Hotel to come to his apartment. We went there to be with Havel, Olga, his brother Ivan. I brought some presidential ties because Havel did not own for his whole life. He was from a bourgeois family, but he was a dissident the whole time and a playwright. And his wife was from a worker's family, she hadn't had a formal education. Wonderful woman, Olga. And Wendy knew she had no first lady clothes, so Wendy bought a suitcase full of upscale clothes that she gave to Olga, and I gave Vaclav a handful of ties.

I have a wonderful picture of me hugging him with my mitt full of "presidential" looking ties. Havel knew that we had played a small part in sustaining international recognition and support for him over those many years. We had come to be friends. We had already set up another of our famous dinner at The Seven Angels restaurant for the night of December 28.

Q: By the way, had the key -- were people using keys yet, or not, or did that come later?

LUERS: The keys were used during the whole period of the revolution, the sort of jingling of the keys. The keys signified the three keys that were important to Czechs, the apartment in Prague, the car, and the small country hut. Much later after Havel had been president and then died, Wendy organized a celebration for him in New York. We had many people who were involved back to celebrate Havel after his death. We passed out a ring of three keys to all of the guests and called on them to ring them throughout the ceremony. There were several symbols of the Velvet Revolution. First, the Beethoven Ninth Symphony and its final chorus – Ode to Joy. Second, were the keys. And third, was the smiling face of the new Civic Forum (Obcanske Forum) that represented Vaclav's answer to the political parties that he detested.

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: The "Ode to Joy" Concert in Prague just before Christmas was the first real event Havel went to after being designated the President of free Czechoslovakia. There had been no election. The people were behind him since he had become the daily hero of the change. They needed someone to lead the transfer of power. He attended the first performance of Beethoven's Ninth at the Great Symphony Hall and the Prague Philharmonic played. It was one of the most moving events in modern history. But Vaclav came with a polka dot tie. Someone had lent him a red and white polka dot tie. He heard back immediately that the Czech nation saw him on TV, and that the nation rejected the idea of their President wearing polka dot ties.

The night before his inauguration was the dinner we had organized. It just happened. When we set that date, the inauguration day had not yet been decided. They set the

inauguration for December 29th in the morning. And we'd already had the restaurant for December 28th and we'd invited an expanding group of people who were all these dissidents. By then there were about 30 or 40 of this gang that had been so important in the evolution of this movement. But new figures had become active over the past couple of months who came to the dinner. Václav Klaus who's an economist who's now the president, who became Prime Minister and Minister of Finance who quickly had a difficult relationship with Václav Havel. He had appeared out of nowhere and joined the group at the Magic Lantern. And we invited him to dinner that night. And then there were several others who had become ministers who were going to become ministers, particularly of economics. Among the group of dissidents there had been no economists and the nation wanted to know what would happen to their jobs, their pensions, the health care and the economy in general. Immediately Havel and his group had to begin facing the realities of governing. Rita Klimová, who was also an economist, spoke beautiful English. She was an interpreter for him for quite a while and she had been a member of Charter 77. She knew the shortcomings of this group on the key issue for most Czechs was going to be: where's the money going. And so, she found Klaus who was always ambitious, and he thought himself highly undervalued. Two economists I had known appeared that evening even though they never been interested in the Charter 77 Havel world.

At the dinner was the new cabinet. Practically every one of them had a key job, including Václav Mali, who was a dissident Catholic priest who became the principle advisor to Havel on the Catholic Church. And now he's a bishop. It was one of the most moving evenings of my life after my years in the Cold War. We had also invited about five American journalists who had come to Prague for the inauguration. We also invited the current American ambassador Shirley Temple Black. She was furious that we were giving the dinner. But when she came to Prague that September of 1989 she decided that my policy of semi-hostility toward the government and friendship with the dissidents was wrong. She stopped seeing the dissidents only weeks before the Velvet Revolution. She began to try to change the dynamics and bring leaders from the Czechoslovak government, the communist party, to the United States and convince them that we wanted good relationships with the Government. Havel knew this. And so the first time she had seen him was our dinner. And yet, she still was mad that this former Ambassador was interfering in her business. I understand her concerns but we successfully opened the door for her to change her policies. Actually Havel, always interested in film stars and media celebrities, found Shirley Temple an appealing American. I'm sure she was mighty pissed off that I'd come into town.

By the way the dinner that night was organized with the great help of my former DCM in Prague, Carl Schmidt and his wife, who were by then running the Salzburg Seminar in Austria. We also received great help from Miles Glaser, Jewish Czech, with a long relationship with Havel then living in Houston.

Q: Oh yeah. I mean it's --

LUERS: And, it's understandable at a certain level. But, I did it and we did it because we had this really special --

Q: I mean the circumstances were different.

LUERS: Oh yeah.

Q: This was not --

LUERS: I mean there'd been a revolution --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: -- Havel and the people had overthrown that government. So that night, which is to say the least, was a celebratory night with him."

So Havel's inauguration was the crowning event of my career in diplomacy. The next morning he was inaugurated -- sworn in as president in Vladislav Hall, which is the hall where kings of Bohemia had been crowned for centuries. It's the gothic hall in Prague castle.

Q: This is a hall where the windows are --

LUERS: Defenestrated. That's the window.

Q: It's the defenestration --

LUERS Yes from Prague Castle.

Q: -- from the -- in history.

LUERS: Wendy and I were given honorary seating because we were so involved with this. When we were waiting for Havel to enter the hall, one of his closest advisers told us "Václav thinks this is all a communist joke. He's convinced they have let us get this far but before he takes his oath the communist authorities will enter the hall and arrest everybody. We will then go back to where we were." This was Czech humor. And, Havel, to his credit, had kept Prime Minister Čalfa who was a communist from the former communist government. He also kept the communist Minister of Defense and several of the ministries were kept on because he wanted to have the transition not to be abrupt and he knew that none of his people knew how to govern. Havel thought through. And concluded that the military are first and foremost ready to protect the nation. They're going to support the nation and its new government." And they did.

Havel then entered the Hall. I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of him, but he's short and bent. He doesn't strut and he shuffles. He was in his fifties at the time. As we watched him walk, I said to Wendy, "Look, Vaclav this short shuffling, kind and

humorous intellectual, who had self-doubt, but always stuck to his principles" and "I somehow can't imagine him becoming the president of this country at this stage in their development, their need." He just does not seem "presidential." But minutes later when he took the oath, I tell you Stu, he stood up, he seemed almost to be six-feet-tall. And his voice carried out when he spoke. He was transformed physically in that very moment by God or some spirit within him or just his sense of responsibility. This wasn't just my imagination. There was a transformation in him. And then afterward, he gave his memorable first inaugural from the balcony of Prague Castle. He believed in words. He never considered himself a great orator but in that moment his words were what we essential. This was not a moment for politics but a moment for reflection and victory of the spirit.

After his speech he walked across the castle grounds to the St. Vitus Cathedral where the Kings of Bohemia would go after their coronation. The Kings would sit for Te Deum in St. Vitus Cathedral. And this would be the first time since the last king of Bohemia, because Masaryk never had a Te Deum and certainly the Communist leaders never did. He was against the church completely but he was the first one since the kings of Bohemia. Havel, the playwright and master of theater, did not miss the drama in creating this moment.

In the Cathedral, Wendy and I are standing right behind Havel who was seated looking at the altar. At the altar was Cardinal Tomasek, whom we knew. He had been a major ally, of Havel during the past ten years.

Q: Because this is all --

LUERS: The Prague Philharmonic played and sang the Dvořák Te Deum, a beautiful piece of music. And after the Te Deum the dissident priests who were gathered around the Cardinal lifted him up. He was quite old and couldn't walk well. These young priests virtually carried the Cardinal from the altar to the new President. And I want to tell you, *nothing* has affected me so prominently as that. And you saw this nation come together no moment has so affected me in my life seeing these two men join hands. The nation was united and there was a new world. I was in tears standing next to the Minister of Defense also with tears streaming down his cheeks. There was such a national high over watching this moment on TV across the entire country Havel was given a great boost that allowed him to govern for several months until the reality of the nation's problems and the allusiveness of solutions came upon him.

When we walked through the crowd through a large pathway made by the students who were protecting the event, we realized that there were no guards in sight anywhere. All that was evident were the students and the decorative palace guards with sparking new costumes designed by one of the city's best theater designers. The students all wore their Civic Forum shirts with the little smiling face and the words in Czech. The civic forum, was his theme. It was his equivalent of the political party. His view was that all of Czechoslovakia would come together united against political parties under this new broad organization. Of course that didn't happen. As we were leaving, the crowd split. But the

grounds were packed. The official party and guests walked out. I walked out with Václav Klaus and another new economist who had quickly become a leader. The crowds were mainly interested in these two men who had been on TV regularly for weeks talking about the economy. The crowd called out to Klaus and the other man foreshadowing the tension that would very quickly arise between the idealist, Václav Havel, and the politically and economically ambitious political leader, Václav Klaus. I said to Wendy afterward, "I realized the strength these two people will have in the new government because they're going to have to try to make the right decision. Havel is not going to know a lot of what to do. Within weeks, Klaus formed his own new political party. He realized right off that this civic forum idea was going to fail, because you can't have a democracy without political parties.

Wendy and I returned from that inspiring few days in Prague to a large group of foundations that knew nothing about that country and wanted to help. Nobody knew Czechoslovakia the way Wendy did, I mean all of the foundations had long ago cut off Czechoslovakia, as had the US government, and they realized they had to start from scratch. And so Wendy formed a new organization called Charter 77, which was an NGO that had been established to Havel when he was a dissident but now was adopted by Wendy to assist the new free Czechoslovak government and getting experts to help run the government. And she started an English language training program, which was huge. She raised over the next five years nearly 15 million dollars to run multiple programs to support the new government and civil society. She also established two foundations one in Prague and one in Bratislava that even today are the top NGOs in those two countries. And Wendy's organization, which became The Foundation for a Civil Society, helped in the transition from what we had known to this new world. During the 1990's she would spend weeks at a time in Prague.

Q: I'd like to examine a bit about your relationship with our embassy and the ambassador there. Because this had to be -- when you look at institutions --

LUERS: Oh yeah.

Q: -- it had to be difficult. Could you talk about this?

LUERS: Well, the first one was, was Shirley Temple. And I don't know if you've heard much about her as ambassador. But she, you know, she'd had a couple of assignments in Africa I think.

Q: Well, she had one in Ghana.

LUERS: Ghana.

Q: And then she'd been to the UN at one point.

LUERS: That's right.

Q: And then she was Chief of Protocol.

LUERS: Right. That's right.

Q: So I mean she knew her way around the --

LUERS: Yeah.

Q: -- the diplomatic core.

LUERS: And, she had I would say a very particular view of her role. She saw herself as, as the centerpiece of all activity in ways that people like you and me who haven't been brought up as the star at the age of five --

Q: Yeah.

LUERS: Shortly after the inauguration, the Bush administration wanted to have Havel on his first State visit and wanted to have a good relationship with him. Since Havel had still not had time to replace the Communist Embassies in DC and New York Havel asked Wendy and me to organize the New York visit and Madeleine Albright (who was Czech) to organize the DC visit. On January 12th, Havel sent a team made up of his brother Ivan and Martin Palous, one of his closest advisers, to plan for a visit in early February. President Bush wanted him there as soon as possible. And so we organized his entire visit to New York City without any reference to their UN Mission. He wanted nothing to do with them. Wendy and I organized a day and a half full of activities. And, Madeleine Albright did the one in Washington without any reference to the embassy. The US office of protocol, the WH and Secret Service dealt with us. It was an odd situation. The Czech government knew our role, and they knew Madeleine's role. Baker was Secretary of State at the time. In DC, Havel spoke to a joint session of Congress and it was a brilliant and inspiring speech. The only favor he asked from the Congress for Czechoslovakia was that it help the Soviet Union go through its own transition so that it has a chance to be democratic. "That will help us all that have lived with that country for so long." A wonderful Havelian angle.

Q: During this transitional thing when Havel came, was the Soviet Embassy kind of out of it? I mean what was happening there?

LUERS: Well, the Soviet Embassy immediately lost its central role in running the government. There's no question in my mind that they maintained relations with the communists that were still in government, of which there were a number. I'm sure they had good relationships with the police, Secret Police, you know, the KGB and the Secret Police were very closer. Havel I think got rid of the STB rather quickly, the --

Q: That was the equivalent of the KGB.

LUERS: KGB, yes. And then, I just don't know what their modes operandi was, how much they thought they were influencing. But what I do know today is that the Czechs, in the Czech Republic at least, are obsessed by the huge presence of Russians. Not Russian officials only, but Russians of all types. And they're convinced that the Russian money is trying to really buy up -- at least the criminal and money making of Czech economy. And they're obsessed by it. You talk to any Czech there and they will assume that it's the Russians who are behind most every bad deal, or every scandal. Which is an understandable paranoia and it may be partially true. But I don't know that first -- I couldn't really tell you, because I wasn't living there, I was doing my own work. About the degree to which the Soviet Embassy and their officials accepted this suddenly dramatically declined sense of responsibility, because you know, very shortly after that the US supported the expansion of NATO as the Warsaw Pact was disbanded because there was nothing left of it. And so the military situation became quite different. The Soviet troops pulled out quietly and without a lot of fanfare and they just left. And there had been troops all over, because it was still an occupied country going back to '68.

Q: How did you feel about NATO and Czechoslovakia?

LUERS: I was outspoken in my opposition to it. There never should have been an expansion of NATO. It was a bad idea and a bad idea for many reasons. *(interruption)*

Q: I was asking about your feeling about inclusion, expansion of NATO?

LUERS: I spoke publicly and wrote against it a couple times. And I thought that after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and sense of urgency that the new governments of Central European desire to become part of Europe, the US and Europe should deemphasize NATO as the defining element in the Western "alliance", because the only justification for NATO was the whole Warsaw Pact structure. And to continue Europe as a military alliance probably was not justified or wise in terms of encouraging the countries of Western Europe to join a new way of thinking about economics politics. Secondly, I thought that it would be a violation of our agreement that Bush had made with Gorbachev in Berlin over the unification of Germany -- that there would be no effort to move NATO into the former Warsaw Pact territory. We had made that agreement with Gorbachev. And third, I knew it would be a source of huge paranoia for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union should have been our major concern. How do they get through the new era and how do we minimize the damage that could come from our not only violating our sort of agreement on NATO, but by trying to get back to encircling them. The Russians historically have worried about being encircled by enemies, which had brought them to take over Central Europe in the first place. I remember when Havel came on one of his visits, he stayed near us in Connecticut. He was then president. This was probably the second year of his presidency, Kissinger who lives near us in Kent gave a lunch for Václav.

Q: This is Kent.

LUERS: Kent, yes.

Q: That's my school.

LUERS: Kissinger had a lunch began the conversation and Václav spoke for a while. I then asked Václav, "Why do you, the peace loving president of this new country, free at last, want to join a military alliance as your first option?" You were the first to call for reconciliation.

And he said, "That's the only club I can join right now," because he knew the European Union was a long way off. NATO was an option for him to join the west and have it done both symbolically and factually by joining NATO. His nation gets NATO protection and while it becomes committed to a whole new alliance. He wanted to get out of any thinking about the old Soviet association. And both of these are persuasive arguments. But I still think it was a serious and grave mistake. I still think that it forced the Czechs and the Poles and the Hungarians into a posture vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and Europe that were routed in military loyalty? And I just don't believe that as a way of designing a structure of international relations. I was also against the plan to include in NATO, Georgia and Ukraine. I thought it was a crazy idea. I didn't think it was a good idea, but Havel had his very strong views on this. And Kissinger supported him. Havel's group, this reformist group of people who took over the country, on foreign affairs were neo-conservative in the sense that they thought Reagan was their great hero. They were convinced that it was Reagan's policies that brought down the Soviet Union rather than the generations of Western policies. When ambassadors would go to Washington they would be immediately taken over by the neo-cons who, who had nothing to do with the Velvet Revolution and hardly knew where Czechoslovakia was on the map. There was not one neo-con who ever showed up in my memory in Czechoslovakia to show -- or showed any interest in Havel. Jean Kirkpatrick took great credit for the fall and many of her right wing colleagues. But they had shown no interest. It was only after he emerged as President. They'd failed to bet on him. Yet, after he'd won, they immediately sought to own him and his legacy. And ideologically in this country, he was their hero. And NATO was a big factor in that. They played to that desire of his to join a club he could join. Who knows, many of the people who I argued with at the time now in the Council of Foreign Relations and other places, recognize that there were shortcomings to this idea, to this concept. But it's done. That's the way history evolved. It kept the vision for us and for Russia that the European relations were defined in military terms. That was a pivotal moment in history and the West, particularly the US failed to grasp the opportunity. The situation today would have been vastly different had the US chosen a more sound and wise path by trying to demilitarize Europe and welcome the Soviet Union into Europe gradually.

Q: Well then, how did this Czech relationship, you know, Havel became president and all, did you find yourself going back much or was it pretty much Wendy and her work?

LUERS: Mainly Wendy. I went back and I would see him when he came here and I, and I -- I mean for him in all cases the job is done, move on. And when Havel did the job and I

participated in a -- in a little tiny piece of it, and I was onto a new life. I didn't spend a lot of time looking back or trying to resuscitate that. I sort of regret it, but --

Q: But did you have any feel about the split, the Czech/Slovak split?

LUERS: Yes I got -- Madeleine and I were on television on this just before it happened. And it was, it was sort of looming. And I sort of said that I thought ultimately they wouldn't do it, so did Madeleine. Of course in retrospect, it was clearly what they needed to do, and they did it. And it hasn't been a disaster, it's been fine. They've both gone their own way. And the Slovaks never felt comfortable being the poor sisters to the Czechs. And in fact, the Prague Spring was basically about the Czechs wanting to break with, change the nature of the system. And when they were invaded by the Warsaw Pact, particularly the Soviets and the allies, the Soviets put the Slovaks in charge. They didn't trust the Czechs at all. And they were much closer physically and psychologically to the Slovaks. So from the Prague Spring on, they sort of -- oh Dubček was the name, I was thinking -- Dubček was, was the man who actually Havel thought should be president, because it was the continuation of the Prague Spring. Dubček had been the head of the Prague Spring. And it was to _____ who said, "No, this isn't about socialism. It's about democracy and capitalism. And you're going to lead that charge." And so Dubček didn't get the nod to be president. And Havel thought there was a certain historic logic to Dubček getting it. But, Dubček was a Slovak, and they -- but when after that, they put in key jobs, the Secret Police, the President then from then on was almost always a Slovak. They would give the Prime Minister's job to the Czech after the revolution. So then when you look back, the split seemed logical, and thank God it was as peaceful as it was. Because they get along -- I mean they're best of friends now still. They have differences, but they're nothing like you see in Serbia -- I mean in former Yugoslavia. And you know, Wendy was involved in the writing of the new constitution of Czechoslovakia, and pulled some American lawyers together. A lot of people claim a role in that, but Wendy's foundation did a number of things that got them off to a quick start in writing it. She had a couple of seminars in Salzburg. At the seminar she had invited people from all over -- lawyers, constitutional lawyers, and some political leaders. Havel came down and spoke to the group and they came together to talk about what you do, and how you write a constitution. And they were one of the first countries that really wrote one, Czechoslovakia. And then of course they split up. You had to write it again.

Q: Well, I'm sure the Czech theme runs throughout the rest of your career, but --

LUERS: Less and less. Wendy's it did, but by the mid-'90s, there was nothing I could do. I had no role and I was completely consumed by the Met, and the Soviet Union. I wrote a lot of pieces. I mean I believed in Gorbachev a lot, and for the reason I told you I'd heard the story from the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia before I left about how Gorbachev got to where he was and how he had a different mandate than any general secretary ever had. And he had a different personality to carry it out. And so when I came back in '80-86, he was already in office. It was clear that people didn't believe that he was different. And so I was looking through what I wrote. I wrote a number of op-ed in The Times during the period '87 to '90 on how important this man was to the history of the Soviet

Union and to us. And it was time when the State Department, the government was still quite skeptical of whether any Soviet leader could break out of the mold of the past. And so I went there a number of times during that period, and I began to resuscitate my interest in the Soviet Union and in its future.

END OF ORAL HISTORY EDITED in JULY, 2018.

What I did not include:

Talk of my first wife, Jane Fuller Luers and my four children with her, Mark, David, William and Amy and their families today. They were a major part of my life and I have happily become ever closer to my four children who have been a major source of my happiness and sense of self over their nearly 60 years since the birth of Mark the eldest.

Talk of my second wife Wendy Woods Luers with whom I have been married for nearly 40 years and has shaped much of my career and happiness during this period. I have also not mentioned my step-daughters, Ramsay and Connor Turnbull and their families all of whom have brought me great happiness.

I did not include much about my experience as President of the Met, none about my experience as President of the United Nations Association of the USA which lasted for 10 years including one of my most cherished programs for high school education, we called Global Classrooms.

I did not talk about my work as an activist in DC from 1965-69 when I was one of the founders of the Open Forum in State (which is still thriving), or my deep involvement in the plan to feed the inner city of DC in case of riots which we completed just before the riots after the shooting of Martin Luther King in Spring 1968. I also did not include my work to try to communicate with some of the radical movements in DC during the heated years, including several meetings with SDS.

Finally, I did not include any discussion of my graduate university teaching over these many decades which gave me such delight and satisfaction. I taught while I was working elsewhere at Johns Hopkins SAIS, at George Washington University, at Princeton University, at Tufts University, at Seton Hall University and for the past decade at SIPA at Columbia University. I also spent a semester teaching at Hamilton College.

End of interview