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**Extraits des cahiers personnels
d'anciens diplomates canadiens**
**Excerpts from the personal notebooks
of former Canadian diplomats**



Jenkins



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d'anciens diplomates canadiens**

Association des chefs de mission à la retraite

**Excerpts from the personal notebooks
of former Canadian diplomats**

Retired Heads of Mission Association

With illustrations by
Anthony Jenkins

Retired Heads of Mission Association (RHOMA)

The Association of Canada's Retired Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consuls General

Association des chefs de mission à la retraite (ACMAR)

L'association des ambassadeurs, hauts-commissaires et consuls-général du Canada à la retraite



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The Professional Association
of Foreign Service Officers
L'Association professionnelle
des agents du Service extérieur

The Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO) is both the bargaining agent and the professional association for Canadian Foreign Service Officers representing 1,544 active and retired Foreign Service employees.

PAFSO is pleased to support this special RHOMA project.

L'Association professionnelle des agents du Service extérieur (l'APASE) est à la fois l'agent négociateur et l'association professionnelle des agents du service extérieur canadien, représentant 1544 agents du service extérieur actifs et retraités. L'APASE est heureuse d'appuyer ce projet special de l'ACMAR.



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Editor's Apologia

Identity and Storytelling

Most senior citizens would agree that as we grow older, short-term memory can fade away to make space for flashback reminiscences of past experiences. Some even argue that in many ways, we *become* our memories, real or imagined, and that memories and life experiences eventually determine our personalities. And so it is the stories we tell each other that give our *individual* lives meaning.

Professional authors often remind us that whole communities also rely on shared stories to describe their role in the world around us. Alas, it is also true that stories and memory may not always be informed by accuracy alone, but tailor-made in our sub-conscious to confirm who we think we are...either as a community or as individuals. It is also just possible that memory-dependent stories can be inspired by who we would like *others* to think we are.

Finally, readers may agree that while helping Canada's diplomats better understand how their stories define who they are as a professional community, they also illustrate for others, some of the things that Canadian diplomats and the Department of Global Affairs Canada, do. In telling these stories, we would like to believe that they offer some additional clues as to who we are as a nation. Those would be the good parts of course.

Recruiting writers and editing their stories

Public literacy may be the pre-condition for democracy and human development but that same literacy also put the art of the oral raconteur on life support. And then, along came digital-everything, further undermining any remaining ancestral storytelling traditions. Perhaps that is why it was not always easy

to pry the anecdotes and reminiscences out of the memories of the 26 colleagues who contributed to this collection.

However, with a few glasses of wine to loosen their tongues and their inhibitions, many retired diplomats, much like retired soldiers with their own “war stories”, can morph into truly entertaining and enlightening companions around a dinner table.

But the morning after that well-lubricated dinner, try getting them to put those stories in writing. I did. And then, try editing those same stories. I did that too...only to be reminded that many colleagues are jealous (sometimes justifiably) of their own writing skills that were honed over years of rigorous oral and written communication duties on behalf of their government.

Our delicate selection and editing tasks were made easier because we were dealing with time-tested diplomats trained to negotiate with *politesse* and grace. Alas, they were also trained not to take an initial “no” for an answer and so sometimes the need to work patiently within the constraints of *politesse* and grace, became your editor’s problem, not theirs.

The result of all that gentle diplomacy is this collection of anecdotes by a few members and spouses of the Retired Heads of Mission Association (RHOMA) who volunteered to join the conversation around an imagined dinner table. We began by inviting submissions on any subject related to their professional careers and experiences abroad, offering only very general guidance on themes that might fit the emerging collection. We wanted to ensure that prospective authors felt entirely free to exercise their (possibly) selective memories.

We also gave our writers a kind of “raconteur’s license”. Readers may notice that in some of the contributions, supporting details have been sacrificed to keep the story moving. Consequently there are very few footnotes in these pages and our word-limit per submission imposed a kind of detail frugality not experienced since those same diplomats communicated via laborious hand-cyphered

dispatches. The authors are all retired now (one is no longer with us) and with the passage of time, are at least partly released from the professional constraints of discretion and reporting objectively from their missions abroad.

The format

It was only after all the papers were submitted that they were sorted into five chapters...again in an effort to make some sense of such diverse recollections.

Part 1, *Of Diplomacy and Diplomats*, contains a few experiences that might be instructive as “trade craft”. That is, lessons for new diplomats or for any others contemplating an international career move. Other contributions to this chapter smile at some of the unique characters that populate diplomatic communities everywhere.

The consular affairs incidents in Part 2, *Canadians in Distress*, are examples of how the consular-services function at what is now Global Affairs Canada, assists Canadian citizens who land in difficulties while abroad. Because of their very nature, these stories rarely show up in the news media where the preference is to report events wherein consular officers fail to rescue a kidnapped citizen or to spring a hapless Canadian tourist from incarceration in a foreign jail. This chapter has a few stories that should normally travel under the radar. It is only the passage of time that legitimizes recounting them now.

Parts 3 and 4, *Cultural Curiosities and Adventures in Protocol*, assemble the more humorous submissions; here are the kind of recollections that retired foreign service veterans like to imagine that ultimate old-school diplo-raconteur, Lawrence Durelle, would have written about.

Part 5, *Snippets of History*, has anecdotes that provide incidental background to some major international events going back as far as 40 or 50 years; snapshots from the RHOMA family album.

They are from colleagues who witnessed such events up-close, as “bit players” perhaps, but from those privileged vantage points that are often unique to diplomats and diplomacy.

The idea to include images by Anthony Jenkins, the renowned but now retired political cartoonist for the Globe and Mail, was inspired by a desire to reinforce the light-hearted side of this 150th national anniversary initiative. We are most grateful for his contributions that indeed serve to remind RHOMA members, and all Canadian diplomats, that notwithstanding the importance of their privileged role as representatives of Canada abroad, it is OK on occasion not to take themselves too seriously.

One last word...

In the first entry in this collection, Louis Delvoie walks us through the things that diplomats do when they come into the office in the morning and, incidentally, when they go back to work in the evening. Readers unfamiliar with the “second oldest profession”, as Louis calls it, might be surprised to see how many of these tales rotate around the hospitality and official representation duties of their diplomatic representatives abroad. This too was an unplanned outcome but now that they are assembled in the same collection, it does serve to remind us how vital to the successful conduct of diplomacy is the networking function and how much personal time in a diplomat’s life is dedicated to “working” those many functions that are specially created for the free and informal exchange of information, and for building relationships of trust amongst strangers of radically different backgrounds. Readers might also find it useful to visit the RHOMA website (rhoma-acmar.ca) for a quick review of the some of the jargon used in many of these stories.

Robin Higham
Ottawa,
September 2016

L'éditeur s'explique

Identité et narration

La plupart des aînés seront d'accord pour dire que la mémoire à court terme s'estompe avec l'âge pour faire place aux réminiscences d'expériences passées. Certaines personnes avanceront même que nous *devenons* nos souvenirs — réels ou imaginaires — et qu'avec nos expériences de vie, ils définissent nos personnalités. Ainsi, ce sont les histoires que nous nous racontons qui donnent un sens à *chacune* de nos vies.

De nombreux auteurs affirment que des communautés entières comptent toujours sur le partage d'histoires pour comprendre leur place dans le monde. Malheureusement, nos histoires et nos souvenirs ne sont pas toujours exacts. En effet, il arrive souvent que notre subconscient les modifie afin d'alimenter l'image que nous nous faisons de nous-mêmes... aussi bien en tant que communauté qu'en tant qu'individu. De même, les histoires prenant naissance dans le souvenir peuvent être largement influencées par l'image que nous souhaitons projeter.

Enfin, en invitant les diplomates canadiens à raconter leurs histoires et à mieux cerner la manière dont elles définissent leur communauté professionnelle, nous avons dressé un tableau du travail réalisé par les diplomates canadiens et le ministère des Affaires mondiales Canada. Nous espérons par la même occasion offrir un aperçu des dynamiques qui nous définissent en tant que nation... Nos bons côtés, bien entendu.

Recrutement des auteurs et révision des anecdotes

Bien que la littératie soit nécessaire à la démocratie et au développement humain, elle est à l'origine de la disparition presque complète de l'art du conteur. Le numérique en est aussi pour quelque chose. Il a anéanti tout ce qu'il restait des traditions ancestrales de narration. C'est peut-être pour cela que ce ne fut pas

toujours facile de faire raconter leurs anecdotes et réminiscences aux 26 personnes ayant contribué à ce recueil.

Cependant, après quelques verres de vin question de délier la langue, plusieurs diplomates à la retraite, un peu comme les anciens soldats avec leurs “histoires de guerre”, peuvent se transformer en conteurs divertissants autour d’une bonne table.

Mais au lendemain de ces dîners, essayez de les convaincre de transcrire ces histoires. C’est ce que j’ai fait. Puis, tentez de les éditer. Je l’ai fait aussi, pour me faire rappeler par des collègues jaloux (parfois à raison) de leurs écrits que la qualité de leur prose avait été le fruit de nombreuses années à communiquer au nom de leur gouvernement.

Les tâches délicates de sélection et de révision ont été aidées par le fait que ces diplomates avérés avaient été formés à négocier avec *politesse* et grâce.

Hélas, ils ont également été formés à ne jamais accepter un non pour réponse. Parfois, c’est donc votre éditeur, et non pas eux, qui ont eu à travailler avec patience dans les limites des contraintes de la *politesse* et de la grâce.

Le résultat de tous ces efforts diplomatiques est un recueil d’anecdotes provenant de plusieurs membres de l’Association des chefs de missions à la retraite (ACMAR) et de leurs époux ayant accepté de s’asseoir autour d’une table à dîner imaginaire et de participer à la conversation que nous leur proposons. Ils ont d’abord été invités à nous envoyer des soumissions portant sur n’importe quel sujet lié à leur carrière et à leurs expériences à l’étranger. Nous leur avons également proposé des thèmes généraux adaptés à la collection émergente d’anecdotes. Nous souhaitons profondément que les auteurs potentiels se sentent entièrement libres d’exercer leur mémoire (possiblement) sélective. C’est pourquoi nous avons également offert à nos auteurs une sorte de « permis de conteur ». Les lecteurs remarqueront peut-être que

des renseignements complémentaires ont été omis dans certains des textes afin de permettre à l'histoire d'avancer. Il y a donc très peu de notes de bas de page dans ce recueil. La limite de mots par soumission que nous avons établie nous a obligés de couper dans les détails, chose que les diplomates ayant participé à la création de ce recueil n'avaient pas vécue depuis le temps où ils étaient obligés à communiquer par chiffrage à la main lors de missions à l'étranger. Tous les auteurs sont à la retraite (l'un d'entre eux nous a quittés) et nous pouvons vous assurer qu'avec le temps, ils se libèrent des obligations professionnelles de discrétion et d'objectivité totale par rapport à leurs missions à l'étranger.

Le format

C'est seulement après que j'ai eu reçu toutes les soumissions que j'ai décidé de les regrouper en cinq chapitres afin de donner un sens commun à tous ces souvenirs.

Dans le premier chapitre, *De la diplomatie et diplomates*, vous trouverez quelques anecdotes liées au « savoir-faire professionnel », des leçons pour les nouveaux diplomates ou toute autre personne envisageant une carrière internationale. D'autres contributions dans ce chapitre font état de quelques-unes des caractéristiques uniques aux communautés de diplomates partout dans le monde.

Le deuxième chapitre, *Des Canadiens en détresse*, porte sur les incidents consulaires et montrent la manière dont fonctionnent les services consulaires au ministère des Affaires globales Canada et les façons dont ils aident les Canadiens qui se retrouvent dans des situations difficiles à l'étranger. En raison de la nature sensible de ces anecdotes, nous en entendons très peu parler dans les nouvelles, ou bien si nous en entendons parler c'est qu'un agent consulaire n'a pas réussi à sauver un citoyen enlevé ou à sortir un touriste canadien malchanceux d'une prison étrangère. Vous trouverez dans ce chapitre des anecdotes qui ne sont donc jamais vraiment racontées ouvertement. Elles ne peuvent l'être maintenant qu'en raison du temps passé depuis les événements en question.

Dans les troisième et quatrième chapitres, *Curiosités culturelles et aventures protocolaires*, vous trouverez un rassemblement des soumissions à caractère humoristiques. C'est le genre de souvenir qu'aurait pu raconter Lawrence Durelle, diploconteur de la vieille école.

Le chapitre cinq, *Des bribes d'histoire*, est composé d'anecdotes dressant un bilan du contexte de certains événements internationaux importants des 40 ou 50 dernières années; des photos tirées directement de l'album photo de famille de l'ACMAR. Ce sont des anecdotes de collègues qui ont vécu ces événements de près, qui ont été en quelque sorte des «figurants», et qui avaient le privilège du point de vue unique réservé souvent seulement aux diplomates et à la diplomatie.

Nous avons décidé d'inclure dans ce recueil des images d'Anthony Jenkins, le caricaturiste retraité très connu du *Globe and Mail*, car nous souhaitons renforcer le ton parfois badin de cette initiative visant à marquer le 150^e du Canada. Nous sommes profondément reconnaissants de toutes ces contributions qui peuvent maintenant servir de rappel à tous les membres de l'ACMAR, et à tous les diplomates canadiens qu'ils ont le droit à l'occasion de ne pas trop se prendre au sérieux, malgré l'importance de leur rôle privilégié de représentants du Canada à l'étranger.

Dernier mot...

Dans le premier texte de ce recueil, Louis Delvois nous parle de ce que font les diplomates lorsqu'ils arrivent au bureau le matin et donc, quand ils reprennent le soir leurs fonctions diplomatiques. Les lecteurs qui ne connaissent pas «le deuxième plus vieux métier du monde», comme le nomme Louis, pourraient être surpris de voir le nombre d'anecdotes dans ce recueil qui parlent de l'hospitalité dont font preuve les diplomates et de leurs fonctions de représentation officielle à l'étranger. Il s'agit là aussi d'un résultat inattendu de cette initiative. Maintenant que toutes ces anecdotes ont été regroupées dans ce recueil, elles

nous rappellent combien le réseautage est essentiel à la réussite de la diplomatie et combien de temps les diplomates investissent dans les évènements organisés pour permettre l'échange libre et informel de renseignements et bâtir des relations de confiance entre étrangers de milieux radicalement différents. Il pourrait être utile pour vous de consulter le site Web de l'ACMAR (rhoma-acmar.ca) afin de mieux comprendre le jargon utilisé dans plusieurs de ces anecdotes.

Many thanks to Anaïs Navarre for the English-to-French translation of this text.

Robin Higham
Ottawa,
Septembre 2016

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Of Diplomacy and Diplomats De la diplomatie et diplomats

Louis Delvoie
Of Diplomacy and Diplomats

James Bartleman
The Ambassador Who Went Back

Alan Bowker
Cast your bread upon the waters

Jean-Yves Dionne
**La première Chambre de commerce canadienne
en l'Europe de l'est**

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Robin Higham
Always Talk to Strangers

Alena Schram
The Glamour is Gone

John Graham
The Great Escape: an Epic for St. Valentine

Louis Delvoie

Of Diplomacy and Diplomats

(Reproduced from the Kingston Whig-Standard,
August 24, 2013.)

Louis A. Delvoie served as Ambassador to Algeria, Deputy High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and High Commissioner to Pakistan. In Ottawa he was director general of the Bureau of International Security and Arms Control at the Department of External Affairs and assistant deputy minister for policy at the department of National Defence. He is now a Fellow in the Centre for International and Defence Policy at Queen's University.

Diplomacy is often said to be the world's second oldest profession. For those of an unkindly turn of mind, it is said to be very much akin to the first. In Roget's Thesaurus it is listed alongside such terms as cunning, chicanery, sharp practice, trickery and backstairs influence. And then of course, is the oft misunderstood and misquoted comment of an eighteenth century English diplomat to the effect that "an ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for his country". All in all, not a particularly pretty picture.

It is little wonder that professional diplomats prefer the somewhat less colourful definitions of their calling provided by others. Thus in his Guide to Diplomatic Practice first published in 1917, Sir Edward Satow stated that "Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments of independent status". Or again, the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines diplomacy as "the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys". Seen in this light, diplomacy is simply an essential instrument in the tool-kit of countries trying to navigate their ways through the vagaries of the international system.

But what of the suggestion that diplomats sometimes engage in lying to achieve their ends? Diplomacy is in the final analysis a profession that relies on confidence for its effective conduct. There is no surer way of destroying that confidence than by telling lies, since sooner or later all lies will come to light. The eighteenth century French diplomat Monsieur de Callières made the case very succinctly when he wrote: “Even were deceit not in itself repugnant to every right-minded person, the negotiator, should recollect that he is likely for the rest of his life to be constantly engaged in diplomatic business and that it is essential for him to establish a reputation for straight and honest dealing so that thereafter men may be ready to trust his word”. Put another way, in diplomacy as elsewhere, honesty is the best policy.

With that canard put to rest, it may also be useful to address a popular image of the diplomat as a stuffed shirt who spends a lot of time attending receptions and cutting ribbons. Diplomats do indeed devote a certain amount of their energies to social and ceremonial activities, but these are rather peripheral to their main functions. What are those functions?

When assigned to the Foreign Ministry in their own capital, diplomats perform functions comparable to those of other public servants. They gather and assess information and formulate policy options for consideration at the political level. Once the elected politicians have made their policy decisions, diplomats are then responsible for implementing them. It is when they are posted abroad, however, that diplomats have unique functions. These can be listed under discrete headings.

Representation: The diplomat is the official representative of his/her country in the country to which he/she is accredited. As such the diplomat is the visible presence of his/her country in the host country and enjoys a special status under international law. For this, if for no other reason, the diplomat is expected to display the highest standards of conduct in both official and personal activities.

Advocacy: The diplomat acts as both a lawyer and a lobbyist on behalf of his/her country. At one end of the scale this may involve little more than trying to persuade the host government to support a Canadian candidate for a position in an international organization. At the other end of the scale it may require convincing the host government to endorse the Canadian position on a maritime treaty of key importance to Canada's fishery or mining industries. And of course, in the realm of trade promotion it may involve persuading governments or corporations to purchase Canadian built aircraft or railway systems.

Negotiations: The diplomat is almost by definition a professional negotiator. The kinds of negotiations in which he/she may engage are remarkably varied. On the one hand, there are fairly routine negotiations aimed at securing double taxation agreements or extradition treaties. On the other hand, there are highly complex and high-stakes negotiations involving free trade or arms control agreements.

Analysis and Reporting: The diplomat must become expert in understanding the personalities and institutions of the government to which he/she is accredited. Shifts in policy must be carefully analyzed and reported back to the Canadian government if they are likely to have an impact on Canadian interests. Similarly an understanding of the local society and culture are essential in the forecasting of potential political and economic change. For diplomats engaged in trade and investment promotion, securing market intelligence and reporting it to the Canadian government and Canadian companies, is an essential function.

Public Diplomacy: The role of the diplomat abroad is not confined to relations with governments. The diplomat must also connect with opinion shapers in the private sector, in support of Canada's political, economic and security interests. Beyond establishing social contacts, this may involve giving speeches to chambers of commerce and service clubs, delivering lectures to university

audiences and conducting media briefings. It also means working to foster cultural, scientific and academic relations between Canada and the host country.

Consular Affairs: Diplomats are also responsible for providing assistance to Canadians living and travelling abroad. At the most mundane level this involves issuing passports and other documents. At a far more serious and difficult level it may involve giving aid and counsel to Canadian women who have been raped or ensuring that Canadians charged with criminal offences have legal representation and are fairly treated under the laws of the host country. Certainly one of the least glamorous aspects of diplomacy is paying regular visits to Canadians incarcerated in often fetid foreign jails.

Visas: Diplomats can be charged with issuing visas to foreign visitors and immigrants to Canada. This is often repetitive work, but also work which requires a high degree of discernment and judgment, since all too often visa officers are told more lies in the course of a morning than most of us are likely to experience in a year. And, of course, this is work that is essential to Canada's social and economic well-being.

In short, the highly varied activities of diplomats are essential to ensuring the security and prosperity of Canada and Canadians. Diplomats are often called upon to live and work under barely tolerable conditions in far-flung corners of Africa and Asia, and yet they persist in doing their duty. They deserve to be better understood and appreciated.

James Bartleman

The Ambassador Who Went Back

Jim Bartleman, former head of mission, foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, author and Lt. Governor of the Province of Ontario, offers a compelling account of the courage of one of Canada's ambassador's as he negotiated, in Peru, with terrorist captors who held the lives of hundreds hostage in their hands.

On December 17, 1996, leftist guerillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) seized the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima as he hosted a reception in honour of the Japanese Emperor's birthday. Among the hundreds of captured guests was Canadian ambassador Anthony (Tony) Vincent, and his wife, Lucie. Canada then found itself dragged into the sordid world of power struggle typical to the region between revolutionary ideologues prepared to go to any means to achieve their goals and governmental forces of repression prepared to do the same.

I knew the region well, having served as a junior officer in the late 1960s in Bogota, Colombia, travelling extensively in Ecuador and Peru. I returned to Peru in 1981 to take temporary charge of a Canadian embassy overwhelmed with the problems of protecting itself against an urban terrorist threat and in managing more than a hundred Canadians being held prisoner in the notorious local jail for drug trafficking. At that time government forces and adherents of the Shining Path guerilla organization were locked in fierce combat. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians would be killed in the crossfire. In time, using scorched earth tactics, the Peruvian government managed to beat back the Shining Path.

In the interim, the MRTA had emerged to take its place. It now demanded the release of all its members held in jail before it would release its prisoners.

Gar Pardy, director-general of consular affairs, telephoned to give me the bad news. I told him the prime minister would want to be informed immediately. And he was, despite being awakened from a sound sleep. He approved a press release condemning the terrorist action and expressed sympathy for the Vincent family. “Call me any time of the day or night.”

Early the next morning, Lucie was released followed by Tony himself, together with diplomats from France, Germany and Greece—on condition they pass messages to the Peruvian government and return to captivity. That is when Tony showed what he was made of. The other diplomats scampered for safety and didn’t return. Tony decided to fulfill his part of the bargain but I managed to get him on the telephone before he went back to the residence “Before you act, I want you to speak to the prime minister.”

Prime Minister Chretien, when he came on the line told him, “You’re a brave man, Tony, but think again before you go back to a possible death.” “I gave my word, Prime Minister,” Tony said. “Besides, by returning I could save lives.”

This part of the story ended satisfactorily. Tony went back and the terrorists released him again. From December to April, they gave every appearance of trying to find a negotiated settlement. At the request of the terrorists, Tony was brought in as one of three guarantors (the other two were representatives of the Catholic Church and the International Committee of the Red Cross). As such, Tony came to Toronto in February to brief the prime minister who hosted the leaders of Japan and Peru to plan a strategy for the crisis. The prime minister pulled Tony aside to tell him once again that he was a “gutsy guy,” and he was proud of him.



Tony returned to Lima, where he continued his efforts to save lives. But in April, Peruvian commandos stormed the Japanese residence, freeing the remaining prisoners and killing the terrorists. In retrospect, the Peruvian government probably never intended to strike a deal with the hostage-takers. Prime Minister Hashimoto of Japan, who had hoped for a non-violent end to the occupation, called the prime minister to express Japan's appreciation for Tony's efforts, and the Department had another hero.

Sadly, Tony died at an early age in 1999 while serving as Canada's ambassador to Spain.

Alan Bowker

Cast Your Bread Upon the Waters Hospitality and Consular response in Dar es Salaam, 1977

***Alan Bowker**, a career diplomat for 35 years, has a Ph.D. in Canadian history and has taught at the Royal Military College of Canada. He has edited two collections of essays by Stephen Leacock, and his latest book, *A Time Such As There Never Was Before*, tells the story of Canada after the Great War. His account here of an event early in his career, shows how (much-maligned) hospitality, and the freedom to use other tools available, benefited Canadians abroad.*

On February 4, 1977, the border between Tanzania and Kenya was abruptly closed as Tanzania retaliated for Kenya's action in terminating East African Airways, a key component of the East African Community. Tanzania confiscated Kenyan planes and tour buses within its territory, and some 800 foreign tourists, including an unknown number of Canadians, were stranded in isolated hotels in Tanzania's game parks, guarded by troops and police. They were safe and reasonably comfortable, but frightened, and no one had any idea what would come next.

One of Tanzania's many grievances against Kenya was that although the best game parks were in Tanzania, most of the tourist industry was in Kenya. Tourists flew into Nairobi and were transported by Kenyan tour companies in a circle through the Tanzanian game parks and back into Kenya. Hotels were prepaid and many tourists did not even know that they were in another country. Tanzania got few benefits; and, of course, none of the visitors were registered with the High Commission in Dar es Salaam.

I was the consular officer in Dar, on my first posting, wearing the usual multiplicity of hats in a small mission. We faced an uncertain political situation and a logistical nightmare. The game parks were a day's drive from the capital and were separated from each other by over a hundred miles of bad road, with no communication except by radio. If I went there I would be away from the office and largely out of touch for days. But a consular assistant or non-consular officer would not have the authority or experience to do what needed to be done. We had to do something, but what?

As I was pondering this dilemma the phone rang. It was the American consular officer. With their much larger staff, they were in a position to send an officer to the game parks to identify and assist Americans and he was willing to do the same for Canadians. But would I please keep this quiet, since it was technically against their rules? I had no sooner offered my effusive thanks than the phone rang again. It was the British consular officer with much the same offer.

Within a day or so, we had received by radio-telephone the names and passport numbers of the Canadians in the various game parks. A few days later the Americans arranged for a PanAm aircraft to be flown to Arusha, and the British brought in a British Airways flight. Canadians were allowed to occupy extra space on both flights. Thus the Canadians stranded in the game parks were among the first foreign tourists to be evacuated. A few days later a SwissAir charter brought out the citizens of other countries.

Why had Canadians been given this special treatment? The answer in part lies in the creative use of hospitality and some judicious bending of rules.

Dar es Salaam was a Level IV hardship post. While some meat, fruits and vegetables, cheese, jams, excellent coffee, and wonderful lobster and prawns, were available locally, much had to be brought in. Entertainment was very limited.

At our high commission we had a Canadian Forces officer who was the last remnant of an important military training program. We were therefore on the circuit for the training flights of Canadian Forces aircraft which brought supplies to their personnel stationed abroad. Although the rules were that these privileges were for military only, a tradition had been established of quietly sharing them with high commission staff provided each family limited requests to a dozen or so items. We also shared out the Canadian beer that came on the flights. In our case, being able to get some basic necessities and baby things was a godsend, and the beer was carefully hoarded for official hospitality purposes.

One of the important items each flight would bring was a first-run movie in 16 mm print, which was circulated among our staff. Following the example of our admin officer, I had a movie screen built from a sheet of 4 x 8 plywood, which could be easily erected to show films outdoors on our patio (thanks to the warm weather and early darkness of a city almost on the equator). I would then issue invitations to a wide variety of local officials, embassy contacts, Canadian expats, and friends, to see a movie *chez nous* – open bar, Canadian beer, popcorn, cashew nuts, very informal. The only stipulation by our high commissioner was that the movie screen should face away from the street, because a crowd would sometimes gather at our fence to watch the (uncensored) films.

Hospitality is always a hot-button issue. Why do we get to live in luxury as striped-pants cookie-pushers? What did that canapé get you? What specific result did that dinner-party have? Why did you invite those particular guests? Did you follow all the rules?

In fact hospitality in a hardship post was a demanding and essential job for my wife and me. In our storeroom we had at any time about \$500 worth of food in the freezer, all imported goods as well as stuff from the military flights. We could recoup the cost from our small hospitality allowance when we actually used these items but in the meantime they were our cost, our risk.

Movie nights were a great supplement to more formal hospitality; they were fun and they were cheap. We never knew what the payoff would be, and in most cases it was nothing more than goodwill. But among the regular attendees were friends in the British High Commission and the American Embassy. At least two dozen Canadians owed their quick extrication from a difficult situation to movie nights at the home of the Canadian Second Secretary, in Dar es Salaam – and they never knew it.

Jean-Yves Dionne
**La première Chambre de commerce canadienne
en l'Europe de l'est**

Jean-Yves Dionne a passé trente cinq ans dans le service diplomatique à titre de délégué commercial et de prospecteur d'investissements. Il a fait des incursions aux Ressources humaines et à l'organisation du Sommet de la Francophonie de Moncton. Conseiller commercial et Consul à Budapest, M. Dionne et son épouse Lucie Tremblay furent des témoins et acteurs privilégiés des grands bouleversements dans cette région. Il a terminé sa carrière à Rio de Janeiro à titre de Consul général.

Nous sommes à la fin des années 80. Le rideau de fer vient de tomber grâce à la Hongrie qui refuse de fermer ses frontières aux milliers d'Allemands de l'Est qui transitent vers la frontière autrichienne. Ce geste frondeur, plus que symbolique, emporte dans son sillage quarante années de guerre froide. Après ces événements, démarre une course effrénée des anciens communistes souhaitant se convertir rapidement au capitalisme. Ils ont les moyens financiers, les réseaux et les accès privilégiés à l'état hongrois. Les sociétés de commerce de l'état, qui passent les commandes pour satisfaire les besoins du peuple, sont dissolues ou mises sous perfusion jusqu'à leur démembrement. Il se crée alors des dizaines de milliers d'entreprises privées. Elles sont nouvelles et elles ont peu d'expérience crédible du monde des affaires à l'Occidental, ce qui augmente l'incertitude, la suspicion et défie le système de transactions bancaires et financières. Tous les regards se tournent vers l'Europe, le modèle économique à suivre en vue du développement rapide du pays. La Hongrie espère devenir un état sous-traitant des manufacturiers allemands et japonais, notamment dans le secteur automobile. Le pays souhaite

une intégration rapide à l'Union européenne et à l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord (l'OTAN), afin de se protéger d'un retour toujours possible de la Russie. En tournant cette page historique, la Hongrie offre au capitalisme mondial ses entreprises nationales et son marché intérieur de 10 millions d'habitants dans le cadre d'un ambitieux programme de privatisation des sociétés d'État. L'histoire de ce pays se réécrit sous leurs yeux et l'espoir du peuple généré par les changements est palpable et bien réel. Un grand vent de liberté souffle sur la jeunesse hongroise qui n'hésite pas à prendre ouvertement parti pour tout ce qui vient de l'Ouest. Ce peuple du Danube a bien souffert de l'occupation communiste. Tout lui semble possible à nouveau.

Un fort désir de retour envahit la diaspora hongroise nostalgique, éparpillée aux États-Unis, au Canada, en Suède et ailleurs, depuis le rendez-vous manqué de la révolte de Budapest (1956). Elle rêve de la restitution des terres et des maisons confisquées à plusieurs de leurs familles sous l'ancien régime. En même temps, les pays occidentaux prennent pied dans ce nouveau marché à conquérir, en y affectant leurs cadres et leurs gestionnaires à la tête de représentations locales, de sociétés de consultants en gestion, de firmes d'avocats, de banques étrangères, et autres experts en acquisitions d'entreprises, etc. La république hongroise vient de se mettre à vendre – ses plus beaux bijoux nationaux vont passer au secteur privé international.

C'est dans cet environnement tumultueux que nous arrivons dans la perle du Danube (surnom donné à Budapest). En ce tournant de décennie et en ce début de période dite de la mondialisation, le service des délégués commerciaux se mobilise pour réagir aux nouveaux défis et opportunités offertes par l'ouverture de ce nouveau marché que représente l'Europe de l'Est. La section est composée d'un agent local et de deux adjointes. En plus de devoir s'adapter à la nouvelle révolution de l'information, plusieurs employés locaux à l'ambassade vivent dans le déni de tous ces événements. Ils s'inquiètent pour leur avenir, ce qui rend

leurs comportements, perceptions et discours teintés de grande confusion et de regrets entre les avantages dont ils jouissaient sous l'ancien régime et les inconnues de cette transformation beaucoup trop rapide à leurs yeux.

Le gouvernement du Canada n'a pas encore mis en place des mécanismes de financement à l'exportation pour les pays de l'Est. Plusieurs expatriés canadiens travaillant à Budapest souhaitent ardemment la création d'un club d'affaires canadien ou d'une Chambre de commerce. Il existe bien sûr une Chambre de commerce hongroise au Canada. Ce forum est partagé entre la diaspora hongroise canadienne localisée à Toronto et à Montréal. Cette Chambre organise un voyage annuel en Hongrie afin de promouvoir les affaires de ses membres et voit d'un œil suspicieux la création d'une entité analogue à Budapest.

Nous en discutons longuement au sein de la mission et tentons d'évaluer le bien-fondé d'une telle implantation. La section commerciale peine déjà à satisfaire sa clientèle et redoute de devoir travailler avec intensité sur un projet périphérique qui la détournerait de ses tâches principales. Nous nous posons des questions existentielles sur la nature de ce projet:

- La Chambre aura-t-elle assez de membres actifs, de moyens financiers et d'activités pour assurer sa pérennité?
- Quel rôle assumera-t-elle pour animer les affaires canadiennes dans le pays?
- Comment trouver une synergie avec les deux chapitres de la Chambre hongroise canadienne, à Toronto et à Montréal, sans se nuire mutuellement?

Nous consultons nos collègues des autres ambassades, alliés et compétiteurs. Pour la section commerciale, cette initiative représente la possibilité d'éliminer un grand nombre de demandes aléatoires non prioritaires. Mes collègues des autres services

y voient aussi d'autres avantages comme celui de confier à la nouvelle Chambre de commerce l'organisation annuelle de la course Terry Fox et d'autres activités non-officielles. Ceci augmenterait la visibilité et la stature de la Chambre. Après une période de rodage normal, la Chambre pourrait-elle voler de ses propres ailes?

Au lancement du projet, les partenaires recommandent d'y associer l'ambassadeur. Il en fera la promotion et en sera la figure de proue en attendant que l'organisme puisse se trouver un premier leader et président. Des mesures de rendement sont alors établies pour évaluer le moment qui permettra au nouvel organisme de devenir indépendant. Le seul lien avec l'ambassade sera un siège permanent au conseil d'administration pour le conseiller commercial. Au départ l'ambassade n'est que la bougie d'allumage du projet. Son rôle est de promouvoir le dynamisme de nos gens d'affaires démontrant aux autorités du pays l'intention sérieuse du Canada d'accroître sa présence dans le pays.

La section commerciale retient les services temporaires d'un jeune employé local. La conjointe du conseiller commercial accepte de gérer bénévolement le nouveau secrétariat. Elle deviendra la première directrice de la Chambre.

Dans les semaines qui suivent, la section commerciale établit les bases d'une Chambre de commerce canadienne: liste de membres potentiels, ébauche de règlements, organisation d'un secrétariat, liste des services à rendre, élection d'un bureau provisoire avant l'élection d'un premier conseil d'administration, etc. Des activités de recrutement sont planifiées. Les milieux d'affaires et les réseaux locaux sont ratissés dans le but de recruter des membres. Le groupe prend de l'ampleur avec la participation des gens d'affaires locaux. Un comité exécutif provisoire est créé. Les premières réunions sont tenues au domicile du conseiller commercial. L'ambassadeur accorde au comité provisoire quelques rencontres de travail à la résidence officielle. Après la création de la Chambre

de commerce canadienne en Hongrie (CCCH – Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hungary), il parraine également une grande réception de lancement et invite les membres du nouvel exécutif à se joindre aux diverses activités de l’ambassade afin d’élargir leur réseau.

Les membres de la Chambre de commerce sont divisés en trois catégories, soit les sociétés (plus d’une quinzaine au départ), les membres individuels (plus d’une centaine) et les étudiants. Quel succès pour un début! La CCCH organise sa première activité annuelle de financement dans le modeste local du club des employés de l’ambassade, le ‘*Moose and Goose Club*’. Pour la première fois dans ce pays, un souper aux homards du Canada atlantique est organisé par les membres du nouveau conseil d’administration. Ces derniers n’hésitent pas à se rouler les manches pour mener à bien l’événement. En quelques heures tous les billets sont vendus! Cette activité deviendra une belle fête annuelle et entrera dans la liste des événements gastronomiques très courus de la capitale de ce petit pays enclavé où la tradition est de s’offrir le sandre ou le silure accompagné d’une *barackpalincka* (boisson d’abricot). La prise en charge de la course annuelle *Terry Fox* sur l’île Marguerite, magnifique parc naturel au centre du Danube entre Buda et Pest, permet aussi à la jeune organisation de faire sa marque dans la communauté civile et médicale locale en partenariat avec la Société du cancer de Budapest qui en reçoit les profits.

Les premiers présidents de la Chambre sont des Hongrois canadiens ou des Canadiens résidant à Budapest. Le premier président élu est le directeur général d’une grande société de consultants internationaux. Aux prochaines élections il est remplacé par le directeur général du fonds d’investissement *First Hungary Funds*, suivi d’un ex-cadre d’Investissement Canada, puis à tour de rôle par deux avocats corporatifs de Montréal établis de manière permanente à Budapest. La direction dynamique de ces bénévoles a une même vision pour la CCCH qu’ils propulsent auprès des

plus grands organismes similaires du pays. Ils imprègnent une image entreprenant tant pour l'aide à promouvoir les affaires canadiennes que pour motiver nos investisseurs et gens d'affaires. Ils mènent également un lobby énergique auprès des autorités pour l'élimination des entraves à l'importation de pièces d'automobiles du Canada, ou encore, pour cerner des questions plus générales sur la conduite des affaires dans ce pays. La Chambre a ainsi mené un forum d'affaires pertinent et dynamique en parallèle aux activités de la section commerciale de l'ambassade. Elle a associé sa synergie aux nombreuses activités commerciales tenues sous notre drapeau.

Au moment où ce texte est rédigé la CCCH est bel et bien implantée à Budapest depuis plus de vingt ans. Elle s'est intégrée par osmose à la couleur locale. Elle offre ses services aux clients qui ambitionnent de faire des affaires au Canada et sert de forum d'affaires en dehors des services de l'ambassade. Et surtout, année après année, son célèbre dîner aux homards du Canada atlantique finance en partie ses activités et agrmente la vie sociale de Budapest. L'événement attire dorénavant plusieurs centaines de convives, non plus au '*Moose and Goose Club*' mais plutôt dans l'un ou l'autre des grands hôtels longeant le magnifique Danube, près du symbolique pont des Chaînes de Széchenyi-Lanchid.

Robert Burchill

The Keys to Sao Paulo

*Saskatchewan-born **Bob Burchill**, a lawyer by training, served in Sao-Paulo, Chicago, London as a trade commissioner, later head of mission in Sydney, Australia and at HQ as head of Legal and Personnel Divisions, tells of the necessity of checking before sequestering key equipment, anywhere.*

The cool Brazilian dawn warmed quickly into swelter. We were to have been met at 9:00 a.m. and so cleared the entry formalities early, then waited as the tropical air became hotter and damper. The smell of rotting coffee beans was odious and pervasive. After an hour of enduring, and trying to discourage our year old son's interest in catching mammoth cockroaches, we decided to go back to our cabin on the ship that had brought us from North America.

We had just got ourselves re-airconditioned when the door burst open and a large, flush faced man clutched the door frame and shouted "Get me a gin and tonic". And thus we were introduced to life in the Foreign Service.

We did get a gin and tonic and it served to calm our prospective boss. He explained that he and his wife had just negotiated the three thousand foot descent from São Paulo to the port at Santos. The highway was four lane and well constructed, but it contained numerous switchbacks that required precise navigation. Normally his wife drove, but possible concern to demonstrate leadership had encouraged him to take the wheel. It quickly became obvious that something was wrong. In fact, the fluid in the power steering system had leaked out, and so their descent had a terrifying slalom quality that further unnerved a man already prone to high levels of anxiety.

Fortunately a staff member in another vehicle had followed them. He was fluent in Portuguese, an ability that our man had failed to master despite six years of representing Canada in Brazil. The staffer saw to the power steering fluid and we reassembled to depart for São Paulo. Our bags were stowed in the car trunk and with a masterful gesture and a beaming smile, our boss slammed the trunk lid shut. As it closed I caught a glimpse of a set of keys inside. Yes, they included those for the car.

This set off another emotional spiral. Cars of that era came with rear seats firmly fixed and did not allow for forward folding and access to the trunk that way. However, even in those innocent days, it was not that difficult to find someone in Santos capable of jimmying a lock, and so it was done. But this time the anxiety was unquenchable and we drove up to São Paulo with his wife shrieking at our boss to be careful, drive more slowly, stay away from the edge, and him, yelling at her, to shut up. On arrival, the fairly crummy hotel they had selected for us looked just fine.

But, all experience is valuable. Since that day I do not close lockable doors without checking that my keys are in hand.

Robin Higham

Always talk to Strangers

*Following thirty-five years in Canada's foreign service (Accra, Liverpool, Boston, Bangkok, Rome, Bruxelles and Rabat) **Robin Higham** re-cycled as senior fellow at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. Returning to academic life he was surprised to discover how the students in international affairs programmes, appreciated hearing about some of the practical life-lessons he picked up while serving abroad. "Always Talk to Strangers" is one of them.*

I have chosen this anecdote because it offers a little lesson that might be of interest to wannabe diplomats as well as other youngsters who are preparing for international careers. Like many lessons Canadian diplomats learn when working abroad, this one has counterpart relevance in almost any environment, but especially in a culturally diverse society like Canada's.

In the summer of 1965 I found myself, along with my wife of six months, assigned as junior trade commissioner at the Canadian high commission in Accra, Ghana. I mention Louise because she is a Franco-Albertan and from the day we left her Edmonton family and our friends behind, she was determined not to abandon her linguistic and cultural roots just because she was going to live with *un maudit anglo*. As a result we spoke quite a lot of French at home; my French literature studies at the University of Alberta business faculty were already coming in handy to keep the conversation going in our new household.

One of the reasons we were sent to distant Accra on our first assignment was precisely because of my French language

pretensions. Our parish, that is, the countries to which the high commission in Ghana was accredited, included the French West African ex-colonies of Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania and Togo. All of them were locked into the French-managed CFA currency and French was their *lingua franca*.

From time-to-time we lowly trade guys at the high commission in Ghana were expected to show the flag in at least the respective capital cities: Abidjan, Bamako, Nouakchott and Lomé. Well, my boss, the senior Canadian trade commissioner in Accra, had been transferred as a young officer to the Canadian government from the Newfoundland foreign service when, in 1949, that British overseas territory became Canada's tenth province. Fluency in French was not a highlight on his C/V.

About three months after our arrival in Accra, the trade office got a heads-up signal from headquarters. (In those days, signals to the high commission arrived by mail, which worked on occasion, by secure diplomatic bag, or by telex.) The message advised that the Québec government was sending a trade and investment mission to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The delegation would be composed of two provincial government officers and representatives of a half-dozen of the province's prestigious engineering consulting firms. Their project was to scout out business and investment opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire. The file naturally landed on the desk of this new kid from Edmonton.

Now for those readers who may not have been around in 1965, understand that the Québec sovereignty issue was hot, hot front-page stuff in Canada at the time. The more hysterical champions of Québec sovereignty were scanning the horizon for any possible situation which might confirm their argument that only through complete independence could *les québécois et les québécoises*, fulfill their manifest destiny as senior members of the global francophone community. That community included French West Africa of course.

As I got off the plane in Abidjan, just two weeks before the arrival of the dreaded delegation, I had persuaded myself that the very survival of Canadian unity was in my 23-year-old hands. And still ringing in my ears were the high commissioner's cheery words as he passed by my office to say goodbye and wish me well... something along the lines of "Well, Higham, I guess this is your first really big assignment...it could be a little sensitive you know, so don't screw up. OK?"

Well, I thought as I checked into Abidjan's luxurious Hôtel Ivoire, this isn't so bad. I had two full weeks to stitch my programme together.

Alas, by the end of the first week, when all business had shut down for an unanticipated long weekend, I had exactly two tentative appointments in place. I don't mind admitting that real panic set in. The week in Abidjan had shown this neophyte trade commissioner that our Accra-based high commission had no contacts, zero, that were of any relevance to my project. Not in the city and not in the whole of Côte d'Ivoire. (Maybe *les séparatistes* were right!) Most Ivoirians I spoke with seemed to have heard of neither Canada nor Québec and they were not all that excited to learn about it now. It was also evident that if there were any potential consulting engineering projects to be had in the country, they were already squarely in the hands of their ex-colonial power, the French. And the French were not about to share their exotic and treasured *chasse-gardée* with competitors from another former colony. So, as I took the elevator up to the rooftop restaurant of the elegant Hotel Ivoire for dinner that Friday evening, my career as a Canadian government trade commissioner and diplomat, and indeed my country's future, was looking bleak at best.

When the elevator door opened I found myself face-to-face with the elderly and distinguished-looking gentleman I had seen dining alone at the same table every evening since my arrival. We had got to the stage of nodding to each other when our eyes met across the

room on previous evenings. This time I took my courage in hand and asked if he was, like myself, dining alone again. If so would he like to join me at table?

Jean-Jacques was as delighted as I was to have someone to talk to. By the time we got to coffee and dessert I had learned that he was a French national who had spent his entire adult life in Abidjan, first as a successful businessman and agent for French engineering consulting firms looking for consulting and investment opportunities. *Tiens, tiens!* Even better, J-J had recently retired as president of the *Côte d'Ivoire-France chambre du commerce*. Now he had just sold his home and was living in the Hotel Ivoire, dining alone and bored, bored, bored.

He was also of course dying to know what this young, fumbling, naïve, obvious newcomer was doing in his territory. I was at first a little reluctant to divulge the full story of my project and my dilemma. As we shared confidences and a bottle of red wine however, it became clear that my dinner partner was a personal friend or acquaintance of pretty well everyone in town who counted in both business and in government...and especially of everyone with whom I should be arranging appointments for my *délégués québécois*. Over a second *pousse-café* and well into the evening, he offered to act as my *consultant bénévole*...to help me line up the appointments that I needed so desperately to save my country...and my job.

On behalf of the Queen of Canada, I picked up our tab for dinner and the substantial bar bill and from Saturday morning until the following Thursday, we (i.e. he, with me in tow.) set up a complete programme of appointments with government officials, local firms and so-called *agents représentatives*; enough bookings to keep all my delegates so busy that they wouldn't have time to even think about Québec sovereignty.

The trade mission was a success! That would be a success in terms of market research and not necessarily in terms of new business.

I learned all that later in a report from Ottawa headquarters that was eventually sent down the hall via the office mail boy...without comment from my astonished high commissioner. So I kept my job and better still, thanks to my new French friend, Québec has remained, at least until now, part of *la Fédération canadienne*... and still a senior player in the global francophone community.

This neophyte trade commissioner never forgot that first on-the-job lesson in the tradecraft of diplomacy. It goes like this: “Don’t believe what your mother told you as a child; always talk to strangers” In fact over the years to follow, that lesson in Abidjan was reinforced many times over.



Building friends and contacts is not all that matters of course, but dinners and national day receptions and diplomatic cocktail parties and casual or accidental acquaintances made on the tennis court or the golf course or with other parents at your children’s school, really do matter. Your task as a diplomat is to understand and interpret the territory and you don’t do that by sitting behind your desk at the chancery or staying home and off-duty in the evening.

In those days, we never used those demeaning and crass business-driven expressions that are so common today: “schmoozing” and “networking” but the notion of building relationships was always a fundamental instrument of diplomacy. Being on the spot in a foreign assignment is only an advantage over your Ottawa-based colleague, who will be following media reports on the local scene, if you have a wide spectrum of contacts with whom you socialize frequently. Oh, you can also visit them in their offices and take lengthy notes of your discussions, but those visits are unlikely to ever be more effective than that dinner with a stranger in the rooftop restaurant of Abidjan’s exotic Hôtel Ivoire.

My story ends on a slightly less positive note. As a thank-you gesture to both my new friend and saviour and the junior trade commissioner in Accra, on our last evening together, the Québec delegates graciously took us to dinner at a splendid seafood restaurant with an outdoor patio overlooking the famously beautiful lagoons of Abidjan. It was early the next morning on the airplane ride back to Accra where it all began, and a very long week later before I was able to commence my weight-loss recovery programme. “That’s just part of doing business around here, my boy.” advised my corpulent senior trade commissioner boss from behind his polished and clutter-free desk.

Alena Schram

The Glamour is Gone

Alena Schram spent 36 years as a diplomatic appendage, 25 of them overseas, 11 as ambassadorial embellishment. She and her husband, John, now live on Amherst Island near Kingston. Her columns have appeared in the Globe and Mail, National Post, Ottawa Citizen, Whig Standard, Chatelaine, and the International Herald Tribune of blessed memory. She is the author of "The Opinionated Old Cow: Ruminations from the Field".

In the summer of 1971, my husband, John, was posted to the Canadian High Commission in Lagos, Nigeria, and I prepared to go with him, as foreign service spouses (read: wives) were expected to do back then.

Posting confirmation in hand, John rushed straight to the finance section of then-External Affairs and took out a posting loan to top up our meagre outfitting allowance. I grabbed the money and headed to Ogilvy's department store, where I used it to buy 12 sets of crystal, china, cutlery and table linens. It didn't matter that we were hopelessly in debt: we could set a beautiful table in hot, humid, post-Biafran War, Nigeria.

"How come you're buying all this stuff?" asked the bewildered young sales assistant, as she rang up my cache.

"My husband's being sent to Africa," I replied loftily, "as a diplomat."

"Oh," she exclaimed, no doubt wondering what a diplomat was, "so what're you going to do?"

Stumped, I answered, "Entertain."

“Wow! Singer or dancer?”

Loyal appendage would have been closer to the truth. I'd read the official handbook and knew my role would be strictly supportive. But I was anxious to do well. In those days, wives figured prominently in their husbands' annual appraisals, and we were in this career together.

According to the handbook, my first task was to send a note to the wife of the high commissioner, declaring our delight at having been selected for Lagos. Composing the message took me half a day and writing it ate up six of my expensive new Birks “informals.” Like the calling cards issued to me, these fold-over white notecards with my official name – Mrs. John R. Schram – prominently embossed on the front, were part of the diplomatic kit.

Once at the post, it was my duty, within three days of our arrival, to call on the high commissioner's spouse, and in full regalia: afternoon dress, nylons, high-heeled shoes. I clearly remember the green and white linen suit that clung to me like a dry-cleaning bag, the white shoes into which I had horned my little sausage feet, and the droplets of perspiration that ran off my nose and trickled down the backs of my panty-hosed thighs. I knew how important it was to make a good first impression and, sitting nervously on the chintz couch, my teacup and saucer rat-tat-a-tat-ing loudly in my slipper, quivering hand, I just hoped I was succeeding.

In those days we all knew that an invitation from our high commissioner – or ambassador – and his wife was a command performance. The diplomatic handbook was quite succinct on the subject: attendance at the Official Residence (O.R.) was mandatory, except in cases of personal ill health or if the officer himself was hosting a function at home; we were there as co-hosts, not as guests; our job was to engage official visitors in conversation, not to stand around talking to our friends.

An invitation to the O.R. also meant arriving 15 minutes ahead of the first guest, and leaving 15 minutes after the last one had

gone home. And if, occasionally, it looked as if one or two invitees might not show up, it meant virtually springing out of the hall closet at the last moment, appropriately attired, to fill the vacant chairs at the dinner table.

In return, we were given suitable accommodation (for which we paid a substantial rent, compared to our pathetic salary), a tiny entertainment allowance that was minutely scrutinized, and the promise of a fascinating – and glamorous, too, we hoped – life.

But all that’s changed now. These expectations and responsibilities no longer exist. Ask an officer today to attend a dinner in honour of a visiting cabinet minister or a local VIP and chances are the response will be, “Thanks for the invite but I think we’ll pass. Taylor’s got soccer practice that night.”

Suggest that he/she might consider hosting a dinner at home, and you’re likely to hear, “Sorry, my spouse isn’t interested. And besides, we don’t have matching dishes.”

Spouses, with busy and fulfilling careers of their own, no longer see themselves as unpaid handmaidens – or the male equivalent – of the now-Department of Global Affairs. And chatting up a bunch of locals at a formal dinner or attending a charity bazaar with the ambassador’s wife have little appeal.

Nor should they. The days of the adoring little wife, lower lip aquiver with pride, working assiduously to support her husband, are over.

No one, we’re told, is entertaining at home any longer anyway, so the expectation of lovely accommodation is gone too. Many of the graceful flats and houses that we used to be put in so that we could host elegant lunches and dinners and get to know – and influence – people that mattered to Canada’s foreign policy objectives, have gone on the block, and the profits used to temper government budget deficiencies.

Unlike our European and Asian and African and Latin American colleagues who still see value in hosting events at home, Canadian diplomats are now lodged in more modest apartments, and officers encouraged to meet officials, counterparts and contacts in restaurants and cafes.



Of course, it doesn't matter a hoot really where the socializing takes place, provided it serves its purpose and gives Canadian taxpayers value for money. But as Canada's former ambassador to the U.S., Allan Gotlieb, points out, inviting someone out for a meal is not the same as having them home: the personal touch is gone,

along with the possibility of a more nuanced – and ultimately fruitful – relationship.

Personally, I regret the change: entertaining at home meant I got a vastly expanded worldview, complete immersion in an unfamiliar culture, and even the opportunity to exert some influence. There was a sense of purpose, an esprit de corps and, dare I say it without sounding too naïve, pride in what we were accomplishing. And if it meant preparing a meal for 10 or 12 after a long day at work, it was – usually, but not always – worth it.

In my opinion, the regalia, the calling cards, the candelabra and the effort that went with them provided Canada with a grown-up, international-standard backdrop to the serious business of diplomacy. But then I'm just a wistful old bag with a cupboard full of crystal, china, and cutlery. And a box of informals with my husband's name on them.

John Graham

The Great Escape: an Epic for St. Valentine

John Graham's first post in the foreign service was Ciudad Trujillo (now Santo Domingo). He served as minister in London, high commissioner and ambassador in the Caribbean and Latin America and was the first head of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy in the Organization of American States. He was the international mediator for the 1994 electoral crisis in the Dominican Republic. From Venezuela he received the 'Gran Cordon del Libertador', a distinction he shares with Fidel Castro and the late Muammar Gaddafi. Graham recorded episodes from his foreign service and international organization careers in his memoir "Whose Man in Havana?" The subtitle, "Adventures from the Far Side of Diplomacy", foreshadow the nature of many of these experiences. He does the cartoons and writes for the Manor Park Chronicle in Ottawa.

This story is one of my favourites, in part because it's a remarkable tale and also because it's not about swashbuckling Canadian diplomatic officers but about a courageous, adventurous and very much in love Canadian embassy secretary – in other words a chronicle about a patient, splendid, indispensable, often long suffering part of the foreign service whose stories, like those of foreign service wives, are too seldom told. My encounter with the story was total serendipity. It was late fall about 15 years ago and I had learned that a neighbour was selling a set of good quality cross country skis, poles and boots. The equipment was being sold almost literally over our back fence. Branco Belovic was selling his skis and doing it through his daughter Natalie who lives with her family just behind us. When I arrived Carmen, the wife of

Branco, opened the door. Neither Branco nor Natalie were there. I looked over the equipment. It was in great shape and the first class boots fit perfectly (The poles have been replaced, but the rest of the equipment is still in use.) In the course of the transaction I asked Carmen how she had met Branco. This story is the answer to that question.

It is about imagination, determination, and audacity, but above all about how the magic of love can overcome the most formidable obstacles. The principals are Carmen Constant (Belovic) and Branko Belovic, the parents of Natalie and grandparents of Nicholas, Martin and Madeleine.

The story opens in the summer of 1951 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, a country then ruled by a stern communist regime, deeply suspicious of all Western powers including Canada. Posted as a secretary to the Canadian embassy by the Department of External Affairs, Carmen arrived with warnings ringing in her ears about the need to avoid close and most especially romantic contact with the local Yugoslav population. The local Yugoslavs received similar warnings, in their case reinforced by knowledge of friends and acquaintances thrown into prison for violating the rules. In these inauspicious circumstances, Carmen and Branko met and fell in love.

As a film actor and an arts reporter for a Belgrade newspaper, Branko's work allowed contact with the diplomatic community and meetings were easily arranged. But these were soon interrupted when Carmen was taken to hospital with dangerously complicated appendicitis. Branko's regular appearance at Carmen's bedside suggested a deepening relationship. News of the romance spread as far as the Papal Nuncio who came to the hospital to warn Carmen, as a good Catholic, not to consider marriage outside her faith. The Canadian embassy also sounded the alarm and the ambassador wrote to Ottawa. External Affairs assumed that they could safely extinguish the 'security risk' by posting her out of

harm's way and assigned her to the embassy in Paris. Carmen, however, had other ideas. The romance was not to be so easily thwarted.

She and Branko had already devised the rough outline of a plan. Soon after settling into her job in Paris, Carmen set out to buy a car. For her purposes it had to be large, and large in those days meant American. She bought a second hand Studebaker for \$600 – the 1950 model with a striking grill arrangement resembling the front end of a small airplane. The more difficult task was to find a very discreet, one-person owner-operated garage. With great good luck, she found the ideal person, M. Chambert, who was intrigued by Carmen's reckless enterprise. Chambert's garage was also conveniently located in the sixteenth arrondissement, not far from her apartment. His job was to build a compartment in the vehicle large enough to hold one adult and invisible to the prying eyes of immigration and customs officials. This was accomplished by reducing the trunk space and the space occupied by the back seat, removing the back seat springs to accommodate the knees, and slinging straps to prevent the legs from falling on the road – an arrangement that rested the occupant's rump on the car's differential.

Once the secret compartment was in place, Carmen had to learn to drive. Chambert, by this time a full co-conspirator, was the instructor and lessons involved taking the Chambert family out of Paris on picnics. When everything was ready, Chambert helped Carmen navigate the outskirts of Paris and set her on the road to the South of France.

The trip proceeded smoothly until an off-duty Italian customs officer asked for a lift to his station at the frontier. The customs officer was about to clamber into the rear when Carmen realized that the peculiar arrangements of the back seat, especially the absence of springs, would excite the suspicions of even the most

bumbling customs official. Somehow, and at the risk of sounding coquettish, she persuaded the young man to sit in the front.

Without further major incident and after four and half days she arrived in the seaside town of Rieka in Yugoslavia where she created a small sensation as a young woman driving a large, beautiful American car. Following a happy reunion with Branko, she hid the car in a garage, where Branko tested the compartment. To their dismay Branko didn't fit – adjustments were necessary. These were conducted warily as it was important for everyone's safety that not even Branko's family should be aware of the intended escape.



Two weeks later Branko and Carmen set off for the first of four border crossings. In a secluded area a few kilometers from the frontier with the Trieste International Zone, Branko squeezed himself into the compartment. Carmen then drove very slowly as every pothole spelled potential disaster for Branko. Tension rose as Carmen stopped to disembark from the car for the inspection of papers by Yugoslav officials. All went well until a horrified

Carmen noticed a section of Branko's pant leg on the underside of the car. Fortunately no-one else saw the offending trouser leg and Carmen refrained from telling the highly stressed and uncomfortable Branko. The next crisis arose just after the Trieste controls. Branko's muscles were seizing and he cried out in pain for Carmen to stop. Carmen shouted back that she could not stop because they were on a busy motorway. Carmen drove on – concerned that passers-by might be curious about her loud conversation with an invisible person.

Crisis naturally followed crisis. The plan was to stop overnight in Trieste and collect a suitcase containing clothes and personal papers for Branko left by a discreet diplomatic friend. First and quickly Carmen had to find a sheltered spot in an unknown city where the agonized Branko could crawl out of concealment. Soon after and only with difficulty were they able to persuade a hotel to register Branko without a passport.

The major problems were now behind them – or so they thought. They passed the Italian and then the French frontier at Menton without incident. Branko, also a novice driver, was at the wheel as a relieved and joyful couple entered the centre of Paris. He drove into the frantically busy roundabout at *l'Étoile* with no understanding of the French traffic rule *priorité à droite*. Amid much Gallic cursing and honking a calamity was narrowly averted.

But fresh problems awaited them. Although Carmen had been careful not to inform anyone including the embassy of her adventures, word had leaked out. On presenting themselves to the French authorities, Branko was arrested for illegal entry and put into a cell with two similarly detained Italians. After three days he was brought before a *juge d'instruction* who suggested that his sole – and from the point of view of French law – inadequate reason for entering France was love for the attractive young French-Canadian woman. “Not at all,” retorted Branko. “I came here to escape the

terrible oppression and injustice in my country.” It is not recorded, but presumably the judge sighed. Branko was fined and let free.

The following summer they married and then immediately set sail for Canada and for Carmen’s home in Montreal. Branko returned to University. He entered the public service, retiring as a director general in the Department of the Environment.

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Canadians in Distress

Serge April
Fin de semaine à Tahiti

Ron Berlet
Inky Pinky Spider

Lawrence Dickenson
Distributing Gas Masks in Bahrain

Jim Elliott
Consular Duties

Robin Higham
Petites astuces/Tricks of the Trade

Serge April

Fin de semaine à Tahiti

Serge April a passé près de quarante ans au service diplomatique du Canada. Il a été quatre fois chef de mission. L'anecdote qui suit est survenue au début de sa carrière alors qu'il était jeune agent juridique à Ottawa.

De retour à Ottawa après ma première affectation à l'étranger, je me retrouvais de nouveau aux Affaires juridiques du ministère. Ce vendredi-là j'étais allé déjeuner à la maison plutôt qu'à la cafétéria. En revenant au bureau, mon directeur, Ronnie Robertson, m'attendait impatiemment en regardant sa montre. Il me dit tout bonnement que j'avais encore le temps, le temps de retourner chez moi faire ma valise !

Ronnie sortait de réunion avec le sous-ministre où il avait été décidé que je devais aller au plus vite à Tahiti pour ramener chez lui à Vancouver, David MacTaggart, le vice-président fondateur de Greenpeace. Ses déclarations télévisuelles intempestives commençaient à exasperer bien des gens des deux côtés de l'Atlantique.

Une semaine auparavant, MacTaggart s'était rendu dans le Pacifique Sud en voilier pour protester contre les essais nucléaires français en naviguant intentionnellement dans la zone d'interdiction. Son voilier avait été arraisonné, ses trois co-équipiers avaient été renvoyés illico chez eux en Nouvelle-Zélande, mais MacTaggart lui-même ayant reçu 'accidentellement' un coup de matraque dans l'oeil nécessitait des soins jusqu'à ce qu'il puisse voyager. Le meilleur hôpital de Polynésie étant l'hôpital militaire de Papeete, les autorités françaises l'avaient placé là.



MacTaggart n'était pas sous arrêt. Il pouvait recevoir qui il voulait et il ne s'en privait pas, particulièrement les télévisions canadiennes. Il savait brillamment jouer sur les mots, se faisant passer pour un prisonnier des militaires français qui voulaient contaminer la planète avec leurs expériences nucléaires.

Ronnie me dit que j'avais moins d'une heure pour retourner chez moi faire ma valise, qu'entre-temps il s'occuperait des billets d'avion, de mon passeport diplomatique etc. Je pars comme un fou, je fais ma valise, j'embrasse Suzanne, ma chère épouse, éberluée. En revenant au bureau, je demande à Ronnie si j'avais des documents à lire et quelles étaient mes instructions. Il me remet quelques coupures de journaux que je connaissais déjà vaguement. Je lui demande d'être plus explicite, et Ronnie, impatient, de me répéter « Serge, c'est simple, tu vas à Tahiti et tu reviens au plus vite à Vancouver avec David MacTaggart ! » Voilà !

La course folle commence. J'attrape de justesse mes vols à Ottawa, à Toronto, et à Chicago, puis à Los Angeles. Quand j'ai

enfin eu le temps de reprendre mon souffle, je me suis demandé comment j'allais faire une fois arrivé sur place. Je me suis dit que je devrais tout simplement me rendre à mon hôtel, qu'avec l'aide du concierge je trouverais les coordonnées de l'hôpital de MacTaggart, que je m'y rendrais. Évidemment ça ne s'est pas passé comme ça.

À l'aéroport de Papeete au pied de l'escalier de l'avion un individu m'interpelle. C'était le chef de cabinet du Gouverneur et il m'annonce que celui-ci m'attendait à son bureau. Aucune formalité de douane. Vingt minutes après l'atterrissage, je me retrouve dans le bureau du Gouverneur de Polynésie. Il me confirme que les autorités françaises feraient tout pour faciliter ma mission, à savoir faire en sorte que MacTaggart rentre au plus vite à Vancouver ... et ainsi mette fin à ses déclarations télévisuelles intempestives qui commençaient à être reprises à la télévision française.

Le chef de cabinet m'amène ensuite à l'hôpital où il me présente au médecin-chef, un général en uniforme, lequel m'est apparu encore plus nerveux que moi. J'ai brisé la glace après qu'il se soit présenté. « Voyons, Bergeron (c'était son nom de famille) c'est un nom canadien bien de chez nous. » Nous avons ri (un peu), puis le général a sorti le texte d'une décharge médicale que MacTaggart devrait signer pour avoir son congé de l'hôpital même s'il n'était pas encore complètement guéri. Je lis le texte qui me semble conforme. Le médecin-chef rajoute que MacTaggart pourrait même prendre l'avion le lendemain s'il était accompagné de l'ophtalmologue arrivé la veille de Vancouver à la demande de la famille. Je rencontre ce dernier, il vérifie le texte, et nous nous dirigeons vers la chambre de MacTaggart pensant que l'affaire serait réglée en deux minutes. Ça ne s'est pas passé comme ça.

MacTaggart était extrêmement heureux de me voir. J'étais selon lui l'envoyé spécial que le premier ministre Trudeau avait dépêché pour le sortir des griffes des militaires français ! Quoiqu'il en soit, je sors le texte de la décharge médicale. Je la lui traduis en

anglais, le médecin de Vancouver la lui explique soigneusement. MacTaggart lit et relit le texte, puis nous annonce avec son plus beau sourire qu'il n'était pas question qu'il signe ça. Nous reprenons nos explications. Je sors brièvement dans le couloir pour informer le chef de cabinet ce qui se passait.

Il nous a fallu un long moment avant de comprendre que MacTaggart ne voulait pas signer parce qu'il craignait que le gouvernement français puisse se servir de cette décharge médicale pour se disculper devant la Cour Internationale de Justice à La Haye. Évidemment il n'en était rien, ne serait-ce que parce que seuls les États y ont accès, aucunement des organisations privées comme Greenpeace ou des individus comme David MacTaggart.

Nous reprenons patiemment nos explications avec, mais MacTaggart hésitait toujours. Pour en finir, je suggère de légèrement modifier le texte, d'y changer tel ou tel mot. MacTaggart me regarde et accepte. Je suis allé voir le chef de cabinet dans le corridor, il a tout de suite compris l'astuce et marqué son accord. Il nous a ensuite fallu aller voir le médecin-chef qui, lui, a longuement hésité, mais a fini par signer. Je retourne à la chambre. MacTaggart me confirme qu'il était prêt à signer et je mets donc le papier devant lui avec un stylo.

C'est alors qu'a commencé une valse-hésitation qui a duré ce qui m'a paru une bonne heure. MacTaggart posait le stylo sur le papier, commençait à signer pour subitement le soulever en disant que ce document était inacceptable. Nouvelle ronde d'explications, puis il recommençait à faire semblant de signer, pour encore soulever subitement son stylo en répétant que le texte n'était pas acceptable. Il a recommencé son petit manège à plusieurs reprises. Puis, à un moment donné il y a eu de sa part un grand moment de silence, de réflexion. Il reprend alors le stylo et signe tout d'un coup. Je retourne dans le corridor remettre le document au chef de cabinet. Grand soulagement de part et d'autre.

MacTaggart c'est alors s'habiller, lui qui jusqu'à présent n'était qu'en jaquette d'hôpital. Nous nous sommes joyeusement rendus à l'hôtel, auquel je ne m'étais pas encore rendu. Je parviens à contacter Ronnie à Ottawa pour faire rapport, je réserve les billets d'avion pour le premier vol disponible, et enfin un peu de repos.

Évidemment il a bien fallu qu'il y ait quelques autres péripéties avant notre vol de retour. Ainsi, le lendemain nous nous apercevons, l'ophtalmologue de Vancouver et moi, que MacTaggart avait disparu. Impossible de le trouver! Puis il apparaît, tout sourire dans le hall de l'hôtel. Il nous explique qu'il était allé en avionnavette rendre visite à des amis sur une île voisine. Notre ami ophtalmologue est furieux : tout en lui imposant sur le champ un examen oculaire, il lui liste tous les dangers de prendre des petits avions mal pressurisés avant qu'il ne serait pas complètement guéri. Enfin, au moment de partir pour l'aéroport, MacTaggart regarde de près nos billets d'avion, et il m'annonce qu'il ne peut prendre ce vol. Nous devons faire escale à Hawaï et, m'expliquet-il, il craignait de s'y faire arrêter par le FBI ...en raison d'une pension alimentaire non payée à Boston. Il était très sérieux, mais nous avons finalement pu le convaincre de monter avec nous. Évidemment il ne s'est rien passé à Hawaï et le reste du voyage s'est déroulé normalement.

Arrivé à Vancouver je pouvais voir par le hublot que les média, particulièrement les caméras de télé, l'attendaient en grand nombre. Aussitôt l'avion arrêté, un agent officiel est monté à bord pour me faire signe discrètement de rester assis. MacTaggart, lui, est descendu. C'était comme l'arrivée d'une grande vedette, caméras, flashes, micros. Pour ma part, on m'a fait passer par tous les couloirs cachés de l'aéroport puis je suis rentré à Ottawa.

J'en avais long à raconter à Suzanne. Elle m'a dit avoir vu l'arrivée de MacTaggart au télé-journal mais que lorsque il s'est retourné pour me remercier je n'étais plus là. J'avais regardé le

tout, expliquai-je à ma chère épouse, par le deuxième hublot de l'appareil avec un sourire satisfait.

Finalement, David MacTaggart est devenu un 'bon ami' en ce sens que lorsqu'il venait à Ottawa il passait par l'édifice Pearson me raconter ses histoires du moment.

Mission accomplie, mais la visite touristique de Tahiti n'était pas au programme!

Ron Berlet

Inky Pinky Spider

*In June, 1968, **Ronald Berlet** was re assigned from his first post in Vienna, Austria, to become Canada's first resident trade commissioner to Czechoslovakia. Subsequently he served as Canada's representative to the United Nations 2nd committee in New York and assignments in London (twice), Germany and Taiwan. Interspersed with work were many sailing adventures including a 28-day Atlantic crossing with 2 friends, in a 38-foot sailboat. In 1986, after completing a 4-year posting in the UK he moved his own small boat from its homeport in the UK, arriving in the Hamburg harbour under sail to present his credentials as Canada's newly assigned Consul General. A fete that caused quite a stir in that sea-faring metropolis.*

More than a few old-school diplomats can recall occasions when they have been on their own in a tight situation and had to invoke that old standby adage of foreign services everywhere. The one that says: *In certain circumstances, it can be better to seek headquarters' forgiveness following an emergency, rather than seek headquarters' permission during an emergency.* That sage advice came to mind on September 6, 1968, when a colleague in charge of consular affairs at our Prague embassy approached me to assist in the escape of a small child from communist Czechoslovakia. Today, I suppose the media would call that people smuggling. The embassy consular officer knew I was planning to drive the two hundred and fifty kilometers to Vienna that evening. He also knew I had crossed the border into Austria by car many times before. My proposed passenger was to be little Monika, the two-year old daughter of Czech students who were studying in

Canada at the time of the Russian invasion of their country, less than a month earlier. Given the circumstances, the young parents were planning to remain in Canada as immigrants, providing they could find a way for their daughter to join them. My colleague took my nervous hesitation to join his conspiracy, as an immediate “Yes” and escorted me directly to the reception area of the gracious old mansion that then served as Canada’s chancery in Prague. We found a distinguished gentleman, who turned out to be Monika’s grandfather, waiting for us...a solemn little blonde girl cradled with one hand, a small bag of her belongings in the other.

The communist-controlled Czech regime, always wary of the risk of bright young students defecting when studying abroad, would not allow their children to accompany them. So Monika had been left behind in the care of her grandparents to await her parents’ return. By the autumn of 1968, following the now famous Prague Spring, a great pall had fallen over the country. Monika’s grandparents foresaw a bleak future for the little family if they settled back home in Czechoslovakia. It was evident that the grandfather cared deeply for his little Monika and wanted what was best for her even if it meant letting her go. All this I saw instantly in the tearful demeanor of that kindly, elderly gentleman. As it turned out, that evening at the Canadian embassy was to be the last time he ever saw his granddaughter.

Newly assigned to Prague, I had just completed four years as Canada’s trade commissioner in Vienna, Austria. My work over the past four years involved making calls on business contacts in the soviet-bloc countries covered from the trade office in Vienna and coming and going regularly through the barbed wire, guard dogs and watch towers of heavily fortified crossing points. Until then I was always secure in the knowledge that my diplomatic passport and license plates would ensure that I could leave behind the austere atmosphere of the communist bloc countries of my trade promotion “parish”. Vienna was still enjoying its reputation as a democratic oasis for post war entrepreneurs and diplomats

and even spies, all of whom enjoyed its vibrant and music filled social life. From time to time, there were cautious indications of a potential thaw but the chill of Cold War still hung over Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Bloc neighbourhood.

During my four years on assignment in Austria I had indeed driven back and forth frequently between Vienna and Prague and was familiar with both the road and the border controls. Due to improving opportunities for Canadian exports, External Affairs in Ottawa decided to add a Trade Commissioner to the complement of staff at our embassy in Czechoslovakia. That new Trade Commissioner turned out to be me and by July 1968 I had set up shop in the Prague Embassy. From Monday to Friday I stayed at a small hotel near the Chancery and returned by car to Vienna each weekend to be with my wife, our two year old Timothy and his new baby brother.

By early 1968 there were already signs that the Soviet regime felt threatened as the pace of stirrings of intellectual freedom picked up momentum. In the beginning they tolerated some limited liberalization but then Alexander Dubcek replaced the Stalinist-loyal premier Novotny as Communist party leader and the subversive expression “socialism with a human face” was being bandied about. This was apparently not the brand of socialism that the regime had in mind and the atmosphere turned distinctly less tolerant. To add fuel to the flames, a people’s manifesto entitled *Two Thousand Words*, critical of the previous twenty years of Soviet rule was published. And then it happened: August 20, 1968, in a violent act of aggression the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies invaded Czechoslovakia.

Prague was suddenly an occupied city with Soviet troops, tanks and armored personnel carriers bullying their way down the streets; heedless of the damage they left in their wake. Smoke curled from the chimney of the American Embassy as the process of burning sensitive files began. Although there were some casualties and

sporadic gunfire and the radio station in Prague came under tank fire, the fear of a general uprising and heavy bloodshed, which had been the result of the Soviet invasion of Hungary twelve years earlier, did not materialize. Instead, anticipating the repression that would follow in a country once again firmly under the control of the Soviets, thousands were fleeing the country. In short, this was not a time for a diplomat from the other side of the Curtain, to be assisting the exit of citizens on the run...with or without the support of his headquarters.

Ability to consult our superiors was particularly problematic because the small Canadian Embassy had no resident ambassador at the time, as the invasion took place in an interim period between ambassadors. I had begun my new assignment by attempting to meet as in the past, with officials in the state-trading agencies, but this became increasingly difficult after the invasion. Government officials suspected of liberal sentiments were either being shadowed by communist-loyal colleagues or had been replaced by others who were unsure if they should be even meeting with a western diplomat. Travelling anywhere in the Soviet-occupied country was severely restricted, even for diplomats, but temporarily at least, I was in a unique position amongst my new embassy colleagues in Prague as I had a legitimate pretext to drive back to Vienna each weekend. My diplomatic plates allowed me to come and go on roads that were by now crowded with Czechs in their overloaded Skoda automobiles seeking to resettle in a country with a more promising future for young families. Drivers on the run now had to share the road with Russian troop trucks, their soldiers peering menacingly into any car heading in the direction of the Austrian border.

Curiously, in the first few days after the invasion, any Czechoslovak citizen with credible travel papers had relatively little trouble leaving the country. We speculated that this was a “good riddance” response, and the Soviet authorities felt that Czechoslovak communism would be better off without the liberal thinkers

who had been agitating for reform. However, it soon became evident that the exodus was composed of a broad spectrum of the intelligentsia...students, teachers, scientists, journalists and doctors; in short, people whose absence would be to the detriment of their country's future. In addition, many Czechs studying or vacationing outside the country were not returning home and in the year following the invasion we learned that one hundred and fifty thousand talented, well-educated Czechoslovakian citizens had relocated beyond the Curtain.

Meanwhile, back home in Ottawa, the prime minister's office and the Department of External Affairs responded to the crises by granting refugee status to those who had already arrived in the camps in Austria. Plans were underway to bolster immigration services at our Vienna embassy and to resettle large numbers, fast.

Sound familiar?

For fear of aggravating already strained relations with a key regional customer for wheat exports, Canadian government policy was to expedite the processing of refugees who had fled Czechoslovakia. We would not assist in any way, Czechoslovak citizens escaping their chaotic homeland. For Monika and me, this was clearly one of those permission-or-forgiveness options. We chose the diplomat's potentially career-limiting forgiveness route.

By that Friday September 6, 1968, when her grandfather brought Monika to our Prague embassy, it had been 17 turbulent days since the invasion and unauthorized flight from the country was becoming not just difficult but dangerous. Russian patrols were stopping cars approaching the border and controls were tightening at the border. I'll never know how, but my consular office colleague and Monika's grandfather had come up with some kind of *laissez-passer* letter written in Russian. Because I had a two-year-old son of my own, my Peugeot wagon was equipped with a toddler's booster seat. Grandfather settled Monika into the seat that was suspended over the passenger seat beside me (there were no safety

regulated car seats or seat belts in those days) and supported by several embassy staff, waved goodbye as Monika and I set off into the night.

Shortly after we started on our way, and she realized her grandfather was not with us, there were some frantic tears but my new friend soon settled back to enjoy the ride and the movement of the car in the night. During that five-hour drive I don't know how many times Monika and I ran through my complete repertoire of songs and stories for two-year-olds. She always listened attentively, not understanding a word but with a clear preference for Inky Pinky Spider.

It was pitch black when we approached the great rolls of barbed wire and drove through the mined clearing surrounding the watchtowers at the border. A Czechoslovak guard, who appeared to be about sixteen, approached holding his rifle in shaking hands. I hoped he wouldn't notice that mine were shaking too. A sullen Russian back-up sentinel with trademark Kalashnikov scowled from behind the boy soldier. As I handed over my diplomatic passport for inspection I decided not to test Monika's papers unless asked so I mumbled the Czech word for daughter. The young border guard nodded and off we went. Monika was wide-eyed but never made a sound until we were clear of the checkpoint. I wonder if she could sense my relief. A few more rounds of Inky-Pinky and the bright lights of Vienna confirmed that we were safe and had left behind the drab, ill-lit communist world.

Our own two year old welcomed the slightly disoriented Monika with great exuberance. Soon they were freshly bathed and bouncing in his crib together. My wife still remembers finding a delicate lace-edged nightgown in that little suitcase that caused her heart to lurch with the realization of the enormous significance of this little girl's journey. Sometime during the night Monika awoke just once and began crying for her grandmother, but she was quickly soothed to sleep in the arms of our children's gentle Austrian nanny.

The Canadian government had begun sponsoring flights for approved refugees and many were already *en route* from Vienna. Only two days later Monika, now an experienced traveler and in the care of a flight attendant, joined one of those several planeloads bound for Montreal. That adventure ended when she was met by her student parents and started her new life in Canada.

Although reporters were present at the arrival of the planeload of refugees and a subsequent newspaper article featured Monica's reunification with her parents, nothing was ever written or spoken about how Monika travelled from Prague to Vienna. We later sent a short note to her parents' Canadian address, not mentioning the journey, simply telling them what a brave little girl Monika had been and enclosing a photo of Monika and our son – two year olds playing happily together in our home in Vienna.

Many years passed and then phone calls began to reach us in far corners of the world each September 6. It was Monika's father just calling to say thank you, on that special anniversary. A few years after the Berlin wall was hammered into rubble and Communist-era émigrés were able to travel to Czechoslovakia, we received a lovely photo taken in Wenceslaus square, the heart of Prague – Monika, her parents and her two younger sisters all smiling happily on their first visit back to their former homeland. In recent years, after our return to Canada and retirement, the parents sought us out, eager to hear any small detail I might remember about that journey with Monika. Sensitive to the fact that my career-standing could be compromised by the regulatory indiscretion, they had been reluctant to make contact earlier. We have become good friends and as we learn of the happy, successful lives of their daughters and share stories and photos of our respective grandchildren it is clear that that spontaneous decision at the embassy in Prague was a forgivable misuse of diplomatic privilege.

Lawrence Dickenson

DISTRIBUTING GAS MASKS IN BAHRAIN

Lawrence (Larry) Dickenson who began his career as a Trade Commissioner, enjoyed a varied experience that included positions as ambassador, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet and foreign service assignments in places like Moscow, Belgrade, Vienna, Cairo, Seoul, the Gulf States and Indonesia.

When joining Canada's Foreign Service, little did I know that I would experience war. That happened when I was ambassador accredited to five small Gulf countries. While resident in Kuwait, I was simultaneously also non-resident ambassador to Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman.

In early August 1990, when Iraq invaded and occupied all of Kuwait, I was on summer vacation. I was unable to return to Kuwait City despite two attempts. After negotiating with the Crown Prince of Qatar for "ramp space" for our air force in Doha and signing on behalf of our government, a bilateral military agreement with the foreign minister of Bahrain, I established tiny temporary Canadian embassies in Manama, Bahrain and Doha, Qatar. The objective was to provide a civilian interface with conservative Muslim governments and their citizens for the 3,000 Canadian armed forces stationed in the region both on shore and at sea. Our F-18s flew out of Doha. The Canadian military HQ was based in Manama, which also served as the base port for our naval ships. I set up residence in Manama.

As the months dragged on, Saddam Hussein stubbornly refused to leave Kuwait. UN resolution # 678 set a clear date for the authorization of a coalition to forcibly liberate Kuwait if Iraqi forces had not withdrawn – it was to be midnight, 15 January

1991. Bahrain is an island nation connected to Saudi Arabia by a very long causeway. As that date drew closer and closer, I and my tiny team in the embassy encouraged Canadians to leave, as once the war commenced, there would be no civilian air connections and no access by personal vehicles to the causeway. Many left, but we could not “order” the remaining souls to leave.

Through an excellent system of volunteer wardens (Canadians living and/or working in a foreign country), we knew exactly who remained and had their coordinates for emergency communications. This proved invaluable as Manama, like much of Saudi Arabia, was in the cross hairs of Iraq’s scud missiles. No one was certain if they were tipped with chemical or even nuclear warheads. On the other hand, Doha, Qatar was considered outside of the range of Iraq’s scuds.

Some experts suggested we should not worry about the scuds, as they were notoriously inaccurate. This gave me no comfort. To this I retorted, “So you think they will land in the sea *vs.* hitting the international airport. Perhaps they will hit a Canadian’s home rather than their intended target!”

Shortly before that UN deadline, Canada’s Department of Defense supplied the embassy with gas masks to distribute to all Canadians living in Manama. Well, not quite! These were military issue masks and not suitable for children or even small-boned adults.

With the help of our wardens, Canadians were invited to the military HQ to be trained and fitted with their own individual gas masks. We developed a “good cop – bad cop – good cop” routine that worked like a charm – for some. Our “good cop”, a delightfully sensitive Indian woman who was working as a locally engaged employee at the embassy, welcomed the families, checked their identification and took down personal details.

Next it was the turn of the “bad cop”. Oh my, one had to love her. She was a tough-as-nails military nurse who had a clear message.

She lined up our citizens ten at a time and handed out the masks. The first “bump” came when she provided masks to a young couple but completely ignored their infant who was suspended in a back pack. When they complained, she barked “these are only for adults and why on earth are you here at a time of war with a baby”. Father, crestfallen, looked rather guilty and mom burst into tears. The message was brutal but clear.



Next, she barked at women with earrings, men with beards, even Muslim women with headscarves – “take them off, shave that beard off”. Her message was that without their faces hermitically sealed by the mask, the masks would be useless. On occasion, she

would turn and secretly give me a big wink, as if to say ‘aren’t I doing a great job?’

Now, as each batch of ten individuals was leaving the base, our “good cop” would quietly note that she had been on the phone with Air France, British Airways, and other international air carriers and could guarantee seats out that very night – “can I help you with reservations” she would demurely inquire. Her gentle persuasion resulted in 16 Canadians flying to safety that very day. Whew, 16 less for us to worry about.

Alas, some could not or would not leave. Their reasons were many and frankly understandable – worries about losing jobs, leaving behind businesses, leaving behind loved ones, lack of funds to live for an indeterminable time abroad, even not wanting to bunk with in-laws for unpredictable extended periods.

As the clock ticked down relentlessly towards midnight, 15 January, I grew more and more worried about the Canadian children who remained in Manama. Tension was growing by the moment throughout the region. Many, including me, felt like piano wires ready to snap. The afternoon of 15 January, I received a call from the British ambassador. He said, “Larry, I understand you have Canadian children without masks. I have some would you like them?” My grateful reply was immediate: “Yes please, many thanks. I need a dozen this afternoon and someone from your side to instruct parents as to how they are to be worn.” I knew exactly who they were, where they lived and their parents’ phone numbers.

These families were asked to come immediately to the embassy with their children – with only hours to spare before war would be unleashed. When all were assembled, “good cop” came to see me and explained that Mr. X had come without his two children. I stormed out to the lobby and spoke with Mr. X who explained: “you have every right not to give me the masks as I did not follow embassy instructions. I was just too frightened to have them leave our home”. Well, I melted at this poor man’s abject distress and

said, “Of course you will get the two masks, just pay special attention as to how they are to be used.” They were complicated little things with tiny battery operated fans to help very young lungs pull air through fine filters. Because of those moving parts, long hair was an issue and thus the need for careful training and usage.

Saddam Husein should have listened to the UN’s ultimatum. At about 2 AM on 16 January, I was invited to the Canadian military HQ by Commodore Ken Summers, Canada’s most senior military officer in the region, to witness the start of the air war. Air force jets from many countries located in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and off aircraft carriers in the Gulf roared into action. Many days saw about 2,000 sorties. Even in the relative safety of my home, even in the shower, one could hear them. It was not the typical sound of one jet taking off or landing, it was a constant buzz as if one’s head was inside a beehive!

From then on, at all times, I wore a tiny beeper (actually a vibrator) that provided advance warning from our local military HQ of incoming scud attacks. When it went off, I would phone embassy staff who would phone the wardens who, in turn, would phone their designated wards. It was effective. We were able to get information to Canadians more quickly than our western colleagues, to ask that they put on their gas masks and stay indoors away from windows (which we had previously requested be heavily taped to avoid shards of flying glass). The best location would be showers with no exterior windows.

These masks resulted in some unusual situations. There were no less than 34 Canadian press in Bahrain and Qatar when the war started. All of them needed stories and as the war ground on, many of them were getting bored. I decided to host a very informal, simple buffet dinner for them to unwind in the tiny home that I had temporarily rented. The invitation specified that it was a “bring your own gas mask” event. Many said they had framed that invitation, as it was unique. Indeed!

Once, while chatting by phone with my elderly mother in London, Ontario, the beeper vibrated in my pocket. In abruptly signing off, I told her that I had a call on the other line. Poor dear, I doubt that I outwitted her as this was one of the first wars which was 24-7 on TV. Mothers always know!

Lessons learned: expect strength in dangerous situations from the most unusual sources. Conversely, not everyone meets challenges equally – that’s just human nature.

Jim Elliott

Consular Duties

Jim Elliott joined the Trade Commissioner Service in 1961 and spent most of his career abroad, in Pakistan, Germany (twice), France, Colombia, Venezuela and the United States (three times.) finishing as consul general in Atlanta. He became the Department's Ombudsman before retiring in 1996.

I was hired on as a trade commissioner in 1961 so, in the normal course of events, I would have had very little to do with consular duties. At a large embassy someone else would do that. Since Consular Services was the Department of External Affairs' single main source of contact with the tax-paying travelling public, it was of course entrusted to the youngest, most junior and least-experienced officer at the Embassy. Oh, a trade commissioner might be expected to serve as duty officer once in a blue moon, but you would have plenty of back-up a telephone call away if anything should come up.

For whatever reason, I served much of my career abroad, in either small Embassies or Consulates. This gave me much greater exposure to consular duties than I would otherwise have enjoyed.

My second foreign assignment was to a small European consulate, in Duesseldorf, Germany, only three foreign service officers, all trade commissioners, but with a very heavy consular workload due to the presence of a Canadian army brigade group in the area (about 5,000 soldiers plus support and dependents.) These people arrived with military travel documents but required passports to travel, usually on leave, anywhere outside NATO member countries. Main destinations seemed to be Austria, Switzerland,

Sweden and Spain (not a NATO member until 1975). In addition, Air Canada served the city airport several times a week.

Early in my posting, I was summoned to the airport on a Saturday to face a near riot by the passengers on a Canadian charter carrier in the process of going bankrupt. The presence of reporters from the local paper did nothing to ease the situation since the passengers had been told the plane would not be arriving as scheduled that day. They were due to return to Canada after a three-week European holiday, and few, if any, had any funds left. My only resource was the singularly unhelpful Manual of Consular Instructions which clearly stated that before funds could be advanced to a stranded Canadian, a particular form had to be filled out, in quintuplicate, (using carbon paper in those days.) This was clearly impossible given the numbers involved, and the fact that some, landed immigrants rather than citizens, could be helped only in the most unusual conditions.

Aided by the Air Canada rep, who really had no reason other than friendship to get involved, I took the bull by the horns, said that everyone had to be fed and put to bed. We chartered a bus and sent the bunch of them somewhere up in the Ruhr area to a hotel willing and able to accommodate them for a small amount.

The next day the bus brought them back, and in due course a one-lunged old Super-Connie limped into the airport to take everyone home. I was, of course personally exposed for the bus and hotel bills to the tune of about a year's pay. The distressed airline's credit cards had been cancelled, I learned from the airport authorities, meaning they would have to pay cash for their fuel. Using, and undoubtedly exceeding, any authority I may have had as consul (OK, vice consul, but who's counting?) I got the control tower to agree that the aircraft would not be cleared for take-off before I gave the word. I then demanded payment from the crew, knowing there was a cache of cash somewhere on the plane. After a thorough search, I found a large wad of US currency concealed

in the purse of one of the flight attendants, which I appropriated, extracting enough to reimburse myself for the bus and hotel costs.

After some discussion I returned enough money to buy fuel to reach Reykjavik where the pilot thought the credit cards might still be good. This was safely out of my jurisdiction and left me out of pocket only a small amount of money which I thought I could recover one way or another from the post accounts, for which, as junior officer I was also responsible. I heard nothing more from either the plane or its passengers. I presume they made it back to Canada safely, unless of course they are still in Reykjavik these fifty years later.

By coincidence a similar planeload was stranded in Britain by the same charter airline that same weekend. The consular official there followed the book; the passengers spent an uncomfortable weekend camped out in the airport and the Department, and by extension the government, were flayed in the Canadian press for cruelty, insensitivity etc. Of course I received neither praise nor condemnation for my rather egregious misuse of authority, albeit in a good cause.

There were other unusual consular cases during my Duesseldorf assignment. On one memorable occasion I received a call, again well after office hours, from the manager of a local hotel who had an unruly Canadian guest. It turned out that the Canadian in question was a ten-year veteran of the Alcoholics Anonymous program who had been travelling with a bunch of his friends on a European tour. His friends decided that it might be fun to get Wilf drunk, ending his ten years of sobriety. This proved easier than getting him sober again, so his friends left him in the hotel and boarded their charter flight home. By the time I was called he had run out of funds and the hotel manager out of patience. What to do? I was stuck for any better idea so I took the man home and, over the course of the next several days managed to wean him off alcohol gradually, obtain plane fare from his wife in Canada, and dry him out enough for Air Canada to take him home.

Wilf was not the only consular houseguest I entertained over the course of my career. There was also “Shipwreck Magee” some years later in Bogota. Again I received a phone call at home, after hours, this time in the evening of December 23rd from the honorary British consul in Barranquilla telling me that he had a distressed Canadian on his hands and what was I going to do? I knew that I was unlikely to get any meaningful support from headquarters that close to Christmas but told the British Consul he would be reimbursed if he sent the Canadian up to me. “Shipwreck” arrived the next day, Christmas Eve, and found Bogota at over 8,000 feet elevation, substantially colder than Barranquilla on the coast. He was still wearing the jeans he had on after the shipwreck, the tattered shirt and straw sandals he had been given by the impoverished Colombian peasants who had taken pity on him after he came ashore. He told me his story.

He and two friends had been taking a load of Colombian marijuana across the Caribbean in a sailing boat. Remember this was back in the day when the marijuana trade had room for amateurs, which would be referred to as “gentleman players” in a British sporting context. Anyhow, the three adventurers got to sampling the product and somehow their vessel caught fire and burned to the waterline just after they abandoned ship. The water was warm and shore was close. When they reached land, all they owned were the blue jeans they were wearing and the ropes holding them up. The first group of Colombian peasants they encountered gave them some old shirts and straw hats to protect them from the tropical sun, and straw sandals to protect their feet as they set out to walk to the nearest city, Barranquilla, where there were foreign consulates.

I brought “Shipwreck” home, gave him an old suit ready for charity and an old shirt which, while frayed at the collar, still had its French cuffs. I threw in a pair of cuff links I had been given on a visit to some agricultural equipment manufacturer or other, some badly worn shoes, etc. and took him home. We didn’t really want to leave him alone there so we took him to the Christmas Eve

service at the local Anglican church. The next day we set an extra place for him at the family Christmas dinner. On Boxing Day we managed to raise someone in Ottawa who contacted his family in Canada. They provided the funds so we bought him a plane ticket and sent him off, still in the old suit, etc.



There was a sequel to this story. About two years later, just as I was getting ready to leave Bogota, the office receptionist told me there was some disreputable looking character asking for me. Curiosity got the better of me and there was “Shipwreck” back in Colombia, and, it turned out, back in the same business. He had come to Bogota to return the farm implement cuff links that he

assumed were quite valuable. It was about lunchtime so I treated him to a slice of pizza and he told me what life was like in the dope trade in Colombia in those days. He lived in a section of Barranquilla known as the “Zona Negra” where the police dared not go, but had to leave it to meet his suppliers, not surprisingly, those same police!

He said he was planning to retire after making another hundred thousand dollars. I wonder where he is now. Probably dead or in jail. I think I may still have those cuff links. I’ll have to look.

Robin Higham

Petites astuces/Tricks of the Trade

*Following thirty-five years in the Canadian foreign service (Accra, Liverpool, Boston, Bangkok, Rome, Bruxelles and Rabat) **Robin Higham** re-cycled as senior fellow at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. Returning to academic life he was surprised to discover how the students in international affairs programmes, appreciated hearing about some of the practical life lessons he picked up while serving abroad. *Des petites astuces/Tricks of the Trade* illustrates how years of on-the-job experience can prepare one to handle challenging circumstances in ways which any amount of formal education may not.*

By the time they are a few years into their careers, most diplomats have made enough mistakes to build an impressive repertoire of *petite astuces*...“tricks of the trade” for staying out of trouble when dealing with sensitive issues. Second from the top of most colleagues' lists is the one that says “When you know that you can't do it alone, go to your Rolodex and find a local contact who might be in a position to help solve your problem.” Of course the first *petite astuce*, number one, is “Have a great Rolodex”. Good contacts are after all, a primary rationale for maintaining an embassy in the first place.

Error-prone diplomats also eventually learn that in a crisis, the person in your Rolodex that you need to recruit is often the same one who, if not on your side in advance, could well become a barrier to the outcome you are looking for.

When you have made the link between problem solving and collaborator-of-choice, you must be very persuasive when you

explain why your preferred outcome is in his/her own best interest too.

Finally and above all, honour the “No Surprises” rule. Once on board, keep Collaborator fully informed of your progress every step of the way. Just another sub *petite astuce*.

But it can be more complicated than that. On some occasions, your diplomatic rules of engagement, your mandate from headquarters, may have to be compromised and yet another *petite astuce* sometimes known as a “much regretted failure to inform” may be unavoidable. That means that even if your professional diplomat colleagues in the Pearson building understood your quandary and agreed with how you managed the crises, you may have to decide not to keep them in the loop as you tackle this one. At least, *sans crayon*, not in writing. If the incident in question goes public, the desk officer drafting the minister’s briefing for Question Period in parliament needs to be able to write that the embassy may perhaps have acted irresponsibly and certainly did not inform the Department or the Minister. The Minister may even want to “deplore the embassy’s disregard for established and appropriate procedures”... stuff like that.

I had been on assignment as Canada’s ambassador in Rabat for about three years and thanks to many diplomatic courtesy calls, hours and hours of dinner parties and national day receptions, and, yes, golf games too...I had a really great Rolodex at my disposal. It may even have been as complete as the mental Rolodex of Jean-Jacques, my French friend in Abidjan so many years earlier (See “Always Talk to Strangers”).

Incoming trade and investment delegations from Québec to Morocco were frequent...almost a matter of routine for the Mission. In those days the Canadian embassy enjoyed much-coveted access to both the Palace (remember Hassan II?) and to Morocco’s most important government officials and cabinet ministers. This was in large part because Moroccans were determined to broaden

their international relations beyond the EU and their ex-colonial masters, the French.

Canada was a perfect alternative for them. We brought access to North American technology, trade, investment and business practices, and we could do it in French...their first second language. Several colleague ambassadors in Rabat were on occasion noticeably envious of the access we enjoyed and how Moroccan government officials always seemed particularly keen to protect and develop the Canada-Morocco bilateral relationship. (Our problem at the embassy was more often about generating counterpart private-sector business enthusiasm at home.)

With all that as background, my story begins one morning when the embassy consular affairs officer asked to see me for guidance on an urgent matter which had just come up in our active “Distressed Canadians” file. She had just received a telephone call from a desperate young mother in Montreal who explained that her two daughters...I think around five and ten years of age at the time, had been “kidnapped” and taken to Morocco by her second husband, a Moroccan immigrant to Canada. He was the father of only the younger of the two girls, but had taken them both. Mother had learned from him by telephone that the children were staying with his parents in some un-named tiny town on the edge of the desert in southern Morocco. *Dans le bled*. It seems that the couple had become estranged when, according to the young mother at least, her husband had grown increasingly religious-conservative and intolerant of liberal Canadian customs. Whatever the circumstances, she was desperately requesting help from her embassy to recover her children.

Problems like this are any embassy’s nightmare scenario. There are so many more ways to get these situations wrong than to get them right. Failure to return the children to their mother and their country of birth would demonstrate for the critical media yet again, the impotence of Canada’s representatives abroad. The national media at home would love the story. On the other hand, success

at facilitating their return by exercising the kind of subterfuge the father had used to get them out of Canada and into Morocco would almost certainly jeopardize the bilateral relationship for which we were responsible. A guaranteed “no-win” situation.

My first response was to seek the advice of the embassy’s media and cultural affairs specialist...a locally engaged Moroccan woman who had earned our trust as interpreter of “how things really work around here”. Fatima reminded me that Moroccan law on child custody matters was designed, much like our own, to block children leaving the country without the written consent of both parents. But Fatima sympathised with the plight of the mom back in Canada. Her no-nonsense advice was immediate and certain: Canadian mother must come to Morocco and rebuild trust with her estranged husband so she can learn where her kids are and perhaps even visit with them. Fatima nevertheless was categorical: getting the kids back to Canada with the father’s consent would never happen. Mother would have to employ not just her womanly wiles but unconventional and probably even illegal tactics to get them out of the country. Nevertheless, the first challenge was just to find out where the children were living.

The following steps took place over about three months and I will not bore you with the details but thanks to some creative networking by an embassy officer attending the parent-teacher meeting at the American school, we learned of a job opening for a mathematics teacher in a local school for ex-patriots.

Luck was with us for once. Our distressed Canadian mother was a certified high-school math teacher. She landed the job, found lodgings in an apartment in Rabat, made contact with her almost-ex. She did as advised by our cultural affairs specialist and in time, learned the location of her two kids.

Next step was up to me according to the no-nonsense Fatima and so I dutifully asked for an appointment “on an urgent matter regarding the bilateral relationship” with Morocco’s powerful Minister of

the Interior... a cabinet minister who I knew was amongst those senior government officials anxious to strengthen the Canada-Morocco bilateral relationship. I explained my dilemma regarding the desperate Canadian mother and her children and reflected on how difficult it would be for Morocco's image in Canada if the Canadian media got hold of her story. We agreed that a crisis like this was to be avoided at all costs and so he put one of his special security officers on the case immediately.

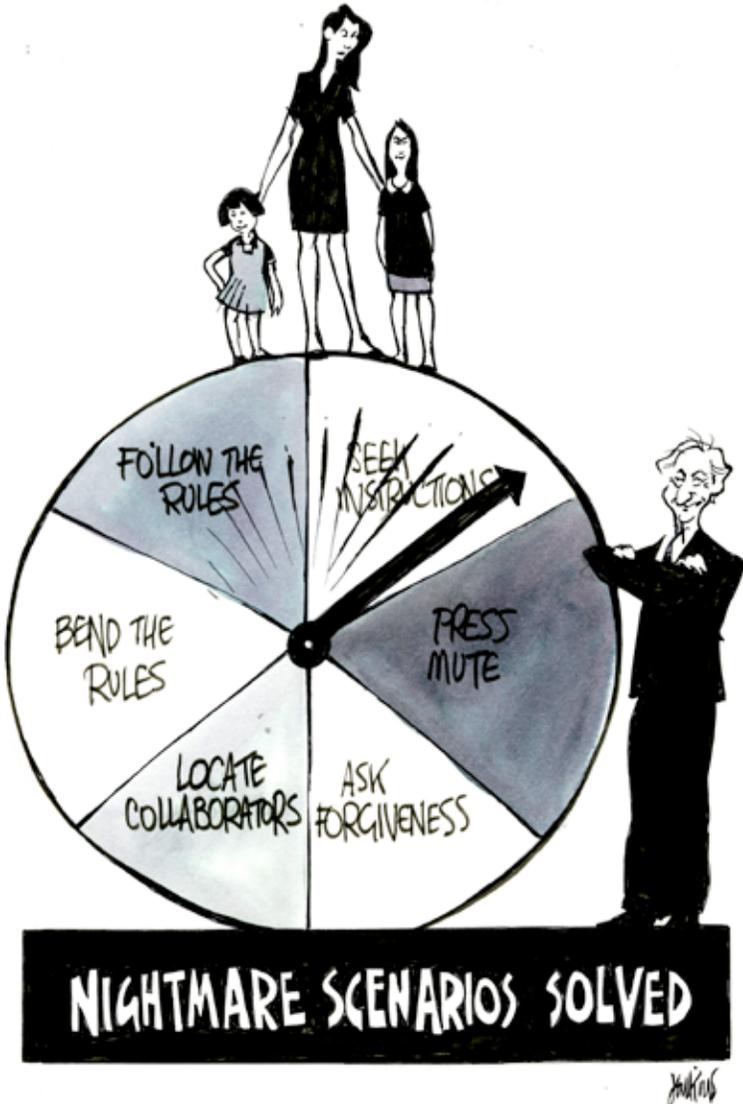
Weeks later a midnight flight out of Marrakech airport was booked for the three of them by some "unknown official". The embassy consular division decided that the children's Canadian passports had mysteriously gone missing and so prepared new ones, carelessly omitting the Moroccan-style second name of the youngest child.

Mother negotiated a visit with her children who were still residing with her estranged husband's parents. They made their escape to the nearest international airport, driven by none other than Fatima in her personal car...discreetly shadowed for the long journey, by the minister's special security guy.

They made it out OK and we got a signal the following day of their safe arrival in Montreal. No media coverage and most important, no betrayal of my undertaking with the Interior Minister to stay under the radar. We probably broke all the rules and certainly some Moroccan laws with respect to child custody.

A few days later Husband showed up at the Embassy, asked to see the ambassador...and I warily agreed to meet him, accompanied of course by Fatima. He appeared wild eyed, less than stable, menacingly agitated. As he spoke it became clear that his wife had broken our confidence and said enough over the telephone for him to figure out that the embassy had something to do with their escape to Canada. He threatened to inform our prime minister. We helpfully complied with this request to give him the correct

mailing address. The subsequent *petit silence*, dear reader, is how the story ends.



3

Cultural Curiosities

Marcella Bissonnet
Hunting Ghosts in Jakarta

Marcella Bissonnet
Chile: Une traversée de frontière insolite

Richard Kohler
O Bordo A Bordo

John Lang
Dutch Entrepreneurship

Mary Taylor
Canadians Born Abroad

Daniel Livermore
The Symbolism of a Guatemala City Intersection

Marcella Bissonnet

Hunting Ghosts in Djakarta

Marcella Bissonnet accompanied her husband Ted throughout his long career in the Foreign Service and shared with him the ups and down of a roving life. After a stint in Ottawa when he was seconded to Treasury Board, Ted was posted as Ambassador to Indonesia and then to Argentina. Following her husband's untimely death in Ottawa, Marcella moved to Cannes where she started a writing career of her own. A Parisian editor has published five of her works.

In October 1968, my husband came home and announced that he had been appointed ambassador to Indonesia. He flew to Djakarta right after the Christmas holidays, leaving me in the middle of a cold Ottawa winter to make arrangements for the children's schooling, the house, and our belongings. The worst of the winter was over when I was finally ready to fly to the tropics and take on my role of *Madame l'ambassadrice*, which also meant supervising a number of house and garden staff.

Being an ambassador's wife isn't always easy. I sometimes felt like an unpaid civil servant loaded with duties and deprived of rights! However, looking back on our last ten years/two posts of our diplomatic career, I realize it gave me a chance to get to leaders, artists, writers, industrial barons, and other exception people. It also meant learning to cope with strange and difficult events: the accidental death of our gardener; the gift – a baby orangutan – my husband had to decline, even at the risk of offending a senior official in Sumatra; or later in Argentina, bumping into terrorists on our way home one day.

In the late sixties a mushrooming population already filled the city of Djakarta. While housing was tight, there was a proliferation of empty homes that nobody would inhabit. Even the squatters preferred precarious tenements on the escarpment of dirty canals built by the Dutch, or on inhospitable muddy riverbanks, to the more comfortable habitations that were known to be the abode of vengeful ghosts. Indonesians strongly believed that if someone had encountered a violent death, his ghost would return to where the death had occurred.

Ghost stories were not an unusual subject of conversation. I recall one told by a Norwegian woman whom I had befriended. Her fluency in the Bahasa language and knowledge of the country's mysticism was a factor in saving her husband's life. At a time when the army was trying to regain control of an area infested by terrorists, soldiers and policemen with machine guns were seen everywhere and anyone caught trying to overtake a military vehicle was shot on the spot. One weekend, this woman and her husband were driving to the mountains, the husband at the wheel. It was late afternoon and perhaps because of a fear of the coming darkness, – it comes so suddenly in the tropics – he overtook what looked like an ordinary truck. No sooner had he passed it than their car was forced to the curb, and a uniformed man appeared from nowhere with a rifle pointed at him. Scared to death, the woman began to scream in Bahasa: “ If you shoot my husband, his ghosts will haunt you for the rest of your life. “ At these words the man stepped quickly backward, jumped into the truck, and yelled at the driver to speed away!

In the sixties, from Sumatra to Java, Bali, the Celebes, Kalimantan and thousands of other beautiful islands, a sort of mysticism and a fear of ghosts was common.

The accident happened on a fateful afternoon with no wind, not even a gentle breeze. At the back of the garden, a tree, probably rotten inside, suddenly fell and landed on the neck of our gardener,

Ahmed. I heard a sort of roar and some screams coming from outside. Recognizing our cook, Rumini's, high pitched voice, I rushed to the garden just in time to see the poor man exhale his last breath, a trickle of blood coming out of his mouth and Rumini pouring water over his head. A few moments later, other staff arrived in the garden and began to yell in a mixture of Bahasa and English.

I could guess that they were calling the neighbours' employees, probably asking for a doctor, or policeman or whatever help one could get in such a terrible circumstance.

In no time, a small crowd had gathered around the corpse. Having heard several stories about the Indonesians' belief in ghosts, the thought crossed my mind that our house employees might now walk out on us, even if it meant leaving well-paid jobs. The ancestral belief that Ahmed's ghost would haunt the residence was probably stronger in them than the fear of not finding an equivalent position at another embassy.

Rumini and the young maid were hysterical, but not speaking their language and their English being rudimentary, all I could do was wait for someone from the embassy or the police to intervene and calm them down. I was at a loss for what to say or do. With my husband in Kuala Lumpur for meetings with Canadian politicians, I was left alone to deal with this dramatic situation. I had tried to call the First Secretary at the embassy, but our telephone line was dead. Fortunately, Youssuf, our butler, was able to contact the embassy from a neighbour's phone and the Second Secretary came over shortly afterwards. A relief.

The next-door neighbour, an Indonesian of Chinese descent called Ling Wang, whose way of manifesting the spectrum of human emotions was a broad smile from a mouth endowed with crooked and yellow teeth, came to see me the following day.

– This sad event of yesterday afternoon...he began warily.

- Yes...yes... It is very sad, I muttered. He was such a good man.
- Because our properties are adjacent, Wang continued, this unfortunate event of yesterday afternoon will cast a spell on my house as well. Your gardener's ghost will surely seek revenge...
- Oh! You shouldn't worry about yourself! You can move somewhere else, you own the house, you can do what suits you best, sell it or rent it to a foreigner who does not believe in ghosts...
- Well! Wang went on, I fear that the spell will follow me... you know, Indonesian ghosts are very persistent... No, believe me, they don't let go, even if an ocean separates you. You should be careful, Mrs, even if you are a foreigner, they can follow you to your country.

Known for his cunning, I could not help wondering what this man was aiming at. His hands had started to shake and some tears seemed to pour out of his eyes, but I wondered if it was part of a comedy. And he did not stop:

- They are very clever, our ghosts. With this unfortunate death, if I leave my house, it will remain empty. Nobody will rent or buy a place inhabited by ghosts, or too near one that is, and house staff won't work in it, ah! ah! Poor me... What can be done? Will you help me, Mrs?
- Well... Sure, I'll think about it and do what I can.
- Something can be done, continued Wang in a persuasive tone. Your residence can be purified and good luck will return to us, especially to a fine lady like you. I can see to it, and the Ambassador will be very grateful when he returns, for no harm will have come upon his family.

- What do you have in mind? I asked, feeling both nervous and fed up with his insistence.
- We can perform a Salamatan.
- What’s that?
- It’s the most powerful exorcism we have, ghost proof, I can assure you. Of course, it requires the intervention of a mullah, the Muslim priest, so to speak. You must know how clever they are. Only a mullah can purify your house after a violent death.

I didn’t know what to answer. I was not sure that Wang could be trusted, but on the other hand, I had to protect our family, and what harm could an exorcism do? Furthermore, how could I run a diplomatic residence if all the house staff left and no replacements could be found because of a ghost?

- Ok, Mr. Wang, you can go ahead and call a mullah.
- Of course, I will, but first I must tell you that it will cost some money. Mullahs are very busy... perhaps a monetary contribution to a mosque might be a convincing argument, but I am not rich, you know. I inherited my house. You have not seen the inside, it is very modest. Besides, this year my wife came down with a lingering disease, one of my daughters is disabled and will never marry... and my mother...

That was a bit too much, I thought.

- All right, all right, Mr. Wang, I said, interrupting his litany, now tell me how much, please!
- I know how anxious you are to have the spell removed. Hmm.. Let me think... I might be able to arrange it for only fifty thousand. We’ll need plenty of food. The neighbours will come, and their employees as well. It’s our tradition, you know, everybody around here must

participate... That means a lot of people expecting to get a good meal. I heard that Rumini is a super cook...

I was sure that, guessing my anxiety, Wang had doubled the amount he had previously considered. After a rapid calculation I realised that fifty thousand, a large sum in rupiahs, wasn't that much in dollars, however; wouldn't it be stupid to give in too easily? I decided to play his game...

– It's a lot of money, I sighed.

I thought about my savings from my job in Ottawa and the special holidays I had planned for the family. I also wondered if a Catholic priest might not be cheaper, as Catholics also practice exorcisms. But in this country the ghosts must surely be Muslim and wouldn't accept the intervention of a priest! What a dilemma! My thoughts went to Ahmed. Somewhere in the distant island of Makassar lived a wife and seven children. That's where he should be buried, I told myself, and his ghost should join him!

After another exchange, Wang reduced the cost to forty thousand. I said yes.

- When do you think the Salamatan can be performed? I asked.
- As soon as possible, he replied, that is if you want to be sure that the employees who have worked for many years in your residence won't leave. You know, they can do it suddenly, and without any explanation! With a ghost wondering on the premises, you should be aware that it would become impossible to replace them. Employees are particularly scared of them! Ah! So heartbreaking for them, this is also their home, you know.

The day of the Salamatan arrived. My husband had just returned from his business trip and was not happy about such a ceremony being performed on Canadian government grounds. I explained to

him that he shouldn't worry, that not belonging to the same faith, we wouldn't have to participate, but only watch from the first floor balcony.

That morning, the household staff began before dawn with a constant to-and-fro between our house and the neighbour's. Assisted by some friendly cooks, by sunrise Rumini had already started to concoct several dishes.

Early in the afternoon a large carpet was laid on the garden lawn and shortly afterwards people began to arrive. Dressed in their best sarongs, the women gathered at the far end of the garden while the men removed their shoes, lined them up in a sort of inner circle and sat on their heels around the carpet. Everyone kept still waiting for the mullah, a tall bearded man wearing a long tunic who was followed by a young boy holding a tray with a brass bowl in which incense was burning. After a pause of profound silence, the mullah's deep voice came out loud and clear, with words seemingly repeated at regular intervals that sounded like a prayer but could have been a curse. When he was finished, the men bent forward touching the ground with their heads, all facing the same direction. We couldn't see much of the women, as they were still at a fair distance from the carpet. After a second interval of silence, the men resumed their sitting position and began to chant a monotonous melody that almost put me to sleep. When they finished, giggles could be heard coming out of the kitchen. Soon afterwards Rumini and some young women carried platters laden with meat, chicken, fish, vegetables, large bowls of rice and other edibles. All the dishes were laid on the carpet and everybody ate with their fingers. As soon as a platter was emptied, another replaced it, the eating lasting almost until darkness fell.

After eating a large amount of food, the mullah rose, chanted again, then left, followed again by the young boy. Chatting amongst themselves, the men put their shoes on and began to disperse, the women trailing slowly behind. The carpet was removed after the last person was gone.

Wang came to see us a couple of days later.

- Your Excellency, he uttered patting my husband on the shoulder, now you can rest in peace. The house has been purified, the servants won't leave and no ghost will harm you here or back in your country.

And he was right!

Marcella Bissonnet

Chili, une traversée de frontière insolite

*Dans son rôle d'épouse, **Marcella Bissonnet** a accompagné son mari tout le long de sa carrière de diplomate et partagé les hauts et les bas d'une vie vagabonde. L'Indonésie et l'Argentine, où Ted avait été envoyé comme ambassadeur, ont été les derniers postes du couple à l'étranger. À la suite du décès de son mari, advenu à peine un an après le retour à Ottawa, Marcella s'est installée à Cannes où elle a entamé une carrière à elle : celle d'écrivaine. Un défi, puisqu'elle n'avait pas poursuivi ses études dans la langue de Molière ! Cinq de ses ouvrages ont été publiés en France.*

C'était le 7 juillet 1971, nous vivions en Argentine depuis un an. Les vacances scolaires d'hiver venaient de commencer et nous avons pensé emmener les enfants quelque part au Chili. N'ayant jamais mis les pieds dans ce pays, mis à part ce que les médias rapportaient, je n'en savais pas grand-chose. J'avais cependant entendu parler de Portillo comme d'une station de ski extraordinaire ! En 1966 Jean-Claude Killy y avait battu un record de vitesse. À treize et dix-sept ans, nos enfants étaient de bons skieurs et nous avons donc choisi d'y aller. À l'époque, la station n'offrait qu'un seul hôtel, le Portillo, immense bâtiment jaune à l'air de caserne, sis à 2850 mètres d'altitude, entouré de majestueuses montagnes frisant les 4000, 5000 mètres ou plus. À presque 7000 mètres, l'Aconcagua, le plus haut pic des Amériques, domine les paysages. En été, ces montagnes abruptes et désertes donnent l'impression d'un monde lunaire, en hiver, l'abondance de poudreuse et de soleil en font un paradis pour les adeptes des sports de glisse !

Des amis chiliens nous avaient prévenus que l'échec de la réforme agraire du gouvernement Allende avait entraîné une grave pénurie alimentaire. S'approvisionner était devenu difficile même pour les stations touristiques les plus branchées. Il ne fallait donc pas s'attendre à une cuisine pour fins gourmets à l'hôtel Portillo ! Mais qu'importe, nous l'avions choisi pour le ski, non pour la table !

Au départ de Buenos Aires nous avons pris le train de nuit pour Mendoza, capitale de la province du même nom, un trajet rectiligne d'un millier de kilomètres à travers une Pampa monotone qui semble s'étendre à l'infini. Bruyant et cahotant, ce train n'offrait pas beaucoup de confort, même les jeunes avaient du mal à s'endormir. Or, peu avant l'aube — on n'était pas loin de Mendoza —, un tremblement de terre se produisit dans cette région connue pour être hautement sismique. Nous n'avons rien ressenti, ou peut-être que nous nous étions finalement endormis. Sinon, aurions-nous pu confondre les secousses sismiques avec le ballotement du train ?

Arrivés à destination, et n'ayant noté rien d'anormal à la gare, nous avons vite pris nos places dans le *Ferrocarril Transandino*, déjà à quai. Il s'agissait d'une sorte de Micheline (probablement une relique des années 30) liant Mendoza à Santiago à travers les Andes. Un des premiers arrêts était Las Cuevas, localité frontalière et dernier avant-poste argentin abritant un bureau de douane et une gendarmerie, et sept habitants, selon le recensement de 2001, peut-être moins dans les années 70 ! Ce minuscule village, ou pour dire mieux, hameau, se situe à une altitude d'environ 3500 mètres, et la bouche du tunnel menant au Chili, nommé *Cristo Redentor*, dans les deux ou trois cents mètres plus bas.

Après environ deux heures de lente grimpée sur le flanc de la montagne, notre *Transandino* s'est soudainement immobilisé. On nous a ensuite expliqué que le tremblement de terre avait provoqué un éboulement de terrain qui avait enseveli la voie ferrée. Heureux

début de vacances, que de se trouver bloqué au milieu de nulle part ! De plus, la brève escale à Mendoza n'avait pas donné le temps pour un petit-déjeuner au bar de la gare; sauf de l'eau minérale et quelques biscuits, nous n'avions rien avalé depuis la veille ! Il va de soi que nous étions plutôt affamés, les jeunes surtout, bien qu'à leurs yeux ce contretemps aurait pu prendre l'air d'une aventure de plus à raconter aux copains !

Censé atteindre Portillo à temps pour le déjeuner de l'hôtel, notre transandin manquait de voiture-restaurant, et pour couronner le tout, le vendeur ambulant de victuailles ne s'était pas montré ce matin-là. Notre rame était immobilisée sur un contre-rail, et lorsqu'un deuxième train s'est arrêté à côté, avec sa voiture-restaurant juste en face de notre wagon, il était déjà midi passé. Par les fenêtres, on apercevait les voyageurs se régaland d'un repas comme si de rien n'était. Je les fixais, l'eau à la bouche...

Finalement, après une attente interminable, les roues de notre convoi ont commencé à grincer puis se sont remises lentement en marche. Au poste de frontière de las Cuevas, que nous avons atteint peu avant la tombée de la nuit, une mauvaise nouvelle nous attendait : trafic ferroviaire et routier complètement paralysé, le *Cristo Redentor* fermé ! Aucun moyen de se rendre à Portillo ni de rebrousser chemin pour passer plus confortablement la nuit dans un hôtel de Mendoza. Nous voici donc bloqués à 3500 mètres d'altitude, dans une localité dotée seulement d'une modeste *hosteria* (auberge), bien sûr déjà envahie par le grand nombre de voyageurs égarés. Fatigués, chargés de sacs et de skis, nous nous sommes précipité à l'auberge pour manger une bouchée. À l'intérieur, la foule était compacte et se frayait un chemin parmi tout ce monde n'était point aisé, il fallait même chevaucher des corps endormis çà et là sur le sol. Et il y en avait un peu partout, dans le hall d'entrée, au salon, dans les couloirs et même au bistro. Un chaos indescriptible et les rares chaises et fauteuils solidement occupés ! Heureusement, parmi nous il n'y avait pas d'*apunados*

(souffrant du mal de montagne), cependant, le manque de sommeil devait avoir commencé à affecter les enfants, car ils se montraient assez énervés. L'aventure avait mal tourné, aucune chambre n'était disponible à l'auberge ! L'idée de passer une nuit sans me coucher ni me laver m'affolait !

Des argentins de Buenos Aires, également bloqués dans ce coin perdu du monde, avaient conseillé à mon mari de contacter le gouverneur de la province pour lui demander de mettre un moyen de transport à notre disposition. Je ne pouvais pas m'empêcher de soupçonner que c'était pour en profiter eux-mêmes ! Mais, fidèle à ses principes, mon époux avait refusé. Jamais n'aurait-il tiré un quelconque avantage de son rang ! « Nous sommes en vacances, je ne peux pas déranger un gouverneur de province à la suite d'une catastrophe dont on ne connaît pas encore l'ampleur » avait-il rétorqué.

Alors, que faire ? Comment et où passer la nuit ?

Je ne sais pourquoi à ce moment-là, quasi avec persistance, un épisode sans importance ni relation avec la péripétie du moment surgit des tréfonds de ma mémoire. Ça remontait au temps où je vivais à Rome et travaillais dans l'immobilier, il y a des années-lumière ! Un jour, ma patronne m'invite pour me faire rencontrer sa fille, maoïste passionnée, fondatrice d'un mouvement d'extrême gauche (plus tard élue députée de gauche au Parlement européen) juste rentrée d'une tournée en URSS. Au retour, elle avait prévu une nuitée à Stockholm, mais n'avait pas trouvé où loger. Elle s'était alors rendue à la police pour demander de passer la nuit dans une prison. Aucun voleur ni ivrogne n'occupant ce jour-là la cellule du poste, sa demande avait été acceptée. Étrange que ce fait me revienne à un moment si particulier ! Et quel diable m'a poussée à faire de même, c'est-à-dire me rendre à la gendarmerie de cette localité, ne sachant même pas si elle était dotée ou non d'une prison ?

Me voici donc dans un bureau, face à un type basané au visage orné d'une moustache à la Galloise :

— *Señor*, lançais-je, *tiene unas camas en su cárcel ?*¹

Déconcerté, il me regarde sans mot dire.

²— *No se puede dejar un Embajador pasar la noche acostado sobre un piso de pasillo !* — Je reprends dans un espagnol encore balbutiant.

Honteuse d'avoir formulé une telle requête et craignant de justes reproches maritiaux, je quitte subitement la pièce en maudissant mon manque de discernement. J'entends alors le gendarme murmurer d'une voix hésitante : — *Espère, Señora, espère...* —³

Une heure plus tard, on nous fait monter dans une chambre à lits jumeaux. Enfin un endroit tranquille, une salle de bain, écartés de la foule ! J'exultais ! Derrière une porte, j'avais noté des peignoirs suspendus à un cintre. S'agissait-il de la chambre de l'aubergiste ? Avait-il été obligé de la céder ? À l'évidence, mon incursion à la gendarmerie avait porté ses fruits ! Mais la nuit n'a pas été de tout repos. Même atténué, le bruit de la foule nous parvenait et avec les pieds de notre progéniture sous le nez — seul moyen de s'enfiler à deux dans des lits si étroits — trouver le sommeil n'était pas donné.

Le jour suivant n'a pas vu d'amélioration. Aucune nouvelle au sujet des transports, la foule encore plus agitée, la nourriture qui commence à manquer, les enfants plus impatientes que jamais, Las Cuevas toujours coupée du monde. C'est pour cela que j'ai accepté la proposition de nous rendre au Chili à pied. C'est tout à fait faisable, car la distance n'est pas longue. Il fallait descendre à

¹ Monsieur, auriez-vous des lits dans votre prison ?

² Vous ne pouvez pas laisser un ambassadeur passer la nuit allongé sur le sol d'un couloir !

³ Attendez, Madame, attendez.

ski jusqu'au *Cristo Redentor*, puis le parcourir jusqu'au Chili, trois kilomètres, pas plus. Naturellement, l'idée avait enthousiasmé les jeunes, mais prévoyant une prochaine reprise du trafic, mon époux avait opté pour rester à l'auberge et s'occuper des bagages.

Le lendemain, je me suis levée de bonne heure pour me préparer. J'ai enfilé trois paires de pantalons, deux pulls, une doudoune, une parka, puis fourré le maximum de vêtements et articles de toilette dans le sac à dos. Quant aux skis, une fois dans le tunnel, je les aurais portés sur une épaule. On nous avait prévenus que la balade pourrait devenir périlleuse à cause de l'énorme quantité de neige du côté chilien. Le risque d'avalanches était donc élevé. Que faire si la neige obstruait la sortie de ce sacré tunnel ?

Nous étions une quinzaine, dont des enfants, puisque c'était le temps des vacances. Le tunnel se trouvait dans l'obscurité la plus totale à cause du tremblement de terre qui en avait affecté le système d'éclairage. Nombre de participants à la balade avaient des lampes de poche, mais nous avions oublié les nôtres à Buenos Aires. Alors, avec ceux qui en manquaient, nous avons concocté un éclairage de fortune moyennant des cannettes et des chiffons imbibés de kérosène. Aujourd'hui, une nouvelle voie ferrée traverse les Andes, et une route internationale, la transandine, lie le Chili à l'Argentine, mais en ce temps-là, le *Cristo Redentor* était le seul passage entre les deux pays. Avec des rails au milieu, le sol çà et là recouvert de glace ou de caillasse, lourdement chargés comme nous étions, et en plus dans l'obscurité, le parcours était bien pénible. On pouvait avancer seulement pas à pas. Trois kilomètres, c'est bien peu, mais sous des conditions extrêmes ça devenait ardu !

Le trajet semblait s'éterniser lorsque, quasi irréaliste, une faible lueur apparut dans le lointain. Illusion, ou la débouchée sur le pays voisin ? On n'en était pas certains, mais à mesure qu'on avançait, la clarté semblait augmenter. Puis, après encore une heure ou plus d'une marche toujours plus lente et pénible, nous avons finalement

atteint le bout du tunnel. Enchevêtrée comme une fine dentelle, une couronne de stalactites de glace reflétant les rayons du soleil en marquait la sortie. Une vision féerique ! Après des heures de semi-obscurité, la lumière devenait aveuglante. Malgré la fatigue, nous n'avons pas perdu une minute avant de chausser les skis et descendre à la douane chilienne, une sorte de baraque au milieu de la *Cordillera*, où il fallait présenter les passeports ! En aval de ce poste, un camion de l'hôtel nous attendait sur une route flanquée de congères de plusieurs mètres de hauteur.

Nous avons eu de la chance, car le tunnel peut réserver des surprises, comme nous avait raconté un alpiniste qui y avait aussi été bloqué par un tremblement de terre. Dans le tunnel, il avait été confronté à un grand troupeau de vaches !

De retour au consortium des humains, nous voici enfin installés dans une belle chambre d'hôtel ! Le parcours de Las Cuevas à Portillo avait duré une bonne partie de la journée. Épuisés, mais heureux, nous étions allongés sur les lits quand on a frappé à la porte. Je l'ai ouverte, et, surprise, qui vois-je droit devant moi ? Monsieur l'ambassadeur, frais comme une rose, un sourire narquois sur les lèvres !

- Ah ! Quel bonheur, te voir ici ! Mais comment es-tu venu, que s'est-il passé ? demandé-je, interloquée.
- Rien, chérie, mais t'aurais pu attendre ! Le tunnel est rouvert, les trains sont encore immobilisés, mais le trafic routier a repris. Un gentil skieur m'a offert un passage dans sa voiture !

Richard Kohler

O Bordo A Bordo

Richard Kohler, with over 40 years in the foreign service – France, Australia, Brazil, the U.S., Thailand, Romania – that included gigs as ambassador to Brazil and Chief of Protocol of Canada, teaches how to plant trees on the Uruguayan border.

As the jet carrying Don Jamieson, Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs, rose into the hot Brazilian sky, I could see through the haze already burning off in the noon-day sun, the vestiges of his visit: a great, long, four-metre tree trunk lying prone on the tarmac, its enormous roots gathered at the base in a bag of cellophane.

“What do we do with the bag of roots he’s left behind?” I asked the consul general, suspecting all the while that I shouldn’t have asked. Jamieson had just completed a boisterous romp through the Brazilian landscape. After his death-defying swoop down São Paulo’s concrete canyons in a military chopper; toasts before the Chamber; and ribbon-cutting at the new consulate, we were awed by the verity of those who had warned of his boundless energy. That [then] Agriculture Minister, Eugene Whelan, had promised the peoples of Southern Brazil a tree to commemorate the Canadian sires of their Hereford bulls, was a bit of a stretch, we thought, to cause us to face this syrupy challenge.

“Yes, my boy, I want you to take this maple tree to the people of Bagé and present it to them on behalf of Eugene Whelan,” retorted my boss and thus I began yet another episode of personal growth in Canada’s foreign service.

As I boarded the Varig jet headed for Brazil's southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, the steward handed me a map, with my Caipiriña⁴ and pointed to a little dot, Bagé, not far from the Uruguayan border. I would be switching down to more primitive modes of transport at Porto Alegre.

Canadian exports to Brazil were modest in these mid-1970's and agricultural livestock was one of the promising lines (along with urban transport and hydroelectric-generating technology).

The great Western happening that attracted so many foreigners each year was the agricultural fair, Expointer, in Porto Alegre. Here, Canadian cowboys mingled with their gaucho counterparts, sipping matte-tea in what looked like leather-bound pipes (but were really mugs with silver stems). We showed our best bulls, finest semen and embryo transplants of progeny from Charolais, Chianina, Hereford and Angus stock (and, at times, Holstein-Friesian dairy cattle).

The real prize would have been of course, Canadian swine, especially the western Canadian Duroc, if it hadn't been for the presence of African swine fever in Brazil. A year earlier, the green-Stetson-wearing Whelan had been downright delighted to meet with the breeding and cattle fraternity of the southern town of Bagé (not but two hours from Porto Alegre) at the Expointer and was so impressed with their enthusiastic bonding with Canadian livestock that he offered to decorate their streets with a real live Canadian maple tree – and thus did his Newfoundland co-minister bring down our cigar-like offering.

At Porto Alegre, I settled down behind a Churrasco sandwich, caffeine sugar-fix (Brazilian coffee) and the Herald Tribune. With only five months in Brazil under my belt, the old Portuguese was fairly rudimentary but was still “hauling” as they said at the time.

⁴ deceptively dangerous Brazilian national drink.

Presently, I heard through the din on the PA system, “Would the Canadian consul going to Bagé please present himself at the VASP counter.” As there couldn’t have been too many others like me around at the time, I assumed this was my call.

“Consul, we regret, but we cannot put your tree on board the airplane to Bagé. It is too big and the plane is too small!” invoked the rather pleasant but firm official. I bristled. This was going to be dicey. The consulate’s PR whiz, Ricardo Duarte, had lined up the mayor, the alderpeople, local cattle association, and print and electronic media to meet the Canadian consul at the airport to mark the auspicious arrival of the “*bordo*” (Portuguese for maple).

“If we don’t get this thing on board, there will be an international incident,” I menaced sweetly. “The mayor and the TV will be awaiting our arrival. The delivery of that tree is of the gravest necessity”.

The official was adamant. Although the small Bandeirante (a Brazilian STOL aircraft equipped, I proudly noted, with Canadian Pratt-Whitney PT-6 engines) was an excellent craft, its hold could never accommodate four metres of tree trunk, plus root-bag.

I persevered and we eventually ended up with the airline’s airport director. He listened to his official, then to my impassioned plea that invoked, in plebian Portuguese, my mother, Brazil-Canada ties, Canadian investments in electricity generation since the turn of the century, the Canadian Jesuit school (Santa Cruz) in São Paulo, Canadian cattle improvements to Brazilian breeding stock, our imports of coffee and OJ, and the clincher: the success of Brazilian soap-operas in Québec.

A steely resolve descended upon his visage and he growled at the official, “This is a case of *force majeure*! Get the consul’s tree on board, somehow, anyhow, Manuel!” That was that.

I returned to my coffee and waited to take off. Sugar-plum fairies danced in my head. I looked out at the ominous skyline where

storm clouds were gathering to the west (Bagé was west). I gritted my teeth when the boarding announcement was made and pulled myself together for the trek across the tarmac to the Bandeirante.



As we approached the sleek little machine, I could see passengers bunching up at the top of the short flight of steps. They seemed to be struggling with some impediment at their feet. When it came my turn to step on aboard, I found myself confronted with an enormous but familiar-looking plastic bag of vegetal tuber! The enterprising ground crew had indeed found a solution to meet this challenge of *force majeure*. There, nestled under the entire configuration of passenger seating, was our maple. Instead of stowing their hand baggage under the seats forward, passengers were obliged to head for the overhead racks, for beneath each seat, engorging the narrow passage down one side of the plane, was our bashful *bordo*.

I clambered aboard, hoping no-one would realize that I was responsible for the flora between their feet, and sat down for the

two hour flight to Bagé. As we drew westward, the little plane started to buffet around, diving relentlessly into darker and darker cloud. Thunder cracked and the knock of significant turbulence reminded us that we were indisputably in tropical Brazilian climes.

Below, as we descended, we could see nothing but torrent and mist until, as if by some miracle, the Bandeirante ground into the porous landing-strip with a bang. We taxied to a stop whereupon I could see movement beneath a cluster of black umbrellas under the fuselage.

The passenger door erupted forth and I heard over the loudspeaker that the Canadian consul was to come to the rear of the plane at the request of Bagé's mayor. I clambered forward and stuck out my hand to greet this beaming, dripping city official with the ubiquitous bag of roots separating our clasped hands. I was beckoned forward to join the welcoming committee of wet well-wishers and in the confusion caught my left foot in the maple's purse of entrails, managing to pirouette on my right toe at the second step and plunked down, splat, in front of a gaggle of cameras, both still and moving.

Flashes popped and microphones protruded. My halting Portuguese answered questions in its best vernacular. I shook the hands, smiled the smiles, chatted to the "Avenida do Canada" Committee (about where they would be planting our maple the following day), and was finally deposited briefly at my hotel for a change – time for a little whiskey I thought and possibly a deep drag or two of Benson and Hedges Special Filter.

Later that night, as I prepared to put to rest the preceding festivities, I turned on the television to catch the news and saw, to my alarm, an up-beat reporting of a callow Canadian consul whirling down a gangplank and babbling courageously of Canada-Brazilian ties before a happy throng of townspersons.

Morning brought breakfast and the Bagé Daily Bugle. The front page headline beamed in generous letters: ‘O Consul Collocou O Bordo A Bordo’, Portuguese wordplay for : ‘The Consul jammed the maple aboard’. There beneath was a story of the saga that brought a tree from Canada to São Paulo to Bagé. “No Brasil apenas cinco meses, o consul ja esta falando bem o Portuguese ...” it marveled, as if to say that my banter wasn’t bad for someone so recently arrived. I felt good about my mission and was spoiled and regaled for two exciting days among the hospitable natives of Rio Grande do Sul before returning to the urban matrix of smoggy São Paulo.

As the taxi home rounded the final corner before entering the suburb of Pacaembu, I wondered, almost aloud, if the zoo in Bagé had any beavers.

John Lang

Dutch Entrepreneurship

John Lang began in the foreign service as a trade commissioner, serving in such diverse locations as Germany, Jamaica, Thailand and the Netherlands. In Ottawa, as a Director in the IT world, he helped shape technological support to business requirements. John's riff on Dutch ingenuity and Canadian recruitment challenges at Expo '86 speak volumes to the art of diplomatic finesse.

In 1985 I was working in our embassy in The Hague. Vancouver was then feverishly preparing for Expo '86. The world was coming to Vancouver and Vancouver was getting ready. False Creek had been made over to accommodate the pavilions that the nations of the world were erecting there. Vancouver had come of age and the federal government of the day finally had an opportunity to show BC that it really did care. The federal government had pumped money into the project and put their best man in charge, a large outspoken Irish-Canadian with a reputation for getting things done. I had bumped into him on several occasions over the preceding years and can confirm that his reputation was well deserved. He neither suffered fools gladly nor brooked any dissent: just the man we needed as Commissioner of Expo '86.

It was therefore with some foreboding that I learned from my ambassador that the Dutch, unique among OECD nations, did not intend to participate in Expo '86 and that the Commissioner found this unacceptable. He had reserved space for them. My job was to change the Dutch mind. Within minutes I was speaking to the friendly, polite, and very direct diplomat who headed the Canada Desk at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He explained that

his ministry had absolutely no budget for participation in fairs, especially Expos that lasted six months, were hideously expensive, and all rather pointless. He directed me to the Ministry of Foreign Trade, suggested my quest was hopeless, and wished me luck.

The lady at the Ministry of Foreign Trade confirmed that hers was the only agency involved with fairs but that as a matter of policy they never considered participating in either World Fairs or Expos. “Why would we do this?” she asked. “The cost of Dutch pavilions is shared with Dutch companies, that absolutely require that there be a marketing objective. No company is willing to consider an event lasting more than a few days. Too expensive! And how long can the costumed Dutch girls with braids hand out the cheese samples anyway? Vancouver will be the only beneficiary, let them pay for a Dutch pavilion.” She was correct, of course, as evidenced by the general growing lack of enthusiasm for these events ever since. As usual, the sensible Dutch were miles ahead of everyone else. To them a proposal for participation had to make good business sense.

I reported the foregoing to the Commissioner, whose reaction was entirely within character. “No goddamn way the Dutch won’t have a pavilion. Remind them that we rescued their sorry asses from the Germans and they owe us.” I tried to persuade him that there was no point trying to make them change their minds. The Dutch have never forgotten Canada’s role in their liberation but were unlikely to feel obliged to participate in Expo ‘86 as a result. The Commissioner replied that I had just not explained it right and that he would come to the Netherlands to do it himself. I was spared having to attend his meetings in The Hague because the ambassador wanted to accompany him to ensure that Dutch-Canadian relations were not irrevocably damaged. In the end, and despite his considerable charm, the Commissioner left empty-handed. The Dutch do not bend when they know their cause is just. Their polite firmness outlasted the Commissioner’s blustering insistence and the latter retreated to Vancouver, seething that

the nation that should have been first to enlist would not attend. He may have comforted himself with the thought that at least the debacle was behind him. If so, he could not have been more wrong, and thus begins the more interesting part of this narrative.

As a result of the publicity that the Commissioner insisted we generate while he was in the Netherlands, I received a phone call from the Mayor of Coevorden, a village in deepest Holland with which I was entirely unacquainted. The mayor had learned of Expo '86 from our press release and had had a brilliant idea.

Here I must explain that before Napoleon required the Dutch to adopt family names (for tax reasons, of course) they generally ran about using the name of their town as an identifier. Thus it was that several centuries ago a gent from Coevorden (literally, Oxford), and thus surnamed van Coevorden emigrated to England and sired a son who joined the British Navy and – you can see where this is going – they bastardized his name to 'Vancouver'. The rest is history.

Bottom line – the mayor wanted to arrange a Coevoerden pavilion at Expo '86. The problem was that an official pavilion would cost millions and be quite beyond the means of his citizenry. Perhaps he could arrange something on a mayor-to-mayor basis? I suggested he call my old UBC chum, and then Mayor of Vancouver, Mike Harcourt, and gave him the phone number little suspecting what the result would be.

That the irascible Expo '86 Commissioner had managed to annoy everyone with whom he had official contact, including Mike Harcourt, was a given. Mike received his Coevorden counterpart's call and knew instantly that he had been delivered of an opportunity for payback. A month later the mayor of Coevorden called on me in The Hague and informed me of his progress. He was very short, unusual in a Dutchman, but his eyes seemed to glitter all the more for this. As we spoke, he explained, carpenters were busy building a one-third-scale model of his village's only landmark, Coevorden

Castle. The model castle, made of plywood but you would never guess, was to grace an open space at the Georgia Street entrance to Pacific Mall, just off Granville – the very hub of Vancouver. Harcourt had arranged everything and it was not costing Coevorden village a penny. Village businesses were helping to cover costs, Coevorden students had volunteered to wear traditional costume and hand out samples of Coevorden's products, notably cheese, while practicing their English in Vancouver. KLM would help with their airfares and Dutch-Canadians in the Vancouver area had been lined up to provide free accommodation for them. All was arranged.

The Commissioner was not amused. Not only had the Dutch government rebuffed him, now an interloping Dutch mayor was going to milk the Expo crowds without paying the considerable official fee. He fumed and I believe he tried, and failed, to block the deal. In the event, Coevorden had a very successful Expo: millions dropped in to investigate the Vancouver-Coevorden connection and sample the cheese. Coevorden was on the map but it was not until Expo ended that the canny Coevorden mayor's entrepreneurial genius really shone through. Faced with the obligation to dismantle and dispose of a somewhat shop-worn plywood castle, what would you have done? He sold it as-is to ex-countryman, Bill Vanderzalm, premier of BC and owner of Fantasy Gardens near Vancouver airport. The castle is still there. Drop in next time you are in the neighbourhood. Sorry, no cheese samples.

Mary Taylor

Canadians Born Abroad

(Reproduced from *Bout de papier*, the magazine of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers, Vol.27-1, Winter, 2012)

Mary Taylor is the wife of a retired foreign service officer and deputy minister. She is the author of two books: If Only I Had Known and A Black Mark.

In August 2015, *The Strengthening of Canadian Citizenship Act* changed earlier legislation regarding citizenship and Canadians born abroad. This had deprived foreign-born children of their citizenship if their parents had also been born abroad as children of Canadian government officials serving overseas. Media coverage of the new Bill C24 made me think of my own children, four of whom were born outside of Canada, each in a different country and in very different circumstances.

Our first child was born in Delhi, though not in the hospital where I had hoped to be, but in a nursing home from which earlier on my husband, suffering from hepatitis, had been rescued because it was so inadequate. I had no choice, for when I called to say labour had started, I was told there was no bed available in the British hospital. But the nursing home, despite many unpleasant features, did have its strengths. Almost all day, my newborn son was rocked by a loving Ayah, who would only pause to spit out her betel juice. It was in its own way a good beginning, though not so good was a nurse's decision to cheer up the other patients by carrying the baby round the wards, and this in the middle of a cholera epidemic.

Number two was born very uneventfully in Ottawa, where nurses found it hard to believe this was my second child, since I seemed quite unfamiliar with all the standard procedures.

Baby number three arrived in a luxurious nursing home in Paris which had once belonged to Napoleon III. Her birth, unlike her brother's was foreseen well in advance. Some time before, my fashionable doctor had predicted the exact date, and when I expressed admiration for his perspicacity, he explained that this was because he would be going on holiday the following day. Despite his lucrative practice he was obviously not about to forfeit his handsome fee. The birth was induced to suit his convenience, though not that of her father who had to be out at the airport meeting a visiting Minister, an event which in those days clearly took precedence. My husband was able however, to share with me some excellent meals accompanied by the appropriate wines. Did I also drink wine as we ate? I can't remember. What I certainly did enjoy was the Nursing Mother's Beer, which I was encouraged to drink as much of as possible. At the time, no one, particularly in France, believed that alcohol would have bad effects on either mother or baby.

It was the birth of our fourth child that was the most dramatic, not because of the actual birth but of what preceded it. I had arrived in Moscow five months pregnant to discover that most Western women went elsewhere to have their babies. Russian hospitals were rough and engaged in a variety of practices, such as communal labour rooms, which Western women found alarming. A stoic people, the Russians didn't believe in using painkillers for childbirth except in extreme circumstances. Worst of all no visitors were allowed throughout one's confinement and this regulation, apparently designed to protect the babies from infection, could produce an almost paranoid sense of isolation in those who spoke little Russian. Despite all this, however, I had decided to stay in Moscow. Most Russian babies seemed to come into the world fairly successfully and I was unwilling to leave my other children so soon after we had moved to a strange country. In the end however, I changed my mind. What did it was the experience of an Australian friend who, for similar reasons, had decided to stay, and for whom things went very badly. No doubt the medical complications would

have been the same anywhere, but what would not have been the same was her fear and isolation, as she lay unable to communicate with friends and family.

I left at midday on the first of January having spent much of the previous night at Ambassador Robert and Mrs. Ford's New Year's party, a splendid event at which it was *de rigueur* for the staff to stay until the most senior guests had gone. Off to Vienna, where I would be with friends, I bade a wistful farewell to my family and boarded the plane, swathed in a voluminous coat. I had not told Aeroflot of my condition and they would have been perfectly within their rights if they had refused to take me. The baby was due in two weeks and all my others had come late. Nonetheless I was worried in case I should go into labour on the plane. It was, therefore, with a sense of relief that at the end of four hours I assumed we must be almost due to land in Vienna. But to my surprise, the plane flew on until finally there came an announcement to the effect that we would be landing in Zurich in a few minutes. There was no mention of Vienna. In a very Russian way Vienna had been wiped out as if it only existed in the imagination of the passengers, of whom, as it happened, there were very few since New Year's Day was not a popular date to travel. I huddled in my seat fighting back the tears and trying to console myself by thinking of all those who had given birth in far worse circumstances than mine. One passenger had the nerve to make a fuss and was told that because of the existing weather conditions the landing equipment was inadequate for Vienna. We could only hope the same was not true for Zurich.

By the time the Aeroflot representative arrived, there were only four of us left in the airport, an American girl touring Europe, a Russian woman with a small baby and myself. The Russian was my mirror image since she had left Vienna, where her husband worked in the embassy, to have her baby in Moscow and was now returning with Ala, who was a week old. We were offered a chit for the airport hotel and assured that we would be flown to Vienna the following morning. The Russian, however, adamantly refused

to leave the airport and finally an arrangement was made for her to stay in the nursery with her baby. Meanwhile the American and I went off to the hotel, where after a congenial dinner, life began to seem a little better. After all if my baby happened to arrive in Zurich she might even enjoy the inestimable advantage of Swiss citizenship.

Early next morning we were hustled out to the airport to board the flight to Vienna. But the hours passed as snow fell gently on the deserted runways. At lunchtime I was called to reception and asked whether I spoke Russian. My hesitant response that I knew a little was greeted with enthusiasm and I was led off to the nursery to act as an interpreter. There my feeble efforts met with evident admiration on the part of the fluently tri-lingual air hostess, who not surprisingly found it strange that one woman should leave Moscow for Vienna to give birth, while another would do exactly the reverse.

The nurse in charge was anxious that the Russian mother should go to have a meal while she looked after the baby, but nothing would persuade Ala's mother to abandon her. No doubt just as I was wary of the wiles of Russian officials so she too had been indoctrinated about Westerners and their evil intentions. Speaking only Russian and reading only Cyrillic, she must have led a life of total isolation in Vienna with all the paranoia that produced. Why a meal could not have been brought to her in the nursery I later failed to understand. But the solution we arrived at was for all three of us to go to the airport restaurant.

Zurich airport in January was the gateway to many fashionable ski resorts and a fair number of the jet set had shaken off their New Year hangovers and were on their way to the slopes. So the restaurant was full of smartly dressed people among whom the appearance of two dowdy women, one enormously pregnant and the other carrying a tiny baby, was a mild sensation. For the first time I knew what it must be like to be a celebrity. Every time I

looked up from my food I was aware of eyes sliding away from me all around the room.

It was late afternoon when our flight was finally called. I had some qualms about boarding it in case once again we flew over Vienna, but I had little alternative. Aeroflot was notoriously bad about exchanging tickets with other airlines and their representative had disappeared. How surprised my husband would be, I thought, if I reappeared at Sheremetievo airport almost two days after I had left. If that happened then I would stay. But the plane did land in Vienna, our baby was in no hurry to arrive, and I spent a delicious two weeks enjoying the luxuries of the West before the birth of my Wiener Kind.

Pregnant with my last baby, I once again fled Moscow, but this time, like many others, to Helsinki. My previous children all arrived late so I was looking forward to two weeks of shopping at that lifeline for those living in Moscow, Stockmann OY. But this was not to be. I had scarcely arrived in my hotel when I had to leave for the hospital. By then I had three daughters, and was sure this would be a fourth – ultra sound had not yet been invented – so I could hardly believe my luck when told it was a boy. The obstetrician I should have had was off skiing, so my son was delivered in the early hours of the morning by a young intern. In response to my question, “Are you sure it’s a boy?”, she drew herself up and replied rather coldly, “I may not be fully qualified but I can tell a boy from a girl.”

Despite this assurance, I wanted to make perfectly certain before calling my husband to pass on the good news. So once in my room I undid the tight swaddling just to check. Yes, just like the Russians, the Finns believed in swaddling – babies were stacked like logs on the trolleys – and didn’t go in much for painkillers either. There was no tender coddling here, as in Paris or Vienna, and shortly after birth I was directed down the hall to the communal shower. A room full of naked pale-skinned women, most of whom had just given birth but some still to do so, was not a thing of beauty.

Not surprisingly many foreign service children marry foreigners and so have children born abroad. None of my five children have done so, and as it happens the only one who might have was the daughter born in Ottawa.

Daniel Livermore

The Symbolism of a Guatemala City Intersection

Daniel Livermore served in Foreign Affairs for more than thirty years, and was head of mission in Guatemala from 1996 to 1999 and ambassador for the international landmine campaign from 1999 to 2002. In his last assignment he was director general in the Department, responsible for security and intelligence.

Four or five blocks from our house in Guatemala City was an ordinary intersection of two streets in a normal residential community. I went through it about four times a day on the way to and from the embassy or to several other destinations. Over time, I came to consider this intersection an analogy of Guatemala as a country: although there was nothing outwardly abnormal about it, it just didn't work.

To begin with, a short overview of the scene. Two streets converged at the usual ninety-degree angle, with stop signs for traffic moving north and south, but none for the east-west direction. There was a fair amount of traffic, as it was close to a shopping plaza with a local video outlet, a corner store and a busy veterinary clinic.

What was the problem? Drivers approaching the intersection on the street without stop signs had two distinct character traits. The first type was the defensive driver who didn't care that there was no stop sign. He stopped in any case, waiting for someone else to make a move in a different part of the inter-section. The result was a rash of stopped cars, honking horns, wild gesticulations, and eventually irate drivers pulling out trying to pass. The second type was the driver who believed that the absence of a stop sign was a license to drive through the intersection or take a turn at maximum velocity.

In the other direction, with stop signs, there were also two distinct types of drivers. The first type not only obeyed a stop sign, but he stayed frozen to the pavement until there was nothing remotely resembling traffic in the direction with the right of way. Behind this risk-averse driver was again the inevitable long line of cars honking, wild gesticulations, and irate driiveirs trying to pass on the inside or outside, wherever there was space. The second type of driver knew the principle behind stop signs but doubted their usefulness and legitimacy. He normally cruised to a shuddering pause as he entered the intersection, took a quick glance in both directions, and then blasted forward. No line-ups here.

The real problems were those drivers who wanted to turn. And why? Drivers in Guatemala don't normally signal their turns. Signalling is considered a sign of cowardice, something almost as shameful as using your brakes. So the preferred option for a left-hand turn is to enter the intersection and coast, waiting for vehicles in all other directions to decide on a course of action. Sometimes, a cautious driver in an oncoming vehicle will stop, not knowing what's going on. That produces a predictable grid-lock, with a loud round of honking and gesticulating until someone makes a turn and everyone else figures it out.

On right-hand turns, the matter is neater, whether there is a stop sign or not. The driver cuts to the inside lane (even if there isn't one), jams down the accelerator, and snips around the corner on two wheels. Pedestrians are not a factor taken into consideration.

So let's picture the total scene. A flow of traffic is beginning to move along the street without stop signs, coming from the daycare and school a block away. Cars are moving in and out of the nearby plaza.

They converge on the intersection that doesn't work. Someone stops, possibly unaware that there's no stop sign in his direction. He pulls into the intersection, but not far, because he's turning left...although not signalling his intention. The cars behind,

sensing movement but not enough, make their moves. Someone passes on the right, only to see someone veer around the corner from the opposite direction, while someone else is trying to turn right, heading in his direction. He tries to move back into line, but he can't, because there's no room. He decides to wait until the traffic moves, but the intersection is now full. One driver is turning left, frozen in the middle, while another is approaching from the right, claiming the right of way and honking wildly, with still another trying to swing right around the corner but blocked because there's a car in front waiting for the driver in the car partially across the solid line to move back into line. Then an oncoming vehicle, which had paused briefly because the driver spotted the stop sign, has decided to move through, and has passed – or not quite passed – the driver trying to turn left.

But I've left out tail-gating, the absolutely essential corollary to this saga, because it explains why this mess can't be sorted out quickly. All of the cars are locked together, because each driver, in approaching the vehicle in front, has stopped exactly the width of a Guatemalan coin behind. No driver can now move in any direction. And the mess gets worse, as each driver who now enters the intersection does exactly the same thing.

And so what should have been an ordinary intersection, capable of handling any reasonable volume of traffic, became a venue for delays at significant times of the day, every day, as drivers piled up, bumped bumpers, yelled and cursed and generally made themselves miserable over something which should have had an easy solution.

I asked myself an obvious question as I looked at countless traffic jams at this intersection over three years: what could help make this situation work? Is it a police force, directing traffic? How about stronger rules, more education for drivers, stricter licensing? And I eventually came to the view that none of these small things was the problem. There was a larger issue here, one that virtually

every individual across the world confronts every day, without even realizing the implications. It was something involving social problem-solving, a view of community obligations, a sense of longer-term shared interests and an implicit acceptance of customs, rules and laws binding a community together. At one level, it was something as small as opening a door for a senior citizen or lining up at a respectful distance at an ATM. In a larger sense, it was acceptance of rules of democratic societies, like free debate about important issues. This sense of community was missing in Guatemala, where what mattered in driving was the size of the vehicle and the class and connections of the driver.

Can the analogy of an intersection apply to an entire country? I think so. In 1996, just months after my arrival, Guatemala finally emerged from a 36 year civil conflict. Over decades, that conflict had left profound social scars and deep-seated divisions. Trust in law and a sense of community had disappeared. Families protected their own, hunkered down in houses behind big walls, affording protection against an epidemic of kidnapping. People defended themselves through money and connections. They solved their problems with influence-peddling and intimidation. Driving was only one reflection of this larger equation, since most kidnappings took place at traffic lights and stop signs, and stopping was considered an invitation to theft. People driving huge, expensive Suburbans ruled a country in which vehicular size mattered. Traffic was not an issue for the few police officers in the country; it was a reflection of social realities.

After the peace accords of 1996, however, there were subtle signs of change. Slowly, fitfully, a sense of community began to re-emerge. In a country at peace, Suburbans could yield to Corollas... on occasion. Honking horns and yelling began to cede to using the brakes...when convenient. Drivers seemingly acquired more patience, possibly in parallel with the attitudes which had fostered the compromise underlying the 1996 peace accords. The idea was beginning to emerge that a little foresight to prevent problems was

better than trying to sort out problems by force and intimidation after they had occurred. I could see this sense of community starting to come together, even on the Guatemalan roads, through small gestures of courtesy and new driving styles based less on a sense of entitlement than on patience and common sense.

But after 36 years of internal conflict, nothing happened quickly. By the time of my departure in 1999, after three years of peace, these changes hadn't solved the challenges of my nearby intersection. I wonder now, almost two decades later, whether that intersection works and what that reflects in a country trying to make peace with itself.

4

Adventures in Protocol

Erika v. C. Bruce
Mousse au chocolat

Clair Nutting
The Day of the Jacket

Mary Taylor
Difficult Dinners

Erika v. C. Bruce

Mousse au chocolat

Erika v. C. Bruce, an economist and archaeologist by training, has held a variety of executive positions in the private sector and in both the Canadian and the international civil service. She spent many years abroad, accompanying her late husband, Geoffrey F. Bruce, on assignments in New York, Kenya/Uganda, and Portugal

Throughout our postings I was never blessed with finding a competent cook still on the payroll: he had either been fired by our predecessor at departure, lured away to another embassy for higher rewards, left for an indefinite vacation or suffered from arthritis which discouraged standing in front of a stove.

It was thus with great relief when in Nairobi, in the early 80's, I finally found a talented cook with good references from a British plantation owner. The fact that he belonged to a different tribe than the rest of our household staff was bound to lead to quarrels and Alphonse – endearingly called Alfunzi – to be locked out occasionally from his staff quarters. But this was small potatoes, considering that he could bake a cake and knew how to prevent a soufflé from collapsing.

My fellow “wives of “ will understand that I tended to Alfunzi like to a delicate plant. I translated for him recipes of varying degrees of finesse, bought whatever special ingredient he desired, and whenever I went to Europe, I returned with a new chef's toque. It was this gift that pleased him most and rewarded us with fine cuisine. After it became obvious that he wasn't looking for a better-paid position on his day off, I arranged for him a *stage* as

senior apprentice, once a week, at the restaurant run by the Centre Culturel Français in the heart of Nairobi. There he learned how to make sauce béarnaise, millefeuille from scratch, Tarte Tatin – albeit it was next to impossible to find the right apples in Nairobi in the 80’s – and a divine *mousse au chocolat*.

It was around that time, with additions to our menu perfected, that we were awaiting the arrival of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, accompanied by his three sons, one Mountie, a personal secretary, and a number of Canadian journalists. After a breakfast at dawn for all at the residence in Limuru, way out of town, we accompanied the PM and his family to an estate with a private game park near the Mount Kenya Safari Club. From there, we flew to the Masai Mara where we spent several days observing, from a small, low-flying aircraft, the migration of tens of thousands of wildebeest or lying in wait for lions, elephants, giraffes, buffalos. At the end of a week, it was back to work for the prime minister and the high commissioner – to the 1981 UN Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in Nairobi, which the prime minister and many other heads of government attended and addressed.

At the end of the conference, which was also the prime minister’s day of departure, Kenyan President Moi hosted a lunch. It was therefore only in the late afternoon that I returned to the residence. I had left ample instructions with the staff for how to prepare house, home and garden for the rest of the day, with the departure of our guests scheduled for midnight. I therefore had no time to get to the kitchen to review the menu with the cook but, of course, I trusted him to pull it off.

We sat down to dinner at 7 p.m. so that the children could have a nap before their flight to London. The long table was beautifully set, china and silver gleaming, flowers and candles in the right spots. Cook and I had decided to serve dishes that would also appeal to the boys. There would be lemon meringue, ice cream and, of course, *the* chocolate mousse. I relaxed.

Dinner had progressed without incident to dessert when the doors were flung wide open and in strode 6ft2 tall Alfunzi, from head to toe in white, looking regal with his new toque decorated with Canadian maple leaf-pins. He had dressed for the occasion which he obviously didn't want to miss.

He awkwardly held out in front of him a large bowl resting on a silver platter, which reminded me of Herod's soldier presenting Salome with the head of John the Baptist. He advanced slowly toward the prime minister. While I couldn't see the bowl's content, its colourful surface was reflected in Alfunzi's broad silver bracelets. And then it dawned on me, and I froze. Food colours! The beloved food colours, which I didn't allow in the kitchen and always threw out when I detected them at the back of a drawer.

Alfunzi stopped in front of Mr Trudeau and proffered his offering. It was the chocolate mousse covered with writing. The circumference of the mousse was decorated with a blue and green garland. The first line of writing in pink said:

To the His Excelency the Canadian P followed by a second line written in red: ***merry wishes for a happy journey.*** At this stage the middle of the mousse was reached and clearly delineated with a horizontal garland in green.

Below the green garland was written in white: ***home made,*** followed by a red maple leaf and: ***Mrs. Bruce's cook***

For a second, Mr Trudeau stared at the dish. We all stared in silence until the butler stepped up to relieve a trembling Alfunzi of the platter.

Mr Trudeau read the text aloud, line by line, pushed back his chair, stood up and shook hands with the cook and thanked him warmly.



Clair Nutting

The Day of the Jacket

Clair Nutting, former head of mission many long years ago, has for the last few years lived with his wife Shirley in retirement in Australia; has written a war memoir A Piece of Cake published by Amazon Kindle.

It was during Jake Warren's time as our ambassador in Washington. I was one of a small band of apparatchiks in the Political Division. Every so often one of us would be summoned at short notice – like an hour before – to fill in for a guest who had dropped out at the last moment, at a luncheon offered by the ambassador at the official residence. Who had to go, depended on the purpose of the lunch i.e. the one whose area of expertise would be most useful.

That day the summons reached us about eleven o'clock. It was a stag affair. So far as we could tell its primary purpose was to entertain officials from State and other government departments plus several journalists, for having helped the embassy in the past, and indeed with an eye toward any help they might provide in the future. They were a mixed bag. It was difficult to decide which of us would be most useful to fill the empty chair. At length a decision was reached. The highest-ranking official on the guest list was from the Department of Defense and one or two of the journalists wrote about military matters. As I was responsible for the defense file, I was the obvious choice.

All well and good. But there was a problem. I had come in to work that day in an old and somewhat scruffy tweed jacket and flannels. I didn't expect to be going out of the chancery that day and I had no meetings, no appointments. I was very fond of that old jacket. It had an easy, comfortable feel, like a snug fitting glove you've

worn for a long time. It was a Harris Tweed in a hounds tooth pattern, charcoal black on white, with leather buttons and suede patches on the elbows. Very classy, though you had to admit it might find itself more at home at the races or a ball game than at the ambassador's luncheon.

What to do? There wasn't time to go home to change. We lived in Maryland, a good hour's drive from the Chancery. I knew my wife Shirley had already left home for a lunch engagement with some of her friends, so she would not be able to bring a suit in to me. (This was before the days of the cell phone.) Clearly someone would have to go in my place.

I called in two of my colleagues in the Division, both very amiable and considerate fellows, Tom and Percy who, while they were not above an occasional practical joke or a little good-natured ribbing, be relied upon to help out in a crisis. In a few words I told them of my predicament. Perhaps it was a little naive of me to expect a ready response. Instead there was a silence so prolonged I was obliged to ask which of them would take my place?

Percy was first off the mark. He was sorry, he said, he would have liked to help out, but he had just recollected an urgent appointment, indeed so urgent that he was afraid he'd have to leave at once. And he did. Tom proved to be equally adroit at dodging bullets. He had promised to take at noon a very important phone call from someone in the Minister's Office in Ottawa. He went on to say how sorry he was, when he stopped in mid sentence. His face lit up. It was clearly a Eureka moment.

"Look!" Tom said, "I'll tell you what we can do! We'll change clothes. We're about the same size. You can borrow my suit." He was wearing a rather smart two-piece pure grey pinstripe.

Well, you couldn't refuse an offer like that. So, we changed clothes there and then. My jacket lent Tom certain panache. It gave him a somewhat raffish look, rugged, independent.

I went on my way to lunch at the Residence. By the time I was seated behind the steering wheel of my car, I began to have some doubts as to whether wearing Tom's suit was such a good idea. It was a tight fit. He and I were roughly the same size, but Tom was some years younger than me and there were places where he went in and I went out and vice versa.

Anyway, in I went and joined the other guests standing in little clumps in the reception room for pre-lunch drinks. I joined one of the clumps and started making polite chatter. Pressed for time I'd come away rather hastily and had transferred a large handful of change from my pants pocket to the top of my desk. On my way out the door I'd scooped up the change and put it in one of the coat pockets of Tom's suit. In the midst of what I recollect was an interesting conversation about some ruckus between the Israelis and the Palestinians, I put my hand in my coat pocket where I encountered the handful of coins. Without thinking about it I transferred the money from my coat to my pants pocket.

I felt the coins slide down my leg. They rattled out on the parquet floor scattering in every direction, with a hard clanking noise. The conversation in the room stopped. Everybody turned to look at the coins rolling about. I bent down to retrieve those I could reach and as I did so I felt something give way in the seat of my pants, and heard what I hoped was not a scarcely audible ripping noise. One or two of the guests helped me to retrieve the rest of the coins. There was not just a hole in Tom's pants pocket; the entire bottom of it was gone! He might have told me.

So into lunch we went. I let myself down easily and slid into my chair, to limit any further damage. Before I picked up the coins I had been careful to unbutton my suit coat. When I was safely down in my chair I buttoned it up. Hope had triumphed again over experience. As I straightened up, pop went the coat button. It flew up in a kind of parabola just over the table and landed in my salad plate with a tiny but distinct ping.

My neighbour on one side was courteous enough to pretend he had not seen my mishap. Not so my neighbour on the other side, who began to talk about guided missiles under cover of a not very well concealed smirk. Nevertheless, the table talk was interesting. The Cold War, NATO, SALT, and by the end of lunch I had nearly forgotten my mishaps. Back in my office, however, after I had surveyed the damage, I was compelled to consider how best to proceed. What should I say to Tom?

Just then there was a light tap on the door. I looked up, and there was Tom, still wearing my jacket. He walked in with his hand out. There was a dollar bill in his hand.

“I am obliged”, he said, “to share this with you. It was your jacket after all. Anyway, while you were living it up at the taxpayers’ expense, I was walking across the park for my meager repast at Hamburger Heaven, my shoelace came undone. I sat down on a park bench to tie it. I looked up to see a little old lady in front of me offering me this dollar. ‘Oh you poor man,’ she said, ‘you must be very hard up’.”

Mary Taylor

Difficult Dinners

(Reproduced from *Bout de papier*, the magazine of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers, Vol.24-1, Winter 2009)

Mary Taylor is the wife of a retired foreign service officer and the author of two books: If Only I Had Known and A Black Mark

Diplomats eat a lot of dinners. So of course do we all but diplomatic dinners are a little different. On these occasions formally dressed people are usually served elaborate food, often in the company of those they barely know and with whom they may even share no common language. Some such events are wonderful. You enjoy gourmet food in beautiful surroundings with fellow guests who make one feel witty and attractive. But many such evenings are not so good and, as Tolstoy so famously observed, it is the unhappy times that are memorable.

Early in our time in Moscow we gave the dinner that was expected of us, for ambassador Robert Ford, and his formidable wife, Thereza. As was his custom, Robert sat at the head of our table, as he would have expected as our ambassador and as a convenience for his disability. Unfortunately I had failed to warn our Russian helper of this change in the arrangements and so she followed her normal procedure serving those at the ends of the table last. In an attempt to correct this I whispered to her, "Serve Mrs. Ford first." She looked at me skeptically but I nodded firmly trusting that the situation would be corrected by the second course. Imagine my horror a few seconds later to see Vyera appearing with a silver salver on which stood a bottle of beer for Mrs. Ford. Unfortunately I must have pronounced the word for first, "pervaya" so badly that it sounded like "piva".



There was worse to come. Following dinner, as was the custom, the guests were served drinks including orange juice. What was available locally was very poor, and with my fourth child only a few months old, I had not had the time to squeeze sufficient oranges, so made the mistake of mixing the two kinds. The result was no doubt lamentable – as half measures so often are. Thereza took one sip and enquired in her usual drawly voice, “What is this darling, Chanel No5?” At least the government sofa did not

collapse beneath her, something which was to happen, though with a different guest, during our successor's stay in that Kutusovksky apartment.

The menu at these Moscow dinners was not a big issue. What was available locally was limited. Perishable food could only be obtained by air, and was therefore very expensive. Good filet mignon was available to the diplomats and caviar was still relatively cheap, so we ate a lot of Boeuf Wellington and blinis. In the winter some of us would arrange our dinners in the same week, order flowers from Helsinki by air and rush them from one apartment to the other swathed in plastic. The French were blessed in that Air France provided their ambassador with a weekly shipment of cheese, something he generously shared with his staff. At a later dinner for the Fords, a French friend nobly lent me her cheese assignment to add lustre to the occasion. There again disaster was narrowly averted when I discovered at the last moment that my Russian treasure was, reasonably enough, preparing to serve this at the beginning of the meal as *Zakuski* (*amuse-gueules*) instead of before the dessert.

If no one expected you to produce a gourmet meal in Moscow the same was certainly not true in Belgium where the standard was exceptionally high not only in restaurants but in private homes. But it was not trouble with the food but a slow eater, which caused me alarm at the first dinner party I gave in Brussels. Struggling to converse with an Italian general – my Italian was non-existent, his English very limited – I longed for the second course to provide a distraction. It never came and as time passed I began to wonder if something awful had happened in the kitchen and how long I should wait before excusing myself and going to investigate. I remembered the tale of a colleague's wife who in a similar dilemma had finally gone behind the scenes to find her cook confronting the waiter with a knife. Could something like that be possibly happening here? Just as I was about to give up hope, the plates were removed and the second course duly appeared. The

problem, I later found out, had been a guest at the far end of the table who ate so slowly that the whole procedure had been held up until he had finished.

Apparently, the diplomatic procedure for those who feel they have been incorrectly seated at a table is to turn over one's plate, sit through the first course, and then leave without explanation. I never actually witnessed this diplomatic myth – I also never saw a maid serve suckling pig holding the apple in her own mouth, though difficulty with the declensions of Russian pronouns made this conceivable – but I had two friends who swore they had seen a plate turned over. One occasion, many years earlier had been in Moscow where great importance was attached to one's place in the hierarchy and where the to and fro of ambassadors often made it difficult to know who was a mere chargé d'affaires. My friend reported that most of the other guests simply assumed that the Latin American in question was simply having a nervous breakdown.

I was present, however, when a guest ate absolutely nothing, though not for reasons of protocol. This was a small dinner given by the Austrian cultural attaché in Moscow for a formerly renowned architect, Melnikov. The regime tolerated him but presumably kept him under surveillance. He himself was charm personified and obviously enjoyed the outing, but not so his wife. Whatever the reason, perhaps fear of what this might lead to; she ate nothing throughout the whole meal.

Because they represent their country, diplomats, especially junior ones, may find themselves seated beside people who are much more prominent than they are. Sometimes the great are charming, sometimes not. I once sat beside a French foreign minister – one who rather to my satisfaction was later taken to court – who obviously found me unutterably boring and barely spoke. Long before in Delhi my husband had attended a dinner where Krishna Menon had clearly indicated that he did not expect to dine in

the company of anyone as junior. Others, Maureen Forrester was an example, could be delightful and treated everyone alike. Sometimes you didn't take on board just how prominent one's fellow guest might be. A young friend seeing "Ionesco" on the place card beside her assumed it was a common Romanian name and asked her companion what he did. "I write plays," was the laconic reply. The first time I met Henryk Szering, at a dinner given by Gilles Lefebvre, the founder of the Jeunesse Musicales, I was not sure who he was. I was left in no doubt, however, as to his importance when the young woman next to me, sank to her knees and murmured "Maitre".

Another problem at these dinners is what to wear and often the simpler and more remote the post the grander the attire. One of the most pleasant events I ever attended was given by the president of Dior to celebrate the company's long association with Holt Renfrew. It was in July in Paris and I had bought myself a summer evening dress which, even on sale, strained my budget. I was very pleased with it despite the fact that my teenaged daughters muttered something about mutton dressed as lamb, but the moment I entered the host's elegant apartment I knew that I was the worst dressed person in the room. Everyone else was sporting Dior, apart from one whose obvious loyalty to another couturier later gave rise to some malicious remarks. There were also the jewels from the safety deposit box. But despite the dress it was a wonderful evening. Not only had the jewels come from the bank but so had the plates, a marvelous set of Creil, edged in coral, which proved an ideal subject of conversation with my host.

Many years later at the time of the French Bicentenary I accompanied Maureen McTeer, the spouse of our then foreign minister, to an outdoor performance of opera at Versailles. The invitation stated that we should dress warmly which we had interpreted as wearing rather simple dresses under our raincoats. Not so le tout Paris by whom we were surrounded. For them it meant a full-length couturier coat well cut so as to show off the

jewels. Our attire did not go unnoticed. When we approached the VIP tent at the intermission the official took one look at us and demanded haughtily, “Where did you find these tickets?” Fortunately a friend of Maureen’s was standing near the door and waved us in.

Diplomatic dinners are sometimes marked by speeches, only too often recitals of banalities about good will and friendship, since no one wishes to offend either the guest or the host. Occasionally, however, things go wrong, and one comes to with a start. It was a French foreign minister, at a time when Canadian federal government relations with Québec were still pretty tense, who remarked at a dinner on the 9th floor of the Pearson Building how glad he was to be in Montréal. The slip passed discreetly unnoticed, but not so the comment of a Chinese visitor, who remarked, presumably due to a faulty translation, that he looked forward to a third world war.

It is usually the host and hostess who suffer most on these occasions, particularly if they are living in very different cultures and are dependent on staff for whom their ways are a mystery. But the guests can have a hard time too. They may be served food which is at best unappetizing, live seafood, fried grasshoppers, sheep’s eyes. They may be expected to eat far more than they want and to sit or kneel uneasily, embarrassed by the still grace of their hosts. So how to cope with these difficult dinners? Do one’s best and then let things roll. Remember this will pass and that even the worst disaster at table is insignificant compared to what is happening in the outside world.

5

Snippets of History

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Serge April

Fidel à la Résidence

Serge April a passé près de quarante ans au service diplomatique du Canada. Il a été quatre fois chefs de mission. L'anecdote qui suit est survenue au début de sa carrière alors qu'il était à notre ambassade de La Havane, premier secrétaire politique.

Il arrive qu'un jeune agent soit aux premières loges à l'occasion d'échanges surprenants. Dans ce cas-ci il s'agit du président Fidel Castro qui s'est fait poliment remettre à sa place par un ministre libéral qui défendait un ancien premier ministre conservateur. Vous verrez bien.

Une fois pendant mes deux ans à La Havane, Fidel est venu à une réception à la résidence de l'ambassadeur. C'était à l'occasion de la visite de Roméo LeBlanc, à l'époque ministre des Pêcheries (devenu plus tard gouverneur-général), visite importante pour les Cubains parce qu'ils voulaient nous marquer leur appréciation pour le quota de pêche que nous venions de leur accorder dans l'Atlantique Nord. (C'était 1978, bien avant que nos stocks de morues s'effondrent.) Monsieur LeBlanc a donc été reçu en grand: rencontres, visites, grand tour de l'île en avion. Suzanne, ma chère épouse, et moi l'accompagnions.

À la fin de la visite, à la réception donnée par l'ambassadeur pour remercier les Cubains que notre ministre avait rencontrés, nous apprenons à la toute dernière minute, alors même que les invités commençaient à arriver, que Fidel arrivait. Branle-bas de combat ! La Sécurité cubaine arrive aussitôt, inspecte toutes les pièces, le goûteur teste les canapés à la cuisine, en met un plateau de côté, fait de même avec le whisky et l'eau minérale. Monsieur

Hyndman, l'ambassadeur, décide que je devais exercer le rôle de chef du protocole et accueillir Fidel devant la résidence.

Une longue limousine soviétique arrive. Fidel me reconnaît et sourit. J'ouvre la portière, je l'accueille. Je ne peux m'empêcher de remarquer, tout en souriant, le fusil mitrailleur à ses pieds dans la limousine. À l'entrée, comme convenu, je le présente à l'ambassadeur, puis quelques pas plus loin l'ambassadeur le présente au ministre, lequel se tenait comme prévu à l'entrée du petit salon où Fidel et lui devaient se retirer.

Cependant Fidel voit et entend les invités sur la terrasse au bout du couloir et tout de go s'y dirige, entraînant monsieur LeBlanc. Le pauvre goûteur, discrètement, quitte le petit salon pour se précipiter dehors avec plateau, canapés et bouteilles. Fidel commence à saluer les invités, puis se met à bavarder avec monsieur LeBlanc. Les invités, spontanément, petit à petit, se sont mis en cercle autour d'eux. Fidel et monsieur LeBlanc, en bons politiciens, se sont prêtés au jeu.

Sur le fond Fidel s'empresse de réitérer son appréciation pour le quota de pêche à la morue que nous avons accordé à Cuba dans l'Atlantique Nord (quota, il faut le préciser, pris sur ce que nos propres pêcheurs ne prenaient pas à l'époque). C'était là le but principal de sa visite. Puis, je ne sais trop comment, la conversation a dévié sur la politique canadienne.

Fidel a d'abord pris des nouvelles du premier ministre Trudeau qui était venu en visite officielle un an plus tôt. Puis, Fidel s'est mis à littéralement à déblatérer contre l'ancien premier ministre Diefenbaker, redevenu simple député mais qui en ce temps-là n'en manquait pas une en Chambre des Communes pour attaquer Trudeau au sujet de sa visite à Cuba l'année précédente.

Monsieur LeBlanc, avec un certain sourire, s'est alors mis à expliquer à Fidel que ces choses-là faisaient partie des joutes

politiques normales surtout à la période des questions en Chambre des communes.



Alors que Fidel commençait à insister un peu trop, monsieur LeBlanc s'est permis poliment de l'interrompre pour lui rappeler tranquillement que c'est monsieur Diefenbaker, alors qu'il était premier ministre, qui avait décidé en 1960 que le Canada ne respecterait pas l'embargo américain et maintiendrait ses relations diplomatiques et commerciales avec Cuba.

Monsieur LeBlanc a conclu en riant que tout ça était parce que monsieur Diefenbaker, en bon conservateur, détestait tellement John Kennedy, bon démocrate, qu'il faisait systématiquement tout le contraire du président américain.

Fidel, disons, n'avait pas l'habitude de se faire interrompre et encore moins de se faire contredire... Il reste silencieux, ne répond pas, avale sa salive. Il réfléchit. Nous retenons tous notre souffle.

Après quelques longues secondes, de sa voix haut perchée, il dit lentement : « Monsieur le ministre, vous avez raison. » Autre seconde de silence. « J'ai déjà eu moi-même tendance à oublier le rôle historique qu'a joué l'ancien premier ministre Diefenbaker ».

Sourires et soulagements. Puis, Fidel est resté une bonne heure à bavarder avec tout le monde.

James Bartleman

The Ambassador Who Went Back

Jim Bartleman, former head of mission, foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, author and Lt. Governor of the Province of Ontario, offers a compelling account of the courage of one of Canada's ambassadors as he negotiated, in Peru, with terrorist captors who held the lives of hundreds of hostages in their hands.

On December 17, 1996, leftist guerillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) seized the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima as he hosted a reception in honour of the Japanese Emperor's birthday. Among the hundreds of captured guests was Canadian ambassador Anthony (Tony) Vincent, and his wife, Lucie. Canada then found itself dragged into the sordid world of power struggle typical to the region between revolutionary ideologues prepared to go to any means to achieve their goals, and governmental forces of repression prepared to do the same.

I knew the region well, having served as a junior officer in the late 1960s in Bogota, Colombia, travelling extensively in Ecuador and Peru. I returned to Peru in 1981 to take temporary charge of a Canadian embassy overwhelmed with the problems of protecting itself against an urban terrorist threat and in managing more than a hundred Canadians being held prisoner in the notorious local jail for drug trafficking. At that time government forces and adherents of the Shining Path guerilla organization were locked in fierce combat. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians would be killed in the crossfire. In time, using scorched earth tactics, the Peruvian government managed to beat back the Shining Path.

In the interim, the MRTA had emerged to take its place. It now demanded the release of all its members held in jail before it would release its prisoners.

Gar Pardy, director-general of consular affairs, telephoned to give me the bad news. I told him the prime minister would want to be informed immediately. And he was, despite being awakened from a sound sleep. He approved a press release condemning the terrorist action and expressed sympathy for the Vincent family. “Call me any time of the day or night.”

Early the next morning, Lucie was released followed by Tony himself, together with diplomats from France, Germany and Greece—on condition they pass messages to the Peruvian government and return to captivity. That is when Tony showed what he was made of. The other diplomats scampered for safety and didn’t return. Tony decided to fulfill his part of the bargain but I managed to get him on the telephone before he went back to the residence “Before you act, I want you to speak to the prime minister.”

Prime Minister Chretien, when he came on the line told him, “You’re a brave man, Tony, but think again before you go back to a possible death.”

“I gave my word, Prime Minister,” Tony said. “Besides, by returning I could save lives.”

This part of the story ended satisfactorily. Tony went back and the terrorists released him again. From December to April, they gave every appearance of trying to find a negotiated settlement. At the request of the terrorists, Tony was brought in as one of three guarantors (the other two were representatives of the Catholic Church and the International Committee of the Red Cross). As such, Tony came to Toronto in February to brief the prime minister who hosted the leaders of Japan and Peru to plan a strategy for the crisis. The prime minister pulled aside to

tell him once again that he was a “gutsy guy,” and he was proud of him.



Tony returned to Lima, where he continued his efforts to save lives. But in April, Peruvian commandos stormed the Japanese residence, freeing the remaining prisoners and killing the terrorists. In retrospect, the Peruvian government probably never intended to strike a deal with the hostage-takers. Prime Minister Hashimoto of Japan, who had hoped for a non-violent end to the occupation, called the prime minister to express Japan’s appreciation for Tony’s efforts, and the Department had another hero.

Sadly, Tony died at an early age in 1999 while serving as Canada’s ambassador to Spain.

Maurice Hladik

Tiananmen Diary

Maurice Hladik spent 21 years with the foreign service in Wellington, Bonn, Dusseldorf, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Beijing, Munich and Seoul. For a second career he joined the private sector in an executive capacity for a decade. He is author of "Demystifying Food from Farm to Fork".

I was Minister and head of the Commercial Division at the Embassy in Beijing during the remarkable events in Tiananmen Square that took place in May 1989. The notes that follow draw on a personal journal kept leading up to and during those eventful days.

Beijing, May 10th, 1989

At sunset when passing Tiananmen Square which was normally deserted at that time, I was struck by the presence of about two dozen young adults holding placards.

Beijing, May 15th

I had reason to be in the vicinity of the Square and now found thousands from all walks of life demonstrating peacefully but with exuberance in nearby streets as well. Banners hung from government buildings so the movement included more than students. CNN started to follow developments.

Beijing, May 16th

My wife Angela flew to Hong Kong in anticipation of the birth of our third child.

Xian, May 24th/25th

Travelled to Xian, home of the Terracotta Warriors, to visit an aircraft manufacturing facility at the request of Bombardier who had an offset agreement with the Chinese government to manufacture door and stair assemblies for their regional jet. It mattered to centrally planned China that the government of Canada demonstrated interest in the activities of Canadian companies.

Arrived in the evening prior to the visit and found the Toronto-sized city, a relative backwater, every bit as involved in demonstrations as observed 1,000 kilometres away in Beijing. My hotel room overlooked a major traffic circle where vehicular movement was totally disrupted by masses of banner-carrying and chanting demonstrators. Activities went on unabated all night.

The four-kilometer taxi ride to my appointment took an hour as the entire city seemed to be overtaken by throngs protesting the regime. My hosts were surprised to see me, given the turmoil, and apparently hoped that I would be a no-show as the entire facility was deserted. Workers had abandoned their stations to join their fellow citizens in the forecourt of the factory, collecting money to charter a bus to Beijing to join protests there.

The promised tour was rather interesting as I was led through cavernous hangars filled with a wide assortment of aircraft in various states of assembly including some spiffy military kit. I commented to my host, partially in jest, that perhaps I should not be observing such equipment. He had me sized up correctly as he responded with some levity that I would not appreciate what I was observing.

My takeaway from Xian was that China was on the verge of chaos if a militarily sensitive and major manufacturing facility like this had lost control of its workers.

Beijing, May 26th

A colleague on the China desk, with a couple of prominent Canadian journalists in tow, was to land that evening at 9 p.m. As foreign journalists were persona non grata in China at this time, Foreign Affairs Department in Ottawa had agreed to a bit of subterfuge suggesting that they simply had business with the embassy. I volunteered to meet the aircraft in an official diplomatic capacity to demonstrate our relationship with the three passengers. Late in the day we received word that the flight was delayed until 4 a.m.

Countryside near Beijing, early morning May 27th

For reasons that became apparent later, no embassy driver would take on the task of this airport run so I set out in my own vehicle around 2:30 a.m. for the drive to the airport which, at the time was surrounded by farmland and small villages. Artificial light was practically nonexistent and the two-lane road quite deserted until I came to an intersection with several hundred people milling around. I found out later that they were a vigilante group there as human shields to block the movement of the military. This explained the reluctance of the embassy drivers who did not want to be seen near any such confrontations.

As my car was a late model German make of the type favored by senior officials, I was immediately surrounded by a decidedly unhappy mob. I rolled down my window and as I had a full beard and could not have been part of the Chinese establishment, ill tempers turned to dismay and amusement on why a *Guilo* (foreign devil) was out and about in the Chinese countryside at this ungodly hour. They barely parted for me to pass and stood inches from the car and drummed on the roof as I proceeded slowly through the throng. A scene from Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds" came to mind where the family walked ever so gingerly through a large flock of barely tranquil birds to the safety of their automobile. Likewise I was acutely aware that running over a foot or bumping someone could turn this crowd against me.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. As a senior diplomat I was escorted to the aircraft door where I met the two journalists and my colleague, and with a show of comradery, we had no difficulty convincing passport control that this was indeed an embassy-inspired visit. On the way back to the city the crowd at the intersection had thinned and when I stuck my head out the window, I was met by smiles and was cheerfully waved through. One of my passengers commented, "They seem to know you."

Hong Kong, May 28th

I received word from Angela that the baby was due a little earlier than expected so I flew to Hong Kong that evening.

Hong Kong, May 29th

Daughter Nina was born shortly before midnight.

Beijing, June 3rd

As we had left our other two young children in the hands of my mother-in-law in Beijing and our Chinese caregiver had abandoned us in the confusion, we decided to return as soon as mother and baby daughter could travel. We arrived in Beijing late afternoon and I proceeded to the embassy with a shipment of two-way radios so all embassy personnel could remain in contact given that the telephone system was barely functioning. The embassy military attaché briefed us on special troop movements in the city.

This apparently escalated tensions with the demonstrators. Violence was considered a possibility.

Beijing, June 4th

Around 4 a.m. I was awakened by heavy gunfire coming from the direction of the roundabout a few hundred metres from our apartment in the opposite direction from Tiananmen Square. While the firefight lasted perhaps twenty minutes, it was the first time I had experienced the sound of guns fired for anything other than duck hunting. This brought on a feeling of real vulnerability

for my sleeping family. Unbeknown to me, my 20 year old son, Taylor, who was visiting from Canada had spent the night on the Square and returned home shortly afterward quite shaken to report that he had seen people being injured or killed in a stampede to escape a charging military. He also reported encountering troops and military vehicles at several locations on his two-kilometer bicycle ride home.



Beijing, June 7th

Canada, along with several other countries, arranged for the evacuation of its citizens. My family's turn came quickly and arrangements were made for us to fly to Tokyo the following evening.

Beijing, June 8th

At dawn using my own car, I started ferrying Canadian evacuees to the airport, as buses, taxis and public transport could not be relied on. On the penultimate trip I took my mother-in-law and son Taylor

to the airport. This time I encountered troops stationed along the highway. Returning to get Angela and the children I noted many more troops now standing on the shoulder of the roadway, fully armed and apparently poised for some eventuality. Thankfully they had pulled back slightly on my last dash to the airport with Angela, Norman, Justin and baby Nina. We were all relieved to be reunited with the other two who were waiting near the departure entrance. My final action before we commenced boarding procedures was to hand my car keys to an embassy driver, wondering if I would ever see him or my vehicle again.

Exit procedures for all two hundred or so passengers were completed with surprisingly little difficulty and we boarded the aircraft. Shortly after pushing back from the gate the captain called me to join him in the cockpit where he pointed at a single soldier with a no-nonsense weapon pointed at the flight deck. A message soon came that someone on board was carrying a recently adopted Chinese baby for whom all the required documentation had not yet been completed and to expect a team of immigration officers to board the plane for the purposes of conducting a passport inspection. Although it was not expressed, orders were probably to remove the baby whom they considered to be a Chinese citizen. As was normally the case, adoptive parents had possession of their baby for several days in anticipation that final approval and paperwork was an imminent formality. Strong parental-child bonding would have occurred so any option other than departure for all the members of this new family was unthinkable.

Without mentioning there was a soldier with a gun outside our plane, I explained over the intercom there was a delay and advised that we were about to undergo a visit by immigration officials who were to conduct a search for a child on board who did not quite satisfy Chinese bureaucratic requirements. I then asked the parents on board who might think they were in this position, not to bring any attention to their situation and just to act as calm

as possible. There were several Canadian couples with infants including Angela and me so there was some comfort in numbers.

I then explained that since we had all completed Chinese exit formalities successfully, there should be no requirement for their passports until we arrived in Tokyo. Furthermore as all Canadian passports technically belong to the Canadian government, I was temporarily confiscating all such travel documents immediately for presentation to the authorities. When shopping bags were passed around there was no dissent and a full understanding of what we were attempting to accomplish.

Soon thereafter, four stern officials with side arms and an interpreter in tow boarded the plane and announced their intentions. I presented my passport first and they duly noted that in my diplomatic visa which roughly translated advised “This guy thinks he is important so humour him.” With my bona fides established, I advised the leader of the inspection group that I understood they were very busy and so to make matters easier for them I had assembled all travel documents for their inspection. I handed over two shopping bags containing the couple hundred passports. To my surprise, an amused or perhaps relieved expression crossed his face as he had been asked to carry out an unsavory task concerning one small child who was really of little consequence to his country that was bursting with 1.3 billion inhabitants. It appeared to me that he welcomed our efforts to avert what could have been a nasty scene. He took a cursory look in both bags, and advised through the interpreter that he appreciated my helpful preparation and that the inspection was now complete. I could not help but think of the “Spy vs. Spy” cartoon in Mad Magazine and the reluctant admiration exhibited when one side outdid the other. Following a few minutes completing his report, probably subterfuge to leave the impression of a thorough document inspection, he and his comrades left the aircraft and we were free to take off for Tokyo. With the cabin crew busy returning passports, there was a palpable sense of relief throughout the cabin.

Somewhere in Canada today there is a young man or woman who may not know that for a brief period on that hot Beijing evening their entire future hung in the hands of two bureaucrats of very different backgrounds who cooperated in the most unlikely of circumstances. Such is life.

Tokyo, June 8th

Our travel to Tokyo was uneventful as were the next couple of days until I received instructions to travel, with the entire family, to Hong Kong where I had been posted recently, to make the rounds of my former contacts who had family and business in China in order to get a take on their views on how things were unfolding throughout the country.

Epilogue

With the benefit of a quarter century of hindsight, I now feel that, while very self-serving, the regime saved China from catastrophe with their rather clumsy attempt at crowd control. The whole country was spinning in turmoil with the hapless students demanding regime change. Had they succeeded in overthrowing the powers that be, a country with 1.3 billion inhabitants with food issues for one, would have been set adrift without the reasonably functioning cradle-to-grave direction of the Communist apparatus. A bad outcome to be sure, but at least the vacuum we see today in much less complex countries such as Libya and Iraq, as a result of regime change without an alternative waiting in the wings, was averted.

Jean-Paul Hubert

Expérience unique à l'OEA

Jean-Paul Hubert a servi 27 de ses 35 ans à l'étranger, dont 16 comme ambassadeur à Dakar, Washington (Organisation des États Américains), Bruxelles, Buenos Aires et Berne. Il a été « sherpa » des premiers ministres Muroney et Chrétien pour les Sommets de la Francophonie, et membre-élu pendant 9 ans du Comité juridique interaméricain de l'OEA. Il a aussi été président du Centre international des Droits de la personne et du développement démocratique.

J'ai passé dix-sept de mes dix-neuf dernières années au Ministère à l'étranger. Toutes comme ambassadeur, à Dakar, OEA/Washington, Bruxelles, Buenos Aires et Berne. Je ne sais pas s'il s'agit d'un record, mais lorsqu'on me demande comment expliquer cette suite plutôt inusuelle de cinq affectations successives comme chef de mission, je m'en remets – en blague bien sûr – à l'hypothèse qui voudrait qu'on ne voulait pas de moi à Ottawa.

Mon propos ici n'est pas d'épiloguer sur la série de circonstances qui ont fait qu'un tel sort, somme toute fort agreeable, et je présume, fort envié, m'ait été réservé. Je vais plutôt m'attarder sur l'un de ces séjours à l'étranger, en raison du caractère un brin anecdotique qui l'a précédé et accompagné.

Souvent on me demande: « De toutes tes affectations, laquelle t'a procuré le plus de satisfaction ? » Ma réponse varie selon que l'on considère la « qualité de vie » en général, ou bien la tâche accomplie. Et à ce second chapitre je réponds invariablement et toujours sans hésitation que là où je me levais le matin et avais le plus hâte de partir au bureau, en d'autres termes là où au plan professionnel je me suis senti le plus comblé, ce fut comme

premier ambassadeur et représentant permanent du Canada près de l'Organisation des États Américains (OEA) à Washington (1990-1993).

Les raisons en sont multiples. J'y reviendrai brièvement à la fin du présent texte. Mais d'abord, voici pour l'anecdote. Une histoire à l'origine improbable, mais bien vraie.

Nous sommes le 10 janvier 1990, deux jours après que le Canada ait déposé son instrument de ratification de la « Charte de Bogota » (1948), document fondateur de la version moderne de l'OEA. Il devenait par le fait membre à part entière de l'entité-phare du Système interaméricain vieux d'un siècle. Deux jours également après que j'eus l'insigne honneur de présenter mes lettres de créances comme premier ambassadeur et représentant permanent du Canada.

Le 10 janvier 1990, donc, se tenait une session ordinaire du Conseil permanent, la première depuis mon entrée en fonction. Et selon que l'exige la coutume, j'y serais invité à prononcer mon « discours d'inauguration » (maiden speech).

Moment qui revêtait pour l'ensemble des membres de l'OEA une importance particulière et suscitait leur curiosité, compte tenu du fait que l'entrée du Canada au sein de l'OEA était attendue depuis des décennies et largement souhaitée par la très vaste majorité de ses membres. Tout cela représentait un moment historique tant pour l'OEA que pour le Canada.

Mais pour moi, il était revêtu d'une charge émotive bien particulière, comme on verra...

Vous devinerez combien le texte formulant les premiers propos formels de notre pays nouvellement membre de l'OEA et présenté par son représentant avait été soigneusement préparé et figolé en collaboration étroite avec le Bureau des Affaires hémisphériques à Ottawa. Lu tantôt en français, tantôt en anglais, les deux langues

officielles du Canada, il fut écouté avec la plus grande attention par les ambassadeurs de tous les pays-membres.

Une fois terminée la lecture du document écrit que j'avais devant moi, je l'ai replié très ostensiblement, l'ai remis dans la poche de mon veston, puis, après un regard circulaire tout autour de la table du Conseil, j'ai continué sans texte et en espagnol, dans les termes paraphrasés ci-après. Je savais que ce que je m'apprêtais à faire s'éloignait du « protocole » habituel, mais j'étais confiant que cela « passerait bien ».

Voici donc, de mémoire, la teneur de mes propos ce jour-là.

« Maintenant que vous avez entendu par mon entremise un bref énoncé du pourquoi de notre présence à cette table après tant d'années d'attente, et des objectifs que mon pays entend y poursuivre aux côtés des vôtres, permettez-moi de vous raconter une petite histoire ».

« Il y a 29 ans, en 1961 donc, un jeune étudiant de 19 ans s'est présenté ici même à l'édifice de l'Union Panaméricaine. Il était sur son chemin de retour au terme d'un voyage qui l'avait conduit « sur le pouce » depuis son village natal au Canada jusqu'au Mexique. Il désirait visiter le siège de l'OEA. Deux années auparavant il avait écrit dans le journal de son collègue un article arguant qu'il était temps que son pays adhère enfin à cette organisation ».

« En entendant qu'il était canadien, l'employé de l'OEA à qui il s'était adressé l'invita à le suivre: « Venez, je vais vous montrer quelque chose », et il conduisit le jeune homme, perplexe, dans une salle où était remisés des meubles divers, couverts de poussière. A leur vue, le jeune étudiant commença à deviner ce qui l'attendait, car il en avait entendu parler: là était rangée la fameuse chaise gravée aux armoiries du Canada plusieurs décennies auparavant, dans l'attente – et l'espoir – que notre pays joindrait les rangs de l'Organisation ».

« Il amena ensuite l'étudiant dans le « Hall of the Americas », la grande salle d'apparat où sont disposés en éventail les drapeaux des états-membres et lui montra un point d'ancrage vide dans le socle où étaient insérés les hampes de ces drapeaux; il lui expliqua que cet espace avait été destiné à l'origine à recevoir le drapeau du Canada ».

« Finalement, il montra au jeune visiteur, gravé dans la frise surplombant la « Galerie des Héros », aux côtés des Bolivar, San Martín, O'Higgins, Juarez, Washington, etc, le nom de (Samuel de) Champlain, fondateur de la ville de Québec. Autre signe, dit-il, que le Canada était attendu comme membre de la grande famille américaine ».

« Lorsque ce jeune étudiant descendit les marches de l'édifice pour entreprendre son retour au Canada, il se retourna pour jeter un dernier regard sur le magnifique siège de l'OEA, et se murmura à lui-même: 'Un jour je serai peut-être ambassadeur du Canada ici'. Il était loin de se douter que 29 ans plus tard il gravirait ces mêmes marches pour la 2^e fois de sa vie; c'est lui qui vient de vous adresser la parole ... Merci ».

Va sans dire que cette invraisemblable histoire a surpris tout le monde

J'étais loin de me douter au moment de revenir au Canada suite à cette visite au siège de l'OEA en 1961 qu'un jour j'aurais l'insigne honneur d'être le premier ambassadeur du Canada à m'asseoir dans la fameuse chaise. Et comme on nous y attendait depuis si longtemps, j'ai pu bénéficier tout au long des trois années et demie d'un énorme capital de sympathie de la part tant de tout le personnel de l'OEA – du Secrétaire général à tous les officiels sous sa gouverne – comme de celle de mes collègues ambassadeurs. Ce qui ne fut pas sans faire de mon travail une tâche des plus agréables. Les relations du Canada avec l'ensemble des pays latino-américains étaient au beau fixe; l'important groupe des pays-membres des Caraïbes étaient pour nous des alliés

naturels et disposés à appuyer nos initiatives. Quant aux États-Unis, ils s'avérèrent immédiatement d'excellents collaborateurs, grâce pour une bonne part à Luigi Einaudi, sans doute le meilleur ambassadeur qu'a eu ce pays auprès de cette organisation.

Il faut dire aussi que le premier ministre Mulroney avait choisi le moment opportune pour décider de l'entrée du Canada à l'OEA. Une OEA qui s'était départie de sa réputation de « repaire de dictateurs obéissant aux diktats de Washington »; une OEA qui, grâce à la fin de la Guerre Froide était à la fois témoin et bénéficiaire d'un changement de ton fort positif dans les relations hémisphériques.

Notre arrivée si longtemps retardée à l'OEA avait suscité bien des attentes. Une voix parmi d'autres, le président du Venezuela, alors Carlos Andres Perez, avait déclaré : « L'incorporation du Canada, que nous accueillons avec satisfaction, ouvre une expectative nouvelle et intéressante pour la rénovation de l'OEA (...) sa restructuration et sa modernization. »

Beau défi pour le Canada...

Les quelques manchettes suivantes tirées des médias de l'époque illustrent la façon dont il a pu y faire face: « OAS benefits from example set by Canada » (mars '91); « Canadian plan gives jolt to OAS » (mai '91); « Canada broadens influence, leadership at OAS » (juin '92); « Ottawa's 'Boy Scouts' invigorated tired old club » (août '93); « Canada moral leader within OAS » (août '93); « OAS team makes its mark » (août '94).

Onze ans plus tard, en février 2001, le Secrétaire général, alors César Gaviria Trujillo, évaluait ainsi, devant le Premier ministre Jean Chrétien, la première décennie du Canada au sein de l'OEA: « L'entrée du Canada à l'OEA a redonné de la vigueur, en y apportant une perspective nouvelle au Système interaméricain, une approche nouvelle (...). Le Canada constitue un phare dans l'Hémisphère ». Par la suite, les politologues Therien, Mace et

Roberge écriraient. « Depuis son adhésion (...) le Canada (...) a pu prétendre qu'il avait réussi à modifier la dynamique même des relations continentales ».

Il était sans doute naturel que dans un tel contexte la tâche et le rôle qui m'ont incombé pendant les trois premières années et demi du Canada au sein de l'OEA aient quelque chose d'exaltant, et demeurent pour moi, parmi toutes les expériences vécues au cours de mes trente-cinq ans au service de la diplomatie canadienne, celle qui au plan professionnel m'a apporté le plus de satisfaction.

Gar Pardy **Meeting Idi**

***Gar Pardy**, foreign service veteran with experience in the USA, Central America, Kenya, India was for years the government's go-to consular affairs specialist and who in retirement became a frequently sought commentator, tells here of the particular delights of meeting one of the world's clearly frightening dictators.*

It was a typically warm November in 1975 when the High Commissioner-designate to Uganda, Gerry Rau, colleague Donald Campbell and I arrived in Kampala. The occasion was for Gerry to present his credentials to Idi Amin, then president of Uganda. Gerry and I had arrived in Nairobi in August but even with Uganda as part of the accreditation territory no one was in a rush to see President Amin and convey the good wishes of the government of Canada and to offer our hopes that the people of Uganda would grow and prosper. Careful attention was paid to those words as no one wanted to suggest by the words used that we were offering our best to the president.

We had arrived in Uganda following a tumultuous five years in the history of the country. In October 1970 President Milton Obote reduced Amin's military role as commander of the armed forces. Four months later on January 25, 1971, Amin struck back while Obote was attending the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore. Obote found refuge in neighbouring Tanzania but Amin quickly took control of the country, using largely, soldiers from his West Nile home in northwestern Uganda.

Amin's takeover started an almost decade-long spree of murder, mayhem and terror. He roiled regional and international relations with his frequent comments on others often parodying the British. He remade the armed forces so that they were dominated by persons from the northwest, largely Muslim, in a country that was overwhelmingly Christian. He then started his "economic war" including the expropriation of property owned by the country's 80,000 Asians and then followed up with an expulsion order for the vast majority who still had British passports. In the following months thousands of these, largely Ismaili and followers of the Aga Khan, came to Canada where they have added much to our political, cultural and economic life.

In a perverse way, those expelled were the fortunate ones. They were beyond Amin's murderous rule that some estimates put at nearing 500,000 victims. In his relations with the world, Amin early on ended his close relationship with Israel, tweaked the Americans and British, and formed close ties with Gadhafi's Libya, the Soviet Union, and East Germany.

Before long the United States and the United Kingdom reduced or ended their diplomatic offices in Kampala to largely caretaker status but Canada maintained relations in order to provide some measure of protection to the 150 or so Canadians who continued to reside in the country. These were White Sisters and Brothers of Christian Instructions, largely from Québec who had dedicated their lives to health and education matters in Uganda. Some had returned to Canada but found life outside Uganda difficult and most returned to live out their lives in the chaos that was now Uganda.

I visited many in the coming months, bringing supplies that added to their comfort. I quickly learned that a few bottles of Canadian Club and ginger ale provided greater comfort than the continuing interest of the Canadian government. Many an evening was spent in their sequestered, candle-lit houses sipping a taste of home with

the sounds of gunfire in the distance. The gunfire failed to limit such a small pleasure. The Canadian whisky was better then, than at any time since.

Among other Canadians who stayed was Dr Lucille Teasdale–Corti, a Montreal-born physician who along with her Italian husband, Dr Piero Corti, worked at a small hospital in northern Uganda near the town of Gulu. They arrived at the hospital in early 1961 and until their deaths, many years later, worked to provide medical services to the Acholi tribe and carried out ground breaking research on AIDS which was making its early appearance in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa in the mid-seventies. I often went north to the hospital during periodic visits with needed medical supplies provided through our Mission administered development assistance fund. Lucille and Piero are buried next to each other on the grounds of the hospital. A foundation in their names continues to support the hospital and is now administered by their daughter, Dominique.

During this period another event roiled the Ugandan political scene. In 1994, Amin appointed Elizabeth Bagaaya, a princess in the royal family of the ancient kingdom of Toro in western Uganda, as his foreign minister. At the time Ms Bagaaya was a leading spokesperson for the regime but her tenure as foreign minister was short. In less than a year, in February 1975, she escaped house arrest in Kampala and returned to London where earlier she had become a member of the English Bar. Her falling out with Amin occasioned accusations by him that there were sexual indiscretions in a Paris bathroom while she was foreign minister. Various European tabloids published Amin's accusations without verification. In subsequent years Ms Bagaaya sued and received court-ordered awards in several countries. During our November 1975 visit Ms Bagaaya was still a subject of wide-spread interest as she was one of a very few critics of Amin who escaped the country with her life.

The presentation of credentials by Mr Rau took place late in the morning at Government House (formerly the State House) in Kampala with a small number of Ugandan officials attending. National anthems were played by a police band and the words of the Ugandan paean were ironically out of touch with reality of Amin's rule:

Oh Uganda! may God uphold thee,
We lay our future in thy hand.
United, free,
For liberty
Together we'll always stand.

Oh Uganda! the land of freedom.
Our love and labour we give,
And with neighbours all
At our country's call
In peace and friendship we'll live.

Oh Uganda! the land that feeds us
By sun and fertile soil grown.
For our own dear land,
We'll always stand:
The Pearl of Africa's Crown.

Following the music, President Amin welcomed Mr Rau and his party (colleague Don Campbell and I) to his country and expressed the hope that the close relationship between Canada and Uganda would grow in the coming months. High Commissioner Rau, not known for his loquaciousness, spoke for a few moments largely expressing the hope that the people of Uganda would prosper in the coming years.

The ceremony was over. President Amin then welcomed us inside Government House for a bilateral toast. As we assembled inside I could hear in the distance the faint sound of delicate bells which within a minute or two sounded as if we would be serenaded with a musical presentation. It was not to be. Instead through a door

to one side of the reception area an elderly aide entered carrying a large tray of crystal champagne glasses filled with amber liquor. It soon became evident the aide was so nervous to be in the presence of the president that he could not hold his tray steady; the glasses slightly touched providing a subtle musical backdrop to the occasion. Soon the aide served the glasses and we raised them and said in unison: “To Canada; To Uganda.”



The president was impeccably dressed just as if he had just left a bespoke tailor in London. The Canadian delegation came nowhere near this standard. But as the ceremonies were ending I noticed a slight bulge at the side of Amin's jacket at waist level. The cloth did not conform to his large size and it was at that moment the tenuousness of his rule became evident. Even in a meeting with Canadians the president needed his own close-in protection. Shakespeare in *Richard IV* spoke for all ages when he wrote, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

The ceremony was over. Gerry, Don and I made our way out of the room to a waiting taxi and returned to the Hotel Intercontinental. There we had lunch and it was an auspicious one as for the first time in months the local brewery released a few cases of the local beer. The beer went well with the Nile perch. We returned to Nairobi that evening but it was not to be my last visit to Uganda as over the next three years numerous returns were necessary as the Amin regime spiraled into deadly irrelevance.

Amin continued to pretend he was the "Last King of Scotland" and thousands continued to die. His balloon grew apace until the early morning hours of July 4, 1976 when an Israeli commando force came calling. It followed the arrival at Entebbe Airport, outside of Kampala, of a hijacked Air France A300 Airbus. The last hostages were freed and within 90 minutes the Israelis were on their way back to Israel via Nairobi. Amin never recovered from the indignity of having Israeli commando raiders pull off this daring operation at the heart of his regime.

Two and half years later Amin invaded Tanzania in order to annex a small piece of land. In response President Nyerere mobilized his own army and invaded Uganda. In a few weeks the balloon that was Amin's rule burst and one of the most successful postwar regime-changes found success. Amin escaped into exile, first to Libya and then to Saudi Arabia. He died there in mid-August 2003 unsung and unmissed. Unfortunately, Uganda continues to

suffer from the indignities of the Amin rule although some of his excesses are now more circumscribed. But the curse of those who come to rule in Africa and stay and stay are still with the continent. Uganda is a paradise; one day, its leaders may reflect that.

Peter Roberts

Mulroney and Gorbachev

***Peter Maclaren Roberts, 1927-2003.** Peter's academic life ranged from Alberta to Oxford, and his foreign service from Hong Kong, Washington, Brussels, and Bucharest to Moscow, the last two postings as ambassador. In Ottawa he served as Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's press secretary. A lover of music and literature, before retirement he was appointed by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney as Director of the Canada Council for the Arts. He wrote "George Costakis, a Russian Life in Art", a semi-fictional biography of Nikolai Ceausescu entitled "Revenge on Christmas Day", and an autobiography, "Raising Eyebrows". The excerpt about Mulroney in Moscow is taken from the latter.*

A state funeral in Moscow, a reception to introduce the new general secretary of the Communist Party, and a brave and nimble ambassador who went to great lengths to put back on track a private meeting between the prime minister and the new general secretary and, in a show of gratitude, was summoned back to Ottawa two years before the end of his posting.

In 1985, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney came to Moscow to help bury Chernyenko, the non-descript general secretary of the Communist Party, who replaced the much more interesting Andropov, who had died the previous year. More to the point, Mulroney came to meet the new general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, about whom everyone had high hopes.

I went to the dreary funeral with Mulroney, in the Hall of Columns, the headquarters of the so-called trade unions of the Soviet Union. Following the funeral there was a reception in the Kremlin for Gorbachev with whom Mulroney was to have a private talk, as

were all the other heads of state and government who were in Moscow for this grand event.

Everyone who was anyone was at the reception: Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Bush, Herr Kohl, M. Mitterand, and lots more. Mulroney, with me tagging along behind, stopped on the grand staircase of the Kremlin to greet them. I recall that he had a long chat with the new and rather gorgeous widow of the president of the Philippines, Mrs. Marcos. Then we went back to the embassy and had a serious dinner, Canadians only, where we discussed where to go with the new Russia. Mulroney had his ideas, which he intended to try out on Gorbachev at their tête-à-tête meeting.

But the next day went to hell in a handcart. Early in the morning I had a phone call from Victor Sukhodrev, head of the Canada desk in the Russian foreign ministry, who said he was terribly sorry, but the new general secretary would not be able to see our prime minister. He had over-crowded his program and would have to cut some people out. We were among those cut out.

I phoned the prime minister's staff and gave them this dismal news. None of them was prepared to pass it on to the PM. They were terrified. He had come to see Gorbachev; not to see him would be a severe political, and personal, affront. I said to myself, "Come on, Peter. This is the time to be brave." So I got in my car and went to the dreadful Rossiya Hotel, where Mulroney was staying. I told him what had happened. He was predictably enraged. "God damn bastards. Order my plane," he said. "I'm going home right now."

It was still before nine o'clock in the morning. I asked him to be patient. I would see what I could do. He fumed, but did not reverse my suggestion that he not order his plane. I got back in my car and went to the foreign ministry, not far away. There I accomplished something absolutely new. I confronted the policeman at the front door, said who I was and said I had to see Victor Sukhodrev on a matter of the utmost importance. Usually they demanded that you be escorted to the office (as do we here in Canada). But, he was so

taken aback by my vehemence that he waved me through. I found Victor and said “Listen, Victor, you can’t do this to us. You’ve got to get our prime minister in there.” Victor said, “I agree. I don’t know who did it. I didn’t. Let’s try to see Gromyko.” (Gromyko was still foreign minister, after nearly 30 years.) So he took me by the hand and hauled me along the corridor to Gromyko’s office. We met the great man, just emerging, in his solemn hat, on his way to a meeting. Victor explained the problem. “Of course,” said Gromyko. “The Canadians must be in. What fool turned them out?”

He went back to his office, made a brief call, and that was that.

I returned to the PM, made a report, and got a broad smile.

Next morning there was a “bilateral,” as they’re called in the trade, with Chancellor Kohl. It took place in the German Embassy. The next stop was Red Square and Gorbachev, then for Mulroney and his vast retinue, to return to Canada. Outside the German embassy we got in our cars: prime minister and staff (and me), Canadian security, Soviet security, and press. The cavalcade must have been half a mile long. An old press secretary, I realized that there was no cameraman at the front of the cortège. There had to be, to take pictures of Mulroney arriving at the Kremlin.

I leapt out of the prime-ministerial car, with an alacrity I no longer possess, told the driver not to move an inch, and ran like a deer back down the column until I spotted the prime minister’s brilliant personal photographer, Peter Bregg, wondering why he had been installed so far back. I caught him by the hand, much as Victor had caught me the day before, dragged him up to Mulroney’s car and put him in my seat beside the prime minister. In Red Square, Peter was out of the car before anyone else, and took superb pictures.

Then, more problems. A KGB officer (you get to know them after a few years in Moscow) came up to me after we had wasted quite a lot of Mulroney’s time sightseeing in Red Square. “Comrade

Ambassador,” he said, “would you be so kind as to speak to Comrade Sukhodrev on our radio?”

I had never before, thank God, been in a KGB car. But there it was, big, black and forbidding, just what you would expect to be taken in to the gulag. But this was different. I was sat down beside the driver and handed the telephone. On the other end was Victor. “Peter,” he said, “Do you think the prime minister would mind a short delay? Gorbachev has had a heavy morning. He would like a few minutes for a sandwich and a cup of tea.” I said, without seeking instructions, that I was sure Comrade Mulroney would be happy to wait a few minutes. And so he was.

The talk in the Kremlin lasted an hour and was interesting and intelligent. In my experience of him, which goes back quite a long way, Mulroney is far better in a private conversation like this, than speaking to a crowd or on TV, where he seems heavy and pretentious. Gorbachev, whom I knew somewhat from earlier meetings, was lively and articulate, and well briefed about Canada (where he had been only a few months earlier, in his then capacity of party secretary responsible for Soviet agriculture). Mulroney displayed what I had seen in him before, an intense curiosity, and a desire to know, from the best source, what was going on. He found out, and played it back to me in the car on the way to the airport.

But this trip to the airport was, in a way, my downfall. “I am grateful for how you fixed up this mess,” said Mulroney. “And I noticed how you didn’t stand on ceremony this morning but ran and got Peter Bregg. Peter, what would you like to do next?” I had fearful premonitions. “Prime Minister,” I said, “I’m very happy with my job in Moscow. I’ve been here only two years. Four is more usual.” “Well,” said the PM, “I have some ideas. Someone will phone you tomorrow.”

It was six months before the call came (August 1985) from Alain Gourd, Deputy Minister of Communications. “The Prime

Minister,” he said, “wants you to come back right away to be head of the Canada Council. We’re having some problems there.”

It wasn’t a request, it was an order. So I made my call on the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, the Bulgarian ambassador, apologized for leaving so precipitously, and got on the plane.

But my heart stayed in Russia, and is there to this day.

John Schram

Waiting for Mandela

John Schram retired from DFAIT to teach at Queen's University and Carleton University (NPSIA) in 2005, when he ended his posting as head of mission in the high commission in Harare. Previously John had served as ambassador in Addis Ababa, high commissioner in Ghana, and as minister counsellor in Pretoria. Together with his wife Alena, he holds a hand-written commendation from Nelson Mandela for support in the struggle against apartheid and the transition to democracy in South Africa.

For twenty-seven tumultuous years the world had waited for Nelson Mandela. Now, on the afternoon of February 11, 1990, he was free. Thousands shouted, danced, laughed, cried as Mandela spoke to them that first thrilling night in Cape Town; over the next two days, thousands more joined in the frenzy of celebrations, rallies and speeches. Late the second night, he retreated to rest in Johannesburg's sprawling black township, Soweto.

In bed in the leafy white Pretoria suburb, Waterkloof, some 40 miles and an immense cultural and racial chasm away, my wife, Alena, and I were suddenly awakened by the phone. A voice from the Prime Minister's Office in Ottawa, insisted that Prime Minister Mulroney talk to Mandela. Now.

In desperation, Alena dialled Albertina Sisulu. Albertina and her husband Walter were long-time comrades of Mandela. Walter had been imprisoned with him on Robben Island. To our astonishment and relief, our call was answered. Mandela was there, undergoing a late-night medical check-up. He would be delighted to talk to Mulroney.

And for good reason...

When Mandela was finally set free, Alena and I had been with the Canadian embassy in South Africa for two years. We were part of a small embassy team that had been told by Mulroney and by Joe Clark, then minister for External Affairs, to test the outer bounds of acceptable diplomatic activity to support South Africans working to bring down apartheid. It was a job description unique in Canada's diplomatic history, and it went a long way to explaining why Mandela was so keen to talk to Brian Mulroney: he wanted to acknowledge Canada's role in pressing for the change that had brought his release, and that would inspire the new South Africa.

Our own introduction to Canada's unorthodox diplomacy in South Africa had come on our first Saturday there, when embassy colleague Lucie Edwards had hauled us away from our bougainvillea-bedecked swimming pool to downtown Johannesburg, to participate in a Detainees Tea Party. Detainees were family breadwinners who had been jailed for challenging apartheid. Their wives and children who needed help with legal defence, education, food, were the guests at this party. Hundreds of Canadians were already supporting them, quietly sending cash through the Toronto offices of IDAFSA – to be handed out secretly in South Africa through functions such as this.

There was little tea at this party. But there was food, appreciated by those who had gathered to sing, chant and march threateningly around the room in a fearsome township dance, the *toyitoyi*. *Toyitoyi* was the scourge of the police, the nightmare of whites – and the joy of protesting crowds everywhere across South Africa.

Here, too, was our first anti-apartheid saint, taking subtle charge from the corner of the stage: David Webster, from all appearances a white professional with the money to be out golfing. Who but perhaps Webster himself would have predicted that within the year he would be assassinated, chiefly for hosting tea parties for detainees?

There were other saints and heroes where David came from. Alena and I marvelled at the willingness of a small group of liberal whites to take risks in the name of human rights, democracy and compassion.

And take risks they did. On October 5, Alena attended a regular public meeting of the Canadian-funded organization, Lawyers for Human Rights. Just as Alistair Teeling Smith finished a courageous charge against the military conscription that was sucking young white South Africans into an unending war of attrition with neighbouring Angola, he was grabbed off the stage by plainclothes security officers to be served with a restriction order. His days of speaking in public were over. He was lucky to avoid detention. We were to work repeatedly with individuals and families – black, white, Coloured and Indian – whose breadwinners were in jail, sons and daughters detained and beaten, and were themselves “banned”, forbidden to speak to more than two people at a time, or to leave their homes.

Some white South Africans in 1988 thought this was as it should be. They saw David Webster, Teeling Smith and their ilk as foolishly misguided, even treasonous. Many were openly hostile to those from Canada, Holland, Sweden and Australia who were making it their business to encourage change.

Most whites, though, were unconcerned with politics. They did not want to know there was a problem; did not need to know; and indeed, went to some lengths to avoid knowing. When Alena went as part of a Canadian-supported programme to stay with a black family in Mamelodi, Pretoria’s black township, our neighbours in the protected confines of Waterkloof were incredulous: in the South Africa of 1988, white people did not eat with black people, let alone stay overnight in their homes.

Ordinary whites may not have wanted to see the problem, but to the security services, the challenge was clear and all-consuming. Black people needed to be watched, controlled, kept down. Those

who went against the system had to be rounded up, banned, detained, imprisoned.

I was plunged into this strange confluence of fear, wilful ignorance and indifference when I went through the line of police, dogs and security checks to watch the later stages of the second Delmas Trial. Our role was simply to be there, to offer some small measure of encouragement to prisoners on trial for their lives. And to show the white judge that countries with similar legal traditions were watching.

As the accused disappeared forlornly down into the cells for the noon break, their dejected families duly raised their fists to shout *amandla – power!* But when we emerged into the bright, dry sun of Church Square, it was to find ourselves surrounded by police, dogs and *caspirs* – the yellow armoured personnel fortresses that police brought to all such gatherings. To weeping wives and children of the prisoners, “power” was a chimera.

Then, barely into the 1989 new year, President P.W. Botha suffered a mild stroke, and was eventually replaced as head of the National Party – and thus putative president – by supposed hardliner, F.W. de Klerk. To our friends in the struggle, life seemed destined to go on as harshly, as separately as before.

For several months, it did: David Webster, tea party host, was shot dead outside his house; trials continued; protests were met by force; our anti-apartheid friends still faced detentions, restrictions, banning and jail; and the middle-class white ladies of the Black Sash continued to stand silently at street corners, embarrassing their husbands and children by holding up placards demanding human rights for all. Government extended the State of Emergency for a fourth year. With canny appreciation of the stakes, our ambassador, Ron McLean, ensured that his embassy troops – by now, with Lucie’s departure, David Viveash, Brian Burton and I – lived on the edge, deftly balancing our vigorous support for the struggle with an awareness that security force tolerance had limits.

We took risks nonetheless. The exceptional Dialogue Fund that Alena administered, underpinned much of the alternative press; it supported human rights groups and anti-apartheid organizations throughout South Africa; it funded Black Sash women and business professionals. It sent student leaders from the Afrikaans citadel of Stellenbosch University to Lusaka, the home-in-exile of the ANC where they were among the first whites to brave the ban on meeting the ANC. Like all our partners, these students could well have faced detention, severe restrictions or the loss of their passports when they returned home.

I, too, went to Zambia to meet the ANC leadership at the home of Lusaka embassy colleagues Gerry and Mavaiah Ohlsen. Here, with Thabo Mbeki – then head of the ANC International Department and later president of the new South Africa – and Joe Slovo, general secretary of the South Africa Communist Party, and leader of Umkonto we Sizwe (the armed wing of the ANC), we argued late into the night, trying to convince them to give up the armed struggle. With discouraging finality both Slovo and Mbeki dismissed our plea to abandon violence. They had a different message for Canada: “We need tougher sanctions, more pressure; more of what you’re doing. And say thanks to Mulroney and Clark.”

Back in Pretoria our extraordinary embassy activity continued: I went to watch 12 brave black patients make their way for treatment at the whites-only Vereeniging hospital. There were plenty of police about – but no violence.

Later we watched four pleasant young Indian kids and a white student try to board a whites-only bus. Any commitment to peaceful change was well hidden: twenty-seven policemen and two inspectors glared across the street at our little party. Tempers flared, threats flew, arrests were made, protesters were hauled into *caspirs* and off to jail.

The evening the ailing P.W. Botha finally resigned his languishing presidency; Alena and I were guests at a small dinner at the Johannesburg home of Helen Suzman. If tea party host David Webster was a saint in the struggle, Helen was a hero. Her courage through lonely years as Parliament's only liberal opposition MP, was already legendary. Now she was full of hope. She knew there was still a long road to travel, with many tribulations to come. But eventually the country would see the democracy that she – and Nelson Mandela – so hoped for.

She was right, of course. The cat and mouse game of protest and crackdown continued – in fact, it worsened significantly. On the last day of August, the normally placid and mostly white students of Johannesburg's famed University of the Witwatersrand – Wits – held an illegal protest.

For three hours police chased cohorts of students about the campus, finally confining several hundred of them to the enclosed multi-storeyed quadrangle of the Senate House Coliseum. Entirely at the mercy of the police who lined the walls, tear gas guns at the ready, students peered apprehensively from balconies above, or knelt and squatted on the marble below. Standing alone in their midst was a diminutive white man – saying and doing nothing. Just standing amongst his students. I had known Mervyn Shear as an oral pathologist and deputy vice-chancellor. Now suddenly I saw that he, too, was a hero. Shear was able to persuade the police commander to call off his men; the presence of a Canadian diplomat did not go unnoticed.

Shortly thereafter I was called to the foreign ministry by the beefy, jovial but hard-nosed Americas Director, Malcolm Ferguson. Backed by a wall of photographs of me in the midst of mass meetings, church services, toyi toyi-ing crowds, police cordons, the students of Wits – and one of me arguing with a policeman at a lonely bus stop in Pretoria – Ferguson told me that each picture showed I had been “participating” in illegal protest activities.

“What you are doing should never be tolerated from a diplomat. But in this case we won’t support our security people in their criticism; we will tolerate what you’re up to in this unique situation here because we in Foreign Affairs want change too.”

I was astonished that Ferguson even mentioned change. But well he might. Bigger events were forcing the pace. The Berlin Wall had fallen, and with it the South African government’s pretext of fighting a Soviet-driven “total onslaught” in southern Africa. De Klerk was indeed under intense pressure – both from the Mass Democratic Movement at home and from the international community (not least Commonwealth countries, especially Canada and Australia). The sense of “waiting for Mandela” was everywhere.

February 2, 1990 was a decisive day: without warning, de Klerk unbanned the ANC, its partner the South Africa Communist Party, the United Democratic Front and the Pan African Congress – and 33 individuals. He lifted hundreds of restrictions, announced the release of political prisoners, suspended the death penalty, cancelled most media restrictions and allowed political exiles home. As Archbishop Tutu said, it was a courageous watershed: “It took one’s breath away...it all left me feeling quite at sea – so much so quickly.”

Only days later, Nelson Mandela was released. The world stopped. For twenty-seven years people had waited for Mandela. And now he was here.

At St. Paul’s Church in Soweto, an exuberant congregation laughed with relief as Archbishop Tutu told us to be thankful: “We have received what you have been praying for all these years: peace, love, change. Have you stopped to thank God now that it has actually happened?” The strains of the ANC anthem *Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika*, had never been sung with such an outpouring of joy.

Nor had it been sung so widely and openly – rising to a crescendo – all around South Africa. On July 2, 1990 the ANC held its 48th Congress in Durban – the first time members had been able to hold such a meeting in South Africa since the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, when the ANC was declared illegal and its leaders forced into exile. For the ANC, as for all the saints and heroes who had worked for change, this was the long-awaited assurance that their efforts and aspirations would succeed. The now-aged Bishop Trevor Huddleston and ANC leader-in-exile Oliver Tambo both spoke nostalgically of the past. There were justified tears in the eyes of the elderly struggle stalwarts who had, against all odds, come out of prison and lived to see this day. But Mandela looked firmly to the future. He and the younger “comrades” radiated commitment and courage as they spoke of the much that still needed to be done. Nkosi Sikelele had become the promise of a real future, not just an inspiring prayer of hope.

Of course South Africa’s travails did not end with Mandela’s release from prison. Or with the ANC Congress. They grew worse. As from nowhere, with no apparent organization, with no-one claiming responsibility, South Africa was convulsed in an orgy of what the white press quickly termed – not entirely without satisfaction – “black-on-black violence”.

As we had done so often in the past when the battle lines were a clearer black and white, our son Peter and I drove to Sebokeng for the funeral of four people shot the week before. There we were immediately engulfed by thousands of dancing, singing deeply emotional mourners. Crushed in the surging crowd and with some apprehension ourselves, we put a small Canadian flag in the car window. We needn’t have worried. I noted that evening: “People were saluting us, thanking Canada for standing with them in the struggle. It was a scene to make any white South African’s blood run cold. Except for a British embassy representative, we were the only whites present. As Canadians we could not have been more welcome”.



Alena and I continued to host our dialogue dinners and parties. It was at one of these functions that we introduced the now-internationally respected former judge, International Court prosecutor, and author of the 2010 UN report on the Israel-Hamas confrontation, to his first ever ANC contact: Gill Marcus, then head of the ANC Information Department and a key figure in Mandela's office. Goldstone says now that because of their late-into-the-night discussion, he brought a whole new outlook and understanding to his "dirty tricks" Commission that ultimately tore away government obfuscation, shone through their denials and convinced de Klerk that there was a better way to preserve Afrikanerdom than repression and violence.

Our daughter, Katherine, went off to teach for six months in the black township of Atteridgeville. Alena, Peter and I stayed on in Pretoria until August 1992. Shortly before we were to leave the

country for good, we called our struggle friends together for a last time. From my diary: “We all knew that this was a gathering that would never be repeated; years of struggle, then two years of hope, terrible frustrations, and now hope again. The old camaraderie of the struggle is now gone, but these are all remarkable people nonetheless. More, they are our friends. We are grateful for this opportunity, pleased with the success of our contribution, deeply aware such a confluence of events – of evil, saints and heroes – will never come again”.

Gill Marcus was there; she presented us with a book, one about the sadness, loneliness and frustration of the struggle. Inside the book was an inscription, written firmly in large, strong script.

“Dear John and Alena:

During your stay in South Africa we have come to know and respect you as people who care about South Africa, about our trials and tribulations, our setbacks and victories. Through your warmth and understanding and positive contributions you have won many friends not only for yourself, but also for Canada.

You have touched our hearts and will be sorely missed

Nelson R. Mandela.”

For South Africans, Nelson Mandela’s release from prison was the fulcrum of history. For Alena and me, his message was the glory of a lifetime.

Gerald Skinner

Moscow 1991: Reading the Tea Leaves

Gerald Skinner undertook graduate studies in International Law at Moscow State University in the 1960's and was on assignment at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow during the August 1991 coup attempt. He was later named ambassador to a number of post-Soviet states, and is now a tutor at the University of Oxford.

It seemed to happen all at once. The challenge was to make sense of it – and to convey that sense to Headquarters. There were competing narratives: events that looked positive to some, looked on the road to disaster to others.

As with others, maintaining a stable relationship with a nuclear-armed superpower was key to Canadian policy, and supporting Gorbachev and his policies of reform seemed the best way to achieve this. In the end they crashed; replaced by the klepto-capitalism of Boris Yeltsin, but not before Moscow had undergone the near-death experience of a hard-line coup of conservatives in August 1991. The Canadian Embassy was charged with tracing the trajectory of these events, to assess their significance, and most important of all, to anticipate what might come next: in fact, to read the tea leaves.

It had been known for some time that the Soviet Union was in trouble. Its dysfunctional economy was under severe strain, and ill-equipped to sustain its outsized military, let alone maintain communist Eastern Europe. By the mid 1980's the CIA was predicting a radical shake-up of leadership. Most observers focussed on lofty political and economic analyses to reach these conclusions.

My own perspective was earlier and more personal. In 1975, as a barely visible and very humble charge d'affaires a.i. in Warsaw, I was placed at the end of a receiving line at the airport to welcome Brezhnev who had flown in on a state visit. As he proceeded down the line, it became evident that, as a result of a jolly alcoholic flight, he was being discreetly held up on each side by two stone-faced KGB officers, his feet dragging slightly on the tarmac. Equally discreetly, one of the officers manoeuvred his elbow so that his hand was properly extended for a handshake. It was clear that the trouble came not only from the Soviet system and bad economics but also from the leadership.

Not only that. The social anomie of the 1970's and 80's found expression in the Russian poetry, much translated by the long-serving Canadian ambassador, Robert Ford. If few grasped the broader implications at the time, they became clear enough on the barriers of the White House in August 1991, where many of the poems were recited or defiantly sung.

Mikhael S. Gorbachev was our man. Canadian officials had spotted him early, two years before he succeeded Yuri Andropov as Soviet President in 1985. Handed the poisoned chalice of Soviet Minister of Agriculture, Gorbachev came to Canada at the invitation of his opposite number, Eugene Whelan, in 1983. In Ottawa, he met Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the two of them hit it off. The Soviet ambassador Aleksandr Yakovliev (who had been handed his own poisoned chalice, being banished to Canada, the moral equivalent of Siberia, as the result of Moscow politics) cemented the relationship, becoming a close friend of Trudeau's. (Trudeau's second son, Sasha, shares his nickname with Yakovliev.) Later in 1985, Yakovliev returned to Moscow to become Gorbachev's senior advisor and the intellectual force behind *glasnost*' and *perestrioka*. The lines of communication and confidence that were established between Yakovliev and Canadians remained unbroken in the turbulent years that followed.

Back doors are one thing; front doors another, and the diplomatic function of analysis and reporting during the critical Gorbachev years was a primary embassy responsibility. The torturous evolution of Soviet efforts to re-invent the Union held a kind of morbid fascination for Canadian officials, preoccupied with Canada's own constitutional problems, including the spectre of Québec separatism. Then came Boris Yeltsin, the first democratically elected president of Russia. It was difficult to know what to make of him, except that he and Gorbachev were locked in a bitterly contested vendetta. With this, anticipating the probable course of events in the Soviet Union lay beyond the reach of confident prediction.

We all consulted the auguries – read the tea leaves. Our regular consultations with our NATO sister embassies in Moscow revealed as much about the countries they represented as about the drama unfolding around us. The Americans tended to Deep Kremlinology (who was up, who was down) keeping details of the evolution of their bilateral nuclear relationship and of the US-Soviet global condominium more-or-less to themselves. The Germans, still digesting the effects of their very recent reunification, tended to cautious assessments lest soviet acquiescence in that momentous event could suddenly be reversed. The British were subconsciously influenced by Mrs. Thatcher's assessment that Gorbachev was a man with whom one could do business. One suspected she meant the only one. The French, reflecting a preference for hierarchy and precedence, also placed their bets on Gorbachev. Only the Swedes, who lay outside of NATO's charmed circle, seemed more detached, possibly reflecting over four centuries of experience with Russian aggression (and to be fair, vice versa).

Any correctives to our partners' analyses lay with the Russians themselves. With *glasnost*, nationalism flourished. With astonishing candour, one KGB officer told us that he was a Russian first and a soviet citizen second, and was ready to dispense with the latter. In a private conversation, Lieutenant-General

Dimitry Volkogonov, a former soviet ideologist and now historian to Gorbachev, declared communism dead, the Soviet State hollow and the Party, without faith, had no future. And so it turned out.



There was a sort of dry run, a ‘dress rehearsal’, in Vilnius and Riga nine months before the attempted August takeover by the Moscow conservatives. In the autumn of 1990, the Baltic states had formally declared independence, endorsed by Yeltsin’s Russia. After occupying the TV station in Vilnius, killing several demonstrators in the process, the OMON shock troops (special police units within the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) surrounded the Lithuanian parliament buildings, but did not move.

It turned out that the soviet authorities were divided on whether to attack. Guarded by volunteers with heritage rifles raided from the nearby war museum, the viscerally anti-soviet President Landsbergis was serenely confident that he would prevail. I had been smuggled through the soviet military barriers, Le Carre-style, to meet him. His preoccupation was what he would have for lunch.

Tea-leaf reading suggested that an attempt to save the Soviet Union from spinning further out of control was moving rapidly from a possibility to a probability. Recent history supported this guess. In December 1981, Polish General Jaruzelski had conducted a successful lockdown of Warsaw as things were getting out of hand, imposing martial law and saving communism. For the same reason, martial law was also declared in Beijing at the time of the 1989 Tienanmen Square massacre.

On August 19, 1991 our Australian colleague was roused out of bed by his mother phoning from home after seeing on TV tanks in the streets of Moscow. Was he all right? Supported by Mayor Luzhkov, Yeltsin made his stand at the White House, not on Red Square, where opportunities for an unrestricted field of fire closely resembled Tienanmen. The international press contacted the Canadian Embassy enquiring about a communiqué issued by the Kremlin stating that Gorbachev was 'indisposed' and had been temporarily replaced. We didn't buy that.

As tragedy degenerated into farce, Air Force General Shaposhnikov threatened to bomb the Kremlin to dislodge the demoralized plotters, including his nominal boss, Minister of Defence, Dmitry Yazov. Middle-ranking KGB officers ignored orders from their chief, Vladimir Kryuchkov, regarding him as an amateur and outsider. He was later charged with treason. On August 22, the aircraft that returned Gorbachev to Moscow from Crimea to a waiting Yeltsin was Russian, not soviet. Some missed this small detail, but it signalled the end of soviet power. Gorbachev was obliged to step down on December 25, 1991.

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Reading tea leaves involves looking into the cup and drawing inferences from their patterns. But there is also taste and smell, difficult to describe, harder to classify. The taste and smell of Moscow was no different, and often had a hallucinatory quality. My experience with this aspect of metaphorical tea leaf-reading began in 1965, when as a graduate student I arrived in Moscow for the first time. It seemed that the entire male population was decked out in green fedoras. This was because the Lenin Haberdashery Factory had only one hat design, and only one dye, kelly green. Before the coup, Moscow supplies ran suddenly short of everything from potatoes to petrol.

We negotiated our last tank of fuel by bargaining for it with a few kilos of cheese, passed through the back door of the station. Just after Gorbachev's resignation, a hard-up policeman tried a bit of personal extortion by threatening us with a blood-alcohol test using a turkey-baster. The last hallucination was in the early Yeltsin years with ex-President Gorbachev, apparently at ease, starring in a Russian TV ad for Pizza Hut. These days, the tea doesn't taste the same.

Louis Delvoie

Vignettes from the Six-Day War

Louis Delvoie's first foreign service postings were to Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria. He maintains an abiding interest in the Arab world and frequently writes about it in his weekly columns in the Kingston Whig-Standard.

The year 2017 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Six-Day War of 1967, a war that totally transformed the Arab-Israeli conflict. Many will no doubt want to reflect on the causes and consequences of the war, but my purpose here is simply to record a few episodes that I experienced or of which I became aware while serving as a very junior officer at the Canadian embassy in Cairo in 1967.

In the month or so leading to the outbreak of the war, the Canadian embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv were flooding Ottawa with messages analyzing what they saw as a seriously deteriorating situation. As time went by they confidently predicted that an armed conflict seemed inevitable. The Department in Ottawa heard virtually nothing, however, from the embassy in Beirut, which was also accredited to Syria and Jordan. The Department finally sent a telegram to the ambassador in Beirut asking him for his assessment of the situation. After three days the ambassador replied with a message in which he said that the crisis was entirely artificial and that it would blow over with no major repercussions. This was less than 10 days before the war actually began. Needless to say the ambassador's reputation as a political analyst was shattered, and he was assigned to administrative functions on his return to Ottawa.

As the crisis unfolded in the month of May, the Egyptian government decided to deploy ever more forces to the Sinai Desert.

Many of these troops had to pass through Cairo on their way to the Sinai. Within a few days of the start of those movements, the road running along the Nile (the Corniche el Nile) was littered with abandoned jeeps, trucks and armoured vehicles. Whether this was indicative of the fact that the equipment was obsolete or poorly maintained or both, this provided many of us with an inkling of how the Egyptian army would perform against the Israelis.

During the month of May, the Canadian government announced its intention to dispatch two warships to the Mediterranean, so that they would be able to evacuate Canadian citizens in the event of war. The Egyptian government chose to interpret this announcement as an indication of hostile intentions. (Rumours were rife at the time that a multinational naval force was being assembled to break the Egyptian blockade of the Straits of Tiran). The result was that Canada came to rank behind only the United States and Great Britain among the countries being pilloried in the government's propaganda. Canada was denounced at mass rallies held in Tahrir Square, only a few hundred metres away from the Canadian embassy. The government party newspaper published a cartoon of a dog, with a head in the image of President Lyndon Johnson and a tail at the end of which was an image of Prime Minister Lester Pearson. And when time came for the Egyptian government to demand the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force, the Canadian contingent was given 48 hours to leave the country whereas all other contingents were given one or two weeks. It was certainly not a comfortable time to be a Canadian in Egypt.

At the time Canada was the protecting power for British interests in Egypt. Although the British mission was larger than ours, it was still the British Interest Section of the Canadian embassy. This meant that when it was decided to evacuate our citizens from Egypt, our Embassy was responsible not only for the small Canadian community (some 70 people) but also for the British community and the communities of the Commonwealth countries

not represented in Cairo. This brought the total to over 2,000. Our task was greatly facilitated by the experience of the British Consul, a veteran of several evacuations from various outposts of empire.

When the decision to evacuate was made, the Head of the British Interests Section and I went to the Foreign Ministry to request the assistance of the Egyptian government. We were told by a senior official that Egypt was prepared to provide a train to take the evacuees to the Libyan border. When we protested that there had been violent anti-American and anti-British riots in Libya, and that it would not be a sage destination, the official said it was that or nothing. When we reported this to our ambassador, John Starnes, he told us to return to the Ministry immediately with the following message: if the Egyptian government stood by its position, he would have the British government expel all Egyptians living in Britain via the remote northern port of John O'Groats. The Egyptians eventually relented and put at our disposal a train to take the evacuees to Alexandria from where they proceeded by ship to Cyprus.

The night of the actual evacuation produced scenes of chaos on the grounds of the British embassy. Despite the very clear instructions provided in advance, many of the evacuees arrived with far more than the one suitcase they would be allowed to take on the train. One Ugandan lady arrived with a truck full of furniture, which she proceeded to have unloaded in the embassy courtyard. Surmounting the pile of furniture was a cage with a parrot inside. The lady was eventually persuaded to board the bus with only one suitcase. The fate of the parrot remains unknown to this day.

On the morning of June 5, I awakened to learn from Radio Cairo that the war had started. I hastened to dress and got into my car to go to the embassy. Less than a mile from my apartment I was stopped at a railway crossing by a group of policemen and soldiers who told me that I could not go any further. Within a few minutes I was joined by the embassy's administrative officer, Maury Hughes,

who was similarly impeded. We decided to phone the embassy and inform the ambassador of our predicament. He told us to stay put and that he would see what he could do. We assumed that he would phone the Protocol Office of the Foreign Ministry and demand that the soldiers on the spot be given instructions to let us pass. Instead, and to our amazement, the ambassador's big black official car with the Canadian flag flying, suddenly appeared on the other side of the railway tracks, and out stepped the ambassador.

Now John Starnes always cut an imposing and commanding figure. He was a tall and handsome man, and was invariably impeccably dressed. He certainly put those assets to good use on this occasion. He crossed the railway tracks to where Maury and I were standing, and ordered the soldiers and policemen to let us through. He then turned to us and told us to follow him back to the embassy. We got into our cars and did so while the soldiers and policemen stood meekly aside.

On that first day of the war, Radio Cairo outdid itself in the realm of creative fiction. By afternoon it was reporting that the Egyptian army was advancing into Israel on three fronts and that the Egyptian and Jordanian air forces had shot down 78 Israeli aircraft. (The reality was that the Egyptian army never set foot in Israel and the Israelis lost a grand total of 3 aircraft during the whole war.) This propaganda was sufficient to create a sense of euphoria among Egyptians, and to make the eventual Egyptian defeat all the more difficult to accept.

By the end of the third day of the war, the Israelis had totally destroyed the Egyptian air force and had routed the Egyptian army in the Sinai. That evening President Gamal Abdel Nasser went on radio and television to announce that he was resigning. The following day the streets of Cairo were teeming with more than 2 million demonstrators demanding that he remain in office. The demonstrations were partly spontaneous and partly engineered by the ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union.

Needless to say, President Nasser eventually withdrew his resignation and remained in office for another three years.

Most Western embassies made calls to the Protocol Department of the Foreign Ministry demanding extra protection against possible excesses committed by the protestors. The Protocol Department responded that it could not provide additional security and advised the embassies to vacate their premises. This is what the American and British embassies did after destroying the last of their classified documents and cypher equipment. At the Canadian embassy we were slightly more sanguine. It was decided that all the staff would be sent home, but that two officers would remain on the premises, Maury Hughes and myself.

Throughout the day, Maury and I sat in the lobby of the embassy watching tens of thousands of demonstrators passing by en route to Tahrir Square. We had prudently lowered the Canadian flag and had an axe and a sledgehammer at the ready to destroy the cypher equipment in the event the embassy was attacked. We also had a well-planned route of escape via a back door. No attack materialized, however, and we breathed a deep sigh of relief as the demonstrators eventually returned home.

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There were two curious footnotes to that day. One was that only one window in the embassy was broken, and that was on the side of the building. We concluded that a stone had been thrown from a neighbouring apartment inhabited by the landlord of one of our officers, who was engaged in a dispute over rent increases. The other was that for a period of more than a week we were dispatching all of the classified telegrams of the British and American embassies, because we alone had functioning cypher equipment. It was very interesting to see what they were reporting, including CIA officers at the American mission.

One of the more surreal episodes occurred in the very early hours of the war. A column of Israeli light tanks was advancing into the Sinai when the officer in the lead tank spotted a line of 14 Egyptian T-54 heavy tanks on a hill ahead. The Israeli commander halted his advance and conferred with his officers in the face of what appeared to be a dangerous situation. The Egyptian tanks had much heavier armour and much longer-range guns than the Israeli tanks. The Israeli commander concluded that he had no choice but to move forward as part of the general Israeli offensive. With some trepidation, the Israeli column advanced but encountered no fire from the Egyptian tanks. The Israelis finally drew level with the Egyptian tanks and found that they were unmanned; they had simply been abandoned on a hilltop.

A few days later the Israelis captured the Egyptian colonel who had been in command of the tank formation. When they asked him why had he abandoned his tanks, he explained that he had been ordered to retreat and that therefore he and his men had simply set out on foot across the Sinai in the direction of the Suez Canal. It had apparently never occurred to the colonel that as part of this retreat he should take his tanks with him.

* * * *

During the three or four weeks immediately following the end of the war, tensions were still running fairly high in Cairo. The ambassador concluded that it was still too early to recall the non-essential staff that had been evacuated several weeks earlier. He nevertheless wanted us to get back to normal operations as quickly as possible. He came into my office one Friday evening and told me that he wanted me to open up the Immigration Section on Monday morning. Somewhat nonplussed, I went down to the office of the Immigration Counselor and collected all the manuals I could. In a weekend of intense study I became an instant immigration officer and opened the door to the immigration section only to find

that there was already a line-up waiting for me. The experience endowed me with a new respect for my immigration colleagues.

* * * *

During the war and for several weeks thereafter, my two External Affairs colleagues and I served as duty officers. It was our responsibility to go to the embassy every four hours round the clock to check for any incoming telegrams or phone messages. One evening at about 8 o'clock I pulled up to the embassy and rang the front door bell so that the guard on duty could open up for me. The guard did not appear. For about ten minutes I rang the bell ever more insistently, but still no guard. I then drove to the home of my colleague Ken Merklinger who lived fairly close by and from there we phoned the embassy. No answer. We then got in touch with ambassador Starnes and explained the situation to him. He told us meet him at the embassy in ten minutes time to see what we could do.

Now there were three of us ringing the embassy bell, all to no avail. We went round the building looking for an open window, but that too proved fruitless. Our concern was of course that the guard might have fallen ill or perhaps even died. That concern was allayed by the Egyptian security man standing nonchalantly on the sidewalk in front of the embassy, who eventually explained to us that the guard had arrived on duty visibly drunk. He told us this with a broad smirk on his face, which only served to intensify the ambassador's annoyance.

Ten minutes of more bell ringing finally proved sufficient to rouse the security guard. He staggered to the door, with his tie at half mast and his shirt out of his pants, and let us in. Within 48 hours the ambassador had had the guard put on a plane back to Canada, and then informed Ottawa of what he had done.

* * * *

Every crisis produces its fair share of jokes or bon mots. The Six Day War was no exception. Here are a few of my favourites:

The urbane, articulate and witty Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban was heard to declare, “The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”

In a commentary on the war one writer asked “How can you tell an Egyptian tank from all other tanks?” The answer: “It is the only tank with one forward gear and four reverse gears.”

In the aftermath of the war, representatives of the Israeli government asserted that their country and people were peace loving and wanted nothing but peace. To which an Arab wit responded: “Yes the Israelis want peace – a piece of Egypt, a piece of Syria and a piece of Jordon.”

The Six-Day War was by definition very short, but some of its consequences are still with us today in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights. Fifty years have gone by and some solutions appear no nearer in sight.

Gary J. Smith

Too Long in Moscow?

Canada-Soviet 1972 Summit Series

Following assignments at the UN in New York, Moscow, NATO HQ in Brussels and Israel; Gary became Director for Arms Control and Disarmament in Ottawa and a member of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's International Peace Initiative.

Subsequent postings included India (during turmoil in the Punjab); Germany (when the Berlin Wall fell); and Indonesia (Bre-X gold scandal and evacuation of Canadians during the collapse of the Suharto regime). As Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for Asia he partook in the first Team Canada Trade Mission to China in 1994. A Fellow at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, upon leaving Government he became Vice President (Advancement) at York University in Toronto.

Moscow. The Cold War. Thursday, September 28, 1972. Luzhniki Palace of Sports.

Game Eight of the "Summit Series" pitting, for the first time, the top Canadian hockey professionals against the USSR's Olympic juggernaut; amateur in designation but year-round athletes salaried predominately by the Red Army and Soviet Police.

The decisive match of the home-and-home series, now knotted at three wins each, along with the tied clash held in Winnipeg earlier in the month.

Originally billed as "The Friendship Series", it was far from friendly by the time the puck dropped to begin the last game. Everything was on the line. Not only a victory for Team Canada but a victory for all of Canada and indeed a victory for capitalism and the "Free World" against the USSR and "Godless Communism".

Virtually every Canadian was glued to their TV sets whether in their homes, in schools, offices or factory floors to listen to the broadcast by Foster Hewitt. So were tens of millions of Soviet citizens spread across eleven time zones watching the Russian version in prime time.. Communist Party boss Brezhnev and Soviet Premier Kosygin were in attendance in a well guarded box high above center ice in the 13,700 capacity arena.

An astonishing three thousand Canadians had purchased a joint Air Canada/Aeroflot/Intourist package and flown to Moscow to wildly and boisterously cheer on Team Canada. For most it was their first visit outside Canada, let alone behind “The Iron Curtain” in the capital of the Communist World.

There we sat side-by-side; close to the ice at the blue line.

With me was the legendary Bobby Orr, 24 years old at the time, who had a brilliant and transformational early career with the Boston Bruins. An automatic choice to join Team Canada, he had been sidelined for the entire series by knee issues but was an enthusiastic and close supporter and was with the Team throughout.

Four years older at 28 and equally having grown up on the shores of Georgian Bay in Ontario (in Penetanguishene south of his Parry Sound), I had studied political science and international affairs at University and worked at EXPO 67 before joining External Affairs in 1968. A subsequent full year studying Russian at a Canadian military school lead to a first posting to Canada’s Moscow Embassy as Second Secretary in February 1971. Part of the job package was encouraging and organizing exchanges between Canada and the USSR including in the fields of culture and sports.

~ 2 ~

There had been no international competition between Canada and the USSR since 1969 but varied proposals to get back on the ice with “the best versus the best” always stumbled over amateur and professional status. The International Olympic Committee’s

contentious boss, Avery Brundage, was the leading impediment, making it clear he did not want amateurs sullied by professionals. The Soviet Union played along, happy to claim that the Olympic Champion (itself) was the World Champion.

The world was a tense place at the time following years of crises with the Soviet Union. These crises included their invasion of Hungary in 1956, the erection of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile stare-down in 1963 and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which was still a fresh wound. NATO faced off militarily against the Warsaw Pact with nuclear weapons and over a million soldiers in close proximity on both sides of a divided Germany. Economic and cultural sanctions were still in place.

Canada's Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was not a believer in megaphone diplomacy or in isolating your enemy where war could start accidentally through miscommunication and miscalculation. Demonizing and dehumanizing your enemy made it easier to pull the trigger. In October of 1970 he had broken the diplomatic isolation of the People's Republic of China. He witnessed what sport diplomacy (ping pong in this case) was doing to develop fledgling contact between bitter rivals in Beijing and Washington.

In May of 1971, despite considerable domestic and international criticism, Trudeau came to Moscow accompanied by his wife on her first official foreign visit. (She was pregnant at the time with a son who would himself become Prime Minister.) The USSR, (engaged in border skirmishes with China and worried about being isolated by Chinese rapprochement with the West) welcomed the NATO leader's visit. Trudeau talked of detente, engagement and seeking common ground. The Soviets favoured scientific and industrial exchanges but he insisted on social and cultural interaction and launched negotiations for a General Exchanges Agreement. This led in quick order to student and professorial exchanges; cultural artists including Inuit sculptors and visits by

the Theatre Du Nouveau Monde and the Stratford Festival as well as the National Arts Centre Orchestra. The Prime Minister enjoyed hockey and let it be known he favoured a resumption of Canadian-Soviet competition.

In the winters of 1970-71 and 71-72 the only Canadians playing the Russians were a rag-tag team called “The Moscow Maple Leafs” wearing cast off uniforms donated by the Toronto Maple Leafs. It was made up of players largely from the Canadian Embassy with a few Swedes and Finns and one American Marine thrown in as goalie. The team also included the two Air Canada Station representatives, one of whom (Aggie Kukulowicz) had played for a short period with the NHL New York Rangers. Aggie often gave us the firepower in our weekend games against a variety of motley crews from TASS News Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Trade as well as Accordion Factory number seven. We provided a case of imported Molson Canadian beer each week to our grateful hosts. Though a wobbly skater, I tried to play a gritty left defence. In front of me on the left wing was the chippy Peter Hancock, a brilliant Canadian diplomat who could make words sing and dance and use text or tongue as a rapier or broad sword.

~ 3 ~

As 1971 wore on there were rumours that the Soviet National Team was fed up winning all their amateur matches and was looking for stiffer competition. In the Embassy I had been tasked with reading the daily Government newspaper Izvestia (News) to determine if there was anything of interest. (There was an old Russian joke that there was never any news in Izvestia and never any Truth in the morning Communist Party paper Pravda (Truth, in Russian). It was a boring job reading about supposed production from brick and tractor factories. I took to reading the paper from back to front to get first to the more interesting sports section.

Izvestia was sponsoring its annual international hockey tournament in Moscow in late December and had a sharp-witted sports

columnist, Boris Fedosov, who wrote under the pseudo name of “Snegovik” (Snowman). Late one snowy afternoon, in the yellow and white stucco embassy building on Old Stable Lane built in the 1830s, my eyes popped when I read his column proposing that the Soviet National Team play Canada’s Professionals. Embassy colleague Hancock was working in the office next to me when I bounded in to show him Fedosov’s proposal. Hancock immediately agreed that this had to have Soviet Government approval if it was printed in the Government newspaper.



My spontaneous telephone call to Fedosov led to an unusual meeting in his office over a glass of vodka (Soviet news organizations were generally off limits to western diplomats).

Fedosov then took the initiative to organize a gathering of top Soviet sports officials and athletes in January 1972. He again provided the vodka while Hancock and I brought along a film of the 1971 Stanley Cup final between the Chicago Black Hawks and Montreal Canadiens. All the Russians were particularly impressed with the speed and slap shot of Bobby Hull and the head of the figure skating federation claimed we had deliberately sped up the film to impress them. At the end of the evening their officials confirmed Fedosov's proposal without condition and Hancock and I cabled the news to External Affairs in Ottawa and on to the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA), Hockey Canada, the NHL and the NHL Players Association led by the dynamic, fractious Alan Eagleson. The wheels had been set in motion. The series was officially sanctioned at the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) championship in April 1972, in Prague.

The bulk of the subsequent detailed and sometimes contentious negotiations of exactly where, specifically when and how the series would unfold went from the hockey authorities in Canada to External Affairs (led by the ebullient and highly competent Director General for Public Affairs, Patrick (Paddy) Reid), and on to the Embassy to be hammered out with the Soviet Ice Hockey Federation and Ministry of Sport. Reid had to be at his diplomatic best in dealing with Eagleson and the reps of Hockey Canada and the CAHA, all of whom wanted to call the shots.

Given my Russian language capability and early involvement in the series, I was asked to accompany the Soviet Team and officials to Canada and to be the official interpreter and liaison officer for Team Canada in Moscow. It was a wonderful opportunity to witness all eight games at rinkside.

During Game Eight, Orr and I talked about off ice antics like the theft of Team Canada's imported milk and steaks; disputes over the referees and Eagleson's threat to cancel the series after game seven; Phil Esposito's secret visit to a Soviet hospital for x rays;

the Canadian bugler arrested for busting up a hotel bar whose release was secured by the Embassy; late night calls to players rooms and the ever presence of the KGB ladies of the night (“The Swallows”). It was all rather amiable but began to turn sour when we discussed the on-ice activities of Team Canada.

~ 4 ~

The overarching goal of the series was to break down barriers between our countries and peoples, I argued. Rough, tough play was a key component of the game but we were crossing the line by threatening the referees with our sticks; deliberately breaking the ankle of the Soviet’s top player; throwing chairs on the ice and Eagleson giving the finger to the crowd as he crossed the ice mid-game. Orr took a different tact. The objective was to win, period. It was us versus them. I was being too balanced and had obviously been too long in Moscow. (I stayed on another two years.)

It was not the first time I had been on the end of that type of criticism. During game one in Montreal, I was seated behind the Soviet bench close to where Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was hosting the official USSR delegation. After the second period when the Soviets had moved ahead and Team Canada was wilting, I had asked Eagleson what was happening. He flew off the handle and screamed “You are an f***ing Communist, just like they are“. I learned later that many Canadian sports journalists had received similar treatment from him when they raised questions about what had initially been predicated to be a Canadian blow out.

Part of the tradecraft about being a Diplomat is to put yourself into the shoes of the other person and try to understand their fears, hopes and motivations. It often helps in ending disputes and resolving conflicts.

The 1972 series became storied history.

In 1999 Canadian Press canvassed all its correspondents about the most important events for Canada in the entire twentieth

century. Team Canada 72 was selected as the ‘Canadian Team of the Century’. The Summit Series itself was chosen as one of the top ten historic events in those hundred years along with the battle of Vimy Ridge, the D-Day landing, Patriation of the Constitution, the Free Trade Agreement with the USA and the introduction of Medicare.

Historic company, indeed!

Post Scriptum: All Canadians will know that Team Canada won the series when Paul Henderson scored with 34 seconds left to break the 5-5 tie. Less well know is that Henderson also scored the winning goals in Games six (3-2) and seven (4-3). In addition, in game five he scored the last Canadian goal in the 5-4 loss. It was a superlative feat on the world stage. Sadly he has still not been personally inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

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R. Higham

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R. Higham

DECLASSIFIED

**Extraits des cahiers personnels d'anciens diplomates canadiens
Excerpts from personal notebooks of former Canadian diplomats**

Have you ever wondered what Canada's diplomats do when they go to work in the morning; why they attend so many social events in the evenings – often with partner in tow? Reading through this collection of arresting reminiscences, you may think that there is no such thing as a normal day at the chancery.

In these often humorous but always informative pages, we have DECLASSIFIED some of the skill sets that diplomats employ for negotiating protocol or cultural constraints when advocating Canadian interests with decision-makers abroad and for managing relations with foreign media. We even unveil some snippets of Canadian foreign-affairs history that readers may wish to tuck away in their own aide-mémoire.

Vous êtes-vous déjà demandé ce que font les diplomates canadiens quand ils partent au travail le matin, ou lorsqu'ils sortent le soir, souvent avec conjoint, pour participer à une réception ou un dîner officiel ? Lorsque vous lirez cette collection d'anecdotes et de récits, votre première réflexion sera peut-être qu'une journée de travail normale à la chancellerie n'existe tout simplement pas !

Dans ces récits souvent humoristiques, mais toujours instructifs, nous avons déclassifié certaines compétences professionnelles utilisées par les diplomates pour négocier les contraintes protocolaires ou culturelles dans la défense des intérêts canadiens auprès des décideurs et les médias à l'étranger. Nous dévoilons même quelques épisodes intrigants dans l'histoire des affaires étrangères, de sorte que vous pourrez composer votre propre aide-mémoire.



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