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Abroad for Her Country
Tales of a Pioneer Woman Ambassador in the U.S. Foreign Service

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Who would have thought that a young girl born in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, in the early part of the twentieth century, the tallest in her class and always in the back row so the other children could see the teacher, would become a United States ambassador and travel around the world? Never, in my wildest dreams while growing up did I have any such aspirations. Thoughts of foreign countries never entered my head in grammar school, high school, or college. Whatever hopes my parents may have had for me were focused on health, happiness, and fear of the Lord. But such aspirations may have suffered when I was expelled from first grade. Some might even have wondered in those days if I was headed for a life of delinquency rather than diplomacy.

Expelled from First Grade

I attended first grade at St. Mary’s parochial school in Rhinelander, a small village of 7,000 that survived on a paper mill and a modest tourist industry. I can’t recall the name of the nun who expelled me, but it should have been Sister Mary Hard Knuckles or Sister Mary of the Roving Eyes. She used to parade around the classroom with a ruler in one hand that
she would tap either on the other hand or the head of a misbehaving student. She was tall and thin, a Franciscan from some place near La Crosse, Wisconsin.

One fine day, my little boy chum, baptized James but nicknamed Jimzie by his family, was caught shooting spitballs at someone in class. He was promptly told by Sister Mary-Never-Miss-a-Thing, or whatever her name was, that he was grounded and confined to the classroom during the lunch break. No one, but no one, the nun insisted, her eyes sweeping the entire classroom, was to tell anyone that Jimzie was being punished.

It was my bad fortune to have been invited that day to Jimzie’s home for lunch as my mother was visiting Jimzie’s mother. That put me on the spot. When I arrived at midday alone at Jimzie’s home, the mothers wanted to know where Jimzie was. I told them I couldn’t tell.

Jimzie’s mother, being something of a policewoman in appearance, manner, and voice, lacking only a badge on her ample Irish bosom and a billy club in her hand, said, “What do you MEAN you can’t tell?” She seemed ready to take me by the scruff of the neck when I wailed, “I can’t tell; the nun won’t let me tell!” She said, “You TELL ME what’s going on!” So I did, thereby violating the nun’s injunction. I was given a sandwich to take back to Jimzie, the mothers agreeing they would deal with the matter later.

When I returned to class after lunch we were all asked if “anyone had told about Jimzie’s detention.” Of course I had to raise my hand and confess. At that point the nun totally lost her cool and expelled the two of us from her class and the school. I can still see Jimzie’s face all scrunched up with tears as he nibbled away on his tired sandwich, which was becoming increasingly wet and limp as we shuffled lazily back to his home.

Jimzie’s mother was enraged. The two mothers promptly put on their hats and marched us back to school. Jimzie developed a serious case of hiccups while I tried to bolt free from yet another round trip to school. I was tired not only of walking but of trouble-prone Jimzie.

The mothers’ showdown with the nun was worth the trip back. Jimzie’s mother nearly reduced the poor religious to rubble right in front of the entire class. There was loud talk of “abuse of little children.” My mother kept giving frequent nods of approval as Jimzie’s mother held the floor.

One nun down, the two mothers then swept off to take on the school principal and the pastor. As Jimzie’s large family were strong supporters
of both church and school, our expulsion was short-lived on recourse to higher authority, thus relieving both of us from carrying the shame through life.

From then on I gave Jimzie a wide berth. I wanted no happenings through association. Before shunning him I told him I thought his name was silly as it rhymed with Chimpanzee. Jimzie thereupon got even by nicknaming me “Squirrel,” which stuck through grade school.

My troubled friendship with Jimzie taught me a lesson early in life about the importance of the company one keeps, as well as the kinds of secrets one has to keep—some worthy, others not. It also put me on guard in future relations with religious. Later in life as I looked back on the expulsion from first grade, I concluded that the nun who had expelled us might well have been having a difficult monthly period, going through change of life, or was just one of those control freaks one occasionally encounters in life.

I wasn’t at St. Mary’s long—only into fifth grade to be exact—when in 1929 my parents decided to move from northern Wisconsin to the south in search of greater economic opportunity.

Long-Distance Travel

Thus when I was ten my brother and I were loaded into the family car and driven from Wisconsin down through the heart of the United States and on into Florida, a distance of some 2,000 miles, on two-lane roads not always paved. It was the longest trip I had ever made and it presaged a life of many journeys. We called Georgia the Black-Eyed Pea State because the item seemed always to be on every menu we encountered along the way.

We were pioneers in our day, being among the first to traverse the Tamiami Trail across the Florida Everglades soon after its completion. Heavy construction equipment and dredges lined the drainage canals on either side of the road. When we took a break from driving, we observed alligators and beautiful tropical birds. We were pioneers also in being among the first to spend our winters in Florida and our summers up north.

What a fortune we could have made—like the Colliers on the West Coast or the Flagers on the East—had we invested in real estate, which was booming in those days. But security rather than speculation seemed the
family hallmark. Perhaps that is why in later years a job in government had subconscious appeal.

On arrival in Miami Beach, we immediately checked into a hotel right on the sandy beach, where we stayed nearly a week. Later my parents rented an apartment in Miami and promptly enrolled my brother and me in a grade school connected with Gesu, the Jesuit Church in the middle of downtown Miami. The church had a shrine to Saint Theresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower. My mother frequently prayed there, probably that my father would soon be reestablished and that we children might get through school. Nearby was a wonderful corner bar, where my mother enjoyed the occasional beer and free lunch, which she extended to her ten- and twelve-year-old children, who shared a sip or two of beer to wash down the corned beef and rye.

I shared my fifth grade class at Gesu with the son of Al Capone, the Chicago gangster, who had recently moved his family to one of the fashionable islands between Miami and the Beach. I immediately pegged the Capone boy for another Jimzie, though his name was Sonny. He would arrive at school in a big black limousine accompanied by two swarthy males in dark suits ("hoods"?), who would see to his safe delivery and collection every day. Later he transferred to St. Patrick’s on the Beach, a high-tuition parochial school operated by the Dominican nuns from Adrian, Michigan. Years later I heard that Sonny Capone made something of a name for himself in high school with his fast sports car, fast girls, and frequent tippling, reportedly to the despair of the local pastor.

Not long after our arrival in Florida my father joined a business partner from Iowa in a resort hotel venture on Miami Beach. So we too moved across Biscayne Bay to the Beach. The parents promptly enrolled us in school, but this time in the public school, St. Patrick’s being too pricey for a family with two youngsters in the waning hard times of the mid-1930s.

Florida—A Whole New World

Coming from the backwoods of northern Wisconsin, our family was continually amazed by differences, not only the change of weather, but the natives—a mix of poor white people from Georgia, blacks in service jobs,
high-powered speculators, and investors from all over the North, plus a galaxy of tourists from Latin America, especially Cuba, and also from Europe.

The tourists wore loud and colorful summer clothing, something new to us. Fashion and high-end articles like jewelry, cars, mansions, and yachts were all big business, as were hotels. Lincoln Road on Miami Beach was the place to see and be seen. The wealthy and famous of the Northeast were conspicuously represented, with their chauffeur-driven cars and island villas, as well as the racetrack crowd and gangsters like the Capones (“the mob”) from New York and Chicago.

I remember hearing about the notorious gangster “Bugsy” Siegel. Gypsy Rose Lee appeared at a nightclub just a few blocks from our hotel. Further down the street across from our garage, Jack Dempsey, the prize-fighting champion, opened a beachside restaurant. New and fancy nightclubs seemed to spring up all over the beach. Bouchet’s Villa Venice (pronounced “Ven–eese”) featured nude dancers fresh from Paris’s Champs Elysées. Coming from the Northwoods of Wisconsin, we were dazzled.

The gift shop and bookstore at our church were run by the divorced wife of former New York mayor Jimmy Walker. Anyone who wanted to watch the “sport of kings” on Sunday afternoons could visit the nearby polo grounds. Local street gossip focused on whether the latest beachfront hotel under construction—a new skyscraper went up every year—was more elegant, outrageous, or higher priced than last year’s leader. Many of the investors shuttled between Miami Beach and Las Vegas.

My early memories of growing up in the Midwest were soon forgotten once we were installed in the South and continued growing up there over our high school years. For entertainment my brother and I would ride the “Aerocar” from the famous Roney Plaza Hotel on Miami Beach over to the grand, Spanish-style Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables. We seemed to have passes to everything—swimming pools, dog races, and movies included.

My father was intrigued with this whole new southern resort style of life, inspired perhaps by a flood of Hollywood movies he continued to follow closely—especially The Thin Man, starring William Powell. He bought a wire-haired fox terrier, more for self-image, I think, than protection. He named it Bugsy, after the gangster, and took to holding the dog on a leash just like Powell in the movie. He also took to copying the
tailor-made suits, shirts, and fancy ties of his new business contacts and associates. I suppose it was appropriate for someone in the resort hotel business in Miami Beach, which attracted such a colorful and lively segment of society. At night after dinner the family would listen on the radio to Walter Winchell, *Amos ’n Andy*, or the fireside chats of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was a fast-changing era and for me an impressionable age.

One day our dog disappeared. When Bugsy didn’t turn up for meals, we assumed she had been stolen. My father was distraught. Luckily, he found her a few weeks later seated alongside a chauffeur, looking anxiously out the window of a Rolls Royce parked around the corner from the nearby Roney Plaza Hotel. With the help of the police, my father quickly retrieved her.

**Counterfeiters and Bootleggers**

My father had become something of a favorite with the local police and FBI because he had discovered and helped break up a counterfeit ring that was printing $100 bills in its hotel suite, then passing them off at the Hialeah race track. The investigation resulted from my father’s having detected a strange chemical odor in one of the hotel hallways.

My father also got involved with another ring of opportunists. This gang was smuggling in liquor from the nearby Bahama Islands. It was in the days of Prohibition. Whenever the rum runners spotted a Coast Guard patrol boat on the Atlantic Ocean, they would throw their illegal caches overboard, carefully recording the spot in relation to either the Gulf Stream, the heavens, or whatever mariners do to fix their locations. They would return later when the coast was clear to fish out their shipments and land them at some hidden private docks, perhaps even on the Indian River alongside the fabulous estates of the wealthy, such as Capone’s place on Palm Island off the causeway to Miami.

Perhaps to buy my father’s allegiance or protection, the rum runners would occasionally gift him with booty, usually a wooden case or two of liquor wrapped in heavy burlap. It would arrive at our apartment soaking wet, with seaweed dangling from it. Many a night I slept with a case or
two hidden under my bed. My father certainly didn’t consume it all, but he became very popular with friends up north when he would pass them some of the stash during our summer trips north.

**Things Foreign and Professional**

My family stayed in Miami Beach throughout my high school and college years. I took two years of high school Latin and two years of French, with some vague obligatory connections to the Alliance Française in Coral Gables. I was certainly meeting some school requirement rather than thinking of a trip to Paris in those days. Moreover, I thought I had to keep an eye on my brother, who seemed taken with the French teacher with the flaming red-hair and loose chiffon blouses, despite her being “a woman of a certain age,” as the French say.

During my junior and senior years, I developed a taste, though not much of a deep interest, in things foreign when I twice traveled on one-week trips to Cuba with an all-star basketball team! Most of my travel in those days was back and forth to Wisconsin to vacation at our home on a lake and play golf at a course my father had helped develop along the Wisconsin River. Travel thus became second nature to me with the family’s spring and fall cross-country junkets.

I graduated from Miami Beach High School in 1937. The school had changed its name that year from Ida M. Fisher High School, having been named for the wife of Carl Fisher, one of the foremost real estate developers of Miami Beach. He had come down from Montauk on Long Island and made a fortune developing Miami Beach by filling in what was then a vast mangrove swamp. In those early days of development the construction people would reportedly joke with prospective buyers by saying, “See that wave out there 100 yards from the shore here? Well, your property will commence there as soon as we dredge the ocean floor or bay bottom and make the land.”

While in high school I worked on the school newspaper, became its editor, and developed an interest in journalism. In my sophomore year, I attended a special course at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism. We visited newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*, made
numerous field trips, wrote news articles, and pretended we were on the city desk of a metropolitan daily. I liked the novelty and stimulation of the work, following news in the making, meeting interesting people, and writing about it all. One day I saw a movie with Rosalind Russell portraying a foreign correspondent. I thought the character might be a role model worth exploring.

College Bound

When it came time for college, I wasn’t at all sure where I would go. I wanted a location that wouldn’t be too far from home. I also wanted a Catholic school to make up for what I missed while attending public high school in Florida. Midway between Florida and Wisconsin was Indiana, home of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College (just north of Terre Haute). Believe it or not, Jimzie’s sister had gone there. It was founded by nuns who came over from France in 1840, like the Holy Cross priests who arrived a year later and founded the University of Notre Dame at South Bend. Both religious groups had been invited to the United States by Bishop Bruté, a Frenchman who headed the Diocese of Vincennes, Indiana.

My parents disagreed about my going to college. My father doubted its necessity, believing it would be a waste of money, contending that I “would only get married right after graduation.” My mother saw it differently and was willing to use some of her wages as a working mother to underwrite my room and board. She knew that college was important to me, and she tended to indulge her children in things important to them. She believed I would work hard to succeed.

I obtained a tuition scholarship to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and contributed to my expenses by working. In one job I worked as correspondent for the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Washington, which collected regional news for Catholic newspapers throughout the country. Neither Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College nor western Indiana were hotspots for breaking news, but I scoured about for subjects and wrote any number of stories that were accepted. Sometimes the story was about an important speaker on campus or nearby. Sometimes it concerned college activities or visitors of note. When I wasn’t working on news, I was teach-
ing swimming or serving as a lifeguard at the campus pool. I also worked summers, sometimes babysitting, sometimes as a counselor at summer camps. One summer I worked on a daily newspaper owned by the family of a college friend in Laconia, New Hampshire.

In contrast to Notre Dame, which gained fame for its football teams and later for the quality of its faculty and academic excellence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods just loped along through the twentieth century, catering mainly to good, upper middle-class Catholic families in Chicago, Indianapolis, and Kansas City.

In 1941 I graduated from “the Woods” with a B.A. degree in journalism and a minor in French, still wondering about being a foreign correspondent, like Roz Russell in the movie, and notwithstanding some unexpected entreaties that I consider a religious vocation! Becoming a nun, however, was the furthest thing from my mind. I had achieved my main objectives—a sound liberal arts education while reaffirming and deepening my faith. I also learned there was something very special—even mystical—about my experience at the Woods in the heart of America.

It was not until sixty-five years later that I fully understood that it was the soul, spirit, and being of its foundress that animated the place and continues today. She was Mother Theodore Guerin, who left France in 1840 to establish schools for young women. She had braved rough seas in a trans-Atlantic crossing in a primitive sailing vessel, and then endured the rigors and privations of frontier life to teach not only about God but about how to live in the world in relation to God. Through her intercession, ordinary people were miraculously cured. She was canonized a saint in the Roman Catholic Church in October 2006. I realized I had lived with a saint and benefited from a special protection and intercession from her and her followers throughout my adult life.

**Looking for a Real Job**

After four years, with a bachelor’s degree from a little-known college in the backwoods of Indiana and with lifelong friends, I set out to look for a job to support myself. Yet I did not consider myself highly competitive in the national job market. World War II was just beginning when I returned
to Miami Beach. I sought help in my job search from my parish priest, one Monsignor William Barry of St. Patrick’s Church and School, explaining that I had done some practice teaching in college. I had my eye on the new Barry College in Miami Shores, which had just been opened under the sponsorship of the monsignor’s Irish family—including his brother, the bishop of St. Augustine, Florida; his sister, the head of a Dominican Order of religious in Michigan that would do the core teaching at Barry; and another brother, an architect in Chicago, who designed the campus.

Monsignor Barry recalled my competitive performance on the public high school basketball team, which, he sadly lamented, had always “creamed” St. Patrick’s. He felt I should have been playing on “his” team. We didn’t go into the cost factor. The recollection prompted him to suggest that I might teach physical education at Barry College! I was appalled at the idea, insisting my interests lay elsewhere. I felt I was capable of helping with the new college’s public relations, even of teaching journalism. He recommended me to the dean of Barry. After interviewing me, the dean offered me employment at the not-very-handsome salary of $2,500 a year, including room and board.

**The Joys of the Job**

My job entailed teaching newswriting and editing in the English Department, setting up a public relations office, and (probably at the insistence of the monsignor) “looking after” the health and recreation needs of the students, of whom there were fewer than a hundred at the time. The recreational aspect of my assignment morphed into my teaching swimming at a beautiful campus pool, horseback riding at a nearby stable, and tennis, archery, and badminton on campus. When it was too cold in February for outdoor activity, I met indoors with the students. And if the Home Economics Department was not using its workroom, we would push back the sewing machines and do calisthenics. First jobs develop initiative and versatility.

This three-sided job at Barry was exhausting. I had to change clothes several times a day, what with any number of swimming classes. As the monsignor observed my feverish activities during his frequent visits to
the campus, I assume he must have enjoyed his revenge (if priests indulge in revenge) for all the St. Patrick’s basketball defeats to which I had contributed. He knew I hated being even a part-time physical education teacher, but it was a job, indeed my first, and I had to be grateful.

On the other hand, I was pleased and satisfied at the frequency with which the *Miami Herald* used the news stories I was generating about Barry. It must have been their sense of obligation to community development. For my part, nothing was too minor for me to report about Barry if I could find the right angle. Often it was the accompanying photos of the lovely young student mermaids in the pool that helped sell the stories.

I had two quite remarkable students in my newswriting class—British-born girls whose godfather was none other than G. K. Chesterton. They brought their personal cachet to my class, which may have been why it became one of the most popular on campus. Or was it because I was one of the few lay teachers in a sea of religious? Both girls were intelligent and talented writers. One went on after graduation to work for the publisher Farrar & Rinehart, her sister to the Associated Press as AP correspondent in Tallahassee. Their postgraduate accomplishments gave me a sense—merited or not—that I may have contributed something to their future. Teachers, however short-lived their careers, like to think such things.

**The Door to Diplomacy Opens**

During my two-year stint at Barry, a group of American Catholic historians visited the campus. Just back from a summer at the University of San Marco in Lima, Peru, they were taking a break in Miami to assess their Latin American experience. Would Barry give their findings some local and national publicity and undertake a few radio broadcasts to Latin America? Naturally I obliged, little knowing that this chance encounter would prove pivotal to a career in diplomacy.

The group’s work in Latin America intrigued me, particularly a phrase the academics kept using on the significance of “the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.” It was new for me to think of other countries, even the world, in such a context.
Before leaving Barry the leader of the visiting group referred to how helpful they had found my “special interest in foreign affairs.” I smiled doubtfully at this remark. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where I had picked up a master’s degree during summer vacations, I had taken a couple of graduate political science courses linked to my journalism studies. One was on Latin America, the other on the Far East. That was about as far foreign as I had ever ventured, except for Cuba.

I told the visiting group’s leader about my four or five basketball trips to Havana during high school and college. I had also chaperoned a group of Barry and other students to the University of Havana one summer for Spanish-language training. However, these experiences had in no way led me to consider a career in foreign relations. But the visiting leader, who was also a priest, urged me to consider a career in the U.S. diplomatic service. This surprised me, as I had no intention of spending a lifetime outside the United States. I was uncomfortable, even repelled, by some of the cultural differences I had encountered in Cuba, while admiring other facets of Cuban culture, like art, music, and architecture, and some of the people. Maybe I’d take to short-term assignments as a foreign correspondent, but not to a life abroad. No, thank you.

The priest asked me to think seriously about the idea. He reminded me that I had a Catholic college education and was currently employed by a Catholic college. “Your education has given you a firm sense of morality and ethics, and that is very much needed in government and international affairs today,” he said. He recommended that I visit Washington, D.C., and apply for a job in the government. “You could do well in foreign affairs.”

I had serious doubts about the man’s rather quick assessment of my long-term potential, even though he had been a chaplain in the U.S. Congress and was a distinguished sociologist and historian. But after pondering his remarks in private, I thought, why not at least investigate? I had been at Barry College for two years and concluded that was enough for a starting job. Perhaps it was the three jobs in one that I wanted to escape. Most important, I was intent on following up on a University of Wisconsin–posted job lead as correspondent with the United Press in Chicago.

I bade the priest goodbye, assuring him I would indeed stop off in Washington en route to Chicago. We would see what came of it. Soon

Early Years, 1926-44
thereafter, I traveled to Washington, stayed with family friends, and visited the Department of State. I never made it to Chicago.

Old State by the White House

I did not use the priest’s letter of introduction, as I found such introductions awkward for both parties. Once at the Department of State, I thought nothing of asking for an appointment with the assistant secretary of state, the priest’s friend. I explained the circumstances and asked for his advice. Such an entry, even a brief meeting would be unheard of today. In the first place, one could never get past security at the front door. Second, appointments at that level are not easy to obtain and certainly not on the spot.

Though cordial, my meeting with the assistant secretary was brief. He directed me to the department’s recruiting office. On my way there, I passed by the office of the acting secretary of state, then Edward Stettinius, who was holding a press conference. I stood on the outer fringe of the group, listened, and found it fascinating. I decided to look for the press office. In those days there was little or no security.

Once at the press office, I inquired of the person in charge if the government had press officers in missions overseas. The man smiled indulgently and replied, “Young lady, we have one press officer, and he is in London.” I said, “Oh, but would he need an assistant?” I don’t know where I got the brass in those days—lack of experience presumably. “No, he does not,” came the prompt answer, followed by, “but I understand Recruiting is looking for people to do general consular work, vice consuls, that is.” “What are they?” I asked. “You’ll find out from Recruiting,” he replied.

“Scraping the Bottom of the Barrel”

Recruiting confirmed that there were indeed openings because of World War II. The man who interviewed me said, “Let me tell you, young lady, you don’t know how lucky you are; it’s wartime, and all the men have gone
into the services. We are literally scraping the bottom of the barrel and taking in 4-Fs and women!"

Should I have been offended that he placed women after the physically handicapped? No, because in those days men always took precedence over women, and I had by then learned to take no offense. I asked him to tell me more about opportunities for women. Although I wanted to serve my country in time of war, I frankly preferred a civilian role over the military. Attractive as were the uniforms of the Army WACs, Navy WAVEs, and Coast Guard SPARs, they did not seem right for me, given my height. A tight uniform with brass buttons and billed cap would probably make me look even more intimidating.

The recruiting officer proceeded to explain what vice consuls were and did. I learned the job had to do with American citizenship cases overseas, visas for immigrants to the United States, and possibly writing economic and political reports from other countries. If I was interested in this kind of work overseas, I could fill out an application form and return in a month for interviews and possible assignment; a new class of trainees would be forming soon.

I quickly looked for a temporary job to wait out the month and pay for my room and board, then let the city of Washington and its museums and parks work their charms on me. After my first encounter with world-class paintings at the National Gallery of Art, I became captivated and excited over the prospects of an overseas assignment. At the end of the month I reported back to the Department of State and was promptly assigned to a new vice consul’s class of about twenty-five people, all around my age, all men except for three women, including me. We were to become Foreign Service auxiliaries.

An experienced retiree taught us the basics of consular work. A Harvard graduate with an annoying habit of flipping his Phi Beta Kappa key from a chain on his waistcoat, his last post had been as consul general in South Africa. I pegged him as a vain old fuddy-duddy, perhaps even irrelevant to the times. Our class was held in a basement room of the old State, War, and Navy Building on Pennsylvania Avenue, next to the White House, since renamed the Executive Office Building and now an integral part of the White House Office. Its dark Victorian architecture made it a haunt for pigeons and other birds. People called it the Starling’s Roost.

Early Years, 1926–44

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I had taken a temporary job at the Catholic University library, where I was assigned to sorting out the Church’s prohibited books—the Index, just right for a twenty-year-old woman! I rented a very inexpensive room nearby in the northeast section of town. By streetcar it took me nearly an hour to reach Old State. About the second time I was late for my training class, the consul general seemed to flip his Phi Beta key even more vigorously than usual. He announced in a loud voice that effective immediately there would be a penalty for late arrivals.

He instructed me to entertain the class with a quotation from Shakespeare! I wanted to ask if we weren’t a little too old for this sort of thing; after all, it wasn’t high school all over again; it was training of adults for the wartime Foreign Service. Fortunately, memory kept me company and I recalled a line from Shakespeare: “Sweet are the uses of adversity which like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in its head.” I dragged out the word “toad” but seriously doubted that the old goat caught it. He was more than likely focused on “precious jewel in its head,” possibly interpreting it as a salute to his superior intelligence.

Enough of this fooling around, I concluded. It was a training session, not a Shakespeare quiz. And indeed we weren’t getting much training. Instead, the class was irrelevant to the times, as so often happens when retirees age. I can’t remember a single lesson he taught us other than vanity, pride, and a superior if not snobbish bearing, all of which I considered setting a bad example.

During the final week of training the secretary posted a lined sheet of yellow legal paper on the bulletin board, showing our assignments. My heart skipped a beat when I read: Wilkowski—Port of Spain, Trinidad, British West Indies. I was outward bound into the vast unknown. So began a thirty-five-year career in the Foreign Service.