

MEMORABLE MOMENTS IN MY MEMORABLE CAREER

By Peter L Rothholz

When I was an undergraduate at Queens College in New York, it was my hope and ambition to become a United States Foreign Service Officer upon my graduation. I prepared for this by majoring in History and taking elective courses in Economics and Political Science. I also completed a Summer program in British Literature at the University of London and another studying French at McGill University in Montreal. Alas, it was not to be. I did not meet the State Department citizenship and age requirements. The Korean War broke out at the same time as my graduation and I spent the next two years as a draftee in the U.S. Army.

After my release from active duty and a number of false starts, I eventually found a job with Lissone-Lindeman, a Dutch conglomerate among whose properties was a major U.S. tour operating company. Less than two years later, I held a relatively responsible position and was sent to Europe on a hotel "inspection" mission. Together with my then wife, Paula, we crossed the Atlantic in First Class accommodations aboard the French Line's SS Liberte. In those days, (mid 1950s) celebrities and those who could afford it, traveled to Europe in First Class aboard luxurious ocean liners including on our crossing. Among our fellow-travelers were the publisher of the New York Post, the owner of a major department store and Al Capp, the creator of the comic strip Li'l Abner. After dinner, they tended to sit together in the lounge and since we were an oddity at that time being only in our mid-twenties, we were invited to join them. Also in that group was the first of the many memorable people I was to meet in the course of my life: Senator Estes Kefauver, who only a year or two earlier had been Adlai Stevenson's running mate. Given my interest in politics and as one of his admirers, we "hit it off" immediately. He asked me the meaning of my family name, Rothholz, and when I told him it was German for red wood, he gave me the nickname "Woody" and we became fast friends for the rest of the voyage.

Some three years later, I became a junior executive with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and among my memorable experiences was my appointment to a team of five colleagues who flew to Moscow on KLM's inaugural flight. My mission was to coordinate our tour offerings with our "opposite number" at Aeroflot. Since KLM was only the second western airline to serve Moscow, that was an extremely fascinating assignment and, as a rare American in the Soviet Union, I was interviewed by Richard R. Levine on "Monitor," NBC's nationally broadcast news service.

In 1962 I founded my own public relations company, specializing in tourism and economic development. Among my clients was Paquet French Cruises, owners of the luxurious MS Renaissance, which one summer offered a star-studded music festival at sea in the Mediterranean. Over the course of 14 days, the Renaissance festival presented concerts and recitals by some of the world's most famous musicians. My wife and I were privileged to be aboard for the entire cruise and had the pleasure of getting to know artists such as the world's most popular flutist Jimmy Galway, famed French trumpeter Maurice Andre, the brilliant young

Israeli violinist Shlomoh Mintz and many, many others. We chatted with them around the pool, at the bar and attended their performances on board as well as fabulous venues ashore from the Alhambra in Spain to Caesarea in Israel.

Mostly, however, we represented foreign government agencies. Foremost among these were the Barbados Board of Tourism and the Barbados Industrial Development Corporation with each of whom we had a relationship for over 40 years. One of my favorite memories of that relationship occurred at a reception hosted by Prime Minister Errol W. Barrow at his official residence. Shortly after my marriage to my wife, Barbara, we were invited to such a reception at Culloden Farm, the Prime Minister's official residence and rather than explaining to Mr. Barrow I was divorced and remarried since he last saw me, I simply said as we greeted one another, "You remember my wife, Prime Minister?" To which he instantly replied, "That's not the one you brought last time." I was taken aback by his memory and we both had a good laugh and continued to be on friendly personal terms for many years thereafter. Another memorable moment, or rather evening, took place at the parental home of Mia Motley at a party to celebrate her graduation from The London School of Economics. She subsequently entered politics and is now the Prime Minister of Barbados!

The most memorable moment of my more than forty years of association with Barbados was the marriage of our good friend Carol Cadogan. For several years Carol was U.S. Manager of the Barbados Board of Tourism and lived in New York. As her U.S. public relations counsel, Barbara and I developed a warm personal relationship with her. It continued beyond her leaving her New York posting and return home. A few years thereafter she was to be married to Peter Fox, an English businessman and Barbados resident. Carol's father had died some years earlier and much to my great surprise and delight she asked me, a Jew, to be Father Giver at her wedding. The ceremony was held in the Episcopal church in Bridgetown and was conducted by the Bishop of Barbados in the presence of the Governor-General and a who's who of Barbados society. It was even featured on the front page of the local press. I was almost floating on a cloud as I walked the beautiful bride down the aisle!

Any contact with an American President is memorable. I was fortunate and had four. First with President Harry S. Truman, an ardent numismatist, when I accompanied my client, the American Director of the Israel Government Coins and Medals Corporation to Independence, Missouri where he presented a proof set of Israeli coinage to the Truman Library. By then retired, Mr. Truman was gracious and my photo with him is a treasure. My second presidential encounter was with Bill Clinton when he gave a major address at the annual meeting in Washington of the U.S. Council on Aging on whose board I served at the time. Finally, as a member of the Barbados delegation, I was also fortunate to have attended a White House reception hosted by President Jimmy Carter.

Among the foreign policy initiatives of the Reagan administration was the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) which was designed to strengthen U.S. relations with our Caribbean neighbors. A good-will tour by President Ronald Reagan through the English-speaking Caribbean was an important part of this and I was asked to be the liaison between the Barbadian press and Larry

Speakes, the president's press secretary. Barbara and I stayed at Cobblers Cove, our favorite hotel on the beach. President and Mrs. Reagan stayed with their friend Claudette Colbert in her home immediately next door. One afternoon when we were on the beach, we spotted the Reagans just a few feet away on the other side of the low stone wall which separated the two properties. We waved to them, and they to us. A press photographer, probably hidden behind some bushes, was apparently nearby because, much to our surprise, about ten days later, a friend sent us a page from 'Paris Match' with a photo of our presidential encounter.

New Zealand was another member of the British Commonwealth on our client roster and on one of my visits there I had the pleasure of visiting a Maori village near the amazing Rotorua hot springs and watching "fierce Maori warriors" performing the traditional Haka, a war dance performed before going into combat with an enemy. While the Maori people are proud of their "fierce" reputation, they like most Kiwis are among the world's friendliest people. Chatting with Prime Minister Robert "Tubby" Muldoon and the many people who hosted us bore this out.

While it was prior to his appointment as President of Israel, I had the pleasure of working with Chaim Herzog when he was Board Chairman of our client, the Keter Publishing Company Ltd. The occasion was the publication of the authoritative Encyclopedia Judaica and its introduction to the American market. Mr. Herzog and I spent a memorable afternoon visiting Manhattan editorial offices and TV studios for his interviews and he graciously invited me to his hotel suite for an evaluation of the publicity he received and I had the rare pleasure of seeing a future Head of State in his underwear as he changed his clothes for his dinner engagement.

Possibly the most enjoyable event we arranged during my career was a luncheon in Manhattan for the Italian Minister of Culture and Tourism. As public relations consultants to ENIT the Italian Government Tourist office, we were charged with selecting a suitable venue and developing an appropriate guest list. As we began to assemble a list of possibilities, we remembered that Luciano Pavarotti was in town. We researched how we might contact him and once we found out, invited him to the luncheon. Much to our surprise and delight, he accepted our invitation. That luncheon turned out to be a never-to-be-forgotten event.

The United States Association for the United Nations engaged us to help them in their effort to limit the use of atomic weapons. At that time, there was a vigorous debate on this topic in the General Assembly and Arthur Goldberg the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. was scheduled to speak on the subject. The leaders of our client, though private citizens, were largely both wealthy and well-connected and "had the ear" of Ambassador Goldberg. He requested our client to provide him with an outline of their position. We, as their public relations consultants were asked to prepare a statement for the ambassador's consideration which I had the pleasure of presenting to him personally. Imagine my thrill when I saw "my" words quoted the following day in a New York Times editorial!

Among the last of our memorable client assignments came from the Consulate of Morocco in New York which asked us to publicize an international trade and investment conference in Rabat, the capital. This gave Barbara and me the opportunity to travel to Morocco and while the Conference itself was rather dull, the opportunity to visit Fez and Meknes to admire the fabulous antiquities there was memorable indeed.

As the time approached for me to make post-retirement plans, I enrolled in the International Executive Service Corps, a volunteer organization which worked with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide expertise and guidance to private industry. Barbara and I spent two fascinating months in Cairo during which we had the opportunity to visit the Sphinx and pyramids in Giza and to cruise on the Nile to Luxor and Assuan and to visit the amazing antiquities there. As it happened, the Jewish festival of Passover occurred during our stay and we were invited to a seder by the Ambassador of Israel at his residence. Among the other guests was a U.S. Congressional Delegation led by Senator Bernie Sanders as well as members of the small Jewish community of Cairo. How ironic it was for us to be celebrating the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt in their capital city!

The following year I received a brief assignment which took me to Ukraine to work with a start-up tour operating company in Odesa. Given the political situation at the time, I was not able to bring Barbara along. Among my most vivid memories of my visit was the welcome I received at the airport on my arrival. I was greeted by an exquisitely beautiful young woman who spoke English like an American. It turned out that she was the daughter of a Russian diplomat and grew up in Washington, D.C. While in Odesa I also had the time and opportunity to make contact with the then still large Jewish community there. Among these memorable events was a weekend visit to a Chabad holiday camp on the Black Sea as well as an encounter at a Jewish Old Age Home with a distinguished looking elder gentleman with whom I was able to communicate only by a handshake and an admiring glance. I was told he was a World War II "Hero of the Soviet Union" and he looked as though he had just stepped out of a propaganda poster.

Due to my close and longstanding relationship with Barbados, I had many contacts with Black Media and Black leaders, among them David Dinkins the first Black mayor of the City of New York. He and I were both tennis fans. One evening we both attended a tennis-related charity event. As the Mayor was chatting with Arthur Ashe, one of the world's greatest tennis stars at the time, he noticed me nearby and invited me to join him. It was a big thrill for me, made even more memorable because he introduced me as "half a brother."

As I write this at age 94, I am reminded of the adage "when life deals you a lemon, make lemonade." In retrospect, I feel mine has been quite tasty.

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