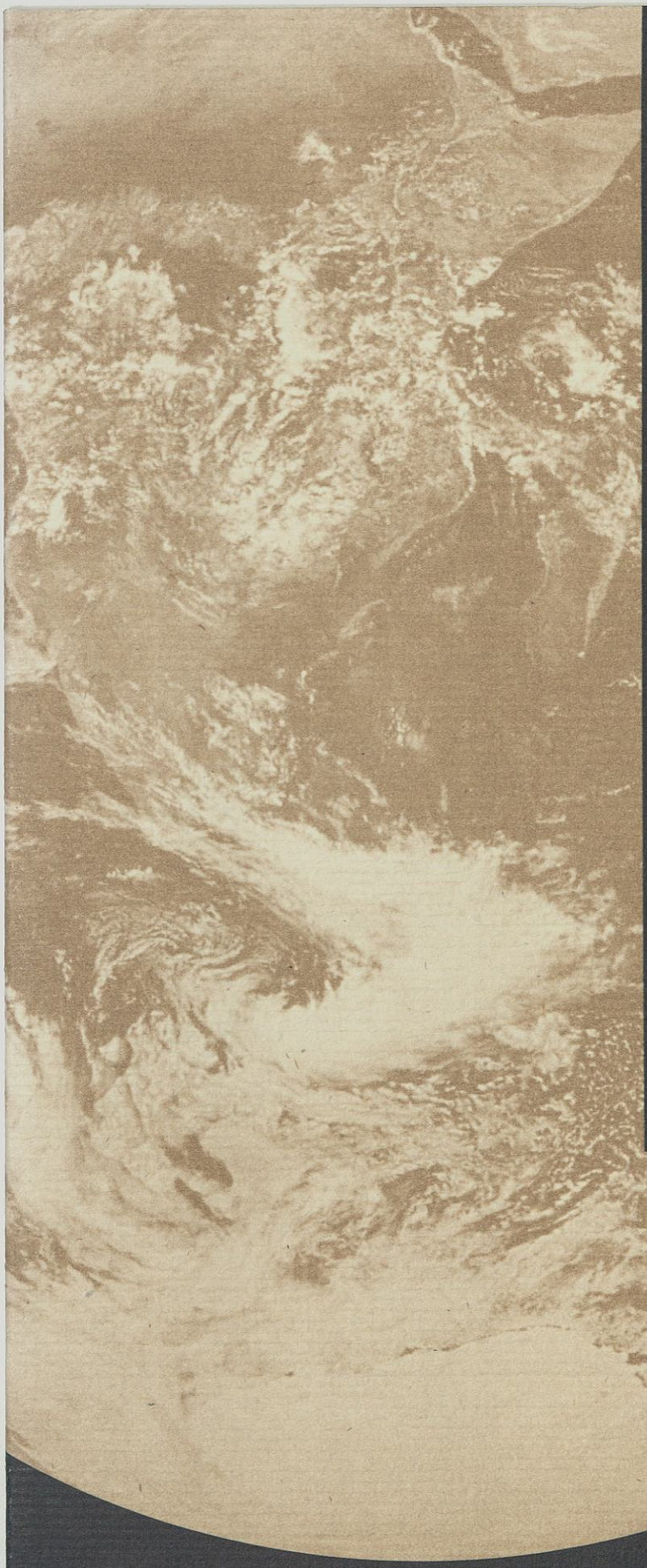

Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems

Living History Interview

Amb. Kenneth Quinn

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LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW
With
Ambassador

KENNETH QUINN

One of the unique features of ***Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*** **(TLCP)** is the publication of a "Living History Interview" with a person of international accomplishment and renown. The Living History Interview complements the symposium format of TLCP by blending theory and practice, thus giving a practical perspective to the questions examined in the symposium. For this feature of TLCP, we conduct an interview with an individual who has experience in the same or related area of transnational law that the symposium addresses. The purpose of the interview is to invite a prominent international scholar, jurist, or politician—not to explore his or her professional point of view—but to gain insight into his or her personal perspectives as shaped by historical events in order to better understand the complex nature of international law.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Kenneth Quinn, an Iowa native, began his career with the American Foreign Service in the early 1970s. His first assignment placed him in rural Vietnam as a development officer, where he became conversant in colloquial Vietnamese. Later, he became the first outsider to identify the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in neighboring Cambodia. His ability to adapt to and observe local cultures helped him enact political and social change over his thirty-two years as a diplomat.

Dr. Quinn's initial work in Vietnam began a long and successful career in international work. He primarily focused on Indochina, but he also earned such titles as member of Henry Kissinger's National Security Council; Special Assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke; Narcotics Counselor at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Vienna; Chairman of the Inter-agency Task Force on POW/MIAs; member of the U.S.-Russia POW/MIA Commission; and U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia. Dr. Quinn's skill as a translator played a critical role in ground-breaking negotiations which culminated in the first U.S. search of Vietnamese prisons for American POW/MIAs. Later, he served on the Russian prison investigatory team.

Dr. Quinn has been a lifelong advocate of international human rights. While serving on former Iowa Governor Robert Ray's staff, Dr. Quinn promoted aid for Indochinese refugees and assisted in their resettlement efforts. As Executive Director of Iowa SHARES, he recruited professionals and sent supplies to alleviate starvation in Cambodia. Dr. Quinn lived amidst terrorism and violence in the Middle East, the Philippines, and Cambodia. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the State Department Award for Human Rights and Democracy as well as a commendation by Secretary Albright for his efficiently run embassy in Phnom Penh; the Secretary of State's Award for Heroism and Valor for protecting U.S. citizens in Cambodia and assisting in rescue efforts in Vietnam; the American Foreign Service Association Award for the strength to question government decisions; the Department of Defense Award for Distinguished Civilian Service; the Presidential Distinguished Service Award; and a Treasury Department Award.

Dr. Quinn assumed leadership of the World Food Prize Foundation, which is located in Des Moines, Iowa, in January 2000, following his retirement from the State Department. The organization was inspired by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug and is directed at recognizing pioneers in global agriculture.[1]

[1] Biographical information regarding Dr. Quinn was taken from the World Food Prize's web site. The World Food Prize Foundation, http://www.worldfoodprize.org/about/Quinn.htm (last visited Nov. 26, 2007).

LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH QUINN

Joseph Michaels, Editor in Chief of Volume 17, and William Hett, an Articles Editor for Volume 17, conducted this interview on August 30, 2007. William Street, Associate Note Editor for Volume 17, contributed questions.

TLCP: In January of 2000, following your retirement from the State Department, you assumed leadership here at the World Food Prize Foundation. Can you tell us about the World Food Prize Foundation?

QUINN: It was created for food and agriculture by one of the world's, and Iowa's, great heroes, Dr. Norman Borlaug. Dr. Borlaug was born in 1914 in Cresco, in Howard County. He worked in Mexico beginning in the mid-1940s and discovered he could cross-breed varieties of wheat which led to higher-yielding wheat that was more disease resistant. That wheat uplifted the poorest Mexican farmers. He was then asked to go to India and Pakistan in the 1960s, when its citizens faced imminent mass starvation and famine. The countries went from deficit to self-sufficient to surplus. Dr. Borlaug received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, as the father of the Green Revolution. He went on to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and on July 17, 2007, he received the Congressional Gold Medal, America's highest civilian honor. There are only five people in the history of America to receive all three awards, and Dr. Borlaug is one of them. The others are Dr. Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, and Elie Wiesel. Dr. Borlaug is credited with saving a billion people; Atlantic magazine wrote that he saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived.

Dr. Borlaug asked the Nobel committee to create a Nobel Prize for food and agriculture. The committee did not have the legal authority or the money, so instead he created the World Food Prize. Dr. Borlaug came to Iowa and met John Ruan, an Iowa businessman and philanthropist, also born in 1914 in a small town in Iowa, who funded it. Since then, every October here in Iowa we give a quarter million dollar prize to a laureate who has made a breakthrough achievement in increasing the quality, quantity, or availability of food in the world. Laureates have come from Brazil, Bangladesh, Cuba, China, Denmark, India, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the same time that we do the ceremony, we hold a symposium and bring in experts from around the world. This year it [was] on biofuels and biofoods—global challenges.

October 16 is World Food Day around the globe, and, by an act of the legislature, it is also Norman Borlaug World Food Prize Day in Iowa. In the whole 161-year history of Iowa, only two official days of recognition have ever been enacted for an individual: for Herbert Hoover and Norman Borlaug. Our goal is to have the most significant observance of World Food Day anywhere around the globe. The last fifty or sixty years have been the single greatest period of food production in all human history. There are few places that can match the heroes of agricultural innovation and humanitarian achievement that Iowa has produced.

Herbert Hoover, for example–most people think of him as a failed president. But in fact, Herbert Hoover is probably the single greatest humanitarian America has ever produced. In World War I, working for a Democrat—for Woodrow Wilson—he brought food to Europe, to feed close to a billion people. It was not like going and buying it there; there *was not* any food in Europe. If you go down to his museum, you'll see that people wrote back, wrote things like he saved Belgium; he saved Poland; he saved large numbers of children in what was then the brand new Soviet Union. He was a great humanitarian. He also did that after World War II, and alone. He is an incredible hero.

Also, there is Henry Wallace and the development of hybrid corn. Henry Wallace was the first one to inspire sharing of American agricultural know-how. It was his inspiration that started this first program in Mexico in the mid-1940s that Dr. Borlaug went to, which was run by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Then you have George Washington Carver who got his education in Iowa. While he had most of his achievements when he was at Tuskegee, he never would have had that education, and never would have been in the position to do any of that, except for Simpson College and Iowa State University, which, unlike other schools in other nearby states, took him in. He was the first African-American student ever to attend; they opened the way and gave him the education and the wherewithal which unleashed his genius. This state has been the epicenter of some of the greatest agricultural achievements in human history.

TLCP: With crude oil prices rising over the past years, and particularly in recent months, this limited supply and limited number of suppliers of crude oils have brought an increased awareness of biofuels, especially ethanol. What is the future of ethanol, especially for Iowa farmers, on an international scale?

QUINN: If we're producing fuel with crops, suddenly we have a resource that need not ever run out. Unlike oil or coal, or whatever you take out of the ground, crop-based energy is not finite. You can always grow more.

TLCP: Is there any concern in the food aid community that more of the corn, especially in Iowa, is being devoted towards biofuels?

QUINN: These are the questions that come up, obviously. Is it going to be more expensive, or are the surpluses going to be there, as they were before? In addition, there is a whole debate in the food aid community about whether it should be American commodities versus American funds, which are used to buy foods locally and take it to people. With the farm bill up, that is always a big question.

TLCP: Getting humanitarian aid to countries like North Korea has not been an easy task. The DPKR essentially wants to control every dollar that comes into the country. Often that means only a small portion, if any, of the food actually reaches those who need it most. What is the most effective way to get food to those who need it?

QUINN: North Korea is the single most difficult place to deliver food and assure it is getting where it needs to be. The way to best work at that is through the United Nations, especially in the case of countries that are deeply authoritarian and totalitarian and which rigidly control movement into and around their country. The personnel with the best chance of doing that, of getting to the areas most in need, are U.N. officials, with the power and prestige of the Secretary General. The U.N. can be a controversial subject and organization in the United States and can become caught up in our politics. However, in most countries in the world, the U.N. gets a lot of respect, so that even authoritarian leaders will not want to go totally afoul of it.

TLCP: Is that what makes the U.N. and its officials influential?

QUINN: I think so, yes. They build long-standing relationships with the recipient countries. The North Koreans, in this case, have not viewed what the U.N. has done as being used to publicly embarrass them. They do not think it is an indirect effort by the United States or somebody else to score points against them internationally. They see that these [U.N.] organizations come and work quietly and effectively. They let them in. I found that out when I was working for the U.S. mission in the United Nations in Vienna, when we dealt with Palestinian refugee camps. I was able to go and visit some of these camps in Gaza and the West Bank and Syria, and even remote parts of Lebanon because I was able to go with U.N. officials. These groups would never have let me in (they knew who I was) but they were used to seeing the U.N. officials come, and I just went with them. They assumed I was another U.N. guy. Being with the U.N., I was able to get into a lot of places in Lebanon in the 1980s that nobody else from the U.S. government ever saw.

TLCP: Moving farther into your past, let's jump way back to when you were growing up in Dubuque. You received your undergraduate degree from Loras, and your graduate degree at Marquette, is that right?

QUINN: I got my Master's at Marquette, and my Ph.D at the University of Maryland.

TLCP: What were your degrees in?

QUINN: My Master's degree was in political science, and my Ph.D was in government politics and international relations.

TLCP: How did you transition from growing up in Iowa, a place that was mostly isolated from international politics, to an international career?

QUINN: Awkwardly. But in the 1950s and the 1960s, television was just coming on, and Kennedy was on television a lot. President Kennedy was this inspirational figure. The notion of being involved internationally was a great

challenge. There was space, which was for physicists, pilots, and astronauts, and then there was helping make the world a better place. There was this calling. To get into foreign affairs, my one shot was with the Foreign Service because the test was free. To be a lawyer, you had to take the LSAT. I didn't have enough money to take the LSAT—$15—so my dream of being a lawyer had to give way because I could not have gone without a scholarship, and Loras did not give scholarships. However, I could take the Foreign Service exam.

I still remember driving out of Dubuque, going across the old wire-mesh bridge—I shudder—and driving up to Madison, which is where they gave the Foreign Service exam. It was your one moment where, even though you were some kid from Dubuque who went to Loras, for a couple of hours you could be on par with anyone from Harvard or Princeton or Yale or Georgetown or wherever else. What mattered was how well your teachers taught you and how hard you studied.

I took the written exam, and I received a passing grade, which felt like a miracle. I was going around telling my professors at Marquette–by then I was in Washington, getting my Ph.D—who suddenly all had a much better opinion of me than they had before. But that was just step one; passing separated you. You were now one of the thousand who passed, as opposed to the fifteen thousand who did not pass. I went down and took the oral exam. Two hours of sitting across the table from three diplomats asking you questions, trying, or you thought they were trying, to trip you up.

Those were the days where there was a lot of talk of psychological tricks of testing. One of the famous ones was that somebody would give you a glass of water with a little hole in it, a dribble glass. So you would drink, the water would run down the front of your shirt, and they would watch you. Well, I was there for two hours, there was a glass of water and a pitcher. They kept saying to me, *Help yourself to some water*, and I thought, *I'm not falling for that trick!* I was so parched I could barely talk, but I was not going to take any of that water and fall into their trap. Of course, there was nothing wrong with the glass, the water was fine; I could have drunk it, there was no trick, but I just remember.

TLCP: Did you ask them if there was a trick?

QUINN: I don't remember any more, you know. People would invite you to smoke. I didn't smoke, but they would invite you to smoke and there would be no ashtray, just to see how you would handle this kind of situation.

I remember twenty-five years later, I was thinking about leaving the Foreign Service. I had an interview with somebody, and when I sat down at the table, I knocked the water all over; I covered myself with water. I thought, here I've done it to myself. Actually, it makes you memorable if you do that. You stand out.

After the oral exam, then you had to go for your security screening, which in those days was used to find out if you had done anything for which you could be manipulated and blackmailed. They were interested in sexual orientation or whether you had had affairs with married people, things like that. So I got through all that, but then I failed the physical exam because there was some problem with my urine!

So I was out several years—I had my Ph.D and dissertation—and then I was over in Huntington, West Virginia, sitting around with a family physician who asked me what I was going to do. I told him the story about the Foreign Service and about my medical problem. And he said, *Well come with me tomorrow*. So I went down to his office, and he took me up another flight, up to the office of this urologist. We went in—there was only one guy, one nurse, a receptionist in his office, a little, very small office—and my uncle said, *Tell him your situation*. I told him my situation. The urologist said, *Give me a sample here*. So I filled up his test tube and gave it to him. He took the test tube, put it in the centrifuge, spun it a few times—I'm not sure it ever really got up to full speed—took it out, and he held it up to the light. He looked at it and said, *Looks clear to me*.

It happened to be that while he was a small town urologist, he was also a medical politician: he was the president-elect of the American Urological Society! Well, he wrote a letter, on his letterhead, and his letterhead says, *From the office of the President-elect of the American Urological Society*. The letter said, *I have examined Kenneth Quinn, on such-and-such a date; his urine was free and clear of anything; signed Doctor So-and-So*.

I took this to the State Department. I went into the office of clearances and there was a desk clerk or somebody there. He looked at the letter, read it, and said, *You're in*. He put the letter in my file, on top of the pile of other documents. All it took was one letter from one of America's greatest specialists. I was in the Foreign Service in a couple of months.

TLCP: One of your first experiences was as a World Development Officer?

QUINN: That is right. I went in the Foreign Service, and I was this kid from Dubuque thinking, *Diplomats: they're all in Europe; they go to fancy receptions; they work in places with chandeliered ballrooms; that is what I will be doing*. I was not quite sure where, London or Paris, of course, but maybe Vienna or Stockholm if I had to. But I got in, and there were eighty of us entry-level officers, and they said, *Well, if you're under twenty-six, single, male, and have not been in the military, there is this program in Vietnam*. This was 1967, so the war was on. They gave me a language aptitude test, which is supposed to judge whether you could learn hard languages. All of my [language] background was poor; I had a marginal grade. If it had been about Chinese or Japanese or Arabic, they probably would have passed on me, but because they desperately needed people to go to Vietnam, they gave it to me. Before I knew what happened, I was assigned to Vietnam. It was so hard to

learn Vietnamese because of the tones. It was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, the hardest intellectual thing.

If you can imagine, there was the stress of the whole questioning of the war. What's going on now about Iraq is nothing. There's not even any controversy compared to Vietnam. With so many people and Foreign Service officers being killed, you became convinced that, from the time you got off the plane until the time you got down to the hotel, several people would have tried to throw hand grenades into your car or something. When you got there, it wasn't that bad. But the stress before you got there was enormous.

The big day was when you went out and bought your pistol, down at one of the D.C. gun stores. We used to spend hours talking about the various advantages of the stopping power of the .38 Special versus the .44 Magnum. Of course none of us knew anything about that; we just picked it up from the police advisors in our classes. Then you had to smuggle it because you weren't really allowed to take it. So you would pack it away in your bag and ship it to Vietnam. I was studying for my comprehensive exams for my Ph.D at the same time. I also had a stressful relationship with a young woman who was very anti-war. I thought I was going to go crazy. Then suddenly I was on a plane, dropped off in the Mekong Delta.

I was part of a district advisory team to eight villages, advising the [local] government as to the fight against the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Army. We were to win the hearts and minds through the pacification program and prudent administration. I had to [be there] for a year and a half, that was the deal. If I did that, the State Department would find me a job in Paris or Vienna. So, I was a year in, and they started asking me, *Where did I want to go.* I decided to go to Harvard to study labor relations. Then I would be assigned to Europe, to an embassy. All my dreams were going to come true until a journalist came to see me. His name was Dick Swanson. He had a Vietnamese woman with him who later became his wife. They opened a famous restaurant in Washington called Germaine's Restaurant, that was her name. He was the *Time Life* reporter and photographer; I was to take him out to show him how we were winning the hearts and minds.

We had a small boat, we were going down the Mekong River, and it was late in the year; the rainy season was over. It was gray and overcast, the water was spraying up in my face, and he asked me what I was going to do. I told him, and he said, *Here you are, you speak the language, you are able to step through the veil that separates our cultures, you are working out in these villages, you are making a difference, you are taking part in the epic event of your generation. Why would you want to go and work in embassies in Europe and write reports about labor movements that nobody in Washington will read or care about? Why would you want to leave here?* I had this Saul-on-the-road-to-Damascus moment, where I was sitting there and I did not have an answer. I thought, and I thought, and I looked at him and said, *I don't know why.*

That night I went back to our compound and wrote a letter to the State Department. I told them I did not want to go to Harvard; I did not want to go to labor training; I wanted to stay in Vietnam. Of course, if they had anybody who was crazy enough to want to do that, they were more than delighted to have you stay as long as you wanted! They broke all my assignments, and I ended up staying for six years. That question changed the whole course of my life. It focused my thinking in a way that I probably never could have done for myself. I was living in this other world that I had conjured up for myself as I drove across that bridge in Dubuque going off to take the test. That was how I ended up doing all the other things that I did, and becoming a specialist in Indochina and working on Cambodia and all that.

I also encountered Norman Borlaug for the first time. Not physically, but at that time his approach to wheat had been adapted to rice. Just as he had produced miracle wheat, there was now miracle rice. It was spreading among farmers in the district where I worked. At the same time, we were building a road, a totally different project; it just happened to be going at the same time. We were improving an old rural road, putting rocks on it, building little bridges and culverts so you could get over the little streams and things. I had eight villages where I was advisor; the road had gone through four. What you saw was, wherever the road went, the new miracle rice went. It had a dramatic impact on life and on the people who lived in those villages. With this miracle rice, you could get two or three crops a year, versus one crop in villages without the road and hence without the rice.

There was surplus income; children were better fed and better clothed, and they stayed in school longer. There were inter-village taxis that could take kids so they could go from the primary school to the middle school, even to the high school. Girls stayed in school longer. Parents could get sick children medical attention sooner, so child mortality dropped. You started seeing a lot of radios and televisions, metal roofing going on the houses, and the Vietcong sort of evaporated because there was so much economic activity. There were so many good prospects for life that young men did not go off and join the Vietcong in the way they had before. With our bombing and our main force units brought in to fight the Vietcong, they just submerged, and then when those were over they popped back up again. But with the road and the rice, it got rid of them. Whereas before you did not dare go to many of these villages at night, and you only went during the day with security, now you could go night and day and you did not have to worry about it, at least in the four villages where the roads had been built.

Where the road stopped, the miracle rice stopped. Those other four villages were as they were fifty or 100 years before: ramshackle housing, people in tattered clothing, thin, emaciated children, children not learning in school, obviously poorly nourished, and child mortality remained high. There the Vietcong continued its presence.

That was the great lesson we learned. But most present-day Americans have forgotten it. Think about it: how did Iowa develop? [Iowa developed] because people built farms and market roads, then the extension service which brought Henry Wallace's hybrid corn, other agricultural innovations; that is what changed our society and really all the Midwest. Down near the University of Iowa there were insurrections against the government during the Depression, but then the roads started getting built and life changed. Iowa was pacified, the hearts and minds were won, and it has developed peacefully ever since.

That was the great lesson I learned about countering terrorists in those villages in Vietnam. You could have built the road, but without the agricultural technology, the road would not have had its impact.

Years later, we were confronting the Khmer Rouge in 1990. Thanks to the U.N. process, the United States was able to go into Cambodia and have a diplomatic presence and aid programs for the first time since the 1960s. There were still 25,000 Khmer Rouge left in the country and they controlled most of the countryside. We had no plan of what to do, so I said, *Go and find all the road-grading equipment you can in Thailand. Rent it, bring it over, drive it into Cambodia, and wherever is a Khmer Rouge area. Start building roads, and hopefully the agricultural technology will follow.*

We re-did a whole highway and wherever the highway went, it weakened the Khmer Rogue. Of course there were other things you had to do, you could not *just* do that. We did de-mining because you could not do the roads unless you did de-mining. We fixed the roads, brought in agricultural technology. Human rights started flowing, and the Khmer Rouge could not keep up with it. Where before they had been blowing each other apart with cannons and things, now it was this flow of human interaction that undid them. Their units started surrendering and defecting. That was 1990. In 1999, the last Khmer Rouge general surrendered. I was the ambassador. I had not been the ambassador when we started; I had been the Deputy Assistant Secretary in Washington. I was there, I remember being told, *He has come across the border, he has surrendered*; I remember calling Washington to say the last guys had given up. Thanks in large part to roads and agricultural technology, the whole terrorist organization that had killed two million people was gone.

TLCP: Back in the 1970s, you were one of the very first people to bring awareness of the Khmer Rouge to the public. How did you go about doing that?

QUINN: I had enormous difficulties because nobody would believe me. I lived down on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. You could literally see into Cambodia from there. You would pick up information, intelligence sources from people traveling. So I learned the North Vietnamese were going through Cambodia and infiltrating the South; they had their supply routes through Cambodia. One day, in June of 1973, I went up to the top of this mountain, and all the Cambodian villages that you could see—you could see out

probably fifteen to twenty miles—every village, every one was on fire on the same day. I had no idea what was going on, other than these strange columns of black smoke pouring up into the sky.

Over the next several days, refugees started pouring out of Cambodia into Vietnam. The story they told was that on that Saturday, in June 1973, the Khmer Rouge had turned from boy scout revolutionaries, who were always very nice and polite, into harsh task masters who rounded up everybody, marched them out of the villages, and set fire to every dwelling, burned everything, so nobody would have anything to go back to. They marched people out to go build new communal living structures in the jungles, and to turn them into labor brigades. This was being done across several different military regions, by different Khmer Rouge administrations. It was not some sort of haphazard aberration. Instead, it was a systematic plan implemented by an organization that existed in three separate administrative areas.

I wrote all this and eventually produced what, in State Department terms, was called an Air Gram. It was a big paper, like a term paper. I said, *This organization, this Khmer Rouge, they were anti-monarch, against the king in Cambodia, and they also were anti-Hanoi, against the Vietnamese.* But there was another article circulating throughout the U.S. government, up to Henry Kissinger, that said Communists in Hanoi controlled everything about the Communist party in Cambodia, and [the Khmer Rouge] just took orders from Hanoi. So if you negotiated with Hanoi, you could also make a deal for Cambodia. It was absolutely not true. These Khmer Rouge guys oriented toward the Gang of Four in Beijing—radical Chinese communists—and they hated the Vietnamese. In fact, they started pushing Vietnamese civilians, who lived along the canals and the rivers in Cambodia, pushing them out of the country, and denying access to the North Vietnamese army. I wrote about all this; there are actually several reports that I did.

People up in Saigon, in the U.S. Embassy and in the military, were incredulous. They sent analysts down. They said, *Go check this guy out*—as if I had been living there too long, thinking I had gone native, or maybe was smoking something—*find out what's going on.* Some young guys came down, and said, *Where are you getting all this? Everything you have is different than ours.* I was a very junior guy, so they thought maybe what I was reporting was accurate to a certain extent but just sort of reflected some strange local thing on the border which did not really have meaning for the whole country. I was transferred back to Washington, and I tried to convince people there at the White House.

The lesson is, whether about terrorism in 2007 or Hanoi and the Vietcong and the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s, is that people buy into their own analyses, and are very reluctant to accept anything that does not fit on that [analysis], especially based on who is in charge. Or they will take new information and twist it to make it fit on their analytical skeleton. But I had a whole new skeleton, a new basis of analysis. Of course, it turned out

everything I had was absolutely right. It was the story of what had happened, and I had given it to them years in advance. But it was a hard sell. Even after the Khmer Rouge took over, people would still treat me politely when I would talk about the horror. Nobody believed me, because no one would accept it—no one.

TLCP: You were one of the first people to negotiate with the Vietnamese for the release of American prisoners. Could you describe that process?

QUINN: Well, I negotiated the first entry in 1991. I went to Hanoi, I was the leader of the delegation, and we negotiated the whole thing in Vietnamese. I negotiated in Vietnamese for access to POW/MIA jails and camps after the war. The guys who were with me all were military guys; they spoke Vietnamese and all were proud of their language. The Vietnamese later said, *You are the only person who has ever come to Vietnam and negotiated with us, as the head of a delegation, in our own language. Other people come and they bring an interpreter.* They let us into the camp. I do not think just because I negotiated in Vietnamese.

The reason they let us in was very interesting. I had all these talks, and I talked with the Vice Foreign Minister because there had been these reports of live Americans. The Vietnamese always thought these [reports] were meant to embarrass them. They thought we did this to score points against them, not because there were live Americans, but to embarrass them publicly and internationally. So I was talking with the Vice Foreign Minister, and I gave him the info we had: *Here's where we think these guys are being held.* He did not make any commitments about anything. He said, *Well, the press is out there, if you want to go out and address the press.* I told him I did not have any need to address the press. He said, *I will go and do it.* So he goes by himself. He comes back in, and he says to me, *I see you did not come here to embarrass us. Tell me where you would like to go, what you want to see.* I had convinced him that I was really there, sincerely, to talk about the information we had. I was not there to berate him or embarrass him, or anything.

It was a great lesson. When you are negotiating with somebody ask, *How are they defining the question; how do they see you; what do they think you are trying to do.* Define the question for them. Here, the question was, *Did we really want to find out if this information is true or not.*

TLCP: You got to the point where you were, well, you still are fluent in Vietnamese, but you were the interpreter for the White House and President Ford.

QUINN: I was not a great student. I was at the bottom end of the performers who went through, got just barely passing grades, but I went in the countryside. The guys with the really good scores, they stayed in Saigon, got fancier jobs, and never used the language. But I went out everyday and used it, because there were not many people around who spoke English. Slowly, listening, learning new words, learning new phrases, watching the television,

and just going out and talking to people, I got fluent. I could talk about growing rice and fertilizer. I would not have lasted a minute talking about poetry or classical music or anything like that. But I could go out on military operations and watch out for booby traps, stuff like that. I started doing research on what I thought was going to be my Ph.D dissertation. I started interviewing people about this particular sect of Vietnamese Buddhism. Then I met a Vietnamese woman who became my wife. People always think I learned from her, but that's not the case. She has a northern accent; I have a southern accent, from the countryside. She used to deride me for my bumpkin-esque words and language.

When I eventually got back to the White House, I could do a lot. The Vietnamese delegations and their cabinet came in with them, and I translated for President Ford and the delegation. I could do that, and I could go off and do things in Cambodia. A lot of the Cambodians had learned to speak Vietnamese. I did not speak Khmer so I would talk to the Prime Minister, who is a Cambodian, in Vietnamese. He would call me up at night and say, *I just got a report: your embassy is going to be bombed*, all in Vietnamese. It was useful.

I negotiated entry into Laos–parts of Laos–and the Lao were always afraid that, somehow, if they agreed to let us do something . . . they did not know *what* it was, but they were sure we had a trick. In their minds, once we got in and got their agreement to do something, then we would start doing our trick. So I would say, *Look, let us try it once, and if it does not work, then you can just tell us we are not going to do it anymore. You do not have to agree to something forever.* They would go, *Oh, okay, we can do that.* So we would do something—it was not a trick, we did not have any tricks up our sleeve—then they would see that we were sincere in what we wanted to do. It really was about looking for people, so they let us keep doing it.

TLCP: Let's talk a little about your work on the Paris Agreement in the early nineties. What was your role in the negotiation and implementation of the Paris Agreement?

QUINN: I was the number two person on the U.S. delegation. The lead person was Assistant Secretary Richard Solomon. I would go to all the negotiating sessions and offer my contribution as to the drafting sessions. We would meet with other Cambodians, then once the agreement was in place, I would go to some of the international sessions on giving aid to Cambodia. I went to Cambodia, too. We were implementing the agreement and leading up to the election of 1993, so there were a couple years in between putting all this in place and registering voters.

We used to negotiate at the Avenue Kléber conference center in Paris. The French were incredible hosts. They had this wonderful buffet, with wine, and we used to say, *We ought to hold out,* and, *Let us not agree on article such-and-such,* so we could get another day of eating there with the French. They were never sure if we were serious. Of course, it was just a facetious

comment. In the middle of all this, the Soviet Union dissolved, and they became the Russians. It was quite a dramatic moment. And then the Perm Five—the British, the French, the United States, the Chinese, and the Russians—came up with this agreement, accepted it, and implemented it.

Nobody thought there would ever be a Cambodian agreement, so we had no money. Secretary Baker had to go to the Congress and get seven hundred million dollars for Cambodia. Money well spent, because it helped the process of going from Cambodia at war with the totalitarian government to Cambodia as a totally open society.

TLCP: Let's talk about the time when you were Ambassador in Cambodia. I believe your residence there was actually struck by explosions? Could you recount some of those events?

QUINN: Sure. It was June of 1997. Cambodia had had a government for four years. The international community had done all this incredible work, all this investment, money, and we discovered along the way a painful lesson. The painful lesson was that, at least in the United States, we all had learned to compromise and get along with each other. I don't think we know that we inculcate this in our young people as they go to school and grow up, but we do. We all assume that everyone is like that. Then you discover that, in Cambodia, and I suspect in Iraq, that people do not have any sense of compromise. It's all king of the hill: there can only be one person on top. That's where everyone wants to be, and they want to push everybody else away. If somebody else is up there and you are down, you might cooperate with some other people to pull the legs out from under that person, but there is only winning and losing. There is no sharing and getting along.

So all this effort and this government election were structured, and the major parties had to be part of this government so there would be no big winner and loser; instead there would be something for everybody. It seemed to be working so well, but then the Cambodian inclinations surfaced: *How can I use this to get ahead*; *how can I use this to get rid of the opposition*; *how can we get power back*? Things started spiraling downward. When I got to Cambodia in 1996, everybody had been talking about how wonderful Cambodia was. *It's peaceful, this is so successful, this is great.* I had been there a month, but I got on a plane back to Washington and said, *This is all heading to violence.*

This was a new message that people in Washington had not heard. I went back to Cambodia in May of 1996. By June of 1997, there were armed units around, and they were bringing other units closer to the city. Tensions were high, and the international community made so many efforts. We had counted at one time, and there were some eighty-eight separate efforts: meetings, calls, joint demarches, senior visitors coming from other capitals. The Japanese came, the French came, and people came from the U.N. and the United States, all telling the Cambodians, *Stop doing this, do not ruin what you have, everything is going so well.* It didn't matter; tensions were so high by that point.

In June, my family arrived. School was out; all my kids, my wife, they were there that day. My birthday had been in May so they brought birthday presents and cake. I was seeing them for the first time. We were all sitting around in our big family room in the residence, upstairs. We had the television on. Most of them were asleep, but my middle son and I were watching *The Thin Man*, with Nick and Nora Charles—Myrna Loy and Dick Powell. All of a sudden, I heard some noise, and I said to my son, *Do you hear that?* It was like a click or something. He said, *No*, and then there was a huge explosion. A B-40 rocket had just missed coming in the window. It hit right outside the house, right outside the window, and blew off all the glass doors and windows—everything on the first floor and up to the second floor. Immediately, there were huge amounts of automatic weapons firing, machine guns and rifles and everything, all around the house. It sounded like the house was surrounded; people were outside shooting.

I pulled my kids off the bed down to the floor, and my wife and I were lying on top of them. She thought the bullets were going to start coming through the windows; no time to do anything else, so we turned the light off. I don't know that anybody could have seen us, but it seemed like the smart thing to do at the time. I had a radio and a phone, so I phoned the State Department Operations Center on the radio. On the radio—I had a phone and a radio—I talked to the other Americans who were part of our country team. We had a responsibility to protect all the American citizens. The shooting continued, but there were not any bullets coming in, so we put the kids in the bathtub. The security people wanted to come, and I said, *No, don't do that, you'll get killed.* Eventually, I went downstairs. Across the street was where the Minister of Interior lived. There were two Ministers of Interior; one of them was there. People were shooting up and down the main street, so I waited for the shooting to subside. There was one soldier who went with me. We ran across the street into the Minister of the Interior's house. He could speak no English, and I could speak no Cambodian, but his Vietnamese was pretty good, so we talked in Vietnamese. Finally, they got somebody from the other side. There were two sides fighting, both of whom lived down the street, and they got one guy to show up and eventually calm things down. He negotiated so that they stopped shooting at each other, a sort of cease-fire after a couple of hours. That was that night. But that was, again, the harbinger of things to come. A couple of weeks later, they went at it full-bore in the city.

TLCP: They weren't specifically attacking your house?

QUINN: Well, there were different theories about that. Some people thought they were. Other people thought they were shooting at the Prime Minister's compound, even though he was not in it, which was just beyond my house. At the time, Secretary Albright was scheduled to come to Cambodia. I had gotten into a lot of trouble with her because I told her she should not come to Cambodia. I told them that if she came, people would use her visit to try to intimidate her as a way of destabilizing the situation. They thought I was not on the team, and what was wrong with me, so I was in the doghouse big-time

with them. She was coming, and they announced it; they did not take my advice. But now there was shooting in the middle of the city, and her security detail was telling her, *You cannot go to Cambodia.* So all the things I told them had proved to be accurate, that she would look like she was being intimidated, that she would be embarrassed and forced to call off the trip. Somebody back in Washington was quoted as saying that maybe Ambassador Quinn knew what he was talking about after all.

So the trip had to be cancelled. After enormous, enormous anguish, she was just going to come and have a meeting at the airport, sort of summon the prime ministers to the airport to meet with her. I said, *You cannot do that, that would be humiliating to them. I'll ride in the car with you, so if anybody is killed, I will be killed. The bullets will have to go through me to hit you.* It didn't make any difference; her security people were not going to let her. So she was embarrassed. And the Cambodians went back to fighting again in July.

TLCP: How did experiencing the personal threat and the violence change the way you did business?

QUINN: Well, I had a death threat or was almost blown up or almost wounded in every foreign assignment I had. In the Philippines, in the mid-1980s (before Cambodia), the New People's Army targeted Americans. We had ten assassinations of official Americans in the country. Some of them were Defense Department people, some of them were Embassy. The intelligence report we had was that the ambassador was their number one target . . . and I was their number two target. All my career, I was waiting to live in the big house, to ride around with that chauffeur-driven Cadillac, the flag flying on it, but all those things are the easy way for the terrorists to kill you. Luckily, the Filipino terrorists did not want to kill families and children. They might shoot you. If they could have gotten to me, they would have shot me, but they would not have shot my wife and children.

I had six bodyguards wherever I was. From the moment I stepped out of the house to when I came back, there were six Filipinos with pistols or Uzis. The idea was to deter the terrorists: *You might get here, you might shoot him, but you'll be dead, too.* They weren't suicide terrorists, as best we could tell. You had to worry about car bombs; you had to worry about explosions. So the two easiest places to kill me were as I drove up the driveway of my house or drove in the driveway of the Embassy. Those were the two places you could count on. So I would change the time I left. Sometimes I would have the car meet me someplace. I would have to go out through my back fence and walk across a big field, and the car would meet me over there. One day we would go at 10:00, the next day at 7:30, the next day not at all. Anything so you did not have a pattern. Then at the Embassy, if you drove up one way and stopped to make a left-hand turn to cross traffic, you would sit there, and they could come and just pull out a gun and shoot. They used to do that to people. They would be waiting, and when you got to these left-hand turns in heavy traffic,

they would walk over and they would shoot you in your car. It was an easy and predictable way.

What I would do is always come from a direction where I did not have to stop and turn across traffic. We would radio ahead and come driving high-speed. They would open up the gates—we had double gates against suicide bombers—and we would roar through, then shut the gates. Or I would get out someplace else, go in the back door, along the waterfront or something. So my life was changed. But there was nothing like sitting in the car, driving home, and looking out on all these people and wondering, *Is that the one who is going to come over and shoot me?* I used to wonder whether heavy, congested traffic was good. Because there I was stuck: I couldn't get away, I was going slowly, and I was an easy target, but the other guys couldn't get away either if they were in a car. Or did I want to be in fast-moving traffic? They could still shoot me, but there they could drive off. So I never felt safe. Every day, going home, coming to work, always looking out the whole time, wondering, *Is that the person coming to kill me?*

It had become my major preoccupation. I got up in the morning, and the first thing I thought was, *Is somebody going to try to kill me today, or blow up my embassy*? It was the last thing I thought about at night. I used to give talks to the new ambassadors, and I would tell them all this stuff, before 9/11. You had to go through it, and once you went through it . . . then it was different. Now they all take it very seriously. In Cambodia, in this little embassy, a totally unsafe place, we paid so much attention to security. We had no marines. The marines wouldn't come. They said, *Oh, your building is not safe enough for us to operate in.*

We had no marines and only a couple sidearms here and there. But when the diplomatic security teams would come through and make assessments, they said ours was the most well-prepared embassy in the entire U.S. Foreign Service for dealing with terrorist threats. Yet, the building was so badly exposed so that if there was ever an explosion, like in Kenya and Tanzania, everybody would be dead! One hundred percent casualties. The State Department people insisted [that] we had to stay there because they did not have money to build all new embassies.

I was out negotiating deals for new buildings. I made good deals, but Washington would never accept them. One person came from Washington, and he said, *You have to understand that right now you are here in these buildings, and we did not put you here, so if something happens it is not our responsibility. But if we move you to a new place and something happens, it is.* It didn't matter what would happen to me and my employees. They were not going to be responsible for us. It didn't matter that I had negotiated all these deals to move us into a safe building with what is called "setback," where you need to be so far back from the road so that if someone blows up a truck . . . .

TLCP: Was that before Kenya?

QUINN: That was after, *after*, if you can imagine! [Washington was not] going to do anything. We had to insist [that] they come and look at our place. It was just a bunch of houses with a fence around it. They said, *You have to stay there, and we want you to sign these papers that you agree.* I thought, *I'm not going to do this*! But I had exhausted all my appeals. Now we have something called the "dissent channel," so if you do not agree with policy you can send [your grievance] to the Secretary of State and just a few other people.

I wrote a cable to the Secretary and said, *I have been told we have to stay in this building, and we have to do these things to fortify this compound, and that I have to sign off on these. I've appealed, but all my appeals have been turned down. So, with this message, I am telling you, I refuse to implement your orders. My employees' safety is more important to me than that.*

It's one of those things you think about the night before. You understand [that] if you do it, chances are you do not have any future. But I had been Ambassador, and I was getting close to the time where I was going to leave. So Washington would say, *Well, he is going to leave in a couple of months. Just let it go, and then we will do what we want.* Now, I had a young woman who was my deputy and who still had most of her career in front of her. When I left, she would be in charge until the new ambassador came. She also wrote a message, really put her career at great risk, and said, *Just so you understand, when he goes, I will not do it either. You will have to get rid of both of us.*

It's always a big deal to do that, to tell the Secretary of State you refuse to implement the Secretary's orders. That really got their attention in Washington. She and I got an award from the Foreign Service officers, not from the State Department, but from the Foreign Service officers. They give an award each year for someone who stands up, who has the courage to dissent about policy. I am the only one in the State Department who has won it three times. But now, there is a brand new embassy in Phnom Penh, and it is safe, and it has setback. They had no choice but they had to do that. Security becomes the whole point, and I felt responsible for all my employees, both Americans and Khmers.

During the fighting in July of 1997, the month after my house had been hit, there was this all-out civil war. When the country went to war, Cambodians immediately thought the Khmer Rouge was still around. Whatever you said, they thought there was some secret Khmer Rouge writing it down, keeping book on you. The assumption was that the Khmer Rouge would come back to power. After all, that had happened once before. When there was fighting, the Khmer Rouge would take charge. They were the toughest, smartest, and most ruthless; they would win.

Well, there was fighting going on in the city, and it was during a work day so all of my employees were there. One of the Americans came in and said, *All of the Khmer staff—the Cambodian staff—is paralyzed with fear. Nobody can work. They all think we are about to leave, that we are going to abandon them and leave them here, and they will all be killed and their families with them.* This American worker asked if I could come talk to them. So I walked over to another building and the Khmer staff–there were probably forty or fifty of them who worked in the compound–were all there, and they all sat down, and it was one of the few times when you see people get fear in their eyes. At the fall of Saigon I saw this, where people get glassy-eyed, and it's because they were so afraid, so riveted with fear.

I recognized that fear from the fall of Saigon again in the room that day. I told them about the situation, about what was going on, and who we were in contact with. I said, *I think the fighting is serious, but I think it will be under control, and we are not planning to leave or anything.* So they were listening, but for them it was, *We know what is going to happen, and that is the same kind of talk we expected, but we think you are going to leave, and we are going to be here, and we are all going to be killed.* Some of them spoke up, asking, *What will happen to us?*, and, *Will you take us with you?* Of course, we had no instructions about taking anybody. I am sure when troops came it would have been, *Save the Americans.*

At the end of the Vietnam War, there were these terrible stories about how loyal employees got abandoned. I [had] all these people out in front of me, all my Khmer staff. There [was] only one other American there with me. I raised my hand, and I said, *I swear to you, I will never leave here unless I take all of you and your families with me.* I think I had the credibility with them that they believed me. I would have; I would have stayed. If I was not able to take them all, I would have sent all the other Americans away. It never came to that. But they all relaxed; they had my word. They all went back to work and the word passed to the guards out guarding all the residences. Nobody deserted, nobody left his post. They were all safe. We did not lose anybody. But once people went through the horrendous thing with the Khmer Rouge, this was the impact. Half the Cambodian population is traumatized. They have permanent post-traumatic stress disorder.

Before the fighting started, there had been an explosion. Somebody was destroying old weapons found out near the airport. They blew them up to get rid of them, in a controlled situation. So this big explosion was heard all the way downtown. All the markets closed, all the merchants locked everything up; the schools closed, parents rushed to the schools to get their children . . . . Except in the Embassy, because we knew, we had heard what was going on, and we spread the word: *Don't worry; it was the de-mining team, they're blowing up some ordinance out there.*

At the end of the school day, parents who worked for us went to the school. Of course, the only kids left were their kids. A couple of teachers screamed at them, *What's the matter with you? Why did you not come and get your kids? What bad parents you are in this kind of situation!* It goes to the point that the population was so traumatized by what had happened under the Khmer

Rouge that it always assumed the worst. They always reacted right away to try to save their lives and that of their families. Everybody went into immediate survival mode.

TLCP: What was your most satisfying accomplishment in the Foreign Service? Or your greatest challenge?

QUINN: Somebody asked me that when I was down at Grinnell [College] talking to a class. I said, *The things I remember are hugs.* The student looked at me, because she was thinking it was the negotiating, the ballistic missile treaties, or something. Hugs? What's this about? But there were various times when things happened and people hugged me that ended up being the most memorable and satisfying things. In Vietnam, I came upon a little boy who had been shot. I rushed him to the hospital, and the doctors were able to save his life. His dad, a laborer, came up to me in the street—which is very, very un-Vietnamese—and just put his arms around me and hugged me, because I had just saved his kid's life.

During the fighting in Cambodia, I had gotten these back-to-back calls at six o'clock in the morning. One was from Senator Orrin Hatch, saying, *There are some people, Mormon missionaries who are trapped on the outside of town, caught in the fighting. Can you run out and rescue them?* I said, *We have been in touch with them*, but he said, *No, no I just heard from them!* I said, *Okay, Senator, I promise you I will go.*

I hung up the phone and it rang again. This time, it was a Cambodian-American who was one of the ministers in the [Cambodian] government—which was now a government at war with itself—and he was in hiding in an area that, by happenstance, was out near where the Mormon missionaries were, on the road to the airport. He spoke in this *sotto voce*, because he did not want to be overheard. Everybody assumed that all the phones were tapped, so he wouldn't tell me exactly where he was. He gave me the name of the general area, and said, *They have me surrounded. The battery in my phone is going dead. Could you call my wife in Bangkok and tell her I called, and I love her, and tell her goodbye.* So I said, *Where are you? I will try to help you.* But he said, *I cannot tell you*, and then the phone went dead.

I went down and got this big black Chevy with American flags out. I had one U.S. military guy and my Cambodian driver, and I said, *Let's go.* No marines, no anything. We drove out to the Mormons. They were all there in the house, and they saw the car coming with the flag, so they came running out. They said they had never been so glad to see the American flag in all their life, and thanked me for staying in touch with them. I said, *I'll take you all out of here.* But they said, *We think we're okay. The troops have moved up here.* They assured us they were okay.

Then we went driving in this general area where we thought this other guy was, the minister from the government. I kept dialing his phone on my cell phone so if I could get him, I could say, *We're here on the road, run out here, jump in the car; nobody is going to kill you in my car.* I called and called and called, but there was no answer, no answer, no answer. Meanwhile, there was shooting, troops moving, tanks were driving past us, and we were driving in the middle of it all. People were looking at us, and we couldn't find him, we could not connect. So we went back to the Embassy.

Later that afternoon, I called his wife in Bangkok. After that, I went to the Hotel Cambodiana, where we were sending all Americans to be safe. It was as protected as we could make them and it was a place for them to live and sleep, in the ballroom. My wife and daughter were there. They came running out and gave me a big hug. A lot of the American citizens came out, and I talked to them. They were all applauding because we had taken good care of all of our citizens. They didn't all run up and hug me or anything, but [there is] nothing like having your own citizens feel that way about what you did.

I walked into the hotel, and I was going to go and see some of our other employees who were there, and there's the guy! There was the minister. He was a great big burly guy, and he came walking down the hall. I said, *I thought you were dead! I came to get you, I came looking for you, and I called you on the phone!* He said, *I know you did. I saw you, but I did not dare run out.* He started crying. He threw his arms around me, and he hugged me. He said, *Now I know what it means to be an American.*

It's not as fancy a thing as being there to sign this agreement or that agreement, but in a certain way it is what you remember. I remember that two-hour interview to get into the Foreign Service. One of the things they asked was, *What do you see for yourself?* I said, *If I could be a footnote to history, somehow be involved in something so that when history's written about something, there is a little footnote indicating that I had some hand on the wheel.* That was 1964–65, I guess; it seemed like the thing to say.

There is a man named Paul Johnson, and he wrote a book called *A History of the American People.* It's over 1000 pages. He started back with the Pilgrims and the earliest settlers and went up through the 1990s. He put in the names of people who did important things in history. There's a sentence in there with my name, about my discovery of the Khmer Rouge: *The guy who was out on the border who discovered all this that other people did not know.* I remember when somebody pointed this out to me, and I said, *Well, there are an awful lot of names of many more well-known people than me, people who are not going to be found in here, a lot of Secretaries of State whose names are not going to be in this book. Maybe I have my footnote to history.*