

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

**VICTOR NIEMEYER**

*Interviewed by: Lewis Hoffacker*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: This is Lew Hoffacker introducing Vic Niemeyer for the oral history, and right now I introduce to you Vic Niemeyer.*

NIEMEYER: Good afternoon, Lew. I'm very pleased to participate in this program, and I

will try to give as good an account of my life and my Foreign Service tour as I can. I might begin by saying that it was all high adventure. Well, I'm from Harris County, Texas. I was born there on September the 28<sup>th</sup> of 1919, to be exact, and I went to school in a little town called La Porte, which was some 25 miles from Houston on Galveston Bay. I finished high school there in '36, went off to Scheiner Institute junior college. I eventually wound up at the University of Texas at Austin and majored in government - political science at some institutions, but they call it "government" there. I graduated in 1941, and I did not really have anything in mind, because that was June of '41, and my friends were all going into the service in one way or another, so I did the same thing, went in in September of '41, went to the USNR midshipman's school at Northwestern University and finished there. I was what they called one of the "90-day-wonders," except by that time they had extended it to 120 days. And I graduated in January 1942, was commissioned, and interestingly enough, a former spouse of my aunt had spoken so highly of the submarine service, in which he was serving at the time, that he talked me into going into submarines. So I did, and went aboard the USS R-18, a World War I boat which had been decommissioned and then for some 10 or more years had sat in or near the Philadelphia Navy Yard in some river there rusting away. They finally chipped off enough rust and got it re-commissioned, and there it was at New London, Connecticut, and I went aboard in the end of January of '42. I made several war patrols on her, but most of the time - this was in the Atlantic - we gave sound practice to allied escort vessels. Then I put a new boat into commission up in Portsmouth Navy Yard in '44, went out to the Pacific, and made four patrols out there. The war was about over. Targets were scarce, but I managed to wind up in Tokyo Bay for the surrender, which was quite an event, then back home.

*Q: Do you want to tell about it? We'd be glad to hear about it. We'd be glad to hear about the surrender. It was on the Missouri, wasn't it?*

NIEMEYER: The *Missouri*, that's right.

*Q: That was where it all happened. Where were you sitting? Where was your ship?*

NIEMEYER: We were moored to a dock at Yokosuka Naval Base, a Japanese naval base, and it must have been that afternoon of the surrender, the submarine officers on the 12 boats that were there (they wanted a whole squadron in for the surrender) all had a huge party - you might call it a bash, I guess, at the Japanese officers' club. Admiral Lockwood, from Guam, had come up with just a whole lot of his spirits, shall we say, of different kinds, and he was at that party. And to me that's the interesting - what shall I say? - the events that I will always remember about this event were what a few skippers said who had made eight or nine runs on a boat and then were ordered to new construction, and on the following patrol of their old boat, the boat was lost at sea with all hands. These were things that stuck in my memory and always will.

At any rate, after the war, I went to Texas A & M because I had married in 1944 and my father-in-law, a country doctor in Washington County, Texas, Dr. W. F. Hasskarl, a very fine gentleman, had a herd of Jerseys, and he thought that I might make a good herdsman

and a good dairy farmer. Well, he was wrong. My wife and I agreed that this was not the career that I should follow, so we left the farm, and I went back to the University and majored in Latin American studies.

*Q: This is at the University of -*

NIEMEYER: University of Texas at Austin.

*Q: Not A & M.*

NIEMEYER: That's right - and I got a master's degree in '51, went on to finish the material for a dissertation, but before I could finish it, I got sidetracked, and this is how I got into the US Information Agency. I went to cocktail party, my wife and I did, at a professor of English at the university, a Dr. John Varner, who was there. We knew of him, not real well, but he got me during the party and said, Vic, you ought to apply for the Binational Center Program. It seems that during the war and before the war he had been invited to Venezuela and Colombia - I'm not sure which of the two countries, maybe both, but he was so impressed with what binational centers were doing that he said, "You should try to get into that." So I inquired as to how I could do it and found out that I had to make an application, of course, and then be interviewed by a group. So between Christmas of 1952 and New Year's Day, I went to Washington on a train, paid my own way, as I recall, and was interviewed. I didn't hear anything from anybody, but back in May I had a chance to teach at Pan American College down at Edinburg, so I accepted that job. It would be a two-semester summer school job. I had been down there I guess not more than three weeks, a little longer perhaps, into the first semester when I got a call from Washington saying that they would like to have me come up and go into the training session for binational center directors. I said, "Well, I have a job here. I can't get out of that easily." They said, "Well, if you don't take it now, we can't promise it to you, but you might get considered later in December." I said, "Well, I think I'll try to find a replacement for the rest of the summer."

*Q: Now this binational center, was that handled by USIA or the State Department.*

NIEMEYER: At that time it was still the State Department. And I thought that was a bit hard on a candidate, and I've since found out that others had similar experiences. If they want you to quit what you're doing right now and go to work for USIA, which was not yet in existence really. This was in late June, early July. So after a midnight dash back to Austin, I found another graduate student who could teach the same government courses, and he agreed, Kenneth Neighbors. He agreed to take my place at Pan-American College. It was just at that time a two-year college, junior college.

*Q: In Edinburgh.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, Edinburg. It became a four-year college; now it's a part of the University of Texas system as a four-year university. So I finally found myself entering the class on July the 13<sup>th</sup> in Washington for training for the Binational Center Program,

learning about English teaching, learning how to conduct cultural programs, learning how to, in Edward R. Murrow's words - and he wasn't the director yet, but they came to symbolize the whole operation - "Telling America's story to the world." And then finishing there, I went to New Orleans, where my wife and my two children had driven over from Austin, and we took off for, of all places, Tegucigalpa, Honduras - that was my first post.

*Q: Did you fly there or take a ship?*

NIEMEYER: We flew, yes, flew Pan American Airlines to San Salvador and then over to Honduras. Well, I arrived in Honduras in sunny Tegucigalpa on August the 1<sup>st</sup> of 1953, and that was the day USIA went into existence. Sunny Tegucigalpa, but it was raining, and we were met at the airport by Jim Webb, one of the well-known Latin Americanists of the Agency, who had been CAO, and at that time was the PAO in Honduras. He just had one assistant, a very nice young lady named Pat Spaulding. Just the two of them ran the office, and Jim was very dedicated to the Binational Center Program. He and his wife, Margot, taught square dancing. He would help me to arrange cultural programs. He was a great help, and I guess that over the years he was probably the best-known American in Tegucigalpa. He lived just a few blocks from the embassy. You could walk from his home to the embassy, and he could not go down the street without meeting people to wish him well.

*Q: Did you make a new program there, or did you move into somebody else's program?*

NIEMEYER: I moved into a well-established binational center. It had been founded in 1938 under the glorious name of the Instituto Hondureño de Cultura Interamericana, or the Honduran Institute of Inter-American Culture, responsible to a board of directors, some American, some Hondurans, a very friendly group. I got along well with them. I relieved a man named Frank D'Amico, and I don't know where he went, but I think a few years later he got out of the program, and the last I heard of him he was teaching at the University of California at Chico, I think. At any rate, when he left, and just a few days later, there I was, not knowing hardly what to do, a real neophyte, but in a friendly town and with a binational center staff that was very limited in number. There weren't more than two people, three people, I think - the librarian, a sort of administrative assistant, and the cleaning girl. And there I was figuring out, now what do I do? But I had Jim Webb's help, and continued the programs that were going on. I had a chance to start some new programs. I found a young Britisher who could teach art, so we offered art lessons. To build up our enrollment at the binational center, I had about 200 posters printed with an attractive little boy and girl with books in their hands, and under the title, "*¿Quiere Usted aprender inglés?* If it's so" - this was all in Spanish - "then register at the Binational Center." It gave the address and so forth. Well, that was in the spring of '54, and it turned out to be a real go-getter as far as young people are concerned, because we just about doubled our enrollment to something like 400 at the first semester. We were on not a semester but a quarterly basis: four quarters a year with classes. You finished one course, and if you did well, you graduated to the next higher. The staff were mostly Honduran teachers, a few Americans, but it was real interesting work, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I

got a chance to know the country, too. And I remember when I got there the coffee in Honduras had a sort of a bitter flavor to it. Well, I didn't know what caused that, but one day a member of my board of directors took me in his Land Rover out into the countryside, and we stopped at a little coffee finca, a small operation, but as you know, the preparation of the coffee bean is a very complicated process. You wash it, then you dry it, you wash it again, you lay it out in the sun for a while, you wash it again, it seems. And here they had a little concrete floor. It couldn't have been more than about 15 feet by 15 feet, with all these coffee beans out there, and there scratching around in those coffee beans were three or four chickens. Well, I knew right away where that bitter flavor came from in the coffee. It didn't stop me from drinking it, but -

*Q: Well, you boiled it at least.*

NIEMEYER: At least it answered my question, anyway.

One of the memorable events of 1954 was the Supreme Court decision which outlawed segregation in the public schools of our country, and I will never forget that when that made the paper in Tegucigalpa, the next day, when I was on my way to the post office from the binational center, which was just a few blocks away, just a number of people whom I knew, whom I'd met, would stop and congratulate me on that. They were so pleased that the United States had outlawed segregation in its public schools. And it made me feel very awkwardly humble. I was so pleased myself that this had occurred, but I couldn't help but think, Here is our country, the great democracy that it is, and it had not provided equal schooling to the African Americans, that is, the Negroes, of our country. It was supposed to be "separate but equal" but it was separate but not equal, as we all knew. And it had an influence on me. I thought, whatever I can do and say to promote better understanding by helping people to get to know how we developed that segregation, I would do so, and also to express our great pleasure that at last it had officially ended.

Well, Honduras was a great post. I loved it. My wife did, too. We had a number of friends. Our children went to the American-type school there. They were just youngsters then. We arrived there in '53. One was four, and the other was six.

*Q: Was that Steve?*

NIEMEYER: No, this was Vic III and his sister, Ruth. So we were there for not quite two years. In '55 I was offered the directorship of the binational center in Lima. Well, in Texas, it would be like going from Floresville to San Antonio, you know, or something like that.

*Q: Big time.*

NIEMEYER: Big time, that's right. A bigger center and a lot more responsibility, a lot more teachers. So we came home, had a great reunion with the family, and in June we were off to Lima. Bad habit of arriving in bad weather - it happened in Tegucigalpa, but

in Lima there's always a fog in the wintertime, and this was June of '55, but we made it, of course, got started there and then went on and began the new year of 1956, which ended tragically for me because my wife contracted polio and three days later she was dead. So my two children and I resigned - I resigned. The two kids and I went back to Texas to finish up in graduate school, and I never thought about getting back into the service again.

*Q: Did you blame it on the local medical facilities, or lack thereof? If that had happened in the States -*

NIEMEYER: I'll tell you what happened, Lew. She had the first Salk shot, but she didn't get the second one, and you have to have two. That was it.

*Q: So you can't blame it on the hospitals in Peru.*

NIEMEYER: No, not at all. I can only blame it on the -

*Q: Everybody else in the family had the two.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, I can only blame it on not the supply but the - I can't think of the organization within the State Department that provides services - General Services. They did not order the second shot, and it happened, and it was too late to do anything about it. But they shipped her body home, and she was buried in our home town cemetery. The kids and I left several months later, not to return to Lima.

This is one of these terrible events in life, but life goes on, and I had my two kids to worry about. And we stayed with my mother; I went back to the university, was offered a teaching assistant job, but I did not do any teaching. The director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas was a man named Louis Hanken, and he was also at that time the editor of the *Hispanic-American Historical Review*, and since I'd been doing my work in Latin American history in the graduate school, he gave me the opportunity of helping him as editorial assistant, which I appreciated very much. It helped me to really survive with a job. I was living with my mother in Austin, and the kids went to school, and I went to work every day and would help Dr. Hanken turn out the successive numbers of the *HAHR*, as we called it, the acronym for *Hispanic-American Historical Review*. That was good work, good training, because it gave me an editorial assistantship, which I was able to utilize, and it helped me to become somewhat of an editor - never a very good one, of course, but somewhat of one, anyway.

The editorial assistant had a secretary, and this secretary was a young lady named Lala Acosta, from -

*Q: Oooh, I see. I see what's coming.*

NIEMEYER: - from Crystal City, Texas. She was a university student, had worked her way through three years at the university without any support from her parents, who just

couldn't afford it, lived in a cooperative house, and she was editorial assistant's secretary. She and I, in a sense, put out this *HAHR*. In 1957, I was offered a teaching position in the Government Department at Texas A&I College in Kingsville, which I was pleased to accept. While there, I told my mother that I had found a young lady and wanted to remarry, and she was not keen on it at all. But she said, "Oh, it's just propinquity, that's what has snared you." And there was something to that, I guess. But the result is that on May the 31<sup>st</sup> of 1958, we were married. And Dr. Hanken had given me the opportunity of taking a summer visiting lectureship at the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, so there with a new wife and two kids, we drove to Miami, then flew to San Jan, and for six weeks of a honeymoon and staying up much of the time trying to prepare courses - I had to teach both in Spanish, and my Spanish was not that good. When I went to Tegucigalpa, I couldn't understand but about three percent of what I heard, but when I left I guess it was up to 35 percent maybe. But then two years speaking mostly English, I was a little rusty, to say the least. However, I got into the swing of it very rapidly, and we were there for six weeks or so. It was not a four-week semester. It was, I think, one six-week summer school on this beautiful campus of the University of Puerto Rico. I did see all the island, took the kids and the wife around the island. We didn't miss a thing and enjoyed that very much.

Let me back up a minute to say that before I went to Puerto Rico I had had second thoughts about teaching at a university. I thought maybe I could get back into the binational center program. So I had applied, and while in Puerto Rico, I got a call from Elizabeth Hopkins in USIA to say that they had a job for me if I was interested, and it would be in Guatemala. Well, I thought that was just great. There I had one job and was offered another job, so she understood. She'd been a little more understanding, I thought, this time, and she said, "Well, when you finish your tour there at the University of Puerto Rico, then we'd like to have you come up to Washington." So we did. We drove the car out of Miami, got to Washington, I guess, maybe three days later (I'm not sure just when), more dead than alive, but started again in a class of binational center grantees, future grantees, teachers, directors of courses. And the only one that I remember, really, was Hugh Ryan, who later became ambassador. He was then a binational center grantee. After finishing in three weeks or so up there in Washington - my wife had gone back to Texas with the kids - we were on our way to Guatemala.

This has to be one of the most beautiful countries in the world. On a moonlit night you could almost think that you saw a whole string of volcanoes out there. During the day, you could see the tips of some of these volcanoes from the city of Guatemala. And here I was the director of a binational center again, larger than the one in Tegucigalpa, smaller than the one in Lima, but with an active cultural program and with - I can't recall exactly how many students now, but we had over 500, 600 - a good group of teachers, more Americans in Guatemala than in Honduras, and a number of them had volunteered as teachers, which is desirable because they have the American English accent which native speakers of Spanish do not develop right away. The same way with us, if we were teaching Spanish. Unless we were very well trained and very attentive to errors in pronunciation and determined to improve, then we would speak with a gringo accent. I'm one of those, I admit, who will always have it. But there I had a very good staff of

capable teachers, and I was very pleased with that. The cultural program consisted of showing USIS films, dances, lectures, a library, etc. It was a very pleasant operation. Of course, the one in Tegucigalpa was too, but this was on a larger scale, and -

*Q: Was it called USIA at that time? At that time it was.*

NIEMEYER: Oh, yes. This was USIA. The USIA by that time, Lew, was... Let's see, that was '58 when I went there. It was five years old.

*Q: Was there a cultural center and a binational center, or are we talking about -*

NIEMEYER: They're the same in this case. I just use the term cultural center as a sort of a generic term, but binational center would be more correct. And then each one had its own individual local name. This was the Instituto Guatemalteco Americano - the *IGA*, as everybody called it. That's the Spanish acronym for those three words, which in English would translate as Guatemalan American Institute.

*Q: Was there a PAO or a CAO in addition to you?*

NIEMEYER: USIS Guatemala at that time had a PAO, CAO, an information officer, and two assistant CAOs. There was also an assistant information officer, all under the PAO. Now they were all Foreign Service officers. I was still on what they call a "grantee" basis. All I had was a contract with the US Government, as I had in Tegucigalpa and in Lima, just a contract. I was not in the Foreign Service, really.

So that went along very well for two years. We saw a good bit of the country, up to Quezaltenango, Lake Amatitlán, over to the coast, Puerto Barrios. Then the appeal of the country, with volcanoes, was very strong, so we climbed three volcanoes when we were there: a small one, Pacaya, which is close to town... The *guatemaltecos* like to climb at night because they say it's cooler. That's true. You get up there for the sunrise. And the problem is they like to do it on a full moon. Well, going up the volcano slope on a full moon from the path that we had to take, holding on much of the time to the little bushes in the sand to keep from sliding back. A problem is that you're looking right into that moon, and it's just like somebody shining a flashlight in your face, shining it right in your eyes, blinding you almost. But you grab a little sapling here, a little sapling there, and finally you get up to the top. But it's worth it. It is worth it, because you feel very close to nature and close to God when you get up and see how bright these stars are. From that altitude, not necessarily very much in Pacaya, this little volcano, but the larger one at the old city of Antigua, called Agua, which is right behind the city - that's 11,000 feet.

*Q: 11,000 - the air is a little thin, too, isn't it? You felt that.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, but it didn't seem to bother us any.

*Q: You were young.*

NIEMEYER: I was young then.

*Q: It makes a difference.*

NIEMEYER: Anyway, it was one of the events that we will never forget, the climbing of those volcanoes and spending the night in the crater in one case. That was an interesting little event. My son and I, Vic III, he and I climbed a volcano, got up there at dusk and built a little fire - this was Agua - and a few hours later we noticed some Indians coming in. Well, we didn't know what they wanted, what they were up to, but they pitched their little camp just a few yards from us and started building a fire, and then we could see what they were doing. They were carrying huge jugs. And we thought, Well, what is this? We couldn't understand it, but we soon found out. Little by little, as daybreak approached, other climbers were coming in, and these enterprising Indians had brought up hot chocolate and coffee, built their own fires to keep them warm up there, keep the coffee and the hot chocolate warm, and by sunup we counted over 100 people in that crater.

*Q: Having a picnic.*

NIEMEYER: Yes. Most of them were university students or that age level. So that was it. And then, of course, we went back down. But a third time when we climbed, we took the ambassador's secretary with us, and I cannot recall her name. But we rested. It was during the day, and we rested under that sun up there in the crater, and I'll never forget, my son's little shirt separated a little from the top of his trousers leaving a line of skin there, and by golly, when we got back down that evening, that was just as red as a beet, that burn. The poor ambassador's secretary, she could put one foot forward and then another foot forward, and there was no space between either foot. She could just barely take a step. She was completely exhausted, I know, after we got back down, because it was about a - it seemed like it was about a four-hour climb up, and then going down you can hardly do it any quicker because you've got to keep putting the brakes on all the time to keep from moving too fast.

*Q: And if you're not in shape, yes. Were your relations with the embassy good?*

NIEMEYER: Yes.

*Q: You had no problem working with the embassy.*

NIEMEYER: No, I did not. I had not much contact with the embassy, really, but I did with USIS, which had its separate office. The embassy was at one place, and the USIS was at another location, both in downtown Guatemala City.

*Q: I see. What were relations between the two governments, Washington and Guatemala? Were they pretty good relations?*

NIEMEYER: In my view they were good at that time. This was following the overthrow

in 1954 of the Arbenz government, a coup in which our government was very directly involved. And then there had been a president, Castillo Armas, who later was assassinated in the Guatemalan White House, really, but it's not white; it's a big green building, the seat of government, the Palacio del Gobierno is what they would call it in Spanish. He was assassinated, and then another president, Ydigoras Fuentes, was the president when we were there. And at that time - we left in '60, December of '60 - there were bombs beginning to go off around the city. This was, I guess, the beginning of the unrest that later so engulfed that country that just came to a conclusion here last year.

*Q: Were there Communists involved in this? Or who -*

NIEMEYER: There was supposed to be some Communist involvement, yes.

*Q: So it was the Communists, yes.*

NIEMEYER: If not, they were certainly leftists and were certainly -

*Q: We didn't like it.*

NIEMEYER: We didn't like it, and we were suspicious of that. In the Binational Center Program, you don't get really close to what's going on in the embassy unless the PAO briefs you on it, and I got some briefing, but I was never intimately aware of just what was going on. But our relations with the government were good.

*Q: And you had no problem.*

NIEMEYER: At the Binational Center, I had no problem at all.

*Q: That's great.*

NIEMEYER: The Guatemalan event ended when I was offered the opportunity to start a binational center in the Philippines, and in January of '61, we all went out to Manila.

*Q: That was a big jump.*

NIEMEYER: That was a big job, that's right. It was to be the Philippine-American Cultural Foundation, a terrible name, because everybody thought we had money, with the word *foundation* in it. It never should have been named that. And it was also difficult to undertake an English-teaching program in a country where English was spoken to a very high degree, and English teaching is what supports the binational centers in Latin America, the income from that. We charge enough tuition, and you make enough money to pay the rent and the utilities and staff and teachers and so forth. But it was more difficult in the Philippines. So there I was trying to *raise* money. I spent two years trying to raise enough funds to match a grant from the US Government, and I failed. I did not do it, could not do it. Two men, two Filipinos had said before I got out there, were quoted as saying, but nobody got their written signature on it, they would give generously. One was

a man named Araneta, who had a huge sports/performing arts coliseum. Another was a man named José Yulo, who had been a very prominent politician. They were brothers-in-law. I think they had married sisters. And José Yulo offered \$1 million to the Philippine-American Cultural Foundation. Mr. Araneta was quoted as having said, "José Yulo give a million dollars? I give million dollars, too." I never got one cent out of either one of them.

*Q: How did you function without money?*

NIEMEYER: Well, we didn't... All we were paying was... Well, our government was paying my salary. We had a fund-raising group headed by a man named Toting del Rosario. He was a very active, dynamic type, and as I recall they sold refrigerators, his company did. So what he did was to let us use a part of his building space for a campaign to raise funds. We did raise a lot of money, but we never raised enough to satisfy US Information Service, Manila. And finally, I left in April of '63, and the successor that I had, a fine fellow named Martin Kashinsky, whom I had known at the University of Texas in graduate school, he came out to relieve me, he had the non-glorious task of winding down the Philippine-American Cultural Center. The Filipinos loved our country, but they were very nationalistic at the same time, and I know because I would hear from members of the Board of Directors to whom I was responsible: "We would like to have the Center, but we just don't need any American influence in it." So they got their center. The Philippine Government picked up the cost, and we were able to get back the \$1,300,000 or so that had been set aside for that particular project. The building that was later built, I understand, was very successful, so I think it all worked out probably in the best interests of both countries. I came away with a great feeling of admiration and respect for the Filipino people, and joined the Manila Boat Club and rowed on the Pasig River, and the labor attaché's son and I were in a two man boat. We won our race one day, and we both got cups for it, and I still have it. His name was Kaukkonen. I can't think of his name, but the young man later became very prominent in the Jefferson Airplane, this... He was one of the founders or one of the stars in the Jefferson Airplane, this musical group.

At any rate, I failed out there. I just couldn't put it together, but I got promoted into the Foreign Service as a result of my efforts.

*Q: I see, as a Foreign Service reserve officer or a Foreign Service officer?*

NIEMEYER: Later I went back to Washington in the summer of '63 and was paneled by a panel of interviewers, and apparently I did not satisfy them completely the first time, so I went back for home leave, and then they called me back to Washington, and I was interviewed again, and this time I did please the panel and was given a position in the Foreign Service, sworn in -

*Q: Foreign Service officer.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, as a Foreign Service officer, that's right, which later became FSIO -

Foreign Service information officer, but at that time they were Foreign Service officers. That was very nice because you get more benefits, too. Out in the Philippines, I had to fight for most every privilege an FS officer received. Front was the name of the commissary and I didn't as a grantee get to buy there at first until I fought for the privilege. It took a while. I had to appeal to Washington, but I did get the privilege and it was so nice because we (my wife and I) could buy food, eat at the restaurant, swim in the pool, etc., as could embassy officers and their families.

*Q: It's a pity you had to do that, yes.*

NIEMEYER: Well, they didn't want to offend the Philippine Government asking for privileges, and there's also such a thing as reciprocity, and our government is always fearful that if a foreign government gives in on various benefits for either Foreign Service officers or for non-Foreign Service officers but connected with the US Government, we well have to do the same in the United States.

At any rate, I was then sent to Mexico City, where Jim Webb was the cultural affairs officer. I had the job as assistant CAO. This was very pleasant. Here we were near our home state, Texas. We both knew Mexico fairly well - my wife and I did - I from research at the university and several visits; she from Mexican parents. And we drove to Mexico City from Austin. It's a long way, but it's good highway. We knew it was something, though, when we left Laredo, Texas, that the heat was terrible. We just wondered how is it this hot? We just couldn't understand it. Well, what happened was that while we were in the aduanas or the customs office there, our son, a little kid, had gotten up (and this time I had two more sons, one had been born in the Philippines, one had been born in Guatemala, if I failed to mention that, Steven in the Guatemala and Chris in the Philippines, just forgot that), he had played with the dashboard heater control. It was a little Chevrolet station wagon. It did not have a cooling system, just a heater. And he had turned on the heater, and we had not noticed it. But I looked around at Lala's mother, who was going down to Matehuala, and she was just dripping, dripping, seated in the front seat next to me, and Lala on the other side, and here were these four kids in the back of the station wagon. So we found out what it was, and then I think we all had to stop at the next little pueblo and get a soft drink or something, because we were burning up and very thirsty.

Mexico was great, but one problem that I had which pursued me the whole time I was there was my name. I'd have to spell it for people over the telephone, because they just couldn't understand Niemeyer. I'd have to say in Spanish, "*Ene de Nora, I de Irma, E de Ester, Eme de Maria...*" and go on down the line of the consonants and vowels with the given names of people. I remember doing it once and coming to Maria I said, "*Eme de Maria,*" for the *M* in Niemeyer, and the girl I was talking to over the phone said, "*¿Maria quién? [Maria who?]*" I said, well, I have to go back and start all over again. I remember, too, that at an art exhibit - this was part, of course, of the cultural affairs program - you tried to attend different art exhibits around town - I remember once going to the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City with my wife, and we met three Africans from an African country, diplomats all three, from their embassy. I got to talking with them and asked

them their names. Well, I didn't understand their answers, and I asked again, didn't understand it, then finally the third time, I was almost too embarrassed to ask what the man's name was, and he said, "Oh, that's okay, just call me Richard. That was my colonial name." I'll never forget that.

Mexico is just a great place. In those days you could see the Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the two big volcanoes, very easily - well, not every day, but the smog was a lot less, of course, than it is now. And we really found that the life there was just very, very delightful. The kids were in the American school there. They liked it. We had a great number of Mexicans with whom we made friends. And the job as assistant CAO, I was trying to do as much of the office work for Jim Webb to allow him, as the CAO, to get and attend more cultural events and make more talks and so forth, which he did, so a lot of it was paper - I mean, it was just office work, which I was pleased to do. But I found the staff there to be very well prepared, the exchange of persons program, Jack Goodwin, who had been in Cyprus or later went to Cyprus. There were Pete Marchetti and Jim Hoyt, who was a specialist in Asiatic culture, Chinese especially. It was a very well-prepared, very well-educated staff, and I think that we were all very pleased to be in Mexico City and to be given responsibilities to work together, and to be doing a job for our country. We moved the office from the old embassy there into a new embassy building that was built to be an embassy. It was a big move, but one day we left the old building and had all of our desks tagged with different room numbers, and when we went to work the next day, we were in a new building with the desk and filing cabinet and so forth all in place.

I guess the one event that impressed me the most was carrying on a cultural program in Oaxaca, capital of the state of the same name, some 340 miles south of Mexico City. This was a one-man event, and I was the one that carried it out and stayed there for two weeks. I drove down, shipped a model mercury capsule, and carried a whole exhibit of books for presentation purposes; I also carried two 35 mm projectors and I don't know how many reels. At one time I had a projector going in one preparatory school and another one going in another preparatory school at the same time. Fortunately they were just a few blocks apart. But I was there turning out press releases, and I gave a talk which I had prepared beforehand at the University Benito Juárez. It was on the friendship between Abraham Lincoln and Benito Juárez. They never met each other personally, but they were both chiefs of state, each trying to save his country during a very crucial period in the history of both, our Civil War, of course, and the French invasion of Mexico in 1863. So I found in Latin America that you cannot go wrong by talking about Abraham Lincoln. You can mention other presidents, and I guess, to a certain extent, Franklin D. Roosevelt also as the author of the good neighbor policy, but Abraham Lincoln is universally admired.

*Q: Isn't that interesting.*

NIEMEYER: And you could almost talk about -

*Q: This was a paper you wrote, for publication?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, I prepared about a 12-page paper on the friendship between these two, how they worked together, although they never met, and how Lincoln helped Juárez and Juárez would help Lincoln.

*Q: And it was well received.*

NIEMEYER: It was very well received.

*Q: Well, that's rewarding.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, it was to me a real satisfaction to be able to give that paper in the university bearing the name of Juárez in the state of Oaxaca. Later, it was published up in northern Mexico, *El Norte* of Monterrey, and I gave it a number of times in Mexico, really.

Well, that was a cultural program down there that I enjoyed doing, and after some two years, I'm sorry to say, we left Mexico City for a new post. I had arrived there in '63, in July. In September of '65 I was offered the job of branch public affairs officer, Branch PAO, in Monterrey, in the northern part of Mexico, by Al Harkness. Harkness was the PAO, and I accepted eagerly. He said, "Don't tell anybody." So a few months later, when we were up there, he said, "Well, did Lala like to get the news?" (That's my wife.) I said, "Well, you said not to tell anybody, so I didn't tell her." He said, "What? You didn't tell her? You should always tell your wife." I said, "Yes, I realize that." But she was overjoyed, of course, when we moved, this was close enough to Texas for her to visit her mother and family in Crystal City, Texas, about 35 miles from the border.

*Q: This was a promotion, too, to branch PAO. I assume it would be.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, I would gather it was a... It certainly involved more work and more responsibility, I would say that.

*Q: Now, Monterrey is industrial, isn't it?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, it is the industrial center of Mexico as well as the capital of the state of Nuevo Leon. It is also the commercial center of northern, especially northeastern, Mexico.

*Q: It's different in that sense from Mexico City, yes.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, very different. Monterrey was smaller than Mexico City but still had 1,500,000 or so people in it and towns on the city limits.

*Q: So you dealt with the people in an industrial city, yes. Business.*

NIEMEYER: There were plenty of cultural activities, labor organizations, businesspeople, government officials, and newspapers with which to establish and

maintain contact.

*Q: Was there a consulate there?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, it was a US consulate general, and I was in charge of information and cultural matters from August of '65 to August of '69. We were there for four years - but in addition to Monterrey. I had an area to cover, too, and it's impossible to do a good job. You did what you could, that was it, because Monterrey was enough for one man, really, to try to cover, but I had the states of Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosí, and Durango in my area. I tried to visit most of those states at least once every couple of months - sometimes not that frequently. I had to cover the border also, all the cities along the border, Matamoros, Reynosa, Ciudad Acuña, Nuevo Laredo, and there's always something happening on the border. I remember very well being in Durango, which is the extreme western part of my territory, picked up a paper that said, "Brother of Lyndon Johnson arrested in Matamoros." I thought, Oh, my God. Johnson was President then. Gosh, this fellow's going to need help. I should be over there trying... Well, it turns out they didn't need me, but Andrew Jackson Johnson - that was his name - had had, I think, a little too much to drink and had a little problem over there in Matamoros, and they had taken him into the jug, and he kept saying, "Well, I'm the brother of the President of the United States." Well, finally he was able to prove it, and Lord, I understand a whole convoy of police cars from Brownsville went over, and the Mexicans, of course, very graciously released him to their custody. But there I was, over in another part of the territory, couldn't do a thing - didn't have to, anyhow.

It was always a satisfaction to me to go into a city and talk to newspaper editors, to talk to university presidents, to try to get to the head of the student organization, to talk to cultural groups, to give a talk wherever I could on some topic about our country and its culture. It was always a pleasure to do that, and I really enjoyed it. And one of the nicest features was to be able to pass out a book that was a result of our book translation program, because, as you know, we had a very successful book translation program in USIA. Representative books about the United States would be translated into Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, French, various - I think some 30 - languages, and then were distributed overseas. They would find a publisher overseas in that particular tongue - whether it was Buenos Aires in Latin America and Mexico, those two cities, I know - and the publisher was told, If you can print two thousand copies of this or three thousand copies of a title, then USIA will buy x number, which was enough for him to realize a profit on it, anyhow, and then we got these books, and wherever a USIA officer went we could present them to people who would be interested in that particular topic. Books on economics - Milton Friedman, I remember, as the author of a book, presented that to the head of the economics department at the University of Nuevo León - and different appropriate topics for appropriate heads of departments and members of their teaching staff. So that was always a pleasure, to walk into somebody's office and give him a book in his own language that was in his field of expertise. And then in my case it was even a particular interest because I had written my doctoral dissertation on the governor of a Mexican state, the state of Nuevo León, and there I was, living in Nuevo León, in Monterrey. And some years before - I guess it was 1963 - I had given a copy of my

dissertation to the rector (the president) of the University of Nuevo León, and he had had it translated. And the Center of Humanistic Studies of the University of Nuevo León published it. I'll never forget. It was in 1966. One of my staff came in, brought a box in, and I said, "What's that?" He said, "I don't know." So we opened it up right there. It was a hundred copies of my doctoral dissertation, which then I was able to give out to people because the governor had been Bernardo Reyes, the father of one of the great writers of Latin America, Alfonso Reyes. And here I had a book to present as something that I had done myself.

*Q: Tell me again the thesis, the subject of your thesis.*

NIEMEYER: It was The Political Career of General Bernardo Reyes - that was the English title of it - and it was just printed in Spanish as *El General Bernardo Reyes*. He was the man who governed that state from 1885 to 1909, when he was sent on a military mission because he was getting too popular, and he went to France. He later came back and landed on the border and attempted to overthrow the president of Mexico, Francisco Madero, a coup in which he perished (This was in 1911, just after the beginning of the Mexican Revolution of 1910). But he was a good governor, and people respected him because of his honesty and for his ability to get along, to join labor and investors at the same time. He was one of the best state governors of the Porfirian period, the period of Porfirio Díaz. Well, it was a nice thing to have a book you'd written to present to people who were interested in that.

The opportunity there that I had was also to become a member of the Nuevo León Society of History, Statistics, and Geography. And I became a member, and later that organization awarded each year the Alonso de León Medalla de Acero. Alonso de León was one of the first Spanish explorers of that area. And they would give it to writers who for one reason or another had distinguished themselves in local history, national Mexican history, or in US-Mexican history. And later, in 1973 - by this time I was in Santiago, Chile, I received this award, and my successor there, Doug Ellerby, who was branch PAO, he was able to go to the meeting at which it was awarded and get it for me and mail it to me. So I was honored by that particular organization to receive that particular medal.

Well, I don't want to dwell on that, but let me just say that we were there for four glorious years, in Monterrey, and my times out of the city, traveling, trying to do my job, sometimes I would take my wife with me, other times, I would just have to cover so much by myself. I remember once we were in Durango, and I was asked to give a talk at a little school about, oh, 15 or 20 miles out of the city. So I told my wife, who was with me, I said, "Honey, let's eat a big breakfast because I don't know what we're going to get between here and Monterrey." We were on our way back to Monterrey after the talk. So we got to this little school, and the director met us at the door with some of his teachers, and he beckoned to me to come with him. Well, let me back up a minute. Before we went, we left Durango and we stopped at a motel there and just ate pancakes and sausage and everything we could because we didn't know when we'd get to eat again. Well, we went to this little school, and the teachers were all there in a room, and the director motioned to me to come into his office. So I went into his office. There he had two or

three teachers with him. He goes over to the wall and opens a little box and brings out a big bottle of tequila - this was about nine o'clock in the morning - with four big tumblers, and he pours each one of us a big shot of tequila. Well, that helped, but it didn't help for what followed, not very much, anyway. They brought me then to where my wife was waiting for me into a room with some of the other teachers. They had taken the desks out, had tables in there, and they had huge bowls of ground meat and tortillas, and here we were, already stuffed to the gills, and they sat us down, poured huge portions of this ground meat and tortillas - *picadillo* they call it - and there we were, with hot coffee, trying to look pleasant and trying to act like we really enjoyed it. And they're standing behind us as we were eating slowly, saying, "*¿Qué le pasa, no le gusta?*" Don't you like this? What's the matter? It was something I'll never forget.

Finally, we were able to eat some of it, but that time we were doubly stuffed, really, and then they took me into another room where the teachers were all lined up, and I gave the talk on the friendship between Abraham Lincoln and Benito Juárez. And just as I finished, somebody in the front row talked to some little *muchacho*, and this kid ran out. He comes back just a few minutes later with a picture of Lincoln, framed in a mahogany frame, and he presented it to me. Well, you know, this is just the opposite of what a USIS officer is supposed to do. He is supposed to give pictures of Lincoln to people, but this man obviously had had this picture hanging on the wall (because the nail was still in the wooden frame), and I've got it now in my study here, Lew.

*Q: That's very touching.*

NIEMEYER: I'll always remember that man for that gift.

*Q: Did you get through your speech?*

NIEMEYER: I finished, yes, I finished, and then we left for Zacatecas and finally home in Monterrey.

*Q: You weren't too drunk. You didn't drink too much tequila.*

NIEMEYER: Oh, no, one little bit. It probably helped me get through that second breakfast. My poor wife was the same, though. She couldn't eat any more than I could, but we somehow forced a good bit down. But they had gone to so much trouble to prepare this huge pot of ground meat and tortillas - I think that was all, maybe some beans - but anyway, whatever it had been, it was too much. Well, that's just one of those things that you tend to remember about a tour of duty in a country. The hospitality of the people is overwhelming.

*Q: Well, certainly, you were living in a friendly environment.*

NIEMEYER: Very friendly environment, yes.

*Q: They were glad to have you, and relations between the two governments were good.*

NIEMEYER: There was no problem. You find a great feeling of admiration and love for our country in Mexico, despite what officially may come out as some, well, resentment over the fact that we've taken almost two-thirds of their territory - that was in 1848 - and invaded them in 1916, in 1917 in pursuit of Pancho Villa, and violated the town of Veracruz in 1847, I guess, marched into Mexico City, took the capital. You still find a great respect and admiration for the United States, not necessarily its government, but for the people and the country. And we saw that very, very frequently, and I'm trying to think of some of the things that would maybe exemplify what I've just said. I remember a poll was run among several different high schools in Mexico City back in the 1960s, and one of the questions was what country do you admire the most? Answer: the United States. What country would you want to live in if you couldn't live in your country? Overwhelming: United States. The third question, What country do you fear the most? The answer was the United States.

*Q: Yes.*

NIEMEYER: Nevertheless, we saw great outpourings of respect -

*Q: That's good. Your wife and the kids were comfortable and content there?*

NIEMEYER: Oh, yes, they were.

*Q: They were able to move around normally.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, they certainly were. The kids grew up speaking Spanish. They would talk to us in English, but then when they really wanted to express themselves, well, they went back into Spanish.

*Q: That's good. A great asset.*

NIEMEYER: It was good. Stephen and Chris - they, I think, really profited greatly from their exposure to the cultures of several different countries, but basically Latin American culture.

Well, four years in Monterrey this time. We were in Mexico City for two years, four in Monterrey, and came time, after having been out of the country for 12 years, to serve a tour in Washington. Alright. So we went back to Texas, bought a car in Laredo, drove to Washington, and I went by the old USIA Foreign Service office at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue. I thought, I would just go and pick up my mail. You know, we'd been there for a day. And as I did, the personnel officer walked down the hall. He said, "Hi, Vic." I said, "Hi, Frank." I can't think of his last name now. He worked for Tony Covins, but Frank was this man's name I'm pretty sure. He stopped about maybe 15 feet and said, "Say, Vic, have you got a minute?" I said, "Sure." So he says, "Come." So I follow him down the corridor, through a long, long corridor back into another corridor into his office, and he gets up and closes the door after I'd sat down. I thought, well, this is strange. We had

orders to Washington. I was going to work in the book program with Lou Fanget, and I thought, well, what's this? Anyway, he closed the door, and there I was. He and I were in this office - I was on one side of his desk; he was on the other behind it. He leaned over his desk and sort of quietly said, "Vic, would you like to go out again?" I said, "What? Go out again? We just got back. My wife has been buying some winter clothes." This was September of '69. He said, "Well, the PAO in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, is coming home on home leave, and he's not returning. He doesn't know it yet, but he's not going back, and we need somebody there for a year." I said, "Well, I don't know. I've got to talk to my wife." "Oh, don't do that," he said.

To make a long story short, we agreed that I would approach her over the weekend, and I'd let him know on Monday. That was a Friday. Well, I did, and the result was that, I think, about two weeks later we were headed to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. We got down there, and that was another –

*Q: That was a promotion in a way.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, it was a one-man post, and I was the PAO there, is what it was. And again, I've liked every place we've ever been, really, but Trinidad was great. No tortillas, but we were speaking English most of the time, well, not all the time really. Every now and then you'd meet somebody who spoke Spanish. The kids went to a school just about a block away, run by some English people, and they developed a little bit of a British way of talking.

But Trinidad was great, memorable for two events. One was Carnival of 1970, and it was just a beautiful experience. We participated in what they call a Jouvère. This was the Monday before the Carnival, and we had gone to what they call a "jump-up." You know, Trinidad is noted for its music, its mambo, it's jump-ups, it's steel bands and pans; and a jump-up is where you'd just be dancing normally, and then you'd just stop and start jumping up and down. This was out on a patio of grass. We danced and jumped on that grass until about 3:30 in the morning. We were supposed to start on this movement down Jouvère, a parade, at 4:30. When we left then there was not a blade of grass. It was a sea of mud. There was absolutely no grass at all, but it had been a most beautiful lawn before we started. I'll never forget that. We went home and tried to sleep. We did go to sleep for just a few minutes, which was a mistake. We never should have done it. We got up and drank coffee, but a few minutes later, there we were parading down the street, yelling, by music in this parade - we were just having a glorious time. And my mother came down for Carnival. She didn't go to that jump-up or that parade, that Jouvère, but she did go to the Carnival, the main Carnival parade. The Trinidadians celebrate Carnival by budgeting their money for the most exotic costumes, and that's about the only word I could use that I find suitable. They are exotic, the most beautiful things. Anyway, then they all parade out in a kind of a stadium-like, after going down the streets. So that was one thing, Carnival. We'd never seen that before.

And the second thing was a black power uprising. Well, this was our second, well, a little bit of a revolution in Guatemala - just a few bombs - but this was something. The militia

mutinied, and they were at a camp called Tetron Bay, where I had been during the war when the submarine I served on was giving sound practice to allied escort vessels in Trinidad. This was my second tour of duty in Trinidad, really, one for the navy and this one for USIA. And they'd mutinied and were marching on the capital, Port-of-Spain, when a very resourceful British captain of the Royal Navy, who was head of the Trinidadian Defense Force, got up close to a cliff on that road and fired I don't know how many rounds of 40 millimeter shells into that cliff, which just produced an avalanche, and that blocked the road. So those soldiers who had mutinied were not about to go through the jungle and get around it. That was a bit of work, I think. And this effectively ended the revolt. They were trapped in their part of the island there and did not come into Port-of-Spain. But it was touch and go there for a while. I remember a man coming who worked for me named Lloyd Rolaire. He was head of the information program. He said, "If you look over there by your house up on the cliffs in those trees, you can just see trees moving. I think there are just a lot of men back in there that *have* gone around." But he was wrong. There weren't any men there. There was just a good breeze that was blowing those coconut palms and other palms, and it made you think that a whole army was encamped there or moving onto the city. Finally things calmed down. Two or three people were killed, but the mutineers decided that they had been wrong, and their leaders were caught, and I don't know what happened to them. But the regiment, as it was called, returned to duty to guarding the country and not to overthrowing the government. This is what Eric Williams, who was the prime minister -

*Q: Oh, yes. Did you have any contact with him, or did you have any impressions of him?*

NIEMEYER: No, I didn't meet him. We met his daughter, but never did meet him.

*Q: He was a very tough customer. At times he was anti-US, was he not?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, he had trouble here in the States, I think - marital problems. He had either abandoned a wife or divorced her and, well, I don't know the story, but I know that he could not return to the United States unless he had some diplomatic coverage.

*Q: And then, as I recall, he wouldn't even see the American ambassador. Was that during your period, or was that later?*

NIEMEYER: The American ambassador was Stuart Symington.

*Q: Well, I guess that worked out. It must have been later when Williams decided he didn't want to see the American ambassador.*

NIEMEYER: Oh, really, is that right?

*Q: But that's not during your period. You had Stuart Symington. Was he a good boss?*

NIEMEYER: Symington, I think, did a creditable job, yes.

*Q: I can't recall. Was he from Missouri?*

NIEMEYER: He was from Maryland.

*Q: Maryland, okay.*

NIEMEYER: I think it was his son who was governor of Arizona that we heard so much about a few months ago. We got along well with Symington.

*Q: But you had just a year there in Port-of-Spain. You had one year.*

NIEMEYER: Had one year, that's right. And we got there in September and left, I guess it was, July.

*Q: Back to Washington.*

NIEMEYER: This time we got our three years in Washington, that's right. I was in the book program in Washington and worked for Lou Fanget. I was his deputy. This was the book translation program I mentioned earlier. And then when Lou retired in 1972, I went to work in another part of the information program in USIA. That was checking on different manuscripts and so forth like that.

*Q: So you had three, four years there?*

NIEMEYER: Had three years, yes. We had three years, and it came time to go overseas again, and this time I was given the opportunity of directing the binational center in Santiago, Chile, the Instituto Chileno-Norteamericano de Cultura. Although I was a Foreign Service officer and not a grantee any longer, they wanted somebody who had some experience in binational centers.

*Q: That was a big job, though.*

NIEMEYER: It was a bigger post, yes.

*Q: Now was that Allende? It wasn't Allende, was it?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, this was during the Allende period. It certainly was. I'll tell you about that.

*Q: Tell us about that, yes.*

NIEMEYER: In March of '73, they offered me the job and said, "Would you like to go down to look it over?" So I did. I spent a week in Santiago, went up to Valparaíso, where I knew the director of the center there. We'd served in Mexico together, Fred Shaver. I thought, well, this is going to be an interesting assignment. You began to feel that there was increasing instability, shall we say? But I went back, and then we managed to rent

our house, and my wife and I and the two kids (by this time, Vic, my oldest son, had finished the University of California at Berkeley and was in the doctoral program at the University of Texas in econometrics, and my daughter was at the University of Texas in Austin), so Lala and I and the two boys flew to Santiago, arrived there on a chilly winter day, June the 26<sup>th</sup>, and began the job of director of the binational cultural center, which was a much bigger operation than any I had been in before. We had 5,000 students and 75 teachers and then 75 on a staff of everything from the English teaching department, the cultural department, the cleaning department, the restaurant - we had a restaurant - the parking lot, the accounting department. It was just a good-sized operation. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, I was in my office and I heard shots. And like a chump I walked over to the window and looked out to see what was going on, and there crouched down - I was on the second floor of this building (it was an old home, is what it was, converted into a binational center, with a seven-story building with 35 classrooms right behind it, a very new building) - there were two *carabineros*. This is the national police force. Chile does not have a federal system of government. In the U.S., each state has its own police force, and each city's got one, too, but down there, it's a national police force called the *carabineros*. There were two of them crouched behind a car, both with pistols out, and I knew that something was happening. Then we heard a lot of shooting. This is what was happening: a tank regiment had decided that it would try to overthrow the Allende government, and they came from where their encampment was, they stopped at the Exxon station (Esso Station then) and filled up their tanks with gasoline. This should have given them away, but they marched up to La Moneda and started shooting. And then the shots were returned from inside. There was a lot of shooting going on, and fortunately - I think it was a Friday - we were able to get most of the students out. There weren't too many that early in the morning. And then everybody went home in the early part of the afternoon except for the 19 people who were killed and lying out there in the street, just a block away from our binational center at La Moneda, the seat of government. Well, that was sort of a prelude to what happened on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, but before that, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, I got a call at three o'clock in the morning from the major domo at the Institute who lived there with his wife. He said, “*¡Señor Niemeyer, venga, venga - una bomba!* [Mr. Niemeyer, come, a bomb has gone off at the Insituto!]” I went down there, and sure enough, a bomb had gone off. It had broken every window on the street side. My desk - I had it covered with papers I was working on - was just literally covered with glass. We had a long entrance tunnel - it was called a tunnel - with glass doors at the end. The bookstore glass - everything was shattered, everything. A small artifact, a small bomb, probably, we think now, set off by the rightists in Chile to show that the government of Allende could not keep law and order. We don't think it was leftists. At least, this is the conclusion they came to later. So we cleaned up that mess, got the glass put back. The insurance covered some, as I recall, and then, on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> of September of 1973, I was on my way to work...

Why don't I back up just a minute and say that public transportation had almost broken down. You would find each block just filled with people trying to hitchhike, catch a ride in to work into town, from the suburbs. Once the ambassador's secretary had an apartment just across from our temporary quarters on Pedro de Valdivia, and she and I,

not every day, but sometimes, would sort of walk together to the corner. A man stopped to pick us up, and we got in his little car - it was a foreign make, just a very small. He said, "You all are Americans, aren't you?" I said yes. He said, "Oh, I'm so glad." He said, "The last time I picked up two *chilenos*, they were from different political parties. They got to discussing the situation, they got violent, they became more violent, they started punching each other." He said, "They almost turned over my little car."

*Q: But the driver was glad to give you a lift, wasn't he?*

NIEMEYER: I think he was. At least we were two passengers who didn't start a fight.

*Q: Well, that's great.*

NIEMEYER: Things were polarized down there. You either were an *allendista*, for Allende, or you were violently opposed to him, and there was just no reconciliation of views.

*Q: But our government was not happy with him, and so our relations with Chile were poor.*

NIEMEYER: They were very poor, that's right.

*Q: More than poor.*

NIEMEYER: They were very poor at that time. Allende was a Socialist, and the Socialists were really to the left of the Communists. He started out, I guess, with good intentions, but basically, he had alienated the Church, he had alienated finally the business community, he had alienated different branches of his own government. He would promulgate decrees with no legal authority to do so - it was just dog-eat-dog. And meanwhile the economy, production was dropping something like 30 percent in agriculture. On this particular day, the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, Allende went to the radio and urged the workers to take over the factories, take over businesses. And that day something like 200 different businesses went from the private sector into the public sector. So this lowered production even further.

Well, back to the morning of September the 11<sup>th</sup>. We heard on the radio that here was a revolt in progress, and I remember the carryall that the embassy had sent out to pick up their employees - not necessarily the Foreign Service officers, but the local employees - it stopped by to pick me up. I'd been riding with them for a week or so, I guess, and there was a man in there who was very excited. He exclaimed, "*¡Al fin, al fin! Ya se levantó el ejército.*" At last, at last, the army has arisen. I thought he was going to have a stroke. He got red in the face and he was just vehemently expressive.

*Q: He was an employee of the embassy.*

NIEMEYER: I'm not sure. I think he was in the management of the building in which the

embassy was located. And we heard about it then on the radio even more. We learned about the coup, as they call it (a *golpe* in Spanish). It was in progress. Elements from the navy and the army were marching from Valparaíso. As we got closer to the city, traffic stalled. It was very difficult to move. Finally, we just stopped and could move no closer to the embassy. We were almost on the edge of Santiago and the business district, which is not a big one. It's just a small business district, really. I told the driver, "Take the women back. Take everybody back." But I got out. I wanted to see what was going on, and as I went down the street to my office - I'll never forget it - people were coming out of their offices in a festive mood. They were happy. Something had happened to break this stalemate. Somebody, something, some elements were now there that were going to bring about, they hoped, some law and order and, well, something better than what they'd been having, because you could go down the street before the *golpe* and you would see an article, like a dress, in a shop. It would have cost 350 escudos - that was the monetary unit. That afternoon, it would be 400 escudos. Inflation was something like 400 percent and getting higher every day.

So there I was, on the way to my office, people passing. I saw some friends, waved to them, they waved to me, shook hands with a couple, got into the office, and there were some students there. It was about nine o'clock, a little after nine, and then the shooting started. I remember vividly going to windows and peeping out, and what I will never forget are the poor pigeons. Santiago was alive with pigeons. These pigeons, they'd be in the air. Every time they tried to land, there'd be a burst of machine gun fire - up in the air again. They'd go try to land on the roof over there. More machine gun fire. I felt sorry for these poor pigeons because they were constantly in motion.

Well, little by little, I got the students out of the binational center, in between spells of no gunfire. And that left me with two women, one the director of courses for the whole country, a Foreign Service officer like myself, Dolores Faye Rick.

This was a memorable event, and again, one of those things that one does not forget. I know I'll never forget it. But to sort of back up for a minute, a few students that morning were able to get out of the binational center during lulls in the shooting, and as far as I know, they all made it home without any difficulty, but there I was with the director of courses, Dolores Faye Rick, also from Texas, and a teacher named Inez Vergara, who had almost finished all of medical school, but I'm not sure why she didn't go through with it, but she didn't, apparently, and she was teaching English, a *chilena*. And she became visibly distraught and began to... Well, she smoked one cigarette after another before that, but boy, she couldn't stop. She became very excited, and I had a bottle of scotch in my desk there, which I kept for medicinal purposes, and I was able to pour her a drink, and that calmed her down. We turned on the radio to Radio Magallanes, which was, I think, the only radio station that had not been seized yet by the military, and we got the voice of Allende. And he was urging his followers to take to the streets to try to combat the advancing military forces, and then we heard also the plea by the leaders of the military for Allende to give up and with his family be allowed safe conduct out of Chile. Allende did not accept that. Then they said, "If you don't do it by 11 o'clock, we're going to bomb *la Moneda*." And boy, with that we thought, Well, we hope they have good aim, because

we were just a block and a half away from *la Moneda*. A little before 11, I decided to go down into the theater. The theater was below the level of the ground. It was, of course, well protected, all four sides, by soil, and that's where we showed our films, had cultural events. So, the two ladies and I went down and waited. Nothing happened. About 11:20, though, we could hear planes coming. These were Hawker Hunters, and they fired their *cohetes* [missiles], three or four of them, into *la Moneda*, and we could feel the ground shake where we were as that happened. It started a fire over there, and then all was quiet after that - a few shots, but nothing serious. I remember poor Inez having to take another drink, and by that time Dolores and I joined her. We had a little refreshment also. And as the afternoon went on, things were quiet. Well, I went up into the classroom building, which had a language laboratory on the seventh floor and then some 35 classrooms, which was a very fine setup, really, and looked out the window. And on my left I saw the flames coming out of *la Moneda*, the Chilean capital. On my right, on San Martín Street, the headquarters of the Socialist Party was on fire. And there was a man in an apartment building right next to it with a pitiful little garden hose, trying to at least keep the fire from getting to his own place. While I was watching that Socialist Party headquarters, I saw the roof fall in. Like so many old places in Latin America, these heavy tile are on the roof, and once the wooden beams are struck by fire, they can't support the weight so it just collapses. What we're told later is that the Socialists set that fire to their own building so as to burn records. I remember later, when I walked by, the papers were strewn out in the street - publications, documents, and things. It would have been great if we'd kept those, but I didn't feel like that. Anyway, in the afternoon, I went up, as I said, and looked out, and saw the fire on the left and the fire on the right, and I thought, what has happened to Chilean democracy? Chile was supposed to be one of the most democratic countries in the Western Hemisphere. The military, if they had arisen for a reason, they were supposed to support the government in power. But in this case, they went over the government and supported Chile. I just didn't know, but as I got to thinking about it more, then I realized that the democracy that they had was not quite the democracy that we have in our country. It was pretty much for the elite and for the upper middle class. It was not one that brought in all of the people of the country. But a demagogue could stir up the people, as Allende did when he came into power, and the voting franchise was broadened. This made it quite possible for discontents to rally and to enter his government and, shall I say, eventually to demand services, demand a better way of life. The factor also that I should mention is the mal-distribution of wealth. When something like four percent of the people had 25 percent of the national income and maybe 40 percent had only 4 percent of it (these are not exact figures, but they're close), you have a great inequality of the distribution of wealth, and I think that was another factor.

So the revolution occurred.

*Q: Allende died in the process.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, Allende, I'm convinced, committed suicide. He committed suicide. His wife, Hortensia Busse de Allende, the next day, said, "Yes, he committed suicide." Then she retracted that, we believe under Soviet pressure. He committed suicide with a tommy gun or machine gun that Fidel Castro had given him.

*Q: That's a funny way to commit suicide. Anyway, that was the end.*

NIEMEYER: Anyway, that was the end of Allende, and the military government took over. Unfortunately, there was a great suppression of civil rights, human rights, I should say, and there was torture, there were killings that should not have occurred.

*Q: Was Pinochet in charge?*

NIEMEYER: He was in charge. That's right. The head of the navy, the air force, the army and Pinochet had been chief of staff under the Allende government, but they had resigned before the coup. In fact, all of the government, all of the military had gotten out of the cabinet before the *golpe*. These four people, the head of each one of the services, including the *carabineros*, it was my understanding that they had never met before, met at this time and formed a military junta and elected Pinochet as the head of the junta. Suppression of human rights, torture, killings occurred. And I remember colleagues in the embassy and USIS officers would say, "Well, now it's time for the military to go back to the barracks and to let the people vote and elect their own government, but unfortunately, when a pendulum has swung far in one direction and there's a change in government, it doesn't stop in the center; it goes to the far right, and this is what happened.

*Q: What about your family? Were you able to talk to your family on the telephone?*

NIEMEYER: There was no interruption of telephone service, nor gas, electricity, nor water.

*Q: So you were able to assure yourself that they were safe.*

NIEMEYER: Yes.

*Q: You didn't worry about them.*

NIEMEYER: They were safe. That afternoon I called the embassy and said, "Say, can we get out of here? If I get over to the embassy, I've got two ladies with me. Is there transportation to take us home?" They said, "Yes, if you can get over here in just a few minutes." So I left the building with Inez Vergara and Dolores. We walked a block and a half from the Institute over to the embassy, which was also a block and a half from *la Moneda*.

*Q: No problem.*

NIEMEYER: No problem. There was a car there driven and owned by Frank Tonini - he was the cultural affairs officer. And we got to this car - it was behind the embassy - and it was a four-door sedan. It had, I think, 12 people in it already, but boy, we got in anyway. So there were something like 14 people in that vehicle. So we took off, and little by little we let them out along the way, and then going down Pedro de Valdivia we had to pass

the Cuban Embassy which had been taken over by the military. And they stopped us out in the street, made us all get out of the car. I remember old Tonini was showing them his diplomatic card; they didn't pay any attention to that. They made us get out. They made us put our hands on the car and spread our feet apart to frisk us. One soldier even moved my feet - gently, he didn't butt me - he had his rifle butt, and he did it with his rifle butt, and he didn't hurt me at all, but he made me move my feet farther apart. Then they looked at what we had inside the car. I figured we'd be home for a few days, so I had taken an English-Spanish, Spanish-English dictionary with me. The soldier who searched me was curious. He thumbed through that dictionary, page after page.

*Q: He couldn't read?*

NIEMEYER: I guess he could but he seemed to be looking for something of importance or trying to decide whether it was a bible or not. And there was poor old Tonini protesting, protesting, and they weren't paying him any attention. We just laughed about that later. He is like a voice crying in the wilderness. At any rate, they let us go, and our curfew was supposed to start at six o'clock, and I remember looking at my watch as I got let out at my door. It was 5:55. Tonini didn't live far away, so he made it, too. It was either that night or the next night that Lala woke me up and said, "Did you hear that? Somebody jumped over the wall onto the patio." We were supposed to call a number if we thought something might be up, so we dialed this number, and within just a few minutes a jeep with a lieutenant in the Chilean army and three soldiers came in. The first thing they did, they came back to the bedroom and turned on the lights. I thought, "My God, we'll get shot right here." Then this lieutenant steps over to the door into the opening onto the patio. And then with all that light - it was dark outside - he takes out his machine gun and just sprays the patio - just sprays it - turns around, and salutes, and says, "Thank you for calling us," got back into his jeep, and drove off.

*Q: That messed up the patio, didn't it?*

NIEMEYER: Well, it was walled, completely walled. Most houses of the affluent in Latin America have a wall around them, and this was no exception.

*Q: He came and cleaned out the patio. Well, well, well.*

NIEMEYER: But just a few minutes later, Lala said, "Did you hear that?" I did. I heard that. I heard somebody jump over the wall, and I could hear their feet as they hit the ground, but we weren't about to call that army detachment back. Well, little by little, things calmed down. I remember the next day I got a call from the embassy saying, "Can you help out a group of California swimmers who are trapped on the top floor of a building?" They spent the night up there with all that shooting going on downtown and were terrified. So I went up to this building. The elevator was not working, so we had to climb something like ten different levels. We finally got to where these people had been bedded down on the floor up there, but they were glad to see some American, and we got them downstairs, and -

*Q: - sent them on their way.*

NIEMEYER: - on their way, that's right. Well, Chile was great, though, in spite of the cost of the golpe in human lives tortured or lost. The country gradually returned to normalcy, but under a military dictatorship. The curfew was gradually shortened. First it was 6 p.m. to 7 a.m., I think. Then it would be 7 p.m., 8 p.m., 10 p.m. You could always tell when the curfew was about to begin at night, because the traffic on the street was just fierce as people tried to get home before it started. As Pinochet said, it's too bad the army had to do this. It's too bad because they bore the biggest brunt of the attack, because when the army goes into the street, it goes in to kill. And he's quoted as having said that.

*Q: Yes, mob control is one thing that... They didn't know anything about mob control.*

NIEMEYER: No.

*Q: They just knew about killing?*

NIEMEYER: To killing I might add imprisoning suspected allendistas, torture, and doing away with those whose fate was later undetermined, the desapanecidos. Well, as I said, the country gradually returned to normal. We learned of the persecutions. I had a friend who was a teacher at the University of Chile. I understood that he was in a concentration camp. I went out there to visit him at the concentration camp, had a nice chat with him, and finally was able to get him out. I got him out, and it seems like six months or so later, he and his wife were able to get to New York. I heard later that he had committed suicide, but I couldn't verify it myself. I was glad to help him.

*Q: Do you remember our ambassador at the time? Do you know who it was?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, the ambassador was Nathaniel Davis.

*Q: Oh, yes. He was an old timer.*

NIEMEYER: He was an old timer.

*Q: Did you have a good impression of him?*

NIEMEYER: He was a very affable person and I think a very capable representative of our country, and I was pleased to have been there during his tenure. He left in '74, and David Popper came in as ambassador. We got to know David, Ambassador Popper, and his wife very well, and I still keep up with him. He's in Washington now. His wife died, and we always exchange cards at Christmastime. He and his wife frequently attended cultural and social functions at the Instituto.

The binational center thrived. I was able to keep most of my teachers. I had labor problems, though. Even though strikes were forbidden, I had labor problems because teachers kept demanding more money and demanding more money, saying, well, we're

the heart of this institute, and we should get pay raises. I was able to give them some, but it all worked out, and I didn't have any serious problems. I was able to build the cultural program up again. The son of a Mexican diplomat whom we got to know very well was a big help. My wife had taught his father and mother English in Mexico City when we were there. Now he was serving in Santiago, and his son, who was in the medical school in the University of Chile, helped me with the cultural program, and we developed a popularity contest - singers, singing especially, and drama, dramatic acts. And I felt after a while, you know, that nothing has really happened to impede our progress. The bookstore was opened up. The book officer for USIA, Jack Brockman, was attached then to Santiago. He traveled a lot, but he opened up a bookstore in the Insituto which was different from what it had been before. We just sold textbooks before, but now we were selling the translations of American books into Spanish. The movie program began again. I remember we showed *Citizen Kane*, and how packed it was. Every time we had a showing, the theater was filled. There was a great dearth of cultural events after the coup, so whatever you had at the binational center was very well received, and people would flock in to look at it.

As '76 approached, why we made plans to celebrate the bicentennial of our country, and I was able to get the Santiago Symphony Orchestra to put on a special program for the people in honor of our country's bicentennial.

*Q: American music?*

NIEMEYER: Yes, American music, that's right - marches and music - and they were pleased to do this. Ambassador Popper and Mrs. Popper were there, and it was in the - I'm not sure of the name of the place now - but it was very well attended, and the ambassador was pleased, and we were all pleased that so many attended the performance. I wrote a little article that I thought might get published in the newspapers, but it wasn't. It was titled "In Pursuit of Knowledge: Three North Americans in Chile." But I sent a copy. Someone suggested I send it to the University of Concepción in Concepción, Chile, in the southern part of the country, and it was published there in a periodical titled *Atenea*. And I was pleased to do that as my own personal contribution to the celebration of our country's Bicentennial.

*Q: The bicentennial was the subject?*

NIEMEYER: No, it was about an explorer, Charles Furlong; Isaiah Bowman, who was president of the American Geographical Society for so long, who mapped the whole Atacama Desert in the north of Chile with the trails in that desert; George McCutcheon McBride, who had written a book, a classic titled, *Land and Society in Chile*, which related from the colonial period to the present the class divisions of Chilean society with the elite at the top (landowners), and the poor at the bottom who were just workers, almost like serfs or peasants on a large *hacienda*. I was pleased to be able to show what these three North Americans had done, and really, they belonged to both countries now because they had done so much. They were fellow Americans, but they had contributed so to making Chile better known. And I was pleased to see that. They sent me a copy of

that number of the periodical in which my article appeared after I had left Chile.

Well, time came to leave, and we hated to leave Chile because it was such an exciting country. We've hated to leave every country, really, except for me with my loss in Peru.

*Q: You were there three or four years?*

NIEMEYER: We were there a little over three years, and they offered me several positions. One was the CAO in Panama, and then they said, "How would you like to go back to Monterey" and we said, "Yes, we'll go back to Monterrey." So we went back to Monterrey for three more years.

*Q: It's like going home, isn't it?*

NIEMEYER: That's right. I had written a master's thesis on the Mexican constitutional convention of 1916-1917, which wrote the present Mexican constitution, and when I was in Mexico City, Americans coming down somehow had gotten wind of it - at least two people - and they wanted to know if they could get a copy of it. So that led me to think of doing a little more research and putting some personal memorabilia in it. I found several delegates to that convention who were still alive, and I interviewed them. One man had a whole book of memorabilia, of pictures. What the old congressmen did as they finished the Constitution was to go around and say, "Write something as a remembrance for me, write something in that." And I was able to get much of that and was able to put this into a book which came out in English in Chile while I was there. It was titled *Revolution at Queretaro: The Mexican Constitutional Convention of 1916-1917*. And it was published in Spanish in 1993 jointly by the Mexican Congress and the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations. When I got back to Monterey, well there I had some friends who wanted to see the second book, which I was able to get a few copies of. The University of Texas Press that published it.

The return to Monterey was like, as you say, Lew, a homecoming. We were able to get a house in the same *colonia* that we'd lived in before. Something that I had done in Santiago was to get a film from USIA called *The Golden Age of Comedy*. This film was made up of excerpts from movies of our earliest film comedians Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, etc.

*Q: Comedians?*

NIEMEYER: I'd showed these at home during the curfews in Chile, and they were just, oh, just great. They were the most hilarious films you'd ever see, and finally, when I got to Monterey, I thought, well, the best thing I can do now is to just ask for this *Golden Age of Comedy* again. So I get the projector set up at the house, and day after day we would show this and invite friends and contacts to come in for drinks and batanas [snacks], and it went over very well, I must say. I really enjoyed it, and everybody did, too. They would really laugh at the comedies. More than that, they would just howl!

Two activities that I carried out during my second tour in Monterrey were the following: First, I planned and carried out cultural missions in the cities of northern Mexico similar to what I had done in Oaxaca in 1965. These involved loading a carryall with films, a projector, books, and pamphlets for presentation purposes, etc. I would visit government officials, university administrators and professors, student leaders, and give talks on various aspects of American culture to any target group that would program me. I would usually take a local employee with me, and while I would be doing one thing, he would be doing another, i.e., showing films. These events usually lasted four or five days but we were always home for the weekend.

Second, in Monterrey, there was a group of five musicians, mostly Americans, who had formed a jazz band and who would give concerts on Friday and Saturday evenings. They loved to play music. The leader was an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture program that was in the process of eradicating the screwworm in Mexico to the delight of Mexican cattlemen. Well, I got the idea of taking this band to the various cities of northern Mexico for a one-night performance in a school gymnasium or the town square. The band was a big hit everywhere it played. Some of the cities in which it gave performances were Tampico, Saltillo, Durango, and Chihuahua.

Well, all good things have to come to an end, and by 1979, after our third year in Monterrey, I had reached the age of 60 and had to retire. So reluctantly, I retired, only to find I think a few years later that USIA had raised the retirement age to 70.

*Q: Well, how many years had you worked for USIA?*

NIEMEYER: Well, all in all it was from '53 to '79, with two years after my wife died I did not work, so all in all it was 23... let's see, '53 to '77, 24 years.

*Q: So you moved back to Texas.*

NIEMEYER: Moved back to Texas.

*Q: Austin?*

NIEMEYER: Moved to Austin, that's right, and have been living here ever since.

*Q: '79 - so you've been here 10 years.*

NIEMEYER: That's right.

*Q: What have you been doing in that time? I know you were on the Foreign Service Group of Central Texas. You got that started, and -*

NIEMEYER: Yes, that's true. That was a little later, but in the spring of '80, I taught a course at St. Edward's University on comparative government. They offered it every three years.

*Q: On Latin American government?*

NIEMEYER: No, I discussed the governments of France, the Soviet Union, and Mexico, which I knew a little something about (the others I had to learn as I went along, really), and comparing features, the parliamentary system or the congressional system, federalism with centralism, and it was just a one-shot deal - I knew that - for that particular spring. And then in the fall of '80, I was offered the job as assistant coordinator of the Office for Mexican Studies in the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin. And I did that from '80 to '85, and -

*Q: You were an adjunct professor? Is that what they called it?*

NIEMEYER: No, at UT I was just the assistant coordinator of this office which... My big job was to edit and publish the *Mexican Forum*, which was a periodical that came out every three months.

*Q: Well, that kept you busy.*

NIEMEYER: It sure did - on matters that concerned Mexico or Mexico and the United States relationship. It was most interesting, and I enjoyed that work very much. Then my boss died, Stanley Ross, a well-known Mexican specialist, and the dean restructured and the Office of Mexican Studies closed, although it was opened some years later. And I went to work then in the International Office at the University, and what I did was the opposite of what I had done in Latin America for USIA. In Latin America, I sought persons to recommend for a 30-day tour of the US under the International Visitor Program, which USIA operated in conjunction with State and other agencies. I recommended educators, journalists, government officials, etc. whom I thought should see the US. Now, if Austin were included on the itinerary, then I set up the local program of visits for them. I enjoyed that very much. I met people whom I never would have met. Somebody would come in and say, "Say, this so-and-so is from Uruguay, and he wants to learn all about the freedom of the press in the US," So you schedule appointments with the dean of the School of Journalism and pertinent professors on his staff or his department, with the *Austin American Statesman*, with other newspapers, if necessary, or take them to San Antonio. I remember three Dutchmen came over from the University of Leyden, and they all spoke good English, and I took them to San Antonio for some reason. On the way back, one of them started speaking Dutch, and there wasn't another word of English till we got back to Austin. I remember that very well. So in '79, I bowed out, and as I said, taught at St. Edwards, and then began work at the University of Texas in a staff position. If you work for the University of Texas for 10 years, you can retire, so I only worked nine years, but I had a year of teaching at Texas A&I College at Kingsville before it became part of the Texas A&M System, so I added a year to my U.T. tenure and was able to retire again in January of '90.

I might add that when I was in Chile - I forgot to mention this - that the CAO developed an American studies program at the Catholic University of Chile, and I participated in

that for two years, giving one course on US-Latin American relations and another course on American government. So I enjoyed that very much, too.

*Q: It was well received?*

NIEMEYER: It was part of my own contribution to the program.

*Q: The students liked it?*

NIEMEYER: They seemed to, yes. I did it in English, fortunately. I didn't have to do it in Spanish, although some parts of it were given in Spanish because there were two people whose English was not quite as good as their Spanish, so I helped them out. But basically it was teaching those two courses. It kept me busy. They were semester courses, one day a week for three hours, is what it was. Well, I could go on, but I won't.

*Q: Do you want to philosophize a little bit, because I should remind you that you told me the last time I saw you that you finally got your degree, although you got your Ph.D... You got your diploma, I guess, last week, didn't you?*

NIEMEYER: Oh, yes.

*Q: You got your degree years ago, but you never got your diploma.*

NIEMEYER: I got my degree in '58, but I couldn't attend graduation exercises in '58 because I got married and went to Puerto Rico to teach that summer in the summer school of the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras.

*Q: So you went up there and got the diploma. That's great.*

NIEMEYER: The university had a graduation for those who missed out at the graduation ceremony, any one for the last 50 years. And I thought, Well, I may be the oldest one there, but then a woman came up who had gotten her degree in 1950, and then there were a couple of them that were 1948. You see, they were master's or doctorates. It was nice to get hooded. I had to borrow a hood and a cape and a mortarboard. I did it from a man who had got his degree in mineralogy, but nobody noticed the difference.

*Q: Now you're happy with your 24 years in USIA.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, I am. I would not have traded it for anything.

*Q: Looking back, you chose well, in other words. You're satisfied.*

NIEMEYER: I really enjoyed it. Perhaps if I'd been more assertive I could have accomplished more, but basically I did the job that I had to do, and I'm not a real innovative person, and I'm not really one who... Well, it's hard to say. Had I been more innovative I might have done more things and accomplished more, and done more good.

But I kept the programs going wherever I could. I added to them where I could, and I found it all to be high adventure. I really liked the work. I really liked working with Latin Americans. I loved the job. I had really very, very few disagreeable instances.

*Q: You were able to cope with the reorganizations of USIA without much difficulty.*

NIEMEYER: It was no strain at all.

*Q: I just felt I was going through agony all the time that I was there.*

NIEMEYER: You do what you can out in the field anyhow, regardless of what they're thinking or telling you what to do from Washington.

*Q: Well, you know, that's a good story, and I'm sure it will be interesting to students and to researchers, because you have a story there which is relevant to people interested in USIA.*

NIEMEYER: I hope it will be of some good. I might say one thing, Lew, that I forgot. I want to pay great tribute to two people who I think were very influential in influencing me in my work. One I've already mentioned - Jim Webb, James H. Webb, Jr., from Virginia - who was the epitome of friendliness, of opening his home, his life, to the people of the country in which he lived. He was so popular, so well received. And the second man, also in the cultural affairs program, but for the State Department on loan to USIA, was John Brown. He was the only man that I've ever known who was the cultural affairs officer in Rome, Brussels, Paris, and Mexico City - all top posts.

*Q: Boy!*

NIEMEYER: I got to know him in Mexico City, and I still keep up with him. He's retired to Washington, he and his wife Simone, but I was very, very much influenced by him, and I found a man who could talk on so many subjects, and he was constantly out addressing some issue in a speech that he had prepared. He wrote a history of the United States in French. He was a fluent French speaker. At a reception, he was one of the most charming persons. He was direct. If he didn't agree with what Mexican policy was, and there was a government official present at a reception or other event, he would say, "I think this is wrong for this reason." I had great respect for John Brown. I still do.

*Q: And apparently the Mexicans and the French did, too. They didn't throw him out. He was not thrown out, upset with his frankness.*

NIEMEYER: He was a diplomat, though, in the sense that he could say, "This is wrong" or "This should not be done;" but "let me just say this," and he would tell a story or an anecdote, and this would just relax everybody. He was a very direct man, and I really appreciated him, as I did Jim Webb. They were different, but they both were valuable officers in our Foreign Service. I feel very honored to have served under both.

*Q: Wonderful. Well, I thank you, Vic. I guess that'll do it for the moment.*

*End of interview*