

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

IRVING SABLOSKY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Well, let's start with when and where you were born.

SABLOSKY: I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on March 5, 1924.

Q: Can you tell me about your family?

SABLOSKY: Yes, my father and mother were both born in the United States, in New York or there-about. Their families moved to Indianapolis in the early 1900s, I guess. They were married in 1920. They had two children, myself and my brother, who is three years older. All four grandparents were immigrants from the old country. The maternal grandparents were from Austria and Germany. The paternal grandparents were from Russia, what was then Russia.

Q: Probably Poland or the Ukraine?

SABLOSKY: Probably now. It is around Grodno. We don't know exactly. The name Sablosky was apparently an immigration official's invention - the real name might have been Zablodovsky. There is a town now in Poland called Zabłudow, where the Zablodovskys probably came from. That is as close as we get, but we are not dead sure that the name was Zablodovsky. That seemed to be the most likely thing. Since we know that my grandfather on the Sablosky side said he came from the Grodno area, and Zabłudow is indeed in the Grodno area, it's probably it. They came to the states in the 1880s, before there was any Ellis Island, and settled in New York. I don't know what my grandfather Sablosky did before he came to Indianapolis. Grandpa Rosner rolled cigars.

Q: Oh, yes, that is very famous. People used to sit around and read to the cigar roller. It was quite an elite group, actually. Quite intellectual.

SABLOSKY: Maybe, yes. He was said to have been a scholar. That is what attracted my grandmother to him apparently. He was considered kind of a catch, since he was a scholarly cigar roller.

Q: Cigar rollers, particularly immigrant cigar rollers in New York, were considered sort of part of an elite group.

SABLOSKY: I didn't know that.

Q: They used to hire readers who, while rolling cigars, would read whatever. They were

usually rather intellectual things. It was a very interesting group.

SABLOSKY: Grandpa Sablosky started as a street peddler, and then started a little department store in Indianapolis in a fairly poor neighborhood. The store grew to have several branches, neighborhood department stores in Indianapolis. My father went into that business when he was old enough. Mother completed high school. She always wanted to go to college but never could because she had to work. My dad finished high school but never went to college. He never wanted to. He expected to work.

Q: By 1924, when you were born, were there brothers and sisters?

SABLOSKY: My older brother had been born in 1921. By then, the families were in Indianapolis. When they got married, they bought a small house at 34th and Broadway in Indianapolis. That is where I was born. I lived there the first 13, 14 years of my life, in that same little house. The neighborhood has completely changed now. I tried to take my new wife there in 1983 to show her the house, but it was a parking lot in a very black neighborhood.

Q: What was family life like growing up? Was it pretty well oriented around the store?

SABLOSKY: Yes, around the store, and around the family itself. We had the four grandparents all in the town of Indianapolis. I hadn't realized until I was quite a bit older, how rare it was to have all four grandparents in one town. I remember my brother and I went to one of the grandparents' houses on Saturday to play and Sunday, after Sunday School, we went to the other grandparents for lunch and the afternoon. That was a very important thing - being with the grandparents. Of course, on all the Jewish holidays, we were with the grandparents.

Q: Was your family Orthodox?

SABLOSKY: No. They were what they called "Conservative Jews." I think it still exists.

Q: I think so too.

SABLOSKY: It's somewhere between Orthodox and Reform. The Sablosky grandparents were inclined to be more Orthodox. They went to an Orthodox synagogue for a while, but then settled on the Bethel congregation which was in that very neighborhood where we lived. It was conservative. The Rosners, my mother's parents, were Reformed. They came from, Germany, Austria, where the Reformed movement was strong.. So, there was a little difference between them, but everyone got along very well. Dad, particularly through the depression era, went through a period of being rather religious. Generally, we were a pretty secular family. We never kept kosher or anything like that.

Q: Was your neighborhood more or less Jewish, or ethnic?

SABLOSKY: No, nothing. It was a completely mixed neighborhood. One of my friends,

who lived diagonally across the street from us, once asked me about what it was like to be Jewish. I offered to take him to a temple to show him what a temple looked like. He was a little scared, and he wasn't sure he was supposed to go in there. He wasn't sure that I was supposed to let him go in there, but of course, it was okay. Being Jewish was a little exotic.

Q: What about schooling?

SABLOSKY: Public schools. I went to a kindergarten, Mrs. Cook's Kindergarten, I think it was called. I guess that was private, but when I was five and a half, I went to public school number 76, about three quarters of a mile from our house. I walked there in all kinds of weather. This was grades one through eight. I got through the eighth grade and then they changed the system so that seventh began junior high school. So I "graduated" (without ceremony) from the eighth grade and went to Shortridge High School.

Q: While you were in, essentially elementary school, do you recall what subjects interested you? Did you start reading early?

SABLOSKY: We read. My mother was great for reading. Dad not so much, but mother was. We used the public library a lot. I enjoyed Math. In seventh grade, we had a music appreciation course which really caught my fancy. I really got into music then. I remember the teacher's name was Mrs. Swan. When I was 13, about the time we got out of grade school, I started taking piano lessons. I have a favorite story. I had been preparing for my bar mitzvah then, and was going to a Hebrew school. I did rather well with the language. I had a knack for language, apparently. At the same time, my cousin, who lived down the street, had a piano. I used to like to go to my cousin's house and play away. My brother was convinced I was some kind of a genius because I could play Home on the Range with harmony. So, after the bar mitzvah, since I was doing so well in the Hebrew school, my father wanted me to continue there. But, I hated it. I tried to find some way not to go. My brother did a very fine thing for me. He said, "Why don't you let him have piano lessons?" I said, "Yes, piano lessons." So, I started taking piano lessons. Music became my main interest. After high school, I went to Indiana University, the School of Music, and majored in composition..

Q: What about in high school? Did you pretty much concentrate on music? I would think it would be a little hard to in that era.

SABLOSKY: I didn't do any music in high school at all. It was all outside of school, all extracurricular. In high school, I belonged to something called the Shortridge Senate, where we were an imitation U.S. senate. We debated various issues. I guess that was my first contact with public affairs. I was very much interested in literature and belonged to a drama club. I had a wonderful English teacher. She interested me in writing very much. Nora Thomas was her name. I won't forget her. I wrote some poetry in those days, and Nora Thomas to encourage me to do that. She would always encourage my interest in reading poetry, which I still do.

Q: In other words, it sounds like you had a pretty remarkable education, didn't you?

SABLOSKY: I think Shortridge had the reputation of being a very good school. One teacher I remember was Frank Wade, who was the Chemistry teacher. I had no real interest in Chemistry, but he could interest anybody in Chemistry. He was the model teacher who kept the students really thinking and imagining, as if they were discovering everything for the first time. When he gave examinations, he said we could use our books or anything, because the sin wasn't in not knowing something, it was not knowing where to find it. Of course, you had to find it in a certain amount of time. I remember Frank Wade very well. He was a fine man.

Q: What about sports?

SABLOSKY: I was never good in sports. My brother was. I liked to ride my bike out into the country and go into the woods, and that sort of thing. Of course, I practiced the piano. I had a couple friends, Martin Marks, who was my piano teacher's son, and a very fine pianist himself. My other friend was Al Dobrowitz, who was the butcher's son. We talked about music and lots of things.

Q: While you were in high school, in Indianapolis, which wasn't that small a town, did you have that much access to performances of one kind or another?

SABLOSKY: Yes, the Indianapolis Symphony, which is pretty well known. Fabian Sevitzy was the conductor. Well, first it was Ferdinand Shaeffer, when I was really young, and then Fabian Sevitzy. I went to symphony concerts sometimes. They played concerts for schools too in those days, and I think that probably still happens. They would come in small ensembles to the school or the kids would go on a bus down to hear the symphony. So, we did that. That's about all of that kind of thing.

Q: Was your family willing to accept a music student in the family?

SABLOSKY: Reluctantly. Mother didn't mind so much. Dad, of course, wanted me to go into the business. He really expected me to go into the business and I have always admired him for saying, "Okay," to the music thing. When I wanted to go to college to study music and not go to a business school, he said, "Okay," and stuck with me all the time.

Q: During the summers, would you work at the store?

SABLOSKY: Oh yes. It was a source of income.

Q: By the time you got to high school, how had the stores developed?

SABLOSKY: The main store was at the corner of Massachusetts and College Avenue, which was a very busy intersection, in a rather poor, working-class neighborhood. Dad considered our competitor to be Sears. He wanted to keep people from going to Sears

with attractive prices and good merchandise. The idea of the store was to provide decent merchandise at fair prices. There was a very mixed, black and white clientele, and mixed black and white staff, too. This was in the middle of some pretty hard times. This was in the 1930s, 1940s. The store went through some very hard times. There was a period there when Dad would come home at night and would say that he might not have a business to go back to the next day. My grandfather, his father, made some bad real estate investments, which put the family in debt. My father had to work to overcome that. Gradually, he really took over the store. It was his consuming occupation.

Q: Indiana, from what I recall, was divided. The south was white southerners and the north was more industrial, standard Midwestern. Where did Indianapolis fall?

SABLOSKY: Indianapolis was right smack in the middle. It was a market town, I guess. There was a big central market and there were corn fields all around it. But, it was a big town, even then. I think, in the 1930s, it was supposed to have had a population of close to 500,000. We were taught in school that it was the largest city in the United States not on a navigable waterway.

Q: Oh, yes. I grew up in Annapolis for a time. We were told that we were the only state capitol not connected by sea or railway. Did you see any manifestations of race problems?

SABLOSKY: Not really. The races were pretty segregated. In Shortridge High School, there may have been a couple... We called them Negroes in those days... black students. But, there was a black high school, Crispus Attucks High School. That is where the blacks were pretty much expected to go. My mother usually had a cleaning lady who was black. So, I knew black people from the start. We had lunch at the Sabloskys (my grandfather's) on Saturday. Then, we would go to the store in the afternoon to work. My grandfather would see black men on the street, walking. He would stop the car and say, "Would you like to work?" He would give them work. Black people did the heavy work. They carried boxes....

Q: How about politics? Particularly the New Deal and all. How did that play in your household?

SABLOSKY: My father was a great Roosevelt fan, and went into the New Deal, wholeheartedly, I would say. Later, he became disaffected as so many people did. As they got more wealthy... He never became terribly wealthy but once the Depression was over, I think he became somewhat disaffected with Roosevelt. But, in the early days, Roosevelt was great in our household, and he's still great with me.

Q: I think with many of us, he was sort of the household God. What about the developments in Europe? Everyone thinks of the rise of Hitler, fascism, also with the Soviet Union. Was this way over the horizon, in another place, or was there a connection, or family following it or not?

SABLOSKY: We heard some discussion of the events, well essentially, Germany, in the temple. The rabbi would bring it up in sermons from time to time with warnings, flags, that sort of thing, that something should be done. The Soviet Union didn't really loom as a problem in my childhood, as I remember.

Q: Jewish families coming particularly to New York more, came out of the socialist tradition. They either got caught on one side or the other on the communist issue, but your family didn't really come out of that socialist workers type.

SABLOSKY: No, not at all.

Q: You graduated from high school when?

SABLOSKY: 1941. What a year.

Q: I was going to say...

SABLOSKY: I can remember December 7th very well at the fraternity house in Bloomington, Indiana, hearing the news on the radio. All of us were aware that we were going to be going.

Q: What about the draft?

SABLOSKY: We had deferrals for being in school. Many boys in the fraternity house volunteered very quickly, or got into some program like the V-5 or the V-7.

Q: V-12.

SABLOSKY: My brother went into V-7 to become a naval officer, which he did. But, I was only 17 at the time, so I wasn't eligible yet, but soon became. I tried to get into a V-5, as it was, at that time. But, they didn't want me for some physical reason or other.

Q: For the naval thing, they were very strict on eyes, at that time.

SABLOSKY: I don't know that it was eyes. But, anyway, I guess I was drafted. I'm not really sure whether I enlisted or was drafted. I think I was drafted. My number came up and I went into something called ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program, which was for college kids. It was kind of an officer training track, but with no promises. They put us into basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia, where the regular Army people did not like these college kids very much. Anyway, it was a pretty tough basic. In fact, by the time we were finished with basic, the whole ASTP thing had been pretty well abandoned, so I found myself in the infantry.

Q: Where did you go in the infantry?

SABLOSKY: First to England for staging. That must have been August or September

1944. I went into the Army in 1943. We staged in a place in England, near Oxford, near the town of Fairford on the Coln River. Then, we went to France - not in the first wave: It was October or November by the time we got there. We went in through Le Havre. I'd seen some damage in England as a result of the bombing, and the V-1 and V-2 rockets. The V-1 were very audible. They came putting over - buzz-bombs, we called them.. We heard those often. With the V-2s, you could see a peculiar, question-mark shaped cloud in the sky, and you knew a V-2 had passed over. We saw rubble there, but nothing compared to Le Havre, which was simply flattened. It was pretty hair raising when we got there. Then we went farther into France, past Rouen, and over to the Schnee-Eiffel, [in] the Ardennes forest.

Q: Were you in a division?

SABLOSKY: I was in the 422nd regiment of the 106th division, which was right in the thick of the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: I was going to say, you got there right at a very interesting time.

SABLOSKY: We were on the front line or beyond the front line, I guess, at the time we were all captured. They captured battalions.

Q: Three regiments went, didn't they?

SABLOSKY: I don't really know the particulars.

Q: Was that the first action that your regiment had seen?

SABLOSKY: Yes.

Q: You were put up there for what? Training?

SABLOSKY: Exactly. We were doing target practice, on what we thought were impressed Russian troops on the other side of the line there. The weather got very bad. There was a lot of snow. We lost any kind of reconnaissance, and the Germans shifted the personnel over there, and crack troops, started coming over. Before we knew it, they surrounded us. That is the story of the Battle of the Bulge. It is certainly well enough known. What I have read of it, it's pretty accurate.

Q: What happened to you? What did they do with your regiment there?

SABLOSKY: They surrounded our unit. We were in a town called Schoenberg. I remember that very well. Theoretically, we were going to try to take that town. I was in a heavy weapons company, 81 millimeter mortars. We were going to fire the mortars, not the usual trajectory, but fire them as if they were cannons, at this town. We were supposedly going to take that town; then, we could make contact with American troops - none of which happened. The valley below us filled with German tanks. They had

promised us tank support, the last radio message we had, we were getting tank support. The only tanks that came were German tanks. Our battalion commander just directed us to destroy our sights, and we were taken prisoner. They could have slaughtered us, very easily, some were. Our unit was not. They took us prisoners, right on the border of Germany and Belgium. Schoenberg is still in Belgium, but barely. It is all German speaking there. Then, we started walking. We carried a few wounded off the field. There weren't so many. There had been some firing, but not a great deal. We walked across the Rhine, to Koblenz, and then a little further to Limburg, I guess. From there, we were put into boxcars. We were taken to a place about 60 miles south of Berlin, Stalag 4-B. Mostly British RAF pilots had been there since 1941. They were pretty entrenched too, and weren't too glad to see these Yanks who were losing the war for them, come in. They were okay and took good care of us, actually. The Brits did.

Q: How long were you in the prison camp?

SABLOSKY: I guess we must have gotten there shortly after the turn of the year, into 1945. I was there until April 23rd, when the Russians liberated us.

Q: What did you do in a prison camp? There you all are.

SABLOSKY: It was sort of a continuous depression, and of course constant hunger. You read. There was a little library, and we could read. I read, I took notes, I kept a journal. I tried to write down whatever music I could remember, just drawing staves with a pencil on paper. I tried to remember all of Beethoven Seventh Symphony, which I couldn't do. I don't know why I picked that. I tried to write some canons, and other exercises in harmony, just to keep the old brain working. It was a very depressing experience. We were starving. I lost a lot of weight. But, we were not mistreated, really, beyond not being fed. Then, there came a time when... This is a strange story. Every once in a while, people would be called out on work detail. We didn't know where they went to work - we didn't know then where they went. The most famous story of this, of course, is Kirk Vonnegut's, in Slaughterhouse 5. They pulled him out to go to Dresden. They finally called my name to go out on a work party. In the barracks, where they were getting us ready to go out, some guy I knew (I don't know from where or when) said, "Irv Sablosky, what are you doing here?" I said, "The same thing you are doing here. Going off to work, I guess." He said, "They aren't going to send you out. You are Jewish, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, they don't send the Jews out." I said, "What kind of thing is that?" He said, "The story according to the party line is that Jews won't fight for their country and so they can't be prisoners of war, so they are not taken out of the prisoner of war camps and shown to the public." It didn't make a hell of a lot of sense. But, he said, "Show them your dog tags." I had my dog tags with the "H" on them. He said, "Show your dog tags to the sergeant over there, and see what happens." Being as depressed as I naturally was, and demoralized, and whatever else you can call it, I said, "What the hell, why not?" Maybe it will be the gas chamber, but we'll see what happens if I show them the dog tags. In fact, I felt a little guilty about it, because when I came into the camp, a British soldier had processed us on the way into the camp. When he was writing on this form, he asked my religion. I told him Jewish. He said, "I'll put down Protestant." I said,

“Well, I’m Jewish. The “H” is on my dog tags.” He said, “I’ll put down Protestant.” I said, “Do what you want.” I had been feeling a little guilty about that. Now, when the chips were down, I was going to be Jewish, whether it was to my advantage or not. I suspected it might be. So, I showed my dog tags to the sergeant, and sure enough, he got angry, but he got me out of there, back to the barracks where I had been. I didn’t go out on work detail. I think I can be grateful for that – it may have saved my life. So, in a very strange way, being Jewish at that point was an asset in Germany.

Q: Well, I heard that they had taken some Jewish GIs and put them into regular concentration camps. There were some cases of that.

SABLOSKY: I guess that is what my British friend had in mind when he put down Protestant. We didn’t really know what was going on. I don’t think the extent of the concentration camps, the gassings, etc.

Q: What happened when the Russians took over?

SABLOSKY: The Russians came in one night. Our German guard disappeared overnight, and in came the Russians. The German guard or two that were found still there, were very badly treated. They were dragged behind horses, for example. The Germans had miserably treated the Russian prisoners - quite differently from the way they treated British and American prisoners. The Russians and the Poles were really badly starved and beaten. The Russians took it out on them. But, they loved the Americans. So, they took us out of there and took us on trucks, down to the town of Riesa, where they had taken over apartment buildings. They put us there, and kept us for a month, waiting for an exchange of prisoners, during which time, we were all kind of grilled. In my case anyway, I think, with a name like Sablosky, they thought it might be a Russian name. We learned later that the Russians who had been taken prisoner, who survived, maybe didn’t survive when they got back to Russia. They were looking for any Russians hidden among the Americans. So, I had a pretty tough grilling. I was a smart aleck, I guess, at the time, and still am, I suppose. The Russian inquisitors asked me if I spoke Russian. I said, “No.” He then said something in Russian. I responded “Nye panyemayu.” It was the only word in Russian I had ever learned. But, I had to show off. Then, they really started questioning me in Russian, which I didn’t understand a word of. They finally became convinced that I didn’t understand any and Sablosky was not really a crypto-Russian. It was pretty scary. I got out of there all right. I didn’t learn until later what was happening to Russians who were found, which I think is the reason we were reluctant to exchange prisoners then. Because we didn’t want to give any Russians back to them and have them sent to Siberia, or something, which I guess, is what happened. So, anyway, we were amongst the Russians. We had been liberated on April 23rd. On May 23rd exactly, we took a truck to an airport near Leipzig and were flown to France where we went into a rehabilitation center. We spent almost another month there.

Q: What were they doing, just processing you?

SABLOSKY: The Russians?

Q: No, I mean when you were at the rehabilitation place.

SABLOSKY: Well, more or less, and building us up. We were all pretty debilitated.

Q: Was it just that the Germans didn't have enough food themselves or was it a deliberate policy not to feed?

SABLOSKY: I really think they didn't have enough food themselves. We got some Red Cross packages. The Red Cross was supposed to get these packets of food to each prisoner. We would generally share one, maybe once a month, or once every couple weeks, we would get a package that was shared among a dozen or sixteen people. The rumor was that the Germans were taking the Red Cross food, which is quite possible.

Q: By, the summer of 1945, what happened?

SABLOSKY: Went back to the United States and went to Fort Sam Houston for duty in San Antonio, Texas. I was in something - I don't remember exactly what it was called - it was the section that arranged entertainment for the troops.

Q: Special services.

SABLOSKY: Special services, there you go. Since I had studied music, they thought that maybe I could help out with the band or something like that, which I did. I started a little jazz combo. I really didn't know much about playing jazz, but there were some jazz musicians there. They put me in charge. We played for officers club dances. I just waved a stick in front of everyone. Once in rehearsal, I tried to play the piano, but that didn't go. I can't play that kind of piano. Then, after a time, my name came up for discharge. I went to Camp Atterbury, in Indiana, near Indianapolis, and was discharged.

Q: Then what, back to Indiana?

SABLOSKY: Back to school.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the University of Indiana. You were taking the classical composition, practice playing, and all that sort of thing?

SABLOSKY: It was mainly music. For electives, I took German. I took Physics. I don't quite know why I took Physics. The only course I ever got a low grade in. I came out with a "B" or something like that - and a number of literature courses. I enjoyed that. I wrote for the school paper, The Indiana Daily Student. I wrote a music column - music reviews. They had a lot of musical events at the University. I wrote about some student recitals, and I wrote about professional concerts, including things like Paul Robeson. I enjoyed writing about music. That landed me my first job. On graduation, in 1947, the head of the journalism department at Indiana heard from someone in Chicago that there was an opening for a music critic at The Chicago Daily News. So, I went for an interview. They hired me right out of school. I guess I was the youngest music critic on a

major daily newspaper in the U.S.A.

Q: Well, this was when?

SABLOSKY: June 1947.

Q: The paper was?

SABLOSKY: The Chicago Daily News. It was a Knight newspaper.

Q: Where was The Chicago Daily News in the spectrum of newspapers?

SABLOSKY: Oh, it was a very good newspaper. It wasn't until the 1970s that it folded, finally. It was owned by John S. Knight. It had been owned by Frank Knox.

Q: Secretary of the Navy and vice-presidential candidate.

SABLOSKY: Exactly, and it had had people writing for it, like Ben Hecht and Carl Sandburg. It had a huge reputation. It was not at its peak when Knight took it over but it was still a very respected paper. The Tribune was obviously the highest-circulating paper. But, The Daily News was number two in circulation, and it was respected as an independent newspaper, politically. It was an evening paper - an afternoon paper, which was not good for it later.

Q: How long were you the music critic there?

SABLOSKY: Ten years.

Q: 1947 to 1957?

SABLOSKY: That's right.

Q: What was the music scene like in Chicago in this period?

SABLOSKY: It was rich. It was a period when the Chicago Symphony got to be at its peak under Fritz Reiner. When I first got there, Artur Rodzinski had just become the conductor. He lasted a couple years, then Rafael Kubelik came, and then Fritz Reiner. The Lyric Opera of Chicago was just getting started. It had its opening seasons with both Callas and Tebaldi on the roster, Tito Gobbi, everybody, Nicola Rossi-Lemeni. Really all the great singers of the day were there. The ballet scene was big, too.

Q: Looking back at your experience, you had been working on composition. I would imagine that writing for ballet, all these things... How did you bring yourself up to speed so you could do this?

SABLOSKY: I just did it. As far as the composition goes, the theory was that I was going to do this writing about music as a profession and do my writing of music in my spare

time. It turned out to be very little spare time. The composition of music just fell by the wayside, largely I think, for lack of talent and because I was inherently lazy. Writing about music took over. I did that all the time. I always liked to write and had been writing music criticism in college. So writing about music came to me quite naturally. I enjoyed doing it for 10 years.

Q: Did Chicago have the equivalent of Eastman School or Juilliard?

SABLOSKY: Not quite that level. There was the Chicago Musical College. This was the top school headed by Rudolf Ganz, a great pianist. Then, the universities there, Roosevelt University, DePaul University, Northwestern - all had music departments. The University of Chicago was mainly academic, not performance. But, these others did have performance aspects. So, there was a lot going on, academically, in Chicago. The Chicago Symphony has a training orchestra called The Chicago Civic Orchestra, which is one of the first-rate training orchestras in the states.

Q: Chicago has had a reputation, even going way back, of strong civic support for the arts, didn't it?

SABLOSKY: Oh, sure, with the Art Institute at the center of it. It is a very lively art scene. There is no question. The theater, too - there was the "Second City" group - some experimental theater - and the LaSalle theater had its own little company that was doing Shakespeare, and various other things. There was a lot of theater. On the music scene, I had the pleasure of really writing about whatever I wanted to write about. I was the only music critic on the staff and could pick what I wanted to write about. So, I wrote about jazz as well as classical music. There was a lot of jazz going on in Chicago. That was during the folk music revival. There was a lot happening. I immersed myself in it, new music too. The composers' forum, that sort of thing.

Q: How about the powers that be in the newspaper? Did they sort of let you go?

SABLOSKY: Oh, absolutely. Partly because I think I was doing okay, but partly because they really weren't interested in music. They had a music critic because a major paper was supposed to have a music critic. I filled the bill for them.

Q: Did you run across anytime when some mogul's daughter was having a recital that you had to cover?

SABLOSKY: No. I never did anything like that. I once wrote about Margaret Truman. In fact, I went to Milwaukee once... This is kind of a gag. I wrote a tongue-and-cheek "serious" critique of a performance given at the Musicians Union Convention by Harry Truman at the piano and James Petrillo on the trumpet.

Q: Petrillo was head of the Musicians Union. They did play, didn't they?

SABLOSKY: They did, indeed. It was front page.

Q: Obviously, during this time you were immersed in music, were you paying any attention to what was developing in the world? Things like the Cold War, the Korean War, etc.?

SABLOSKY: Well, yes. Through music, I was very conscious of what was going on in the Soviet Union because of the story of Shostakovich and Prokofiev's problems with the regime, the composers' union, and when they were denounced. At the time, there was a book called Musical Uproar in Moscow by Alexander Werth. That was really the first detailed account I had heard. In the '50s, the Soviets tried to patch up this image a bit by sending over such artists as David Oistrakh and Emil Gilels. They were careful not to talk politics when we interviewed them. But we were already conscious of the political side of music, when Henry Wallace was a candidate for president.

Q: Oh, 1948, yes.

SABLOSKY: That was right in there. In the folk music scene in Chicago, people like Studs Terkel were very much involved. Pete Seeger came to town. There was a lot of "left wing" activity. So, one was aware that something was going on, that something was cooking, politically. More and more artists were coming over from Europe who never had before. During this period, there was a new consciousness of music in the Orient. Troops of musicians were coming from India, from Bali. I was tremendously impressed by Ravi Shankar. His brother, Uday Shankar, was really the pioneer in bringing Indian music and dance to the States. That and the dancers of Bali who came over for the first time, I think in the early 1950s - I was really knocked out by those things. I really wanted to get into that.

Q: Was there much coming out of Japan, for example, at that time?

SABLOSKY: Kabuki. The Kabuki Dance Theater Company came to Chicago. It was the first time they had ever been in the United States. It was the first time we had ever seen anything like that in our lives. It was tremendously exciting.

Q: How did you find the Chicago audiences on music and things? Were they knowledgeable?

SABLOSKY: Pretty knowledgeable, yes. It was the first time I ran into the second city complex, but it's real. I ran into it again when I served in Cebu in the Philippines, which was at rivalry with Manila. I served in Hamburg. Again, a second city. So, I can tell you, there is a second city complex.

Q: So, what happened in 1957?

SABLOSKY: In 1957, I began to get restless. I began casting about. I began to think seriously about changing my life. I had been divorced in 1954. I remarried in 1955 and our first child - a son - was born in 1956. (Two daughters from my first marriage lived with their mother.) I was beginning to wonder whether I wanted to do music critiquing

for the rest of my life. Where was I going to advance? The place to advance from being music critic of The Chicago Daily News would be to go to New York, and do the same thing. Did I really want to do that? I was really getting a little bored about writing about the same people playing the same music night after night. Sometimes I would go to seven, eight concerts in a week. Sometimes I would review a Saturday evening, a Sunday afternoon and a Sunday evening concert in the same paper. I began looking around, thinking about what else I could do. I thought of public relations, things that had to do with writing. Public relations, advertising; I didn't think I had the temperament to be in advertising. So, I was looking around a bit. I met a man at a party at a friend's house who was leaving his job as public relations director for the telephone company there, to go with U.S. Information Agency. I talked with him. His name was Stafford Davis. He told me about what USIA did. I had never heard of it. It sounded really interesting. He told me that if I was interested in what he was talking about, I should hear about their cultural affairs program. So, he told me a little about that. And I certainly was interested. He said they were recruiting people. If I was serious, he would get somebody in touch with me. Sure enough, Carl Larsen, who wrote for the Chicago Sun Times, called me up and asked if I'd be interested in being interviewed. I told him I was. He sent me the Form 171, something like that. I filled it out. I was thinking seriously about it; Pat, and I were discussing it. Several weeks passed and I got a call asking if I could come to be interviewed by a panel that was coming to Chicago to interview prospective recruits. I said, "Okay." I went to the interview. When I came out of the interview, Carl Larsen was there. He said, "Did they talk salary?" I said, "Yes, we did talk salary." He said, "Well, then you are in." They didn't make any commitment at all, but he said that if they talked money, they are taking you seriously.

Q: Do you recall what sort of questions they were asking?

SABLOSKY: They asked about current affairs, a lot. It was mostly general background. I think they were a little chary of me because I was in music. My education concentrated in music, I was writing about music. Though I was a journalist, which is what they were looking for, a narrow music background threatened them, so they asked me about sports. Actually, I was clever enough at that time to suspect that something like that was going to happen, so a few days before that, I read the sports pages. When they asked me if I was interested in sports, I said, "Well, I've never been good in sports. But, I have noticed that Don Larsen pitched the first no-hit game in the World Series the other day." So, they seem convinced by that, that I was a rounded character. Maybe it didn't have anything to do with anything, but I thought of it as a kind of a victory. So, suddenly this was obviously a serious thing. Should my wife and I really be thinking of packing up? (By now, we had a baby son to think about, too.) I told the managing editor that this possibility had come up. In fact, I wasn't quite that honest. I hadn't said anything to anybody. Our intellectual columnist, Sydney Harris, who was friendly to me on the paper, came to me and said, "Irving, are you looking for a government job?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because the FBI is around. If you are considering something, you had better tell Norlander because you don't want them popping in to see him before he hears about it." That was very nice of Sidney. So, I told Ev Norlander, the managing editor, that this was in the wind, and it may or may not happen. Sure enough, it happened. In

remarkably short order, they called and wanted me to be in Washington in three weeks. I said that that was impossible. I guess that was right at the beginning of the year. So, we made it in April. Pat and I and our little boy drove out to Washington in April and I started a new career and a new life.

Q: So, you got there in April of?

SABLOSKY: 1957.

Q: How did you come in? Did you start out in training?

SABLOSKY: Yes, I came into a training program. There were between 25 and 30 of us who were coming in at that time. USIA was anticipating an increase in budget, we understood. The new director was Arthur Larson, who was a buddy of Eisenhower's. Things were on the upswing. That is why they were recruiting. So, we went into what was to be an eight-week training program at USIA. We were to be trained to be USIA officers. Before the eight weeks were over, Arthur Larson had appeared before the Congress and the budget was slashed brutally. The posts for which many of us had been intended were eliminated, including mine. I heard much later that I had been slated to be Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer in Florence. It was abolished before I even knew it existed. So, I was in Washington then for 14 months, waiting for an assignment. I was in limbo. We called ourselves the legion of the damned, because we had all been sworn in and we were all now employees of the U.S. government. We had no place to go and were in sort of make-work jobs. The work they made for me, or which I made, was to write background materials about American music for use by cultural affairs officers abroad. Then, David Cooper, who was head of the music division of USIA at that time, saw these and said, "We should do a major pamphlet." So, I did write the text of a really handsome Life magazine size pamphlet on American music. It was the first time the agency had produced anything like that. It went all over and was translated in many, many languages. That took a lot of time, and that was certainly well worth doing. In fact, it stood me in good personal stead later, when I had a year of American studies under agency auspices 1963-1964. I went to the University of Chicago for that training year. I met Daniel Boorstin, the historian, who was at that time working on the second volume of his trilogy, called The Americans. He was trying to figure out how to handle the development of American music during that period, mid-19th century to end of the 19th century. So, he asked me for some recommendations about sources he might look into. I gave him a list and I also gave him the very condensed pamphlet, which would give him some background on it. He called me up in the middle of the night, one night, and said, "You have to do a book for us, for the University of Chicago's American Civilization series." I said, "I can't do a book, I am not a scholar. I am a journalist." He said, "You can, you have almost done it." He seduced me into writing a book, which I did. I started on it while I was there in Chicago in the American studies thing. Then, when I came back to Washington for German language training, whatever time I could get away from German language training, I worked on the book. I kept working on the book in any spare time I could find in Hamburg, when I got there. I worked on it on the weekends, I took leave, I worked on it whenever I could. Finally, I got it finished. It was published in 1969 -

American Music, which is maybe the best thing I ever did.

Q: What was the tie between the agency and this book?

SABLOSKY: There was no tie. It was just that Boorstin got the idea from the pamphlet I had done for the agency and said that I could do a full book on the subject. Later, the Agency took the published book into its translation program, and it was published in Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Korean... quite a few languages.

Q: What was the agency's interest in music, when you arrived there in 1957? During the early years? What were they doing music wise?

SABLOSKY: As I said, they had David Cooper, who was the music division. David and an assistant (Elaine Fry) were the music division. Their primary function, I think, was to keep the posts informed of musical events in which there might be an interest abroad. And they furnished phonograph records, long-playing records, for the libraries. They selected the records to be sent to the USIS libraries overseas, where they were much used. They also did some presentations to universities and so forth abroad of records, and books on music. The idea was, and this is true of the Voice of America, too, that the field of music offered an excellent prism through which to view American culture. It's innovativeness, its accomplishment. Few people abroad really were aware that there were so many symphony orchestras in the United States, or opera companies, or serious composers, beyond jazz, which they may have had an inkling about. But, they didn't know about American music. We had a whole world of music in the United States which told a wonderful story about the country, about its growth, about its differences from Europe or from any other country.

Q: Music is not my expertise by any means, but it does seem that it has only been in the last several decades that we have really looked at our musical heritage. Prior to that, it seemed that not much was played. There was quite a revival of some of the people who were popular, including people like Scott Joplin, of that nature. Were you beginning to see people who thought that we really had something here?

SABLOSKY: I think that may have been the case. That development is largely post-World War II. I think the general public probably didn't get with it for a decade or so after that. The agency, I think, was on to it, insofar as they had actually gotten themselves a musical advisor. That is what the job was called. David Cooper was the musical advisor for the agency. A man named Angelo Egan followed him and then Daryl Dayton was, for many years, the musical advisor for the agency. They did a very good job of getting the materials out to the posts.

Q: I was in Belgrade in the early 1960s. I had a wonderful time going to the library there and taping all the music comedy records.

SABLOSKY: Musical comedies, absolutely. That is a feature of American musical life that people in other countries love, once they get acquainted with it. It is very American.

Jazz, of course, in a big way, and the folk music. But, also, the concert music, which was the least familiar abroad, but which became a tremendous influence on European music, not to mention in other countries.

Q: Later, were you seeing the Tchaikovsky competition, Van Cliburn, and all that? There was Saul Hurok. Wasn't he doing most of the fishing for the classical performances?

SABLOSKY: The concert managements helped somewhat, but they were mainly interested in the stars. Hurok was mainly bringing people in from Europe. Most of his stable were foreign artists. The biggest factor in the post-war development of American music I think was the conservatories, the music schools, which were so very good. They turned out such splendidly trained musicians, which is still the case. The amount of talent and the quality of the training in American music is unequalled anywhere in the world. When I was in Hamburg, which was 1965 to 1968, 16 of the top singers of the Hamburg Staatsoper were Americans. There were about 600 American singers in German opera houses. The German directors said that the Americans were better trained and would work harder than the local people. They wanted the Americans. It's a credit to our training ground here

Q: You wrote this book while you were in Washington?

SABLOSKY: Mostly in Washington, actually. I finished it when I was in Hamburg.

Q: Where did you find the material for the book?

SABLOSKY: The Library of Congress, almost totally.

Q: Was it more biographical, on who was doing it?

SABLOSKY: It's a narrative history from the time of the Pilgrims to the 1960s, covering the development of all kinds of music, except religious. Generally, it was an attempt to place the development of music in the context of American history. There is no musical analysis in it at all. It is really for a general reader who wants to get a brief survey of the whole field of American music, where does it come from.

Q: Of course, we have all these ethnic strains like the Appalachian mountains, each one was quite distinct. Your first post was Hamburg?

SABLOSKY: No, my first post was Korea, after those 14 months in limbo.

Q: Good heavens. You were in Korea from when to when?

SABLOSKY: 1958 to 1960. I went out as publications officer, on the basis of my having written these pamphlets in Washington. I not only wrote on music, but I also wrote one called, The Strange Case of Mr. K, which was about Khrushchev's double talk on many subjects, exposing the Russian disinformation. I wrote a couple of political things like

that. Anyway, I was publications officer in Korea. We had a major pamphlet program there. I wrote pamphlets - the texts of pamphlets, on different subjects, which were translated into Korean, for distribution to schools, to journalists, intellectuals, etc. One was on Abraham Lincoln, for example - it was the Lincoln sesquicentennial that year (1959), so I wrote something called Abraham Lincoln and American Democracy. In Korea, we were trying to influence the government toward democratic ideals. It was mostly quotations from Abraham Lincoln on the nature of democracy. This was translated into Korean, and put into schools. The idea was that it was going to inspire Korea ideals of democracy, which it certainly did. 1960 was the year Syngman Rhee was thrown out as president. I'm not trying to take responsibility for that...

Q: No, students had a hand in that.

SABLOSKY: They did, indeed.

Q: What was Korea like, when you went there in 1958?

SABLOSKY: Korea was on the verge of modernizing. It was still a very traditional culture, with a very sophisticated, University educated elite. They were certainly starting then to make what became the new Korea. The USIS post and the embassy - the political section and the economic section - were very well plugged into that elite. We were very well received there. There were no wraps on what we could do. What better friend did Korea have than the United States at that time? It was very hard, I think, when the revolution came, which was inevitable. Rhee was planting the seeds himself. He was teaching democracy. His schools were teaching American democracy. The logical conclusion of that was that they weren't going to have a dictator anymore. That happened while I was there. It was fascinating to see. I don't doubt that we were a factor in it. When it did happen, the Koreans wanted to hear immediately: with the students in the streets, where did the embassy come down? We felt we had to make some kind of a statement to the press and to the students who were gathered in front of the Embassy. It was quite an experience for me as a kind of neophyte Foreign Service officer. I happened to be acting Press Officer at the time, and I remember a very tense meeting with the Deputy Chief of Mission, Marshall Green, and Don Ranard who was Political Officer, and maybe a couple of others, as we worked out the language of a statement, going virtually without instructions from Washington. We finally issued a press release in which the Embassy stated that we couldn't interfere in the internal affairs of another country, but that the Embassy trusted the Korean government would address any justifiable grievances of the protestors. The fact that the embassy would say something about justifiable grievances was dynamite, and I had the feeling that we were making history there.

Q: Well, how did you find working in Korea? Did you have a Korean staff?

SABLOSKY: Oh, yes. The publications officer was in the press office, which had the press attache, and the information officer in it. There was also a huge AID program in Korea. The AID program had its own information officer, also a USIA man. We had a

staff of maybe six translating whatever we needed. We didn't attempt to write anything in Korean, but these people were very good in translation. The hardest thing that had to do was to translate for the press. We would get on the wireless file transcripts of Eisenhower's press conferences. I don't know if you remember those. There were so many ellipses, unfinished sentences. We would try to translate those for the newspapers in Korea. We would put out a Korean translation of the transcript. My translator would come and ask what a particular sentence meant. It was undecipherable. So, I was really making American policy. I had to say it in plain enough English that it could be translated. It was hard.

Q: It's really interesting because I'm told that Eisenhower was a superb briefer in the military, which you are trained to do. You are not trained to drift all over the place. You say it in very precise terms. But, _____ latitude because nobody could pin him down as to what he was saying.

How was the economy, from your perspective, in Korea at that time?

SABLOSKY: I don't think I could answer that now, from this distance. I believe things were looking up in Korea at the time. The industrialization was certainly starting, and also the AID program - it made many mistakes, but I think they also did a lot of things right. It made a difference.

Q: Did you have any chance to use your knowledge of musical affairs?

SABLOSKY: Yes, every place I was, starting in Korea. I gave talks on American music. We had an information center in Seoul. An officer named Bernard Lavin, who was a terrific officer, ran it. He had conferences on American civilization - and not just on American: he arranged for discussions where there would be comparisons of Korean and American civilizations. So, I was often called upon to give a talk with illustrations on American music, jazz, concert music, whatever there was. I worked up two or three standard illustrated lectures with recorded examples on the history of jazz, on the American and the European musical traditions, the contrast. Recent trends in American music for very sophisticated audiences, I would do that. I did it at all my posts. It was my hobby horse, I guess.

Q: I would have thought that Korea would have been quite a receptive place, at a higher level for music, because even today, some of our top violinists, conductors, come out of Korea. You go to a normal kisaeng party, which is the geisha house, and the guys will jump up and sing opera for you at the drop of a hat. They have beautiful baritones.

SABLOSKY: At the end of any dinner, everybody goes around the table and sings a song. Herb Baumgartner, the information officer, and I used to sing Take Me Out To The Ballgame. That was our song.

Q: I used to sing Old McDonald Had A Farm.

SABLOSKY: You were in Korea, too, weren't you?

Q: I was there in 1976.

SABLOSKY: Yes - how else would you know about Kisaeng houses?

Q: It was frightening, because they were very good. We are talking about for me, in the late 1970s, but they certainly absorbed western music.

SABLOSKY: Even in the late 1950s when I was there. There were two symphony orchestras in Seoul at that time. There was the Seoul Symphony, which was the regular symphony orchestra and the Korean Broadcasting System Symphony Orchestra, which was the better orchestra. The conductors of both of them were American trained, I believe. I know the Broadcasting orchestra was... The orchestras were not bad at all. They had wonderful singers.

Q: Wonderful real baritones, boy.

SABLOSKY: Sopranos, too. Very talented.

Q: It was obviously fostered at a very early level in the regular school system.

Did you get involved with the press, at all?

SABLOSKY: A little. I was acting press officer sometimes. Of course, journalists, even for the cultural affairs officers, were some of our main contacts. We went out with them a lot, and had them to our houses, and so forth. Many journalists were English speaking. One of the most important ones for me was not English speaking. His name was Chang Chun Ha. He was the editor/publisher of a magazine called Sassang-gye, which was an intellectual journal really, a quarterly. He was very interested in the United States and reprinted my pamphlet about Lincoln in his magazine. He later got the Magsaysay award. He came to the Philippines to accept it. I was in the Philippines, and we had him over, and had a party for him. He was a fascinating man, a wonderful man and very deep. He was connected to us by the number one Korean assistant in the Cultural Affairs sections, in the cultural office, a man named Park So-jin. He knew Chang very well. He thought I would get along with Chang, even though we needed a translator between us. He knew a little English, and I knew a little Korean, but very little, in both cases. With mediators, we could converse. We really hit it off. It was not only very pleasant, but it was important because Chang's magazine was important.

Q: After the student revolt, which overthrew Rhee... In the first place, while Rhee was the president, he had been the president for a long time, and it was probably beginning to wear thin. Did you sense a disquiet about Rhee within the embassy, kind of wishing he would go away?

SABLOSKY: Oh, I think the political officers wished he would go away, but the revolution really centered on his vice president, Li Ki-poong, who I think was involved in some corruption. It was Li Ki-poong's reelection which triggered the revolution. It was a

rigged election. The students went out against it. Li Ki-poong's house was burned down. The regime had become corrupt. So, yes, I think we were wishing Mr. Rhee would go away. There was kind of a mystique around him, among the general populous I think, not among the sophisticated journalists. With the journalists, there was a lot of skepticism, but there was still a certain mystique, as I say, about Rhee. You didn't really talk against Rhee. You could talk against Li Ki-poong.

Q: What was the impression of the newspapers there, like the Hankuk Ilbo, and other ones? Were they pretty good or sort of preachers of certain powers?

SABLOSKY: No. You mentioned the Hankuk Ilbo. Mr. Chang who ran that newspaper, which was very independent, didn't really talk anti-regime, but he was as close as you could come to it. His paper was very popular. He was a very independent character. The Chosun Ilbo was a very high-class paper. We would have dinner sometimes with Mr. Hong, the publisher. He was a very fine man. He was an older man. I was young at the time, so I knew some of the younger reporters. I think one of them was named Hong also. I can't remember that well. But, Hong, the publisher was a very imposing man, and a very independent thinker.

Q: What was your impression of the ambassador, Walter McConaughy?

SABLOSKY: My impression of him was that he was a very wise, prudent man. He had been in Pakistan before, I think. He and Mrs. McConaughy were very southern. She was quite charming. She was very southern. She didn't quite know how to do things without help, so she got a lot of help from the embassy. But, she was charming, and they liked her. Ambassador McConaughy had everybody's respect. He didn't give the impression of being the most decisive man in the world, or the fastest, but very wise and prudent, he was.

Q: How about during this time, was the threat from North Korea there? Was this a matter of concern?

SABLOSKY: Not especially. I had the occasion to go up to Panmunjong to one of the sessions of the Truce Commission, to observe. I guess occasionally, there would be an incident at the 38th parallel, at the DMZ, as they called it. But, it wasn't hot. There weren't submarines and things like that, certainly not during that period, as I remember.

Q: In 1960, whither?

SABLOSKY: In 1960, home leave, transfer to the Philippines, to Cebu, where I was going to be Branch Public Affairs Officer.

Q: I must say that going to Cebu with a music critic background seems to be a cast in your bread on sparse waters. If that is the right way to put it.

SABLOSKY: Well, we are all generalists. The idea of having a branch post, I had asked

for it. On the personnel form, where they ask where for your next post, I had put Cebu, Chiang Mai, Thailand, and maybe somewhere in Burma, where it would be a so-called one man post. There were many other people there. A one-man post was certainly a misnomer. But, I actually got Cebu. That was my second choice, I think.

Q: You were in Cebu from 1960 until?

SABLOSKY: 1963.

Q: What was Cebu like at that time?

SABLOSKY: Cebu is like a western town. People carry guns, and yet there was a very sophisticated, often Spanish-influenced, upper-class. There was no orchestra in Cebu. I think there was not very much music really in Cebu. In people's houses, there was. There were newspapers. The first television station in Cebu opened while I was there. They put me on doing a newscast. The influence of the clergy was very strong. The biggest university there was the University of San Carlos, which was run by the SVD, the Society of the Divine Word, partly American and partly Dutch. It was mostly a Dutch order, but the head of it, the rector of the university, was Father Rigney, who was an American from Chicago. He had spent many years in a Chinese communist prison camp. That is where he ended up, I think literally, he died in Cebu. He was a very anticommunist man. Cebu was the seat of the Osmeña family. Osmeña having been the former president, and now by the time I was there, his son, Sergio, who was a senator, had his political machine centered in Cebu. It was the second city. It was a rich city. Shipping was the main thing. There was a U.S. air base on Mactan Island, nearby, which was across the strait.

Q: Was there an insurrection going around in that area?

SABLOSKY: No, not in that area at all. Not around Cebu. In Mindanao, there was supposedly some. As Public Affairs Officer in Cebu, I had the only branch port post outside Manila. They had had branch posts all over the southern Philippines. But, now, Cebu was the only one left. So, I covered the whole central and southern Philippines. I went into Mindanao, and all the way down to the Sulu Islands. It was fascinating. It was a real adventure.

Q: I imagine it would be.

SABLOSKY: Philippine Airlines flew these old C-47s everywhere you could fly. They were good, the pilots. So, I went to as many places as I could go. We had a consulate in Cebu. There was a principal officer and a vice-consul. There were two consuls during my period, Robert Yost and Lyle Lane. Then, there were a couple vice consuls. One of those, in fact was Charles Bray, who later became deputy head of USIA. He was also later head of the Foreign Service Institute. Charlie came to Cebu as a junior officer. I was still pretty junior, too, but I wasn't quite as junior as Charlie. Anyway, the consuls and the USIS guy, whoever it was, traveled all over. It was fascinating. We met so many people. The Philippine welcome is incredible.

Q: I would imagine so. In a way, I don't imagine you had much of a selling job to do.

SABLOSKY: No, but an informing job to do because there were a lot of wrong impressions about the United States there. There were a lot of aspects of American life that they weren't familiar with. The racial situation in the United States was of interest.

Q: It was just beginning to heat up.

SABLOSKY: So, we had a lot of occasions to talk about that because there were changes taking place in the states at that time. In lectures, I often talked about jazz there. When you talk to somebody about the history of jazz, the question and comment period afterwards leads to all kinds of other places. It is a wonderful opportunity to talk about anything that might be on their minds. It was a wonderful chance to exchange views about the United States and clear up some misperceptions.

Q: What about the press? How did you find the press there?

SABLOSKY: I would say the Cebu press was pretty provincial. I hope the Cebuanos don't hear me say this. The Manila press was pretty wild. The newspapers there were subject to strong political influence. They represented political leaders, generally. People had a newspaper, and so it was their spokesman, and sometimes not quite responsible. But, they were lively. Some were in English. There were also papers in Cebuano. There was a Cebuano paper, but I think most people read the Cebu Republic News, I think it was called. It was the main newspaper. One of the Manila papers had a Cebu edition that was published in Cebu. I can't remember which paper it was. It may have been the Manila Chronicle.

Q: During this time in Cebu, were there any major events that sort of grabbed your attention there?

SABLOSKY: Yes, there were two that I can think of off-hand. One was the return of General MacArthur, who came to Cebu. He went to Leyte, of course. I didn't go to Leyte with him; the consul did, I think, and the ambassador did. He came through Cebu and was received in Cebu with a tremendous parade, and all kinds of jubilation. It was quite a thing to see. Then, there was a change of presidents, from Garcia, who was considered quite corrupt and who had been in power quite a long time, to Macapagal, who was the first of the Liberal party, who promised real democracy, and a brake on corruption. I think Macapagal kept his promise, pretty much. I think he was followed by Marcos.

Q: When Marcos came in, he wasn't considered too bad. They say power corrupts.

SABLOSKY: Some friends of ours back then said if Marcos came in as president, he would end up being a dictator. They saw it coming.

Q: I think this might be a good place to stop. We will pick it up next time. You left Cebu

in 1963, and where did you go?

SABLOSKY: Went for a year of American studies at the University of Chicago.

Q: All right, we will pick it up then.

Today is the 3rd of April 2000. Irving, we want to talk a little more about Cebu.

SABLOSKY: I would just like to backtrack a little bit Stuart, since I mentioned what I thought were two globally important things that we really had very little to do with. The Consulate, of course, had a role in the MacArthur visit, but it was generally a Philippine government affair; we were peripheral to it. There were a couple of things that I would like to mention that were very important to us from a program standpoint. One was the appearance of Rudolf Serkin in Cebu, brought there by what was called then the President's International Program of Cultural Presentations.

Q: You should mention who that is.

SABLOSKY: Then, the president was Dwight Eisenhower, of course. The performer was Rudolf Serkin, one of the greatest pianists of the times. For him to come to a place as remote as Cebu, was really quite unprecedented. There was a great question before he came to Cebu and that was, can we find a piano - a concert grand for him to play on? Fortunately, by that time, I was acquainted with a piano teacher in Cebu whose husband was a shipping magnate, so to speak. They had a nine-foot Steinway in their living room. I talked with Mrs. Sala and asked whether she would permit it to be used for a Serkin concert. We were going to do it in a nice auditorium in St. Theresa's College in Cebu and would she allow it to be transported to St. Theresa's College. Of course, she said she would be honored to do so. So, we got Mrs. Sala's piano over to the hall and Serkin came to town. He was just marvelous. That was really historic, from the standpoint of Cebu and from the standpoint of USIS in the Philippines presenting something at that level. It was very, very well received. The other thing, along the same line, was the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, which was brand new at the time. This was 1962. Of course, in the next 10 years, they became one of the top companies in the United States. This was a predominantly black, modern dance company. Alvin Ailey performed not only in Cebu, but we took him down to Cotabato City in the Mindanao, in the middle of Mindanao, in the Muslim country. They, of course, had never seen anything like this. The company was tremendously exciting, and everybody was excited by it. It was quite a cultural achievement for the USA.

Q: How did you find the local governments there in Cebu and Mindanao? Did you have many dealings with them?

SABLOSKY: Always, yes. I traveled to all of the main cities in Mindanao and from the islands of Panay and Negros in the north down to Zamboanga City and even to Jolo in the

Sulu Islands. Everywhere I went, of course, I would meet the mayor, as a representative of the U.S. They were always tremendously friendly. I would have a nine o'clock appointment with the mayor, and he would pull out the brandy. The attitude toward Americans was invariably friendly. Then I would call at the local college or university and touch base with educators there. I found that the legendary Philippine hospitality was real - and that interest in the United States was real, too which meant interest in the books and films and other materials we were able to furnish..

Q: You left the Philippines when?

SABLOSKY: In 1963.

Q: In 1963, whither?

SABLOSKY: The word came that I was going to go Hamburg. I would be Director of the Amerika Haus (the USIS Information Center) there. To prepare me for that, I proposed that I take an academic year at the University of Chicago, in American Studies. That request was granted. So, I went to Chicago in the fall of 1963, and stayed for the school year, 1963 - 1964. They didn't really have an integrated American Studies curriculum, but I took American Literature, American History, etc. Walter Johnson was the main history professor, head of the History Department at that time. Daniel Boorstin was the other professor there, with whom I had a number of courses. It was just a marvelous year, because I had never really formally studied American History and Literature. I, of course, dabbled in it, but that hadn't been my field. It was good preparation for what I was going to do. Then, we came to Washington, after the school year, in the summer of 1964, for German language training. ("We" being my wife, Pat, and our four children - ages one to eight.) I had had a little German in college, so I had a little start on it. But, German language training was a very wonderful course. I had a very good teacher. We got along well. I came out speaking German.

Q: You were in Hamburg from 1965 to when?

SABLOSKY: 1965 to 1968.

Q: Could you talk about how you saw Hamburg at that time, and what the German/American relations were in that area?

SABLOSKY: Hamburg, is a north German capitol, very close to England. English is very widely spoken. It is different from the rest of Germany, in many respects, and proud of it. They were proud to being the last major city to be taken over by Hitler. At this point, the Hamburgers were very receptive to American presence. Hamburg, of course, was the second city in Germany... I think I mentioned before about the second city complex... Hamburg was greatly affected by the division of Germany. Though the "Oder-Neisse Line" lay about 30 miles east of Hamburg, it effectively cut off Hamburg's commerce on the Elbe River. The greatness of the port had diminished, and Hamburg was feeling it. Anyway, the great shipping companies were there. Hamburg University was very

important there. An important contact there was Fritz Fischer, the professor of German History who was controversial at the time because he was the first to raise the idea that Germany was at fault for World War I. I got to know Fritz Fischer a little bit. Another was Guenther Moltmann, who was doing American studies at the University of Hamburg. He was a very fine man. One project we had at the Amerika Haus at that time was to try to get instituted by the education ministry or office a curriculum in American studies for the Gymnasium - that would be upper high school, not just in Hamburg, also in the surrounding territory, but mainly in Hamburg. We had some luck with that, actually. There was a very fine German national employee of ours, Rheinhard Kaphiske, who worked very hard on this, and he had very good contacts in education circles. We helped the education department fashion and distribute a new curriculum in American studies, which had not existed before at that level. Those who go to the Gymnasium are most likely going to university and possibly lead the country in the future.

Q: Well, one of the gaps in European education that has been pointed out has been American studies. The United States has been terribly important to Europe. Most Americans who reach leadership roles have gotten a pretty solid dose of European history, whether it sticks or not, is another thing, but this is true in any course. But, the Europeans often don't really get much about American history. So, they are trying to understand us from a rather frail base.

SABLOSKY: That is exactly right. What happened, generally, around that time at European universities was that American Literature was taught as part of English Literature. There would be an English Literature department, and some American Literature was attached to that. American History hardly it all, only as it related to the literature. So, you hoped to get a rounded curriculum in American History, Literature, Politics, even Geography.

Q: Did you find that you were in competition with the British Council at all?

SABLOSKY: Not really in competition. Of course, the British Council was teaching English. It was a very active program, it had resources beyond ours. The Amerika Haus had a fine library and a wonderful clientele, mostly of university students. We were right across the street from the University of Hamburg campus. It was well trafficked, so we had lectures, of course, and exhibits. The British Council did similar work, and we worked closely together. The head of the British Council, and I, and the French cultural representative and the Italian - the four of us would have lunch together every once in a while. We were all in the same business, and worked together very well.

Q: I would imagine that the Hamburg cultural life would be quite rich, wasn't it?

SABLOSKY: Oh, yes. The Hamburg Staatsoper was one of the best in the country, featuring at that time, 16 major American singers - Tatiana Troyanos was there, Arlene Saunders, Jeanette Scovotti, Richard Cassilly... There were some very good and very valued American singers there at that time. In fact, we arranged a recital at the Amerika Haus to show them off. They appeared in pairs - joint recitals. They were glad to do that

for the Amerika Haus at no fee. They just did it for their country's sake. The programs were very well received.

Q: This was a period, wasn't it, when an American opera singer... to get solid work and to develop their repertoire would find that particularly Germany was the place to go.

SABLOSKY: Yes, at that time, there were something like 600 American singers in German opera houses. Of course, there is an opera house on every corner in Germany. But, they got to love the American singers because they were very well trained, and were willing to work, often harder than German singers. Once the German singers were in the opera company, they were civil servants, and tended to coast. The Americans didn't become... few were actually appointed as civil servants. They were the younger singers. They were getting started. They were learning new roles, and they worked harder at it than the German singers did. So they were highly valued.

Q: 1965 to 1968 was at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. How was that playing in Germany? I mean, were you working on that?

SABLOSKY: Yes, we certainly were. There was a lot of interest in it. We didn't address it really, but allowed it to show. James Baldwin, for instance, came through Hamburg on his own and we had a reception for him at the Amerika Haus. He was somebody who had to be presented in the Amerika Haus. We were honoring James Baldwin, and giving access to him. He spoke freely. Even radical Americans, when they are abroad, are suddenly more consciously American, and proud of it. Baldwin was not an exception. He was not crazy about the civil rights situation in the United States, but he did recognize that it was happening. Patricia Roberts Harris came through also. It wasn't exactly easy to see that she was black, but she passed for black. She lectured for us at the Amerika Haus.

Q: She had been a professor and was an ambassador, and a member of the cabinet, I think, at one time.

SABLOSKY: I don't know that she was actually in the cabinet.

Q: But, she had a fairly high position.

SABLOSKY: She was a lawyer, and she spoke about the American judicial system, and of course, got into Civil Rights. What happened at these lectures often was that there would be a general, or even a very specific subject of the lecture, and in the question period, anything might come up. If it was a black lecturer, of course, the Civil Rights movement came up. As the years went on, the Vietnam War came up more and more, though we did not program directly on the Vietnam War, a question arose and was discussed often in our programs, not only in Hamburg, but in outlying towns in which we held programs as well.

Q: How did you find the German media in... What is the main paper, is it Die Welt?

SABLOSKY: Die Welt is published in Berlin, but it had a Hamburg edition, and Die Zeit

was the weekly. It was published in Hamburg.

Q: Was your job to monitor the press?

SABLOSKY: We certainly kept track of it. Ray Benson, the Public Affairs officer in Hamburg had that primary responsibility. I was responsible for the Amerika Haus the public programs there. Ray and his staff were doing most of the monitoring.

Q: Ray is up in Vermont now. I talked with him about a week ago. I'm getting a professor at the University of Vermont to interview him.

SABLOSKY: That's great. That's perfect. Ray would have the story, all of his history in Yugoslavia and Russia, is invaluable. He is so articulate.

Q: His parents were communists. They took him to Russia as a kid, and then left.

SABLOSKY: The father stayed there, and the mother brought him back. Ray is a fountain of information. He has total recall, and he is very articulate. That will be a very good contribution to your program, I'm sure. He was the Public Affairs officer in Hamburg at the time I was there.

Q: What was your impression of the Amerika Hauser in Germany? What role were they playing during the mid-1960s?

SABLOSKY: The numbers were being reduced by the time I left Hamburg. At that time there were nine left of the original 30, I believe. A number of the rest had become bi-national centers, called German-American Institutes. They were run and financed by the Germans. We furnished books for the library. In some cases, the American director remained in the Amerika Haus. I think they played a very important role. They were a center mainly for the university students, and some of the upper high school students. For Germans, this was a source of information about the United States. One thing that impressed them maybe more anything was our shelf of periodicals. We had periodicals of every shade, from left to right, in American politics, and literature, whatever. The fact that these were open shelf, American-style libraries was a new concept to the Germans, and the variety of periodicals which were offered, with no regard to whether they were for or anti-government, was a demonstration of American democracy, for sure, and openness.

Q: Were you just letting people know about America or were people coming over and using the library for all sorts of things, including getting more information about Physics, and that sort of thing?

SABLOSKY: Well, our libraries were limited in that sense. They wouldn't really find an extensive collection on Physics in our libraries. Our libraries were mainly about the United States. We did have the Encyclopedia Britannica and Americana, but it was a library about the United States. That is what they came here for. They were curious about

the United States, and they wanted to be informed about it. The journalists used it too for background research. They trusted it. It certainly was not a slanted library. It was a real library.

Q: Did the Soviets have an equivalent organization in Hamburg?

SABLOSKY: No, they did not.

Q: What about English training? Was that left to the British Council?

SABLOSKY: We didn't do English language training in Hamburg, or Germany at all, as far as I knew. The German American Institute, the former Amerika Haus often had English teaching as part of their curriculum, but we did not do that.

Q: What was your impression of the University of Hamburg? Did it rest somewhere, at least in the political spectrum, right, left? What sort of activity was going on at the university?

SABLOSKY: My impression is that it was a very high level of scholarship, certainly highly regarded among the German universities. It was very strong in Science, and finance, I believe. Also, because the kind of city that Hamburg was. I would say that the faculty I knew tended to be a little to the left. There was a lot of Marxist type thinking in the German universities at the time, but not communism. Marxist from the academic standpoint and the philosophical approach to economics, mainly. The Vietnam War did become a factor in the last year I was there. We hadn't really had any friction on it, until then. Late in my time there, I would go out and lecture, in, say, Lüneburg, 30 miles from Hamburg. We would go to a youth group affiliated with the social-democratic labor unions (the DGB). My lecture was on the history of American jazz, which attracted a lot of interest there. That was one of the advantages I had in lecturing. But, the question period was about Vietnam. That happened a number of times when I was lecturing on something completely different, but the questions were about Vietnam. I carried a number of Dean Rusk official statements and would quote from them.

Q: You left there in 1968, and whither?

SABLOSKY: In 1968, I came back to Washington. Let me just mention one thing about the Vietnam War. During my last weeks of my stay in Hamburg, we had an incident. We were presenting a lecture by an American who was with the German radio in Berlin, RIAS, the radio in the free sector of Berlin. He was coming over to lecture in German on NATO, the North Atlantic Alliance. He was supposed to be fairly scholarly. It was a technical lecture. The police warned us ahead of time that a student group planned a demonstration against our role in Vietnam. They were going to break up the lecture. They suggested that we might be wise to call the program off.. Well, I didn't want to be buffaloed. Ray Benson and I discussed it and decided we would go ahead with it. The police asked us what we wanted them to do if something happened. We assured them that we could handle it. The students who came to these lectures were a faithful public and

they would help us, and it would be okay. One of the thoughts in my mind was that I didn't want to have pictures in the newspapers of police carrying students out of the Amerika Haus. So, what happened was that I got up to introduce the speaker. Mind you, it was not on the subject of Vietnam at all. I started to introduce the speaker and heckling started from about 10 people in the audience of 150. They also had bottles of champagne and they started popping the corks, just making a racket. I pleaded for silence so that we could go on with the program, and if they wanted to discuss something, this was a democratic institution, and we certainly were open to any kind of open discussion, but let's give the speaker a chance to give his lecture, then we can discuss anything you want. They wouldn't stop. It was obvious that the thing couldn't go on, so I finally called it off, at that point, on the spot. I apologized to the people who really wanted to stay and hear the lecture. We called it quits for the evening.

Q: What was the audience's reaction?

SABLOSKY: Most of the audience wanted to hear the lecture. They were kind of disgusted. I think that was the main reaction. They left quietly. I have to say that one of the most rewarding aspects of my tour in Hamburg was the chance to associate with some of the younger generation of Germans. Many were quite outstanding, and it was interesting to find that many consciously thought of themselves not as Germans first but as Europeans - some turned to a European identity really as an alternative to German nationalism, which they found unsympathetic. It was an attitude that was new to me at the time.

Q: Then, in 1968, you left, and where did you go?

SABLOSKY: I came back to Washington. A new magazine had just started at the agency called Dialogue magazine, edited by a man named Nathan Glick. This was going to be a quarterly academic type journal for intellectuals, to be distributed worldwide in English. Later, it got into other languages. It was just getting off the ground. I think they had published one issue. They needed an assistant editor, associate editor, I was called. So, they assigned me there, to help get things going with my journalistic background.

Q: You were there from 1968 to when?

SABLOSKY: A little over a year with Dialogue magazine. After that, I went to what was then called IOP, the Office of Policy and Plans. There was a very impressive woman there named Barbara White, who was the senior woman officer in the agency at the time. Maybe Pat van Delden, who had been Deputy Public Affairs Officer in Germany, was senior to Barbara. But, Barbara White was a senior woman officer; she was the Deputy Chief of Policy and Plans, and I worked for her in the planning office.

Q: All right. Well, let's go back to Dialogue. From 1968 to 1969, what was your target audience and how was the magazine being framed?

SABLOSKY: The target audience was intellectual leadership in the universities and in

the governments of the countries. It was to be on a very high plane, maybe like the Partisan Review or Sewanee Review, maybe a mixture of the two. It dealt with political thought in the U.S., and also with literary criticism and trends the arts. It was also in a somewhat lighter in vein, like Harpers, or the Atlantic. It consisted mainly of reprints of articles from such magazines, essentially. We would get permission to use pertinent articles which might be on political trends or sociological trends or literary trends, something that would show the range and direction of thought in the intellectual sector of the United States. We figured, that to begin with anyway, that audience in most countries, could read it in English. Later it was translated into Spanish. It was picked up for publication in Latin America, and some other languages too. It was a great success.

Q: You were there as an associate editor. Did you have debates or were the criteria for what sort of articles to choose?

SABLOSKY: Oh, yes. Nat and I would talk the over the possibilities. Nat was full of ideas. He would do thematic issues, for instance. He did one issue on films, for example, from many different standpoints - not only the cinematic standpoint, but the social, and political standpoint. The magazine stood or fell on its integrity as an intellectual journal. So, we tried to get a pretty good spectrum of opinions. Of course, we weren't going to have anything that was really radically anti-American... but the choice was pretty wide open. Nat was an ingenious editor. He did it very well. What we did a good part of the time was reading all the magazines we could get our hands on to get articles that could, at least, be adapted. Sometimes we didn't use the full article. We would use excerpts with the permission of the author. Sometimes Nat commissioned pieces for the magazine.

Q: Did you find it was difficult to have a magazine which was essentially on a worldwide basis? You would have the Spanish market. You would have the Asian market, and the European market. Would you have to keep in mind, how well this will play there, and that will play there?

SABLOSKY: To a certain extent, but if I remember correctly, as the magazine developed, it began to have an Asian supplement, a Latin American supplement, for articles that were more parochial.

Q: Well, it must have been pretty exciting.

SABLOSKY: It was. It was fun, and I think it made a contribution..

Q: Were you getting any response or was it too new to get feedback from the field?

SABLOSKY: From our offices in the field, the feedback was very positive. It definitely had that. From leadership, I don't recall that during my period.

Q: In 1969, you went over to Policy and Plans. How long were you there?

SABLOSKY: Until 1971, when I went to Thailand.

Q: What did Policy and Plans do at that time?

SABLOSKY: One thing we were working on at that time was... As you recall, the Cultural exchange programs were administered by something called CU, the Educational Cultural Affairs Bureau of the State Department. This was separate from USIA, but we administered the programs overseas. One bureaucratic thing we were working on, and spent a lot of time on at the time, was to get coordinated country planning from the Washington side. There was never any problem in the field because the Cultural Affairs officer, who was the USIS person, also ran the cultural program. He reported both to the Washington office of USIA, and to the bureau in the State Department. But, there were two separate country plans. There was the CU country plan and the USIS country plan. To get these things coordinated, and even melded was a policy planning project. Eventually, the CU bureau was absorbed into USIA..

Q: 1969 to 1971 was the beginning of the Nixon administration. Did you see a shift in policy at all with this new administration?

SABLOSKY: I think we became aware of a narrower approach to what were doing, more of an emphasis on anti-communism, maybe a narrower approach to selection of speakers and those abroad to represent the United States under our program. I think that was on the conservative side of the political spectrum.

Q: There was a magazine at one point, I don't know if it was still going then, called Problems of Communism. Was that going?

SABLOSKY: Yes, it was, indeed.

Q: How was it felt? Was this considered an intellectual magazine or was it pointed toward trying to make the communists look bad?

SABLOSKY: No, not the latter. It was certainly an intellectual magazine. I think it probably, in a way, was the model for Dialogue. Nat's conception was to do something on the broader spectrum of American culture and civilization that would be on an intellectual level with Problems of Communism. Problems of Communism was a highly academic journal of theoretical articles on Marxist philosophy and the way it was being carried out in the Soviet Union. It was highly technical and theoretical. Abraham Brumberg, the editor of it, kept it on a very high level.

Q: I would think that there would always be the battle that continues to rage but the things you were doing with Dialogue and in Policy and Plans was really long-term, reaching out, making people understand about the United States, our system. Those who are practical would say, "We've got the Vietnam policy today, and why don't you concentrate everything on Vietnam?" I mean, did this battle rage while you were there?

SABLOSKY: Oh it was constant in USIA, the short-term ad hoc day-by-day policy

questions versus the long-term. George Shultz, I think, mentioned foreign policy being like a garden. You don't just go day-to-day with your garden, you have to water it and cultivate it, and ultimately, the flowers grow. You have to take care of it in good weather so that it will survive the bad weather;. That was the underlining philosophy, I guess, of our long term programs. Some of the long-term programs being the exchange programs, the arts programs, etc. Of course, those had been whittled away through the years, in favor of a more ad hoc approach. Advocacy is a word that comes up a lot. In recent years, advocacy has been regarded as the sole purpose of USIA programs. The longer term cultivating programs have languished.

Q: I think it is a mistake. Well, in the Policy and Plans, did you find yourself immersed in Vietnam?

SABLOSKY: No, not so much. I wasn't, anyway. Of course, it was there, but we went with the Secretary's and the President's statements, or William Bundy's, or whoever happened to be speaking at the time. There were clear policy guidelines being given by them. Our office was the policy liaison with Voice of America, for example. We monitored the Voice's broadcasts, to make sure they didn't violate the policy line. The Voice, of course, being very jealous of its independence and didn't like being guided by the office over at 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Q: Well, in 1971, you were off again.

SABLOSKY: In 1971, off to Bangkok as a Cultural Affairs officer.

Q: You were there from 1971 to?

SABLOSKY: 1973.

Q: Who was our ambassador and what was the embassy like when you got there?

SABLOSKY: The ambassador was Leonard Unger. It was a big embassy. Of course, there was big American business in Bangkok. There was the U.N. AID program in which Americans were involved. There was a U.S. AID program. There was an Army hospital. There were nearby bases. The huge air base was in southern Thailand. There was a big American military presence. There were many activities in Bangkok at that time.

Q: Who was your Public Affairs officer?

SABLOSKY: Jack Hedges, during that whole time.

Q: Cultural Affairs officer meant what at that time in Thailand?

SABLOSKY: Cultural Affairs officer meant contact with the universities and cultural community. We had branch posts in Chiang Mai, Song-kla, Khon Kaen... In those places, there were information centers - libraries - under our office's supervision. In Bangkok,

we had a bi-national center, called the AUA, American University Association. The binational center had a mixed Thai and American Board of Directors with a distinguished Thai president and with an American executive director, Jack Juergens at that time. Again, it was very comparable to the Amerika Haus in Hamburg. It had the same kinds of programs. I wasn't exactly in charge. Jack Juergens and I worked together on that. Our programs were very much coordinated. We would program lectures at the AUA and worked very closely with Jack. He helped to carry out the cultural programs. There was also a book publication program, a translation book program that was in our office. There was the exchange program. There was a Fulbright commission in Thailand. I was the vice chairman. There was a Thai chairman, and I was the vice chairman of the Fulbright Commission, which again had a board of Americans and Thais, with an American executive director, Doug Batson. The Commission was in charge of awarding Fulbright grants, supervising the selection of American Fulbright scholars who were moving to Thailand, and choosing those Thais who were going to the United States under the Fulbright program.

Q: How did this exchange program work? I would have thought you would have a lot more Thais wanting to go to the United States than Americans wanting to come to Thailand.

SABLOSKY: I think that is true. I don't remember the numbers, but the number of American Fulbrighters coming to Thailand was probably smaller than the number of Thais to go to the United States.

Q: Where were the Thais going in the United States? What were they mainly after?

SABLOSKY: They were mostly at the graduate level. They had come from the university in Thailand, and were going for an advanced degree in the United States, and went to a wide range of universities, depending on what university was interested in having a Thai scholar. Thais have a good record of going to the U.S., staying there two or three years, getting their degree and coming home to Thailand.

Q: What about cultural events? The Thais being an Oriental society. I would think they would be less interested in American culture than maybe the Europeans.

SABLOSKY: No, the Thais are extremely open culturally. They are very confident in their own culture. I didn't discover any xenophobia in Thailand. I think it is partly because of their history of having never been colonized from the west, with a brief Japanese occupation. But there is no chip on their shoulder. So, they were interested in other cultures, and always have been open to western culture. There is an interesting thing going on there; western countries working to bring western cultures to Thailand. The Germans, for example, the Goethe Haus in Bangkok, our counterpart, actually sponsored a Thai orchestra that played western music. They hired a conductor to come live in Thailand and conduct this Thai orchestra. The concertmaster, and really the leader, was a man named Usni Pramroj, the son of a former Premier, Seni Pramroj. An American project was under the auspices not of USIS or the U.S. Government, but of the JDR Third

Foundation. They brought to Bangkok a string quartet of American players which was to be in residence at the Department of Fine Arts in Bangkok, which was the center of Thai music. But the aim of this was to introduce western music into Thai curriculum. The quartet was led by Edgar Schenkman, a very fine musician who had been conductor of the Richmond Orchestra and the orchestra at Norfolk. He had been head of the opera department at Juilliard School. He was a first-rate musician. His wife was an accomplished violinist. There were just two other members. She was the first violinist in the quartet, and then there was a second violinist, and a wonderful young cellist. They played concerts of string quartet music, and taught western music at the conservatory, at this Department of Fine Arts. Of course, we took advantage of the presence of these people. That is, we arranged for them to play public concerts in Bangkok and in outlying places in Thailand. We even coordinated with other posts in southeast Asia to have the quartet travel under USIS auspices. The concerts were a demonstration of American accomplishment in string quartet playing. So, we tried to ride piggyback on such things as that.

Q: If I recall, early on, maybe when he was crowned Prince, the King of Thailand, I connect him with jazz.

SABLOSKY: Jazz, that's right. He played the clarinet and I think the saxophone, too. King Bhumiphal Aduljadet... At that time, the American pianist Agustin Anievas came to perform at the AUA, under our auspices. He gave a wonderful recital. We had word from the Queen's office that they would like to have a Anievas give a command performance at the palace. Our senior Thai staff member was M.R. Puckpring Thongyai - really, a member of the royal family. Through her, we had a direct line to the palace. She relayed the Palace's invitation to Gus Anievas and was prepared to make the necessary arrangements. Fortunately, he had the time and we went to the palace. The Queen herself was ill at the time, so the royal audience consisted of the King and his young daughter who was studying the piano. I got a kick out of being there.

Q: During this time, did Vietnam intrude at all?

SABLOSKY: Oh, it was ever-present. We were aware of the B-52s flying from Sataheep over in the direction of Vietnam, when we said we were not bombing Cambodia. Vietnam was a presence, but it wasn't talked about very much.

Q: Was there general interest in American culture and all in Thailand?

SABLOSKY: Oh, yes. Thai artists were very much influenced by the abstract expressionists. Art exhibits of Thai artists were often dominated by that kind of art. They were very good, too. Even pop art was coming into Thailand at that point. The Thais were very much abreast of whatever was going on. But, they were also very proud of their own culture and very protective of it.

Q: Was there much effort by the Thais to export their culture and what type of culture was coming out?

SABLOSKY: One of the people I got to know there was Princess Chumbhot, who was prominent in the art world in Thailand, what Usni Pramoj was to the music world. She had, in her small palace in Bangkok, a Thai music group, which she was very proud of. She asked me if there was a possibility, if she had a recording made of her group, that I could help her get it pressed and distributed in the United States. So, I actually got in touch with Moses Asch of Folkways Records and asked if he was interested in an authentic recording of Thai music, made with very fine equipment the Princess had access to in a studio in Bangkok. He was interested and we sent him a tape. He did publish a record called Drums of Thailand in the Folkways library, which is still extant.

Q: What about the performing arts, plays and things of this nature? Was there much, either in translation or in the original language that we were pushing?

SABLOSKY: We weren't pushing that sort of thing. We had musical groups and there was a theater group that came. In Thailand, there was enough of an American and British community that they had their own theater group and put on plays. Edgar Schenkman of the quartet also took a hand in the Bangkok Opera Company, which was mostly British and Americans, but some Thai singers, too. They put on the Menotti opera, The Medium. They did a very good job of it. So, there were things like that. We had visiting artists. The Duke Ellington orchestra came through under commercial sponsorship.

Q: Well, in 1973, whither?

SABLOSKY: Again, back to the USA for almost three years. This time, first as German desk officer and the policy officer in the European area of USIA. I seem to have this cultural identification overseas and the policy identification in the states.

Q: During this period, on the German desk, what were your concerns?

SABLOSKY: The biggest concern was establishing posts in East Germany. We didn't have anything in East Germany. The State Department head finally wangled a way for us to establish a USIS post in East Berlin. So, there was a lot going on in preparing for that. Our Public Affairs officer, Pick Littell, had already been chosen. We were designing the program and went over and looked at the premises.

Q: Did you get involved or give support or anything on the negotiations of this?

SABLOSKY: The main negotiations had taken place before, in the State Department.

Q: As German desk officer, you covered both, east and west?

SABLOSKY: Yes.

Q: How did you feel that the USIA effort in East Germany had never been there before? What were the problems?

SABLOSKY: The main problem was simply getting access to the public - or making it possible for the public to gain access to us. That was a painstaking job, to establish contact with the press, with the public, in general. We had a small library, and of course, people who came there were carefully watched by the police. They were obviously under surveillance. It was a very difficult situation, but little by little, the library did win a clientele.

Q: Did you feel that there were attempts by the German democratic republic, the East German government, to sabotage the access of our information, culturally?

SABLOSKY: As I say, there were policemen stationed across the street from the door and the people who went in were noted. That was a deterrent.

Q: Were you sensing any change in West Germany, toward the United States, at this point? Were we getting increasingly concerned, new generation, with Vietnam, and protest movements taking place all over Europe?

SABLOSKY: Let's see, 1973 to 1976. I'm trying to think what the issues might have been. I don't believe there was any movement at that time that we were following. Mainly, what was happening with the USIS posts was they were dwindling. We were closing America Houses and closing libraries in West Germany. But, we carried on an active program, within the limits of diminishing resources.

Q: Then, you moved over to the European area? What were you doing there?

SABLOSKY: It was all in the European area.

Q: It was all in the European area. How about France, while you were dealing with Europe?

SABLOSKY: There was a French desk officer, Mary Gawronski. There was a French desk just as there was a German desk. We were all in the area. When I went into it, it was "IWE," the Western European area, in which I was the German desk officer. Then, that was combined with the east European office, which was responsible for programs in the Soviet Union, etc. so that it was renamed "IEU," covering all of Europe, under Jock Shirley. That's when I became deputy policy officer, then policy officer for the European Area.

In the policy officer job, a big part of it was keeping track of the Voice of America, coordinating policy with the State Department. I attended meetings at the State Department in the European area there. We had a brown bag lunch with the policy officers from the other areas to discuss whatever problems there might be, and meetings at the Voice, a lot of telephoning to the Voice. Particularly after we had Eastern Europe in our area, the Voice was sometimes prickly because a number of the broadcasters and the broadcast services there were expatriates from those countries, who were really very

strongly opinionated. They would get their digs into some of their editorials, which we tried to ease a little bit. We tried to keep the Voice sounding cool and objective, as much as possible.

Q: Someone I was talking to, it was Jeff Dietrich, I think, with every USIS officer moving in the field and out, saying that work in Washington for the USIA is not much fun, because overseas you really are doing something. Whereas when you come back to Washington, you realize you are not dealing with much policy. It is more a support role, because the policy thing is handled by the Department of State. You feel secondary whereas you are really on the front line overseas. Did you find this?

SABLOSKY: Yes, indeed. As policy officer in the European area, one of the main things I was responsible for was monitoring the country plans. The country plan, of course, was a document that's written at the post, which is to set forth the objectives of the operation in the country in view of policy issues that exist between the U.S. and the country, which can be affected by information and cultural programs. The objectives are specified and the programs designed to carry them out are mapped out in the country plans. In the area office, we would read those country plans and studies them to make sure they are on track. That is a largely academic exercise, in a way, because overseas, it's pretty obvious what you have to do, without referring to a country plan. There, "on the ground," it's no longer at all academic; it's personal contact, whom you get to know, what you can sense that could be affected by what you do, what opportunities you can take advantage of within the scope of the budget. While there are big worries about budgets in Washington, and always the feeling there wasn't going to be enough money, overseas, I never knew of a really good idea that money couldn't be found for.

Q: 1976, whither?

SABLOSKY: 1976 to London. At the end of the bicentennial year, I went there as Culture Affairs officer. For several years, they had had so-called "super CAOs" in London. These were top-notch academics - Wayne Wilcox and Robin Winks, Cleanth Brooks, Charles Ritcheson had been academic Cultural Affairs officers there, imported from American universities to be in touch with the British universities, at a high level. For some reason, in 1976, it was thought it was time to go back to what we call a professional CAO in London, and I was it. So, I was the first after some years. I had my work cut out for me because it was a time of dwindling resources, dwindling staff; and in England, the opportunities are so great - there is so great a demand for our participation, so great a potential for activity - that you just find yourself saying "no" a lot of the time. To me, it was very frustrating because there were so many things you could do, but you can't do, because there isn't the staff or money for it.

Q: You were there from 1976 to when?

SABLOSKY: 1979.

Q: In a way, one almost wonders what we would do in the cultural field, because the ties

are so close that it sort of goes on... It's like the dog barks at the caravan, but the caravan moves on. In a way, no matter what you did, these ties would be back and forth.

SABLOSKY: Well, that is certainly true. We talked about the special relationship, and I think that does exist. Of course, there is a tie of the language, many jokes are made about it. But there are a lot of misconceptions, too. It was worth a shot to try to demonstrate the vitality and depth of cultural achievement in the United States. Of course, the British academics know our writers and so forth. In the field of American music, some of the Brits knew more about "doo-wop" than I did - and they knew jazz. But they weren't that conversant with American concert music. That was a field in which I had some expertise, so I gave lectures, in a number of universities, on recent trends in American concert music. Again, the field of American studies - as it had been in Hamburg - was very important to us. Many British universities were establishing departments of American studies; alongside the departments that associated American literature and British literature, they were now teaching film, jazz, folklore, and American literature as American literature. There was an opportunity here for us to reinforce that and encourage it. We certainly did that. One thing we did, for example, was to sponsor a study which would coordinate the holdings in American studies in the libraries at all the British universities, so one university would know what another university had. Making these connections was very important to us. We managed to come up with \$25,000 to support the project, and they were able to make a catalogue that would be used for coordination among the libraries. We helped to sponsor other activities of the British Association of American Studies. Whatever we could do to strengthen that movement, we did.

Q: What one always hears about the chattering class in England and Great Britain, these are the people who appear on TV and talk shows, write columns for the major papers. That is a relatively small group. They are not quite the same as the intellectuals, say, in France, but they sort of pass for that. Did you mark these as being one of your targets?

SABLOSKY: Journalists, in general, were among the people we made an effort to be in touch with. Not so much for the Cultural Affairs Section as for the Press Attache and the Information section. It seems to be a little compartmentalized. We, of course, had contacts with the cultural writers of the newspapers, particularly, the music critics, the dance critics, the art critics, people like that. One example - when the American poet Robert Lowell died, an acquaintance of mine at the National Theater liked the idea of arranging a memorial poetry reading in the Embassy auditorium, with some of the leading actors from the National Theater taking part. Harold Pinter insisted on taking part; he wanted to read. Ronald Pickup was another participant. Helen Mirren attended, but she didn't actually read. Anyway, it was a well-attended program, invitational, for a very select audience with wonderful cooperation of the National Theater in honor of an American poet who had many admirers in England. Another example: When the BBC Symphony performed Elliott Carter's Piano Concerto, we arranged for a conversation in the embassy auditorium between Carter, who was there for the performance, Charles Rosen, the American pianist who was the soloist, and William Glock, who for years had been head of BBC music, to discuss Carter's music on the stage of the Embassy auditorium. Again, the audience was a carefully selected group of academics, journalists,

political and cultural leaders... The Queen's silver jubilee took place in that year, 1979, I guess it was, or maybe 1978. Anyway, we wanted to do something about that, so we arranged what we called a series of Jubilee Lectures in the embassy auditorium. Bill Leuchtenberg from Columbia University came and gave the first address. We had four lectures, Leuchtenberg, David Owen, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, talking about the transatlantic alliance and its history, Anthony Quinton, about American philosophy, and George W. Ball, who was Undersecretary of State. The lectures were then published as a book called America and Britain. So, that was pretty substantial. Also for the Queen's silver jubilee, we latched onto the American Ballet Theater, which was in Europe at the time. They actually had a couple of free dates, and with the cooperation of the State Department (Jean Lashly, in the Office of Cultural and Educational Affairs (CU), to be specific - this was before CU was integrated into USIA) we got some extra money to bring them over to London to do a week's season in honor of the Queen's jubilee, under the auspices of the embassy and the State Department, with an additional contribution from a private-sector co-sponsor, American Express, I think it was.

Q: It would strike me that you were really dealing with, as you say, the field was so great that you must have really had a crush in you time and efforts, didn't you?

SABLOSKY: Yes, indeed. It was very exciting...the people we dealt with... For instance, when Philip Roth was in town, we (my wife and I, that is) had a brunch at which he met fellow writers like Malcolm Bradbury and V.S. Pritchett and Angus Wilson, Eric Mottram, the poet and professor of American literature at the University of London... We had the same kind of thing at the time that Steve Reich, the composer was performing in London with his group. We had an evening set aside for Steve Reich, and some of the younger British composers - Michael Nyman and Brian Eno, and several others of the avant garde. We could do things like that. You had such easy access to all these people. It was wonderful to become acquainted with them.

Q: How did you find the music and cultural type critics of the British papers? This has been your thing before, and how did you find them, particularly in dealing with American things?

SABLOSKY: I thought the level of criticism in London was quite respectable. They did not condescend to American music. I think American music was respected in that quarter. London, of course, was and I think probably still is, the most musical city in the world. There is more going on musically in London than anyplace else that I can think of. There are four or five orchestras, countless chamber music groups, two major opera companies, and a smaller opera company. It is just amazing what goes on in London. It has gotten a lot more expensive, but it was comparatively inexpensive at that time, certainly less than what you would pay for similar programs in New York.

Q: Well, 1979, you were off again.

SABLOSKY: No, in 1979, I was back in the USA. Unfortunately, my wife was ill. She had cancer just before we went to London, and was being treated while we were in

London. She was in remission for a year in London, but in the end, the cancer returned, so we went back to the United States for further treatment. Unfortunately, she died in 1980.

Q: That's too bad.

SABLOSKY: I had retired at the end of 1979, so I could spend more time with her. So, that was where the career ended.

Q: Have you kept up with any of the cultural work since that time?

SABLOSKY: Yes, in fact, in 1981, after Pat died, I was called back to Europe. Lee Johnson was the coordinator for USIS' Regional Resources Unit in London, and handled programming throughout Europe. Ray Benson, at that time was PAO in Yugoslavia, and they asked me to do a lecture tour, talking about American music, mostly in Eastern Europe. So, I went to Greece, to Athens and Thessaloniki, to Austria, (Vienna). I went to Skopje and Titograd, and Zagreb and Ljubljana in Yugoslavia. I was supposed to have gone to Bulgaria, but the Bulgarians decided that they didn't want me, and wouldn't give me a visa. Nevertheless, I did go to Prague, and lectured there. That was an experience that I will never forget.

Q: How so?

SABLOSKY: Well, in Prague, Western music, and especially avant-garde music were considered subversive. The post there - Mike Hoffman, the PAO, and the CAO Alice Lemaistre - were in touch with what was called the Jazz Section of the Composer's Union in Prague. The Jazz Section invited me to talk to the membership about current trends in American concert music. The Jazz Section wasn't just musicians, but it was journalists and university people, too. They assembled an audience of 120 people to hear me talk and play tapes of recent American music. The president of the Jazz Section, Karel Srp, was harassed by the police. We didn't know until the last moment if they would let the lecture take place. They did. Not only did I give my lecture, but they played for me some examples of avant garde Czech music I certainly had never heard before. Music was for them a lifeline to the west; it was a symbol of freedom of thought and innovation, for which the Czechs were starving. The Czech government was right to consider it subversive. It's very important, jazz itself, but also all the work of avant garde composers in Europe and the U.S.; the jazz section published a magazine - which was later banned - about trends in western music, including rock music and jazz, and so forth. It was quite moving to see this turnout for American music among people whom it endangered.

Q: How about when you were in Yugoslavia. How were you received there?

SABLOSKY: Oh, very well. I gave my illustrated lectures mostly in music schools, at the universities there, where people wanted to keep up with musical trends in Europe and the United States; these audiences were often pretty well-informed about contemporary

music in Europe and had more than a little knowledge too of what went on in the United States. In Yugoslavia, of course, they were much more open to the west than in Prague. But, out in a place like Titograd...

Q: Which is now known as “Podgorica...”

SABLOSKY: That’s right. They really hadn’t had much contact with American concert music. One of the lectures I had prepared was called “American Music and the European Tradition,” where I tried to show how American composers had at first tried to follow the established European musical tradition but then had split from it to create something new and uniquely American. Of course, in the process, I tried also to convey something of the openness of American society, its innovativeness and creativity, and the accomplishments of our composers and performers.

Q: It sounds like it was quite a trip.

SABLOSKY: It was.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop, don’t you think?

SABLOSKY: I think so.

Q: Great. Well, I really appreciate this. This has been fun.

SABLOSKY: For me, too. Thank you.

End of interview