

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

**ROBERT K. GEIS**

*Interviewed by: Lewis Hoffacker*  
*Initial interview date: April 21, 1999*  
*Copyright 2001 ADST*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Background	
Born in Havana, Cuba of American parents	
Raised in Houston, Texas	
Rice University; American University	
Entered Foreign Service - 1962	
Buenos Aires, Argentina - USIS	1963-1964
State Department - Foreign Service Institute	1964
Romanian Language Training	
Bucharest, Romania - Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer	1964-1966
Ceausescu	
East-West exhibits	
Security	
Environment	
Alexandru Ivasiuc	
Cultural life	
Guayaquil, Ecuador - USIS - Cultural Affairs Officer	1966-1968
Programs	
Environment	
Missionaries	
Washington, DC - USIA - Training	1968-1969
Nixon's Romania visit	
Bucharest, Romania - USIS - Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer	1969-1972
American Library	
U.S. exhibits	
U.S. relations	
Ceausescu	

Washington, DC - USIA - Recruitment Watergate Minorities	1972-1973
Johns Hopkins University [SAIS]; George Washington University - Student	1973-1974
Monterrey, California - Russian Language Study	1974
Leningrad, USSR Environment Apollo-Soyuz docking Media Exchange programs Baltic Republics Soviet-American film production <u>The Blue Bird</u> Jane Fonda Cultural Life Anti-Semitism Security Human rights U.S. relations KGB U.S. media	1974-1978
Trinidad and Tobago - USIS - Public Affairs Officer Environment Prime Minister Eric Williams Cultural affairs	1978-1983
Washington, DC - USIA - Caribbean Affairs Grenada invasion Havana visit USIA economy	1983-1985
Florence, Italy - USIS - Public Affairs Officer Environment “Star Wars” program Venice G-7 summit Florentines	1985-19??
Postscript USSR collapse USIA and State relationship Communism	

## INTERVIEW

*Q: This is Lew Hoffacker interviewing Bob Geis for the Oral History Program, and without further ado, Bob Geis.*

GEIS: Thank you. My father was the son of Volga German immigrants. My grandfather left Russia to avoid the Czar's military draft. In fact, not serving in the military became kind of a family tradition for us. Religiously speaking, on that side of the family, we were Baptists. The family seemed to value the democracy that was part of the credo of the Baptist Church. On my mother's side, the family was Daughters of the American Revolution. They were country club Republicans, Episcopalian - in fact, I was myself christened Episcopalian, but as an adult I would eventually identify more with my paternal influences and kind of reject my maternal influences. My mother, unfortunately, died in 1947, when I was just eight, and I'm certain that that had quite a profound effect on me. I was born on October the 28<sup>th</sup>, 1939, in Havana, Cuba. My father was a geologist who was with an oil company in Cuba at the time; however, they were not very lucky. They did not find any oil, and the family returned to the U.S. in 1940, when I was just one year old. But I've always sort of felt that I was influenced somehow by this happenstance of being born in Havana. I've always sort of had an affinity for things Latin American. I knew I eventually would have to choose Cuban or U.S. citizenship, and so I've continued to sort of nurture an interest in things Hispanic. I enjoyed Latin American music and dance, remembering such luminaries as Xavier Cugat and his orchestra in that period, Carmen Miranda, '40s movies that were located in South America such as Argentina and Brazil. I was raised in Houston Texas from 1940 to 1961, went to public schools in the '40s and the '50s. We were the original rock 'n' roll generation, and we were also the original generation-gap generation. Although we were basically not particularly rebellious kids - in fact, far from it - we did disagree with our parents in this area of music at least. I graduated from high school in 1957 and was fortunate enough to go on from there and was accepted into Rice University in Houston, where I completed a bachelor's degree in history and languages in 1961. During that period I had summer jobs to help put my way through college, and they included such things as roofing and, more interestingly, I was for one year an oil field "roughneck." One of the things I discovered there was that I was very certain I never wanted to be a manual laborer. However, at the same time, I enjoyed a lot of the kind of interesting characters with whom I worked during that period. Another sort of Texas experience at that time was when I was working with some young fellows at an aluminum factory, and it must have been about 1960 or so, they dared me into riding a bull in rodeo, which was probably one of the stupidest things I ever did, but it was memorable, to say the least.

*Q: Not Gillie's?*

GEIS: No, no, this was a real bull. At a real live rodeo in Katy, Texas.

*Q: Not Symington.*

GEIS: A little country rodeo.

*Q: Well, how long did you sit on the bull?*

GEIS: About two seconds. That was the *smartest* thing I ever did, was to get off as fast as I could. That's for sure.

I was a somewhat nerdy kid, well mannered, '50s style teenager, sort of a tactful person, and in college I began to think about the possibility of a diplomatic career, but it was very difficult, if not impossible, to find anybody in Houston who was familiar with the Foreign Service at that time. I took the Foreign Service Exam in 1960 and failed it, and I realized that I desperately needed graduate work in the relevant foreign service fields. So I was at that time ready to leave Houston and to leave Texas and to leave my parental influences, and at that time, in fact, I had my first vote, in 1960, and to my eternal embarrassment, I voted for Richard Nixon. It was the first and last time I ever voted for a Republican. So as I began to think about the Foreign Service career I realized that there were probably at least two possibilities here, and I applied to the Thunderbird School, which would have prepared me for a career in overseas business, and at the same time I applied for several more traditional foreign service schools, among which was the School of International Service at American University. And although I was accepted in both schools, I eventually decided I would be more comfortable with a career related to government service, to representing the American people abroad and their foreign policy than I would be in business, which I sort of felt had somewhat narrower horizons. So I was off to Washington. From 1961 to 1963, I spent a year of graduate work, studies in international relations at the School of International Service at American University. I retook the Foreign Service Exam in 1961 and passed it and then passed the orals. At that time I renounced my Cuban citizenship—it was necessary at that time to do it, and there was no question about my decision there. I also took the military induction physical because that was imperative, and I failed it due to a history of asthma, and thus I continued the family tradition of not serving in the military. While I was in Washington, I first learned of USIA and its careers in information and press affairs, educational and cultural affairs, and it sounded to me that it would be of greatest interest to me, and I think it was a good decision. I've never regretted going in that direction. On September the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1962, I entered the duty at the grand sum of \$5,625 *per annum*, class 8, Foreign Service career reserve officer, or as we were better known, JOT - junior officer trainee. And began my career. We had one year of training at that time in Washington. It seemed like it was lasting forever. We were all so anxious to get overseas, and this included for me Spanish language training. We were given a selection of countries that we might opt for, and I asked for Buenos Aires, Argentina, as a training post and was fortunate and got my first choice.

These were fascinating years in Washington. There was the drama of the Cuban Missile Crisis and Kennedy's programs such as the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. Also at this time, USIA was the beneficiary of a very fine appointment by Kennedy of

Edward Murrow as the director, so there was an excitement, and *élan*, in Washington which I don't think has ever been recaptured. Moreover, he was the finest director I think USIA ever had. In the summer of 1963 I flew to Chile for some summer skiing and then went on to Buenos Aires.

Buenos Aires was an excellent training post for a young bachelor. BA was kind of strange and exciting. It excited as a great metropolis would, the European flavor with a Latin beat, which was the tango. But BA was strangely remote in some ways. Of course, it's down at the very bottom of the world. It seemed to me in some ways inadequate in its ability to realize its great economic potential, a politically immature nation still at that time obsessed with the exiled dictator Juan Perón. There was a certain undercurrent of anti-Americanism existing at that time, too. The United States was called *el coloso del norte* - 'the colossus of the north.'

USIS in Buenos Aires had a large and varied program, with several branch posts, and in the year I was there I traveled extensively, met and escorted several prominent Americans, including for instance Aaron Copeland, the composer, and I escorted the Robert Shaw Chorale. The Chorale performed in Buenos Aires' magnificent opera house, the Teatro Colón. We also had significant information programs promoting the Alliance for Progress, and I worked quite a bit doing that sort of thing. On a sad note, I was in Buenos Aires at the time of the Kennedy assassination.

But Buenos Aires turned out to be a brief Latin American interlude. After one year of training, I was recalled to Washington to begin a totally different experience. I was selected in a rather hush-hush fashion to train for work in Communist Eastern Europe, and specifically in Romania. The reason things were kind of hush-hush was that I was going to be the first to go to a Communist country without transferring into the State Department, which was the policy at the time. In other words, I was going to go openly as a USIS officer, although there was no USIS in existence in these countries. We were considered, and we were called, the press and cultural section of whatever, the legation or embassy, and in the case, there was a legation in Bucharest. After six months of Romanian language training (I found that Spanish helped quite a bit in that, being as Romania is a Romance language), I was ready to go on to Bucharest.

Bucharest at the time was called the People's Republic of Romania. This was a Latin culture in sort of a Slavic sea. It was a testing ground at that time for Lyndon Baines Johnson's policy of bridge-building toward select Communist countries. In other words, the idea was that we would select certain Communist countries that seemed more amenable to better relation with the United States and concentrate on those countries. Romania was one of the countries. And it was a policy which I find definitely bore fruit at the end of the decade of the '60s in a very interesting way.

*Q: Was that Ceausescu?*

GEIS: He was not yet president, no. He became president while I was there. In December of 1964, Minister William Crawford presented his credentials - or re-presented them, I

might say - to the old dictator of Romania, who was called Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and it was at that time then that the U.S. legation was raised to embassy level. Later on, Ceausescu became the head of the Party.

*Q: If you want to talk about Crawford and the way he ran the embassy, feel free.*

GEIS: Yes, he was a fine ambassador, he and his wife, Barbara. He was very excited, I might add, at being there when the legation became an embassy and being able to present his credentials and such. He was followed by Richard H. Davis and his wife, Harriet. Davis was probably the best ambassador and the best ambassadorial pair that I ever had in my career. He was a person of great intellect, style, and a real pro. Our program in Romania was rather limited, but at that time we had a wonderful graphic arts of the USA exhibit. This was early in 1965. It was one of USIA's best in a series of what are called East-West exhibits, for which young language-speaking U.S. guides were recruited in the U.S. and sent out to interpret the exhibit to the host country. This recruiting of guides was a task I was later to become involved in. At that time, the embassy had as a Romanian employee one of the country's brightest young writers, Alexandru Ivasiuc. It was truly unusual to have a person of his caliber as an advisor to the Political Section. And through Alex I was fortunate in meeting a number of young artists, writers, and intellectuals of Bucharest. This became sort of a pattern in my career, and one of its most rewarding aspects. I also began a modest personal collection of art through these contacts.

*Q: Excuse me, this was a commie regime, so you were being watched all the time.*

GEIS: Absolutely.

*Q: And this great guy who was your conduit into the intellectual community was obviously reporting back to his masters.*

GEIS: That's right.

*Q: And so the embassy was, in effect, penetrated.*

GEIS: Yes.

*Q: But that's all right. You learned to live in that environment, and you didn't say anything that would put you in jail or PNGed.*

GEIS: Yes, you're absolutely right. The thing that was interesting about Alex is that, although obviously he was vetted by the authorities to come and work for the embassy, he was somewhat of a free agent, I think. He really was. He was a person of real artistic stature, and as I said, it was extremely unusual to have a person like this in our embassy, and he was helping the Political Section do some reporting that was very unusual in its ability to penetrate into Romanian Communist society.

*Q: Did he survive?*

GEIS: Oh, very much so.

*Q: In other words, he died a normal death.*

GEIS: Well, he didn't die a normal death, but he did survive. In fact, I don't think I made a note of that. I'm glad you mentioned it. Now I'll just leaf ahead and mention the way he died because it was very sad. He ended up, once he left the embassy's employment, he went on to a really distinguished career as a writer and very tragically died in the famous Bucharest earthquake. He was walking down a street, and the thing fell on his head. It was just incredible.

*Q: And he was not old.*

GEIS: No, he would have been in his '40s. It was a terrible loss. It really was. Of a good friend, too.

But anyway, to go on, some of the intellectuals I met at that time later gained reputations in this country. They include the director Andrei Serban and the noted writer Petru Popescu. This was 1964, and I had just received what became one of the major attractions in the city. I had a 1964 Mustang convertible, racing green, and this car, I have to admit, was the talk of Bucharest. In fact, I would often have to kind of push my way through crowds of people to get to the car. I'm not sure my profile should have been that high.

*Q: Your profile was pretty high.*

GEIS: It was not as high should have been, but was a little too high.

*Q: What a great car. I hope you kept it.*

GEIS: No, afraid not. I went ahead and sold it while I was there, before I left, but it was a lot of fun. One of the memorable episodes from our exchange program at this time was the visit of the noted American writer John Updike.

*Q: Oh, boy.*

GEIS: His visit is recounted in his work *Bech: A Book*, in the chapter called "Bech in Romania," in which I was portrayed with considerable artistic license as Philips. Updike enjoyed, as he put it, and I quote, "mocking his fellow Americans," and I found that he was a fairly mocking individual. I found that he could be surprisingly insensitive and not a very sympathetic personality.

*Q: How interesting. Very interesting.*

GEIS: Also at this time, we had a modest Fulbright program - a student exchange program - and this program brought a bright, attractive young linguist to Bucharest in the

fall of 1965. Arlene Jennings and I were married in June of 1966 in Bucharest. We said "Da" at the People's Council, which was a civil ceremony, and we said "Ja" at the Lutheran Church. And then we honeymooned at the embassy's villa in the Carpathian Mountains. This was a wonderful retreat which we had in this Communist country sort of for rest and recuperation. It was at the famous resort town of Sinaia.

But it was now time to move on and to leave Romania, and I was going to be assigned back to South America, to be precise, to Guayaquil, Ecuador. Guayaquil was not the most appealing post in South America, but this was the Vietnam era and I was happy, as a young newlywed, to be anywhere but Vietnam. I was assigned as a vice consul and cultural attaché to USIS in Guayaquil. The program issues at this time were dominated by Vietnam and anticommunism, the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. Explaining the United States in the '60s was a real challenge, but we made use of the excellent binational center program. We had a very fine center in Guayaquil, and we had branch centers in coastal Ecuador, too. Some of the specific programs that we had ranged from such things as a company of performers doing *Showboat*, came to us from Los Angeles. And then while I was there, there was a major exhibit of the Gemini capsule in Guayaquil and in the coastal provinces. I also worked during that period with the State Department overseas schools program. We assisted the local school, which was the Colegio Americano de Guayaquil, the American High School in Guayaquil, assisted it in getting grants from the State Department, which were given to certain binational secondary schools. As usual, I enjoyed getting to know artists and writers of Guayaquil and the capital, Quito. The Ecuadorians, especially the people of the coast, which are known as *Costeños*, were lively and fun-loving and thoroughly enjoyed their fiestas. The dance rhythm that was most popular was the *cumbia*, and the Ecuadorians, the Guayaquileños, would party till late into the night. On the down side, Guayaquil had some of the grimmest slums in South America.

Another interesting cultural experience that my wife and I had at that time was to visit the Amazon jungle of Ecuador. The Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries had an establishment out in the jungle, and this was of considerable interest to my wife, who was a linguist. And they were in the process of translating and recording the local languages, which had not been written in any form, and then translating the Bible into these languages. It was very interesting to be out there. We had our first experience in lepidoptery as we went around catching butterflies here and there, and it was interesting to see how the missionaries lived. They had such amenities as freezers, and I'll never forget looking into one of their freezers and seeing a little monkey sitting in a plastic bag next to a frozen fish that looked completely prehistoric. I guess it had come out of the rivers.

*Q: What denomination were they? Do you remember?*

GEIS: Oh, no I don't.

*Q: But they were Protestant.*

GEIS: They were Protestant, yes, absolutely. And it may have been more than one denomination, as a matter of fact.

*Q: But you didn't run into the fundamentalism that is the issue now.*

GEIS: Well, not extreme fundamentalism, no, I wouldn't say that. I mean, they were very much dedicated to the proposition of translating the Bible for proselytizing the natives, but there certainly was not the extremism. And on top of that, they were very fine linguists who were, indeed, preserving this language. I mean, it had a significant purpose, too.

So however, time was approaching to return to the United States. I was selected for and returned to Washington for a mid-career training program, which was supposed to bring us up to date with things going on in the U.S., and this was the late '60s, and a lot was going on. We were supposed to hone our skills in contemporary issues such as economic and sociopolitical changes in the U.S. It was, as I said, a period of great ferment in Washington and in the country in general.

*Q: This is USIA, not... You weren't with other agencies.*

GEIS: No, this was a USIA training program. But this year, 1969, as we went from 1968 to 1969, was to prove a real landmark year for me personally. My Romanian experience and my knowledge of the language gave me the opportunity of a lifetime when I was selected to escort a Romanian TV team in covering the U.S. space program including the Apollo 11 launch. So off I went with my Romanians in tow, and I we visited Huntsville, Alabama, where we met the great German rocket scientist Hermann Oberth, and then went on to Cape Kennedy where we watched the Apollo 11 launch to the moon and met Walter Cronkite. At the same time that this was going on, we had the new Nixon Administration coming into office, and things were brewing again in Romania. I'll make a small digression here to kind of mention what brought this about.

Nixon, who we discovered later on was a man of long memory, during the '60s, when he was out of office, had made a trip to Bucharest as a private citizen, and he had been received royally by the Romanian Communist Party and the government of dictator Nicolai Ceausescu. So once he was in office, he selected Romania as the first Communist country for a visit by an incumbent American president since the war. So this was what was in the offing as I was making this trip with the Romanian TV people. As usual on such cases, as series of agreements was being prepared before the Nixon visit, and one of the agreements was to be reciprocal opening of cultural centers in the two countries. Earlier, actually in the spring of '69, as the agreement was being negotiated, I lobbied and was finally selected to return to Bucharest as the first director of what was called the Biblioteca Americana, the American Library. It was going to be the most frustrating but ultimately the most rewarding assignment in my career.

Right in the middle of the visit of the TV team, while we were in Houston for the moon landing, I was abruptly called back to Washington and sent to Bucharest for the Nixon

visit. And then I stayed on. So here we were, going back to Bucharest all of a sudden. Our very beloved Dick Davis was still ambassador, but he was due to leave in just a very short while. The Nixon visit actually prompted a sort of a reunion of our colleagues of our previous tour in Bucharest. The visit was a great success and was the subject of a USIA documentary film and culminated, most importantly for me, in the signing of the cultural center agreement. So here we were, beginning to work on this cultural center. It was an interminable and frustrating process, mainly due to Romanian recalcitrance in showing us suitable sites.

Meanwhile, in a personal note, on December the 21<sup>st</sup>, 1969, my daughter, Katherine Jennings Geis, was born in the famous hostage hospital in Wiesbaden, West Germany, and my life was changed forever, as all parents know.

Putting together the American Library in Bucharest was a unique experience. When we were finally shown an acceptable complex of what were 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings - this took a couple of years, actually, to locate this complex - we began to work on renovation. USIA in Washington put considerable resources of money and talent to create a vibrant venue, including a 10,000-volume library, a multimedia theater, and exhibit space. My wife Arlene created an English teaching program. At that time I also recruited an excellent local staff for the library. The library was finally inaugurated in January of 1972 with much fanfare by USIA Director Frank Shakespeare and the Romanian deputy foreign minister. But at that time only the library was ready to go, so we made a virtue out of necessity and had two other library openings as each part of the complex was completed. The second opening of the library was the theater part, and in April, again of '72, this part was opened. Our guest of honor was the famed author James Michener, and at that time I was pleased to receive from Michener the Agency's Meritorious Honor Award for my work in putting the library together.

The first performing arts group in the library was the wonderful William Warfield and a group of his friends who were doing excerpts from *Porgy and Bess*. Finally in June of '72, the third opening of the library actually was the opening of our exhibit facilities, and that event brought Secretary of State William Rogers. Our first exhibit was a modern American art exhibit from the University of Texas at Austin, the very fine Michener collection. On the political side during this period, although we didn't know it at the time, Romanians were helping with contacts with the Chinese which would lead eventually to Nixon's historic visit to China.

*Q: So Romania was a fair-haired boy.*

GEIS: Very much so under Nixon, because he remembered well what they'd done to him.

*Q: But even under Johnson - Bridges to Eastern Europe.*

GEIS: Yes, that's right.

*Q: It's interesting that Romania should have been that. That was strategy.*

GEIS: Well, one of the things that contributed to that, too, of course, was the fact that Romania, during the Czech crisis, in 1968, had refused to let Soviet troops cross the country to go to Czechoslovakia. And so that endeared Romanians to the United States, as you can imagine, and it was a further reason why we chose to lavish a certain amount of attention on Romania, including such things as most favored nation treatment, which I think - I'm not sure whether it was the Nixon visit, but sometime around that period - Romanians were given MFN.

*Q: And Ceausescu, as I recall, came to Houston in the '70s. Now, you weren't in Bucharest at that time.*

GEIS: I would have been, yes, but I honestly don't remember that at all.

*Q: Well, I remember he arrived. I was sort of surprised. There was a lot of fanfare, and I assume he went to Washington.*

GEIS: I'm sure he would have, yes. So he had a visit to the U.S.

*Q: They gave him the benefit of the doubt in those days.*

GEIS: Yes, well, the man really went crazy later on.

*Q: Yes, well, we know that.*

GEIS: At this time he was viewed - in fact, even particularly because of his actions vis-à-vis the Czech invasion - he had gained a certain amount of popularity in Romania. I mean, he was not beloved by any means, and later on he was despised, but at that time he was viewed as sort of a nationalist, and there was a certain positive feeling about him.

*Q: But he hadn't built his palace by then, had he?*

GEIS: No, he had not. He hadn't started that.

*Q: Then he was really around the bend.*

GEIS: And the cult of personality was beginning to be built at that time, but not to the extreme that occurred later on. Anyway, to go on, I was now due a full Washington assignment, which I'd never really had before. I was never really very happy working in the bureaucracy of USIA in Washington, but I enjoyed at that time, living in the model planned community of Reston, Virginia, for two years. I was heading up USIA's recruiting division. This lasted for about a year in 1973. This gave me an opportunity for some managerial experience and included running our East-West exhibit guide program, which I mentioned before, the recruiting of these guides. And it also included recruitment of minorities. It was an amazing time to be in Washington again, as the national trauma which became known as Watergate was working itself out. During this period, the head

librarian in Bucharest was given permission to visit the United States. While in Romania, she had been very candid with me in discussion her contacts with the notorious Romanian secret police, the Securitate. And I duly reported on this. So, at that time, the CIA, when this woman came to Washington, asked me to continue my conversations with her while she was there. After very careful consideration, I refused. I felt very strongly that a previous misidentification of me as a CIA agent should not be given any actual basis by any action of mine. Specifically what had happened was that I had been mentioned in an East German propaganda publication which was called "Who's Who in the CIA." In fact, I have to confess, I'm not a big fan of the CIA. I think with a few exceptions the CIA personnel I have known overseas have been amoral, abnormal personalities, and I frankly wonder how they recruit them.

In 1974, I was selected, after lobbying for the job, for the new branch public affairs officer position in the recently established consulate general in Leningrad. As a result of the policy of detente with the USSR, this consulate had been opened. So I started doing graduate work in Russian and Soviet affairs at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and also a course at George Washington University. Then, in the summer of 1974, we packed up and moved to Monterey, California, to learn Russian. This was to be a year course at the well-known Defense Language Institute in Monterey. Ours was an experiment based on the notion that was prevalent in USIA and in the State Department at that time than the training out at Monterey was better than the training at FSI, and while it was delightful to be in Monterey for a year, the DLI experience, as far as I'm concerned, was a mistake. We were a group of three USI officers with our wives and we were given a separate class and teachers, but we were being taught within a rigid system created for the army's needs for surveillance training, and thus emphasizing comprehension with little attention paid to conversation, and we had to constantly fight to get conversational training and to get away from the highly specialized military vocabulary. In other words, we learned such things as how to say "barbed wire entanglement," which we didn't expect to be using an awful lot while we were in Leningrad. However, we did get through the course, but to the best of my knowledge, after our complaints, this experiment was never repeated.

So we were off to Leningrad. It's hard for me to summarize briefly four years in that brooding and sinister yet beautiful and exhilarating Russian land. We were lucky to be in Leningrad, one of the great planned cities, whose grandeur remained even if somewhat tarnished, lucky also to be in an apartment in the heart of old St. Petersburg and not in a complex for foreigners, as many of our colleagues were, particularly in Moscow. We were two blocks away from the old Winter Palace, now the Hermitage, and one could not help but become a devotee of this great city, of its history, and its culture. At this time, U.S.-Soviet relations witnessed the heyday and the beginning of decline of detente. Shortly after my arrival, the Apollo-Soyuz docking experiment took place, and the Russians played this event to the hilt as proof of their technical equivalence with the U.S. They used the image of the docking of the space ships as a parallel with the 1945 meeting of the Russian and U.S. troops in Germany. And it was interesting, and my contacts in the Soviet media at the time were surprisingly friendly, emphasizing this remembrance of the war and our meeting and our being allies in the war. In fact, more than at any other time,

particularly the media contacts were friendliest. The Cosmonauts and the Astronauts later visited Leningrad, with much fanfare, and I was involved in the first of many escort duties over the years.

Our educational and cultural exchanges were very active at this time, under a bilateral agreement between the two countries. We worked with the infamous Goskoncert, which is the Soviet State Concert Bureau. I was involved in implementing our exchange program, not only for Leningrad but also for the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. I came to know Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, their capitals, and their stalwart people very well. These republics were permitted a bit more cultural freedom of action by the Soviets, so that American touring groups often were scheduled there. I was, in fact, one of the few more senior officers who was permitted by the U.S. Government to visit these republics. Our consul general in Leningrad, for example, was not allowed to visit since we deemed that such a visit would come too close to recognizing the incorporation of the formerly independent republics into the USSR. At the time of my arrival, one of the more unique exchanges was in progress. It was the first Soviet-American film co-production. And at that time I met and assisted the director George Cukor and several of his stellar cast members, including Elizabeth Taylor, Cicely Tyson, Jane Fonda. Fonda was also in the cast, and I made a pointed effort to be cool toward her for her Vietnam activities. She thought the Russians would welcome her with open arms, which proved not to be the case. They apparently didn't like this radical, even if she was pro-North Vietnam. As it turned out, unfortunately, *The Blue Bird*, the film, was a resounding flop in the U.S. and was duly christened by the critics as "The Blue Turkey."

Leningrad at that point was selected for one of our major East-West exhibits. This was called "Technology in the American Home." It was in January of 1976, and we worked at that time with some old friends from USIA's Exhibit Division, but we also entertained them and their language guides who'd come over for the exhibit at the consulate's *dacha* on the outskirts of Leningrad. Like the villa in Romania, the *dacha* was a wonderful retreat from the Leningrad routine, both for cross-country skiing in the winter and for water sports out in the Gulf of Finland in the summer. But back to this exhibit. I wanted to mention that they were truly effective propaganda vehicles, well worth every cent we every spent on them.

In 1976, in the performing arts area, we had a major country music show headed by Roy Clark, and later we had the superb American Conservatory Theater (ACT) of San Francisco, which did productions of *The Matchmaker* and *Desire under the Elms* in Leningrad and Riga [Note: Another notable visitor around then was Jackie Kennedy Onassis. She was accompanied by Met Director, the redoubtable Thomas Hoving. They were arranging one of the exchanges between the Met and the Hermitage, a major exhibit of Russian costumes, for which Mrs. Onassis was writing the catalog. She was a sweet and rather shy woman and we talked about her children. The Fourth of July, 1976, we celebrated with a reception at the consul general's palatial residence, and then my wife and I snuck off. We had been invited to go sailing in the Gulf of Finland with the director of the Jubilee Sports Palace. We met this gentleman at the time of the Roy Clark performances, and he was a real character. He had been an Olympic champion sailor, and

so he took us out on the gulf, and we toasted the Fourth with champagne, caviar, and flares shot up into the white nights, into the bright night sky of the Gulf of Finland. It was truly an unforgettable experience.

One of the most exciting aspects of life in the former Czarist capital was the history and culture of the city - the great museums, the Kirov, the summer palaces, theater, concerts, and above all for me the ballet, both classical and a certain amount of modern dance. We had some contact with official artists and performers but much more with the unofficial and dissident artists and intellectuals of the city and of the Baltic republics. One was almost able to have normal social contacts with these people, which was certainly not true of any other Russians, and they sort of helped to keep one's sanity in this land of constant surveillance by the KGB. I remember very fondly the artist Volodya Ochinnikov, whose Malevich-like art celebrated folk and later religious themes. We spent evenings with much vodka and eating potatoes at his mother's *dacha* outside the city. There was the talented Tolya Belkin, noted for his humorous drawings; Sasha and Tanya Danov, whose paintings and ceramics were rooted in his native Daghestan, which is one of the Caucasian republics, in fact, right next door to the infamous Chechnya. We had wonderful warm evenings with the Danovs, eating *shashlik* and drinking Georgian wine. The Dyshlenko brothers, Sasha the writer and Yuri the abstract artist, and their lovely wives. And last, but not least, the redoubtable Eugene Rukhin, noted as an abstract collagist and dissident. His untimely death in a studio fire in 1976 was attributed by some to the KGB, and he certainly suffered. He was Jewish and certainly suffered from KGB harassment for years. I had the pleasure of introducing American artists who visited during that period, such as Jamie Wyeth, Larry Rivers, and George Segal

to these dissident artists and friends. I always attended their unofficial exhibits. It was interesting because the artists- (end of tape)

You mentioned, Lew, your interest in what anti-Semitism was like at that time. I certainly had contact with a number of Jewish intellectuals and writers and artists then, and there's no question that, I think, some of them were singled out as Jews for a certain amount of harassment; however, anti-Semitism was certainly not the policy of the Soviet Government, as it had been under the Czars. And indeed, there were prominent Communist Party members who were Jewish and had been ever since the Leninist era. But at that time, anti-Semitism in the population persisted. There's no question about it.

*Q: It was endemic.*

GEIS: It was endemic. It's always been there and probably always will be there.

*Q: But no pogroms.*

GEIS: There were no pogroms at all. Our policy at that time was trying to effect a greater exchange of Jews via the famous Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which you'll remember was being pushed to get more Jews being permitted to emigrate from the Soviet Union, and of course the whole idea of most-favored-nation treatment was dependent throughout

that period on whether or not Jews were being given permission to emigrate. So that was very definitely affecting, in fact, having such an effect that it was part of the items that caused the decline of detente, which was going on during the time I was there.

But anyway, to go on, as I was mentioning these unofficial artists. They always had a feeling that their contact with official Americans was a positive thing for them and that they felt that they might not just suddenly be spirited away during the night if they knew Americans and if the Americans had contact with them. So they encouraged our getting to know them and to attend all their exhibits. And it was on one such occasion that I was going to visit an exhibit where the KGB demonstrated its dismay with me very clearly, displeasure, by what we called bumper-to-bumper surveillance. They were following my Volvo, and it was not a very happy experience, to say the least.

The USSR at that time took its toll in a more personal way. In the spring of 1977, my marriage began to fall apart. In order to keep our problems as private as possible in this land of surveillance, my wife and I sometimes actually went to use the secure area of the consulate for our discussions and arguments, but we did divorce in the summer of 1977 while I was on home leave in Texas.

As I mentioned earlier, I have Russian roots - in other words, Volga German roots. And on my arrival in the USSR, while I was in Moscow, I discussed with then Ambassador Walter Stoessel the advisability of sort of seeking out or searching out my roots. He was very encouraging, but I soon discovered that the ancestral villages were in off-limits areas near the city of Seratov on the Volga, so I essentially gave up the possibility of trying to look into that. However, in the spring of 1977, a colleague of mine in the West German consulate approached me and said that a person by the name of Geis had visited the consulate and had asked about me. I got goose bumps. I wasn't sure, was this a KGB setup, or was it a real encounter with the past? So I invited Viktor Geis to come to see me at my apartment. He had read of my name in copies of the Leningrad newspaper. His trucking co-op had a relationship with a co-op in Leningrad, and therefore he saw the Leningrad papers. And he turned out to be a very nice, simple man about my age, a truck driver. His family, which was of course German ethnically and had suffered during the war - they had been sent, deported, as many Germans were, to Central Asia, where Viktor was born - but then they had been allowed to return at a later date, and they now lived in the area that my family came from on the Volga. Although I later did some research at home, during home leave, I was never able to find any direct ties to Viktor. In fact, our grandparents were almost a generation apart in age. Viktor later on brought his family to Leningrad to meet me, and I ultimately decided that either he was real or he was one of the best actors in Russia. He was both naïve and very determined. I actually got my dissident artist friends to attempt to explain to him the potential damage to him of his contacts with me, but Viktor pressed on. Finally, as I was about to leave the USSR in 1979, he asked that I extend an invitation to him and his family to visit the U.S. - that is, to emigrate. I did this, and I also made arrangements for him to be received and assisted in the U.S. when and if he was able to leave. Unfortunately, we have never heard anything further from him at all.

In the summer of 1977, I returned as a bachelor to Leningrad. Kate, my daughter, was still with me while her mother established herself as a Pan Am employee in Moscow. I applied to the state agency which assisted the consular corps in Leningrad for a maid and a cook, and they sent over a buxom blonde to help me out. It turned out that she was lousy cook but she seemed to me to be the stereotype of what a KGB agent would find alluring. I was not allured, and I asked for a replacement. And this time they sent a good cook and a very nice married lady who helped me out. The KGB was all too obvious [Note: We have recently been intrigued to learn that the newly elected President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, was a KGB operative in Leningrad during the years we were there. Furthermore, he was involved in surveillance of Western diplomats! I guess if you must be spied on, why not by a future president!].

*Q: Good for you.*

GEIS: Our busy program continued with a documentary film director who called on me to discuss the prospects for a film on the Kirov's famous Vaganova Dance School, which had produced such luminaries as Anna Pavlova, Nureyev, Makarova, and Baryshnikov, among others. The result was an academy award winning film narrated by Princess Grace called *The Children of Theater Street*, where the school was located in Leningrad. Unfortunately, this fine film, which had been sanctioned by the authorities, was not acceptable to them ultimately in the final version, since it mentioned, albeit briefly, the great Kirov defectors. However, I had the good fortune that they sent to me a 16-millimeter copy of the film, and I was able to show it, once only, to the principal protagonist of the film, some of the major ballet people in Leningrad on a very quiet, private basis in my apartment one weekend. And so it was a very wonderful experience to be able to do that, but I'm sure now - I would hope, anyway - that that film is now being shown widely in Russia.

Jimmy Carter was now President, and with his emphasis on human rights policy, relations with the USSR cooled rapidly. We still had cultural presentations, but fewer. At that time, the Vice President's wife, Joan Mondale, visited, and as a result we were allowed to see the great Russian Museum's subterranean collection of the Russian avant garde artists, Kandinsky, Malevich, and Filonov among others. These people were not acceptable to the Russian authorities, whose standards, of course, were socialist realism for all art. At this time also, the wonderful Paul Taylor Dance Company visited Vilnius and Leningrad. I was their escort and became a great fan of this fine company. It was one of the first modern dance companies to visit the USSR. For some reason or other, because I once admitted to having attended the Baptist church in my youth, I became the "designated Baptist" at the consulate. So when noted Baptist senators, John Glenn and Sam Nunn, visited, I took them to visit the onion-domed church which had been turned over to the Evangelistic Baptist Christians in Leningrad. It was truly a memorable experience to see these two symbols of American democracy and achievement in space in this unusual setting. Although I'm not a believer, many of us in the consular community expressed our solidarity with the Russian Orthodox believers by attending Easter services and other such events. One really unforgettable event occurred when the consul general and I attended the funeral of the Archbishop of Leningrad and Novgorod. This sumptuous

event, with its pomp and magnificent music, lasted some nine or 10 hours, during which we all stood and watched. I'll never forget that one. In 1979 the great blues singer B. B. King visited, and he was a great hit. He's one of the nicest people I ever met. During the four years of my stay in Leningrad, I had three local cultural assistants. One we were forced to let go because of alcoholism. A second, a very capable woman, became too useful to us, and the KGB pulled her out. So this was one of the crosses we had to bear with local employees in Russia. Shortly after I left the USSR - this was the summer of 1979 - I was once again misidentified in articles entitled "Mask" and "Sly Diversionists." I was alleged to be a spy [Note: In stark contrast to this Soviet misuse of the media was my experience with the American journalists resident in Moscow and in Leningrad, such as Chris Wren and David Shipler of *The New York Times*, Phil Caputo and Emil Sveilis of UPI. As Americans, we owe a lot to these talented analysts of the complexities of the Soviet Union, who labored under tough conditions for themselves and their families].

It had been an unforgettable experience with many ups and downs. I came away with a great affection for the voluble, romantic, and long-suffering Russian people. I would never have dreamed at that time that 10 years later the Berlin Wall would have fallen and the Soviet empire would begin to break up. I feel strongly that the seeds of all this were being planted during this time, which was the Brezhnev era, which would later be called by the Russians, the period of the Great Stagnation. It was called this during the period later on of the democratic Russia.

Toward the end of my Leningrad assignment, the new director of USIA, John Reinhardt, visited. He has been much criticized by agency officers as not sufficiently political and hard-information-oriented. In contrast, I liked him, approved strongly of his emphasis on two-way reciprocal communication with foreign cultures. In other words, the idea is that you're more effective as a communicator inasmuch as you get to know and involve yourself in the local culture, language, *et cetera*. Reinhardt called this the "second mandate," which, as I saw it, was something that most good agency officers did anyway in the course of business. Now it had official sanction, and Reinhardt also actually changed the name of USIA to the U.S. International Communication Agency. Maybe seeing in me a kindred spirit and in any case taking pity on me after the draining Soviet experience, Reinhardt gave me my first country PAO-ship. This was to the lovely country island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It would prove to be my most wonderful and my favorite assignment.

Trinidad and Leningrad could not have been more different. In climate, in lifestyle, in culture and history, it was like going from Siberia to paradise. I was warmly received and rapidly became involved in a modest but vibrant program of information and culture using the USIS-created American center, Port-of-Spain. I had a fine Trinidadian staff of information, cultural, and library specialists, both of African and East Indian descent. These were the two major ethnic groups of Trinidad. On a personal note, in 1980, I met my West German information officer colleague, the lovely and very talented Anneliese Sturm. As we got to know each other better, I decided she was much too capable and much too much competition, so in October I married her. Unfortunately, she did have to resign from her foreign service to marry. We happily honeymooned in Tobago, sister

island of Trinidad.

Eric Williams was the Prime Minister and father of his country. From 1956 to 1981, he was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. By 1979, Prime Minister Williams had become a strange, very reclusive figure. He had locked himself away in the Government House and appeared only for certain national holidays. He did not meet with foreign ambassadors. In fact, he very rarely met with his own cabinet. And this fate befell, unfortunately, the American ambassador. Ambassador Irving Cheslaw arrived in Port-of-Spain shortly after I did. He had known Williams when he was a more junior officer serving in Trinidad and Tobago at the time that Williams still was in office but before he had become as reclusive as he later became. And it was hoped that this would serve Cheslaw in renewing contact with the Prime Minister with his previous experience. But unfortunately no contact was taking place. The ambassador and I arranged for the visit of a distinguished American historian, Henry Steele Commager. Commager was an old friend of the ambassador's and had also been a friend of the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, even this did not result in a meeting. And Williams died in 1981, and Cheslaw departed the same year, never having met the Prime Minister. It was very sad. It was crazy. It should never have happened. It was very disappointing, I know, to Ambassador Cheslaw.

*Q: Williams was, I guess you'd call him, senile?*

GEIS: Yes, he really was paranoid and very strange and very critical at that time of the United States.

*Q: He had a mental health problem.*

GEIS: I think he did, yes, I really do. And it was sad because the country deserved better, and later on... Well, our relations still were fairly good with Trinidad and Tobago, but he certainly was no positive element.

Although it's a small country, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are immensely creative. USICA and the American Center worked closely with cultural luminaries in the theater, dance, and plastic arts. One of the most rewarding collaborations was with the famed Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott. In 1980, Derek received a MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant, and he decided to use some of the funds to promote U.S.-Caribbean cultural ties. Needless to say, we were delighted and honored to collaborate with him. As a result, we cosponsored visits to Trinidad and Tobago by the late Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky, who was a revered defector from Leningrad, and another visitor for workshops was the distinguished American writer and essayist, Susan Sontag. Later on, two young American actors, Coster Smith and Frances McDormond, came to Trinidad and performed in Derek's play, *The Last Carnival*. We were thrilled when in 1992 Derek received the Nobel Prize for Literature. And later, Fran McDormond received the Best Actress Oscar for her fine performance in *Fargo*. Other Trinidad and Tobago luminaries with whom we worked included the famed dancer Beryl McBurnie, the artist Boscoe Holder, actor Wilbert Holder, dancer and choreographer Astor Johnson,

and the noted journalist George John, who was my best man in my wedding.

In 1981, the Reagan Administration came into office, and although I was never a fan of this politician, I strongly supported the policy of emphasis on economic development of Caribbean island nations, the Caribbean Basin Initiative, which was one of Reagan's major foreign policy initiatives. USICA became very involved in promoting the CBI. After laborious negotiations in 1983, we arranged for USIA's energy exhibit to be shown in Port-of-Spain. The President of Trinidad and Tobago, Ellis Clark, visited the exhibit, and the exhibit director turned out to be an old friend and colleague of ours from Soviet days, Frank Ursino. But a recounting of our programs cannot convey a feeling of why this was my favorite assignment. The greatest pleasure of Trinidad, aside from its lush ecology and delightful climate was the wonderful and creative people on the island. The annual outburst of new calypsos, the steel band competition, and the costume bands which culminate in Carnival is truly one of life's greatest experiences. It is an authentic street carnival in which everyone can participate. And Anneliese and I "played mas," which is to say we participated in Carnival in the bands, and we "jumped up," another expression for participating in Carnival, each year of our stay there, and we really miss it today.

We left Trinidad and Tobago in August of 1983 for a Washington assignment, but I didn't leave the Caribbean. I was in charge of Caribbean affairs for USIA for the next year or so. On another personal note, my life flip-flopped again on December the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1983, when Alexandra Sturm-Geis was born at George Washington Hospital, Washington, DC.

The most significant event of my brief stint on the Caribbean Desk was, as you can imagine, the U.S. intervention in Grenada. It was one of the few cases in my career when I knew a real state secret in advance. Most of us who were knowledgeable about the region supported the activist policy adopted by the Reagan Administration. We felt that it was in the national security interests of the United States to protect that Caribbean island from a totalitarian Communist takeover. I had the pleasure of visiting Grenada to assist our staff there during the visit of Secretary of State Shultz in February of 1984. After a tour of my island posts in December of 1984, this was preparatory to writing the dreaded performance reports, I had the great pleasure of returning to my birthplace, Havana. I would never have done this without a diplomatic passport. As it was, I received a visa only at the very last minute, and upon arrival in Havana, sure enough, I was pulled out of line and quizzed about my being born in Havana. But no problem. Our man in Havana, Don Besom, who was an old buddy with whom I had served in Argentina and Ecuador, was there to meet me. Havana was sad to see, really run down. We visited some officials, some artists, and the famous *finca*, the farm, of Ernest Hemingway. The visit culminated in an evening at the famed Tropicana night club, also now a bit seedy. And then, true to form, the Cubans, some three years later, put my picture in *Granma*, the Communist Party newspaper, along with Don Besom and other former PAOs. We were labeled as CIA agents.

During my stint as desk officer, I worked with our exhibit division to put together a major

U.S. exhibition celebrating Caribbean-American cultural interaction. Funds for this came from the East-West exhibit money, which was not being used due to declining relations with the USSR. Among others, we consulted with Derek Walcott, our old friend, on exhibit content. And the exhibit opened in Nassau in the Bahamas in January, 1985. It was truly a wonderful show, which included performing arts groups and jazz and such musical areas as Louisiana performers and Zydeco, among other things. Sadly, the exhibit would never reach my beloved Trinidad. USIA director at the time, Charles Wick, a personal friend of the Reagans, who was a very energetic idea man, made the foolish decision that the exhibit was too costly and could not continue to be shown. So very penny-wise and pound-foolish, it was canceled. This sort of mentality periodically affected USIA's leadership. Like as not, the cultural side of our program tended to suffer the most during budget cutbacks. I was horrified to learn, just a few years ago, that in a fit of belt-tightening, the USIA assistant director for Europe closed every single library in Europe, including my own American center in Bucharest. I was stunned and still am. As usual, during this Washington assignment it didn't take me long to tire of USIA's bureaucracy and Washington infighting, and I began to look into another foreign assignment. Fortunately for me at that time, a former colleague of mine from Bucharest departed early from our branch post in Florence, Italy. There was fierce competition for the assignment, but I emerged the winner, and Anneliese and I began language training in spring of 1985.

As was the case with Leningrad, Florence was a city one can't help becoming a devotee of. An ancient, moldy place, Florence is the opposite of Leningrad in being basically unplanned. But each byway, each nook and cranny speaks of the history, intrigue, and art of this great birthplace of the Renaissance. We lived in a 16<sup>th</sup>-century palazzo called *Marescialla* after a marshal of France who once owned it. It was a huge rambling apartment with 14-foot ceilings located a block off the Arno and a few blocks from the Ponte Vecchio and the famed Uffizi Gallery. USIS Florence faced the Arno. It had once been a stable which was attached to the great palace that houses the American consulate general. Our modest program emphasized educational-cultural affairs, although we had good relations with the local media. My small USIS staff was excellent, led by the stalwart Sergio Era. The consular district included Bologna, so the historic universities of Florence and Bologna were major audiences of ours. In addition, we had program activities in the wonderful cities of Siena and Pisa. The PAO in Florence spent a lot of time coordinating with USIS Rome in furthering program objectives. Program highlights included such events as our collaboration with a local institution in the Month of American Culture, during which we entertained among others the noted American folklorist Alan Lomax and the Harlem Dance Theater with Arthur Mitchell. Another major event was carried out in collaboration with the Universities of Bologna and Florence. It brought together notable American historians in celebration of the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution in 1987. Later a similar series of events celebrated the creation of the Marshall Plan. We spent a lot of time programming speakers in our country plan themes such as the infamous Strategic Defense Initiative [SDI], Reagan's "Star Wars" program. I always felt that this was a marvelous propaganda vehicle against the Soviets, but when we took it so seriously as to pour billions down what was a technological rat hole, I had to wonder who was fooling whom. In June of 1987, all of

USIS suddenly became involved in the U.S. participation in the Venice G-7 summit. One has to question the value of these staged set-pieces, given the resources devoted to them, but of course we dutifully did our part.

The real joy of this assignment was getting to know the people and traditions of Tuscany. Our first encounter was to represent the consulate at a gala lunch celebrating 800 years or so of Chianti wine, the wine of Tuscany. It was an elegant and effervescent evening, and we came away reeling!

I had mixed feelings about the Florentines. They are thought of as arrogant, sharp-tongued, and great complainers by other Italians. They are also viewed as contentious and virtually ungovernable. At the same time, on the positive side, they are extremely proud of their city and are among the most talented craftsmen of Europe. I found them to be all of these things and more. The Bolognesi on the other hand, were much easier to work with, and had the same gusto for living that most Italians are famous for. One of our favorite Florentine families was the Latinis, who owned one of the city's most popular restaurants. We visited them at their Tuscan farm and vineyard on several occasions and were the beneficiaries of their marvelous hospitality. We also got to know the owners of the magnificent Verrazano castle and vineyard. This was the seat of the great explorer and we were invited to the castle to celebrate the anniversary of the explorer's historic voyage to America, at a sumptuous feast of historically accurate food. Another great Italian explorer was closer to home, however. Our apartment was directly across the street from the ancestral palace of Amerigo Vespucci. Another of our most happy encounters in Florence was with the noted Americanist and Pulitzer Prize winner, R. W. B. Lewis. Dick and Nancy Lewis, both devotees of the city of Florence, had become very good friends, and we were delighted to have them stay in our apartment one summer while we were on home leave. The result of this was a chapter on the Vespucci territory in Dick's excellent history called *The City of Florence*. Tuscany is the home of some of Italy's most historic and fascinating festivals, none more so than Palio in Siena, which we attended for several years. This drama of Siennese pageantry, history, rivalry occurred twice a year and culminated in the famous bareback horse race. Florence annually hosts the medieval costume procession of the Carro at Easter and the costumed football game which pitted rival teams from the four sectors of the city against each other. Viareggio in Tuscany is famed for its great Carnival, where the focus is on costumed revelers and huge floats, some of which are quite political. The year that we attended, in 1989, the Soviet consul from Milan also was invited, and the local newspapers noted how much we laughed at the caricatures of Reagan and Gorbachev in the floats.

1989 witnessed both my retirement, when leaving Florence in November, and somehow fittingly the first act of the demise of Communism in the USSR with the fall of the Berlin Wall. I find it astonishing that certain analysts, usually right-wing, have credited the Bush-Reagan Administrations with the demise of Soviet Communism. Not only does this fly in the face of the historical reality of the decades-old U.S. policy of containment as followed by all presidents since Truman, but also ignores the contribution of many other nations in and out of NATO. Finally and most importantly, it ignores the role of the many peoples of the former Soviet empire, including the Russians themselves, whose valiant

opposition to this ideology finally succeeded in assuring that it died with a whimper rather than a bang. They are the real heroes who had lost and now gained the most. The U.S. was often inclined to overestimate the strength of the USSR, and those of us who lived there always had questions about this historical exaggeration and miscalculation. It was a costly mistake, and one in which I believe our intelligence services are very culpable. In any case, I see my career as bracketed by the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962, and the fall of the Wall. I am proud to have been a realistic Cold Warrior, especially to have worked in the more subtle, insidious fields - the press, culture and education - to help achieve the goals of the American people and their foreign policy. That's it.

*Q: Bravo. Okay, there we are. This is a postscript, for whatever it's worth.*

GEIS: Yes, I agree with you on this whole question of... Well, first of all, maybe to talk briefly about the relationship between USIA and the State Department. Those of us who served in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the Communist era had the opportunity to work probably more closely than normally one would in USIA with our State Department colleagues, because we were an integral part of the mission, a section of the consulate or embassy. And we therefore worked very, very closely. And I think it made for, frankly, a more coherent and better Foreign Service and foreign policy.

*Q: It certainly was integrated.*

GEIS: It was integrated, it really was. And whereas I think sometimes in other places, where USIS was separate from the consulate or the embassy, sometimes the coordination was not quite the same or not quite as good as it might have been. Not to say that I didn't feel that it was good to have a separate agency. I still feel that that was the best way to be. I'm not looking forward to the re-amalgamation of USIA into the State Department. I'm sure it will end up working out all right, but I just think that it's going to be an even larger bureaucracy than it is, and I don't think that one needs a larger bureaucracy. But we will end up seeing how that works out.

We were also talking about our obsession during this period that you and I have been in the Foreign Service with Communism. Well, having served in those countries, I'm a pretty staunch anticommunist, but at the same time, I hope that I was realistic, and I don't think that sometimes our foreign policy was very realistic about Communism and about what it meant in the world. I think we attributed too much power to it, too much attractiveness, too much strength, and I think we ended up somewhat obsessing about Communism in various parts of the world, particularly in South and Central America. I think that frankly in our foreign policy we have a lot to answer for in our support of dictatorships which were just anticommunist and nothing more and ended up trampling on the human rights of their own citizens. So in that respect I think that it's too bad that the Communist era kind of distorted our foreign policy, and I'm happy to see that I think that's beginning to straighten out now and we'll have a little more even-handed and a little more rational, I hope, foreign policy with regard to that point.

*Q: Well, that's a good tape, as far as I'm concerned.*

*End of interview*