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

BARBARA MERELLO

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mrs. Merello]

Q: I'm interviewing Barbara Shelby Merello, retired from USIA, and who will tell the story of her life, and that includes her career with USIA. Barbara, it's yours.

MERELLO: Thank you. I'm so happy that someone is doing this. One of the things that used to bother me when I was in the agency many years ago was that people would leave after careers of 20 or 30 years and that no one would even interview them or ask them any questions, and they might have some very useful experiences or opinions. And I think this is making up for it. I'm delighted to take part in it, and I think it's going to be a very valuable resource for historians as well as for future Foreign Service officers. This week I'm reminded of moments when it was embarrassing to be trying to explain some policy. That's two occasions this week. I might as well start with that.

Q: Yes.

MERELLO: One was I happened to flick on C-Span and saw that Jesse Helms was entering the chamber in the United Nations, and I thought, Good heavens, what is he doing there? Here's the first senator who has ever addressed the UN, and it's Jesse Helms. But I heard him speak very plainly and bluntly, as is his wont, and it seemed to me that he got as good as he gave, and I started thinking that this is quite a coup for Richard Holbrooke. I congratulate him. I think this was a great thing to do. I'm in favor of dialogue, and I guess any good diplomat would be. And I think it's a fine thing that he did. I think that it's very good that they spoke plainly, and even more that they stayed until the next day, that some of the ambassadors are going to be visiting Washington and talking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and I feel that this is going to result in some improvement and more knowledge on both sides of where people are coming from. So I feel very happy about that, and I want to congratulate our colleague Richard Holbrooke. I think he's going to be a fine ambassador to the UN.

And then the other thing, which makes me so angry that I can hardly speak about it, is the little Cuban boy, Elián González. The boy's still not really grieving for his mother, but he will, and when he does, he should be with the people who love him the most, which is his father and grandparents. And I think it's unspeakable, abominable, that this is being treated as it is. I think that the politicians and the Cuban zealots who are trying to keep him in this country are - well, we know they're hostile to women, and now we know they don't care much about children either. And I really don't even want to speak about it, it makes me so angry. I'm glad I don't have to explain it.

But of course, one of the good things about this country is that we were expected to explain policies to the best of our ability, and that's fair enough, and we were never told that we had to agree with them all. And I'm proud of that.

Q: Did you have a dissent channel when you were in the Service, or that followed?

MERELLO: No, well, not in the beginning. It was [later], yes, yes, and that's a very good thing.

Q: I think it is. I left before they had that channel, but I think it helps.

MERELLO: I think so too, and I understand it has actually made some difference in some cases. Articles have been published. Of course, there are always people who know. There were people in Iran, I'm sure, in our embassy in Iran who knew that there was a great deal of danger and that the embassy could be overrun. The problem is that usually the people at the top may not want not to listen or believe. There's always someone who knows. There's always someone in the CIA or the State Department who knows what's going on and reports it, and they can't control whether or not they're listened to. A President, for example, may take some line in an article, for instance, as President Reagan took Jeanne Kirkpatrick's distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian governments and take that to heart and treat that as gospel. People listen to a lot of different opinions, and it may be just one word or one phrase, and there's nothing you can do about that. People have to listen as well as be informed.

Anyway, I certainly do not regret my years in USIA. I'm very, very happy to have been there about 27 years. Actually, it was an accident that I joined, because I'd never heard of USIA until I was working in the World Trade Corporation - don't ask me why. I never knew anything about computers either, but I was in the press section there, and with me there was a very interesting woman who had worked for VOA, and she told me about the Voice of America and about USIA, and it sounded like the career for a dilettante. And so I found out about it, and more than a year later I was accepted. It was the last year when USIA applicants did not take the written exam, but we had a very strict oral exam.

Q: Do you remember the year exactly, roughly?

MERELLO: That was 1959, I assume - '58 or '59.

Q: That gives our readers a benchmark.

MERELLO: And it was a three-and-a-half hour oral exam, which was extremely intimidating. Three members, three people on the panel, and I remember thinking, Well, I'm not going to pass this at all because I knew nothing about economics. Of course, you would have to now, but in those days that wasn't quite as important. And I knew nothing about jazz or baseball. For some reason, I was sure that everyone was going to ask me about baseball or jazz. I didn't realize that I [had to] explain Vietnam. Anyway, there were other things. You had to write. If you knew a foreign language it helped. You had to write something in English. I forget what we had to write, but I can write good English, and I knew Spanish, and so to my surprise I was accepted, and I have never regretted it.

We had training in Washington in the fall of 1960, it must have been, because it was when John Kennedy was elected, and I remember Washington was a totally different

place in those days. The agency's headquarters were at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, an old brick building -

Q: Wonderful.

MERELLO: - a wonderful place. After we moved it started going downhill, I'm afraid.

Q: I couldn't understand it.

MERELLO: But I stayed in a little French hotel called the Hotel Maury, that was where the World Bank is now, just a block or two away. Oh, the little birdcage elevators, and the rooms were different shapes, and I was hardly getting any money at all, and I remember buying cheese and fruit and putting it out on the windowsill. But the training was good, of course. We were in the middle of a cold war, and it was very much oriented to the enemy and countering false intelligence and this sort of thing, but we also learned a good many other things. And then in the midst of it, John Kennedy was elected, and there was a television set downstairs in the hotel, and that was very exciting, even more so later, when the great speeches and the "torch has been passed to a new generation" and I can't even remember - I can't recapture that spirit. I can't even really describe what it was like, it was so totally different from anything since then.

Q: Who was the director of the agency?

MERELLO: The director at that time, I think, was George Allen for [awhile], and then, of course, Edward R. Murrow became director not too long after that.

Q: Do you have impressions of those people, or were you too low on the -

MERELLO: No, I was too low. No, I was a junior officer in training. There was no air conditioning to speak of in Washington in those days, and I guess that's why they trained in the fall. And as I remember it was about six weeks, probably, that we were there, maybe two months. And I remember when I had my first interview in the agency after I was accepted. The director of Personnel was a man named Leon Schelma, very nice man. I have the best memories of him. And I asked him at the time - we knew that any Foreign Service officer had to have permission to marry, but I also had learned that women could not marry at all - and I asked him about that, and he said, "Well, you know, that really isn't fair, because as a matter of fact, as many men leave after a few years as women do." And it wasn't until 1971 that Foreign Service officers who were women were given permission to marry and stay in the Service. It's amazing what we put up with in those days. There was a great deal of discrimination, mostly in assignments, special assignments, for example. I don't know of any woman who was actually assigned temporarily to be a PAO, for example, filling in for someone, and that makes a difference because, of course, you're not on the first rung for that ladder. But we put up with a great deal. Of course, in those days you also called on the wives of the ambassador or maybe the consul general when we first went to a post, and you were expected to wear gloves

and a hat - you may not believe it, but that was it - and leave the little card with the corner turned down. You would stay ten minutes, and then if she invited you graciously to stay a little longer, you'd stay another five minutes. But you know, all that protocol had its reason for being. After all, it was important to become acquainted, and there was a formality that, in a way, I'm sorry they did away with all of it. On the other hand, I felt very sorry for the wives, particularly in Brazil. They were expected to do everything from walk the dog to make sandwiches to... Whatever their careers might have been or whatever their interests were, they were expected to fill in whenever necessary. But then, of course, women Foreign Service officers were expected to do both. We were expected to be good officers and do the entertaining as well. Anyway, that's all in the past, and that's changed very, very much.

Q: Your comments are very appropriate. It gives us historical perspective.

MERELLO: But I really didn't think of it as I think of it now in those days. I admire the women who pushed to get equality for women. I'm sorry to say I wasn't one of them. My only contribution was insisting on having my own byline. But that was later, anyway; that was in 1968, when I was writing a weekly column which was translated and sent to our embassies in Latin America, and then they would offer it to local newspapers. It was called *America Joven,* "Young America." And at the time, there was a great deal of interest in what young people were thinking, and so I wrote about whatever interested me. I didn't know what they were thinking either. I'd been out of the country for years at that point. So I wrote about whatever seemed interesting, and many of the columns were published. And there was a question - I think our PAO, our public affairs officer, in Colombia, I think it was, suggested that we use a man's name and a Hispanic name - and I said, "Absolutely not. This is my column, and we're going to use my name." And of course, he was wrong. It was his own prejudice. He said that the Colombian editors might be prejudiced. It was not true at all. They printed it. It was his own prejudice, which I think was often the case. But I don't want to harp on this too much, because I really didn't give it much thought. It was all very exciting.

I joined in the first place, well, because this woman had told me about it, but I had been wanting to leave the country anyway. I can't say that I joined out of patriotism or any sort of missionary zeal. No, I wanted to see the world, not see it but know it. I wanted to know the world, and I also wanted to get out of the United States. The '50s were a very smug, complacent time. They look better in retrospect than they did at the time.

Q: Conformism was the thing.

MERELLO: Oh, the conformism and the smugness and the assumption that everything we did was the best, unquestioning sort of chauvinism it seemed to me. And then also, more than that, I really did want to travel. I had *Wanderlust.* I remember once when I was still in junior high school, I think, a friend of my parents had come to dinner. His name was Edmond Carillo, and he had been in the Foreign Service, and he talked about his experiences in the Middle East, and from that moment I wanted to go to the Middle East.

I wanted to see the blue domes of Shiraz - and I never have seen the blue domes of Shiraz, but I wanted to learn Arabic and go to the Middle East. Well, it never turned out to be possible, but that, I think, planted the seed in my mind. Also in the late '40s, an uncle and aunt of mine had gone to Peru and stayed for a year or two. He had been a pilot in World War II, and when they were starting their national airline, he went down and became a pilot. And they invited me to visit them, and I was too young. My parents didn't let me go, but I always wanted to. I think those two things were probably what kind of started me on this feeling that the Foreign Service was a good thing for me to do. But then I didn't think about it much until I got this push from a woman who was not my friend exactly, but we were talking and it seemed like the right thing to do - and it was. It was a very good time to be joining. It was very exciting, I must say. With Kennedy as President and the feeling that we could make a better world. The Peace Corps was beginning. It was exciting to be in public service. It was a wonderful thing to do. I still think it's a good thing to do. It just doesn't have as much cachet as it used to.

And in those days we also had to go through a... We had to visit a psychiatrist, and that was a dreadful ordeal. Oh, heavens, it was dreadful. This was a man, I think on Madison Avenue, and rather stern and really intimidating, I found, and one little yapping dog, who kept... I was sure I hadn't passed that test either, actually. He asked me about other jobs I had had, and I told him about working for Dr. Paul Fejos at the Winograd Anthropological Foundation. And this was an extremely elegant town house, just a block from the Frick Museum in New York. Dr. Fejos was a Hungarian. He'd been a cavalry officer, a movie director, and had four wives - a very colorful character. And I was his secretary. I was a terrible secretary. I could spell, but that was about all. I could type, but I was not a good secretary. And one morning, Dr. Fejos came in and addressed me as *Locusta*, accused me of trying to poison him, and said that if I had really wanted to do it he had books in his library on different sorts of poisons. I couldn't imagine what he was talking about. It turned out that his silver teapot - he expected me to make tea for him every morning, and that was bad enough, but he would drink it all day long, cold, and then in the afternoon to make him coffee (no, it was *vice versa*, coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoon) - and apparently he had started drinking his tea that night and found a great lump of silver polish in the pot. I didn't polish the teapot. I think it was his Jamaican houseboy who wanted to kill him. But the entourage was extremely interesting. There was someone from every nationality, it seemed, there, about 20 people, and they were all from different countries. That was an interesting experience. Dr. Fejos, on each of our birthdays, he would give us a big bottle of Arpège, his favorite perfume, and we always had lunch downstairs in the basement, and there were enormous blowups of Charles Addams cartoons on the walls. Very interesting, almost surreal, experience. And none of my other previous jobs had been that interesting.

But the psychiatrist... I had foolishly referred to Dr. Fejos as a mad Hungarian, and of course, I was given demerits for that.

Q: But he was.

MERELLO: He was.

Q: He sounds mad. Oh, dear.

MERELLO: But despite all of this, I did manage to join the agency, and now that I look back on it, I wonder, not how I put up with them - because I've always hated hierarchy, bureaucracy, penny-pinching, endless reports - but how they put up with me. My talents were - I was good at languages, and it was easy for me to establish rapport. And what I loved most in USIA was the liaison work, was bringing people and ideas together, bringing speakers down and introducing them to people who were in their same profession or just had the same interests and ideas and books - and this is what I always loved. And I feel that it was very much worth doing. You can't quantify it. You don't know what the results will be. They will probably be good. More often than not there will be something - it will make a difference. Having a whole network of people who respect each other and understand each other better is certainly a good thing for the world, and I was always very happy to be able to do that. And that is something I was good at because I always felt somehow that I would love to know every language in the world and have a drop of blood from every people in the world. And of course, we all do; if we go back far enough, we are all kin. And I think that was my strength. I had many weaknesses as well, but we won't go into those. Anyway, that's how I joined the Foreign Service.

And 27 years. When I joined you could walk into any embassy in the world and just go on and say hello to the marine guard and walk up to the third floor and wander about as you pleased, go and visit someone. And I'm sorry it's not that way now. It was better when it was that way. I would hate to be locked in a fortress somewhere way out of town. I'm glad that I'm not in the agency now. At any rate, it's been taken over. We had a hostile takeover by the State Department, which I think is a bad idea, but very few people cared. I'm afraid that some of the programs that were the most valuable may be lost, some of the cultural exchange programs. I think the Fulbright Program will certainly survive, and that is a very good thing, particularly in Peru. I was cultural attaché in Peru, and one of the things that I most enjoyed, most looked forward to, was the meetings of the Fulbright Commission, because they were so superior, really, such a group of dedicated and interesting people - university presidents and American businessmen who had been there for years and years, a very tough-minded American Jesuit priest, who had also been there about 30 years. Both the Americans and the Peruvians, it was an honor to be with them, and our director too. Our executive director was a former USIA officer, and she had married a Peruvian and she had lived there for many years too, and she was a wonderful director. She just retired, I believe. And it was an honor. As I said earlier, I did not join out of patriotism, but it didn't take long before I felt very privileged to represent the American people, more privileged to represent some of them than others. But it's a great honor. And whenever we felt we were too overworked, too much meddling from Congress, whatever, then you'd be invited to go out to the John F. Kennedy School (because they're all over the world) and go out and represent the embassy, and there would be usually some music - they would play the two national anthems - and we'd make a little speech, and they would make a speech, and they would honor the President.

And when you saw the flag and heard the national anthem, it was a very emotional moment, and you'd feel very proud to be there representing your country.

Q: You were in countries - and you'll get down to specifics later, I hope - where you were working in a friendly environment, but did you run into anti-American sentiment and actions in one post or the other?
MERELLO: Well, it wasn't so much the place; it was during the Vietnam War. There were very strong feelings about it, and it was very difficult to explain. Of course, most people were not as interested in us as they were in their own concerns. That was the first thing I learned. No one was going to ask me about jazz or baseball. Sometimes they would ask about Vietnam, and it was hard. That was difficult. I'm trying to think of a country where... Of course, in every country there are some people who hate the United States. The people who bothered me, I think, were the people who loved us too much for reasons that were never quite clear to me, who were too - I don't know - too accepting of everything, some of the worst as well as the best.

Q: Did they have selfish reasons? They wanted to get something from you?

MERELLO: Yes, I think so. Maybe not from me directly, but from - oh, how can I explain? I should have thought of this sooner. It just occurred to me now. Some just wanted visas, but of course I couldn't help them with that, thank God. No, I felt that they didn't love their own country enough or that they were too uncritical, suspiciously uncritical - there are a variety of motives for that.

Q: So many of them wanted to become Americans. I guess they wanted to jump ship.

MERELLO: Some certainly did, and yes, there were places where there were long, long lines, and Peru was certainly one of them, where there were long lines to get visas. I was always so glad that I didn't have to decide who would get one and who wouldn't. It bothered me that it was so subjective, that people would be turned down because they didn't have enough money or just so subjectively. It still bothers me, our whole... The INS bothers me, that we keep people in detention for months at a time. They don't have enough money, and the rules are not clear. I'm glad that I'm not responsible for them. I'm not sure what changes I would make, but even when I was a Foreign Service officer I was not able to find out what the rules were, really. I remember once I was in the Foreign Service national office in Washington and had the honor of serving with Mr. Luong. He was the chief Vietnamese person in Vietnam.

Q: Foreign Service national?

MERELLO: Foreign Service national.

Q: That was in USIA?

MERELLO: Yes. Mr. Luong had served in Vietnam and he had barely managed to get out with his family on a boat when they evacuated Vietnam. Of course, the Vietnamese were not put on the helicopters, and so they were just left to their own devices, and he was one of the most loyal, and he had persuaded other Vietnamese not to worry, that they would be taken care of. Of course they were not, which I think is one of the biggest disgraces of that whole war.

But Mr. Luong had managed to escape with his immediate family and make his way by boat, I think to the Philippines and then finally to this country. And the agency had given him a good position in the FSN office. I forget what his title was, but he had a good position, and I remember once we went over - he desperately wanted to bring his parents - and we went over to the Visa Office and we simply got no where. It was years before his parents could come, but at least the agency did make some efforts, what they could do, which was not much, at the time.

I'm not going chronologically. I should, really. We got our assignments in the fall, of course, of 1960. I went in with three other people. It's strange, but I've never seen any of them again. There was one young woman and two men. I've seen the names of the men, but we've never been at the same post, so I've never seen them again since 1960, and the young woman was drowned at her first post on the Ivory Coast. She was drowned in the ocean. But at that time we were all very happy and enjoyed the training and were looking forward to our assignments. And I remember telling the Personnel officer that I liked cities. I've always been a city girl. And they sent me to Rio, and I was very grateful. That was a pretty good first assignment. I was a junior officer trainee, so I went there in December of 1960. At that point some posts had language training at the post, three months of training. When I was in the University of Texas, I had just for fun taken a semester of Portuguese. There was a girl from Bahia, and I had just taken it for fun, never thinking that I would ever use it. And [lo and behold] it came in handy. But it as good training - three months, six hours a day. There were only three or four of us in the class, and we had several different teachers, so we heard different accents. And it was excellent training. The only drawback was that we were not working, so we weren't meeting anyone, and so it was very lonely, being there for those first few months.

But I found a little wonderful place to live. I have to laugh about it because it was actually an illegal little house. It was on the Baisandu, a long street that leads up to the Governor's Palace in Rio, an old, kind of dilapidated street with tall royal palms. Every once in a while a branch would fall and knock someone on the head, but it was an elegant street - a little dilapidated, a little gone to seed. And I found a little apartment on the top of a four-story building. In Rio it was illegal to have any more than four stories without an elevator, and this was actually the fifth story, but it was all right - I always thought that was kind of fun. There was an open iron gate, and it was extremely small, but there was a big terrace, and I spent most of the time on the terrace. I had a hammock there, and I remember I had Wisteria. It never stopped blooming the whole time I was in Rio, which was a year and a half, I guess. It never stopped blooming.

And I remember Carnival. Carnival in those days was marvelous fun. There were neighborhood associations. There still are. Ours was Narangeras, and the Brazilian family on the floor below I'd made friends with the young woman, who happened to work in USIS. It just happened that she worked in USIS, and we became good friends, and I joined this little neighborhood association, went out, and it would start around New Year's, when you would hear this clink [*taps a rhythm on a glass*], and then the rhythm would pick up and so on, and everyone would start rehearsing. Some of them had been sewing their costumes all year. And then you'd go out in the streets and that day everyone would go out, and they would round up the usual suspects, pickpockets and so on, and they would have their costumes in jail, and they would celebrate their own Carnival. But amazingly, they wouldn't sell liquor. No one really got drunk. The worst that could happen was they'd spray some ether. But there actually was no crime during Carnival. It was just a lot of fun, everyone jumping around. And I got to go to the ball at the Opera House, and you would see the costumes like nothing in this world. I don't think before or since have so many sequins been sewn on so many - real diamond! You can't imagine. Some of the people couldn't even walk, the costumes were so elaborate. But you danced all night, and of course it was hot - it was hot and humid - but the costumes were brief (all the others, not the ones who were being judged), and you danced all night. And then there was a night club where they would serve onion soup; after four in the morning anyone would get onion soup for free. And then there was a place called Drink on Copacabana Beach, where you could finish up, dance a little more, if you had the energy, and then go out and watch the sun come up over that green ocean. And on Ash Wednesday, everyone was exhausted. It was marvelous to do once. I wouldn't want to do it again, but it was great fun.

And the work - of course I was in training, so I got to be in press and radio and television and the cultural side. It was good training. I enjoyed press especially. And that was the time, while I was in Rio, that John Glenn went up and circled the earth. In fact, this was a very exciting time because of that. It was just amazing. Some people felt that it couldn't be true, that it was all made up, as some people still don't believe that we sent anyone to the moon. But in São Paulo, which was my next post - my first real post was in São Paulo - we had a couple of astronauts visit. I think one was Pete Conrad, and I have a signed, an autographed picture of him, and that was a great event. Pete Conrad was here not long ago. There was an anniversary celebration of the '60s at the LBJ Library, where I volunteer as a docent, and it was like a homecoming party. Everyone was there, and they had a panel on NASA, and Pete Conrad was there telling wonderful stories, and I was so shocked when he died very suddenly a few weeks later. In São Paulo we also had a visit from Louis Armstrong, and that was very exciting, too. And for some reason this has stuck in my mind. Of course, the Brazilians are so self-righteous about how they don't have any racial prejudice. As a matter of fact they do. It's just a different kind. I met a number of black people in São Paulo who told me that it was more economic than anything else, but at that time, black people were not admitted either to the navy or to the foreign service, the Itamarati. That has changed, but this was in the '60s.

Q: How did this affect your reception of Louis Armstrong?

MERELLO: Oh, not at all. Well, everyone loved Louis Armstrong, but what I was going to say was that when he arrived there was a press interview, and one of the reporters said, "Well, how does it feel to be in a country where there is no prejudice?" And he said, "Well, I don't see very many of my color here at this Jaguar Hotel." It was the Jaraguar, one of the fanciest hotels in town, and by golly, there weren't any others his color in that hotel, because they didn't admit people [of] his color in that hotel. And they said it was because some of their guests were prejudiced, but of course, again, it was because they were prejudiced themselves. But on the other hand, every woman wanted to be a beautiful *mulata*, and who wouldn't? Who wouldn't want to have beautiful *café au lait* skin and lovely black wavy hair? And so they found that many women, when they took a census, a lot of women called themselves *mulatas* who really weren't. So it's a different sort of prejudice, and I think it's probably less now. That was just an interesting sidelight.

And I loved Rio. In those days, Rio was falling apart, actually. It was awfully dilapidated, but it was fun. There wasn't much crime at all, and there was the only *bonji*, the trolley that you could sit on and go all over town. It took about a day to go around town because, I think, it was a hundred years old at that time, or almost. I think it was dated from the 1880s, and these were still the same cars and the same little torn curtains at the windows. If it rained you got wet. But it was so much fun, and it still had that old magic. It's lost now. I've been back since, just very briefly, but the crime is the problem now, many things. It was after I left that the terrible things started happening. The police would go out - I think maybe out of frustration because criminals were always set free immediately - and they would start just killing them instead. And even children, even orphan children on the street. This was after I'd left, but things are not what they were. I know we always say this, but it's true in Rio's case.

In São Paulo, I didn't want to go there, but it was wonderful. It's a very interesting city, and at that time it hadn't become such a monstrosity as it is now. Now it's an anthill, not a city. It's grown much too much. But even then it was called "the engine of Brazil," and very interesting. It was industrial, but it was also full of artists and writers and musicians and a great many immigrants, many from Eastern Europe or the Middle East or Italy. In fact, one of the wealthiest men there was Francisco Macarazzo. He started the São Paulo *Bienal*. At that time it was one of the two big art shows in the world. The other one was the Venice *Biennale*. And Macarazzo had come as a penniless immigrant. He had a pushcart - everyone starts with a pushcart - and he had become a multi-millionaire. And so he built this enormous building, and that was one of my first tasks, to participate in the *Bienal*, and as a matter of fact, we ended up winning the grand prize for the first time, much to the dismay of the Europeans, who had always divided the prizes up among themselves before. But this was a very big deal. You had a certain amount of space, and you could bring in the artists that you want. And the artist who came, the exhibit was of Adolph Gottlieb, one of the New York impressionists, and I wasn't familiar with their work at the time, but when I saw those pictures hung, and getting them hung was not easy, because we had to build special walls and special materials, and we didn't get the paintings until about a day before the big reception was due - and that was a panic. There

was a longshoremen's strike in New York, and so it was late leaving. Then when they got to Santos, there was so much rain that they were afraid to bring them up the hill, and so we had more delay. And the curator who had come down was Walter Friedman, who then went to the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis. I'm not sure where he is now. He was fairly young at the time, and he was tearing his hair out. He was in despair. He said it takes a week to put these up. Well it turned out we had a day and a half, and we put them up, and they looked marvelous, these enormous paintings with these suns and - wonderful energy. And I came to love those paintings very, very much. They were marvelous, very romantic in their own way. Maybe the last romantics were the impressionists.

And then some sculptures by young sculptors who later became famous - a number of them did. Stella was one. There were a half a dozen of them. So it was really a stunning show when we finally had it up on the special walls and everything. It really was an amazing show, quite overwhelming. And since Walter Friedman had never been curator at a *Bienal* before, he refused to play the game with the Europeans, and he just wouldn't go along, and so finally and luckily, they gave the Grand Prize to Adolph Gottlieb, to our section, and it deserved it. It was a marvelous show, anyway. The whole show was good, but we really did deserve the prize, and Adolph Gottlieb deserved it, and I was so happy that he had come down and was here when it was announced. He had come down, and he was a wonderful man, just had the best time. He didn't know Portuguese, but he met all the artists in town. They took him to a geisha house, and that's because one of the Japanese artists was one of the most famous in Brazil, Manabumabe. He had started out as a penniless immigrant himself. He planted heels and his father had died when he was young, and he had had to work in a dry cleaner when he was 14 to support his family, and then he started painting neckties, and he ended up becoming the most famous impressionist in Brazil, enormous canvases, very beautiful and very expensive. He also was a wonderful man. They were good friends. They didn't have any language in common but they communicated. So he had a grand time and had not dreamed that he would win the Grand Prize, and when he did - it was about $1500, I think - he decided that he would spend it all on jewelry for his wife. His wife had been a teacher, and she had supported him for many years in New York, and he had never given her any jewelry. And Brazil was the place to buy jewelry - gold and tourmalines and topazes and aquamarines and anything that you could imagine. I had the most wonderful time, and I went with him to the best jewelry store in São Paulo, and he decided what to get. And he could buy a lot for $1500. He bought a great many jewels, and I know that she was very pleased when she got them. So this was all great fun. It was tremendously exciting. This was my first real assignment, and I worked very hard on it. It wasn't easy to get those materials and to hang all this and get it all ready. It was intoxicating, really. It was great fun. And the newspapers were plastered with pictures of Adolph Gottlieb, and everyone recognized that it really was a fine show. So that was a wonderful way to start out. Not everything was that successful, but it was fun to be part of something. And of course, the fun of the agency is that you're always an amateur because you're always doing something you've never done. I don't know whether the State Department is that way or not. I don't think it is.

Q: Not quite.

MERELLO: But of course we were in public diplomacy, so we really had contacts with anyone who was doing anything. My last assignment was cultural attaché in Lima, and I had worked very hard to go somewhere else. It was the only time that I had really wanted to go to a specific place, and it was a total waste of time. They'd already decided. Always before I just, you know, the luck, *Qué sera sera*, serendipity - and things seem to work out better for me when I do that. Anyway, I did go to Lima, and while the situation was very difficult, really - the Shining Path was on the rampage, and the MRTA, the more traditional Marxist organization, and there were bombs every day, and things were difficult - but the Peruvians never stopped going to cultural events. They would always go to a concert no matter what. That was one of the most important things to them, their cultural life. And I felt that I had the best job in the embassy by far, because anyone who was doing anything interesting, I would have a chance to meet and to talk to. And I find that when you are in a country, no matter how bad the news may sound somewhere else, you can't be as pessimistic as you would be just reading about it, because you're meeting people who are actually making a difference. And in Peru that was particularly striking. My husband and I left in 1987 - I was selected out, as most of us are, a lovely phrase - and we would have liked to stay another year, difficult as it was, because really, everything was quite difficult. Agustín was doing workshops on the future for all sorts of people.

Q: This is your husband, Agustín?

MERELLO: Yes, and he enjoyed doing that, and I thought that we were doing some important things. At the time, I was trying to persuade the top cultural officials to do the paperwork necessary so that the United States could implement a new policy of cooperating, confiscating artifacts from Peru and from other countries (but Peru was one of the most affected). People would smuggle things in - you know, old things, prehistoric remains, pots and all sorts of things - and the United States had worked out some very good provisions, which I believe are in force, but it involved a great deal of work on the part of the folks in the country of origin. They would have had to do a lot of work to get illustrations of the different sorts of things that the customs officials should be looking for, and in Peru you can't scratch the ground without digging up something, so this would have been a great deal of work. And we would sit, we would have lunch, and we would talk about it, and, oh, they were delighted that finally we were going to crack down on the smugglers. And then nothing would happen- (end of tape)

We're starting another tape, and this is disjointed enough already, but I'll just go back to São Paulo because it was a very interesting place to do cultural work. It was I believe the biggest consular district in the world, if I'm not mistaken. There were all sorts of little cities besides São Paulo that are important in Brazil, and at that time, in the '60s, our money went a long way. I think it's interesting to remember that. We could afford, for instance, to bring Eugene Ormandy and his symphony orchestra. It seems impossible now, but we did. We brought them, and they played in São Paulo.

Q: Was that the Philadelphia Orchestra?

MERELLO: The Philadelphia Orchestra, yes. They came to Brazil.

Q: A big deal.

MERELLO: It was a big deal. Plane travel wasn't so expensive, and the money went a lot farther than it did, and we had more, too. And you can't imagine the pride that you felt when a great orchestra played and everyone was fighting for tickets and you could invite people to your box. It was all very exciting.

And then *The Skin of Our Teeth* - we had those people come and give that. June Havoc was Sabina. Helen Hayes was Mrs. Antrobus. I never could stand Mrs. Antrobus. And a very distinguished actor was Mr. Antrobus, and I have not been able to remember at all who he was. It was a very distinguished cast and a great performance, and that was interesting too. Many, many people in São Paulo were studying English, and there was a very good audience for this sort of thing.

As the years went by and money got tighter and tighter and plane fares got higher and higher, it began to cramp our style considerably. The Fulbright Commission, for instance, instead of giving them, say, 40 scholarships, you could only give maybe 25, mostly because of the air fare. That was the big sticking point. I never could understand why the government couldn't get a good discount, and I still don't understand why. We have to use American airlines, and so the least they could have done would be to give us a decent discount, but for some reason that was never pressed. And it really did affect all of our exchange programs - the International Visitor Program, for instance. In the old days you could invite people for six weeks to the United States, and almost always it was someone who had never been here, someone of influence or someone who you were sure would be influential. Usually it was someone who already was, in one field or another. And within limits they could decide where they wanted to go, maybe three or four different places, and then branch out from there. Usually they would have a home stay and get an idea of what the United States was like. And then as the years went by, the time was reduced more and more, and then, of course, in recent years more and more people had been here, so it wasn't such a big deal. But it was in the old days. Many things were a big deal in the old days. In the days of Edward R. Murrow, for instance, we still had the mobile units. They must have been a lot of fun. And we would show movies. They would drive all over the country and go to little places and show movies. And that was a big thing. People didn't have television then. And so you'd go, not even just to villages, cities - a city in northern Brazil, for example. And you'd pick a propitious spot, which I remember one time a colleague told me happened to be the red light district. That was where all the politicians were, all the important people. So they went down to the main square, and they played their movies, and everyone joined the audience. And then, of course, when everyone got television sets, that was no longer necessary, no longer any reason to do that. But it must have been a lot of fun while it lasted.

But São Paulo was a very lively place, a very interesting place to work, to learn about a lot of things. We also had a very large book translation program in those days. We had libraries. We still have libraries. And often they would be the first circulating library in the country or in that particular city. And that was something that people were not used to - being able to actually take the books out, take them home and read them. And all of the books - we weren't competing with other libraries - all of the books either were about the United States or by American authors. They might be about the host country, but by American authors. And the first one, I think, was founded in Mexico in 1935, if I'm not mistaken - the Franklin Library. And these were very well respected institutions. Students would come and study there. It was a place where you could find information, but also people could gather there. It was a thing that we had going for us already. The book translation program - I realize now that a lot of the translations were really very bad - but there were all sorts of books, and we would send them to people. And that was a good program.

Q: That was what we used to buy for a dollar? Was that the book program? I remember in Africa, we used to... We didn't buy them, but out on the newsstand, you paid a dollar for...

MERELLO: I don't think so, because we didn't sell ours. Maybe it was resale.

Q: All right, you describe your program.

MERELLO: And publishers would give us books too, sometimes old textbooks. You have to realize, it was such a different world. People were glad to get books. Now they would scorn anything that wasn't the latest information, but it wasn't true then. We would also give gift subscriptions to American magazines to scientific institutions or libraries, universities, and so on. The problem with that was - everyone was very grateful for it - the problem was that very often they didn't arrive. If we could send them through APO that was one thing, but that was a little cumbersome. Then every month you'd have to deliver them. That was a problem. And again, now we can do it electronically. Our libraries are electronic, and you can get much more information. So that has made up for the lack of funds, and I'm very glad that it has, and just in time, because I don't think we could have afforded, the way the agency's been squeezed, even to maintain the libraries at all.

Another thing that we had was Binational Centers. And those were mostly started after World War II, when there was an era of good feeling toward the United States and a great desire to maintain contact. And things started in Europe and in Latin America, primarily, although we had them all over the world. And those were very interesting jobs. Director of a Binational Center meant that you learned about everything - administration, programming, and English teaching, which was their principal source of funds. They were all English teaching academies, but they were much more than that. They had a range of cultural programs, and whenever we had anyone, an American performer, for instance, come to that country, then they would perform at the Binational Center. And it was a venue for seminars on topics of interest to both countries. They're very good institutions.

I was a director in Barcelona later, and I wouldn't take anything for those years, a tremendous, wonderful experience - even though Madrid would meddle too often. But that's always true.

Q: Well, yes.

MERELLO: There's always the field and headquarters, and my sympathies are always with the field. I used to wish I were an old-fashioned "remittance woman." They didn't exist, but just pay me to stay out of the country and just leave me alone. I think a lot of us felt that way. We'd like to be at a one-man post where nobody ever visited. Anyway, the Binational Center - it was enormous. It was extremely important in Barcelona. It was the only institution where parents would trust their daughters to come to a dance unchaperoned, and it was an amazing place. There were something like 6,000 students studying English, and there was constant cultural programming. Every day there would be some sort of program. There were former students who stayed on and helped organize these special programs, and it was marvelously exciting. And we celebrated our 20th anniversary while I was there, in the 1970s, and I cherish those memories. It was wonderful. And I don't know what's become of them now. They don't have American directors any more because, again, we couldn't afford them. The advantage of having an American director was that occasionally you could get a little money and that you knew what performers were coming, and sometimes you could get an art exhibit. We had art exhibits in the old days, too. Even in Peru we managed to have a few. There was one especially interesting one - or two. One was on weaving. No one has ever exceeded the ancient Peruvians in their weaving. It's just a marvel. No one has ever equaled it. So they're very interested in textiles. And we had some examples of modern weaving, and that was a very interesting one for them. And another one was making jewelry out of - not trash - inexpensive materials. They found that extremely interesting, because all of their jewelry is silver or gold, and they enjoyed this. They enjoyed this idea that you could just pick up a few pieces of something and make something beautiful out of it. Those are two that I remember especially, that were especially successful. So we had exhibits. We had books. We had libraries. English teaching in those days was very important, and again, now it's not necessary because everyone's teaching English or learning it. But in those days the British had their institutes of British culture, I think they were called - *cultura inglesa*. And we had the Binational Centers, and there were always plenty of students for everyone. In Barcelona we had 50 American teachers, who gave me more trouble than the 5,000 students and everyone else put together. But they were good. They were good teachers, and the students really learned. They learned, I think, more than they do now here. They learned actually to write compositions. They actually learned good English. So that was all very fulfilling.

What was going on in Brazil in those days, in the early '60s, soon after I arrived, Janni Cuadros had been elected president. He was a very competent governor of the Province of São Paulo. He stayed in São Paulo. And he became president, and one night there was an eclipse of the moon, and the next morning, Brazilians woke up and Janni Cuadros was not there. He had decided that he didn't want to be president, and so he simply resigned,

which created a consternation, as you can well imagine, and his vice-president, João Collar, was much farther to the left. And so that made the military uneasy, and so eventually, in 1964, there was a military coup, on April Fools' Day. And at first, the first general was a fairly moderate man - something Campos - I can't think of his name now. But then things got much, much worse, and there was torture, and there was persecution and things got very bad in Brazil. I was in São Paulo at the time and left in 1967. I was transferred. It was just when things were starting to get very bad. And this went on for many years, but my general impression of Brazil, in those days at least, was of a country where I don't remember ever meeting a stupid Brazilian - very quick-witted people. And it was a pleasure working there for a woman, because Brazilian men like women, in any situation. They don't care whether they're working for a woman or with a woman or just to be with a woman. And that's very pleasant for a woman. There's a Carnival song that expressed that philosophy, and it was something like, "I don't care about parades. Who wants to see a lot of military men marching down the street? But if you put women in the parade, I'll even beat the drum." And they really did feel like that, so it was quite pleasant living there.

And they seem to have no sense of tragedy, which after a while began to bother me a little. They were such a contrast to Argentines. But they'll say, "Oh, yes, my mother's in the hospital and my son broke his leg and the car broke down, but *mais nada ser nada.*" It's nothing. After a while I got a little tired of that.

But I think that the difference between Brazilians and Argentines I think I can tell by one incident. I was in São Paulo at the time, and on one of the newspapers there was a columnist who wrote about different things that were going on, and he wrote something about Argentina that the Argentine consul took offense at. I don't recall what it was. And so the Argentine consul challenged the columnist to a duel, and the columnist in the paper said, "The honorable consul of Argentina" - so-and-so-and-so-and-so - "has challenged me to a duel. Since I am the one challenged, I have the right to pick my weapon, and I pick spitballs at 20 paces." And that illustrates the difference between the two countries better than I could ever say.

Q: I wonder if there's any connection between the Brazilians' attitudes and their Portuguese origin, or isn't there much -

MERELLO: Oh, no, they're so different from the Portuguese, though. The Portuguese are melancholy and lyrical, and oh, they're very different.

Q: So this is a new breed.

MERELLO: Yes, it is. They're very different in the different regions of Brazil. I would say the *Paulistas* are the coffee and the *Nordestinos*, the northeasterners, are the sugar. And it's true, the northeasterners are much sweeter. They're southern. They're the equivalent of southern. They're northern, actually, but they're like our southern; they're more like us. And even the plantations and the whole way of life bears some resemblance

to our south, although maybe superficial but not entirely. Climate has something to do with it. But they're very different, but the amazing thing to me was, even in that time when communications were not all that good (they still aren't - you couldn't say there was a real national highway system), and yet everyone is very Brazilian. They don't consider themselves part of the province. They're definitely Brazilian. The Brazilian nationality is a very strong feeling, more than in some of the smaller countries, and it is different from anyplace else. So at the time, it was more lighthearted, I think, than it is now, probably. A great many tragedies have happened since then. And I'm happy to have been there at that time, when Carnival was still so much fun and when work was so rewarding because we actually were able to do so much more there than I've ever been able to do before or since.

For instance, we had student affairs officers there who would go into the universities or either teach a class or study one or anyway, make friends with the students, because the students were seen as very important. And we had special programs for students. We ran groups of students to the United States and put them in touch with university students here, and all of this went by the board later because there simply wasn't enough money. And I got very tired of the penny-pinching and never having any money at all to take advantage of an opportunity that might arise. This got very old. That's one thing that I don't miss at all. I got very tired of being preached to about not wasting any money when we had so little, compared to the Pentagon, for example. But I think in this country we always will spend pennies for diplomats and millions for spies and billions for weapons, and it's always been that way, and I think those are still the priorities. And they're foolish, because diplomats are much more cost effective. But that's the way it's always been, and I've never gotten used to it. When a ship would come - I remember this especially in Brazil - we were always happy when a US ship would come, and often they would invite people to go aboard and so on, and they would come ashore, and the sailors were, of course, a lot of fun. And they would do something nice, like paint a school building or something. And they would always have the navy band play a concert, and we were always very glad, except that we were the ones who would arrange everything, and whenever one of our performers would come through the auspices of USIA, we would be lucky if we got a press release and a couple of photographs and maybe a record to play on the local radio station. Here the navy band would come, and they'd be giving out records like hotcakes. And it just had so much money to spend, so much to splash around. The contrast was just so great, and I think it's reflected in everything, not just in those small things. I think it is to this day. They can lose $15 million - or is it $15 billion - that they spend on that building, and nobody even raises an eyebrow. And all of our agency's budget put together wouldn't be enough to buy a submarine, and I think we did a great deal with that very little bit of money. But that's all gone by the board. But what worries me is that I believe they've cut the foreign affairs agencies to about 50 per cent in 20 years, if I'm not mistaken, and there's a limit. They're already down to the bone. I don't know how much longer they think we can even have a Foreign Service. There are more countries. There are more opportunities and fewer people. And technology does not make up for it. I'm glad in a way that I was there at a time when you could have a successful career without either learning to use a computer or having a facelift. I say hurrah for us.

Q: Amen.

MERELLO: And it's not the same. There's nothing like face to face, face time. That makes all the difference. And it takes time and it's not measurable. I remember Robert McNamara wanted to quantify the unquantifiable and all sorts of silly little abbreviations for cost-effectiveness and how many people attended a speaker program, for instance. And of course, how many attended has nothing to do with it, depending on who listened and what happened afterwards. And that was something that you wouldn't often know. It was very seldom that someone would come up to you and say, oh, thank you so much for changing my mind about that policy. People don't often do that. And so I don't know. I was low enough down the scale so that I just ignored all of that, and it may not have helped my career, but I just didn't want to fool with it.

My next post after São Paulo was Quito, Ecuador. Quito is a beautiful city. It has all the four seasons in one day, and when it gets cool people burn eucalyptus wood so the whole city smells of eucalyptus, and it's a very lovely city, and very sad to see what's happening now. It's a poor country, but it's an interesting country and it's very sharply divided. There are the cities. Quito is an old colonial city, and they're trying to preserve what they can - or were, since this is a long time ago. And then there's the jungle, the mountain jungle, the mountains and the coast, and all of these places are very different from one another.

Q: What about the split between the Indians and the non-Indians?

MERELLO: Well, in Quito I didn't notice that nearly as much as in Peru. I didn't get to know Ecuador very well because I was only there for about a year, a year and a half or so. But they have some very unusual groups of Indians. There's one called the Yotabalos. They make absolutely beautiful blankets, and they go all over the world selling their blankets. They have for many years. And the women dress in a way that's almost Egyptian-looking, and you wonder what the origin of the different costumes is. They're so varied, so different. And I always speculate. I think that there probably was communication early. I think that people have always wanted to go as far as they could and go wherever they could go, and I think there was probably trading that went across the oceans, and I think there was contact early. But I don't have any proof of it, except that they've found very strange mummies on the west coast, very different from any of the Indians who lived there. Some are redheaded and some are tall and big-boned and just totally different. There's no real explanation for this, other than that there are so many mysteries.

And then I was in Washington in the Press Section for a while. I was writing this column that I mentioned earlier, I think. I enjoyed being in the Press Section. I've always liked newspaper work, and we wrote features and we were a very congenial group and we did various things. And then they asked me to write a column on what young people were

doing, thinking and doing. This was 1969-1970, when people were interested in young people, and young people were making quite a splash in the ‘60s.

Q: This is where you talked about they didn’t want to have your byline.

MERELLO: My byline, oh, yes. Well, I never would... What am I going to write about this week? I got a lot of ideas from the *Christian Science Monitor*, a paper that I still admire very much. I feel that they’re very fair, and once in a while I would get an idea from them. Or something that interested me. I had been out of the country for years, and I didn’t know what young people were thinking.

I remember one time interviewing Mark Green, who was very young then, early 20s. Ralph Nader was just getting started, and Mark Green was one of “Nader’s Raiders.” And I did an interview with him. Also I did an interview with a young person who was working for President Nixon. All sorts of different things. And then they would be translated, and they would be sent to our embassies in Central and South America and the Caribbean, and they would offer them to local newspapers. And I have many, many clippings because everyone was interested in young people at that time and also wondering what we were going to do next after the ‘60s. And it was always with my byline until one of our public affairs officers - I think it was in Colombia - said that he didn’t think that the Colombian editors would accept a column written by a woman and couldn’t I use a male name, and preferably a Hispanic name. And I said nothing doing. I don’t send it unless it’s my byline. I’m responsible for it. And that was my sole contribution, I’m afraid, to making things better for women. So he shrugged his shoulders. They offered it, and of course they took it. It was his prejudice, not theirs. And I really enjoyed writing that column. I did that for about a year and a half. Then what else did I do? Anyway, I was sent to Barcelona, and that was perhaps my dream assignment.

It was marvelous. I was director of the Binational Center, and the Center had a very distinct place in the community. And Barcelona, again, is a city of very competent people, but also dreamers, all sorts of artists and architects. The architecture in Barcelona is incredible - not only Gaudí, but everything. The turn-of-the-century architecture is magnificent and not like anyplace in the world. Some of it is very bizarre, wonderful. And also I found that the Catalans, unlike almost all the rest of us, will always do more than they promise. If you make a friend in Catalonia it’s always a friend. And I had no time or there was no one to teach me Catalan before I left. I wanted to study it. Then after I got there I really had no time to study it systematically, but I got some children’s books. At the time, of course, Franco was still in power, and he allowed the intellectuals to have their magazines in Catalan. He was very shrewd. They could read in the café’s. They could criticize all they wanted to. The could have their little magazines. But he had forbidden Catalan to be taught in the schools, and they had changed all the street names. So as a result, of course, Catalans all taught their children Catalan. If he told them they had to speak it, they probably would have stopped. Catalans are very stubborn, and I admire them greatly. And they have very good children’s books, so I got some of those

and I learned a little, but I never was able to learn as much as I would have liked to, but at least a little.

And I was given the great privilege there... Everywhere I went I would try to join a good chorus. I've always loved singing, and this was something I always tried to do, and in Barcelona - Barcelona is a city of choruses, great choruses - they're renowned for that, their music in general. They were the first opera house to present Wagner after Germany. And they have wonderful choruses, and I was privileged to be able to join one directed by a legendary man named Auriol Maturel, and he was something of a hero in Barcelona. He was considered a real one of the Catalan stalwarts, and everyone admired him. And I was in a constant state of panic. I was very much honored, but I was probably the weakest sight-reader in the group, and I was always terrified that I would make some mistake. They were just tolerating me, anyway. But it was very, very exciting. We did great music, and there's nothing quite as... There's an ecstasy in singing great music in a great chorus that's not like anything on earth, I don't think. We sang in the Palau de la Música, which again is a unique building in the world. It was built about 1900, and I can't really describe it. There's no way to describe it except that it's the *art nouveau* style of that time, and a great concert hall. And we sang marvelous things - the *Saint Matthew Passion*, the *Saint John Passion*, the - oh, what were some of the other things? - Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, and then a Christmas program that I've never forgotten, with children. And I managed to survive it without ever making a serious mistake. I'm very grateful that they allowed me this honor, because it was a privilege. And I felt very much a part of that place, because the center was important to it. I had a good friend who would take me to opera, and the opera in those days in Barcelona was... I suppose it was like Covent Garden, in a way. There were greengrocers who would be coming in early in the morning. Well, there was club next to it called Le Club du Museo, where people would go and have dinner during the intermission, and some people would never come back, some of the gentlemen especially would just linger there and the ladies would go back to their boxes. The opera would start at 9:30, which was the hour of the *apéritif* and then they would have this long intermission, so you wouldn't actually get out of the opera until one or two in the morning. By that time the greengrocers would be coming in with their vegetables and fruits and so on. And the contrast - and people *really* dressed up. You had to wear a long gown and all your jewels - this contrast of people going to get their cars with these other people coming in was something that, again, has been lost because people started wearing blue jeans and so on. They don't know what they're missing. It was very dressy in those days.

So directing the Center was quite a responsibility, because there was a board of directors, mostly Catalans. The Catalans had actually founded it, but there were always some Americans on the board, long-time residents, really marvelous people. And everything was going very well, and year after year the board of directors would vote not to give social security to the American teachers, which was quite wise of them because they were never going to get it. They would only come for a couple of years, and it would have been a lot of money. And the teachers also would have had to pay something. And so they decided every year they would just take the chance and not do it. However, one year, the

accountant came in, white-faced, and said there was a man from the Financial Ministry outside and wanted to see the books. Well, the books were quite well kept. He looked at the books and said, "You haven't been paying social security all these years." (This is Spanish social security, I should say, which, of course, the teachers were never deriving benefit from. That was why the board of directors always voted to take this chance). Well, they got caught, and so they probably would have put us out of business, because the fine would have been enormous, as so many years had gone by. And so finally we were able to work out a deal that we would pay a fine, but it wouldn't be so big, but we had to start paying social security. So that meant that the teachers had to pay some, too, and they rebelled at that. They didn't want to do that. It was quite a nuisance, because it meant that each one of them had to go to various offices and so on, and go through all this. Well, we explained that we couldn't afford to pay it all, that they would have to pay their share of it, and this was the tensest moment that I've lived through, except for the time when the accountant came in in the first place. But that all passed, and I'm not sure what they're doing now. Some of the teachers decided they would stay longer, but I don't think any of them ever reaped the benefits.

So it was a big business. But we had marvelous programs. I remember John Denver came one time. He just showed up. He was just starting to become famous. And he gave a beautiful concert. I cried when John Denver died. I think he was marvelous. And then another time the Smithsonian Institution for some reason lent us a great many machines, for six months I think, for the local artists to make lithographs and serigraphs and whatever other kind of graphs. We had this little old house behind the Institute, and we put the machines there and we let all the artists who wanted to come and work together. So it was sort of like a little guild. It was almost medieval. They would come and they loved it. It was such fun. And then at the end of it, when we had to give the machines back, we had a reception. And of course we had the artwork, and we had really Catalan things like bread and tomatoes, which is wonderful. It's mashed tomato on crusty bread with garlic and olive oil. You know, rustic things like that. And it was written up in the society columns, and all of that was a lot of fun and got us a lot of good will, I must say, even though no one ever understood why it was that we made such a fuss about Watergate. "Well, what has he done?" *What has he done?!* He's flouted the Constitution! And I realized that Europeans never understand why we make so much fuss about anything. They never will.

Well, after Barcelona, which I really hated to leave - I loved it there - I was sent as cultural attaché to Costa Rica, and it was a very good country to work in because it's a democratic country - you could do all sorts of things that you couldn't do in other places - and also it was small enough that you could know all the government officials and all the people who were in charge of anything. So we had some interesting programs. For instance, every year we had an enormous sort of seminar for secondary school teachers from all over the country, and it would always be on a different aspect of American history. The year I did it it was on the Roosevelt era. It was very worthwhile, I think. We had some good speakers and good materials, and many, many, many teachers. And that was very satisfying.

It was hard socially because after being in Barcelona and being one of the belles of the ball, so to speak, going to Costa Rica, which is very much a family place (and of course, I didn't have a family then), and people got up early and went to bed early, and it was quite a letdown. But as far as the work was concerned, it was a very good place to work and to have the satisfaction of really communicating with people and exchanging ideas, which is always what I love.

And then I went to - where after that? Oh, of course. After that, one day I got a call, and they said, "How would you like to go to Buenos Aires?" I hesitated for half a second, and "Yes, take me to a big city." And I did go to Buenos Aires. I was director of what we called the Lincoln Center there, which is the Binational Center - no, it isn't the Binational Center, I'm sorry. We had a Binational Center there as well, but this is a library and cultural center, which was founded long ago, during World War II. And again, it was a well-known institution in Buenos Aires. At the time it was the only circulating library, and people would come there, and they would say, "How do we start a political party?" or "How do we impeach a president?" This was long before our own impeachment. People would go there and study, just sit there and study, or just take the books down and look at them. We had a wonderful librarian, a woman who, to me, she's a saint. She would always find a way to get the information that anyone wanted. I loved that lady. And the whole staff was very good.

And then we had a great many cultural programs as well. One of the ones that I remember most fondly was when Admiral Samuel Eliot Morrison came to town. He was just - I think he had just made his voyage repeating Columbus's voyage. He had a good friend there, and he came and lectured, and that was a great honor. It was wonderful to meet that man - a wonderful man. And we got to take him to this medieval shipyard in Buenos Aires, where they still have a full-sized caravel. Amazing that they ever crossed the Atlantic. They're not much bigger than rowboats, just amazing. And that was fun, taking him to that and to the Gothic quarter, and then he gave a talk in the Lincoln Center along with a distinguished Argentine admiral. It was delightful.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

MERELLO: Well, part of the time, it was Robert [Hill], and actually I have a picture with Jesse Helms.

Q: Is that necessary?

MERELLO: Jesse Helms came to see him, and I just happened to be in the office. I hardly every went to the embassy unless I had to, but I just happened to be there, and I don't know what for, some errand or other, and Jesse Helms came in and [he had to] have a picture. I didn't know who he was at that time. And I have to confess, I have a picture of me with Jesse Helms.

Well, it was, again, a very interesting job because it was taken seriously. It was an institution that was taken seriously, and it was important to do things well. And we tried to... Borges lived not far from there, a few blocks from there, and once or twice we had him come and give a talk, and one of the talks was not very good, and the other one was superb. His talk on Walt Whitman was wonderful. And we would see him sometimes. He liked to frequent a little Chilean restaurant nearby, and I remember that Agustín and I saw him several times, just around there. And I don't remember how this happened. One time we went to see him to ask him if he would give a talk, and he found out that I was from Texas, and he had a great fondness for Texas because after Perón had made him chicken inspector or something, he really didn't have any money, and the University of Texas was the first institution that invited him to come to speak, and forever after, any Texan would have an entrée to Jorge Luís Borges. He was very grateful.

And Argentines and Texans have a certain compatibility anyway. But he found out that my family was from Texas, and so he started - I think he was teasing me, pulling my leg - telling me about the good old days of slavery. I remember I ended up singing him "Summertime," why, I don't remember the circumstances. I sang "Summertime." And I had very fond memories of Borges. The last time I saw him we had actually left Argentina. It was some years later, and we were just passing through on the way back from Peru, 1987, I guess, and we stayed a few weeks in Argentina to visit Agustín's family and so on. And one day he was with one of his daughters, and I wandered around old haunts - Florida is the pedestrian street in Buenos Aires, and that is where the library was. So I was wandering around in one of the galleries, and I saw that Borges was in a little bookstore signing one of his books. And so I went in and spoke to him, and he was the last person I saw in Argentina, practically. And he died only a few months after that. I have a very good memory of him. He was not like anyone else. He could be very cold, really, but he was also a very - he wanted to be like everyone else, but he wasn't. He was unique.

Q: Well, he was outspoken politically.

MERELLO: Well, yes, he was, and he really hated Perón. And so he was a little too indulgent of the military, but afterward he hated them too. And they deserved to be hated.

Q: Was that the period of the "disappeared."

MERELLO: Yes. I went there in 1975, and that was when Eva Peron was still - you can't say in power, because she was never in power, but she was there. And things were not going too well. Then they got worse. I was there for about two months before they actually had a reception for me because they had been expecting Henry Kissinger on and off, and then in the end he didn't come, so they finally had a reception at the library. In the meantime I had met a very interesting artist named Marta Mujinin. She was a fine artist in every way, but she became notorious for some of her happenings that she would stage. And it was very easy to scandalize the Argentines in those days. They were very conventional. And my favorite thing that she did - this was later, after the military took

over, or maybe when they were finally out of there - she had a framework made to look like the Parthenon, and it was almost the size of the Parthenon, and she got publishers to donate books. And most of the books were forbidden books - books and books and books, thousands and thousands of books. She filled it with the books, and then she gave them away. This was unbelievable.

Q: Eccentric is a polite term for her.

MERELLO: Oh, no, she's marvelous. She's wonderful.

Q: As an artist, what was she? Was she a painter?

MERELLO: Oh, a great artist. She could paint. She was a good sculptor. She still is working. She's very versatile, a real artist. But Marta would come to the library to look at art books and so on, so I had met her already, and the day of the reception, she met Agustín, my future husband. Agustín was a futurist, among other things. He had done many other things, too, but he was a futurist, and he had an idea for a school for failure. The Argentines are too hooked on triumphalism, as they call it, too hooked on success, and they don't understand that you have to fail in order to learn anything and then go beyond it. This was a philosophical idea for him. So a mutual friend wanted to introduce him to Marta Mujinin because he thought that she would be interested. She saw it as a sort of happening. Anyway- (end of tape)

I was in the middle of a story of Marta Mujinen, our fairy godmother. Anyway, she and Agustín had just met, and they were talking about this possibility of this school for failure, and Marta dragged him to the reception, and of course he didn't want to go. He didn't know anyone there, and she said, "No, no, no. Come along, come along. Who knows, you may fall in love with Barbara and get married."

Q: A fairy godmother. Isn't that nice.?

MERELLO: Yes, and we met, and later on we collaborated on the school for failure because I was very intrigued by this idea. Agustín had a friend who had a very modern art gallery, a three-story art gallery, and was going to lend it to him for that purpose. So they actually did have an Academia del Fracaso, a school for failure, for 10 days. And as I was saying, Marta saw it as a sort of happening, and she invented all sorts of things. When people came in, there was a platform, and you could get up on the platform, and there would be television lights and canned *¡Viva, muy bien!*. And some people did not like to stand on that platform. There were people who wanted to stay up there. And I was dressed as a nurse, and I would inoculate people who were willing against triumphalism. And some people were willing and some people weren't, and some people on the way out said that they would be inoculated. And we had a gallery of portraits of people who had gone beyond failure. And there's a wonderful word in Spanish Agustín used - *transfracasales* - when they'd gone beyond it. Van Gogh and I forget who the others were, people who had surmounted failure. And then there was a hammock; you could lie and you could talk to a

psychiatrist. There are more psychiatrists in Argentina *per capita* than in any other country in the world. And you could talk about your failures and so on. And then we invited a lot of people to give talks about failures in their lives, and some of them were quite famous. There was a movie maker who told about the movie that he had dreamed of making and never was able to get backing for it. And then, providentially for me, there was a cancer researcher at the university named Dr. Skolnik, and Dr. Skolnik had a theory that people with allergies did not get certain sorts of cancer. And that may be true. And he felt that it was because of the histamines, and he thought that he had proved it, but he was terribly frustrated because he could never get enough funds. He did work on animals and a few people, but at this point he needed to work on a lot of people, and he was unable to get grant. Well, when I heard him, I remembered that they had just started saying that it was a good idea for women to discover whether they had any nodules in their breasts, and I 'd never done it, of course. I hadn't even thought about it. I went home, I found a lump. I went to the doctor, to a surgeon, and he said, "Well, it's probably benign. It's probably nothing, but we'll have to look and see. Well, they didn't have biopsy in those days. And two days later I had the operation. Well, it turned out it was carcinoma, so I probably would have been dead because I never would have bothered. It probably would have been too late.

Q: That was providential?

MERELLO: Yes, providential. I'll always be grateful to Dr. Skolnik. I wish I could tell him to thank him.

Q: Was he Argentine?

MERELLO: This doctor? Yes. The doctor who was talking, the researcher.

Q: But you had it done in Buenos Aires.

MERELLO: Oh, I had it done in Buenos Aires. I never thought differently. Well, it turned out afterward they said they wanted me to go to Panama. I wouldn't have dreamed of going to Panama. I had just met Agustín, and he couldn't have been more wonderful. The next day I woke up, and it turned out they had to do the mastectomy. But I'm glad it was that way. I wouldn't have wanted to fret about it for days and days and days. I hadn't even called my mother, and she was very upset when she found out. But, you know, everyone assumed it would be benign. Well, it wasn't. So I only had one really bad day, and Agustín came and, oh, it was hot, and he brought the only soda pop they let me have, some awful stuff the equivalent of Gatorade. And then he brought "the cheese that walked," we called it, because it was a soft cheese and it was so hot that it would sort of [run away]. But he came and one of his sons offered to donate blood. I had never met him, of course, and I was so touched, and he was wonderful. And I wouldn't have dreamed of going to Panama where I didn't know anyone. I never even thought about it. And I felt, Oh, no, this isn't such a big deal; they talk about it all the time. Marta actually lent us her little apartment in a place called Punamar, down on the shore, on the ocean,

sand dunes and pine trees, a lovely place. And I just walked a lot along the seashore, and I thought, Why do people make so much fuss over this. Well, later on, many, many years later, I developed lymphodema in my left arm, which I think I could have avoided if anyone had ever warned me about it. And I had so much radiation after that - I'm sure they gave me too much radiation - that eventually I lost the use of my left hand because the nerves were destroyed. This happened many years later, and I never thought about it at the time. I never thought about it at all. And fortunately it was the left hand, you know, and after all, when you think of the alternative, it's not such a high price to pay.

Q: No. You were lucky.

MERELLO: I feel extremely lucky. So the School for Failure was a success as far as we were concerned.

Q: Well, that's great.

MERELLO: But it's amazing how much indignation there was about this. The phrase made people angry, which proved that it was needed.

Q: This had no relationship to the library which you were running.

MERELLO: No, no, this had nothing to do with it. This was just free time.

Q: Extracurricular.

MERELLO: This was just extracurricular.

Q: And getting married.

MERELLO: Oh, I didn't get married for quite a while actually, because Agustín was divorced when we met, but there was no remarriage in Argentina at that time, so we couldn't get married there.

Q: Oh, so you had to move on.

MERELLO: Anyway, well, it didn't happen that fast anyway. We said we were going to get married, and so when my time was up we were transferred to Washington, which was customary. When you wanted to marry a foreigner they usually bring you to Washington as soon as they can. And of course, I was fortunate that it wasn't before 1971. We couldn't have married at all, although I would have had to leave the Foreign Service, which I didn't want to do. And Agustín was able to leave. He was older than I was, and he had done many, many things in his life. He had been in a Jesuit seminary, which always leaves its mark. He'd grown up, his childhood was spent in France, and so he was really more European than Argentine in a way, but a man of the world, a citizen of the world. He had decided - I think the Jesuits decided - that he would be better off outside

the seminary, and he had married and had eight children. And not too long before I met him, a year or two before, he had divorced, but I still have a very good relationship with his children, his older boys especially. And he had, let's see, he had studied law; he had studied engineering; he had been a businessman for a while; and then he went to the Sorbonne and became very, very interested in the future, the study of the future, *prospective* it's called in French. And you think about the future that you want, and then you go back from that vantage point and think what steps you should take to get it. And from that time on he gave many, many workshops - he had all sorts of devices to get people to think about the future. He found that it was very easy to get people to think about what they did not want and what they were afraid of, the "dystopia," very easy, and so he would start with that and then gradually take some particular specific facet of life. He wasn't interested in the technology. It was the institutions, democracy and so on. And for the rest of his life he would give workshops to all sorts of different people to get them to think about the future, about what they wanted. So this for him was just another experiment, really.

We went to Washington, and I was first in the Foreign Service National Office, and I always had a lot of appreciation for the Foreign Service nationals who have to put up with all of us and really run things. And in the course of that time they were instituting an entirely new system, and I went to several places to explain it and actually start it. I went to Belgium for six weeks, and I went to Africa then, to Zaire. And that was quite an experience.

Q: What period was that? Do you remember, roughly?

MERELLO: That would have been sometime in the late '70s. And of course, Mobutu was still there.

Q: Everything going downhill.

MERELLO: Yes, dreadfully.

Q: You were in Kinshasa?

MERELLO: In Kinshasa. But I also traveled some. I went to Lubumbashi, this enormous mountain of copper.

Q: I was assigned there. I was consul in Katanga during the terrible period of '61-'63.

MERELLO: You were there during that time? Oh.

Q: Well, I didn't enjoy it either.

MERELLO: What a terrible time that must have been! Then it got much worse.

Q: You got to Lubumbashi, you told us.

MERELLO: Because we had a little post there at the time.

Q: Yes, we did.

MERELLO: I saw a malachite table that was as big as this room.

Q: Isn't that something?

MERELLO: Polished malachite, and copper. But I was only there for a few days, and I also went to Congo, to the Congo across the river.

Q: Brazzaville.

MERELLO: A colleague of mine whom I knew from Argentina, John Archibald, was just opening up the USIS post there and hiring people, and so that was very interesting. So we were implementing this system, and I really enjoyed that visit. But Kinshasa was very dispiriting.

Q: It was deadening. I spent a year there. It was just deadening.

MERELLO: It was so expensive, and I don't know how people lived at all. You'd go to the market and -

Q: Subsistence, that's what it was.

MERELLO: - I don't know how they lived. USIA had a special... We had our own building, and there was a kitchen, and so the PAO would have soup for them, so they would have one hot meal a day, our employees. They would get up at four in the morning and take the bus in, and then the gendarme would board the bus and shake down the passengers because they weren't getting paid either. You'd have to bribe a clerk to get your mail at the post office, or to make an overseas call was a bottle of whiskey, depending on where you were calling. And one of our employees children had died in his arms at the hospital because he couldn't afford to bribe an intern. It was heartbreaking.

Q: You were there only a short time.

MERELLO: I was there for about six weeks, I think. And also there were vestiges of neocolonialism. We had a fleet of buses to take the American children to school. Couldn't they have used those buses to help bring our employees in to work? They had such a hard time. They had to get up so early. And surely they could have used those buses to meet some of them, you know, at place. But oh, no. And then they had this club, but only the Americans belonged, and I think - I won't mention his name - the

administrative officer there was later one of the men who was captured in Iran. It couldn't happen to a nicer guy.

Q: Oh, dear.

MERELLO: Well... And Belgium, and then Agustín and I went together to Tunisia. I had always wanted to go to North Africa, and I would have loved to be stationed in North Africa, but again, we were there about six weeks, I think, and implementing this system and got to do some traveling.

Q: What was this system, tell me, then because I missed it the first time around.

MERELLO: Well, let's see. Well, it was more like the civil service system than what we had before.

Q: For personnel?

MERELLO: Personnel. It was a new personnel system, and it was fairer, actually, and it was good for people who were in the lower grades or hadn't been working for us very long, but it was not very good for the top people, and the top people were remarkable people. A lot of them were from the World War II generation.

Q: We're talking about the nationals, Foreign Service nationals.

MERELLO: Foreign Service nationals, yes. And really it was not an advantage to them. It was just a lot stricter, and it seemed more logical, but I'm not sure. I guess it is better. It's a better system overall.

Q: I wonder if it's still prevailing.

MERELLO: I think so. The new one. I think so. It makes more sense, but of course we're not going to get people like that again anyway. That was a different generation, and that was the time when we could afford to pay more than anyone else, and that's certainly not true. So it would be hard to get people to... You'd have to pay quite well to get the equivalent of that kind of person.

And then just the fact that they've been with us so long. And they didn't like to see... No one likes to have something taken away, and in a way they were. A few people had to be downgraded, and you know, we could explain over and over that it's not that they've done anything wrong; it's just a different grading system; but that doesn't wash.

Q: You know, I had the impression sitting in the Foreign Service that USIA was always reorganizing and was always being abused, always being changed. I don't know, maybe that was the wrong impression, but I said I would never work for an organization that

went through so many convulsions. Now looking from the inside out, was that a fair judgment?

MERELLO: Oh, well, there's some truth to that.

Q: You were always being changed.

MERELLO: Yes, except we always just went on with our work.

Q: Okay, I'm glad you did. I'm glad you stuck with it, but I said, Look at the turmoil over there.

MERELLO: We didn't change. They said, Well this is a Cold War agency. Well, I never thought of it that way. I thought of it as public diplomacy and bringing people together and representing the whole country, the whole society. And when Charles Wick became director and the blacklists of speakers. We had never had a blacklist before. We invited all kinds of speakers. It didn't matter which political party. We invited them all.

Q: He was the fair-haired boy of Ronald Reagan.

MERELLO: But he did get us the money, and he started the Worldnet, which was kind of a pre-CNN thing. It was the first of its kind, where we got journalists from different countries talking to someone. And looking back I feel a little bit more kindly toward him than I did at the time, but not much.

Q: Well, you're allowed to be frank. It's no state secret.

MERELLO: No, but whatever, this business of McNamara, this business of the peekapee, whatever that's good for. It was some silly thing about quantifying everything. And I just paid no attention to it. And I don't think most of us did. Some people higher up had to. And doing the country plan every year. I dreaded that. Good Lord, that was awful. And then Congress, oh. Every 15 minutes they would say, what would you do if you had 10 per cent less or 10 per cent more. Well, we knew we weren't going to get 10 per cent more; what a waste of everyone's time. I did resent their wasting our time so much.

When I first joined and went Brazil, I went on Varig. And at that time, if it was more than 12 hours or 10 hours or something, they would send you first class. Of course, Congress stopped that, except for themselves. But that was a flight that I remember with great pleasure because I felt so important going to my first post.

Q: In the old days it was very comfortable.

MERELLO: I got so tired of them saying we were wasting their money. We weren't wasting their money. They were starving us. You couldn't even get money to invite someone to have a cup of coffee. And really, that penny-pinching got awfully old. When

you realized the opportunities that you lost because of very small sums of money, and in Peru especially. I spent a lot of my time going around begging for cosponsors. I met a lot of interesting people that way in the big companies, for instance, businesses and banks and so on, but still, you know, I felt... At first, no one believed us. In the old days no one would believe us. They thought we had a lot of money. And it was useless to tell them we didn't, but after a while they realized we really [meant it]. And then, of course, in the '60s, we were still kind of complacent. You know, we were helping the world, and everyone was worse off than we were, but then later on we started having the same problems as everyone else, and that was healthier.

Q: Yes, yes. You were still in Washington. For how many years were you there?

MERELLO: Let's see. We were there from 1978 until 1984. I had two jobs. First the FSN's, and then I invented my title of cultural coordinator for the American republics. And we had all sorts of programs. That was one of the regional offices, and the head of that office, Steve Dachi, oh, not a mad Hungarian, but a very canny Hungarian. Steve was a character. He sometimes moonlighted as a cab driver "to meet a better class of people," as he said. And I remember shortly after the Reagan régime came into town, for some reason Steve and I had lunch with someone who had come in with the team. I don't remember what the connection was or why we had lunch with him. And during the course of the lunch, he said, "We're going to destroy you." And for once Steve was speechless. It felt more like a coup than a change of government. I didn't want to remember that.

But by and large, our work, especially on the cultural side - I always preferred the cultural side because it was long-range. The Fulbright Program, these exchanges of people and ideas and speakers and performers and art exhibits and all of this was just lasting and had nothing to do with politics, or shouldn't, and usually didn't. And I know that it was worth doing. I have no qualms at all, and I don't know that many people can say that their profession has never caused any harm. I never knowingly lied, either, about what we were doing. Of course, we were often lied to, as I know now.

Q: You read your script.

MERELLO: But no, then you could say you didn't know.

Q: You made it a practice not to deal with the embassy more than necessary in order to maintain your autonomy.

MERELLO: No, I didn't mind going there, and in those days, of course, USIS was usually separate, not always, but usually. In Peru we were in the embassy. USIS actually had a little house, a little rundown house around the corner from the embassy, but the public affairs officer and I were actually in the embassy, which faced a big park. And one night someone shot a bullet into the office next to mine, and it ricocheted and actually did a lot of damage, as we found the next morning. Well, the public affairs officer said, "We're going to the house." And this was when they made room for us in the little house.

We were all together. We were happy, actually. No protection at all, but you never dreamed that it was any official office. It was just a little house. And then after a while they got worried because a lot of things were happening, bombs going off. And there wasn't any particular animus against us. I mean, it was everyone. They were bombing all the embassies. One day it was the French and the Chinese, and another day it would be something else, or a bus full of cadets or a restaurant. They would go in a restaurant and...

Q: And who were the people shooting?

MERELLO: Well, there were two groups. There was the MRTA, and they were the kind of classical Marxist run-of-the-mill terrorist group - take over a television station and, you know, bombs and so on. And then there was the Shining Path, and they were really terrifying because they were nihilists and they never said what they wanted.

Q: They're still around.

MERELLO: Well, yes, but...

Q: Didn't they do the Japanese embassy?

MERELLO: They did. No, that was the other group. Everyone thought that group was defunct.

Q: Oh, that's right. It was these MRTA.

MERELLO: No, but the Shining Path, it was started by some disgruntled university professors up in Ayacucha, which means 'corner of the dead' in Quechua. And they were terrible. Engineers started destroying bridges, and agronomists destroyed the agricultural station where all the animals... It was this weird mixture of Maoism and nihilism and nativism - really terrifying. They would go to some village and they would just shoot any little authority who was there, whether it was the teacher, the mayor. They'd use children to take bombs. I have no sentimental feelings about the Shining Path. But while we were there they actually captured the second in command, but then after we left there was a Peruvian general who had made it his business to try to find Guzmán, the leader of it, and for more than a year he would very patiently follow every clue. He found out that he was actually living in Lima in a sort of middle class district, so first they rented an apartment across the street, and then they waited and they waited, and then finally one night they had a party, a very big party, and then they raided it and they caught Guzmán, fortunately. And with that it sort of withered. I mean, there still are some, but sometimes relatives of people in it would be forced into it or blackmailed into it. And it was frightening because you didn't really know what they wanted. Did they want everyone to leave who had any white blood? What was it they were going to do? I mean, they really just like destroying. It seemed to me all they did was kill.

Q: Anarchists.

MERELLO: I couldn't see that they did anything else. The other group - both groups - could plunge Lima, the whole city, in to darkness. They would cut the leg off one of the towers, for instance, outside of the city, the electric towers, and then the power thing, and I remember the first time that happened. We were at the Binational Center at an art gallery or something, and the whole city went dark. I thought, Oh, my Lord, how are we going to get home, because driving in Lima was a thrill in itself, and that night everyone was driving safely. But it was terrible. You never knew when that would happen. And a third of the people in the country were living in Lima or the outskirts. And then they started picking us up in the morning. We had our USIS chauffeur, and he would pick us up, and a young couple of USIS people had moved into the same apartment building we were in, and we were very pleased that they wanted to. We were in the same building, so he would pick us up. Ever Friday we would get the schedule when we were going to be picked up. Well, they couldn't vary it that much. it was never noon. It would be any time from seven to ten. But that was when Rafael would pick us up. So we'd go down, and my colleague with her coffee cup in her hand, and she'd say, her eyes as big as saucers, "Did you hear the bomb last night?" or "Did you hear the shooting?" or "Do you know, that restaurant outside was bombed?" That kind of woke us up - well, that and Rafael's driving, because his idea of defensive driving was going through red lights over very rough streets. And somehow, you know, we never thought we were going to be attacked. There was no particular... It wasn't us they were mad at particularly, no more than anyone else. They were mad at everyone, but no more than anyone else. Oh, dear.

Then we all got radios that we had to have, and from our district, from Mina Flores, there was so much static that you couldn't hear them. This was all kind of futile. After we left, this friend of ours who actually was acting cultural affairs officer for a while, although she hated cultural work, but she was there, and she and her husband got death threats. And they think it was a woman that worked in the cultural section that I had really been too lenient with, I guess, but she had certain talents, but she was really a little mad. We think it was [her]. We're not sure. So they had to go out and stay away for a few weeks.

I have a very interesting... She sent on the computer and she gave me a copy. I don't have a computer, but she gave me a copy of a wonderful description of Cuzco and Machu Picchu and some of their travels that you might like to see. It's very vivid and very, very good. But those were the times. And I'm so proud of our friends, our Peruvian friends. They all stuck it out. They didn't leave. A lot of people were leaving. They didn't leave. I didn't go back for a while. We left in 1987, and as I say, we would have stayed another year, but it was probably all for the best because I was very tired. I was not feeling very well, and so it was probably just as well to retire at that point, although I had no choice. And my mother was living in West Texas, and she only lived for two more years, as it turned out.

Q: You were with her.

MERELLO: At least, we would drive to Alpine and -

Q: Nice town.

MERELLO: Yes. She loved Alpine. She spent the last 10 or 12 years of her life there, after living very happily in New York with my father. But she was very happy there, and I can understand why she wanted to get away from hucksters and too much news. She had her books and her music and lots of former students who would come to see her, and she was very happy there. I'm very glad.

Q: Was she a teacher, professor?

MERELLO: After my father died, she started teaching, and she loved 16-year-olds. That was her favorite age. And she taught them literature, mostly American literature, and rhetoric and how to write. And sometimes it was hard going, but she had some very good students in the end.

Q: Was that at the state university?

MERELLO: No, it was not. No, actually it was at the Teaneck High School. That was my high school. She had moved to New York in the mean time.

Q: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

MERELLO: Then she moved back to Fort Lee, and she taught at Teaneck High School for a number of years, and she always kept in touch with her students. And they would go and visit her in Alpine, which is not easy, as you know.

Q: I know, end of the world.

MERELLO: But then I have a French friend who's almost like a brother, although I never see him, but he was very fond of my mother, and he would come, all the way from Brussels, where he was living. If he ever made a business trip to New York, he would go all the way to Alpine. He loved the West, and he was very fond of my mother.

Q: Well, maybe you'll tell us a little bit more about your Texas origin and then why you came back and what you've done because I know it's important for people to know that when you retire you don't die, that a new phase of life is Texas, I think, unless I'm putting words in your mouth.

MERELLO: No, you're absolutely right, and Connie can tell you that when you retire you immediately feel 10 years younger, which is true, wouldn't you say?

Q: It's a new challenge.

MERELLO: I was sad about it, but I have a nice letter. Afterwards I was very glad because at least we'd been able to see my mother a little more, and she had never said she was worried, she never complained. But I think in Peru she [was worried]. And I'm grateful for that. It all worked out very well.

And in Austin? Well, we thought of San Antonio. In fact, I would have been very glad to live in Buenos Aires. I loved Buenos Aires, but we wanted to be near my mother, and Agustín had never been to the United States until we came home on home leave in 1976 from Buenos Aires. We took a freighter, and it was a three-week trip. It was wonderful. And coming into New York harbor was very exciting, and a friend of ours happened to be there. He met us, and Agustín immediately loved New York. My sister happened to be visiting there, so this was wonderful. And then we made our way down. Well, we had to go to Washington, and then we made our way to Durham, where my mother was living and my sister and brother in law are still. And we had home leave there. But Agustín had never learned English, and when we were in Buenos Aires he went for several weeks to the Binational Center, with early morning classes, and they were mostly Argentine businessmen and all very conventional, and they had coats and ties and all. And he said it was so funny, because the teacher was a young Armenian-Argentine, but very fiery, and a good teacher. He learned a lot from her. And anytime someone would make a mistake, she would say, *"Feo, nené,*" as if they were little boys. And he read a lot. He read a lot and he learned very fast. He was a very, very intelligent man. Luckily he had a sense of humor because when they gave him the form - I don't know if you've ever seen that form or whether they've changed it in the meantime - "The Would-Be Alien Spouse." And if you can think of a more insulting phrase, I don't know what it would be. But "would-be alien spouse" - I thought that was very funny. They were calling him an "alien." And it was the same form, part of it at least, that they would use for employment. So it asked "How many words a minute do you type?" "Do you drink to excess?" This sort of thing. Well, luckily, he had a sense of humor. But it took about a year for them to agree that we could marry, and we were on a trip in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I wanted him to see the Blue Ridge because we had gone there with the family when I was young. We used to go there in the spring to see the rhododendrons, and it's one of the most beautiful places in the world, I think. I wanted him to see that. And we were there, and we called my mother, and she said, "Well, you got the telegram. You can marry." So we went to the courthouse square in this little town of Sparta, just to see what we would have to do to get married, and before we knew we were married. It's very easy to get married in North Carolina. So it was very romantic in a way, in its own way. And then we found out that that wasn't strictly legal actually. We had to go through a lawyer and all this business. Oh, so we got married again in Arlington, Virginia. That was fine, and we really were married. But it took a while. It wasn't easy.

Q: Then you chose Austin.

MERELLO: Well, then we weren't sure whether we would go to San Antonio or Austin. We started in San Antonio, and I don't know quite why, because I've always loved Austin. And we just somehow... I don't know. I thought maybe more opportunities in San

Antonio. I did have a beloved aunt there. But we looked around, and we just couldn't somehow find a place. My mother kept saying, "What is wrong with you? You know you love Austin. Go on to Austin." So we finally did, and we were driving to the house of an aunt and uncle, where we were going to stay for a few weeks, and on the way we stopped at a café near the university, and they were playing Mozart, and the coffee was good, and the sun was setting over the hills, and Agustín looked at me, and he said, "Why did we wait so long?" And this was 1987. This was the very best year for buying a house, although we didn't know that at the time. We didn't even know if we could afford a house. We sort of wanted one because we had so many books and we wanted more space. We were both city people and had always lived in apartments, and Agustín *really* wanted a pool. He wanted water, to be near water, any kind of water. And he wanted a workbench. And so at that time we looked around, and we looked at about a hundred houses, some of them very fancy houses indeed. And if we'd had $100,000 we could have had quite a house here. But we didn't have that, and we were just barely able to find the house we did, which was just an ordinary middle-class house, just fine for us, just right. And we were very happy there. And Agustín had to do all these things. He loved going to a hardware store, and he could fix things, and he knew how things worked, and I don't. And so for me, life is a drama because I don't really know how the house works, and maybe some day everything will go to pieces, and I won't even know. But he enjoyed Austin, and I had Kim here. I had a lot of relatives here at the time. Some have died since, but I had younger cousins, and we always loved it.

We used to drive here every summer when I was little. My parents had met at the university. My mother was born in Mexico, in Aguas Calientes. Her father had had a hardware store there before the revolution, and after the revolution he died of typhus shortly after that, and so my grandmother had to make the way with the three children, four children - she had adopted two little cousins who were fatherless and motherless - and so they made their way through the railroads being blown up and all this to Veracruz and then took a boat to New Orleans and stayed in New Orleans for a while, and my mother went to elementary school there. And then they moved out to California for a while because they had some cousins, and then San Antonio, and then finally they were old enough to come to Austin. And my mother remembered that sometimes she'd come home from school and my grandmother would be packing up, saying, "Well, we're going to move again." And I still don't know how my grandmother managed. I don't know what she did, whether she had enough to buy a little house and fix it up and then sell it - I don't know what she did, but they managed. And the house that I remember that was my grandmother's house for years and years was 3202 Guadelupe, not too far from the university, and that particular block is businesses now, but the street behind it hasn't changed at all. It's still great big high oaks, and there was a swing, and she had a shed that I loved full of letters, which she burned, and I'm sorry for that because her father was a captain in the Confederacy and it would have been very interesting to read that.

But anyway, she's like my mother. She wasn't very interested in genealogy, and she didn't want to think about the past too much. But that was where we used to go, and my father's family had a big house on West Ninth Street, which is still there. It's been

changed a little bit, but the house is in good condition, and he was one of ten children. And that family had been in Austin for generations, a long, long time. My mother's father was of German descent, and I think his parents or maybe his grandparents - I think his parents - actually came over in 1845, very young. The story is that they met and married on the boat, 15 and 16 respectively. So I guess it could be that, because he was the youngest son and so on. There were very few generations. And there's still a little house there that Andreas Eiffel built in 1984.

So my father started the radio station here at the university, and when NBC was thinking about television in the late '20s, they came and they hired him, and he went there and eventually became chief engineer. And when I think how exciting that must have been in those days - they were inventing everything. They had offices on the 86th floor of the Empire State Building, and he helped put up the antenna there. And the strangest thing happened a couple of years ago. There was a program here at the university on the early days of television, and they had people from CBS, and I was sort of miffed. I asked one of the organizers why they didn't have anyone from NBC because NBC actually started sooner. They said, "Well, because CBS gave us all its papers and exhibits." But I explained why I was interested, and she said, "Well, there's a man here who was hired by your father." And I had never met this man, this nice engineer who was hired the day that the plane crashed into the Empire State Building, and crashed on the 70th floor, so they were above it, and he made his way up through the dust and so on. Fortunately there wasn't too much damage to the building. They must have thought their last day had come. We never met him because he went to Cleveland not long after that, so I never knew him, but he was just a delightful man. He and his wife still live at Westminster Manor, and even more astonishing - he's the one who saved a lot of the memorabilia because he realized that after GE took over they weren't interested at all in the history of the company, so he gathered everything he could and he did an album and donated it to the Smithsonian Institution and had a copy made for himself. And he showed me things like Toscanini's microphone, which to me was like an icon, because I remembered Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra and that beautiful studio that they built, the first floating studio. The engineers later told me that the insulation for that studio was seaweed from Greenland. Don't ask me why they thought of it or why. It worked all these years. It worked very well. But that beautiful studio - and now it's "Saturday Night Live," which gets raunchier every week. It just shows how we've come down in the world.

In fact, I don't really believe in competition. It seemed when there were only three networks, they all did the best programs they could. Now, they try to find the lowest common denominator. And they deserve to have lower ratings, because they don't respect their viewers.

Q: Yes.

MERELLO: But that's how they happened to come to New York. That was during the depression, or the depression soon came along. And I was born in 1932, which is, I guess, the lowest year of the depression, so I feel quite honored to be born then - really wanted. I

think those of us who were born back there were really wanted. And years later my mother told me a story that showed me what it was like and how little money everyone had. There's an art show in Washington Square which you may know about. Every spring there's an art show, and they were there one time in the '30s, and they both saw a painting that they liked very much. It was a painting of Central Park, and they really wanted to buy it but just could not afford to. They wanted to and they couldn't. It cost $12.00.

Q: It tells you something.

MERELLO: I could have bought it for them. But that was the time when we would drive down to Texas every summer. Two days and two nights, they'd take turns driving, and they'd take a little Sterno stove, and it was adventurous. And I remember I always loved Austin. Austin was heaven. Being in my grandmother's house and then to go to Barton's Springs, and the whole family, all of us, would meet there, and the table where we used to sit is still there, and Barton's is one of the few places that hasn't changed, really. That old tree leaning over the water, and those flat stones across the... When I go there I feel like four years old again. (End of tape)

Yes, we were talking about Austin, and Austin is a very fine place, and I was just saying that one of the few places that hasn't changed is Barton Springs, our sacred place. It still looks the way I remember it as a little girl before I knew how to swim. And I'm glad they put the three philosophers there, Betacek and Webb and Frank Dobie. It's a grand place for those of you who were not fortunate enough to have been here.

So we moved here, and we found our little house, and we were able to buy it, and we were very happy here. We started doing a few things. We took a very good course - I can't remember the name of the institution - but the idea was to teach people to read, native speakers to read, and I actually did do that twice, and it was very rewarding. I feel very strongly that someone who can't read is like someone disinherited. It seems a terrible thing not to be able to read. And so I wanted to help with this. And what you do is go to a library and there's a very good method. You don't have to be a teacher, and Lord knows, I wouldn't be a good teacher. It's a very good method: the Laubach method. There are several books, and you go step by step, and it works quite well. And I taught two people, two very intelligent people. One was a young woman who had a couple of children and I think got in trouble with the law because she abruptly left town. I'm sorry. I hope that isn't why. I hope she did get to join the National Guard, which was her ambition. And she got to book three, and then she was doing fine, and I assume that she went on and learned and bettered herself. And then a young man, 32 years old, charming young man, who had been in the army in Germany and they didn't know he couldn't read. He had fooled everyone. And we had been told that before. People would rather confess to time in jail than that they don't know how to read. For instance, he learned just enough to pass the... They gave him the drivers' orally, so he could just, you know... The essential signs he could read - that was about it. In his church the pastor once asked him to greet new people at the door and write down their names and addresses, and he said, "Well, why don't you write it down, because I may not spell it right." He fooled everyone, but then he realized

finally - he was very smart - that he was never going to be more than a janitor if he didn't learn how to read. And again, we were on book three, and I was so proud of him, and he's doing wonderfully. He had written his first letter to a brother who was in jail in Alabama. And the brother had learned how to read in prison. So he was able to do it. And then the first crossword puzzle that he was able to do, and all these landmarks. It was very exciting. And then again, he had to drop out because - this often happens with adults - his car would break down and he had two jobs, and it gets very difficult for them; especially when the language gets a little more complicated, they sometimes get discouraged. But I had every faith in Wardell. I'm sure that Wardell went on. He probably owns his own company by now. He's absolutely charming, would have made a wonderful salesman or anything. He could have done anything, and I trust that he had sense enough to go on, because actually there was still a lot that he had to learn and I was really angry at him. He thought he knew enough, I think. He didn't really, but I assume he kept up. By then he was reading the paper every [day] and so on and so on.

And then we saw a little ad in the paper that the dispute resolution center here in Austin needed volunteers, and we were very interested in that because mediation was something that was being talked about. And so we went, and we were chosen, and we had excellent training - very good training - and we did some mediation and both very much enjoyed it because it was empowering the disputants to work out their own problem. You weren't giving them therapy; you weren't telling them what to do. It's an art, really. It's very challenging, and there are a whole series of steps and there are just a few rules to it. And if you can get the people to come at all, then there's an 80 per cent chance that they'll work out some kind of agreement, and then you write it down and help them write it down. It has to be very specific, very, very specific - "Bob will not speak to anyone in the family until he has had his first cup of coffee." It's no use saying "Bob will be more polite." You have to be very specific. And immensely satisfying, but we translated some of the materials into Spanish, and we went to visit some of the Hispanic Associations and so on. They were very interested, and we were hoping to do more with them, but I think that they had more volunteers than they needed and also they had said they wanted people during the day, and that's what we preferred, but what we should have done was call in the evening, because many, many people, more came in the evening, and so we should have pushed it a little more, but I still regret that and I think I'll go back to it.

But one of the most interesting experiences of my life I had several years later, when I finally went back to Peru. We had very good friends there, and they finally said, "Come and see us." And so I did. Our best friends there were a couple who were remarkable people. Carmen had done a lot of work in the slums. She was a psychologist, and she helped women, for instance, get organized and find out what their rights and responsibilities were and how to deal with government, how to deal with the law, all of these things. And then later she became the executive director of an anti-drug effort, which was sponsored initially by AID and now is independent, called SENDO, and she's marvelous. She really is a wonderful friend. When I went there I found things better. Usually when you go back to a place, they're worse. In Peru, things were better because there wasn't as much bombing going on - very little, in fact - and the economy had

improved a little. They had all the problems everyone else does, but at least they weren't killing each other any more. And all our friends who had been brave and had stayed, they were all doing good things, and there was a whole new feel to the place. A lot of young people were going into social work. They realized that they all had to come together. At least, this is a feeling that I got. It was just an impression. And Carmen said, "Well, come back next year." This was after Agustín had died, and I was just... I still am. I miss him more than ever, and it's just a constant grief. And Carmen as a psychologist, I think, said, "Why don't you come back next year, and we'll do something together?" And I said, "Carmen, what?" And then the next day, I thought, Well, I could do mediation. We can have a workshop on mediation because this is just the right time in Peru. They had institutions that would give people advice in a paternalistic sort of way, but they didn't have anything like mediation that would actually empower people to work out their own problems. And she liked the idea, so we did it. I went there, and we were able to go to Ayacucho, which Agustín and I never could go to because it was so dangerous when we were living there. Beautiful city. It was absolutely ravaged by the terrorists and the army. People caught in the crossfire. We expected about 30 people for our workshop, and we ended up with 84. And these were people who wanted to work as volunteers to help other people. Every one of them had suffered some loss. It scared me even. And very exciting and a lot of fun. We had some elderly men who were governors in little villages and [others who] spoke in Quechua in Quechua. And there were lots of [problems] because the rules had changed a couple of times and none of them was very clear about who owned what, and so they were hoping to use this to resolve some disputes. And I hope they did by now. I imagine they did. And then a lot of social workers and teachers and so on. We went to a large city which had been completely cut off. They used to have a train, but no more, and you had to go over a mountain pass 14,000 feet high, and there's no plane. The only way to get there is to drive, and yet it's a very large city. So again, we had many, many people, a very large workshop, and a lot of people worked very hard on this. The local priest killed one of his own chickens to make us chicken sandwiches for a snack. And we met everyone involved, the mayor, everyone. And again, it was a great success. And we also did one in Lima. But I'll never forget it because it was like being on the crest of a wave at exactly the right moment for this. Everyone was receptive. Everyone understands this philosophy. It's not hard to understand, and Carmen had so much experience in doing workshops that we made a good team. She also had her delightful assistant, and the three of us really had a marvelous time, and you just felt it was exactly the right thing to do at this particular moment. We visited a slum where the young people were [caring for] the children, and the children felt safe. And they were starting all sorts of big projects, and they were hoping to use mediation. And I hope all of these things flourished. I don't know. Often in Peru things wither. But I hope they flourished. Anyway, we were hoping to do it again, but then Carmen ever since then has been so busy just traveling a lot to other countries as well, and just doesn't get to call her time her own, so she's too busy to organize it again, but I'll never forget that one experience. That was a real high point in my life.

And another thing that we did, we became interested in a Tibetan project. I had always felt a great deal of sympathy for Tibet, and there was a very remarkable woman here,

who's living somewhere else now, but she had started a committee here. There's a Tibetan Committee of New York and then in other cities as well. I had plenty of money, I guess, and so she called me and she said Congress had agreed to bring a thousand Tibetans to this country (and this was in 1992, I think), and they were going to come in little groups to different cities, because the whole idea was for them to be able to preserve their culture that they had in Tibet. And they drew lots, people who were willing to come, because the Dalai Lama didn't want only educated people to come; he wanted everyone to have a chance who was willing. So they drew lots, and so it was a great variety of people. Some people knew English. Most did not. Some were more educated than others. All of them were refugees, either in Nepal or in India. And Austin was the last city, where 20 Tibetans were to come. And they came in May of 1993, the first five Tibetans, and we only had two or three months to plan all this, and many, many people helped with it. We had to find jobs for them because they came with this fiction that they were immigrants, that they were not refugees. Of course, they were refugees, but the fiction had to be that they were just immigrants, so we had to find jobs for them before they came. And the Hyatt Hotel was one place that accepted some Tibetans. They were very glad they had. And so that was arranged, and then we decided that every Tibetan would have a sponsor for two or three months until we could find an apartment building where they could all live together. So we went to the first meeting over at - I think it was - Schultz's Beer Garden, where else? And I was thinking, well, I'm glad to volunteer to teach English or whatever, and Agustín said, "Well, they need sponsors. Why don't we volunteer as sponsors?" It was the first time we had ever had anyone to stay in our house who wasn't a friend or a relative, but we had a little guest bedroom, very small, but we decided we would. And so we found out who he would be. All we knew was that he was 46, that he had a wife and two daughters, but the family would have to stay behind. They were living in Darjeeling. And he had learned a little bit of English as a male nurse in the Indian army. And that's all we knew, and we were on tenterhooks. You can imagine. We really didn't know anything. And they warned us. The people who had been in Tibet and were familiar with this said, "Don't expect them all to be enlightened. But of course we did, and Dow really was enlightened. Everyone looked up to Dow, and he was a wonderful man. So we learned a few little phrases - *kashi delay*, the greeting, and a few little things, and one or two things that we could cook, how to make Tibetan tea, which is really horrible. It has butter and salt in it. And after [our efforts], D said, "Please, you don't have to make the tea." And he drank Darjeeling tea. So he and I would have tea together. But anyway, we all learned these things, and if we had tried, the five sponsors cold not have lived farther apart. We had the illusion that Austin was a small city. Now it isn't. We were constantly meeting and driving all the time. It was like being parents of a child, almost, going to school because we had everything to do. We had to arrange for people to tutor him in English. Most didn't know any English at all. To them it was like coming to a different planet, and I can't imagine what they thought Austin would be like. We found out afterwards that they were so relieved when they flew over and they saw all the trees, because someone had told them there weren't any trees in Texas. And they needed trees for a special ceremony. But can you imagine that flight around the world? A long, long flight, those first [flight] people. And the press was interested at that time, so a lot of people, a whole crowd of people were there to welcome them. We had silk scarves and so

when they got off the plane they came to the waiting room, [they] stepped forward and we put the [scarves] around their necks, and saw the smile of relief. They knew they were welcome. It still brings tears to my eyes to think about it. Dowa had brought several very large cooking pots, and so we had decided that we would all drive to the house of one of the sponsors - a couple of musicians, actually - so that we would all get to meet each other. So each one went in the car of their sponsor. Going out of the parking lot, the host, the musician, was stopped by the police because he hadn't paid some traffic tickets, and they took him off to jail. So his poor wife had to drive home and hold the party by herself, and their Tibetan, it turned out, had malaria and hadn't want to tell anyone because they wouldn't have let him come. So he had to go to the hospital, but he was out in two days and he never had it again. None of them ever got sick, fortunately, because the other thing we had to do was arrange for some health care - you know, shots and all that - at one of the clinics here. All of these things had to be done ahead of time, and a lot of people worked very, very hard. But it was such a joy for [us] to [do]this. What a wonderful man.

Q: Good for you.

MERELLO: We knew that some of them, they have five little bowls that they fill full of water in the morning, and then around five o'clock they pour the water out. It's sort of a symbol of pouring [water out] with maybe the bad things of the day. And the Dalai Lama had interviewed each one of them and taken over their burdens, whatever they had suffered, and some of them had really suffered and had to walk out of Tibet through the mountains or had relatives killed. And he sort of took over all their suffering and gave each one of them an amulet. I still have the amulet and a picture of the Dalai Lama.

Q: That was a worthy cause.

MERELLO: And later we got to meet the Dalai Lama, because he spoke at the Southern University in Houston. Of course, we all go there and we were hoping to have an audience just the Tibetans and us, but it turned out there were so many people there. The did a beautiful reception for him, and he spoke. But he was very tired, too, so we didn't stay long with him. But he does emit a radiance. He is a holy man. There's no question of that. He's a remarkable leader.

And he said something I liked very much during his talk. He said, "What a good thing that there are so many religions in the world. We need them all."

Q: That's touching.

MERELLO: But they came to Austin, and they had to learn everything, not only the English. Our musicians in Austin were wonderful. There were restaurants that sent over free lunches. We found a place where they could learn English and people tutored them for nothing. And restaurants would send over lunches. And the musicians offered to play for nothing, and the Tibetans would cook and make some Tibetan food, and then they'd charge $5.00. They needed money because they needed to pay something for health care,

to go to the clinic. And also just for living. And they had also to pay back their plane tickets, and they never spent a dime that they didn't need to spend. They didn't ever buy a soft drink or anything. They saved up, and they all paid their fare back. But if it was something important they would get it. Later on, though, Dowa bought a computer for his two daughters, for instance. You know, they'd spend on something they knew was worth it, but they wouldn't spend on foolishness. I can't tell you how much I admired them. We wanted to do everything we could because they deserved it all and were wonderful people.

They weren't all alike, and some were quite uneducated. One of them, for instance, a woman who had grown up in a village, had never seen a globe of the world. She had no idea what the world looked like, and many, many other things, too. But Dowa was much more... He had sacrificed for his younger brothers. They were all able to go to school and do well, and he never could, but they admire him and love him and help him, and they're grateful, which is always a pleasure to see. But we celebrated the Dalai Lama's birthday in Mayfield Park, a lovely old park, and that was very beautiful. I have pictures of that. That first year especially was very, very touching, and then gradually the others came, and we finally ended up with 20 Tibetans. And fortunately, we had a Vista volunteer who helped us, and she found an apartment building where they could all live, four in an apartment. And of course, the idea was that they really should stay together. They needed each other. And now Dowa and his family, finally reunited after five years, his family came and found him. Dowa had bought a car and learned enough English to get along quite well. And I'll never forget it. He came up the driveway with his family. And I thought, this is one project where everyone did the right thing and there was a happy ending. All of the family were reunited.

Dowa and his family went to Minneapolis, Minnesota, because his wife's sister and brother-in-law are there. And they're very happy. There's quite a Tibetan colony there, and I went to see them last summer, and they're doing well. The girls had gone to a very good school in India and one of them is now in the community college and will go to college, I'm sure. And they're all working very, very hard, but at least they're not working two jobs any more. And they will be fine. But a lot of people deserve credit for that, and it was something that turned out well.

Q: Good for you.

MERELLO: And I belong to LAMP, which has an impressive name: it's Learning Activities for Mature People. We were invited to join not too long after we came here. It meets at the university, and we hear lectures on every conceivable subject. It's wonderful. It's a great privilege because you go to what you want to go to, and I always enjoy ones that I don't know anything about - something on the cutting edge of science, for instance. It's not just professors but other people too, everything from art to politics to science. It's grand, and I'm very grateful for that, being able to go on learning things.

I'm not sure what I'll do next. I really have a great capacity for laziness.

Q: Well, I hope you'll have time -

MERELLO: One of the reasons I wanted to move to the United States was because they were publishing books with titles like *The Problem of Leisure in the Affluent Society*. Remember that? In the '50s? And I thought any place that thinks leisure is a problem is a proper place for me. So I feel very glad. I don't even want to do anything else. I don't know what advice I would give to someone thinking about the Foreign Service now. I liked it when the communication was poor. The poorer the communications, the fewer visitations - which they call it with a straight face; I always liked their calling it visitations; they were visitations - from congressmen and others, the better. All of us wanted to be in a one-man post. Very few of us ever got to one, where no one ever wanted to go. But now a lot of the young people who join want to make policy. Well, they shouldn't be under the illusion. They're not going to make policy. It's made by politicians.

Q: Not with electronic instructions coming all the time.

MERELLO: And a lot of them seem to want to stay in Washington, which really is quite a change. And it's hard for couples who are both professional people. It is hard, but they can't really expect to be catered to beyond a certain point. There's a decision that you have to make.

Q: Well, I hope you give me a preface when we send this good article talking about your avocation.

MERELLO: The translation. I'll just say a word about that. That was when I was in Brazil, and Alfred Knopf came to Brazil. He loved Brazil, and he and Blanche both had an interest in Brazil. They discovered some Brazilian writers shortly during World War II, when they couldn't go to Europe. Before a visit of Robert Kennedy... The year after John Kennedy was assassinated, Robert Kennedy was coming to São Paulo, Brazil, and we were planning it, planning what we would do. And I was sitting next to our cultural attaché, and I didn't know anything, I [was searching] for something to say [and] he said, "Do you know any translators?" And I said, "Well, I translate myself." Of course, I never had, but I really thought I would like to. And he said that Alfred Knopf was looking for translators. So I said, "[I'm available]." So he said, "Go and see Alfred Knopf when you're in New York, when you're on home leave." And I did, and we became friends, and I translated a number of Brazilian novels for Knopf, and there's more about that in the annex which we're going to send you, but I could do that in my so-called free time, usually when I was on home leave. And it was kind of in between. It was hard. The Foreign Service was not a nine-to-five job. But when I did have a vacation, mostly on home leave, I would do a translation for them, and I am extremely grateful for that too, because I love doing it. I think you have to be a masochist, but there's a great satisfaction in it. I don't know quite how to explain it.

Q: You also mentioned in your article that you began your correspondence with Knopf and the Ransom Center. That's important because it's rather extensive, is it not?

MERELLO: It is extensive, and it shows how well they treated translators and what perfectionists they were, and how they were all interested in every book that was published. It was amazing. It was a different world, totally... Well, even at the time it was a little old-fashioned, in the early '60s. But I feel so lucky to have been able to work with... And they still keep up those traditions. They still publish some books. But yes, I think [about] how interested they all were and how things worked, and also a good deal about Alfred Knopf.

Q: Yes, well this article, that I think is well worth giving a wider audience than -

MERELLO: Well, you're very kind. I appreciate that.

Q: And this has been a good interview, as far as I'm concerned. You can make a difference. It's my impression of the Foreign Service, you can make a difference.

MERELLO: Yes, you certainly can, and you learn so much. One day you're In a slum, and the next day you're in a palace.

Q: If you like people, join the Foreign Service.

MERELLO: I think if you can tolerate people. I learned a thousand ways to say no, when we didn't have any money.

Q: Well, I know, but people are good. People are the same the world over, essentially, and some of them had the good luck to be Americans, and others have had bad luck. And I'm grateful.

MERELLO: Oh, I'm grateful for the people I've known. When I think back on the people I've known, ordinary people, you know. Things are never as bad as they seem as long as there are people like that in the world.

Q: Well, I thank you very much, Barbara. This has been a good two tapes.

MERELLO: It's the first time I've ever thought about it *in toto* like that.

End of interview