

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

**AMBASSADOR GILBERT A. ROBINSON**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is August 15, 2002. This is an interview with Gilbert A. Robinson. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Gil?*

ROBINSON: Yes.

*Q: Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born?*

ROBINSON: I was born in New York City, New York. They wrote a song about the address. I think George M. Cohen wrote that song "45 Minutes from Broadway" and that was 45 minutes on the trolley. I lived at 4500 Broadway and it took 45 minutes to get there.

*Q: In what year were you born?*

ROBINSON: 1928. I graduated the same year you did.

*Q: It was a good year. We were both born in the year of the dragon.*

*Going back, where did the Robinson family come from?*

ROBINSON: I don't know a lot on my father's side. He lost his father two days before he was born, so he didn't know much. He was brought up in an orphanage.

*Q: Was there any family around?*

ROBINSON: I think probably his mother was alive at the time but couldn't support the three children and they were put in an orphanage in Brooklyn. I once asked him when I was married and had my own child what he wanted the most when he was in an orphanage. I was thinking of a baseball or a football or something. He said, "The thing we wanted the most was a piece of bread with jam." You see they didn't get a lot of food. Then he went on at a very early age, probably under age to sign up, to join the Marines. He was on the first Battleship New Jersey and was in the landing at Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1914. One day, I took him around the Iwo Jima Memorial. He looked around there and saw inscriptions about early actions against pirates that the Marines had done and then something else historical and then he saw the information that they had about the landing at Vera Cruz - and he said, "I'm not that old." There wasn't a lot of action for the Marines until World War II and Korea.

*Q: Then what did he do?*

ROBINSON: He got caught in the Depression. He was going for a career in business. My mother said he was excellent in sales but there were no jobs, so he took an exam and ended up in the Post Office Department. He spent his work life on what you don't see anymore: the mail trains. My early recollection is that at night if I came in late or something and he had gone to bed early, I'd see on the table in the dining room, his hat, the letters that had to go out, and his gun, a small .38 detective special. All people working on the mail trains were trained to use guns. In those days, the only way you could ship money or valuables was on the train. There were holdups a little bit like the Pony Express days. Robbers went for the mail trains. He basically ran up and down the East Coast. It was very interesting because the federal government had a very rigorous system for applying for these jobs at the time. They had exams and you had to take an exam twice a year so you would be accurate and fast and wouldn't be throwing mail in the wrong box. They sorted mail so that the letter for the lady in Peoria, Illinois wouldn't go in the box for Tucson, Arizona. So, he had to know the schedules of the trains. It was remarkable. My father only had formal education through the eighth grade but he could read and write and do many things well. What they did was, they stood on the trains and had these rows of sorting boxes. They would sort mail so that as they got the letters, they were sorted into boxes for the correct destinations. The trains were going from New York to Boston and at Springfield mail would be taken off and would be put on the train to Chicago and then to California. The postal workers had to know the trains and the routes. In a practice session, mail sorters had a miniature box and sat at an easel. My father sat there with addressed mail the size of a business card and the letter would say, "Mary Jane Smith, Cincinnati, Ohio" and some address. He would have to put the card in the right box, but fast. He would time himself. Then to check himself afterwards, he'd take it out and on the back it would say, "Norfolk and Western via Roanoke, another train to Cincinnati and the New York train." It was amazing. He never got less than 98 on the

exams.

*Q: My understanding was that the people who did this were considered to be the elite of the Post Office.*

ROBINSON: Yes. And he ended his career being a supervisor on the mail trains. Because the salaries in government were pretty low and he had a tough time getting me through college and stuff (I probably wouldn't have gotten through without a scholarship), he advised me not to go into government. But I liked international foreign affairs and loved the thought of working with the State Department. So, I decided that if I couldn't go in full-time, I'd go in part-time.

*Q: We'll come back to that. What was the background of your mother?*

ROBINSON: My mother was an accountant. First she was a bookkeeper. I did a little oral history with my mother. She used to come up and visit us from West Palm Beach, where they retired. She lived until she was 95. When she was about 90, I sat her down outside the house on a nice spring/summer day and set up my video camera and asked her about some things. I said, "By the way, did you ever know or see Charles Lindbergh?" She said, "Oh, yes. I was in a firm on Broadway and we had these high chairs and desks, as I was the head bookkeeper. The tickertape parade for Lindbergh came right down." I said, "Well, what was he like?" She said, "He sat very stiff. He never turned to the right, never turned to the left, and he didn't wave. He was a stiff." I said, "You know why? They didn't have any media advisors in those days and he didn't know what to do."

*Q: What about her family?*

ROBINSON: They came from Eastern Europe. Her mother and father came from Romania. I remember my grandfather talking to me (He was very interested in politics and government and used to read all the time. He came over at a young age) about voting for Grover Cleveland. He talked to me about that. When he was about 96 or 97, living with my uncle down in New Jersey, I ran for Congress. I had a mobile office. I advertised it as the first mobile congressional office. It was a Dodge motor home. I converted it and painted my name on either side. Of course, if you run in New York City, as I did, you also paint the roof because when your music played people opened their windows and looked down. So, I drove that down for his 96<sup>th</sup> or 97<sup>th</sup> birthday with a lot of the family in it from New York.

*Q: Did you go to school in New York City itself?*

ROBINSON: I remember, we started kindergarten... They had moved from 4500 Broadway, New York City to Westchester. I started kindergarten there. From age five to 10, we lived in Mount Vernon, New York. Of course, the suburbs where I was born were the suburbs in those days up near the George Washington Bridge. Then the suburbs kept moving out. My father sometimes had difficult hours. So, no matter where our family moved, he rented the top floor of the building, with no elevators sometimes, so he would be able to sleep in the daytime with no one walking over our apartment – those stairs

were probably tough on my mother. Then we moved to Long Island, Queens, where my parents bought their first house, and I went into the public school system. I graduated from PS107 in Flushing, New York City.

*Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?*

ROBINSON: No. I had 14 first cousins.

*Q: Good heavens. Did they all live around you?*

ROBINSON: A lot of them did. When we moved to a house, we lived next door to my mother's sister; my cousin Len and I grew up almost like brothers. To this day, I'm in touch with all of them.

*Q: Was this a close-knit big family?*

ROBINSON: Yes. Not my father's side. He had one brother and one sister. His brother died when I was young. The sister survived him. She was about 95. I took care of her when she got elderly. She had her own place, but I put people there to supervise and everything. My mother – there were seven: three brothers and four sisters. My last uncle is still alive at 96 years of age. His brother passed away about a year ago when he was about 96.

*Q: You really have a long-living family.*

ROBINSON: Yes. It's very interesting because the cousins started in New York and now they're in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Los Angeles, California, etc. One is a surgeon in Albuquerque. One is a psychiatrist in Los Angeles. Another is a lawyer here. Another cousin is with the Broadway theater as a producer and director. He had prominent roles on Broadway as an actor. Several owned their own businesses in printing, pharmacies, public relations, computers, government, etc. and all did extremely well. When you think about the American dream, this is another case study of a poor immigrant coming off the boat from Romania and having this kind of a family story by the third generation.

*Q: As a kid in the '30s, did your family have a religion and did they have a party?*

ROBINSON: The religion we had. It was very strong. I was brought up in the Christian Science Sunday School. We had a good, normal Sunday school bringing up. I remain a Christian Scientist to this day. My daughter is a Christian Scientist. My wife was. My wife is gone now.

I think my parents were fairly independent. In those days, everybody loved Roosevelt. I think that they were great Roosevelt supporters, although my father probably leaned to the Republican side and voted that way after Roosevelt. I think they were pretty intelligent voters. They read a lot and listened to the radio. If a Republican or Democratic candidate was persuasive, I'm sure they were ticket splitters. My father worked in

Republican politics a little bit in Long Island and then later on a lot when he went to down to Florida. My mother and he became very active Republicans in Florida. He even ran for office in heavily Democratic Florida and lost. At one time, he served on a Florida commission that supervised judges of the Supreme Court of Florida. He couldn't come up to New York City and help me when I was running for the U.S. Congress because he was running at the same time for office in Florida.

*Q: What about at home? Your father obviously was out when you were young.*

ROBINSON: Not always the case. As a young boy growing up, I thought everybody's father worked a week and then was home a week. With the railway mail service, they worked such long hours, morning to night, and then they'd turn around and come back. He had the run from New York to Boston as I remember it. I think he had a room in a rooming house and kept some of his clothes there and all. Then he came back the next day. Then he was off a week. During that week, he would study a couple of times a week. He cut the grass and he did many things with me.

*Q: Was this the sort of family where you sat around the table and events were discussed?*

ROBINSON: Yes, definitely. I do remember growing up with the news... It was Lowell Thomas in those days. Then you had Jack Benny, comedians, and things like that, and on Sunday Edgar Bergen. We ate dinner at the table. If my father was away, it was my mother and I. We always heard the news every night. Lowell Thomas was 7:00 PM or something like that. I grew up being very interested in all things international.

*Q: How about the kids in your neighborhood and in your school? Was this one of these ethnically diverse areas?*

ROBINSON: It was basically a neighborhood of white blue-collar workers, many of whom were immigrants, so it was diverse in that sense but not diverse racially. One of the guys across the street, his father was a contractor and I'm not sure he spoke English. He was from Italy. He did paving and things like that. Another one was from England. Another one's father was a captain in the Maritime Service and did the run to Murmansk during the war. Then another was a policeman. Three houses away was a fireman. It was a very blue collar neighborhood but not like today with Asians, Hispanics, blacks, and others culturally assimilated in neighborhoods.

*Q: Starting with elementary school, how was it?*

ROBINSON: For me, the elementary school, up to the fourth grade was in Westchester, which had a really superb educational system. New York City had a good system, too. It was okay. Some things were different in the systems. For example, you were taught in Westchester to print. If you asked me to take notes or something now, I print. But I had to use cursive writing in New York from the fifth grade. They always gave me D's in handwriting because I was taught another way. The teachers didn't have any flexibility. They didn't understand. So, when I went to college – even if I look at old notes in high school – I reverted. I can write faster printing than writing. So, I don't write in cursive

much.

*Q: In grammar school, were there any parts of the education you particularly liked and didn't like?*

ROBINSON: The social studies, geography, history was always of interest. Math wasn't too exciting for me. We had very tough – but now I'm grateful for – English teachers where you did diagramming on the blackboard. I've had over the years different secretaries and occasionally I get one who puts a comma with every prepositional phrase. They weren't taught well. I think the teaching in New York City in PS107 was tough, but I think it was good. I think you learned.

*Q: We were born the same year. I remember I got very much interested by the time I was about 12 in World War II 'way before we got into it. I knew all the airplanes. I made models and followed everything. Did the war grab you?*

ROBINSON: Yes. I found clippings in stuff that my mother had stored. She said that I used to cut clippings out of the newspapers and made scrapbooks of the war and all the way up to the landing on D-Day. By the time we got to be 16, it was 1944. All of that caught me. Somebody said the other day, "What is a Panay?" I said, "The bombing of the Panay? You know that." Of course, they were 15 years younger than me. Those things stuck with me. You heard the news. You heard about the rape of Nanking. You heard about the bombing of the Panay in 1938. The Panay was an American gunboat which was bombed by the Japanese. I think there was some loss of life. Those things really stuck with you. Do you remember the cards with gum?

*Q: Yes.*

ROBINSON: They had a card in there, a picture, of the bombing of the Panay. They had different cards about international events, not just baseball.

*Q: For most of our age, World War II with all its regrettable things was a good geography lesson.*

ROBINSON: Absolutely. We were very aware of World War II and the places where it was fought. Those cards about World War II and international events were the centerpiece and a symbol for the 1939-40 N.Y. World's Fair. I still have some things that I saved from that. Now they have the world globe there at that same World Fair site in Flushing.

*Q: You knew where all these obscure islands were and cities in the Soviet Union, the Mediterranean border.*

ROBINSON: The landing in Africa, the landing in Italy. To me, it was extremely interesting because some of the older boys I knew just one or two years older were in many of those places. One boy who was 14 in our seventh grade was very big. He looked

17. He lied about his age when he signed up. He was wounded trying to take a monastery held by the Germans. When he came home, he came to see me and showed his leg, which had been hit by machine gun bullets. Later I ended up getting to know Eisenhower a little and then being the youngest appointee in his administration. So, following the news as a boy and things like that was very interesting.

*Q: Where did you go to high school?*

ROBINSON: I went to high school at a school called Bayside High School. That was in the neighboring town of Flushing, which is where the tennis open is.

*Q: Also the World's Fair.*

ROBINSON: The World's Fair was there.

*Q: It must have still been either going-*

ROBINSON: Oh, no. It probably was a major eye opener. It was in 1939 and '40, so I was 11 and 12. I was there. My parents had an appreciation of history and I was there on opening day when FDR opened the fair. Then my cousin – we grew up like brothers – who lived next door and was two and a half years younger than me... I remember holding his hand. Can you imagine letting an 11 year old take an eight and a half year old these days to a major world's fair? The schools provided tickets. We bought little books of tickets for two dollars for 20. So, I went frequently. It's very interesting how things turn out: in my business career, I built two of the pavilions at the 1964-'65 World's Fair 25 years later at the same location in Flushing.

*Q: Trilon and Perisphere?*

ROBINSON: Absolutely. They were the centerpieces of the 1939-40 World's Fair. I still have some things that I saved from that. Now they have the World Globe there.

*Q: They had International Village and all that. Did that intrigue you?*

ROBINSON: I think the individual country pavilions interested me more than anything – France and England. But I was just as much intrigued as a young boy at the General Motors pavilion.

*Q: I was going to say that General Motors was the world of the future.*

ROBINSON: Oh, yes. What it showed in 1939 was the idea of superhighways crossing each other. There weren't any then. There were two-lane roads. If you fly over Los Angeles or any of the great metropolitan areas where they have five layers of roads... the Fair's exhibit was a precursor to those.

*Q: When you were in elementary and then junior high and high school, what about your reading?*



ROBINSON: You have to understand that from age 13 until I graduated from high school, one of my major interests was the Boy Scouts. I went through all the first class, second class, star scout, and became an Eagle Scout. I was also a member of the Order of the Arrow. I was a senior patrol leader and a junior assistant scout master. I think that the elements of leadership were taught to me more by the Boy Scouts than any other thing in life. I wouldn't want to have to make the decision in life: You can go through the Boy Scouts and become an Eagle Scout or go to college. They're both very important. For me, the training of the Scouts was very important. If you're a city boy or a suburb lad, you don't get to camp out. To get your Eagle Badge, you've got to camp out 100 nights under the stars. Or learn the knots. Or be able to use an ax and a knife and to cook. To this day, I can cook better outside than I can in.

In my reading, I liked pulp westerns and books about adventure. I got hooked on them and read them one after the other....Zane Grey's books and Jack London's "Call of the Wild,"....

*Q: Where did you go out? How did you get outside in the Scouts?*

ROBINSON: Long Island was pretty heavily wooded and we had a campsite out there. There were potato fields and corn on Long Island. Now, it's suburbia. Some woods. In Wyandanch, Long Island, we had a campsite. But then we had the Boy Scout Camp at Ten Mile River in New Jersey. It was very heavily wooded. I remember at 15 years of age, I could swim but I wouldn't put my head in the water. But to take my Boy Scout badge, I had to learn to swim that way. That enabled me to learn to swim pretty well. I ended up with summer jobs as a lifeguard and then I became a Red Cross instructor. To be in the water is very comfortable for me to this day... Then I became a swimmer in college and was captain of the swimming team. I attribute that all to the Boy Scouts. They provided the incentive and teaching. I learned how to teach canoeing. I learned how to teach row-boating. It opened up vistas. To be able to get out on the water and to know how to control a canoe in any kind of weather was like a gift.

*Q: In high school, was it pretty much scouting or did you get involved in other extracurricular activities?*

ROBINSON: I think some usual ones maybe with the newspaper or something like that. But basically I didn't even do my swimming that well in high school. It developed afterwards. When I went to college, it was perfected. But basically the Boy Scouts. We had a group of us who were scout leaders. The Boy Scouts had the patrol leader system. We developed through that. During the war, a lot of the older kids were leaving. So, your tendency was to speed up through the levels. I got out in three and a half years.

*Q: Did you have jobs?*

ROBINSON: Oh, yes, sure. I think I worked in the Post Office Department Christmases or something like that, which I did not like and didn't do again. I had an interesting job under the Brooklyn Bridge in a factory that made gold rings and jewelry. They put me in

a cage for measuring out gold to the workers. They figured this young 16- or 17-year old guy would be too scared to steal any gold, I guess. I would weigh the gold and issue it to the men who made the rings. That was very interesting. I saw these old factory machines... It looked like something out of Dickens. They had these barrels and the water would come and would run out and would run through the barrels into another sink. Then I learned that gold was heavier, so, as it passed through the flooded barrel, the gold would drop to the bottom and every so often the gold filings, the gold shavings from the rings would be emptied from the barrel. I also had a magazine route. I delivered magazines for a couple of years.

*Q: What magazines?*

ROBINSON: "Parents," "Ladies Home Journal," the regular Hearst magazines.

*Q: As you were getting close to graduation... I assume from about the age of 15 on, it was almost a given that you were going to end up in the military.*

ROBINSON: Right.

*Q: But then the war was over in '45.*

ROBINSON: Because of the Boy Scout experience and training, I had a summer job as a camp counselor. I had just graduated from high school in June of 1945—one month after the war ended in Europe. I graduated a little early. I was going to go to college in September '45. The war ended in Germany May 9<sup>th</sup>. So, I'm in camp. The war in the Pacific hadn't ended yet. I was at camp there. What had happened to me is that I had gotten a congressional appointment to King's Point, the Maritime Academy. Annapolis couldn't push out enough officers fast enough, so they commissioned through King's Point. But you still had to get a congressional appointment. I knew a man through church who was close to the congressman and I got a congressional appointment to King's Point. So, here I am, 17, knew I was going to go to King's Point, would come out an officer. I liked the idea of being an officer and in a uniform without thinking it through. That summer, I got to thinking it through. I didn't like physics. I didn't like engineering. Here I was going to be a maritime engineer on a boat. So, I went back to the school. The lady was too busy. She said, "Oh, I filled out applications for you. I can't do that for everybody." We had about 300 in the graduating class. So, I came back to her. I guess the Boy Scout training for leadership influenced me... I insisted. When I insisted, she did it. Then I saw a posting on the bulletin board for a scholarship to a small school down in Virginia with a guaranteed job after graduation. That was very rare. So, I went for it. It sort of spoke to me because they didn't just want grades... My grades were okay. They weren't 4.0 because I did so much on scouting and activities. But they wanted well-rounded people in leadership. So, I got the letters from the scoutmaster and all the stuff from the school. I won that scholarship. So, when I went to school in September – a small lovely school called Roanoke College. The company that gave the scholarship was American Viscose Corporation, which later was bought by Dupont, but it started the first synthetic fabrics. They had seven plants. One was in Roanoke. One was in Front Royal.

So, that's why they focused on a Virginia school. I used to go to the headquarters in Philadelphia. I just knew I had a job after college. But they headed me toward accounting and I didn't really want that. I ended up wanting to get into public relations. After a year in college, I felt that everybody, all of us of the same age, would go into the Army and the draft would continue. They were debating the draft then. I knew that they were going to continue it. Everybody knew it. So, I joined the Army. I left college after a year and joined the Army. I ended up in the worst place in peacetime you could be, in Adak in the Aleutian Islands.

*Q: You went too fast. I signed up... I was going to go into the Navy. I had taken a cram course in physics where I could be a radar operator. This was supposed to be hot stuff. Then they cut off the draft in the summer of '46.*

ROBINSON: But then they continued it again.

*Q: As far as I know, it wasn't going while I was in college. I just went to college and then all of a sudden the Korean War started when I graduated and – whammo... Let's talk about the military. First, let's talk about Roanoke College. What was it like?*

ROBINSON: It was a wonderful little school surrounded by the mountains. It was like a Hollywood version of a college. It was founded in 1842. It had a lot of old southern traditions, a lot of which I didn't like, coming from New York. They had hazing still going on then, which wasn't very nice. But the academics were excellent. Some of the professors we had used to teach summer courses at Harvard. It was very good in the English department, the Spanish department, and political science, which I went heavily for. I got a BS in economics, but I really almost had a major in political science and was very heavy in Spanish. So, I thought it was a very good education. The dean of the school, Dean E. D. Myers, wrote the prologues for and edited Toynbee's books. We had a small, very leading cadre of professors.

*Q: Did you do this for four years?*

ROBINSON: Yes. I now came back from the military. I had one year of college. Then I had the GI Bill, so I didn't even need the scholarship. I could go anyplace in the country. But I went back there. I loved the area. It was quite nice. To this day, I enjoy a lot of friends in southwest Virginia.

*Q: After your freshman year, you enlisted in the Army. What did they do with you?*

ROBINSON: Sent me down for basic training to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland. They kept us there and put us in the Ordinance Department. The war was ending in Japan, so I thought that to bring the guys home we would be sent over. That's what they were trying to do. I was in Seattle, Washington, in a replacement depot month after month. I couldn't understand. Everybody was going to Japan. When my time came, I went to the bulletin board after three months and there I was going to Adak in the Aleutians. I had to go get a map and find out where it was. The Aleutian chain almost joins Russia and Alaska.

*Q: What were we doing up in Adak?*

ROBINSON: We soldiers were on guard day and night fearing a Soviet invasion. We were putting together guns and rifles and issuing motors and parts for vehicles. I became an excellent forklift driver, operator of an overhead 50-ton crane, and a driver of a four-ton diamond T wrecker. Some of these things all came into play later.

*Q: I'm trying to figure out Adak. One time later, we had an intercept station where people sat around with earphones and listened to Soviet stuff.*

ROBINSON: I am sure that they did that and other intelligence work. There were 10,000 troops up there. I don't know what the others would do. I was very low level. I was a private for more than a private should ever be. I was only 18. There were Navy up there. We went up from Seattle, Washington through the Inland Passage and I had more time on ships than a lot of the Navy guys because they flew them back when their time of duty was over. We went back on the ship. We used to write our parents and say, "Dear Mom and Dad, we don't mind that there are no women on this island, that we haven't seen a woman for a year. We don't mind that there is no grass. But we miss the trees." That's the way we used to kid around. It was tough duty. Psychologically, they had problems with some of the men and they began to discharge early.

*Q: I would think so. You would dismantle...*

ROBINSON: They had regular troops. You were on guard duty. This was 1947. You were on duty for an invasion from Russia. Every night, somebody was out on the points and in foxholes and waiting for the Russians to invade. You were highly trained. We supported all of the different troops with trucks and jeeps and tracked vehicles. We operated a warehouse. That's where I learned to do all those things. But you also took your turn at being a regular soldier.

*Q: You were in the Army for two years?*

ROBINSON: Because Adak was considered a hardship tour and because of psychological problems that a lot of the people had up in Adak, they began to send the troops back, so I got out early. I was able to get back in school by February of '47.

*Q: What did you major in at Roanoke?*

ROBINSON: Economics. I had almost a double major in political science and was very heavy in Spanish.

*Q: What were your obligations with the American Viscose company?*

ROBINSON: My obligations were, if I finished school and got my degree, if I wanted to, I would work there. They were very nice. I didn't want to go into accounting. They were pointing me in that direction. I was not accounting material. In the last year, I told them I

didn't want to go into accounting and I said, "Why don't you give the scholarship to somebody who wants to? I have the GI Bill, so I can continue my studies."

*Q: So you sort of severed your relations.*

ROBINSON: Yes, I sort of segued out. Years later, I went back and saw the people. They were nice people.

*Q: You graduated when?*

ROBINSON: In 1950.

*Q: What happened? What did you do?*

ROBINSON: I went back to New York after graduation. A fraternity brother of mine contacted me in New York, knew I liked Spanish, and knew I was interested in public relations. He said, "I think there's a place in Washington that you can use your Spanish and public relations." I wrote them. They invited me to come take a Spanish exam. I took the Spanish exam, went back to New York City. A couple weeks later, they said, "Come down. You're hired." I came out, took a bus from Washington to go out to the suburbs, and I'm in some sort of a campus called Arlington Hall on Glebe Road. It was called the Armed Forces National Security Agency. It was really the National Security Agency, NSA, as they later formalized the name and it later moved up to Fort Meade. But we were here. I was learning Russian and cryptography.

*Q: For the record, we are sitting right now doing the interview at Arlington Hall, which has been given to the State Department about eight years ago. It is the site of the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, the FS Institute. Our organization has a little cottage on the campus.*

ROBINSON: I was here in '52. It's 2002. I made a full circle in 50 years. I did not care for cryptography. It was highly classified. I had all my security clearances and everything. My father was a very wise man and always said, "Never leave a job unless you've been there a year or two." So, after that amount of time, I decided to go back to New York and get into public relations.

*Q: How did you find the atmosphere? Sometimes it can be very difficult being in something where everything is compartmentalized and you can't talk about what you're doing.*

ROBINSON: I guess my security clearance was very clean. I was put in one of the highest security areas. I found it interesting. You were working with people because it was the Korean War. I found out that I had been very fortunate because I had left college to do my military service; all my colleagues were drafted immediately, given six weeks training, and sent to Korea. Some of them ended up in the Chinese prison camps, were captured at the Chosen reservoir. Meanwhile, I was untouchable because I had not signed up for the Reserves and had had my military service. So, here, with the war, Navy

captains and admirals were suddenly called back and I was sitting at tables with them doing some of the same things. So, it was quite interesting. It was the Korean War. You were helping out. Then I had to live in Washington. I found a place near Dupont Circle at 21<sup>st</sup> and P. It was called the "world's largest boarding house." Somebody had taken over all these apartment houses and townhouses. They had a dining room there and everything. It was interesting. You met a lot of people.

*Q: At this point, you weren't married.*

ROBINSON: No, I was not.

*Q: After a year, about '52...*

ROBINSON: In '52, I went back to New York. In '50, I was here at Arlington Hall. I had a mentor who was in public relations in New York. He had bought out Amy Vanderbilt, who owned a firm in the Empire State Building. That firm took care of the Empire State Building's public relations. He was 10-15 years ahead of me and told me about it. He took me to lunch near the Empire State Building and we got to talking about Eisenhower somehow. This man had been over in Europe. I said to him... I have this incredible story: Eisenhower made a speech to the men there in Adak. You lived and breathed and died on Adak. You couldn't get off it. It was a rock. He said, "You men here on Umnak. Umnak was 1,000 miles down the chain and for anybody else... anybody else, the troops would laugh at the mistake. But there was such great respect for Eisenhower that there wasn't a sound. These people realized that this was a great general and he could make a mistake. Then my friend said, "Let me tell you my story. I was sent over to Germany when I was over there to put up the presses. I was there during the war and afterwards to reestablish the newspapers and to get non-Nazis involved. I had to go to Eisenhower," and then he told me his story. I said, "You know, this guy, Eisenhower, is just the kind of person who generates anecdotes. This would be a wonderful "Collier's" magazine article. We should do that." I knew he was a good writer. He said, "No, you're looking at the guy who turned down 'Superman' as a syndicated strip. I worked for Esquire Features. This would be a good newspaper feature." I said, "Do you want to do it? You're a great writer and I'll go out and be the reporter." He said, "Well, we've got to sell it first. You've got to get some examples." Well, Eisenhower had come back and was at Columbia as president. Everybody, all the delegates, were up there. So, I went up there and met Sherman Adams, former governor of New Hampshire, and Mary Pillsbury Lord, and others. I got stories from them. Then I met the hostesses on the plane who brought him back. They told me they never saw a man like this, a great man. He's coming off the plane and flashbulbs are popping and the people are there and he sees a little kid being trampled. He runs over and saves the kid, pulls him out. Most people wouldn't be conscious of the crowd in that way. So, we did these stories called "Why I Like Ike: Anecdotes About Eisenhower by Those Who Knew Him for a Lifetime or Glimpsed Him for a Moment" by Bernard L. Lewis and Gilbert A. Robinson." He was a terrific writer. So, we got about 12 stories assembled. He was busy. He was a businessman. So, he sent me out to go knock on the doors. There must have been 50 syndicates. So, week after week after week, I trudged the New York Streets. He goes away on vacation to Lake George on a canoe trip and is

unreachable. I come into the last one, the North American Newspaper Alliance, and they say, "Kid, where you been? These are terrific. Let's sign the contract." I said, "Give me a day." So, I go to his lawyer and say, "How do we do this? Do we get a power of attorney?" His lawyer sends him a telegram. It takes two days. He goes over by canoe, sees it, telegraphs back his approval to his lawyer. I went and signed an agreement. I still have those. In fact, I'm looking around for a publisher now. I think they'd make a good little book. We did a syndicated newspaper column that ran in the "Daily News" in New York, the "Boston Globe," the Texas papers, all around the country for six weeks, five columns a week. After Eisenhower was elected, a couple of papers wanted to run them again.

*Q: So what happened to you?*

ROBINSON: That's how I got into my first job in government. My friend and I did not want apocryphal stories like those that happened with Lincoln, that weren't really verified. So, I took these stories to the people who had given personal anecdotes and had them sign them. Sometimes I couldn't get to them and had to go to their secretaries or assistants. There was a man named Robert R. Mullen who had been Eisenhower's press secretary when he first came back to Columbia University. He had been the most successful public relations manager in government ever. He ran public relations for the Marshall Plan under Paul Hoffman. He pulled in bureau chiefs like Roscoe Drummond and Walter Lippman. I went to see him. This was a very valuable lesson I learned. Early, somebody told me secretaries were important. You couldn't get to see him. She said, "I'll handle it, but sit here and tell me something about yourself." It was like a pre-interview and I didn't know it. So, when I came in to see him, she set up an appointment... She had been his secretary for a long time. He told me, "I'm going to have a press conference." He was now the public relations director for Citizens for Eisenhower, the most successful independent political movement in American history. Democrats, Republicans, independents came together in support of Eisenhower. He said, "Why don't you help me with the announcement that I've got Mary Pillsbury Lord and Governor Sherman Adams as co-chairmen of Citizens for Eisenhower." Adams later became chief-of-staff in the White House.

*Q: Mary Lord is Winston Lord's mother.*

ROBINSON: Yes, she was.

In response to Mr. Mullen's question about my working with him, I said, "I can't do that." I was a young guy with a narrow focus. He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, I have this column to finish." "Well, when will you finish?" "Well, I've got another two or three weeks." He said, "I'll let you finish it. Come work with me." So, I went with him and he became one of my mentors in public relations. He had been one of the editors of "Life." He had been an editor of the "Christian Science Monitor," just a fantastic man.

Then when everything was finished, everybody who didn't go to the White House went with him because Paul Hoffman then became head of the Ford Foundation and asked

Mullen to start educational television. He had said that we had totally missed educational radio. They sent me over to the Federal Communications Commission to pick up 242 licenses reserved for educational television, which today is the Public Broadcasting System. So, I was in on the origination of public broadcasting. This was 1952. I was there for three years.

Of course, I knew many people in the White House. I had worked with many of them in the campaign. For example, Charles Willis and Stan Rumbough, who had both been fighter pilots in World War II, were the cofounders of Citizens for Eisenhower as young men. The organization needed a top leader so Walter Williams, who had been chairman of the Committee on Economic Development, CED, was drafted to take it over. This thing sort of grew. They had a terrific concept and they drove it. Both Rumbough and Willis were very nice guys.

After the election, they went into the administration. Rumbough, who later married the actress Dina Merrill, went as a special assistant to Williams, who had been named number two at Commerce. In those days, there wasn't a deputy secretary. It was Under Secretary. Then in 1955, Rumbough moved over to the White House to head an operation with former Governor Pyle of Arizona that functioned as an Eisenhower administration speaker's bureau. Again, a secretary remembered me and at one time said to me, "Would you like to take that job? I'll talk to Secretary Williams." She did and I replaced Rumbough and became the youngest appointee in 1955 of the Eisenhower administration. I served as special assistant to the Under Secretary and then became special assistant to the Secretary of Commerce.

*Q: While you were working with public TV, what was the thrust of it at the beginning? They must have been floundering around trying to figure out what they're going to be about.*

ROBINSON: No. Mullen knew. He was extremely creative. He put together a wonderful team. He took Earle Minderman, the executive secretary from the Federal Communications Commission. He took Betty Coakley, one of the founders of "Meet the Press." He took one of the former deans at Yale. He took the executive director of the Republican National Committee, who knew how to make things move, a guy named Clancy Adamy. He took the daughter of the founder of J. Walter Thompson and put her in charge of the newsletter. She was a good writer. I was the first employee. He called me after the campaign and said, "What are you doing?" "I'm in New York at my home." He said, "Why don't you come down on Monday?" He told me about his new project. So I was the first employee. I ended up being his assistant and doing public relations. But the concept was to take those who were the best in literature, science, music, and to put them on programs and film this. There was no tape. Tape had not been invented. This was 1953. Then what he did was, he got the people in, let's say Chicago... Then there was a man named Myerson. He supported the Chicago Symphony. We went and talked to him. We had a legal contingent of our own. So, we had the licenses in our hand to give the right party. We said, "You put together a group and finance it. We will give you the license and you will be one of the first stations in the United States on the air." We did



this with Chicago, Pittsburgh, Boston, San Francisco. We got a dozen stations on the air. Mullen brilliantly conceived all of this. In those days, you put a 16 millimeter camera in front of television and it was called a kinescope. In order to get the film to other places, it needed to be physically moved. One station could mail it to another, but this process wasn't going to work for large numbers. You needed a center to organize and catalogue them and keep track as the film would go in and out. Mullen established an exchange center in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan. So, before PBS, here was a situation with the stations exchanging films on brilliant artists and great educational programs. It was working very well. We had a newsletter. They sent me out to New York to explore buying WOR 10 years before New York ever got an educational station. They established this educational TV system. Then Ampex invented tape. Sometime when we're talking about Russia, I'll tell you about being with the first tape and how I used this first tape with Khrushchev and Nixon. Then satellites were born. Then you could send a program up on a satellite and download it.

*Q: That came much later.*

ROBINSON: Yes. But this is all a forerunner of what is now PBS.

*Q: Were you running into either potential or real opposition from people in Congress who were saying, "Well, this is just going to be another one of these government propaganda outfits?"*

ROBINSON: You know what? The Congress couldn't fault it because it was not funded by government. It was all done privately – and by the Ford Foundation. We were called the Citizens Committee for Educational Television. Mullen was brilliant. You have a citizens committee and then committees in Chicago and New York. It was almost like a political thing. So Congress wasn't going to fool with that. Plus, they loved it. It was going to involve their constituents. They wouldn't be beholden. It would be an alternative to commercials. The real thrust was commercial against educational. But even some of the guys were sick of commercial television and they'd jump ship and go into educational television.

*Q: You were doing this until about when?*

ROBINSON: 1955. It was educational television. Then I went into the Eisenhower administration. I had various assignments in the Eisenhower administration which led me to live in Tunisia, Turkey, Russia...

*Q: What were you doing in your first job?*

ROBINSON: I was a special assistant to the Under Secretary of Commerce, Walter Williams. He was from Seattle. I did all the things a special assistant does. I'll tell you one anecdote which illustrates the power a special assistant has to do things when you're only 26 or 27. I was in the dining room of the Secretary one time. The admiral in charge of the Coast and Geodetic Survey... Commerce at that time was huge. They took out of

the Commerce Department the FAA, the Maritime Administration, Transportation, Highway, everything, and made the Transportation Department. Up until that time, I had been under that. I had a parking space at National Airport. I could drive out there, leave my car, fly up to New York. So, I was sitting down at the dining room next to the admiral. He was just nicely complaining – and rightly so – that he hadn't been able to see the Secretary for almost two months. I said that the Secretary had been away and traveling. He needed to get a new ship or something. So, I sort of felt sorry for him. So, I said, "Why don't you deliver me the papers and let me see what I can do?" By that time, I had been helping the Secretary, too. I didn't tell him I had 20 minutes a day with the Secretary to go over all the things that people would call about – Assistant Secretaries, bureau chiefs, highway administrators, and they would try to get him a memo or something. I would go over these things with him trying to save his time and trying to expedite things. So, I said to the Secretary, "You've been busy. The admiral really needs his budget. Why don't I go to the Assistant Secretary for Administration, get him to sign off, go to So and So, get him to sign off" and he said, "Don't forget the General Counsel." I said, "Yes, Sir. And then I'll bring it back to you for signature when it has all those signatures." I did it in three days. So, I called the admiral and said, "Would you mind coming up?" I gave him his budget and he almost fainted. He had been trying for three months. One day, we were sitting down at the table. People in the military spend their life in the military and think of rank. He said, "Were you ever in the Service?" I said, "Oh, yes, Sir. I was in the Army." He said, "What was your rank?" I said, "Private. I may have come out as a corporal, but I was the longest serving private you could ever know because they forgot about us up in the Aleutians." I'm sure that night he went home to his wife and said, "You know, I'm really, in effect, an admiral reporting to a private." But he was a very nice man. That little anecdote kind of tells you what you do in your work as a special assistant. You need judgment because you are trying to save your principal time. If you exercise bad judgment, you don't last in the job.

*Q: You're there for about three years.*

ROBINSON: Until '59 just before Kennedy came in.

*Q: Before Kennedy came in, did you get outside?*

ROBINSON: That how I first found out what State and USIA did.

*Q: Let's talk about that.*

ROBINSON: Eisenhower had said to his Cabinet, "The United States is conspicuous by its absence at international trade fairs. We want to do something about it. I've talked with the Secretary of Commerce. He's going to set up a special division. I want USIA to work with them also." And the State Department. It will basically be for trade, but we wanted to tell our story also. So, Commerce, USIA and State all worked closely together. I was at a luncheon at the Japanese embassy and Harrison McClung, a man from Commerce, was seated next to me. He had just come in to head the whole international trade affairs division. You know how, when you're young, people pass you around? Well, he had been in New York as a top executive at J. Walter Thompson, an advertising firm. Somebody

had put me together with him in New York City. So, he turns to me in the middle of lunch and says, "How would you like to go to Baghdad or Izmir?" I said, "I know where Baghdad is. Where is Izmir?" He said, "It's the old city of Smyrna in Turkey." I said, "Oh, yes, I remember now. Why?" He said, "I need to have somebody go out there fast. I can't get a security clearance." I said, "I don't know anything about exhibitions." "Well, you're in public relations. I'll teach you." I said, "Well, the Secretary is going away." I sort of declined. I get back to the office and the Secretary calls me in. He said, "McClung is telling me that he could use you. You're a young man. It would be very good experience for you. You'll be back in two months." I said, "But I don't know anything about it." He said, "Oh, you're in public relations." Well, people who headed industry, as Sinclair Weeks did, they thought marketing, public relations, and exhibitions were sort of the same. So, he did me a big favor because I did learn the business. In two days, I just really packed up and was on the plane to Turkey and arrived in Izmir to help put up the exhibition. I was attached to the U.S. consulate there. I learned about State and about USIA, and we all worked together very nicely, never dreaming that I would end up as the Deputy Director of USIA some day.

*Q: What was the focus of the trade fair?*

ROBINSON: It was eclectic. For my work, a lot of it depended on how well you can manage in that country and deal with the unexpected. One day, I found out that there were these gorgeous tractor. They were polished every day. I think they were made by International Harvester. I found out the story when I went up to a meeting in the embassy in Ankara. Some guy from AID tells me the story. He said, "We shipped those down 10 years ago. Somebody who was drafted right after the war to do this, to help, only knew one thing: State had said that what you give Greece you've got to be equal with Turkey. What they didn't tell him was that the farms we were shipping to in Greece were big farms and that Turkey had small farms with walls so you couldn't use the big tractors in these smaller patches of land. So they sat there. So, I saw this as an opportunity for the fair and borrowed them to use as a U.S. exhibit. I borrowed a crane that was the biggest in the world at that time when they were finished building the dam in Turkey. I met the president of the corporation and he loaned it to us. Things like that. We also had new Polaroid cameras for exhibits. We put on a major exhibit there. The Russians were there with a big exhibit because they had just had to come down to the Black Sea with lots and lots of lumber. The Israelis were there, as were the Romanians. It was a miniature World's Fair. It was very interesting for me as a young man. The Russians used to try to find out what we were doing, so they would wine and dine the Israelis and then later on we would wine and dine the Israelis and find out what the Russians were asking. You learned a little bit about open intelligence. Then I came back to my regular job at Commerce. I was there for another year or so. Then they had another emergency.

The communist Chinese were coming into Tunisia. President Bourguiba was in power the first year and there was no U.S. presence. We decided to put in an exhibition opposite the Chinese at the Foie de Tunis, the international fair of Tunis. Suddenly, I was on a plane again - now I was experienced - to manage and build the exhibit there. It was quite interesting. You had to use your ingenuity. We were short an exhibit... Polaroid, which was still new then, had given us a bunch of cameras and film, so I set up a stage. We

always hired locals as guides in uniforms and trained them from the colleges, those who spoke English. The guide would call somebody up from the audience and take their picture. It became the biggest hit of the fair and it was an afterthought for us. Bourguiba cut the ribbon and opened it. I was there six months. A group of us were planning to take a trip to Egypt and Israel but I get a telegram: "Come home immediately."

So, I come home. I meet with a man who had been a former Assistant Secretary for Commerce that I knew. He had been a former president of the National Association of Manufacturers. His name was Chad McClellan. He said, "You remember we were negotiating with the Soviets the year before?" I said, "Uh, yes." He said, "It fell through. But while you were away, I continued negotiating and we are now exchanging exhibitions. The Soviets Union is going to go into the coliseum in New York and we're going into a 10 acre site in the Sokoliniki Park in Moscow. He said, "You're probably mad at me because you just came back, but I want you to know I want you to be my assistant to do this." So, we spent six months doing the exhibition, putting it together. We sent managers over there. I also became the coordinator of the exhibition. We had staff in Moscow. Then he and I went over for six months and had the largest contingent of Americans since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. We had as exhibitors IBM, GE, Ford, General Motors, all of the major people. Macy's did the furniture for the model house we had. We had top fashion models. The cement was still drying on the morning that we put up the platform for Khrushchev, Nixon, and Milton Eisenhower to open the fair. A lot of people think that Nixon was the head of the delegation, but Eisenhower made his brother, Milton Eisenhower the Chairman of the delegation. I was riding in a taxi once and was sort of testing how much the population knew about the exhibition. I said to the taxi driver in Russian, "Eisenhower is coming here." He turned around and said, "Da. Nyet President Eisenhower. Milton Eisenhower." He knew that it was the brother, not the President. We found out when I met alone with the Soviets after the Exhibition had closed, that there had been a big fight - this is very interesting to students of history - between the Stalinists and the Khrushchevists because Khrushchev tried to do what Gorbachev did later to open the Soviet Union up. He wanted more consumer goods. He wanted the U.S. to come in and the Soviet citizens to see it. So, we had a tremendous exhibition. We had 100 Russian-speaking American college students or graduate students who were the guides. This was another area where there was very close cooperation. In fact, the President mandated that Commerce had the lead; USIA and State were close support; and they reported to the President on this one. Ambassador Tommy Thompson gave me an office there at the embassy and said, "Look, you're doing more than the embassy is doing with the business contacts, with Americans and Soviets. So why don't you handle that and give us the cultural and we'll handle that?" And we did. It worked out very well. The cooperation was wonderful between all elements mainly because we had a very good, strong leader, an independent guy, Chad McClelland, who knew how to make people work together. He was the only man I ever saw who dictated a three page contract with commas and semicolons and nobody ever had to change it.

*Q: What year was this?*

ROBINSON: This was 1959. Do you want me to tell you about opening day?

*Q: Yes.*

ROBINSON: Americans and Russians worked together very cooperatively. As a matter of fact, some funny things happened. One thing that McClelland did – and the State Department could not understand it – was, he asked that all cables to the Soviet Union from the exhibition be in the clear so that the Soviets could read them. The reason he did that was that he wanted clear communications. It was an exhibition, nothing to hide. It turned out to be great for us. We kept sending our messages to our manager over there: “Can’t the Soviets provide you with forklifts and trucks? We have seven forklifts right on the dock ready to go now. Tell us: should we put them on a ship?” We could communicate our needs freely. Every day, we’d do that. Finally, we get a pouch from State. We open it and find Polaroid pictures of a parade of forklifts, trucks, and everything. The Russians had been reading our cables and they didn’t want to be embarrassed. McClelland wrote these messages deliberately so we could get action. So, that proved to us that it was helpful. We found the Russians providing things we needed without asking them directly. It was good cooperation. The architect of Moscow was a Khrushchevite, and he helped tremendously.

On opening day in July, Khrushchev and Nixon came. I had planned the night before to take them around and then McClelland said to me, “How are we going to do this?” I said, “I was in the Army and in the Army you’re taught that the squad leader puts up his arm and everybody follows. I’ll put up my arm. We’ll decide now where we’re going to go. You’ll follow me and Khrushchev and Nixon know to follow you because you’re the head of the exhibition.” We decided we’d take them into the first color studio in the world, which was provided there by NBC. After that, we would go past the Pepsi Cola stand, girls with colorful dresses and things like that. That’s a separate story I’ll tell you about later. Then we went to the model house. In model houses, you can only have a single line go through them, so we cut it in half and put the halves 20 feet apart so people could go and see the living room, the kitchen, and all. So, as we went into the studio, there was Madam Fursteva, one of the women members of the cabinet, president of the Soviet Union, Vorashelov and Mikoyan and then of course Khrushchev and Nixon. They all stood in the color studio. Khrushchev was very impressed and began talking about his achievement in building these 16-story apartment buildings. He revolutionized their housing so people could get away from their in-laws and 10 people living in a small apartment. So, then Nixon talked to him about our individual homes. So, things sort of escalated into a little debate. Nixon was not known to be very ambidextrous with mechanical things. We had shown him the new Ampex recordable audio tape for the first time. He said, “Mr. Premier, please come over here with me.” So, the whole group went over. He pressed the rewind button on the Ampex tape, pressed the stop button, pressed the play, as we had shown him, and suddenly the whole debate could be heard. Khrushchev looked up and his mouth dropped open, as everybody’s did. The Americans, too, hadn’t seen it before. It was very interesting.

We went from there past the Pepsi Cola exhibit. A little sidebar: The night before, the vice president of Pepsi Cola, Don Kendall, said, “I’ve got to get Khrushchev to drink

Pepsi Cola.” Don said, “How am I going to do that?” We talked a while and I said, “Well, you asked me to lead. We’ll go by and I’ll just go a little closer to the Pepsi exhibit. The Soviets are very egalitarian, and they’ll probably call out and offer drinks.” There were six or eight of these Russian guides helping us and they were very pretty. That’s exactly what happened. We got him to drink the Pepsi Cola. Kendall came back in December after the exhibition was closed, negotiated a 15-year contract exclusive. Coke wasn’t even allowed in there for 15 years. It’s very interesting for me when I go back now to see Coke more predominant than Pepsi.

*Q: Jim Farley was also pushing that very much.*

ROBINSON: Right, but it was Kendall who did it. The exhibition did it. Khrushchev tasted it and knew what it was. In Russia, like most bureaucracies, you follow the lead of the leader. “If Premier Khrushchev was going to drink Pepsi, we will drink Pepsi.”

We then moved to the kitchen of the model house. Khrushchev and Nixon stopped in front of the kitchen display. Now, they started up the debate again. Everybody thinks the debate was started in the kitchen. It actually started in the studio. It got hot and heavy, but it was civil. Nixon was pointing out these things and then Khrushchev would tell what his country had done. Journalists and everybody were squished in there. William Safire who is now the famous New York Times columnist, was with the public relations firm and his assignment was the model house. So, he was in the kitchen looking out and the AP guy couldn’t do anything, so he threw Safire the camera. Safire took the picture. One of the pictures was Nixon pointing to Khrushchev’s chest. That picture was used in Nixon’s campaign, and a lot of people attribute that picture to helping him to win. The reason is that in those days, from Truman through Kennedy through to almost Clinton, a predominant factor that students of political science will tell you about is that the American people basically voted for the leader who they thought could deal best with the Soviet Union. They feared that the Soviets had huge atomic weapons and were afraid of a first strike. The photo showed Nixon being tough, and the photo captured a moment that influenced political history and had impact far beyond the immediate occasion. The ability to defend and be prepared against aggression is one of the reasons why many analysts think that Eisenhower was elected.

Just an aside, two curious things is that one of my best friends today is William Safire. After the American National Exhibition in Moscow, we got to know each other in New York and became partners in a firm at one time together. Of course, he went into the Nixon administration as a speechwriter and then left and is now as we speak considered the leading political columnist in the United States. So, you never know where history leads you.

*Q: The six months you were in Moscow, did you have problems with the security forces there, the KGB, and the Americans there? The KGB was not always following... They had their own policy which was not very friendly.*

ROBINSON: They made life miserable. You were followed. You were bugged. Your

room was bugged. We were taught certain tricks... If you set your drawers a certain way, you knew somebody had been in them. We never had anything that was controversial. The exhibition was all open. We were not dealing in anything secret. The interesting thing is, when I was with Commerce, I traveled on a government passport, not a diplomatic passport. So, the Soviets asked me to come over to the foreign ministry to meet with them. I said, "I'll bring my State Department colleague." "Not the State Department. No, not him." They absolutely despised the State Department. You know why? Because the State Department was very tough with them. I'm happy. So, I went over. As a matter of fact, at the end of the Exhibition, I was alone in the foreign ministry at the green cloth table. The people in the American section and the head of the American Section said, "Do you think this exhibition was a successful activity between the two countries?" I said, "2000%." They all smiled and they all said, "We were for it." We had not totally known that there was a big fight between those opposing and supporting the exhibition in Russia. So, I came back and told Ambassador Thompson and he suggested I write a memo to the President and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Commerce, which we did and which confirmed the success of the thing. It was good for history at that time. You learn a lot. It was interesting. In many instances, I'd walk out of a restaurant or take a cab and be followed. It was not pleasant, the Cold War. To be in Moscow in the middle of the Cold War was not good at all. Very interesting but not fun.

*Q: How about these young Americans, the interpreters? I would think they would have a problem.*

ROBINSON: They didn't have a problem. They spoke fluent Russian. The Soviets had a problem because they were afraid that they would penetrate society and find out too much, which they did. They were trying to hide the fact that there was privilege for some. The Communist Party had privileges. The Soviets came to me and said, "Those two girls that you have, the blond and brown haired, they're not Americans." I said, "What do you mean? Of course they're Americans." They would say, "They're not Americans. They speak like we do." Both their mothers had immigrated from Russia and the young women spoke perfect Russian. They were invited by the kids of the communist leader's to parties. They saw the special schools. They saw the special cars. They learned a lot. One of them, Charlotte Sakowski - she is no longer living - later became the bureau chief of the "Christian Science Monitor." The "Monitor" had the best reporting on Russia for a couple of years because she could go anywhere in society and was well informed about the country. I talked to Irwin Canham, who came over. He was the editor of the "Christian Science Monitor," long respected, and then became at the same time the head of the Chamber of Commerce of the U.S. He came over and I talked to him. I had met him before. I recommended this young woman. I was surprised when he hired her but put her in Tokyo. Some years later she came back to Moscow.

But it was an extraordinary time. The exhibition did a lot to break down misunderstandings between the two countries. We went to the State Department board that picked foreign service officers and had them help us pick the 100 best speaking Russian graduates. That's how I also got to work closely with State. They did a terrific job. We wanted diversity, so we had a couple of black men. The Russians would not

leave the black men alone. They wouldn't go and see the exhibit. They would stand around for hours talking to them. "Where do you live in New Jersey? What do you mean, your father is a doctor? You're a slave." This is what the Soviets had been told. When they'd ask them, "How many cars does your family have?" "Oh, we have two." "How could you have two cars? You're a slave." The communist indoctrination broke down. The Soviets tried to limit tickets to the Communist Party members. But word got out. For years afterward I kept meeting people I negotiated with. They said, "When I was a kid, I was at the exhibition."

*Q: I think this is a perfect place to stop for today.*

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*Today is September 11, 2002. In 1959, you finished the exhibit. Where did you go?*

ROBINSON: I resigned from the government and, in returning to the U.S., took a trip around the world to India, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong. I had not seen that part of the world. I took advantage of the change and mental adjustment to prepare myself to get a job in business. I came back to New York. I had been very interested in communications. I got a job as a vice president of a public relations firm. I'll tell you a very interesting story. When I was looking and thinking about it, I thought about calling Bernard L. Lewis, this man whom I mentioned earlier. We had done the column about Eisenhower together, but then I remembered that he had told me that he would never hire anybody who did not go into the newspaper business. You had to be a writer, get experience. So, I happened to be at a meeting in Boston and decided to call him. I knew he'd never hire me, so I asked him for advice. He had a major public relations firm in the Empire State Building. It handled the Empire State Building as one of his clients and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association of the United States. Very interesting clients. When I started asking him for advice, he said, "Why don't you come work for me?" I said, "But you told me 10 years ago you'd never hire anybody who didn't have newspaper experience. I wasn't interested in going into the newspaper business." He said, "Times change. You've had five years in the government. Government experience is very important now for public relations." So, I ended up as a vice president in his company.

*Q: You were doing that from about 1960?*

ROBINSON: Yes, from the end of '59 for a couple of years until I ran for Congress. While I was in New York, I decided that there are only two ways if you love government service, as I did, and that was you either would go in as career or you'd come back and forth with a political party. I had watched Eisenhower. I guess my family had been great supporters and loved Franklin Roosevelt, as most people did at that time. My family was probably independent. When I had been in college... As you end college, you get sort of passed around by friends of your father or your dentist or somebody. So, I was passed around to some very interesting people in the communications business. One of them was the founder of Young and Rubicon, the big advertising agency, Mr. Young. He was interested in Eisenhower and had started a little newsletter, so I began to correspond with



him. The more I found out about Eisenhower the more I became interested in him and his policies.

*Q: Do you want to pick up around '59?*

ROBINSON: Yes. What I did was work in the business, learn the public relations field, learn about the media. Television was kind of new. How you worked with them. And radio. Government was important because clients had issues with government and I did know my way around a little bit in Washington – the Department of Commerce. So, I began to volunteer – the mayoral campaign and then some others. Then I did some work with Governor Rockefeller. There was an opening to run for Congress in the Congressional Election of 1962. I had gotten some recognition working in public relations and putting Nixon and Khrushchev together. Rockefeller gave me the nomination. I didn't have to have a primary. It was very interesting. I was a Republican in a very heavily Democratic district.

*Q: Where was this?*

ROBINSON: The Upper West Side of Manhattan from 96<sup>th</sup> Street to 232<sup>nd</sup> Street. It's the Columbia University district. Eisenhower had been president of Columbia University. I had been the youngest appointee to his administration. I came to Gettysburg to visit Eisenhower. Ike invited me there and gave me a great deal of support. He was very interested in that area. I had a very tough race, although later on I became a campaign manager and I've been in presidential campaigns and others. Until you're a candidate, you never really understand that the buck stops here. In other words, a manager, a coordinator of a campaign, and a volunteer, all up to here, they're like putting all your fingers close together and then, putting your thumb way out here, the candidate is way out here. I'll never forget what Senator Javits told me. I had a very interesting experience because I had gotten to know these people as a young man. I went to see Senator Javits, Governor Rockefeller, President Eisenhower, Thomas Dewey had run for President, Herbert Brownell (Attorney General under Eisenhower), and these figures. I asked all of them basically one question, which is the most important thing: "How do you raise your money?" The answer I got in some instances startled me. You thought people who would run for office all knew. One of them said, "Well, I don't know. I never did it myself." The other spectrum said, which was absolutely correct, "Until the day you get elected or defeated, you will never stop raising money." I think every candidate has a dream that he'll raise the money before and then he'll go for months and just campaign. It's not true. You are spending 2/3 of your time, 1/3 of your time, 1/2 of your time, raising money, and the other half attending events and walking the streets. It's an exhausting business.

*Q: You say you spend half your time raising money. In that context, what were you doing?*

ROBINSON: You were going around to see people who had some money. In the beginning, you have to get a finance chairman. I went around for three months talking to the head of Merrill Lynch, and other major CEOs. One person passed you to another.

Finally, I came back to Governor Rockefeller and said, "Look, I've been looking for a finance chairman for my campaign. I cannot afford to have another lunch in the fanciest club in New York. I go to see a chief executive officer and he says, 'Well, come on and I'll take you to lunch.' He takes me to his fancy club at the top of the nicest building and then he kisses me off with a couple hundred dollar campaign contribution and says he's too busy to take it on as finance chairman. I can't go see anybody anymore. I don't have that kind of time." He said, "One more lunch." He picked up the phone and called his brother, David Rockefeller, and told him the situation. David Rockefeller had a little lunch for me and he had present six Chase executives. In the middle of the lunch, he said, "This young man, Mr. Hoeck, is our up and coming vice-president. He has volunteered to be your finance chairman." He did. He did a wonderful job. To this day, 40 years later, he and I remain friends. As a matter of fact, he is treasurer of the little foundation that I have that feeds Russian orphans. So, it was a hard fought campaign. What you do is, you go to events – black tie, non-black tie, dinners, churches, synagogues, anything where you can get a group of people to talk to. All the parties help you. The Democratic and Republican Party both have inroads to all the churches and synagogues and things. They'll usually have somebody who is a member there take you and introduce you around. As a result, you would go to these events, but then you would take lunch hour or the mornings where you couldn't get a crowd or there weren't any meetings and you would go visit people to try to raise money.

*Q: This was the election of 1962.*

ROBINSON: It was Kennedy's off-year election.

*Q: What were the issues that you found yourself having to deal with?*

ROBINSON: There was one burning issue and that was the recognition of communist China into the UN. At the time, the Republican position was no recognition of Red China. But I was a little different kind of candidate. People would approach me on the street and say, "Are you a conservative Republican? Are you a liberal Republican? What are you?" At that time, we didn't have the phrase "Read my lips," but I said, "When you see my vote, you'll know. I am an independent minded person and I believe in voting on the facts. I don't think I have a label. I'm a Republican candidate and I don't accept any of the labels." The basic issue was recognition, foreign policy, and how you deal with the Soviet Union and all of their and our weapons.

*Q: I didn't think Kennedy was pushing recognition of China.*

ROBINSON: He wasn't but it was a very major issue. People wanted to know what your position was. And they wanted to know your position on the normal issues that were there in '62. Polls showed up until maybe Carter but certainly through Kennedy and Eisenhower, Truman, all of those, the burning question in people's mind was, which presidential candidate – and to a certain degree it fell on a congressional candidate, too – which presidential candidate could best handle the Soviets. They chose Eisenhower over Adlai Stevenson, Kennedy over Nixon. I think that concern over international affairs

was a major issue.

*Q: How did the election come out?*

ROBINSON: I am a member of the defeated candidates club. I was in the green room once on a television show with Bella Abzug, and she said, "If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be in Congress." She had observed my race and decided that in the Democratic primary she could beat the man whom I lost to in general election. I still have the most Republican votes that were ever cast for an election in that district, but it was a 6:1 Democratic:Republican district when I started. I brought it down to 2 to 1. But a loss is a loss. Only a candidate who has given his all for a year knows what it is like to run for Congress or I guess almost any office. Whether you win or lose at the end you are exhausted and then either elated or dejected.

*Q: When they sent somebody like you up to run in a place where you're not a sacrificial lamb but at the same time the odds are that you're not going to win...*

ROBINSON: It was a little different circumstance. 1960 was a census year. So, the Governor and the Republicans gerrymandered the districts as all the states do regardless of party. In the new 20<sup>th</sup> congressional district, they threw a conservative or regular Democrat with a liberal Democrat. The regular Democratic candidate was a guy named Zelenko. The other man was William Fitz Ryan, a liberal. In New York City, the liberal line was very strong. Javits coached me and said, "This is the way I got in in a split. You'll have a three-way race. The regular Democratic candidate will win and the liberals will give the designation to their man and he'll run on the liberal line, so there will be three lines: Liberal, Democrat, Republican. That's the way I did it." The script was okay for the first couple of months. Then for whatever reason. Mr. Zelenko was chairman of a subcommittee and gratuitously took on the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in a hearing. It made them very mad and they came out in droves against him in the primary and he lost. If he hadn't done that, he would have won. I was already into the election. The primary wasn't until September, so from February I was campaigning all the way through. So, you're into it and the odds became insurmountable. But the amount of votes I had gotten showed that I would have won if there had been the three-way split. In that case, I was not a sacrificial lamb. There was a plan. However, if I had been elected, I would never have been an ambassador, so...

*Q: Did the Republican establishment feel they owed you one?*

ROBINSON: Not in so many words, but you gain some stature by being a candidate in a district like Manhattan. The Lieutenant Governor always called me "Congressman" when he saw me. I said, "Come on, Malcolm." He said, "You're my congressman."

*Q: Then what happened?*

ROBINSON: Then I decided to go into my own public relations business in 1963 or '64. I opened my own company and got married in 1964 to a lovely gal from Bay Village,

Ohio.

*Q: Where did you meet her?*

ROBINSON: In Boston through mutual friends. We were at the same conference. Her name was Patricia Lee Armstrong. In '64, we got married. She was a school teacher from Ohio but she had modeled in the summers. I put her together with my television coach when I ran for Congress. She trained her to be a television spokesperson. She introduced "Safeguard soap" and did many other television commercials. At the end of her first year, she said to me, "I made more from my residuals with one commercial than I did teaching school for a year in Bay Village, Ohio. Later on she became the television spokeswoman for Timex watches. She later worked with me in my public relations firm.

Then in '65, I helped John V. Lindsay, who had been assistant to Attorney General Brownell in the Eisenhower administration. I had been the special assistant to Sinclair Weeks, Secretary of Commerce So we knew each other. John had observed my race as he ran for re-election from the "Silk Stocking" district on New York's east side. Unlike me, he breezed to victory. He was in Congress. So, he asked me if I would help him with the press when he decided to run for mayor. New York City had been Democratic for years and had lots of scandals. So, I thought he would have a good chance, a personable guy. So, he said, "Well, I'm going to have my announcement. Would you help me with it?" I said, "Sure." I always liked to do things a little differently. So, instead of having the announcement in Manhattan, what we did is, we went to every borough and had an announcement so all the local papers could have their own say on it. We ended up at 6:00 p.m. for the television announcement in Manhattan. Very successful. I went back to my business, which was in the PanAm Building. John called and said, "Aren't you going to help me?" I said, "Oh, I thought I was just helping you on the announcement." I ended up walking every step of the way with him as his field manager. I did this as a volunteer. This was very difficult to do in terms of time demands and finances since this was my first year of marriage and I was trying to keep my fledgling business alive. So, it worked out. He won. I was the only person close in on the campaign, one of the closest, who did not go into the administration.

*Q: Why not?*

ROBINSON: Newly married, had a business. I just thought it was a different career from what I wanted. I was basically interested more in the federal government than I was in local government. So, Governor Rockefeller watched what happened with Lindsay and came to me and said, "Would you do for me what you did for Lindsay?" '65 was the year he was running for the '66 election. I did that and became his campaign manager for New York City. I started with just myself and ended up with 10,000 volunteers all around the five boroughs and did a very successful job. So, I gained some stature in the Republican Party. I was a businessman. I had been in the government. In '66, we had a baby, a little daughter named Nancy Lee Robinson. When you've got a family, that comes first. And I was building the business and things like that. I was involved in some of the conventions and other activities. I handled Nixon's New York City press. I've got a picture on my

office wall signed by Nixon with a letter thanking me. I handled the last press conference he had in New York City before he was elected President. Then I continued as a businessman. I was also involved on the board of the New York Board of Trade. I also became chairman of the New York Board of Trade as a voluntary position. That was later on in the '70s. Then I did go into the corporate world for a while. I was recruited by a headhunter and became the vice president of Gulf and Western, one of the Fortune 500. It was number 64 at the time. I was vice president and had a budget of \$50 million for communications. We had built a big building on Columbus Circle, which is now Trump Tower. I had an office that looked down to the Statue of Liberty. I got a taste of the corporate world. It was very interesting. It wasn't my type of corporation, but it didn't turn me off of corporations. So, I was there for a short time. Then I left and merged my business with a larger one and became president of one of the top public relations firms in the country.

*Q: Did your firm handle particular types of accounts?*

ROBINSON: We had everything from Helene Curtis, which was hair products and things, to mining companies. I helped open the first gold mine in the Dominican Republic. I remember commuting down to Santa Domingo and brought a lot of the press there. It was one of the really fine gold and silver mining companies, called Rosario Mining Company. They had properties in Nicaragua, all through Central America. Here is where the government experience comes in. The Sandinistas took control and expropriated the gold and then stole the gold bars that were sitting to be shipped. I took them to top executives of the mining companies and to meet with the Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South America. We had a wide range of discussions. Because we did a good job with that situation, I ended up having the American Mining Congress as a client. We also had the National Association of Food Chains. They are both located in Washington. I used to commute back and forth. I became a consultant in the Nixon years to the third head of the Peace Corps and was trying to help with communications. What they had tried to do was take the Peace Corps and put it into Action, a larger organization. There were several organizations. The Peace Corps had such a strong image that to fool with it was not good policy as was shown later on when it again emerged independently as just the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps Director, Joe Blatchford had three secretaries. He asked one of them Betty Currie to work with me. We stayed friends all these years. When Clinton was elected she became his White House Secretary for eight years. Two people whom I have known Ronald Reagan and Betty Currie were both described to me by their friends as "not having a bad bone in their body" I found that to be true with both of them

*Q: By the '70s, was television the main place in communications?*

ROBINSON: Television was very important. Public relations didn't deal with advertising, just mainly with the news and special events and things like that. But the newspapers still were quite strong. I think television came more into its own in the '80s and the '90s. But it was an important media. Radio also was very important. There were 500-600 television stations and maybe 10,000 radio stations, 5,000 of them music and

5,000 with news and features and things like that.

*Q: Chairman of the Board of Trade. What does the Board of Trade do?*

ROBINSON: It's like the chamber of commerce of a major city. Only the chamber of commerce in New York dealt more with policy issues and interfaced with the legislature in New York and Albany. The New York Board of Trade was more direct action. One of the things we did was provide the doormen on Park Avenue and major streets with walkie talkie radios to help stop crime and things of that nature.

The Chinese came to the Board of Trade in 1977/'78. Ambassador Christopher Phillips, who had been Bush's Deputy as Ambassador to the UN had known me since the Eisenhower Administration, where we both had worked. He became President of the National Council for U.S.-China Trade. He got to know a lot of the Chinese and they came to him about a business delegation. He put them together with me since I was Chairman of the New York Board of Trade. They asked me to bring a business delegation to China. This was the communist Chinese. I came down and talked with the Secretary of Commerce in the Carter administration and the State Department and all. They didn't object at all, thought it would be a good thing. As it turned out, I led the first major business delegation to China. We took the heads of the big banks – Manufacturers Hanover, Manhattan Life, and others – and we went to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanking... It was extremely successful. The businessmen were surprised when the so-called "businessmen" of China, who were government officials, sat and asked us, "Could you tell us what percentage of your profits you reinvest for new plant and equipment?" The businessmen were shocked because the concept of profits was not in the communist language and they didn't think that they knew about these things. It was obvious that they wanted help from us with figures so that they could go to the bosses and say, "The plants are going to cease and desist unless you get new plant and equipment." So, I came back from there... I was about 10 years ahead of myself. I would make speeches and say, "You're going to go into Communist China and you're going to come back out as a businessman and you're going to lose your shirt. They're very sharp." Then I came back and had the idea that the Chinese might be ready for a marketing and advertising delegation. So, I talked to them about it and the Chinese said they would welcome it. I went to the Chinese ambassador here in Washington. So, I figured out that we could only take three major advertising agencies. I had breakfast or lunch with the chairman of all the top ad agencies in New York at that time. I just said, "The first three that come in we will take to China." I formed the U.S.-China Advertising Council. It turned out to be quite interesting. The first meeting was at Compton Advertising. BBDO and N. W. Ayer were the other two agencies. I said to the CEOs, "Who has the best graphics person?" Each said, "I do." And then one would admit, "Okay, I'm trying to get Joe's guy." "He does." Then I said, "Who has the best writer?" "I do." I said, "Come on." "Okay, I think Compton does." Then they said, "What are you trying to do? We don't work together. We compete against each other." I said, "Well, you can't go to China and make a joint marketing presentation without all of you cooperating." So, I got them together and after a while they really enjoyed it and liked it and they went to Beijing, Shanghai, and made these presentations. It was very interesting. The people who produced Peking duck like the Peking Duck Association said, "We want to show you our

commercial.” Then you’d give tips on it. In those days, there was only kinescope, film, so they’d show us this thing. A half hour long from the birth of the duck and so on, even the forced feeding of the duck. Everybody in the United States is used to not 30-minute but 30-second commercials. So, we tried to be kind. Nobody wanted to insult them. We said, “We think it should be a little shorter.” Finally they prodded us but nobody would say, “30 seconds.” “Well, maybe a couple of minutes, five minutes.” So, that was our introduction into China. We came back.

Then later that year, 1979, the U.S. and China recognized each other officially. So, the Chinese contacted me since I had led the first business delegation to China. They said, “We have a normalization of relations. The U.S. is going to put a major exhibition in China and we’re supposed to put it in three different cities. We have the artisans, but we don’t know how to ship it and don’t know the legal and the transportation aspects and how you do this. Would you help us?” So, I said, “What cities are you going to put them in?” They said, “We’re thinking of Atlanta and Dallas.” I said, “Who were the last delegations to come here?” They said, “Atlanta and Dallas.” I said, “If you let us pick the cities – and I’ll give you some other suggestions and if you agree, we’ll help you.” I talked to some of my associates. I had that experience in putting on exhibitions in Tunis, Turkey, and Moscow. I also talked to a business associate of mine who had the largest exhibition firm in South America. So, we talked. We decided that if we put it in San Francisco, the largest Chinese population, then moved it to Chicago at the Navy Pier and then moved to the Coliseum in New York, we would reach larger numbers. But we decided to do it as a business venture. We went back to the Chinese. I said, “Number one, it’s expensive for you. I don’t want to take money from the Chinese government. I’ll have to register as a foreign agent. I don’t want to be a foreign agent for China. We’ll do it as a business proposition so we can make some money and help you finance it.” So, we told them that we would have it at the Three Piers in San Francisco, the Navy Pier in Chicago and the Coliseum in New York City. They agreed and I formed the China Exhibition Corporation. I had a separate office on Park Avenue just for the Exhibition around the corner from my regular public relations offices of my company. We also had exhibition offices in Chicago and also in San Francisco. I went to Manufacturers Hanover and said, “Look, it’s going to cost a couple million dollars. We think it will all be recouped. We’ll make a profit. You’re interested in China. Why don’t you finance it?” The chairman said to me, “Sure, we’ll do it.” They saw the opportunity right there. We worked out the projections. I said to the Chinese, “One of the things that you need in an exhibition is something that will draw crowds.” They didn’t quite understand. I said, “A circus has three rings but there is a central attraction.” They said, “What do you want?” I said, “I saw in Shanghai the 4,000-year-old jade suit in which the Emperor was buried. The jade suit was made up of small jade tiles connected by gold wire. We want to display that. If you can’t give us that, I saw in Xian these marvelous horses that were buried with the Emperor.” So they agreed, and we got to work on everything. Pretty soon, we thought, “You know, we’re going to have a lot of attendance. We’re going to advertise about the attendance.” So I went to the “New York Times” and said, “Why don’t you publish a special section? We’re going to have this marvelous China exhibition in the U.S. – three cities.” He said, “We don’t publish the sections.” I said, “Well, I see them.” “No, no, we put them together. If you want to publish them, you’re the publisher.” Okay.

“Will you work with us?” “Yes, we’d be glad to. But you need to get an editor.” So, I called John Hughes former Editor of the Monitor who had just retired from the “Christian Science Monitor” to start his own newspapers and got him to be the editor of that special Sunday supplement section. That section was to this day the largest advertising section that the “New York Times” ever put out. It was in the “New York Times,” the “Washington Post,” the Chicago paper, and the San Francisco main paper all on the same Sunday. So then things began to look good. “This thing is going to be successful. We’re going to have a big opening.” I organized the Fortune 500, talked to the leaders, and we decided to do it in three bunches – the Fortune 500 on the West Coast, in the middle with Chicago, and the East Coast. So then I said, “Gee, this is getting pretty big.” I knew Senator Percy and I talked to him. He was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Javits from New York was on Foreign Relations. He was from Illinois. And Cranston was from California. So they became the co-chairmen for their states. So we organized a congressional delegation. We had the advertising supplement. Now we had these big dinners. A problem came up with who would be chairman. I was told by one Fortune 500 CEO that if I pick one CEO over the other, then I might not get support and had to treat all of the CEOs equally. So, my colleague suggested that I be the chairman. I was chairman of all three dinners. The other top leaders were named the vice chairmen. I was at the microphone during the dinners and I introduced everybody and it worked very well. The openings were very big. The Chinese had come to us in the beginning and said, “We would like to bring some of our products over to sell them. We have beautiful products besides the exhibits of things Chinese.” So, I went to Marvin Traub, the head of Bloomingdale’s, and he liked the idea. We were going to use four floors. On the fifth floor we built for him a Bloomingdale’s in China. Then I went to the Emporium in San Francisco and Nieman Marcus and Marshall Field in Chicago and tied in with the department stores. This became a big thing and I was looking forward to retiring on that except for one thing. The Chinese... in common parlance, we would call it “welched.” They never made good on their promise for the centerpiece that would have drawn the largest crowds. Everything was based on audience projections. My partner made all these projections of how many people would be there and therefore they would pay a fee to get in. Even though we had the largest attendance at the Colosseum – maybe 550,000 - the break even point was a million to get the money in. So, instead of making money, we lost money. So, that was that. But it was quite interesting. I was over in China in 1980 negotiating with the Chinese about some of the things that we were still trying to clear up with the exhibition. Meanwhile I had gotten involved with the Reagan for President campaign as an advisor to William Casey, the campaign manager. While I was in China, I got a phone call from the new interregnum office of Ronald Reagan that offered me the job to be Deputy Director of USIA. So, I always say that the Chinese knew about it before I did. I was in a Chinese guest house and of course it was wired. Then when I came back, I was also asked to come down and see Malcolm Baldrige, who was going to be the Secretary of Commerce. He offered me the Under Secretary of Commerce for International Affairs. Well, I had been a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Commerce and before that assistant to the Under Secretary, and I knew Commerce very well – Coast and Geodetic, Federal Aviation... In fact, the whole Transportation Department is formed from the old Commerce. But my expertise was communications, so I thought it would be very interesting to be with USIA. I liked the international and diplomatic... So, I



accepted that job and came down in '81 as Deputy Director of the U.S. Information Agency. The Director was Charles Wick. Since I had the government experience, the White House asked me to handle all personnel and other administrative operations like that. I brought to USIA John Hughes, whom I knew, was a former Pulitzer Prize winner, editor of the "Christian Science Monitor." I asked John if he wanted to head the Voice of America, which he did. Then Shultz later asked me, "I need a spokesperson. Who should that be?" I said jokingly "I can't tell you." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, John Hughes obviously." He just asked the President to switch him from one to the other, which he did. I recommended Ken Tomlinson for VOA. Tomlinson recently was sworn in as the chairman of the new Board of Broadcasting on the Board of Governors. I had a very interesting experience for two years at USIA, '81-'83. I came in when Reagan came in. Then in May '83, I went over to the State Department to set up the first office of Public Diplomacy. Shultz appointed me as Ambassador with the formal title of Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for public diplomacy. I spent two years there.

*Q: Let's talk about Deputy Director... Working with Charlie Wick, who is quite a character... What was your impression of him and how did he operate?*

ROBINSON: He was very creative. He formed a lot of little committees. You heard where Rove went out to Hollywood. Wick had a Hollywood committee to work with us and other different committees. He delegated to me a lot of the operating matters. In the beginning, we decided to operate like a business, that he would be the CEO and I would be the chief operating officer. I handled a lot of the day to day work inside. As I said, the White House- (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying Judge Clark...*

ROBINSON: Yes. While I was at USIA in 1982, Judge Clark said that he had talked with the President and they usually would have the Director chair a committee under the NSC, but since I was knowledgeable on communications – I think Wick had been a businessman, managed nursing homes and some Hollywood properties – he asked me to be the chairman of the International Information Committee under the National Security structure. In order to give it prestige, Judge Clark and McFarlane, his deputy, sat at the meetings every Thursday night. David Gergen was there, assistant to the President, representing the White House. Cato, who later became ambassador to Britain and head of USIA himself, was Assistant Secretary for Defense. So, we had 30-40 agencies represented. We were basically handling three problems. The Soviets had put in SS20s facing Europe. We could not put in the Pershing missiles because there was rioting in the streets against placement of the missiles. Our job was to communicate our reasons for placing the missiles and to build public support. Then we had the problem in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas and Afghanistan with the Russians. In that year, we were trying to communicate more clearly on a number of issues. The Russians said they would never ever speak to us, would never negotiate if we put the Pershing missiles in. Of course, they wanted to have a unilateral threat from them to us with their SS20 missiles, not us posing a threat. We put in the Pershings. The minute they were in, the Russians came back to the arms negotiation. Very interestingly, five years before that, Reagan made a speech on the

Voice of America saying, "Let's not just keep having arms control. Let's get rid of a whole class of nuclear weapons." Shortly after the Pershings and SS20s were at a stalemate, the SS20s could reach Paris and London in 15 minutes and the Pershings 12 minutes to Moscow... It was a standoff. Gorbachev made a speech almost the same as the one that Reagan made and said, "Let's get rid of this whole class of nuclear weapons." Reagan said, "Great. Let's shake" and it was done. Interestingly enough – I was on the way back from Moscow in the '90s - I was sitting next to a Nunn-Lugar arms inspector and I said, "Where do we stand on the SS20s and the Pershing missiles?" He said, "They're all gone except one in the museum in Moscow and one in a museum in the U.S." It was quite interesting that that could be done. I don't think the story has really been told. It's a classic case where President Reagan gave us his schedule, Margaret Thatcher gave us hers, Lubbers of Holland gave us his, so that we could orchestrate a speech, a presence, a trip, to make news. So, you get to be a little part of history. During the Cold War, all of us who had worked in government were part of that. It was a very interesting time. Reagan was a great leader.

*Q: With Charlie Wick, I'm seeing a very short attention span. Can you give any feel for working with him?*

ROBINSON: He was an interesting person, very creative. He was able to get things done in many ways because he and his wife were very close to the Reagans socially. He also had one of the longest runs of a Director of USIA - eight years. He was quick to make decisions. One time when he was in China and I was Acting Director, I had to testify about the Voice of America. I realized then that much of the world was getting their information from television. So when Wick returned, I told him of my idea that the U.S. Government should have a television broadcasting operation, not just radio. He immediately saw the opportunity and said, "Go do it." So I organized the first U.S. government television operation and it came to be known as WorldNet.

*Q: How did you find working with USIA, the officers?*

ROBINSON: I enjoyed it immensely. It was probably one of the most interesting highlights of my career. I thought the professionals were highly qualified

*Q: Was the White House very intrusive? Sometimes the White House is and sometimes it isn't.*

ROBINSON: I think the White House... I have a view about White House direction that others may share, at least I hope they do. The American people elected the President and the President has certain policies. Whether I voted for him or against him, I only have one President and he has the right and the people have the right to have those policies put into effect. So, sometimes a President will come in with fairly strong views of how to get things done. Then some Presidents will come in... affecting your agency, maybe State or USIA... not that they don't care, but they're interested in trade or something like that. They'll have strong views on that. Reagan did have strong views on foreign policy. The White House put in people who they thought would carry out those policies. Since

Reagan communicated them very clearly, we knew what the marching orders were. If you didn't like it, then you should get out. Anybody who doesn't agree with a policy and you're appointed, I think the honest thing to do is resign. The thing that always bothers me is, you hear about a Cabinet or Sub-Cabinet officer... The President anoints him, appoints him, he gets publicity. Nobody knew him and now he has stature. The President made him. Then he doesn't agree with the President, so he goes public. What he should do is go in and say, "Mr. President, I don't agree with your policy." The President and he work it out or if they can't work it out, then he quietly resigns. But to bat the President back on the head with a policy you don't agree with after he made you is sort of like being an ingrate. I don't think we had any problems with the White House. We kept them informed... Wick was creative. I was creative. We would probably be going to the White House and saying, "Here is what we think we're going to do." The people we worked with closely at the policy level were the National Security Advisor to the President, Richard Allen, Judge William Clark and Robert "Bud" McFarlane in that order. All three of them were unfailingly courteous and helpful. If they had suggestions they always made them in the most constructive way. They were gentlemen to the core. They invariably added just the right little touch when it was needed. They could translate with great discretion what they knew the President wanted because they all worked so closely with him.

*Q: By '85, you left?*

ROBINSON: My daughter was going into college and I wasn't born with a silver spoon, so I had to go to work in the private sector.

*Q: Where did she go to college?*

ROBINSON: She started at Randolph Macon and then went to the University of Maryland and graduated from the University of Maryland.

*Q: You left government in '85. What did you do?*

ROBINSON: I re-opened my business Gilbert A. Robinson, Inc., in Washington on K Street. I still have my business to this day. Depending on what else was occurring, business would be heavier or lighter. I first began helping Russian orphanages at that time. I actually had attended a White House conference that asked among other things the question, "How do we get corporations involved with helping with hunger-related problems?" Shortly after I attended, I called the man who had organized the conference and asked him, "What are we going to do about it?" He said that he just organized conferences and wouldn't be implementing ideas from the conference. I called a meeting of 4 or 5 people who had especially impressed me and said that we can't let this go. We decided to form a foundation, a 501C3, called Corporations to End World Hunger Foundation. I thought there ought to be a way for companies to work together to help. Nothing happened at first but then I became aware of the fact that orphanages were having a tough time in Russia and the former Soviet republics and began to explore ways to help them. I contacted the Department of Agriculture, Ben Gilman, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, Sen. Ted Kennedy, ADM Corporation, people

I had met in Russia or its embassy here, and others. So, in 1993, I organized a feeding drive. I received a few million dollars worth of agricultural surplus and arranged for processing and shipping. I ended up feeding 130,000 orphans in Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine. We fed for about two years. When Shevardnadze, now president of Georgia, came on a state visit to see Clinton, I attended a luncheon and state dinner held for him. I was surprised to be invited by Shevardnadze to meet him after the state dinner at Blair House. I met privately with him and his foreign minister, Chikvashili, at 11 p.m.. He said, "I wanted to thank you personally for saving the lives of thousands of the children who were caught in the fighting in Abkashia," which I had not realized. He said, "Yours was the only protein they had." So, I had a nice visit with him. That inspired me to continue. I have had a staff in Moscow for 10 years now. I have a manager. I have a former general who was in charge of the missile defense of the Soviet Union, a major general, who is my national operations director. I'm in touch with them every morning by e-mail. They send me a message overnight and I answer it in the morning. Besides my business, I'm involved in that.

Then about five years ago, '97 or '98, I was approached and asked to take over as acting president of the Center for the Study of the Presidency, which was then based in New York. I strongly suggested to the board that it should move the Center from New York to Washington, where it really belonged. They agreed, and I opened the office on 19<sup>th</sup> Street in the heart of the business district. I intended originally to serve until we brought in a major player who was also strong at fund-raising. David Abshire, who had been ambassador to NATO and then counsel to President Reagan and who had great experience in fund-raising, was hired. He had founded the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) with Admiral Arleigh Burke about 40 years ago. He remains as vice chairman of CSIS. Sam Nunn is chairman. So, we worked together. I thought I would leave. Then after about two or three months, he said, "You're not doing what I'm doing. I'm not doing what you're doing. We work together so well. Why don't you stay?" We worked very harmoniously together for four years and I'm still there, now as an adjunct counselor. I now have a separate business office since my business has expanded to the point where I need to devote full-time to it.

*Q: Working with orphans in Russia, when you started this, was this a problem? One heard about the real chaos in Russia after the fallout from the change from the Soviet system. How did you find it then and now?*

ROBINSON: Well, what's different now? Still tough. But in the beginning, we were introduced to 102 orphanages in Moscow alone with about 30,000 orphans. We began working in there. Then about four years ago, Tom Brokaw was in Russia and interviewed the Prime Minister and did an economic story. He ended his program with a very poignant piece about a six-year-old blond, blue-eyed girl left in an orphanage. The child's mother had three children. They were starving. She had placed this child, her youngest, in the orphanage. Well, phones rang off the hook at NBC. I contacted Tom Brokaw, whom I knew, and told him we were working in Russia with orphans. He asked if I had ideas. They had already had responses to the segment. I offered to help. I told him that our foundation could set up a lockbox and a separate bank account for those who wished to

donate for the purpose of getting the child back. So, he did that. I also sent my manager, who is Russian, to check out the orphanage. She called me back, saying, "The situation is much worse. The orphanage's septic system is gone." The authorities had already given the orphanage notice that it would be closed if improvements were not made. About five weeks later, I went over with money to get the child back to her mother and to help fix up the orphanage. Before the trip, I let Tom know about the child's return and also about the condition of the orphanage. As they say, I got my five minutes of fame and was shown on NBC giving the money to the mother, who cried when I read letters, translated as I read by my manager for her from English to Russian, from Americans who had donated. The house that the mother lived in was really bad. She earned 50 cents a day milking cows. We have been supporting that family now for four years. The kids are lovely. They have clothes. Very little money really. You can do seven times in Russia what you can do here for one dollar. Their mother has bought two cows and a horse and chickens and pigs and is getting to be self-sufficient. In December, Brokaw ended his end-of-the year program with a follow-up segment on the child. The first television segment had been in March.

The first follow-up program, when I went over, was in May. Then, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, he had an end-of-year program in which he lauded our foundation but then told of a worse case where a family's three children had been placed in the orphanage – a five-, three-, and two-year-old, with the five-year-old comforting them – from a family with seven children. Well, we were set up now to help others. So, we got those children back to their family in five days. We've continued to support these families, keeping them together, these 10 children. I go over to Russia a couple times a year. I used to go over almost every other month. Now it's once or twice a year. I was over in May and I saw the two families. They're both doing wonderfully well. But what happens if you can't support them? The father was a veteran who was wounded in Afghanistan, can't work.

And we continue to help the orphanage. I saw the bathhouse on my first visit. It was like a mildewed, decaying shed. We built a brand new bathhouse. I had the General who is our national director of operations oversee the building of it. The new one is clean and looks very solidly built, like a Siberian log cabin. The head of the orphanage told me the local priest comes and says he prays for us every week as he takes his hot shower. We've rebuilt more than half of the orphanage – a new septic system and new buildings. We bought two cows so the children would have milk, built a barn for the cows and storage for hay, a greenhouse for raising vegetables in the winter, and a separate building for teaching trades. And we rebuilt the schoolroom, bought all new beds for the children, and redid the orphanage's kitchen, which was a crumbling mess. There is no safety net 200 kilometers from Moscow where these people are. The orphanage is located only 120 miles northeast of Moscow in Staritsa in the Tver region. The caregivers only get \$30 a month. It takes \$150 a month now to live. We're talking now in 2002. There is not a safety net. Lushkov, the mayor of Moscow, is strong. He won't let his orphans starve. But she told me that the orphans that they're getting now in Staritsa aren't coming in just hungry. She said, "They're starving." We saw that the 50 orphans last fall didn't have any milk, so we bought the cows. The cows only cost \$350 a piece. Then we built the barn. We could get the barn built for \$3,000 – and the hay... Now the children are getting half a liter of milk a day. She said that the children who are coming in starving, they put the milk in the kitchen for them – and bread – and they can come in as often as they want. The kids who are already built up and are nourished can't come in. She said, "These kids

that came in starving are coming in every hour to eat.” So, we’ve got some difficult situations while Russia is transforming itself economically. We’re trying to help where we can. Getting money, though, and explaining the rationale for support by Americans is very difficult.

*Q: How did things work for this type of thing, the transition between the two administrations from Clinton to Bush II? Has that made any difference?*

ROBINSON: You mean with the orphanage?

*Q: Yes.*

ROBINSON: There has really been no difference in support between administrations. Since the original Agriculture grant at the end of the Bush and the beginning of the Clinton administrations, we have had no government support. It really wasn’t a partisan issue. We also received a commendation letter from the Secretary of Agriculture at the end of the project because we did not lose any of the agricultural products either from our warehouses or as they were being transported to or from the orphanages. I have board members from Russia and the U.S. - with Gorbachev and former U.S. ambassadors from both Democratic and Republican administrations. I just saw Tom Pickering last night, the former ambassador to Moscow and Under Secretary of State under Clinton. He has agreed to be on my advisory board. Jim Collins, a former ambassador under Clinton, has agreed also. Jack Matlock was ambassador to Russia under Reagan and has been on my advisory board. I’m going to get Ambassador Strauss. I’ll have almost all of the former ambassadors to Russia.

*Q: Great. This has been very interesting. Is there anything we haven’t covered?*

ROBINSON: I can’t think of anything.

*Q: Alright. I want to thank you very much.*

*End of interview*