INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES Z. WICK

April 24-25, 2003
Los Angeles, California

Interviewers

University of Virginia
Stephen F. Knott
James Sterling Young, Chair

In attendance
Mary Jane Wick
Wick: This is sort of a post-memorable, if there is such a designation, occasion in my life. The incumbency I enjoyed there with the friendship of Reagan and the world leaders whom I met—I’ll show you some pictures we have here after—were in a frame of historic reference that I only read about or heard about in school. And there I was in the middle of that pool of notoriety. So, when your lovely people from the Miller Center called me a few years ago I frankly just didn’t want to take the time I didn’t have easily available on a Washington trip. We got back once or twice a year or more. My wife is a long-time member, a trustee, of the board of Ford’s Theater. As a matter of fact, when you walk into Ford’s Theater—I’m sure you’ve been there—there’s a giant plaque called the Mary Jane Wick Endowment Fund. She’s been a fundraiser for the Reagans. She has really been fantastic with that. So I didn’t want to take the time away from our Washington trip or wherever we were going.

Then up until recently when you folks volunteered to come here, I realized my reluctance to be available in the past, by virtue of the inconvenience of the travel departure from my destination in Washington or south of there—we went to Florida quite a bit—was really an unspoken, in my own mind, reluctance to participate in this. Why? Because I had been through so much and had such volumes of memories that weren’t cataloged in my mind that as time started to erase them my performance would be incomplete. I feel the same way now, frankly.

I appreciate and would like to congratulate very much your researcher, who prepared this briefing for me, and I admire its organization as well as its content, and it was helpful. Just this morning I was up at five o’clock again reviewing a lot of material, most of which we sent to the library, official material, but I just came across—I couldn’t believe it, I’ll tell you more about this—the announcement dinner list. I hadn’t seen this since the announcement dinner in November of 1979 in New York that was such a giant hit, and that really launched him in the primary—his announcement to be a candidate. Then I also came across a whole bunch of copies of his initial mailgram that we sent out. Is it okay if I just skip around?

Young: Sure, sure.

Wick: I won’t be chronological too much, although having said that I’ll start at the beginning of the Reagan relationship.
My wife and I and three children came here from New York. I was a financial partner of Ralph Evinrude, who was the chairman of Outboard Marine, and I came out here more or less looking for various opportunities where some type of capitalist financing could avail itself of capital gain opportunities with companies. When we came out here in 1956, the combined federal tax rate and the California rate were somewhere close to 93 percent to operate. So Ralph and I were looking for opportunities. Of course, he had a lot more money than I did. He had an earlier start by a generation. We were looking for opportunities where we could help develop capital entities that would produce capital gains at a much lower tax bracket than the confiscatory 93 percent that we were not enjoying at that time. Also, he was very interested in the movie business.

My background—should I go into it? You have copies of the biographies—

Young: Yes, you gave us copies, back in Ohio.

Wick: Most of it was true, by the way.

Knott: We’re glad to hear it.

Young: How did you go into music?

Wick: My father and mother were musical devotees and they, when I was a little kid, six years old, seven years old, would take me to concerts in Cleveland, Ohio. They loved music, and I thought, well, that sounds pretty good. I had a couple of older cousins who played the piano and my folks said, “Would you like to learn to play the piano? If you do, we’ll buy a piano.” So they went out and bought this piano. It’s in that room over there. They bought that piano about 78 years ago. I’m 85 now—hold your applause. I was about 7 years old. So this beautiful piano, this Kurtzmann, came in and I had my first lesson.

I admit I had to practice. Well, they had the piano in our home in Cleveland Heights, something like this with a lot of windows and all. I looked out in the street and saw some of my guys playing ball and all, which I used to do about this time, and so I finally told my folks, “I don’t think I want to play the piano.” They’d just spent $2,300, $2,700, which was like $40,000 here today. My dad looked at me. He said, “We bought that piano for you. You’re going to take lessons for six months. Then, if you do not want to continue, you won’t have to, and maybe we’ll sell the piano.”

Well, as it developed, I became interested. I was taking classical piano, and then I became interested in so-called popular music, and about 1928 or ’29, when I was about eleven years old or so, I started taking popular music lessons and I started to play at some of our family parties. It was just really inspiring hearing the songs of the day being lyricized or articulated by friends and family and all while I was playing.

Then, in the seventh grade, a very dear contemporary friend of mine, a student who played saxophone, formed a little dance band And so I went over to his house and we started playing private parties. I couldn’t believe it. I became furious when my folks insisted that I continue to wear knickers. They didn’t want me to grow up too fast. Yet the guys in the band said, “This is
embarrassing.” We were playing some pretty good social parties at some very nice homes and country clubs. “This is embarrassing for you to be wearing knickers.” So they finally had to buy me longer pants.

Well, I seem to have a natural affinity for the piano. I had an excellent classical teacher, which gave me quite a great facility at the piano, comparatively speaking, at that early age. His name was Al Preyer and he’s still a very dear friend of mine. He still lives in Cleveland, Ohio. He went to Duke University ultimately and I went to Michigan and he performed with a dance orchestra there and became friendly with Les Brown, his senior at Duke University—Les Brown and his Duke Blue Devils, later known as Les Brown and His Band of Renown.

It became quite inspirational. It was the middle of the Depression. My father had retired pretty much at the age of 43 or 44. He had been quite successful, and sold out all of his stocks, I think it was about September of 1929. He reminds me of myself here in this dot-com thing that I just went through. I just got out. I couldn’t believe those prices about three years ago. I sold all that out and bought tax-exempt bonds, which really were quite a wonderful resource.

Father became fidgety after getting out of the stock market because he was accustomed to doing things. So about 1931 or so, he went into the foundry business. He knew a little bit about that. He financed some guys and he started working there himself. And that was the Depression. So they would buy all these metals that were used in making moldings, or whatever were their customers’ needs and every time they got ready to put a price on it for their customer, the metals’ prices had gone down. In two or three years he damn near lost everything. So he had no income, although we did have money sufficient to live in a very nice way.

When I was in ninth, tenth, eleventh grade, I guess it was, I was making $15 or $20 a week playing two or three nights a week while I was going to high school or even junior high school. Therefore, I was making more money then a lot of my dad’s friends or other people who had no money coming in, and $15 a week in those days was about a medium income for somebody, some bookkeeper in an administrative capacity. So, as we became recognized, as my piano around town became recognized, then some visiting bandleaders would come to town and I’d meet them. I had the opportunity with a couple of them to write an arrangement for them on an emergency basis, and that gave me the idea about creating music arrangements. I was fortunate to have perfect pitch, which greatly facilitated my ability to write arrangements and know what key somebody was going to be playing in or listen to the orchestra and determine what was wrong.

Then, in 1935 I graduated from Cleveland Heights High School and I was making about $20, $25 a week, which was fairly high. I had several offers from the Palace Theater where vaudeville, and also from some of the bandleaders in town, where I could have been making, I can’t quite remember now, maybe $50 or $100 a week. Well, when you stop and think that the tuition at the University of Michigan for the year was only about $400, you can see the perspective. Well, God bless my folks. They wouldn’t hear of my not going to college and said, “Forget about that money. Your education is much more important.” It didn’t seem quite that good to me because I was driving a wonderful car and all that.
I had a friend who played bass with our high school dance orchestra—he’s a little bit older than I am. Let’s see, do I remember his name? Lawrence Morse, and he played with a dance band, or a band that played one of the big restaurants in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan. He told me with my skills—I don’t want to sound braggadocio, but I’d had so much experience, I had to be a heck of a lot better than most of the guys that didn’t have that background—that I could get a job with the dance band that had hired him for a couple of years during his incumbency at Michigan, and be able to pay for my education.

So my folks insisted that I go to the University of Michigan—it was a very fine school—and seize the opportunity to get an education. My dad borrowed, as I recall, $500 on his life insurance to pay for my first semester at the University of Michigan. I got up there and I met one of the top bookers in town—he booked parties. Each fall the fraternity houses and sorority houses would have their rushing period, I guess about two or three weeks, where each night, or three nights a week or whatever, they would invite prospective recruits to their fraternities or sororities to meet the folks and have them judged as well, and I guess they would take votes of the recruitees—whom would they invite?

Well, this one booker, actually he also had the orchestra; his name was Al Cowan—how I remember that, I don’t know. Al was a much older man; he probably had to be 32 or 33. He booked me into several sorority houses where I would play the piano, background, when the girls, sorority members, and their recruits were talking and conversing, and then they would dance with each other.

I attracted so much attention in these sorority houses, having been probably the most professional musician they’d ever had, as against some of these students, that they told Al Cowan, the booker, that they wanted me back. So I think I was able to send my folks back the $500 after the first two months and pay my own way thereafter. The girls at the sorority houses, several key ones were heads of the student administration—the Michigan League building. The Michigan League building was the girls’ counterpart to the men’s Michigan Union. They—this was 1935—they said I had to form a band and play every Friday and Saturday night at their weekend dances at the Michigan League building. I felt sorry for the guy whose band preceded me. But they signed me up.

It was either in January, the second semester of ’35 or the beginning of the year, 1936, that I put together a band, I guess about nine pieces—it was pretty big at the time—and we played every Friday and Saturday night in the Michigan League ballroom for the student dates and their dancing. It was quite a very exciting opportunity. As I recall, I think I was able to make about $125 or $135 a week, which was just tremendous in those days, still the Depression and all. Then, I enjoyed the School of Music and I studied theory and I studied piano. My minor option was English literature, which I enjoyed very much. I had a very wonderful experience at the University of Michigan playing every Friday and Saturday night, making enough money not only to put me through the University but to send money home to bank. It was unheard of.

I spent summers, just a few summers, in Cleveland playing with orchestras there, and then the last two summers of my incumbency as a student at the University of Michigan, I played at the Michigan League building for the summer school dancing and all that.
**Young:** You went to New York, didn’t you?

**Wick:** After law school. I graduated from Michigan in June of 1940. A very wonderful gal from a socially prominent family whose parents had a home in Mackinac Island—I don’t know if you ever heard of Mackinac Island—

**Young:** Sure, sure.

**Wick:** It’s at the top of Mackinac, and there were no automobiles allowed on the island, you had to take a ferry and cross from Mackinac City. They have since built a bridge there. And it was the home of some extremely wealthy Chicagoans, Detroiter, and some from other areas. She was enamored of my playing, my orchestra and all that. I’m trying to remember her name. She asked me in 1939—that was before I graduated, I was the class of ’39 but I didn’t graduate until ’40 because of my combination of music and other subjects. She said that she was very friendly, her family was very friendly, with Stuart Woodfill, who was the owner of the Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island, which was probably one of the most spectacular luxury hotels in the world. They advertised the longest verandah in the world, around 900 feet, something like that. It was perched on top of a hill overlooking Canada, Michigan, the whole thing. They had a large yacht harbor. Some of the most important private yachts habitually would come up to Mackinac Island and dock there. I remember Delphine Dodge and her fabulous—I guess the boat was named the *Delphine.* I think it was about 250 feet long, maybe 300. Had a crew of 250. If you can imagine being around that kind of luxury.

I became very friendly with a gentleman who wanted me to come and play the piano on his fabulous boat, after-hours, with all the pretty girls and all that kind of thing. His name was Commander Eugene McDonald. He was the founder of the Zenith Corporation—electronics, radios—which is a big thing now. So it was a fabulous life I was leading there, however, I was working my fanny off. We started playing at the hotel. The hotel was up on the hill. There were only about 150 steps down to a lovely lawn area and pool area, that kind of thing, where they had dancing. So we would come down and play—I think it was from 4:00 to 5:30 for tea dancing.

**Young:** Tea dances, right.

**Wick:** You probably read about this Jim.

**Young:** I’ve been to those dances. You know I’m no spring chicken myself.

**Wick:** I told Steve, I’m getting so old that they just discontinued my blood type.

So we’d get back up at 5:30, back to the top of the hotel, six nights a week. We played in the Blue Room, which was a lovely small nightclub; it was lovely there, and with the right kind of lighting and all. No, pardon me. We’d go up to the giant dining room.

The dining room had to be almost as long as a football field and had a big bandstand, so we would play in the dining room, just the strings and the cello and my piano, play more semi-
classical things from about 6:30 or 7:00 to 8:30 or 8:15. Okay, having finished that, we would then go to the Blue Room for the dance orchestra. Beautiful lighting and all, and we’d play mainly for the hotel guests, and there were plenty of them. I forget what their capacity was—it had to be at least five or six hundred. We would play there for dancing from about 9:00, I guess maybe until midnight. Six nights a week. Except on Sunday, in that big fabulous lobby, instead of playing for tea dancing, we had all of the strings, and hired some strings from outside where we would give a concert and the whole lobby was filled with chairs. So we would give a concert, semi-classical music and that kind of thing.

Young: That was the matinee?

Wick: That was about 4:00 or something like that.

Young: I was just thinking, from down below—

Wick: Yes, but we may not have played tea dancing on Sunday, I can’t remember. However, not only was Mackinac Island a focus for all these fabulous yachts from around the world—well, around the country, anyway. The [Walter Owen] Briggs used to come up on their boat, the [Henry] Fords. I became so friendly with all of them. They loved the music and all. However, it was also a site for the Great Lakes cruise boats that would be available, I think, for overnight or for a couple of days. So they would come from Cleveland and Detroit. They’d come up the Great Lakes and they had to go through the Mackinac Island canal or whatever you called it, that allowed them the gateway to the other lakes. Lake Huron—although Lake Huron was around Detroit. What’s the lake around Chicago?

Knott: Superior or Michigan.

Wick: Yes, I guess it was Lake Michigan. So they would come, as I recall, on Saturday nights. They would dock and they’d send out a lot of horses and buggies to meet them—no automobiles—and long, long, multi-seated vehicles drawn by horses, for their guests on the cruises. So we’d open up this giant ballroom on Sunday night, instead of being in the Blue Room where we played for dancing. We probably had 300 people there. Then I think we stopped at maybe 11:00 or so, so a lot of them could get back on the boat.

So my first year at Mackinac Island was 1939. Then we came back, and I graduated from Michigan in 1940. We also played there in 1941, ’42, and ’43. I was admitted to the Michigan Law School after I graduated; however, the echoes of war were then sounding and I thought I would try and enlist in one of the armed services rather than maybe—I can’t remember whether they had the draft then, but they were talking about the draft. So I applied to my hometown law school, which I knew very well from having lived there, Western Reserve University, which is now Case Western Reserve. I had no trouble getting in because guys were being thinned out.

In the meantime, I applied to every branch of the service for enrollment and I was turned down by each and every one of them. The reason was, when I entered Michigan in 1935, they had just opened a new dermatological unit, or whatever it was, for research and all, which was a new type of consideration. I still remember, this Dr. Jimenez from Puerto Rico, and his daughter, who ran
the thing—she was a doctor too. As a freshman, among the various tests we had to take was an elaborate set of allergies. Well, when they reviewed my record they called me in. I must have had 150 allergies of different kinds. So I agreed to help them in their research. I agreed to be one of their research subjects because I was getting these rashes on my arms, sneezing a lot, and they indicated that if they could find and detect the allergies, I’d have a much easier physical time of it.

So faithfully I went in to their research area; as I recall it was two or three times a week. It was just for a few minutes, but they would give me shots to desensitize my allergies. So that lasted my whole Michigan incumbency. As I tried to get into these branches of the service, they would require my background from the University of Michigan, and when they saw this two- or three-foot stack of medical records—these charts, it was awesome—they wouldn’t take me. That took about three, four, five, or six months. Meantime, my last appearance with the band at Mackinac Island, I think, was 1941 for a cruise audience one Saturday night—dancing. It was a very important band, and the bandstand was about three-and-a-half feet high so people all around the big room could see us.

A fellow named Allen James Lowe—I’ll never forget him—was complimenting me as I was looking down. He was dancing and he said, “Where are you from?” I said, “Cleveland.” He said, “I’d like to talk to you.” So during the intermission I went to a table and sat with him and he said he was either the new manager or the manager of the Carter Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio, owned by the Pick Corporation of Chicago. He said, “We have the Petite Café. It’s a lovely room, about the size of your Blue Room here. How would you like to play there six nights a week?” I’ll tell you, I was so lucky. So I was able to organize a little orchestra in Cleveland, with some of the top musicians there, and play six nights a week at the Petite Café in the Carter Hotel.

The Carter Hotel was sort of a second-class hotel. The Statler was number one, then the Cleveland Hotel. But it still drew quite a number of businessmen, and the performers at the Palace Theater, where the traveling vaudeville shows would stop, big bands, or Eddy Cantor, people like that, comedians, would usually stay in the Carter Hotel, right downtown. After their shows they’d come in, they’d listen to our orchestra, and I became very friendly with a lot of them. And so I would play until 1:00 in the morning. Allen Lowe gave me a room in the hotel. It was so far to go to my folks’ home in Cleveland Heights out in the suburbs. So I would go up and go to bed and I’d have 8:00 classes the next day at law school, which is about a twenty-minute drive from where I was. I’ll tell you, that was really wearing.

I remember, I bought a little photography clock-timer for developing and I’d go in the back of my car and sleep there for twelve minutes or so in between classes, maybe twice a morning or something. It would give me just enough energy to go back in. Well, I also met some of these band guys, band leaders, and I started—oh gee, I remember when I graduated from high school, I’d written a couple of songs. Did you ever hear of Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians?

Young: Sure.

Wick: Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians were one of the biggest orchestras in the country—about 50 pieces with singers and choruses and all. He was on five nights a week, at 7:00 for
fifteen minutes on the Chesterfield program. Well, the father of a friend of mine in Cleveland was head of the Greyhound Bus Company and I said, “Gee, I’d love to go and meet Fred Waring. I can go in cold and show him a couple of these songs I’ve written.” I loved his music. So his dad arranged for me to take a Greyhound bus from Cleveland to New York, and I was on the bus alone. I don’t know how I got back or whatever. So I got there. I stayed at the big YMCA there; I can’t remember what street that was on.

Young: Columbus Circle? Around there? On the East Side?

Wick: It wasn’t Columbus Circle. I think maybe it was a little south of that. It was twelve, thirteen stories, I can’t quite remember. I don’t think it was Columbus Circle. Columbus Circle is a much too expensive an area for a Y there. Maybe somewhere near there, maybe down the street, maybe down 59th Street or something. Fred Waring’s office, where the band rehearsed every day, was on the tenth floor of 1697 Broadway at 53rd Street. I’ll never forget that.

I went over to his office and I walked around the block for almost an hour, getting up enough courage to take the elevator up in that building to his office to meet him. So, I get off the elevator. He has the whole tenth floor, and you can hear the band rehearsing. I still remember what that lady receptionist looks like, sort of a great looking buxom lass, and I said, “I hope you don’t think I’m out of line, but I’m from Cleveland, Ohio, and Ken Means, manager of the Palace Theatre, suggested that I use his name and meet Mr. Waring.” I can’t remember his name—he was the manager of the Palace Theater in Cleveland. Well, Fred had played there, so he knew him very well. So that was my access. But a lot of guys still would have referred you to somebody else in the band. She said, “Well, Mr. Wick, I’ll send a note back to his assistant.” So his assistant came out and said, “They’re busy now and they won’t be through rehearsing for the show tonight until later.” So I said, “Would it be okay if I came back in two hours?” She said, “I’ll try.” So I went down the stairs and I walked around again for two hours, came back up. I went into his office. He couldn’t have been nicer. I went in the big band room. I played the song I had written called “I’ve Only Been Dreaming Again.” He really liked it.

He said, “Well, Charles,” it was, like, June, 1935. I said, “Mr. Waring, if you would like, I’ve been doing some arranging in Cleveland for some of the big bands there at the Palace Theater, members of the band. I’ll make an arrangement for your orchestra.” So he looked at me with a little amusement and said, “Well, fine.” I sent him the arrangement and I didn’t hear from them and I would call every once in a while and I would write him. He’d write me a little nice note. He’s a real fine gentleman. I can’t remember but it must have been darn near a year later, nine months later, when I got a call saying that they were going to be featuring my song, “I’ve Only Been Dreaming Again” on the Chesterfield Show, sung by Paul Owen. The guy had a beautiful tenor voice.

That evening I went to my folks’ house, this was about 1936. I still remember mother, who was extremely well disciplined. She had very thick glasses. She spent her life reading. I was there to help her cure that, by the way. When Waring came on and said, “This new song was written by Charlie Z. Wick of Cleveland, Ohio,” I thought she was going to die. She started to shake.
That was a great introduction for me, Fred Waring. Then when I went to Michigan, I did a couple more arrangements for Fred. He would call me from time to time when we were at the Grand Hotel. People couldn't believe that Fred Waring would be calling me.

Then, I’m through at the Grand Hotel. I’m in law school, and I finally got my draft notice and it was October 26, 1942. My birthday is October 12th, every year. So I said, well, this is going to be pretty tough. I’m going to go in as a private but I know a lot of the guys in the musical outfits. Maybe they can do something there rather than wash dishes.

So I started around 6:00 in the morning. I went down to the armory in Cleveland and my draft number I think was 169. So I went through, undressed, went through everything in front of a couple of doctors and I see this big pile of charts.

Young: Your medical records.

Wick: They said, “These are yours?” I said, “Yes, but I’m just about cured of everything now.” They said, “Okay, blah, blah, blah.” Then when you’re all through you get dressed and you go sit in this big room. They call a couple of names. My name was one of the five, six, seven guys called. Some Army guy, an officer, said, “I’m really sorry but we have to reject you.” I said, “Reject me? Why? I don’t want to go through this again.” He said, “Because of your allergies.” I said, “Gee, I’m over about all of those allergies.” He said, “Yes, you probably are; however, you still have this wool allergy and we can’t put you in a wool uniform.” I was very careful about what trousers I wear. I said, “Gee, do I have to wear a wool uniform? Can’t I go to some area in Africa?”

Young: Wear cotton?

Wick: Yes, wear your regular stuff? He said, “I’m sorry, but that’s out of my hands.” Then a real nice guy came out and talked to me. I said, “Can’t somebody explain this?” He said, “Look, Mr. Zwick, what is our experience? I think a year ago or so, we probably would have disregarded your wool allergy. However, what has happened is, we have taken some people with wool allergies and certain other kinds of allergies and as a result, after nine months or so, they were discharged and went on permanent disability, which is costly to the Armed Forces.” It was as simple as that.

So I went back to the Carter Hotel, playing each night with these beautiful girls, with fewer and fewer guys around, making a lot of money, enjoying law school. I loved law school. I loved the law. Then different people—actors, stars—am I taking too long on this aspect? Let me know.

Young: What do you think? Another ten or fifteen minutes. I know you’re going to get up to how you got into politics.

Wick: Yes, I’m almost there. I’ll be through in about a day on this subject. So a couple of movie stars would come in after-hours and they said, “Gee, if you’re in Hollywood please look me up and blah, blah, blah.” Then Rudy Vallee came in, a giant name as you know, with the Coast Guard band. And Rudy—they’d lost one of his arrangements or something and I stayed up all
night and did the arrangement. He said, “Charles, thank you so much.” He’s a giant star. “If you’re in Hollywood, please call me. I’ll take you to dinner.” Okay. Now I graduated from law school in 1943. I take the Ohio bar, pass it first time, get back to the orchestra at the Carter Hotel and then Tommy Dorsey comes through again, early ’44, February or March. He was listening and he said, “Have you graduated?” I said “Yes.” He said, “How would you like to join my outfit? You can coach the Sentimentalists.” I helped them, a vocal group, wonderful girls. “And you can also maybe do some arrangements, although I’ve got plenty of arrangers. And I’d like to have you handle my business.”

Well, I was just invited to a top law firm in Cleveland. I remember one of the guys traveling with an aide said to me, “You’re crazy if you don’t take this opportunity. This would be a giant career move for you in California.” So I did that. I joined Tommy in Milwaukee, at the theater there, and then he sent me out to Los Angeles to buy the Casino Gardens in Ocean Park. It’s not there anymore. It’s where all the big bands played.

I loved it. I stayed at the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel. I called a couple of movie stars who had said, “Please call me,” and they were going to call back. I called Rudy Vallee and he said, “Come on up to the house.” He had this fabulous house on top of a mountain. He’d just gotten out of the Coast Guard. He took me to dinner in an Italian restaurant. He said, “Charles, I’m just separated from my wife. You saw that beautiful house. No point in your paying rent here at the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel. Why don’t we try being pals? You can play for me at some of the parties I go to. I’ll introduce you. You can also help me with my business and stay at my house. We’ll see how it works out.” He said, “I’m a pretty frank guy. If it doesn’t work out for me, you’re out.” And I said, “Same with me.”

So I moved in with him and had this fabulous life of meeting all these Hollywood stars. One of the parties I remember Bing Crosby leaning over the piano singing while I was playing and all that. Then Tommy wanted me to come back to New York. I determined to stay out here and take the bar here. I met Abe Lastfogel, head of the William Morris Agency, which is one of the large booking agencies, and they were shorthanded. He offered me a job. I met him with Dorsey. I said, “Mr. Lastfogel, I’ve never really worked for anybody like this before, but I won’t stay longer than a year because I want to take the bar anyway.” I wound up staying there almost five years.

I took the California bar and I passed it. While I was at William Morris—I’ve always loved business—I became enchanted with the real estate situation out here. I couldn’t believe the prices were so low, relatively speaking. I saw enormous growth.

When I was living with Rudy Vallee in 1944, August, I came out with my books to study for the bar at the pool. Some guys were playing tennis, and there was a gal watching them playing tennis, this gorgeous girl. And “Doodles” [Winstead S.] Weaver, a comedian—his brother was Pat [Sylvester L.] Weaver, head of NBC—introduced me to Mary Jane Woods and—here I’ve been going out with the Hollywood glamour girls—she stood up and shook hands with me Minneapolis style. Anyway, we started going together and we later got married. But she would go with me to look at real estate, and I would buy maybe one or two houses on a weekend by
putting a thousand dollars in escrow. If I couldn’t turn it over in hopefully 90 or 120 days at a profit, I’d walk away.

I got pretty lucky. I bought about seven acres across from Clark Gable on Petit and we became friendly and the girls couldn’t believe it. Now, I took the California bar and I decided to go open up my own law office with another guy I’d gone to law school with. Meanwhile Ken Murray had become a very dear friend of mine. He and his wife—his wife became my wife’s best friend, she’s much younger than he. Ken Murray’s “Blackouts” ran here for about seven years at El Capitan, a giant hit. That’s before television came all the way out here.

I said to Ken, “Ken, you ought to get into television now, while it is still in a vaudeville mode, which you have in ‘Blackouts,’ and I’d like to sell your show for you.” Anyway, I gave my notice at the Morris office. I went to New York. [August A.] Gussy Busch was a guy I’d come to know through Mackinac Island. I was able to sell the Ken Murray Show to Budweiser for an unheard of 40 or 45 thousand dollars a week in those days. So Mary Jane and I moved to New York.

I had met Henry Ford II, who ran the Ford Motor Company. I was down in Palm Beach and he saw this gorgeous car I was driving. It belonged to James Melton. It was one of those fabulous English cars; I forget which one of the most prominent—

**Knott:** Bentley?

**Young:** A Rolls?

**Wick:** It was even better, more distinguished than a Rolls or a Bentley. It might have been a Bentley. Anyway, he was on Worth Avenue and he left a note. He said, “I’d like to talk to you.” Jim Melton was a friend of mine. I was getting him engaged, trying to sell his show. So I call Henry Ford and he said, “I like that car. Whose is it?” I said, “James Melton. I wish you’d watch him.” I’d sold James to Ed Sullivan in January of ’50, something like that, and I talked to James Melton, against his advisors. I said “Jim, guys are going on the Ed Sullivan Show. It’s a very big thing. It’s new to television and if they’re a hit they get their own show.” He said, “I’ll go with you.” So I put him on twice and I got a call from Henry Ford. He said, “I’d like to replace Kay Kyser.” So, can you believe it? The One-House James Melton Show went on the air—I think it was March of 1950—and I had to put the whole thing together in about two months. There I was, I had the Ken Murray show on the air for Budweiser, and sold James Melton to Ford. Nobody ever heard of the deal I made, it was non-cancelable for I think about 39 weeks. In those days there were 13-week cycles. Henry, Mr. Ford, and Ernie Breech—ever hear of him?

**Young:** No.

**Wick:** Ernie Breech, he’s the one who really ran Ford when Henry was in the armed forces. Ernie Breech was a genius. He was a CEO of Ford. So I had Ford, also Arthur Murray. I opened an office in the building where Arthur Murray was. He saw some of the shows. He wanted to know if I could put together the Arthur Murray Show for him—a tough guy. So I sold his show. I forget whom I sold it to. So I had Arthur Murray on the air. These were all big one-hour shows.
Ken Murray, James Melton. Then, I forget whom I knew at Proctor and Gamble. I sold Pinky Lee. I got him on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the same thing happened. I had Pinky Lee and Vivian Blaine three nights a week, 15 minutes each.

Then Sarah Churchill’s guest appearance. We bought her as a guest for, I think it was the *James Melton Show*. I invited her and her husband, Tony Beauchamp, to come up to our penthouse at 40 Central Park South, next to the St. Moritz. I said, “Sarah, our show bought you for $750. You should be getting at least $2,000.” So I said, “I’ll be glad to handle these bookings for you.” So I booked her on some shows at $2,000 and we became very good friends. Tony Beauchamp was quite a fine professional photographer. Her father, Winston Churchill, came back after losing office. He came back into power in 1952 and I said, “Sarah, I’ll arrange with CBS for you to go back there and cover your father’s election.”

So I worked it out for CBS radio to have Sarah go back to London for CBS and cover his re-election. Actually, his re-election was October 26, 1952, and in still another one of the great thrills of our life, he won the election, and the next morning, Mrs. Churchill invited me to their home at 28 Hyde Park Gate. It was about three or four stories. I went in the morning, about 11:00 or so. I went up. He wanted to meet me again and thank me for what little I’d done for Sarah. I went up to his bedroom. He was in bed. He was always in bed reading or something. The room was very warm. He hated open windows. His wife would always open the windows. He finally had them nailed shut. He said, “Yes, Charles, we’ve won by four places.” I guess in Parliament. Anyway, we became very good friends.

I was their guest at Chartwell, their summer place, and then I was able to arrange for—I can’t remember his lawyer’s name but they worked with me and he wanted me to help him—I sold the *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. When I came back there, Churchill introduced me to [Robert] Fabian of Scotland Yard, the legendary detective, head of Scotland Yard. So I put this television series together, *Fabian of the Yard*. Sold it around the world—first in Australia. Then I converted a factory outside of London into a motion picture studio. By the way, that studio is still there at Twickenham.

Then I was going back and forth between New York and London while we were doing that show, doing *Fabian of the Yard*, and I became very friendly with the Churchill family. Then, after I sold it all, I came back to New York. I’d been in some deals with Ralph Evinrude. Frances Langford—she was a very big singer. We were dear friends. I helped with the legal aspect of her divorce from Jon Hall who made *Hurricane*, and who was one of the big stars. We became very friendly and I said to Frances in New York—I got her appearing at a couple of hotels—I said, “You’ve got to meet Ralph Evinrude.” So Ralph came in to hear her at the Pierre Hotel. Boy, it was love at first sight. Ralph had been divorced for some time. I got her an engagement in Milwaukee, Ralph’s hometown, at the big nightclub there. Ralph came in every night and I put together a group to sing with her. She really became an attraction. Then she and Ralph became engaged. It worked out and we all became very friendly. I was the best man at their wedding, which was on the *Chanticleer*, his beautiful boat in New York harbor.

Ralph and I talked about putting together some venture capital and we wanted also to do a big show with Frances. We loved her so much and we put together these two variety special shows
that sold very, very well. Mary Jane and I came out here to California in 1956 with three children, two boys and one daughter. Then we had two more children born here. The kids enrolled, 1957, in a private school called Brentwood Town and Country. I think it was called that. They changed the name to John Thomas Dye, who was the son of the headmaster and his wife who founded the school, a very handsome son who had been killed. He was an aviator in World War II.

Nancy and Ronnie had their two children in the school. Our kids became very friendly. Ronnie wasn’t doing the General Electric show yet. He started shortly after that. But we became very good friends socially, and Mary Jane has always been interested in politics. One of her uncles, whom I loved, was a deputy district attorney of Illinois or something like that. Even though we had a driver here at our house, and I guess Nancy had hers—my wife, Mary Jane, and Nancy would pick their children up after school. They’d park and wait fifteen or twenty minutes and get into one or the other’s car, and while waiting they would talk politics. We all felt the same way. We all felt that Jimmy Carter—whom I later admired as a very fine person, and was very nice to us. But we talked about the terrible position our country was in with the inflation and all that.

Anyway, then I encouraged Ronnie—and I was a very minor, minor part of some of the very wealthy businessmen around him—to run for Governor. He succeeded. We weren’t too much involved in the Governorship, although his son Ron [Ronald Reagan, Jr.] came to live with us for a year to make it a little easier on their transition to Sacramento. He was a senior in high school.

Then we would see them from time to time, the Reagans. Then after his Governorship, which was extremely successful, I had to almost teach him how to drive again. He’d been chauffeured for so long. We went out to dinner a couple of times. I remember, we were talking and I said, “Ronnie, you’ve got to make a run for the primary, for the Presidency. I think you would do great.” There were about seven candidates there. So we finally convinced him, we and this little group, although Mary Jane and I were really at the fore at the beginning. The Reagans opened an office near the airport and they were invited to different fundraising receptions as an unofficial primary—

Young: Do you remember when this was?


Young: Okay, ’79. Were you involved with the [Barry] Goldwater, politics at all?

Wick: Oh no.

Young: You’re first coming into politics. Goldwater was ’64, much earlier.

Wick: Oh yes, much earlier. Although we were very friendly at the time. I remember he went down and made that speech. No, the earliest politics that we became involved in, really, was in ’79, when we talked about his running for the Presidency. They had a lot of friends here. People who admired him as Governor and all, who would like to help. So they had different cocktail
receptions, and they were living hand-to-mouth as far as office rental and all that kind of thing. If they could get $14,000 or $15,000 at one of these things, he thought that was really fine.

That was early ’79. In April of ’79, about April 28th or something like that, Nancy—oh, he was making speaking tours too, that’s how he was making money—Nancy and Mary Jane and I went to some restaurant up here at the top of Beverly Glen and we were talking—Nancy and Mary Jane and I. Ronnie was out somewhere on a speaking tour. I said, “You know, Nancy, we’d like to help Ronnie. I’d like to give a luncheon—” I knew quite a number of executives here—“and have Ronnie come and then he could leave and I’d make a pitch for him. The only problem with that is, these guys are all busy. If some of them can’t come, I feel sensitive about trying to call them later and say you missed a fund-raiser.” Nancy said, “Gee, I wish you’d think of something.” I said, “I was thinking maybe of just sending a good series of letters or something like that.” She said, “I wish you’d think of something.” Did you read this?

Young: I haven’t read it but I know about this.

Wick: Want me to read it?

Young: Sure, go ahead. Be sure you identify what it is.

Wick: Mary Jane and I decided that we would try and put something together that really could pull the money in. So we formed—number one, all they could pull in was about $14,000, $15,000 a night.

Young: That was fundraising?

Wick: Fundraiser reception, yes. “Meet Ronald Reagan, who will be a primary candidate. He needs money to run in the primary, with your help.” So we, Mary Jane and I, talked and I said, “We’d like to have a reception even with all this competition, but what would happen if nobody came, or we took in only $5,000?” So what we did was, we called about—I don’t know how many couples there are in here—dear friends of ours who would do anything that we would do. Well, I think with about ten or eleven couples, each at the $2,000 limit, we’d have about $24,000 at least. So we would practically double what they’d been able to do even with nobody showing up.

So here’s what we sent out. This was a mailgram. I’d never realized with Western Union, a recipient of a mailgram has a return that that same messenger can send back or whatever. It says: “We cordially invite you to join us in the formation of the ground floor committee, first meeting June 28th 1979, Los Angeles; next meeting June 28th 1981, at the White House, Washington, D.C. Cocktails 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Thursday, June 28th, 1979, 120 South Mapleton Drive.” Gave them our address. “One thousand dollars per person, made out to Reagan for President.” This is the maximum amount contributable by any one person to a specific candidate in the entire campaign. “Sincerely, Mary Jane and Charles Z. Wick, and Audrey and Martin Appel,” who is one of my tax attorneys. “Nancy and Bill Hayes,” he was a very important booker here, “Lupe Hinkel,” friend of ours, “Art Linkletter, Marilyn and Glen McDaniel,” he was head of one of the large corporations here. “Beverly and Chase Morsey,” friends of ours, “Elsie and Frank Pollock,
George and Marian Scharffenberger, Jean and William French Smith,” who became Attorney General, “Mary and Geoffrey Swaebe,” who became Ambassador to Belgium, etc. “P.S.: Nancy and Ronnie Reagan will be with us at both meetings.” And then it tells them how to RSVP. I’ll give you—

Young: And they’ll certainly be at the second meeting.

Wick: They were.

Young: Yes indeed. So this started it off.

Wick: This started it off, and what we did was—this is background which I think may fit, in addition to what the other guys that you’ve seen haven’t really been exposed to—and Ronnie was genial, as you know. These people who showed up—by the way, we wound up with almost $80,000. Can you imagine that? Maybe $20,000 of it, they sent the money in and they couldn’t come, but they were that intrigued.

At our front door, through which you came, we had a couple of tables with some really attractive gals who had the list of people, and, as they came in, they gave each one a big name tag. Well, you gentlemen know that anybody who fancies himself to be somewhat chic doesn’t like to wear a big name tag; however, if you’re going to be having a conversation here, intermingling with this group, and maybe the next President of the United States, you’d like to have him know your name, without glasses.

Knott: Sure.

Wick: My wife is very artistic. She made wonderful nametags with “My name is so-and-so.” So when they came in I’d say, “Hey Ronnie, this is so-and-so,” and he’d say, “Hello, Murray” without looking at their eyes. “Hello, Frank. Hello, Jim. Hello, Steve.” It was a success. Now, my being not very tall, I’ve always been frustrated when I’m in a group and someone that I want to see is addressing the group in an informal gathering. I can’t see over some of those tall heads. So after cocktails for a while, an hour or so, we had everybody come out here to this very large area in the garden. And right outside here, where you’re sitting, we put a small platform, just three steps actually, about this high. Then we put Ronnie up there where he addressed this group. Well, no matter if you’re a midget, you’d still be able to see him. So there is more bonding there. That went extremely well.

Then, some other friends of ours and the Reagans wanted to do a similar kind of thing. I don’t have it here, I was looking at all kinds of things the last day or two, maybe I gave them to the library. I put together a manual—it probably ran about ten or eleven pages—of exactly how we did it, how we put this together, the ground floor committee, the size of the name tags, all the various things that made this thing—and the automobile boys, they wore a big Reagan thing too, the parking boys. That’s how that started.
Knott: You hear some politicians say that the worst part of their job, the part they like the least, is the fundraising aspect of it. Did you get the sense from Ronald Reagan that he enjoyed those types of events or—

Wick: I didn’t have a sense; I had a conviction that Ronald Reagan loved people. So as far as he was concerned, whether it was fundraising or whatever, just so there were people there that he could talk to, that would be it. So he would leave it to others. Ronnie, himself, would not make a pitch for money necessarily. This was part of his personal taste, and I guess he also realized—not that he wouldn’t hesitate if the chips were really down—that it wasn’t necessary because he had others who would do that with an aura of admiration for him.

Young: Were the people who came to the first event out here—did they include people who knew the Reagans well?

Wick: Yes, some who knew the Reagans well, some who knew us well. Well, not intimately. There were very few who were intimate, because we didn’t need them to come here to raise money. You see what I mean. In fact, we may not even have sent them an invitation, the more I think about it. We had no problem getting money from friends. So they were people on the periphery that we knew, important people.

Young: I was asking for the purpose of knowing, for Reagan knowing whom he was addressing. This was a familiar place for him and they were familiar people. It wasn’t like going to—

Wick: He had no problem with these big name tags.

Young: No problem at all.

Wick: See what I mean? That was part of my consideration. So you walk over to him, he’d call your name right away, although he was not very good at remembering names or using them. He had a phenomenal memory. He could sit down and do literally 20 verses of some western song or something without stopping. But he very rarely used people’s names. So a few of the friends used out manual and had some rather successful fundraiser receptions as well. That was June 28th of 1979. By that time John Sears was on board as campaign manager, and Mike Deaver had been with him—Mike Deaver, very faithful and very helpful. Mike was with him when it was, “Ronald who?”

We, Mary Jane and I, had a place out at Trancas, which was just past Malibu, kind of a large place. The Reagans came out there, oh, I guess at the end of July in 1979. We were spending the weekend, or a couple of days anyway, and we were walking on the beach. Ronnie and I were following; Mary Jane and Nancy were talking. I said, “You know, Ronnie, I think with the success we’ve had with this ground floor committee here—a very good friend of mine with whom I went to Michigan, Bill Edwards, is chairman, or president, of Hilton—I think I could put together a ground floor committee in New York. I know I could raise a couple of hundred thousand dollars, which would pay all your expenses and put you in the citadel of the world’s media while you’re there for that week. That would be an enormous exploitation area for you in competing with—” I think there were six or seven other candidates. John Connally—

Wick: You’re right. [Phillip] Crane from Illinois and the Hispanic guy, lovely guy, I forget his name, I have it here, we’ll get to it.

So he said, “Gee, let me talk to Deaver and Sears.” So I had lunch with those guys about three, four, five days later in early August, and they said, “Charles, we think it’s a great idea, but we would recommend it on only one basis.” I said, “What’s that?” They said, “That’s if you and Mary Jane go back and do it.” I said, “I don’t know, let me talk to Mary Jane.”

Well, my wife Mary Jane is Nancy’s best friend, probably. My wife is a real doer, very unobtrusive. Walter Annenberg called her “The Closer”—the late Walter Annenberg. She got out of him progressively about $2.5 million for the Reagan Library, and there’s a Mary Jane Wick gallery at the Reagan Library. The way that came about—there’s a bronze plaque: “This library never could have been built if it hadn’t been for Mary Jane Wick, to whom we express great gratitude.”

When the library opened on November 9, 1991, I think it was, when George Shultz, the Reagans, and the other members of the Board were presented with the costs and the money, they found that of the $76 million raised, approximately $70 million was attributable to Mary Jane Wick.

Young: That’s amazing.

Wick: She’s so modest. She said, “Look, I had all kinds of help.” She did, but she had put them together. She has been so successful at that, but in a very unobtrusive way. She has great personal dignity. She raised a lot of money for schools and all that, and I tell people on the few nights when we’re home alone, Mary Jane after dinner will look at me and say, “How much did you say his name was again?” So, Mary Jane said, “Yes, why don’t we do it?”

We knew the manager of the Mayfair Regent Hotel back there; it’s at 65th and Park, called the Mayfair Regent. It was the Mayfair before that. We booked a couple of suites adjacent to each other so we could hold meetings up there. Then of course, we were warned by some of the lawyers, too, that we had to be careful what kind of money we spent, as to the various limitations. I can’t quite remember what they were. I think they also applied to primary candidates.

So we went back there. I talked to my friend Bill Edwards, CEO of Hilton. He said, “Charlie, I can book the International Ballroom for you,” a big ballroom at the New York Hilton. I said, “Well, Bill, it might be too big.” He said, “We can partition it off to two or three sizes, 200, 300, 500, and so on. However, I’ve got to be careful, too. I’ll reserve the ballroom for you on the condition that if there is an offer for it made for the same night, where we have to—then you’re going to have to come up with the money.” I said, “Fine.”

We had to be terribly careful about how we handled everything. I guess it was September 9th, 1979. So we went back there and we got a couple of friends to help us. I forget how we met Bill
Casey, William Casey—he was a giant. Bill had run himself for Congress but had lost and he was head of—I have his whole biography, a very important guy. Was he head of the SEC [Securities & Exchange Commission] once?

**Knott:** SEC, yes, that’s right.

**Wick:** Casey was wonderful. Casey introduced me to Max [Maxwell M.] Rabb. Max was one of the leading Jewish financiers, lawyers, who had been, I guess, the youngest assistant in [Dwight D.] Eisenhower’s Cabinet.

**Young:** Yes, yes.

**Wick:** So Max joined us. Max didn’t want to let it be too well known at the time because in the back of his mind, if we didn’t make it he didn’t want to be associated with us. But I couldn’t help shelter him from that. Then we met another guy from New Jersey, Ray Donovan, who was a successful builder, and then Reagan came over. So we would have our nightly meetings there at the Mayfair Regent, just the way we used to in California. We used as a model my ground floor committee letter. Where they disagreed with me, they said, “You can’t ask for $1,000 here; there’s just too much in the way of competition. Five hundred a person.” I said, “Okay, if you guys say so.” They said, “A lot of these fellows live out of the urban areas, too—Connecticut—and they commute here, and they want to see their families.” I said, “I’ll tell you what, it’s only going to cost us about $35 a plate for the food. Why don’t we put in—” I have it here somewhere—

**Young:** Tickets for the kids?

**Wick:** No tickets.

**Young:** Free for the kids?

**Wick:** I have it here somewhere. I was reading it in this invitation. “P.S., you may bring any of your children between 15 and 25 as our guests.” I’ll jump way ahead. We were hoping to get a couple of hundred thousand. We were very assiduous. I forget the guy’s name who ran the Republicans in Long Island—a good friend of Bill Casey—he came in to help us too. But as this thing started to build, we finally, on that night, November 9th, 1979—I’ll correct that date, but I’m almost sure it was the 9th—we took in almost $160,000 or $180,000. And, in that ballroom there—maybe it was the grand ballroom in the Hilton Hotel in New York, there’s a half balcony—we had 225, approximately, of the world’s press. It was a giant success.

We had a rabbi and a priest and a minister give preliminary invocations. Poor Max Rabb got so mad because we couldn’t find his rabbi. I think just at the last minute I was able to hold up the minister and the priest until we found the rabbi. It had to be ecumenical. That was really fine. So much spirit in the whole thing.

Then my son had put together—I don’t know if we ever had it in the campaign—he and some of his friends who were pros in the motion picture industry put together a short on Ronald Reagan,
the history, the whole thing. We spent about $20,000 or something like that. I think we gave it to the library. It ran about 20 minutes. So we began—cocktails and so-on. Then we darkened the place, the stage curtains were drawn, and a screen came down and we did this thing—Ronald Reagan, blah, blah, blah. Then all of a sudden the house lights went off, and instead of the screen, there he was in person, illuminated by a spotlight which just came on. It brought the house down.

Then Ronnie went around. I think he shook hands almost with every table, with at least somebody at every table. I got mad at John Sears because he had booked him out of New York that night to hit Philadelphia and all these different things. I said, “My God, we’ve got other things for him here as a follow up.” He got pretty tough and I said, “You’ve got to cancel those, because we made friends here and promised them things.” But anyway, it went from there.

Young: Did Sears back off?

Wick: Yes. He was later replaced.

Young: I know.

Wick: Is John Sears still living?

Young: Yes he is.

Wick: I liked John very much but I guess the feeling was—and I don’t think it was entirely his fault. I remember, just before we switched off, there was a Time magazine article that had more of Sears than it did of Reagan, and that’s when Reagan’s advisors felt—

Paul Truesdale, who is a big developer here, a dear friend of ours, had this great boat. Mary Jane and I were down in the Virgin Islands, I think it was, somewhere down there. Near the end of January 1980, I got a call and they said, “Listen, we’ve decided against John Sears.” I said, “Well, I told you guys, Casey would be the guy.” They said, “Why don’t you see if you can get Casey.” So, from there, down in the Virgin Islands or wherever, I called Bill Casey in New York. Bill had been so much involved with us. He was just terrific. We used to gag about Bill. Bill would read a book a night. His mind was so active, and he would talk so fast you could hardly understand him. I would tell the guys, “I’m going to have Bill here with the simultaneous translation.”

So Bill agreed, but then, of course, we had to be careful how we spent the money. We didn’t want to spend any money that we couldn’t use for buying votes—well, not buying votes, but buying the background for votes. So Bill came out here and stayed with us. He flew out here in February of ’80, stayed right upstairs here, and it was really funny. Bill was somewhat absent-minded despite this fabulous retentive memory, and he would take his shirts out to the laundry. We’d be happy to do it for him; we had three in help here. And he couldn’t remember which laundry it was. Long after he was gone, we finally found a lot of his shirts.
So Bill went to the Reagan office up there near the airport. We were working here on the announcement dinner in New York and it was—I’m getting confused. It was the Presidential Unity Dinner of California, June 13, 1980, so that was after Bill was here. That was at the Beverly Hilton Hotel here. Ronald and Nancy Reagan, the Republican Presidential Unity Dinner—I’ll give you a copy of this program. Pat Boone opened it. Invocation, greetings, honored guests. Mike Curb, who was the assistant governor here, Deputy Governor. The honored guests were Howard Baker, Jr.—was Howard running then? I think he was. George Bush—these are all candidates. John B. Connally, Phillip M. Crane, Bob Dole, Ben Fernandez. Dinner. “It’s a great night in America with Ronald Reagan, Howard H. Baker, Jr., John Connally, George Bush,” Yes. I have it here somewhere. We were splitting the proceeds among the candidates. I think Fernandez only got about 5 percent, and Connally, who was a front-runner, and Reagan, each got about 40 percent, or something like that.

**Young:** Whose idea was this Unity—

**Wick:** Mine.

**Young:** And what was your idea?

**Wick:** Oh, also, for the Unity Dinner, NBC picked up a half-hour. The idea was—all these candidates—how many candidates were there? Seven, did we say? They’d been adversarial for the whole campaign.

**Young:** Sure.

**Wick:** And they all had constituencies. Otherwise, they never would have been able to appear as adversaries. So my idea was, let’s all get together now. Because the most important consideration was no longer each candidate’s individual success in becoming the President, but the Republican Party winning, which of course would be to everybody’s benefit. And that’s supposedly their dedicated chief goal anyway. So that’s why we called it the Unity Dinner and that’s why they made their appearance here.

**Young:** Did they all come?

**Wick:** They all came, yes. They all made their appearances, brief speeches. Efrem Zimbalist Jr. was the host, Pat Boone, Tanya Tucker, she was a singer at that time. Guest appearances by Don DeFore, Chris Robinson, Vicki Lawrence, Robert Stack, and so on. Then, September 30th, 1980, just before the election of November 4th. I had this idea of using satellite television and having this announcement, or dinner or something. We had crowded the Waldorf-Astoria for that evening. I think one of the big hotels in Chicago, some place in Tulsa, and in Los Angeles, all contemporaneous, all these diners, giant screens. Frank Sinatra was a host in New York where we were at the Waldorf. I forget who, some giant star, was in Los Angeles, et cetera. As I recall, we took in $5 million that night, which was phenomenal, with the satellite. It was a two-way satellite, too. Each candidate, or former candidate, could address everybody that had been constituencies of all the other candidates, plus friends. Well, that was a giant success, that evening. In fact, we sold out everywhere.
Then we continued with the appearances, or Ron did. Then, of course, November 4th is history. I remember November 4th. Two of the Reagans’ very close friends, Earle and Marion Jorgensen—Earle Jorgensen was an extremely successful steel manufacturer. I think he had 30 plants around the country. Never had an education. Sailed around the Horn on his father’s sailing boat, which carried cargo and he needed a cabin boy. The cabin boy was Earle. He was a marvelous guy. Anyway, on November 4th, at their house up here in Bel Air, about five minutes from here, they were having very close friends of the Reagans to celebrate, hopefully, the victory.

So we got up there about five o’clock our time, which is eight o’clock Eastern time. We got up there and as we walked in we found out that he had already just about won—phenomenal. They had to go tell Ronnie. He was taking a shower. And we came out, and then the others came up, and we were ecstatic. By that time the Secret Service had already been assigned. More Secret Service. So we had a joint celebration down here, I guess it was at the Beverly Hilton. We had this big convoy of friends’ cars being squired by the Secret Service, and overhead all these, the aircraft—

Knott: Helicopters?

Wick: Helicopters following the whole thing. We were watching on television in our car. So it went on from there.

[BREAK]

Wick: We were on Malcolm Forbes’ beautiful yacht. This was well after—maybe it was ’91, or ’90. I can’t quite remember now, because I’m addressing myself to the pre-opening of the library, the Reagan library, which, by the way, is the largest presidential library in our country. We were having dinner with a group of people all over the boat. We were above, with John Kluge. As I recall, Mary Jane had initially gotten a million dollars from Kluge for the library, and we were talking about the library and stuff, and Mary Jane—you’ll meet her—in her low-key way finally said, “Well, you know, Walter Annenberg has just been fabulous for us. He’s given us $2 million.” She got that from him one million at a time. John said, “I’ll give you another million.”

About three weeks later—he wanted to be on a par with Annenberg—about two weeks later we were at the Annenberg’s estate down here—we’re going down there tomorrow for the weekend—and Walter welcomed us, welcomed me, welcomed “The Closer.” And we’re having lunch, and we got around to, “How’s the financing of the library coming now—blah, blah, blah.” Mary Jane said, “We just got another million”—it’s a wonderful lead in—“from John Kluge, which makes him in effect parallel with you, Walter.” Not quite that crass. She got another half-million from Walter.

She is working now, not quite as intensively—she’s a trustee of the library. We got Air Force One, as you know, and it’s parked out here in San Bernardino. They’re trying to raise about $25
million now for the hanger. It will be wonderful. It’s going to be more than a hanger. It’s going to be part of a museum where they’ll have very interesting things with it. The visitors will be encouraged to come up the front stairs as the President did, look in the cockpit on the left, make a right turn, see the President’s private quarters, and then go down to where the news people were, and then leave the way the non-celebrities do, from the back door. As they pause on the back steps, the visitors will get their photograph taken with the United States of America familiar emblem of Air Force One in the back. They think with Air Force One they’ll probably be able to almost double the number of visitors, which is quite considerable. I don’t know exactly how many there are offhand.

So, the election has been won—November 4th, 1980—

**Young:** Can I just interrupt for one thing? During the time before you really became involved with Reagan’s campaign, starting with the ground floor committee idea, were Justin Dart, [Al] Bloomingdale, [Henry] Salvatori—that group—were they involved in a different way in Reagan’s campaign?

**Wick:** They were the primary group before me—

**Young:** Before you, okay.

**Wick:** What did they call them again?

**Young:** The kitchen cabinet.

**Wick:** They were really instrumental—I had nothing to do with his becoming Governor. They were the keys. However, when this thing started, then I guess I became—Mary Jane and I—the primary people. There was nothing else necessarily that they could do as far as raising money or whatever. But they remained great friends and great supporters.

Meantime, the President-elect, from November 4th, is now going around the country, making appearances, and the Reagans had always had Christmas Eve here with their kids and our kids. So they were here that Christmas Eve, 1980. I went down to make a television appearance briefly, on some local show, talking about Reagan, and he had asked me what would I want to do. I said, “Frankly, Ronnie, there’s nothing I really want to do that I can think of. I don’t want to be ambassador. The title sounds good but I don’t want to be out of the country. I want to be here, and see my kids and all that kind of thing. I am not equipped to become the Minister of Defense. I could become Minister of Offense. I came back from that appearance in time for dinner here on Christmas Eve. I forget who else was here, one of the guys who was one of our chief aides, if I can remember his name. His stepfather was that famous English actor.

**Knott:** Mason?

**Wick:** Yes, James Mason was his stepfather. What was his son’s name?

**Knott:** Morgan, I think it was Morgan.
Wick: Yes, Morgan Mason. He took me aside. He said, “You’re crazy. You’d be ideal for the United States International Communications Agency (later USIA, the United States Information Agency). That’s a moribund, second-, third-tier agency. Here you’ve had all this experience in business, in music, in PR work. Your experiences with Churchill—You’d be ideal.” So I thought to myself, that does sound pretty good. So when Ronnie asked me again, he said, “I wish you’d make a decision.” I said, “Ronnie, I was talking”—I think I said I was talking to Morgan Mason—“He suggested”—He said, “Fine, fine.” Then, when we started having the transition meetings, Bill Casey or somebody wanted me to take a different job—a bigger one. I can’t quite remember what it was—in charge of all the facilities in the country—

Knott: GSA administrator?

Young: Government Services Administration?

Wick: Something like that. Casey and Max Rabb—they said, “Look, with your kind of experience, that’s what this needs. There are plenty of guys who know what goes on.” I said, “I wouldn’t feel comfortable.” In fact, I criticized myself, or criticized Ronnie. So anyway, I was appointed as Director of the United States International Communications Agency.

Young: That’s what it was called then.

Wick: That’s what it was called then. It had been originally constituted legislatively as the United States International Communications Agency, in your chronology here. It didn’t seem to fit. After I took office, I was able to convince Congress—it wasn’t too hard—that they ought to call it the United States—

Young: Could we just talk a little bit more about your choice and Reagan’s choice? This was made during the transition time, or when did you—

Wick: It was made that Christmas Eve.

Young: That Christmas Eve, okay.

Wick: It was formalized, I guess, in Washington. We went back to Washington right after New Year’s. To start transition discussions and all that kind of thing. I was actually appointed, somewhere here—was it March?

Young: Yes. So was this the first time that you had been approached, at this Christmas Eve, about doing something in the administration or—

Wick: I think so, yes. You know, we were all so busy, working and getting things done. Christmas Eve was probably the first time that we were really together socially, because he’d been traveling all over. He may have said to me at one time, why don’t you think about what you can do. And what you’ve done. He’s given me the most fantastic accolades. I came across one
copy yesterday, which I can give you, of what I accomplished. So I fulfilled his belief, anyway, which I was very happy to do.

**Young:** The only other person who was then in the kitchen cabinet that I know of, who stayed on to serve in the government, besides yourself, was Smith.

**Wick:** William French Smith?

**Young:** Yes.

**Wick:** Yes.

**Young:** And the others—?

**Wick:** They all had their own interests. Justin Dart, head of Rexall, and Holmes Tuttle had this giant automobile business. I guess they wanted to tend to their giant businesses. So, before being confirmed, I took office up there, provisionally, at the original building, right down from the White House.

**Young:** The old executive office building?

**Wick:** No, it was a commercial building. And Rogers & Cowan were—

**Young:** That’s where the agency was.

**Wick:** I think I have a picture of this recapitulation, I just saw it this morning. There’s a signed picture of it there, 17th and Pennsylvania.

**Knott:** You also ran the inaugural festivities prior to—

**Wick:** Yes. Before taking office. Ronnie wanted me to—after he had seen what had gone on with all those satellites and all that kind of thing, he wanted me to run the inaugural. I felt that I needed—I’ve always been innovative. Some of the things have worked, and many of them have not worked. I guess my saving grace, literally, and my ending up solvent, related to a quick recognition of what I didn’t know. So I felt that I didn’t know enough about Washington. I had a cursory transitional type of experience with many of the top people during this campaign. But I’d met Bob Gray with—what was the name of the agency?

**Young:** I don’t know, he had a communications business, didn’t he?

**Wick:** I think he was in New York, the managing partner of a very famous agency, still there.

**Young:** It became Gray Associates later. That was Washington based—I don’t know what the New York one was.
Wick: They were in New York, pardon me, it is Washington, absolutely. We were so successful, and Bob was one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew. I characterize his diplomacy by his ability to tell you to go to hell in such a nice way you actually looked forward to the trip.

I recruited a lot of PR people to help us there—the volunteers. I remember Bob came up to my office there. I guess I did go into the office early in January, and Bob said, “I’d be happy to help you.” He knew everybody there. I forget, what was the name of that agency?

Knott: It wasn’t Hill and Knowlton, was it?

Wick: Hill and Knowlton, yes. I said, “Look, I’d like you to help me with the inaugural.” He said, “Gee, I’m really busy, Charles.” I guess he went back and thought over it and realized what a giant opportunity this was. So I made him co-chairman of the inaugural. We worked together, and Bob had tremendous contacts everywhere. So we were able to maximize the exploitation—I don’t like that word—but the merchandising—second word, of the inaugural. We needed—I forget how much money we needed—$200,000, $300,000—whatever it was, we had to raise it. I had so many private sector committees later—I’d gotten to know so many influential CEOs and others, had no problem getting it, borrowing money.

I can’t remember now whether it was $200,000 or $300,000 they loaned the committee. Non-governmental type of obligation—whatever. We formed an advisory committee and these guys were our advisors in many different ways. Because there are so many elements involved, printing, and so on. Bob and I ran that. He got enormous exposure. Of course, I did too. But he got enormous exposure in that whole milieu where he was professionally a member of a competitive group. I think he was able to—he’ll tell you himself—at the end of this kind of thing. I can’t quite remember when he broke away, but it wasn’t too long after, he formed his own company, which became very successful—Bob Gray.

We had a terrible time with the inaugural. It was almost a total economic failure. Failure, period.

Young: Why do you say that?

Wick: I’ll tell you. I engaged, or we engaged, a guy from the Army who was a pro. We had to send out hundreds of thousands—I guess hundreds of thousands—of invitations and follow-up procedures—the whole thing. So, with my great intuition, I located a guy who was a pro at doing that for the Army and we brought him on board. That would have been—let’s see, we set this up the end of November. We had to get going after the election. And so I was thrilled to death that everything was being done in a great innovative way, using new technologies and all that kind of thing.

The inaugural was January 20th. We had this office. Overnight we had, I don’t know, 2,000 people working with us, volunteers, at an old fort down there. Right after New Year’s they come to me, said that there was some mass malfunction in the whole computer system, and we were two-and-a-half weeks away, maybe, from the inaugural itself, and we had no idea who was coming. I’m speaking literally, and the money for the tickets.
I couldn’t believe it. I forget this guy’s name. I just couldn’t believe him. That this vaunted
guy—he obviously wasn’t as good as he said he was—could screw up as badly as—and as I’m
telling you this, I am in no way minimizing the horrendous catastrophic impact potential.

**Young:** Was it a case of people being invited without any follow-up, or not knowing who was
invited, or not getting responses, or was it a problem with who was doing the selecting?

**Wick:** There was a problem with everything. He and his group were handling everything. I
forget, I had to bring some people in and they had to start from scratch, working day and night,
just to figure out what was going on. To whom was it sent, and where’s the money, how do you
respond? With my innovation, did the obvious thing, too. We got hold of the lists and I got some
wonderful volunteers making two and three and four and five hundred telephone calls a day and
making their notes for follow-up, and whatever follow-up mechanism we could accomplish.

I’ll tell you, we had seven or eight ballrooms. It was almost historic in number. The only
problem we had was we had too many people. The Fire Department—I had to talk them out of a
couple of situations. I said, “So it burns down. Just think how old that building is.” No, we had
their cooperation. They were just great. It was historic. We had seven bands, some of the greatest
bands that were then current. I forget how much we grossed—some fantastic amount. Now, I
remember, with Max Rabb, and who helped us? Bill Casey—maybe a couple of other things,
having a giant check reproduction of what our committee was giving to—who were we giving it
to, not the Republican committee? We were giving it to Reagan-something. I forget what it was
now. It’s probably in the record somewhere. I think it was well over a million dollars. It was
something and they printed it all over. So, I’ll tell you. Speaking of stresses that produce heart
attacks, I really surpassed that.

**Young:** But it turned out well. You said earlier it was a failure.

**Wick:** I said we were a potential, catastrophic failure.

**Young:** So, at the eleventh hour—

**Wick:** Eleven-and-a-half hour.

**Young:** D minus something—

**Wick:** The option I had was one that seemed somewhat unacceptable, and that was to kill
myself. It was just spectacularly successful. I have some photographs, too, of the Bushes and the
Reagans sitting on a long bench and Bob Gray and me and Mary Jane standing behind, watching
the—what were we watching? Some results, it couldn’t be election results.

I guess the address was 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, where we had three or four floors—the
USIA did—and Evans and Novak were on the top floor. So the different groups of people who
were instrumental in the various elements that together represented the compilation of USIA and
its many activities would brief me. We had a guy, like Matt here, transcribing days and hours of
all this terrific detail. I think we wound up with 218 posts in 159 countries. That may be a little
bit more. I remember reading that later. But we were in 170 countries with around 200 posts or something like that.

When I say posts, I’m talking about embassies and consulates. In some larger countries, there might be five consulates, including the embassy. Maybe in some smaller country there might be only one, with only two or three or four people. The embassies were comprised of our Foreign Service officers. We had 9,300 people including about 2,300 in Washington, and foreign nationals, very nice people who had the various reciprocal kinds of skills necessary to make the place function.

So I absorbed all of it. I had to absorb all these kinds of things. I had to absorb the technical aspects, the factual aspects. Of course, having been through two bar exams and working at night and going to law school, and, by the way, if you don’t mind my saying so—you can probably re-check this, maybe I’m a little off—I placed in Ohio in the top 2 or 3 percent on the bar. So I had quite an aptitude for absorbing information, which you can attest to right now is somewhat faulty.

Young: No, no, it’s quite the reverse actually. One of the things that is quite interesting about this getting into Washington and familiarizing yourself with the agency, is just how that familiarizing takes place, because historically people differ very much, or administrations even differ in when they’re bringing in new people to responsible positions—how they get to be in charge—

Wick: You’re talking about the bureaucracy.

Young: Yes. How they relate to that. From a historical point of view, it is very interesting when an administration comes in with relatively few people who are products of that environment. For example, George H.W. Bush—that was almost home territory to him—government. He’d been to CIA and everywhere, unlike yourself. You were not a product of Washington.

Wick: I was a stranger.

Young: You were a stranger, and Ronald Reagan in a sense was also, and a number of the people who came with him were. So you’re coming in there with a strong public backing. You’re outsiders to the establishment and you’ve got some notions about what needs to be changed. The way one would see this is you’re going to have to shake things up. So I’m very interested in hearing you talk about just how you went—it wasn’t just the amount of detail you had to absorb, but, did you have to do it on your own? What kind of help did you have? Were the people who were there at all helpful to you? Did you have to bring in people from the outside? How did that work during your first learning period?

Wick: My biggest supporters from the bureaucracy manifested themselves after I’d been out ten years or whatever, and I’ll work backwards from that. More people from the agency alumni have told me—and guys who are still there—talk about the great days of the Reagan-Wick Administration. I’m being clinical in telling you that, and the records certainly indicate that, as you can see what was accomplished.
The United States Information Agency was composed of about 9,300 members. Only under 2,000, maybe 1,200 or 1,500, were actual Foreign Service officers. The rest were in various types of positions as they would be in almost any business, but they were specialists in what they did. In other words, to be a specialist in interrelating with somebody in a foreign country where you’re stationed, you didn’t have to be a Foreign Service officer. However, you had to have certain skills, and you were under the monitorship of the Foreign Service officer in charge.

I observed no antipathy by anybody toward me, although I was vaguely aware that there was a great deal. There were many reasons. Morgan Mason suggested to me that, “This is a second- or third-tier agency and I think this would be a great challenge for you,” or something like that, and then Reagan, with what information he got from some of his colleagues, recognized the same thing. And Reagan at all times has been the master of communication and the methodologies that go into communication and information.

You see, I shared Reagan’s philosophy. Why is the information so important? Well, we have to get along with the rest of the world. The rest of the world has attitudes toward us or toward certain values that we have. We only know what we know. The only way we can know something is to have it related to us in some way—by a person, by a book, by the radio at that time, by television—whatever. Therefore, the kinds of goals that we have must be a reflection of what we know, which information has helped produce. Therefore, the misinformation that was extant when we came in, which was one of the big problems we had, and today is just terrible—this negative public diplomacy—had to be rebutted in a highly credible fashion, where the coloration that the recipients of our information would attach to the self-aggrandizement of our country had to be such that the information was highly credible, and with a little investigation could be corroborated from other sources.

Young: Sure.

Wick: So, to my surprise, most of the people at USIA were very talented and highly competent—but a lot of them were on their way out, maybe had five or ten more years and were marking time for their pensions.

I was very fortunate that during the course of these lessons I was getting and the pictures on the screen and the different area directors telling me what they do and all that kind of thing, I was exposed over a number of hours to varying individuals. I’ve always had a quick instinctive evaluation of somebody. Not always right, but just sort of a gut feeling. When you get that feeling, which has arisen instinctively by a lot of reflective input, then your intuition no longer is a vital, necessary factor. You’ve come to a conclusion.

Young: Right, right.

Wick: So there were three or four or five key guys there that liked me, I could tell, and liked what I could do for the agency, with everybody’s perception of my being a chief friend and access holder to the President of the United States, and no reluctance to use it. Although, as time went on, they perceived a reluctance—a refusal to use it to the extent that in any way it might be
considered an abuse of a relationship, going around somebody unless I had to. I went around a few guys who were Cabinet members. I won’t name them now, but I felt that they were dead wrong, as far as affecting our public diplomacy, in my purview.

So these guys were very helpful. Three or four of the alumni have been in touch with me in the last year now about the terrible public diplomacy situation the United States is in, and when I was back there summer before last, they met with me. I pulled together the problem generated by this terrible catastrophe of October 1st, 1999—the merging of USIA into the State Department. That was strictly a political move, as I understand it. Jesse Helms, who had tremendous power in the administration and who’d been one of my biggest supporters, bargained that as a chip for whatever he was going to get—this is what I heard. So I had them pull together, with my advice, or reactions, I should say—they’re the experts—and I called Colin Powell, and I went over to see him. I guess it was June of ’01, the year before last summer. His secretary wanted Charlotte Beers to come, too, who is head of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and he said, no, he first wanted to talk to me alone. We were very close friends, Alma [Powell] and he and I had worked with him when he was more or less an aide or a secretary to the National Security Council in the White House with Reagan.

Of course, he was disturbed with what was going on, with the war potential and all that kind of thing, so he set up a meeting for me with Charlotte Beers the next day. So I met with Charlotte Beers and two or three of these key alumni guys. Stan Silverman was one. Fabulously talented low-key guy in charge of all the financial things, a career guy at USIA. Fred Coffey, Jr.—brilliant guy who was in the field in Indonesia, for years. William Rugh, who was an ambassador somewhere, and one or two other guys—brilliant.

They put together a chart of the way things had worked under the administration of USIA. The area directors who responded to the Director of USIA in Washington. How the various subdivisions of information and foreign service officers worked. Our job was public diplomacy, along with the State Department’s private diplomacy. Therefore the sensitized touch that our Washington policymakers had—the State Department, National Security Council, et cetera—had almost instantaneously with the field giving them quick communications and observations of what their particular country was thinking, or not thinking, or wrongly thinking and all, which could be hopefully corrected with instructions from Washington. They showed how that whole interspersal, that chart, the lines, were totally—disfigured is a lousy word—with the current. And so, there were the people there—

Young: So in effect, public diplomacy was kind of shut down.

Wick: In effect, yes. The very nice people at State, career people and all—they didn’t need any more headaches. They didn’t need any more responsibility. Plus the fact, as I recall, the State Department always viewed—at least until the end of the Reagan incumbency, the United States Information Agency, because they too had Foreign Service officers. We had Foreign Service officers, too, but they were always sort of a second tier group.

Young: Number two.
Wick: As far as the number one State Department guys were concerned, no matter how talented they were. Then, of course, the public diplomacy got even worse. As you can see, it is just in all the press and everything. So I went to talk to Charlotte Beers and she was very nice. She respected what I had done, and made some very complimentary remarks, and I, in turn, admired her for what she had done in advertising, that kind of thing. But it was quickly apparent to me, as it was to her, when she resigned because of whatever, that in that bureaucracy—and I don’t mean that in any scathing way, that’s the kind of animal it is, and we need that kind of an animal to pull the weight of everything else—but that animal needs direction and that animal needs control.

She, obviously, was buried in the bureaucracy of no longer having the channels of direct communication with the experienced people who knew everything that goes on and how to do it, which could implement or assist her, with her talent in PR, in formulating policies, or converting PR to addressable policies that would strike a responsive chord. You just can’t do it in that—you’ve got to have a guy who is totally in charge and cannot be overruled by anybody higher up other than the President of the United States.

Now, technically, as I recall, the Director of the USIA reported directly to the President of the United States. But he was a principal advisor on policy to the Secretary of State and to the NSC and something else. Now, that doesn’t mean I could tell George Shultz what to do.

Young: Could I interrupt to go back a little bit more? Because the picture you paint, and it seems to be, even for a consumer of news, the picture you paint currently of the situation is just evident in what it shows. I’d like to take us back to—we can stop and go into this in more detail—but I’d like to go back to what you brought. First, how you got familiarized with the agency, but also what you brought in terms of ideas and a sense of mission to the agency that had not been apparent before, and that may have been different from what the bureaucrats routinely thought about.

It was not only your bringing a mission that’s going to require some shaking up in the agency. It also seems to me that you had a President with whom you not only had a good personal relationship, but you and he were probably very much on the same wavelength of being able to think in terms of public diplomacy, to think in terms of a mission for the agency. That seems to be missing now. I haven’t seen—I don’t see in the current President—that idea like Reagan had, of a mission for public diplomacy.

But I’m getting off the subject. To go back to what you had working—

Wick: Speaking of the President, he’s a friend of mine. I knew the Bush kids when their father—we got along great by the way, when he was Vice President—and I know Karl Rove pretty well. Obviously, Reagan was unique, and George Bush will be the first one to tell you about that. I think what’s missing there, unfortunately, is somebody that has his ear, or Karl Rove’s ear, with the same stature that I had. And I say stature—I’m not speaking as a world personality, but interpersonal with the President of the United States, who recognized precisely what my skills were that could complement and project his philosophies—you see what I’m saying?
Young: Yes.

Wick: I think that’s the problem there today. I was hoping, with my meeting with Colin Powell, that maybe it could lead to something. We’ll see what happens.

I was confirmed June 8th or something of ’81 and of course I’d been preparing for some months, believing that I would be confirmed. My confirmation was really quite a process because they knew—I’m not a right-winger but I’m pretty conservative, and I had a couple of great exchanges with Ted Kennedy and some others. I got my budget just about doubled from the time I was there, while they were cutting back, and I was able to do that with Democrats and Republicans, because I was able to convince them by my actions and what we had done that what we were doing was for America. It wasn’t for Ronald Reagan, it wasn’t for the Republicans, and it was producing results that their foreign travels or foreign contacts could relate to them with great approbation as far as they were concerned. You see what I’m saying?

So we were all prepared, upon my confirmation, practically the next day to leave, I guess for Europe, and visit as many posts as possible. Mary Jane left with me. By the way, she was with me most all the time and I had to be terribly careful about being sure that not a penny was charged to the government. We had suites, which we used for business, so I paid for the bedroom, and the government paid for the parlor—forgive my old-style language.

So I was quickly able to correlate a graphic articulation of what had been the written and oral explanations and characterizations and pictures of what these places looked like, what the milieu surrounding them looked like, which might have some reference to how they worked and what the service officers themselves and their national counterparts had. I got that pretty fast with the kind of experience I had with audiences and all.

I quickly perceived, number one, that the wireless file, which had been the modern contemporary communication technology, was now long-time past, and Western Union, their teletypes, was their chief function. I recognized that we had to put an emphasis on computers. We had, if at all, a very primitive computer setup—of course everybody did—for our purposes. But I was able to get a gal into the office—I forget her name now—she left a giant job with some of the big computer companies. We were able to upgrade our total computer network, and customize it more to precisely what was required of our kinds of interchange and all that sort of thing.

That was in June. Then we became very friendly with the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court—

Young: Was this Warren Burger?

Wick: Warren Burger. Burger had invited me to meet the Supreme Court, got a lot of publicity and I persuaded Burger, I had formed an interchange of American executives. I convinced him, and his wife—what was her name? She was sweet—to come on this trip with us to China. We arranged for him to address—gee, I forgot all about this—Chinese law students and so we had a private American government plane, obviously, and so we flew to China, Mary Jane and the Burgers and I and a couple of their aides and some of my aides and the Secret Service.
A tremendous relationship developed out of that. I was able to see what was going on in China as far as our post, what their problems were. I’ve got pictures somewhere with the prime minister of China—a picture of me, and Warren Burger, and, I’ve forgotten his name, he was sitting in the middle, we each sat on the sides, you know, these guys have adjacent chairs.

Young: Well, the foreign minister then was Deng Xiao Ping, wasn’t it?

Wick: Yes it was, Deng Xiao Ping. I was quickly able to synchronize the sight and sound of what made the USIA effective and then use, hopefully, the appropriate judgment in implementing what appears to be effective. So in China we got along just great with Warren Burger and all. Then they and my wife flew back to the States and I stopped in the Philippines to see our posts there and the head of the Philippines, Marcos, Ferdinand Marcos.

Boy, they were really adept at maximizing their access to the White House and they knew I had it. So they put me up in this—I had two or three people with me all the time from the agency, plus the local post, involved in all the meetings which they had set up. But again, how I changed the agency to a certain extent—the bureaucrats in the agency, which included all those wonderful guys who made careers out of working for the agency, found it very difficult in the various countries they were serving to ever have a face-to-face meeting above a third or fourth level person in that particular country. Even the media—very rarely top level. But it was enough to make them function and it worked for us.

But when I came to town as the President’s “right hand man,” in effect, boy, we got ASAP meetings and they met with people at the very top tier of the government they’d never even had a chance to meet in the three or four years they’d been there. Of course, those people obviously were concerned about having the appropriate and most beneficial relationship with the United States of America, and here was one of their chief opportunities to have a conduit right directly to the President, in effect, and to the members of the Congress who were influential in foreign affairs, through me, at least through their perspective. So they rolled out the red carpet. Marcos really rolled out the red carpet.

I can’t remember where we stayed but we went to this great palace. He was having a dinner for me and my post guys. A metaphor for how he ruled—maybe he was a nicer Saddam Hussein, but he seemed to have the same kind of control. I won’t accuse him in any way of murders or whatever, but as soon as I walked in—they wanted me to be received on the second floor, that’s where the family quarters and the business quarters and the vast area—they took me into his office up there. I had a big long bench, with some chairs around it. We had a very nice discussion and he said, “I want you to meet the members of my Supreme Court.”

So we walk out, and that big long bench I had, all of a sudden there are guys all around it and when I came out they stood up. Members of the Supreme Court.

Young: Well, he did say “my” Supreme Court, didn’t he?
Wick: Well, I’ll tell you, I could see exactly how much their judicial decisions, which I guess a Supreme Court is supposed to embark upon, were independent. Now we come down to dinner. There’s this gorgeous giant ballroom. Across the ballroom, across the width of the ballroom was a platform with great big tables where a lot of his key ministers were sitting. I was in the middle next to Mrs. [Imelda] Marcos and he was on the other side—we had a fabulous dinner and then they brought in these dancing girls. It wasn’t anything that was erotic, but they were gorgeous young girls and they did all these dances and all that kind of thing.

We had discussions with our posts and public diplomacy, and what ideas I had for the Philippines that could be helpful, and welcomed their ideas as to what might be helpful for the Philippines and our relationship. Well, part of what I had learned, very early in my incumbency, in being tutored as to how a director behaves is that you can’t—well nobody in the State Department can accept a gift over $150. As we were leaving, they gave me a giant portrait. They gave me things that were probably worth $40,000 or $50,000, various kinds of presents and all that kind of thing.

I consulted with my post and they told me it might be an insult if I told them I wasn’t able to do it. I remember going back practically in the cargo plane. Of course, when I came back I had to turn it over to the State Department immediately. Maybe I shouldn’t say this but later on I learned that some of that stuff disappeared from the State Department, but I guess it must have been some outsiders.

Anyway, thereafter, Mary Jane and I went on trips to our different posts. I think it took a third of our time. The legislation that created USIA in 1953, and I guess legislation theretofore—in 1947, I think it was—mandated, or regulated, or ordered strictly that the United States Information Agency which it was called then—and later changed and then changed back—could not engage in any “propaganda” and must always tell the truth. I must say that my predecessors all adhered to that and the bureaucrats and the people in the various embassies were a little corny about being so careful. It’s not a very good description, but it is a compliment to them. They wanted to ensure that they would not be put in a position where they would tell anything but the truth. And so we had the opportunity to evaluate the various posts and libraries. My God, we had all these fabulous libraries which created a great understanding, mutual understanding, which I’m not sure we have much today.

We were able to—you guys have probably read a lot of things, like [Alvin A.] Al Snyder. I see various quotations that your researchers found about how tough I was, and ruthless, and all that kind of thing. Well, probably a lot of it was true, and a lot of it I think was unfair. Some of those guys were trying to get back at me. But, as you pointed out, I wouldn’t tolerate the bureaucracy in the beginning. I was under a lot of stress and all that kind of thing. As a matter of policy I would very rarely say anything I wouldn’t mean, and yet I could be really blunt and hurt a lot of feelings, sometimes for which I apologized. But, you used the word “shakeup”—

Young: You have to.
Wick: There was a massive shakeup within the permissive regulatory boundaries that squealing to somebody higher up would occasion as to everything I was doing wrong that would ruin our public diplomacy or our agency.

Young: And also a lot of what the agency was doing was almost pretty modern, it seems to me, in terms of its use of modern communications to connect the sights and sounds, and to use to maximum advantage. Of course, the technology revolution was in progress, but when you were there it wasn’t yet quite where it is today. I think that there were agencies—it looked to me like it was fairly traditional in its approaches at that time. It was wireless and so forth, and it hadn’t been brought up to a major role with the use of the new technology. I mean, those are just my observations.

Wick: You’re absolutely right. And that’s what I found. They were just behind advancing, exploding, modern technology. Even being confronted with the opportunities that “exploding technology” could provide, they were so ingrained with the technology they used in their careers, and to a certain extent were almost isolated from the outside world of technology by virtue of their dedication to their being away—most of them, or two-thirds of them overseas—in areas that were not even capable of modern technology. And our obsoleting the technology was then something of a great nature to some of their contemporaries in those countries.

However, these loyal guys that I had intuitively and then conclusively figured would be helpful, with their broad spectrum of reciprocal kinds of knowledge—they were marvelous. They recognized that my heart was in the right place. And it really was. I had no grudges against anybody who mistreated me or I thought was disloyal. I just would cut them off in my own mind from any type of placement in which a disloyalty or a dislike of me might mitigate against their being effective for something that I was responsible for them to pursue.

That was about 1981 with Marcos. Then, going around Western Europe I was personally distressed with the subjugation of Poland that I had seen. I wanted to vomit when I saw the death camps. Visiting our posts in Poland, one of the cities—not Warsaw, one of the other cities—I was taken to a Catholic church and these Catholic priests got me in a back room. They were wonderful. At the risk of their getting into trouble they were telling me everything that was going wrong. I was so honored and so flattered. I seemed to be transported into antiquity. So that’s where I got the idea to shame the oppressors of Poland. Talk about modern technology—I remembered the big announcement dinner we had September 30, 1980—the satellite across the country and the vast audiences we got. One of the priests showed me something by the artist who created the expression, “Let Poland be Poland” and I have that which he created for the—what did they call the Polish group there?

Knott: Solidarity.

Wick: That was the Solidarity emblem. So I figured the way to free Poland is not go through this diplomacy charade we’ve gone through here with Saddam, which I hadn’t foreseen, but get the power of massive international public opinion, starting at the high level. You’ve probably read this digest of when we had eighteen world leaders—you name them, world leaders, each participating in “Let Poland Be Free”—the Polish people interspersed with Frank Sinatra,
many other giant leaders, many great authors, the great Polish author that got the Pulitzer Prize and all. I’ve forgotten his name.

We had a spectrum of the arts, politics, and government. I’ll tell you, that was a giant, momentous thrill. I think it was January 30, 1982. I hadn’t been in office quite a year. I recruited some of the top guys from Hollywood and the satellite business to help us put this thing together. Was it [Vaclav] Havel? He was our guest here in 1990 at the Reagan Library or something. I’d met him before but—

Young: Havel was Czechoslovakia.

Wick: That’s right, Czechoslovakia.

Young: Lech—

Knott: Lech Walesa?

Wick: Lech Walesa. Yes. Sorry, thanks. Particularly, telling me later what it meant to them and how it encouraged all these guys and that’s the way the whole thing started to—I’m not taking credit for it but boy, I’m telling you, getting together all these heads of state—

Young: You have to take the credit for it because you were certainly—

Knott: You were criticized as well.

Young: The critics of that called you “that crazy man Wick—what’s he doing?”

Wick: Yes, I read—she did some great research here. It bothered me only to the extent that I was disappointed at how wrong others could be. Actually, it reinforced my conviction that this was the way to go and if I was wrong, I was wrong. But Ronald Reagan didn’t think I was wrong.

Young: I was going to ask, did you talk about this idea?

Wick: I told him I was going to do it. That’s all I ever did. I didn’t ask for his permission, which I’d be delighted to. Now, if I heard something like, “Charlie, I don’t think this is the right time” or whatever, obviously—But I told him, he thought, and then he said, “Great idea. Any help I can give you, you let me know.” As a matter of fact I think maybe I got him to write a letter to these heads of state, that I would be calling or something. I can’t quite remember now. Because I certainly couldn’t get them on a phone call even though they might perceive who I was as being close to the President. At least I don’t think I could.

Young: You had some resistance in NSC?

Wick: Yes, I’ve been reading about it. Go ahead, you guys know a lot about that. Remind me, I’m not sensitive about it.
Knott: I think it was Daniel Pipes, right?

Wick: Harvard, yes.

Young: Richard Pipes. There was one time when [John] Poindexter gave you the brushoff.

Wick: Oh God, yes.

Young: I don’t know whether it was about the “Let Poland be Poland” but there is a story here about Richard Pipes talking to you about, “maybe this isn’t the right time” or something. You were quoted.

Wick: I had great respect for those academicians. I don’t mean that as a swear word. I really did. I always admired academicians, even though you had to help them put their shoes on sometimes.

Young: And if not that, tie them.

Wick: But—all the criticisms, yes.

Young: Pipes suggested, and you’re quoted as saying, with some heat, “You make the policy, I do the television.”

Wick: Yes, great. I got pretty tough with a lot of people that way. Or I’d say, “Go tell the President.” Now, the predecessor head of NSC—

Young: The first one—

Wick: Who was the last guy again—you just mentioned his name?

Knott: Poindexter?

Wick: Poindexter. He succeeded some prior heads—

Young: He succeeded—the first one was Richard Allen—

Wick: Oh yes, Dick Allen.

Young: The second one was Bill Clark, then came Poindexter—

Knott: No, then came [Robert/Bud] McFarlane.

Young: Yes, McFarlane, then Poindexter.

Wick: I got along great with all those guys. Not because of my closeness to the President. A lot of those guys were very close to the President and had his ear, so it was a question strictly of what has merit, what will work, how will it affect their particular position. I got great
cooperation from those guys. Now, what happened with Poindexter was, I needed to get the permission of the National Security Council—it had to do with Radio Marti.

Radio Marti was passed by Congress in October of `83 as radio directly to [Fidel] Castro’s Cuba. They were going to put it under the Voice of America originally. Then, my reputation for making things happen finally influenced them, before the end of all the legislation, to put it under USIA. They wanted me to have it. I think it was VOA, but I was in charge. What I did was I took over a building right near our First Street new headquarters—remind me to tell you about how we acquired that building. We got it for practically nothing. These guys blew it. After ten years, we could buy it for about a third what it would cost to replace it. We leased it. It was a new building. The guy was having so much trouble getting tenants that I made a very favorable—I love real estate—deal for USIA for the whole building, with the right to buy it in ten years at a ridiculous price now. But these guys, it probably got buried somewhere.

So we had that building. I pulled together the group that would be the nucleus of broadcasting to Cuba. I figured that we would rehearse it in there, in that building, and that it would be not as effective for us to go on the air to Cuba unless we went out and hit them hard. Originally the talk was, three or four hours a day, incrementally. I thought, you’ve got to hit him full hard. Well Castro, he didn’t like it. And to show his unhappiness, he had a million watts on two transmitters to jam our radios. He jammed the Miami stations and the network that followed his radar—whatever you call it—right up to, really strange, right up to Des Moines, where Reagan used to broadcast, the same station. I think he had it on for one minute or five minutes, just to discourage us.

So we had some problems with the guy that I had hired to run the thing. I can’t remember his name, but he turned out to be too much of a self-promoter, than a Marti promoter. It takes one to know one. We finally got Ernesto Betancourt, as I remember now—I’m trying to refresh my memory here—who had been with Castro in an official position and then became disenchanted with him and left Cuba. We put him in charge with great advice from the Cuban-American community who were wonderful to me, and I to them. Also I got some—the Senator from Florida was a little unhappy we were taking so long. The lady, I forget—

Young: The two Senators, Paula Hawkins?

Wick: Paula Hawkins.

Young: And also Lawton Chiles.

Wick: Lawton Chiles. I asked them both to come to my office in December, and they said, “Hey, this is important to us.” She had a big Cuban population, and so did he—Cuban-American. So I said, “Look, here’s what we want to do. If we go on four-and-a-half hours”—and I took them into some of our rooms where these guys were broadcasting simulations. I said, “The only way we’re going to hit Castro—you know, he could knock us off the air again with one of these kinds of things he did before—we’ve got to overwhelm him, where it would be impossible for him to jam fourteen-and-a-half hours,” or ultimately eighteen, I think it was. So they both said to me,
and particularly Lawton Chiles, who was a Democrat, I think it was Chiles. He said, “Mr. Wick, we’ll take your word for it on trust.”

I said, “What I would like to do is be ready by May 20, 1985, the 150th anniversary, I’m pretty sure, of Jose Marti’s birth.” Jose Marti was the only democratically-elected head of Cuba, as I recall, even now. He said, “Okay. I just want you to know that I’m taking certain steps and sticking my neck out to a degree.” The Cuban-American Foundation came and they backed me 100 percent, the same way. The guy turned out to be one of my best friends and he had such an untimely, natural death here a couple of years ago, Jorge Mas. They thought he was going to be the next Cuban premier. I know his name so well, what a wonderful guy. He was head of the Cuban-American community, undisputed, a very successful businessman, millionaire.

So I wanted not necessarily the permission of the NSC, because this was legislation, but I wanted them to understand it and I wanted them to recognize that any fallout that might ensue would be something that they should foresee now and not with 20/20 hindsight, but back and field it in some way. My actions, pursuant to regulation, had been handled in such a way that by adhering to the law I was hurting myself in some way. So theretofore, I had no trouble with the NSC. I’d call the head of the NSC say, “Gee, I’ve got to have a meeting of the NSC.” It was a normal thing, or a usual thing, for \( x, y \) or \( z \). Or they would call me. I think I was in attendance at more NSC meetings than any prior director. I think it was predicated on my not just being close to the President, but seeing how effective USIA had become and thereby believing that foreign strategy should be something that I should be aware of, and the formulations of our implementation of policies and the dos and don’ts.

So I called Poindexter. I couldn’t talk to him, I talked to his secretary. I think this was—let’s see—we went on the air May 15th. This was March. I said I have to have an NSC meeting. I explained why, and I sent him a digest of what I was proposing to meet our implementation and said I have to have one as soon as possible because we have to be ready.

I didn’t get an answer for about two or three days. Then I finally gave him an ultimatum. I said, “Unless I can have an answer from you where there’s an NSC meeting here no later than—I think it was two weeks before the 15th—we’re going to go on the air anyway—No, I’m going to call the President of the United States.” Well, I quickly got a meeting about two or three weeks before.

So, there we were in the Situation Room, long table. The President was at that end. I was sitting here with General John Vessey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of State across from me, George Shultz, head of the—Poindexter—

**Young:** [Caspar] Weinberger was there?

**Wick:** Oh yes, Caspar Weinberger, all the key people in Defense. I can’t remember now whether somebody from the Congress was there or not.

**Young:** James Baker was probably—
Wick: Oh yes, Jim Baker was there, by all means. And so, as we went around the table, the head of the—the Secretary of the Navy, what a lovely guy—

Knott: John Lehman?

Wick: No, succeeding him, lovely guy. He sat at my right. He said, “Look, I’m an admirer of Charlie and I think he’s done a great job, and what he has done here is terribly innovative and impressive. I like the way he’s going to launch Radio Marti” and blah, blah. He said, “However, I am afraid how Castro might take this. Now remember, when Congress passed the legislation, he jammed all these radio stations from Miami all the way up to Des Moines. When we go on, if he does the same thing, what are we going to do? We’ve got to react. Okay, what does that lead to then? We can react to his doing something else where the only way, our next step is to drop a bomb down the smokestack there.” He goes—very persuasive— “Where can this stop?”

So we go around, Weinberger was—he’s not an equivocator necessarily, but I can’t quite remember now. And then my friend George Shultz, who was always on the record telling me what a great job I’d done. George was a very blunt guy, but he couldn’t get over the fact that I’d set up WORLDNET—which I haven’t talked about—where he could talk directly to heads around the world at this various minute and they could see him face-to-face. He said, “Charlie, I think what you’ve done with satellites is great, but, I share the Secretary of the Navy”—I forget his name—“I share his grave concern.” Now I can’t remember what they felt. It could be that maybe we wouldn’t go on, but maybe we should try it with fewer hours and see what happens, so-on and so-on, and they finally came to the President. Oh, by the way, I stood up, and he said, “Charlie, go ahead.” I made my presentation first. I had a big chart.

I pointed out how our current radio shows that came from the United States didn’t necessarily reflect our policy or whatever, but because of the diagonal shape of Cuba, they could only reach the northern part of Cuba in the daytime, whereas with the power of Marti we’d be able to cover the whole Cuba, initially. So I had all these impressive charts.

[Interruption/Mary Jane discussing trip to China with the Burgers]

Mrs. Wick: Anyway, Chief Justice Burger was sitting there, and he couldn’t get his legs inside the airplane—

Wick: I forgot all about that.

Mrs. Wick: He was so tall. Then we were up in the air and the airplane started to smoke inside.

Wick: What a memory you’ve got.

Mrs. Wick: We thought, This is it, this is it. And it was the condensation of vapor. And then I said to the Chief Justice, “Do you use a cleaner?” Because he’d been to China a number of times—“Do you use a cleaner?” “No,” he said, “My wife washes my suits.” I said, “What do you mean she washes—how can you wash a suit on a trip?” He said, “She washes them in the bathtub, they’re drip-dry.”
Wick: Forgive me for interrupting you—He always looked well dressed, didn’t he?

Mrs. Wick: Yes, he always looked well dressed. From that day on I kept looking to see if his pants were wet or his shirt was wet. These are just little personal things that I remember. Anyway, that was a kind of interesting—

Young: Was that your first time in China?

Mrs. Wick: That was our first time, yes.

Young: And theirs also—Chief Justice Burger?

Mrs. Wick: Oh no, I believe he’d been there before.

Wick: I’m not sure he was, honey.

Mrs. Wick: I’m not really sure. Very charming man.

Wick: They asked me a question—how did Reagan, himself, feel about fundraising? Was he a fundraiser, and I told them—well, see what you say. See if it coincides with what I said.

Knott: A lot of political figures are uncomfortable with that aspect of the job, of having to raise money, and we were just wondering if Ronald Reagan, himself, was uncomfortable.

Mrs. Wick: Oh no, I don’t think of him as being a fundraiser, but what a President!

Wick: They asked, “How did he feel about fundraising?” My answer was, there’s only one thing he feels that would relate to any of that, and that is he likes people—put him anywhere where he likes people, and that’s it.

Mrs. Wick: Doesn’t matter. He really is a very, very, unbelievable human being.

Wick: Also, remember, we were up there at Camp David—Nancy was away, that was maybe in the last year that he was there, whatever—we had dinner, that’s when he gave me those slippers I still have. Just the three of us. I started to sing a western thing. I knew a verse, not even a verse. It’s a pretty famous western song. He just went—I don’t know, 20, 25 verses, whatever it was, without—remember, honey?—without hesitation at all.

Young: One of the things we also get out of these interviews is the characterization of a sitting President. What he gets characterized as being is almost never what you hear from the people who actually knew him.

Mrs. Wick: That’s interesting.
Young: There’s considerable disparity. For example, there are all of these images—you know them better than I—Ronald Reagan press images that were created, critical images. First, he really was sort of out of it. There was the feeling that he just didn’t really know what he was doing. And then that moved to, well, he’s too old, or he delegates too much, and so forth.

When you start—in these interviews, when you ask people to talk about the President—what were the characteristics of this President? What was it like to work with him? What was it like on the campaign? What was he like? Almost invariably you come up with far greater insight than these media snapshots, or editorial snapshots, I should say, that you get during the Presidency.

I was first struck with that with Jimmy Carter, who was self-characterized as this peanut farmer from Georgia who didn’t have much going for him, except the one thing he did know was how to win an election. Of course, he also knew how to lose, but those were not his essential qualities as a President. What you see after it’s all over, he’s the same person he was, and that didn’t come out at all.

And Reagan has had his fair share, also, of some public myths, created during the office and then propagated. The real, the actual person does not come through. I think all of the people we talked to who knew Reagan at all well, or worked with him, just give such an understandable, authentic picture, and I really think that’s one of the most important things that comes out of these projects—to have the people who knew him and worked with the President talk about that. Because that’s really one reason we’re doing these projects.

Wick: I’ll tell you one element that not too many people are familiar with and that is, nobody knows Reagan as an individual better than Mary Jane, and to a certain extent, I. We will attest, as will others, that the Reagan you see publicly, the nice genial guy, polite and all that, is the same Reagan—

Mrs. Wick: Let me give you one little instance of what he’s talking about. We went over there one summer day to swim, at the White House. Nancy and Ronnie were going to meet us down by the pool. So he came down, he had shorts on and little swimming trunks, and a little thing, and he looked at me and he said, “Gee, Mary Jane, I feel a little strange walking around here in a pair of shorts.” He had always that gentle, wonderful warm feeling, but he could also be very strong in what he believed in.

Knott: Sure.

Wick: He had a warm dignity. However, despite what we tell you is the observation, which—anybody would make the observation who saw everything, i.e., it is the same individual that you see publicly. Still, no matter how close anybody was to him, maybe with the exception of Nancy, his openness is such that there still is a very slight wall that you don’t get past.

Mrs. Wick: Cross over, right.

Wick: I don’t know quite how to characterize it. But you’re with him, you feel a great bonding, openness and all, and yet, there is a certain reserve, you just can’t put your finger on. Correct?
Mrs. Wick: Yes, I think so.

Wick: Which doesn’t seem consistent with somebody that is so open and all that kind of thing.

Mrs. Wick: You mean, “Tear down that wall”?

Wick: They knew what he meant by that.

Young: This is an interesting observation. Nancy Reagan said in one of the forwards to one of the books, that, “My husband is a very private man.”

Mrs. Wick: Yes.

Young: “But also a very simple one.” There are just a lot of people, like Edmund Morris, I think, who are always trying to, not necessarily get behind the privacy, but who can’t quite accept the authenticity of the person as they really are. They say, “There’s got to be something else. I’m not getting behind the public persona.” What I’m learning is exactly what you said. Sure, I think everybody has a private point. And if you don’t, and if you’re a public person—

Wick: However, Jim, don’t you think there’s a difference between being a private person and being private insofar as interchange with others? What is surprising about his kind of privacy with that little wall or whatever you call it—a hedge, which is not a very good word for this—is that he is so open and so easy to talk to. We had parties here before he was President and after he was President and diverse people that we would know and they would know. There might be a guy here worth a billion dollars, the captain of something. Unerringly, he’d make his way over to the person that looked the least comfortable being in this group. Right, honey? And talk to them, not just a courtesy “how are you?” or something like that. But I think what’s a little bit of a surprise—which isn’t generally known anyway, so it can’t surprise you if you don’t know something—and that is what I just suggested to you, and Mary Jane corroborated, that you can only go so far with him.

Mrs. Wick: But again, in a way, it’s similar to just a little private piece.

Wick: You’re absolutely right, but the point I’m making is, it seems so incongruous. At least, I don’t know about you fellows, but most of the people I know who are private are very nice and they’re very responsive in a very proper way and all that kind of thing, but you don’t find them gregarious, which is not really the word—

Knott: I know what you’re saying.

Young: Warm—

Wick: Yes, warm, open guy who will listen to you. He’s a very important guy but if you’re talking to him, he’ll wait until you’re through and all that kind of thing. It seems very
anachronistic that—also, there could be, because usually you’d say, “I know this guy, I can tell him anything, or ask him anything,” which you can do, but you can’t—You’ll feel it.

Young: I guess there are a lot of people in politics, in Washington, I’ll put it this way, who are so extremely conscious of their status and their position, that they can’t be warm to just anybody. They can’t. They’re always the Secretary of this or the boss of that—

Wick: But he’s warm to everybody, Ronnie is. He’ll warm to the guy—

Young: That’s one of the pictures we get—

Wick: And it’s a true picture.

Knott: Everybody tells us.

Young: Everybody tells us that. This isn’t necessarily recognized. It wasn’t at the time. There must be a method to all this. There must be a purpose to all this.

Wick: You know the sad—

Mrs. Wick: I was just trying to think, what was it, one time, during one of the campaigns and he said, “I paid for that microphone”—what was that?

Knott: Oh yes, that was in New Hampshire in 1980.

Mrs. Wick: Speaking of being gentle all the time. If he believed something, he—

Young: He had enormous, I think, self-confidence, real commitments.

Wick: I think what she just talked about is an illustration of how highly principled he is. As a simple man, nevertheless, he’s highly principled. You can only go so far, and then, if it violates his principle he doesn’t care.

For example, I just happened to think of this. I told them all about the ground floor committee. We have a separate wing back here where I have a couple of secretaries and a bookkeeper who comes once a week and I have an office upstairs. When we were looking for responses to our invitations for the ground floor committee, we had Frank Pollock—the late Frank Pollock, God bless him—he was with Justin Dart. Justin—Rexall bought out his company. Justin Dart, and Geoffrey Swaebe, who later became Ambassador to Belgium. They would help us. We would scurry up there looking at the responses, you know? I’m trying to think—oh, so here we are—we invited, I guess, some Democrats—

Mrs. Wick: Not many.

Wick: Yes we did, guys who were—
Mrs. Wick: Oh, who were going to vote—yes.

Wick: Remember, this guy who was a giant, big dealer here, I forget his name. We had Democrats for Reagan, very important guys. And we had some liberals who were dedicated with principle and most of these people were disgusted with Carter’s Administration, where the prime rate had gone to 12.5 or 13 percent; inflation was 20 or 21 percent. There’s only so much you can adhere to as far as addressing a sterile principle.

So here we had this fabulously successful ground floor committee thing where we raised all this money, and now we’re getting calls from people we know are liberal, and/or Democrats and whatever. Then the paper picks up this thing—something about his being against abortion. I called him up. This was at the beginning, shortly after our ground floor committee. I said, “My God, Ronnie, why did you have to say that you’re against abortion? You can be for anything you want but we’re in a political campaign. Why do you have to make unnecessary observations that are not necessarily related to the elements in your campaign? Because what they can do is turn off some of these middle-of-the-road people that we have to attract over.”

So, here’s a guy who wants to be President. He said, “Charles, I’m sorry, but that’s what I believe in.” The guy has full appreciation for the value of different types of conduct for votes and all that kind of thing, except the boundary is his principles.

Mrs. Wick: Which we admire.

Knott: Sure, sure.

Mrs. Wick: More people should have that. I was just thinking of something. When we were going to do the Reagan Library, it was—in the beginning the Heritage Foundation wanted it on the Stanford—between their campus—

Wick: When was this, about ’85? About three years before the end, or two years before?

Mrs. Wick: I don’t remember the date. It was a couple of years before he was out. So anyway, we all went, a bunch of us went over and had a look at it and everything—

Wick: At Stanford.

Mrs. Wick: The only thing is, Stanford really was—who was the head of Stanford at that time? But anyway, they really weren’t pleased at all to have the Reagan Library on the Stanford campus. This was not going to be a love affair. And they kept changing the location, so pretty soon we were going to be underground, practically. After that we decided finally that we were going to have it in southern California, which is where he lived and—can you imagine today, as much activity as goes on with the Reagan Library—it is extremely successful—

Wick: How many visitors do they have a year?
Mrs. Wick: Thousands. I don’t know what we have now. Anyway, so we were talking about the type of architecture and I said, “I think it ought to be what he wants. What’s his favorite architecture?” Well, how would he know, he can’t come to the—I said, “Let’s just take two that we know that he would really like, and take them to the White House and put them on the third floor.” Which is what we did so he could choose what he wanted.

Knott: These were models?

Mrs. Wick: Yes, they were really good models. They had some really good architects, but again, knowing him, it had to be simple—

Wick: Western.

Mrs. Wick: And our library is just wonderful. And with Air Force One it is going to be something else.

Young: You know, I’ve never been there.

Mrs. Wick: You haven’t?

Knott: I haven’t either.

Mrs. Wick: Promise me something. The next time you come out here, I will give you a private tour, I won’t charge you anything.

Knott: That’s a deal.

Young: That’s a deal.

Wick: Honey, don’t say, “won’t charge you anything”—just reserve those—

Mrs. Wick: I won’t charge you anything before we get there. I’m going to leave you gentlemen. Thank you for allowing me to say a few words—not wisdom, just words. Two days and you’re going back?

Knott: We leave on Sunday. We’re interviewing Kathy Osborne on Saturday.

Wick: Is Kathy living here, or is she living in Sacramento?

Knott: She’s here, yes. She’s Warren Christopher’s secretary and chief assistant.

Wick: I had to trick her into—turn this off here. [Break off]

Now, we’ve gone around the table. If you picture the rectangle, Reagan is sitting on, say, the left head of it, and I forget who’s down on the right head, and I’m sitting next to Reagan. I forget how many of us there were, based upon what I told you before. So we’ve now gone all around
the table, and the conclusion is, particularly with John, head of the NSC—and after George Shultz, who is probably one of the most influential men in the Reagan Administration, pays me a great compliment but still feels—I forget the words he used—

Oh yes, I just remembered now. Reagan picked it up. George says something about, “I think Charlie has made a great observation here, but we ought to take it easy”—something like that. So we get to Reagan. He looks at his watch. He says, “George, we’ve already taken it too easy.” Something like that. This was a Friday. He says, “Guys, I’ve got to leave. I’ve got an important thing I’ve got to take care of now.” He gets up and he walks to the door of the Situation Room, which is a small room, and he stands by the door and he looks over. He says, “Now you guys, I want you to know my decision is, Charlie, you go ahead. And next week I don’t want to hear any other changes or delays that we’re going to encounter. That’s it.” And boy, that is one of the most graphic illustrations of Reagan overruling everybody there—each expert in his own way. And, we went on the air May 15th—I guess it was 1985—or was it May 20th, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Jose Marti, and fourteen-and-a-half hours a day.

The feedback we got was fabulous. Castro never tried to jam it, as I recall. We get reports back that as people walked down the street, if you were walking down the street from the hotel or whatever, the cabs lined up. As you would walk down the street past all these cabs, you wouldn’t miss a word coming from Radio Marti. They were all tuned to Radio Marti. I guess it was very successful.

Young: You went with Reagan to Reykjavik? You were with him at Geneva—

Wick: Yes, I set up a meeting—

Young: Could you talk about these times with Reagan and others and foreign leaders, both in Washington and elsewhere?

Wick: Yes. USIA was one of the key catalysts in the multi-agency preparations for these meetings overseas. I remember, with Geneva—you probably read all about it—where it was the first meeting with the head Soviet guys there and—

Young: He had a succession of Soviet leaders—[Leonid] Brezhnev died—

Wick: Reagan complained they kept dying on him.


Wick: Yes, finally Gorbachev, that was—

Knott: 85, I think. Because you had Brezhnev, then you had [Yuri] Andropov, then you had [Konstantin] Chernenko, and then finally Gorbachev.

Wick: Good for you. So it was strange, Reagan had been in office for only a couple of years. Gorbachev was supposed to be very crafty, which he was. We had a joke about one of our top
political leaders—I won’t mention his name—this is a brief digression—being characterized by
some of his detractors, by meeting Gorbachev and saying, “Pardon me, Mr. Gorbachev, what is
that thing on your forehead?” And Gorbachev said, “Oh, that’s a birthmark.” And the politician
said, “Yeah, how long have you had it?” You’d be surprised if I told you who that was. Anyway,
that’s a true story.

Young: Was he in Congress or the Executive branch?

Wick: In the Executive branch. I don’t think he really meant it that way, but sometimes these
guys half listen, with the interpreter and all. Geneva, yes, I remember, this big room. I met some
of my counterparts. I forget the guy’s name, one of the very craftiest guys there, in charge of,
darn; I can’t quite remember his name. I met him and had some dealings with him, and talked
about their jamming and all. Finally, as you probably have read—

Knott: Alexander Yakovlev?

Wick: Oh, Yakovlev is terrific. He was the architect of glasnost. I saw him, but there was
another guy—

Young: Began with V, didn’t it?

Knott: This guy is the Soviet Communist Party Secretary in Charge of Information.

Wick: What was his name?

Knott: Alexander Yakovlev.

Wick: He was very powerful. He and I became very friendly. No, this guy wasn’t that important,
but he was very significant. Anyway, Reagan’s style. I guess it was Geneva—was that October?
One of the summits was October, not Reykjavik. Anyway, I was back here because there wasn’t
anything really for me to do. We were listening to it, or watching it here on television. Bill Casey
had come over and a couple of other guys. But Reagan—the meeting was at a hotel. I remember
it was up on a hill, overlooking the river, and you walked down a slope in front of the hotel.
There were some guesthouses down there.

Reagan wanted to talk privately to Gorbachev, and so they both went down there with just their
interpreters. They were exchanging views, getting to know each other and Reagan said
something about, “Mr. Gorbachev”—oh, I think it was Reykjavik when—something else I’ll tell
you about. Anyway, Reagan indicated that they had no chance of winning any controversy with
us, meaning, if you wanted to get down to the military thing, we won’t discuss that, but this is
going to be nothing where we’re going to be intimidated by any talks of threats or actions.

I guess it worked out reasonably successfully. Then we set up Reykjavik. I remember, I guess it
was Yakovlev who had talked to me, and he said, “Instead of a full-fledged summit, why don’t
we meet halfway between Moscow and the United States, and let’s go over some things here and
see if we can sort them out and maybe make a subsequent summit more meaningful.” So we set that up—was that in October?

**Knott:** Geneva was November ’85 and Reykjavik was October ’86.

**Wick:** October ’86, yes. There was a small little town there, and the snow, and we were staying at this hotel. I remember, we walked up the stairs; they were wooden stairs, a small little hotel. Again, right overlooking—Reykjavik—I forget whether it was a bay or river. There was another type of guesthouse down there where he and Gorbachev went. These were near the beginnings of the proceedings. It might have been the beginning of the second day, and Gorbachev was concerned—oh yes, I had meetings with Yakovlev and some of my guys and some of their guys on that first night while Reagan was with Gorbachev. The general thrust of what they wanted to accomplish at Reykjavik was to bluff Reagan about not going ahead with his so-called “Star Wars.” What do you call that?

**Young:** SDI?

**Wick:** Yes, Strategic Defense Initiative. So he and Gorbachev were down at this house on the river—whatever it is—bay, it’s not the Baltic Sea, is it? And all of a sudden he reappears, I don’t know, after the non-customary length of time or something. He said, “We’re going back.” Aborted the meeting. Walked out. Our guys, meaning the State Department, all of our guys, they were in deep consternation because they felt that we’d already made progress in this Cold War by even getting as far as Reykjavik with this new guy, Gorbachev, although it was a year of incumbency by him, at least.

Reagan was talking about all the missiles they had that dwarfed the number of missiles we have. I think that’s what it was. But the punch line was that Gorbachev had told him if he would give up our SDI, our Strategic Defense Initiative, if we would not go forward with it—he was under the impression that we were practically there—that they would get rid of, I think, the vast majority of their missiles—something like that. And Reagan would not agree. He said, “We can’t take a chance, and frankly, Mr. Gorbachev”—I’m just paraphrasing what I think he later recounted to me on the way back, I sat with him for a while in the airplane—that “We can’t take a chance, but I’ll tell you what we’ll do for you, Mr. Gorbachev. As soon as we’ve perfected this, we’ll try to help you arrange a similar defense.”

**Young:** We’ll share it with you.

**Wick:** Which is the most stupid observation you could make, except it’s probably one of the smartest. But anyway, all of our guys, State Department and all, everybody, we packed up and we left prematurely.

**Knott:** What was his mood like when you sat next to him on the flight back? Was he upset that it had led to a—

**Wick:** I can’t remember ever seeing him visibly upset except just for certain situations, you know, “Tear that wall down.”
Young: It was reported in the press that at the time he was deeply disappointed, that he saw this as an opportunity for a breakthrough at Reykjavik and a real breakthrough toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, and was deeply disappointed in the Soviet response.

Wick: However, he was not depressed visibly. He was solemn. He wasn’t telling jokes. Nobody was. And frankly, talking about the bureaucrats, including guys who were appointees, they thought he was very unwise for walking out, because like the current situation of Saddam Hussein diplomacy, which is kind of fruitless—they thought that with further negotiations with this new guy Gorbachev. But then going back—

Young: But there was also leaking through the press, before the meeting, that there were plenty of unnamed sources in Washington who were opposed to any meeting at all in Reykjavik, because they thought the President would be giving away too much.

Wick: I don’t remember that necessarily.

Young: I think this came out of Richard Perle.

Wick: Oh yes, Richard Perle, he was a terrific guy. It’s so sad what happened to him here with his conflict of interest thing. Yes, Richard Perle is a great man, I think.

Anyway, coming back I sat with him part of the way. I went into his cabin. You could see as he walked down the aisle, nodding to the guys. They all had long faces. I said to him—not that I was the great man from above who told everybody what the future was going to bring—I said, “Ronnie, you just defeated the Soviet Union and won the Cold War.” He said, “Charlie, I wasn’t bluffing him on Star Wars. I’m 100 percent sure how far along we can go with that. But I knew, I knew, with his having to compete if we continued, we would break him. They couldn’t possibly spend the kind of money we’re spending to create this.” I forget what the figures were, but I think our budget, or whatever they planned to spend, was damned near equal to the Soviets’ entire gross national product. I think that Gorbachev was a supreme negotiator, but that’s when he felt he was licked, because he knew that there was no way that they could compete with us, economically, in being able to fight that thing off.

So then we got back and I can’t remember now all the incidents that followed thereafter. From my observations, I think that was the turning point in the Cold War. It was more than a turning point. It was a turnabout in the Cold War. Then, just as the Soviets for two years had—even those precursor guys from Gorbachev—for two years they wouldn’t have any meetings on missiles in Europe. Finally, Gorbachev says, obviously we better have those meetings. So that was part of the turnabout chronology thereafter that finally led to the end of the Cold War without firing a shot.

Knott: Right after Reykjavik was when the Iran-Contra story broke, a couple of weeks after he returned. Do you have any reflections or any memories of that time—in particular, his reaction to the storm that was swirling about?
Wick: Frankly, I was so busy with all the other things we were doing, I didn’t know that much about it at all and hadn’t ever discussed it with him. Nor did I discuss it with him after, because there’s nothing much I could do in my job. I was consternated to a degree to think that that sort of a blemish could apparently appear. But the way he took it is what the record shows, because I never really discussed it with him. Never really wanted to discuss it with him. Never wanted to know anything more about it.

Knott: You didn’t sense that it sort of did a number on his confidence or—

Wick: On his personal confidence?

Knott: Yes.

Wick: Oh. I don’t think anything could ever damage his innate personal confidence. However, he could certainly be subjected to keen disappointments, which would not necessarily reflect upon his unwavering personal confidence. If he didn’t have that personal confidence as he did, he never would have made it through all the pitfalls in career and life and ups and downs. If he ever lost that self-confidence—that self-confidence is what was his golden path through all kinds of deflective types of situations to where he arrived.

Young: There was some suggestion—I’m trying to remember—some comment that Reagan made, in a personal context, to his disappointment, or sadness, over a feeling on the part of the people that he may have let them down. Their perception of that, not that he had, but the feeling that he had lost, in their minds, that he had lost—

Wick: An unwavering image of principle.

Young: Yes, and just very alert to the public perception of this.

Wick: I have nothing authoritative to say, nor even recall, nor do I think there was anything that I could recall other than being the same as other bystanders. Obviously, the way he talked, I could tell he was very disappointed, and the way he would offer explanations or rebuttals or whatever. Yes, I think he was deeply disappointed.

Young: He must also have been disappointed in some of the people in the White House.

Wick: Well, yes. I think he admired loyalty and he had to be terribly disappointed. I don’t quite know exactly what the trigger fingers were, or whatever happened. But yes, he would be disappointed in anybody who was guilty of disloyalty. If they were disloyal to him, he didn’t feel it was disloyal to him personally, he felt it was disloyal to his country. But I think that was unfortunate. I think it had a temporary reducing of his sterling image from, say, 95 percent of those who admired him, as against—forgetting those who were detractors. I think it knocked it off say 15 or 20 percent for a while. But he had too much going for him in the way of grateful behavior and all that sort of thing where I think it didn’t last as long as—it could have put a permanent blight on his legacy.
Knott: You mentioned, to change subjects just a little bit—Just before lunch you said you wanted to talk about WORLDNET and you were—

Wick: Yes. Jim was asking me about my arrival in surveying the scene and learning about the scene called USIA. That they were, I guess “mired” is an unfair word, they were stratified, I guess, in the then-current technology of a short time before, and advanced even on the progressive basis toward ultimate goals of taking advantage of all current technology available to our implementing our particular mission. But I was always impressed with that September 30th, 1980, multi-city satellite meeting we had in all those cities, raising all that money, and the interchange of the voices and the former candidates being interviewed at the Waldorf-Astoria by somebody at the Beverly Hilton.

I think WORLDNET was ’85 or something like that. Well, here I’d been in the office for almost four years, tremendously experienced with firsthand observation and accountability of literally all the relevant nations in the world. Relevant for what? Relevant for our foreign concerns and needs of varying degrees. I recognized when Mary Jane and I were making these trips—one of the many things that impressed me was our very able USIA guys who were head of a particular mission and a particular embassy or consulate—the fact that when I arrived, the Director of USIA who was so close to the President of the United States, how all of a sudden they were able to meet the top people in the government of the nation that they were trying to bond with, instead of the second or third tier. And the feedback I got was that after my visits, they were able to have established thereby a channel with those same heads. In other words, they wouldn’t go around the guys that were opposite them in that nation in their particular calling.

But the fruitful thing I felt so good about was, again, information creating understanding, and understanding being the prime foundation upon which mutuality is built, and misunderstanding is evaporated. When you have understanding and not misunderstanding, you have the basis for a peaceful coexistence. So, our guys, our missions, were able to get to the top people in their particular nation in those particular governments, and were able to convey to the head people in that country, the instructions, the approaches, the policies of our Washington office.

This office was implementing an instruction and sending information of what the State Department, which forms our international policies, was able to effectuate with the people. Our people, on the scene directly in those countries, maximized the ability to wash away misunderstandings on the one hand, and were able to initiate new understandings of our policies. These policies, with our philosophy as a great democracy, were calculated not to take advantage of anybody, or “feather our own nest.” I just happened to think of that little expression, maybe you guys will use it one day. But to be able to have them realize, those addressees in those different nations, that we want to be helpful to them, and we want to be fair with them, and we want to use our past history of how we handled our World War II people—countries that we vanquished—and helped set them up and never took advantage of them, and the others around the world—that these were the kinds of values that guided our government.

Any misinformation they got, or detractors—others who were against us that would try to convey a very plausible different position—were dead wrong, by the credible evidence that we were able to communicate to our guys to give to them. So I said, boy, this face-to-face stuff—
Now, George Shultz—by the way, I loved Al Haig, too—I’ll digress just one minute. When Al Haig was in there, maybe about a year—it wasn’t two years, was it?

**Knott:** He was gone by the fall of ’82.

**Wick:** Yes, so he was there a year. He had just been “resigned” about two days before a big USIA dinner we were having. I forget exactly what the occasion was, but everybody, government—It was a very important dinner. I can’t remember who was supposed to be the principal speaker now, who couldn’t make it for some reason. So I asked Al, who’d resigned, if he would mind taking the place. And I remember—what a charming guy. He stood up there—everybody was conscious that he’d just been kicked out or resigned two days earlier—and Al paid me a nice compliment, something that USIA was the catalyst for or involved in. He said, “You know, folks, Washington is a very, very odd place. One day you’re drinking the wine, the next day you’re picking the grapes.” I’ll never forget that line. It was a classic coming from the guy who had been the Secretary of State of the biggest country in the world.

So I thought, George Shultz, Secretary of State—wouldn’t it be wonderful if he could talk face-to-face with some of these guys who control their nations’, even democratic nations’, opinions and policies face-to-face, the way we’ve enabled our guys on occasion to, and the results that seemed to ensue when our guys can jump over some of the second and third tier guys who aren’t always necessarily that bright, or who aren’t necessarily for us, either, with their interpretation of what they receive from our mission people.

So I went back again to September 30th—that’s where we left off—1980 with the multi-city satellite, two-way kind of thing with Frank Sinatra, a number of stars from all fields, and the 18 heads of government, and the guy who founded **Solidarnosc**, as they pronounce it. I decided that what we need is, we’ve got to be able to talk, and we have to have our key people—Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State—the key policymakers who run this government, including the President, and are so perceived by all the nations around the world as to who’s who in the heavyweights of the government of the United States. If they could talk face-to-face with these guys and answer questions and dispel wrongful impressions and encourage adversarial types of observations, that would again give our particular nationals who were in the WORLDNET, give them an idea, too, of what our guys are facing, and a very cogent, true picture of what are the viewpoints of those in the rest of the world.

I got some advice. We didn’t have much of a budget left, but I took the budget and I said, “Let’s try this out.” I remember I was going to call it WORLDNET if we connected the whole world. I think it was “Euronet” for Europe, it was “Afrinet or something like that—we had four or five regions we covered—we wouldn’t cover the world at one time. So we started in Western Europe. Here I was, the guy with all kinds of conflicting observations about what kind of a guy is that Director? You know—**did they let him out of the zoo or something like that? What’s he going to have us do now?** By the way, I abolished that five o’clock-go-home thing they’d been using for years.

**Young:** What was that?
Wick: At headquarters here. Everybody would leave at five o’clock or a quarter to five. Well, I figured, we’re in a 24-hour world. So I would ask certain people, certain divisions, certain things, and say, “I’m going to call you at six o’clock and see if you have it ready.” Or I’d call a meeting at 6:30. A lot of those guys blew their stack. I felt that with the manpower we had—and with the varied talents in that manpower—that we weren’t getting effective productivity that their numbers represented. Well, how do you get more productivity if you have the right workers? Put in more time. So I guess a lot of those guys didn’t like me because instead of going home at a quarter to five or something like that, a lot of those guys were afraid to leave before six, or five, if they knew I had a meeting with somebody, a division, at 5:30 or 6:00. They were a little afraid to not be there in case we called them. I was very successful in making a lot of “un-friends” that way.

Young: How did USIA get its breaking news, or things that were happening, say, at 10:00 PM our time? In general, how did you—I don’t know a better way to put it—what kind of information loop were you in so you could see what was happening, get information or field reports? Were State Department reports—were you tapped into those? Was that a problem for you?

Wick: No problem at all. They were tapped into ours, too. I’m glad you asked me that. In other words, we had the benefit—you know, the State Department consulates and embassies around the world—those guys had a lot to do other than just follow the news, although they would have, obviously, a public news person of varying stature, or varying importance, as far as size. But that was our guy’s business.

Young: To monitor—

Wick: To report back what’s going on. Because one of the functions of USIA, as far as the subjectivity of the recipients of our information from around the world, was that our policymakers in the State Department, or NSC or whatever, would have as clear a picture as possible of what is happening right this minute with the thinking in different parts of the world, about us, or that which we should know about.

We had a big office there in that building with the wireless file, and with the teletypes, the computers, even—I can’t quite remember whether we ever used the Voice of America channels with a code on them. I don’t think so. I think we were afraid that it might contaminate the whole Voice of America truth, credibility. Oh my God, we had stuff streaming in and we had guys on all night that were pulling this stuff together. At six o’clock in the morning I’d get a messenger over at my house with a stack of stuff, digests, and I had a driver that the agency furnished to pick me up at 7:30, I guess. I was the first Director, not because it was I, but the recognition of the relevance of the Director of USIA, to be totally bonding with what policy problems there were in the foreign area in the Secretary of State’s office, meaning all of his assistants.

So I would attend, each morning, the Secretary of State’s meeting of his associate secretaries, the heads of different regions. We’d go around the table. There were maybe ten of us or more at the table and there were probably 15 or 20 representing different regions, taking notes. So each guy from each area would announce what he had found or reported. And then I would give them a
distillation of what had been sent to me by a hundred-and-some posts, 150—whatever it was—USIA guys whose specialty it was in those countries to know all the news, sources, and know the people and all, which was much more primary in access, in relationship and source, than some of the State Department guys, who had other things to be concentrating on—you see what I mean?

So, USIA was represented by those morning meetings—and you can extend that to as many meetings as you want that would be necessary to expand and interpret what new information came, or what reports were returning that should be addressed and be the subject of further philosophies or policies. It’s too bad, again, with the merger into State Department of USIA on October 1, 1999. You could just see from the charts of alignment I told you about, and misalignment now, of how that—I guess “destroy” is a harsh word, but I think it was—

**Young:** Why was Jesse Helms so—

**Wick:** I don’t really understand it. Jesse Helms is a very powerful guy, and the Clinton Administration—I don’t know whether, after I had left, or by the time of the Clinton Administration—No, gee. George Shultz—a couple of guys followed me, they were okay. I think it had something to do with the Clinton Administration.

**Young:** Not with something that happened in the Bush Administration?

**Wick:** I don’t think so. No. October 1st, 1999.

**Young:** No, but I’m wondering what had happened during the Bush years to what you set up.

**Wick:** Nice guys. Bruce Gelb—he lasted only a year or so following me. It’s in this—I just looked at this for about the second time in 20 years.

**Young:** Then one of the White House staffers was appointed.

**Wick:** It tells you right here, starting with Edward R. Murrow. The last guy here, who wrote the forward, Penn Kemble, Acting Director, United States Information Agency. That was at the time of ’99. My precursors were—the great guy I admired so much, Edward R. Murrow, then Carl T. Rowan—he was Director only one year, then Leonard H. Marks, who was a brilliant Democrat working for President Johnson. Leonard—we became very friendly—his wife recently died, I think ’86 or ’87. I see him when I go to Washington. Leonard graduated from law school at the age of 20 or something like that. Okay, so, Edward R. Murrow, Carl T. Rowan, Leonard H. Marks—gee, it goes on here—then the ’70s. There I am, a couple of guys after Leonard Marks, then Bruce Gelb, who was about a year. I don’t know. Oh yes—a very, very nice guy who had served in the government before—[Joseph] Duffey. He was under Clinton.

**Young:** I’m wondering who George Bush’s appointees were? Anybody know?

**Wick:** Henry Catto was one, 1991 to ’93—

**Knott:** That’s Bush.
Wick: Henry Catto was married to this landed gentry Houston lady, I forget her name. Nice guy. Then Joseph Duffey, Director from 1995 to 1999. He was the guy who had his head cut off. Then there is this Evelyn S. Lieberman, Under Secretary Designate for Public Diplomacy. I guess that was the Department of State already.

Getting back to Jesse Helms, I don’t know. I think there was some type of a thing they wanted from him or maybe somebody—you know something? I’m glad you mentioned that. It was something that was shocking. There was a quid pro quo when it happened, I just couldn’t believe it—

Young: Helms was never a friend, was he, of USIA anyway?

Wick: Well, he was a big supporter of mine.

Young: Oh, he was? Okay.

Wick: He really was. No, he was a real supporter. That’s why everybody was so shocked. I forget his Chief of Staff—I used to meet with Helms. I’ve got some beautiful letters from him. Helms recognized—Apparently some of my predecessors were such that they did not have the influence or the access—there may have been an exception—that I had by virtue of being so close to Reagan in perception, and thereby being able to use that perception to pierce all the bureaucratic barriers that would prevent my getting things done. And the things I was doing Jesse Helms was very much in favor of. So that’s why he supported me, because he felt that I was effective and he felt that I didn’t have these leftist leanings—“left” is the wrong word. Even “liberal” might be the wrong word—maybe “super liberal” leanings—that he thought a lot of these guys had. I won’t say that they did or not. So that’s why he was a big supporter of mine.

We had, gee, I’ve got a big book here. November of ’88, just before we left office, we had this giant testimonial to me, in departure, and Jesse Helms was there. There were, I don’t know, 25 or 30, 40 members of Congress, plus everybody, including the President, heading the thing. So he was definitely a supporter. Again, I just hope that when you do this transcript or edit it, these various references I make to myself or what I accomplished, I hope will not be meant to reflect that I had this super opinion of myself, as against a certain confidence and candor about what I can and couldn’t do.

Knott: You mentioned Senator Helms being a strong supporter of you. Were there members of Congress who were particularly strongly opposed to you?

Wick: Strangely enough, Ted Kennedy thought he was opposed to me. He was opposed to Reagan. He became one of my best supporters, sitting down, talking about the things we were going to do, and the things I initiated. He liked the idea of an exchange of students to better understand each other’s countries—and some of the things I initiated. He thought that WORLDNET was great. We became very friendly. I won’t say we became friends.
**Young:** Did you find a change in the weather as respects you and your work at USIA—the Washington weather?

**Wick:** Oh yes.

**Young:** That was different from the beginning?

**Wick:** Yes. The beginning was highly controversial after a short period. I came in with all the glow of Reagan and all that kind of thing. Certain interviews I had were portrayed as my having self-confidence that exceeded the premises upon which it was built. There was that period. Then I remember—I was reviewing some of this stuff. I don’t know if it is in here. Bernie Weinraub—you know, the *New York Times*?

**Young:** Um-hum.

**Wick:** He’s out here now for the *New York Times* and his wife’s chief at Doug’s [Wick] studio, Sony. Bernie Weinraub. I guess the taping—One of my chief guys was a close friend of Bill Safire. When I discovered—early December of ’84 or late November—we had about 30 or 35 interns, young guys, each summer. When I discovered that we had the intern program, and wanted to recommend a couple of friends of mine that could be helpful to USIA, I learned that there was no room. We had like 40 or 45, among whom was one of Bill Safire’s sons. This guy appointed all of these people without ever consulting me.

Again, I was concerned, very sensitive to whether Congress or somebody might leak the fact that we exceeded our limit or whatever. So I sat down with this guy and said, “Look, I’m sorry, we can’t take some of these guys.” I still remember reaching Bill Safire who was in Paris, saying, “Bill, gee, I’m just terribly sorry, but there’s been a misunderstanding and we can’t take your son after all.” He understood, and then he got his leaking source into USIA and they gave him chapter and verse on my taping. Nothing about how the tapes were transcribed and distributed to the appropriate groups relating to their areas or whatever.

I guess it was just before Christmas of ’84. Damn near destroyed my wife. You’re aware of those very vicious columns that came out by Safire.

**Young:** Safire can be a very vicious person.

**Wick:** And frankly—I know his motivation was there, but he was egged on by his friend, and I must say that I don’t think he was totally unfair in his reporting, but I think the characterization was unfair.

**Young:** He’s also very selective.

**Wick:** So I called Reagan. I’ll tell you, I damn near had a heart attack. It was just before Christmas of ’84. I remember the way it came about. Safire called me, and he said he’d like to send two of his people out to interview me. I said, “Gee, Bill, I’m just getting ready to go home for Christmas and all.” He said, “Just one meeting.”
So these two gals came over. I’d rather not mention their names. They’re pretty important and I don’t want any further retribution. I remember they sat down with me. I thought it was going to be another nice evaluation of what I’d accomplished at USIA, and man, did they ever ask me devastating questions. Some of it relating to accurate types of activities, but with a negative slant and all that. I finally just had to say, “Listen, I think you people are crucifying me. Just tell Bill Safire, there’s no way that I can continue this.” But wanting to be accommodating for my position, for myself, for my family and to try to limit as much negativism as possible, I went way beyond where I prudently should have allowed myself to listen to them and respond.

Then about two days later these devastating Bill Safire columns came out. So I called Ronald Reagan after the first week and said, “Ronnie, I’m very sorry to be responsible for this blight on your Administration but I’m just really terribly sorry, so I want to tender to you my resignation, which I will put in writing, to minimize any further harm.” Here’s the real Ronald Reagan. He says, “What are you talking about, Charles? Don’t you know they’re trying to get at me through you? Forget it. You’re here as long as I’m here.” I nearly cried—the real Ronald Reagan. And these were vicious attacks.

Some years later, by the way, Bill Safire—I wrote him a little note. Something came up. He had another column where it was very easy—I was attached to it in some way, but not in a negative way. It would have been so easy to naturally put me in with that particular negative thing he was reporting, and he didn’t. I wrote him a note and thanked him.

\textbf{Knott:} Was that the lowest point for you during your—

\textbf{Wick:} Oh yes. It was shocking. It was embarrassing. My family, my kids, they were mad as hell. They even wrote him some nasty letters. My wife is a very proud lady, and being in various social groups with all the top people in the Administration and others in Washington with whom we’d become very friendly, she was just horribly embarrassed. Yes, that was the lowest point in my life, other than when I flunked my first kindergarten exam for cheating because I used the wrong toy.

So, I was going to say about Weinraub—you asked me about the atmosphere. Yes, it was mixed. A lot of people still liked me. I made a lot of friends and they felt sorry for me. That was the end of ’84. So ’85—I’m still trying, trying to do our job, bring in Radio Marti, get WORLDNET going. Still have detractors who look at the file if you say hello or something like that. Finally it started to ease up and I started getting some good reports about what we accomplished.

I got a report from Sri Lanka telling how I had handled a tribe controversy there that impeded our setting up a new transmitter, which I did. I surprised everyone. Even myself. So I get a call—we’re now in the second administration, what was it, ’85, August ’85? I went to Australia in August on a mission for USIA and I got a call from Bernie Weinraub of the \textit{New York Times}. It was the end of July, and Bernie said—and he had hit me a couple of times, too, although frankly I thought he wasn’t really unfair because he was sort of following the lead of some of his contemporaries. He said, “Charles, I’d like to come over and see you and report on some of the things that you’ve accomplished.” I said, “Do you really have to?” I was afraid to talk to these
guys. So I said, “I’ll tell you, Bernie, I’m just leaving in a couple of days for Australia and some of our posts there. Could we postpone this until I get back?” I’m almost positive that it was after I got back, and I’ll tell you why—No, I guess it was just before we left.

Anyway, I did have the interview with him. I said, “You’re sure you have to do this?” So my God, he wrote almost a full page, outlining what you’ve seen here, all these contributions that just smacked of innovation, of success, of the whole thing, and right there at the end he said one thing that I had done wrong in some way, totally inconsequential, something I had said. I called him and said, “Bernie, gee, why did you have to say that?” He said, “For God’s sake, Charles, do you want my boss to think you’ve got me in your pocket?” That produced an invitation for me to come to—I don’t know what they call it—all the top members of the hierarchy at the New York Times.

Young: The editorial board.

Wick: All the top guys, the chairman of the board, the president—So, I guess it was just before we left. They called me and I said, “How about when I get back? When are you folks back?” They said, “We’re back Labor Day.” Following my return. I said, “How about the day after Labor Day? So I was supposed to be there at twelve o’clock and I got a call from the office of—who’s the number one guy’s family?

Young: Punch [Arthur Ochs] Sulzberger?

Wick: Yes, Punch Sulzberger. He said, “Charles, why don’t you come in 15 minutes earlier? I’d like to show you around.” What a difference, huh? I got there 15 minutes earlier. He couldn’t have been more cordial. He showed me the archival figures on the wall of his family, and those who were stars during the course of the evolution or revolution of the New York Times and all. Then we went to this long table with all these key guys—no reporters, just the top level people, who I made—You know, I’ve got a weird sense of humor, as you’ve probably observed. A big long table and I sat right in the middle here and Punch sat next to me or across, and I said, “You gentlemen will have to forgive me if, after everything you’ve written about me, I respond to you only with the truth.” It brought everybody down.

I had a wonderful meeting and these guys—they’re veterans—all reflected the fact that they recognized that I had beaten the game by being, or attempting to be, a really good person with all of it. I think that was probably the highlight of my incumbency contrasted with the low point. So, ever since then, the publicity was just terrific. I forget. I know different magazines here, in London, around the world. I was voted by the association of all the public relations firms, international, local, to be the PR person of the year. I think it’s in this chronology. All a testimonial to the fact that, with the help of everybody concerned, that I was able to accomplish something for our country and our government that was worthy of commendation. And I’ve always felt there should be no commendation without representation.

Knott: Can we take a short break? We’re almost in the home-stretch here.
Wick: There’s an article coming out I believe in Salon magazine and I was very candid with this guy, and I heard that they might have some bias, but I told this fellow—I think his name is Jake Tapper, a charming young guy. I said, “Look, I’ll be very happy to comment on the public diplomacy debacle, as it is being called. I just hope that you’ll characterize what I’m telling you and not put any kind of a negative context, or negative aura, surrounding what I’m telling you that might be in conflict with the facts that I’m enumerating to you.”

He said, “Mr. Wick, I promise you I won’t do that.” I said, “Please don’t do that. Look, I’ll just trust you. You do what you think is best. If there are some parts about it I don’t like, I’ll leave it to your journalistic integrity.” I don’t know if I told him this, but I just remembered it a couple of days ago, or a couple of weeks ago. Yakovlev, who was really number two to Gorbachev, hidden behind the scenes—by the way, he’d lost a leg in the war with Germany and he walked with a limp—We became very friendly, and he said, would I okay a Soviet camera crew to come and take some pictures in New York of what goes on?

I said, “Sure.” I got it through. These guys for eight, nine, ten days they tried to find out everything that was wrong with New York. For example, one of the principal elements in that documentary was some of the homeless guys on Fifth Avenue. Boy, they thought that would wreak havoc and encourage the Soviet citizens to realize how much better off they were than the Americans. The reports I got back from the post and from some Russian friends was, when they finally ran this on Russian TV, all the public looked at on Fifth Avenue—they paid no attention to those homeless guys. They said, “My God, look at all those automobiles! Look at all those things in those windows of those stores!” That kind of thing. Man, there’s really nothing like reality to impart reality.

So my idea right now is, maybe I’ll try to ask Colin Powell, or suggest this to him. I’ll pull these guys together. I’ve been working with USIA alumni. They’re just marvelous guys. If we can—if they’ll grab this. Right now, if we have one of these interchanges, as I said, between students or between schools, five thousand at a time come. Some will spend a year here, young students who later go back and may become very important in their countries, influencing their countries’ observations. I think I told you, the International Visitors Program had Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl among 42 people who later became heads of state or very important.

Then, again, getting back to that Russian Fifth Avenue, invite key media from as many countries. Let them come over with great antipathy, but let them go anywhere they want, photograph anything they want to see, and be that open. I think that’s the greatest hand that we can play in the shortest period of time, with the widest saturation, rather than what we’re doing—appropriately having a new Arabian broadcasting station headed by a wonderful guy here, the head of Westwood One.

I’ve got all kinds of letters here from Walter Annenberg, from Rupert Murdoch, from guys from the 34 countries, complimenting me and USIA on how successful that was, getting all those people together to exchange views on culture, tariffs, trade, whatever, for further understanding
and all that kind of thing. The kind of letters—they weren’t merely cursory, polite thank-yous. They went into depth with further elaborations on what might be extensions of what we had agreed to.

**Young:** A couple of weeks ago I heard a little program—a radio program—driving in to the office. It was on one of the NPR stations and it was very interesting to me because it was a schoolteacher in some town in North Carolina who had gotten the idea of connecting with another school with the same grade that he taught, probably junior high, in Cairo. They got a link set up so that the students in Cairo and the students in North Carolina could talk to each other on some issues of the day and how they felt about it. Just to listen to that exchange—

**Wicks:** You were listening to it? Could they see each other? Was it on television?

**Young:** No, I don’t think they could. But this is just a small example. And they were asking very pointed questions about—the Egyptian kids were asking, what they thought about America, and is it true that—because they’re getting a lot of propaganda. And then, we’re hearing some of the American kids saying, “I don’t believe in this war, myself, personally, but the country does.” You know, it was civics questions back and forth.

**Wick:** See, we were doing that with WORLDNET. It was two-way transmission, one-way image from our guys. But let me suggest something to you. I’m trying to learn more about computers, beyond what I know about and use on a daily basis, and there’s a guy here who is very successful in the computer business. He’s from Iran originally, lovely guy, and he pointed out to me—He just got married. He brought his beautiful woman over from Iran to here, and we were talking about the Internet. There’s a way of handling the Internet set-up and—I’ve got to review my notes, he dictated them—and, what he did was, his parents and friends in Iran couldn’t come over, but they watched the wedding on a receiver by using the Internet in a certain way. He bought a camera for $150, and the camera was here—fixed—and they had a monitor there, and it cost them nothing. This would be something that would be great for a school to experiment with. You probably know somebody at the University of Virginia.

**Young:** I think that, yes, we know—

**Wick:** They may already have that.

**Young:** I was also thinking of it in connection with your idea, and what you’re talking about with AEI [American Enterprise Institute] and Heritage Foundation.

**Wick:** Oh sure, yes. Exactly.

**Young:** You could carry this down to a—

**Wick:** Yes, I mentioned to them—

**Young:** It doesn’t have to be all at the top level. It can be down at the lower level.
Wick: Excellent suggestion. I was talking about a WORLDNET counterpart, or anything else—that’s excellent.

Knott: I was wondering if we could spend perhaps the last few minutes just talking about the Reagan Presidency and Ronald Reagan in retrospect, some of the bigger questions.

Wick: Yes, I think it’s a little surprising, although I guess it’s appropriate when we say this is the end of this meeting. Unfortunately, that phrase “this is the end” also applies to the great Ronald Reagan. As I’ve reviewed a lot of this material here just in the last few days, trying to refresh my recollections, where I might impart to you—make your trip worthwhile as far as you’re concerned—the thought of that great man, Ronald Reagan, the man with great principles, great imagination, great tolerance. God, I remember some of his stories. A little town in Dixon, Illinois, which was very anti-Negro and all that kind of thing. He was on the football team and he brought the black lineman into his house 25 miles away to stay overnight. He had no real prejudice. I think he did have a prejudice against people who were prejudiced, although frequently it didn’t seem that way.

When I think of the fact that there is that young lifeguard in Dixon, Illinois, a minor town in a minor area, having to climb up in the American way, and ultimately becoming the President of the United States, the most powerful man in the history of the world. And now, because of some molecular distortions in his brain, or whatever is the anatomy of Alzheimer’s, that this person, who is revered and honored, no longer can communicate, nor anybody communicate with him. He’s just too sick, and I don’t know how long he’ll live. That also touches upon something that we probably should have mentioned or certainly discussed and that’s Nancy Reagan.

Knott: Sure, sure.

Wick: Nancy has been a very dear friend of ours. Nancy, again, is a person of great determination, great dignity, great reserve, great charm, and great sense of humor. Contrary to maybe some of the allegations about her control of Ronald Reagan in certain situations, her recognition of when he’d made his mind up—that was it, as far as she was concerned and she wouldn’t say a word, or raise anything to try and counter what he had concluded. I think unfortunately she ran into some negative reactions herself which she—I think she tended to redeem a great deal in her appearance before—was it the Gridiron Club?

Knott: Oh, right.

Wick: Nancy is a great patriot and despite what I’ve just told you, in his formulation of a conclusion I do know that if she felt he was going a little bit too rightist—still not inconsistent with basic principles—that she could move him just a little bit to where she thought that the broad stream of America would be most satisfied as to a solution of the problems as they were posed by circumstances.

Today, Nancy, who was the toast of the world, is a caregiver. They have nurses around the clock, which is tremendously expensive. I don’t think much of it is paid by insurance. I don’t think so. Nancy is very reluctant to make any firm dates anywhere. She never knows when she is going to
be needed. And, as you’ve probably read, her two very independent types of children, Patty Davis, which was Nancy’s maiden name, Davis, and Ron Junior, had drifted quite away and didn’t want to be part of the Washington scene, and very commendably in certain ways wanted to be independent, despite that they had the opportunity to have the world at their command, too. They are very devoted to Nancy now, and it has been a tremendous comfort to her for them to come see their father once in a while, whether or not he recognizes them at a given point in time. So a record that could be chronicled for Nancy, post-Washington—it would be a very great legacy for it to be generally known, in confluence with some of the less attractive kinds of publicity she had. Much of it was unfair and some was fair.

Young: Will anybody do that overview of her post-Presidency life?

Wick: I don’t really know.

Young: Does she want it done?

Wick: I’ve never discussed it with Nancy, but maybe I will. What do you think of that?

Young: Well, I think it’s a great idea and I think there’s a lot that ought to be in the historical record that isn’t in there about the two of them as a team and as a couple. Though Ronald Reagan was often misunderstood and caricatured, I think she was far more subject to this kind of thing, far less understood. Not that I know her.

Wick: Not enough exposure, positiveness or whatever, that could rebut that.

Young: Yes, and there seems to be very little understanding of what we’re getting of the nature of the relationship between the two. Let me tell you something. This is from one of my very smart mentors when I was a student, and he’s still around. He’s a very well-renowned, practical political scientist by the name of Richard Neustadt. Richard was the first to point out to his colleagues many years ago that all Presidents need somebody who is looking out for them, and not for their own agendas. Some Presidents have it and some don’t. But he said certainly this is the way one should look at Nancy Reagan’s role. That was tremendously useful to him, and he needed it, and how key that was to his ability to be in the office he was. People have even given a name to it now, “the Nancy factor.” So we’re asking, who was Clinton’s Nancy? Who was George’s Nancy?

It’s not that it was Nancy, per se, but she is a spouse who filled that role, and I think that’s just not well understood.

Wick: I don’t think it is.

Young: And I don’t know that she is the kind of person who would want to say it herself.

Wick: I’m not really sure. Post-Washington, one of her great contributions, which hasn’t been circulated too much as far as PR recognition, is the “Just Say No” program.
Young: Yes.

Wick: We’ve known Nancy and Ronnie, right now, for 47 years. Is that right? Fifty-six from 2003? We are convinced that with all of the abilities of Ronald Reagan, he never could have made the Presidency without Nancy—her encouragement, her sensors for helping him avoid the kinds of areas that might be entrapment as far as career advancement and that kind of thing. I guess I never thought about it this way, but somebody might say, “What do you mean, he couldn’t have made it without Nancy? The guy’s supposed to have all these abilities.” Yes. It reminds me of Nancy being the rocket launcher, and once he gets into orbit, man, he covers the world and sends back imagery of everything that’s happening.

Young: A number of people have said they were a team.

Wick: They were a team—

Young: And they were a team from the beginning.

Wick: That’s exactly right. They were a team from the very beginning. And they were primary and their kids and friends were secondary. They took good care of their kids, but their kids recognized they were a team. It’s a beautiful story.

Knott: I think we’re finished and I want to thank you very much—

Wick: I think I’ve got a few years left.

Young: People at my age don’t like to hear the end of anything.

Knott: Thank you again.