

Foreword

by John Hlavacek
(circa 2002)

In the autumn of 1951, as the United Press bureau chief for India and Pakistan, I attended a meeting of Pakistan newspaper editors in Lahore. Also attending the meeting was Mrs. Margaret (Pegge) Mackiernan, the Vice Consul for Public Affairs at the American Consulate. As the two of us were the only foreigners at the meeting, she invited me to tea and I invited her for dinner. I then learned that she was a widowed mother of twins and that her first husband, Douglas S. Mackiernan, had been a CIA agent who was killed by Tibetan border guards as he and his party were escaping from northwest China ahead of the Communist takeover in 1950. As consolation for her loss, the State Department offered her the post of a vice consul, the cover that her husband had used as a vice consul in Tihwah, China.

Pegge came by her press credentials honestly. As Margaret Lyons, she began her newspaper career at age 19 at the *Harrisburg Patriot News*, writing an advice column for teenagers (an early Ann Landers). And she took a pen name: Pegge (with an *e*) Parker (because everyone knew about Parker pens). Soon she took her clippings to the *Washington Times Herald*, where she became the women's page editor and a favorite of Eleanor ("Cissie") Patterson, the publisher. It was wartime, and Pegge covered the training of servicemen—clips of the time show her marching with troops, flying in airplanes for parachute drops, and riding tanks. Her newspaper stories were featured in the *Herald*, and as a result she became a Camel Cigarette poster girl, even though she was not a smoker (and never became one).

With the war still on, in 1945 she left Washington to be sole reporter on the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*. Fairbanks was a hub for the transfer of wartime planes and supplies to the Soviet Union, and Pegge was there to report on the celebrities who traveled through Fairbanks on their way to the Soviet Union. Among them were author Lillian Hellman and champion boxer Joe Louis. Then she wrote a story for *Reader's Digest* on Alaska's Ice Pool. Her check was so large that she quit her job in 1946 and sailed to Shanghai, China. She soon found a job with the military, and with her adventurous nature, she traveled to Saigon, to Manchuria, and to northwest China where she met and later married her first husband. Their twins were born in Shanghai in September of 1948, and she and the twins were evacuated six weeks later on a Pan American flight just ahead of the entry of the Chinese Communists into Shanghai. Her husband returned to his post at Tihwah, and she never saw him again. (For those who would like to know more about that part of her life, there are two books that detail Douglas Mackiernan's life: *The Book of Honor* by Ted Gup, and *Into Tibet* by Thomas Laird.)



Pegge Mackiernan at her desk, working as a vice consul in Pakistan.



Our romance was rocky. I went back to my headquarters in Bombay, and Pegge soon was transferred to the American Embassy in Karachi, which was part of my United Press territory. Whenever I was in Karachi, we would meet. We met again in the spring of 1952, when Pegge and a friend came through Bombay on a trip to Goa, which was then a Portuguese colony on an island off the west coast of India. On her return trip through Bombay, she was delayed for a few days because her plane reservations were cancelled, and we had time to get to know one another better.

A few months later, in October of 1952, Pegge came to Bombay to marry John Hlavacek. The story that follows is her recording of our first five years of marriage. She called it *Diapers on a Dateline*, and she first wrote these words in 1960, when the book should have been published. I rediscovered the manuscript while cleaning out our home for a possible move. With the help of Janet Tilden, a fellow Carleton graduate, I decided to publish our story for our children and grandchildren as well as readers who would like to know about an American newspaper family in India in the 1950s.

John Hlavacek
Omaha, Nebraska
September 2002



Pegge and John on their wedding day.

Foreword

by Pegge Hlavacek
(circa 1962)



In that tall, tall tower at Radio City that decks the clouds and cricks the neck—the RCA Building—there is, upon the fifth floor, the NBC Newsroom.

Everything on this newsy fifth floor is in hot, live production. Each telephone, typewriter, and teletype quivers with *news*. Even the paper clips jump! The main news desk is like a captain's roundtable hung with sidearms of telephones. From the ceilings hang double TV screens that run, without voice, all day and all night, dogwatching CBS, dogchecking NBC.

Some of the most attractive, best-tailored men I have ever seen through a drift of late five o'clock cigarette smoke rush past with cables, scripts, and stopwatches.

Chet Huntley, whose home office is on this high-charged fifth floor, walks past shuffling a full hand of mail. He studies every fan letter intently, as though he were reading the handwriting on a check.

News and noise...names and overseas operators calling, calling...And outside the black-walled fifth-floor elevators, hundreds of tourists on Guided Tours...

It was here on this fantastic fifth floor at NBC that I did the final typing of this manuscript. I sat at a desk and typewriter that were away on summer vacation, so to speak.

I had originally found my way into this jumping newsroom because the wonderful Guy of this book, Husband and Father of Five, John Hlavacek, is now a roving cameraman-correspondent in the Caribbean for NBC. As I wrote in New York he was roving in Costa Rica.

How I ever got a chapter finished or spelled words from dictionaries marked “Special Commentators—Do Not Remove,” I do not know. Deep as I was in kiddie copy, I was far from immune to the whirling world around me. Such a summer it was for news!

Not only the Olympics in Rome and the presidential campaigns but the Belgian Congo...Castro in Harlem...Krushchev a bully boy...Hurricane Donna...Birds causing plane crash in Boston...the sad passing of Oscar Hammerstein...

Diapers had hard going through all of this. But even though the excitement kept me listening hard to one thing while writing another, I must give warm thanks to NBC for letting me hum on its lovely typewriters and for letting me crib all the paper on which *Diapers* was written...



The greatest mystery of the East was about my husband’s job. I was constantly explaining that although John was a Foreign Correspondent, he wasn’t “with” any newspaper. He was the bureau chief of a worldwide news agency called a wire service. No, not Western Union. The wire service was called United Press. There was scarcely a newspaper one could pick up anywhere in the world in whatever language that did not have a UP story in it somewhere.

This was all very well but not completely clear. “Thought you said, dear, your husband had been writing for newspapers in India and Pakistan and All Over for—heavens!—eleven years? Yet he’s not a newspaper man, but a wire service man?” Mystery solid as sandalwood.

What, exactly, is a wire service? I am surprised how many people simply do not know. A wire service is like a chain of newspaper offices called

“bureaus” in all the key newsmaking centers of the world. Newspapermen and photographers who work out of these bureaus send their news stories and what they call PIX by cable, fastest airmail, or air-freight to leading communication cities like London, New York, Tokyo, and San Francisco, where incoming news is put out on “wires” (teletypes), feeding a direct pipeline to newspapers and radio stations around the world. The *same* (wire) story goes to the same newspaper-radio-TV newsrooms at the *same time*. This is a “service”—a wire service!

Newspapers naturally pay good money to get news within minutes or hours of actual events in faraway places like New Delhi. And this paid our Keep, justified our having a “news bureau” there.

I have explained all this a hundred times over, but the really very curious will press on down to my trade talk: “What’s a dateline?”

A dateline tells exactly where a news story originates, where it is On Location, and exactly what day it happened. Glance at any newspaper: a pleat-folded commuter’s *Times*, yesterday afternoon’s with the grocery specials marked, last Sunday’s scattered like blotter paper over the Just Done, Still Damp kitchen floor. Note that little bit at the beginning of a news item that looks like this:

Sweet Wine, Iran (UPI) May 1—Sheraz White
Label is great...

or Moscow (UPI) Dec. 25—Yes, we have no
Christmas today...

The “dateline” is the bit before Sheraz and Santa Claus. You may never have “seen” a dateline before. All that is changed. *Now you know.*

Incidentally, although John’s wire service has for years been called simply UP, it has now merged with an “I” and is, strictly speaking, a tongueroll called “United Press International.”

The notion of hanging diapers for five (three boys, two girls, including a set of boy-girl twins) on anything so airy and other-purposed as a dateline is just to give you an idea of Time, Place, and Condition. Which is all a dateline can do for you—even in *The New York Times!*

In this story five children and I viewed an incredible world over the rims of the cribs. I would say the Asian world outside was often kin to the kiddie world at home. For things on the Outside were no more predictable, smooth-running, reasonable, fair-shared, or geared to peace and quiet than they were behind my closed doors at home.

As a family in India we have all come quite a way, survived and bounced. We are by no means unique or so unusual. There are today thousands of Americans—Average Ones, Ugly Ones, Terribly Nice and Sincere-to-Tears Ones, Boiled Water Ones, Technically Expert Ones, Dedicated Ones, Fat Ones, and Government Ones—living a family life of curious adaptations, turns and twists, all over Asia.

All of us, I feel, receive much more than we give.



I have come to look upon India not as a country, but as an Experience. As the children's life in India is the essence, the total *raison d'être* (just try spelling *that* one quick! Where was I? Oh yes...), this book is a purely lighthearted family story. I have only briefly skimmed events in which the children took no part. The vast profundities of this Great Country I leave to others.

India itself is a family story in many ways. A very big, very sensitive family story with all its triumphs, tragedies, its religions and passionate divisions self-contained. Like any family, it looks with annoyance and resistance upon meddlers who would interfere by offering Good Advice. As a Family, India demands to Straighten Things Out Her Own Way—she can and will—and *must*, to survive. But it will take time, more time probably than this nervous, jetty, pressurized age will allow.

I do not intend to be flippant or to make a joke of India with all my skitterish nonsense here. For there is no amusement in the heart of India.

Let us clearly say that this is not a story of India at all, but of a family's experiences there. The diapers on the family line are fresh and bright, and laughter is our talcum.