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From New Delhi to New York

In 1956, as a United Press correspondent in India, I had never heard of the Council on Foreign Relations. Therefore it was a complete surprise when I received a bid to apply for the Council's fellowship for an American correspondent. I later learned that the bid was prompted by Carroll Binder, the editor of the *Minneapolis Star & Tribune*, who had toured the world with his friend, David Winton, a Minnesota businessman. The Minneapolis paper was a United Press client, and Pegge and I had done what we always did for UP clients—tried to make their visit to India pleasant and informative.

In a letter to her parents in October 1956, Pegge described the requirements of the fellowship bid:

John must send 10 samples of his writing and a brief on his education, background, experience and a 500-word definition of how the study fellowship would benefit him in interpreting the news from India. Our UP client is on the board of selectors—so is Edward R. Murrow, the top news commentator. We had people coming to dinner the night this arrived so we didn't have a chance to discuss it until after midnight ... some discussion ... pros and cons. John is somewhat worried that UP would not reassign him to India if he got the fellowship and went off for a year. He also hasn't got in hand 10 impressive clips ... stories that might impress the selection board. I think we can dig up his Goa pieces which with his pictures were very good. It is true we have not a single clipping with his byline in hand, on the spot ... anyway, the most wonderful part of the whole proposition is the chance to study, the associations which would do no harm at all for future contacts, and for the kids—one whole year in the U.S., good food, schools, American kids, games ... O the thousand and one things the U.S. represents to us, from way out here.

On June 19, 1957, Pegge called to let me know that a cable had come in from New York announcing that I had been awarded the fellowship. This announcement would signal the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Hlavacek family.

Receiving the fellowship meant that we would be able to return to the United States and we would be free of financial worries for at least the next year. We could follow up on our plan to sail from Cochin on July 14 on a ship to Italy and then continue our voyage to New York.

We had been through two months of uncertainty prior to the fellowship announcement. I had been fired in April after 13 years with United Press, and our friends in the Delhi foreign press corps had rallied around to find a job for me. Jim Greenfield, the *Time* correspondent, tipped us to a story provided we sold it to a newspaper. He told us that Roberto Rossellini, who was in India to direct a film, had fallen in love with the wife of an Indian film producer. As Rossellini was then married to Ingrid Bergman, the story caused a sensation.

Pegge and I worked on the Rossellini story together and sold it as an exclusive to the *New York Daily News*, a paper with which Pegge had formed close ties during the years when she was a reporter in Alaska and China. The *Daily News* rewarded us handsomely for our efforts. Pegge had flown down to Bombay earlier for an exclusive interview with Roberto, and then I had followed to wrap up the story. After the story was completed, I flew home to Delhi and the family prepared to leave India.

While we awaited the detailed letter spelling out the provisions of the fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations, Pegge and I decided to make a quick trip to Darjeeling to visit Tenzing Norgay, the Everest climber. I had written Tenzing's first account of his Everest climb for United Press and then had arranged for James Ramsay Ullman to write Tenzing's autobiography, *Tiger of the Snows*. As a result, we had become members of Tenzing's family. (The complete story is included in Pegge's book about our first five years of marriage, *Diapers on a Dateline*.) Tenzing had written us a wonderful letter asking us to come for a visit. We hadn't seen him for two years, and now that we were preparing to leave India it seemed the right thing to do.

When we returned from Darjeeling, we began the task of packing for our departure. In a letter to my parents, I reported that "Pegge has three tailors working in the next room on the children's clothes. I am getting final papers ready: income tax clearance, police clearance and shipping, train and plane reservations."

The fellowship provided a stipend equal to the current salary of the recipient as well as tuition for a course of study at one of three universities: Columbia in New York, Princeton in New Jersey, or Yale in Connecticut. I decided on Columbia because we planned to live in the New York area where we would be close to the Council to attend the meetings and conferences available with the fellowship.

The next three weeks were a whirlwind of activity. Finally, on the evening of July 8, with a large group of friends gathered at the train station to see us off, we boarded the Indian railway's *Frontier Mail* which had, and still has, a famous and storied history, having been featured in the writings of Kipling and others. The journey began with a 26-hour trip into Victoria Station in Bombay. Accompanying the family were two of our loyal servants: Pana, the bearer (butler), and Tai Bhai, our *aiha* (nanny). The nine of us made quite a gang—the twins, Mike and Mary, were 9, Suzy was 4, John Patrick was 3, and James Matthew was 1.

Upon our arrival in Bombay, our good friends Drs. Piloo and Eddie Bharucha met us at the train station and took us to the Taj Mahal Hotel on Bombay's harbor overlooking the Gateway to India arch erected during the British colonial period. (Years later, son Mike recalled that he had spent the day spotting the many foreign ships in the harbor.)

The next day, in a driving rainstorm, Pegge and the children and Tai Bhai went by taxi to the Santa Cruz airport where an Indian Airlines DC-3 awaited them for the five-hour flight to Cochin on India's southern west coast. (Pana, the bearer, and I stayed behind to ship the rest of the heavy baggage by train.) Mike later reported that the flight had been so rough that most of the passengers had been unable to eat their meals. The weather didn't bother Mike, and to this day he remembers putting away an English breakfast: tea, fish, poached eggs, toast, and marmalade. Since most of the passengers had declined the meal, Mike asked if "seconds" were available. His request was cheerfully granted.

Upon arrival in Cochin, the family stayed in the Malabar Hotel while awaiting the arrival of the Italian ship, the *Sydney*, which would take us to Italy. The Malabar Hotel was a wonderful choice for our last few days in India, located right on the Cochin harbor with the garden going all the way down to the waterfront where the children were able to watch the ships coming and going. Pegge was also able to take them for rides on the ferryboats that served as Cochin's public bus system. Pegge, Tai Bhai, and the children arrived at noon on July 10, and Pana and I joined them two days later. After I arrived we were able to arrange a full day's excursion through the inner waterways of Trivandrum on a launch powered by an outboard motor. Mike later remembered that the launch had run out of gas

and we had paddled the boat near a Caltex Station. We beached the boat and took the outboard motor tank to the gas station to fill it up for our return trip.

After our wonderful weekend at Cochon, on Monday, July 14, we boarded the Italian Flotta Lauro ship, *T/S Sydney*, for the voyage to Genoa, Italy. We had ten glorious days of sailing across the Indian Ocean and feasting on great food. Years later, the children remembered that “blue juice” (red wine) was served with every meal except breakfast. Our first landfall was passing the island of Socotra off Africa’s east coast before the ship stopped at Aden for bunkers and provisions. Underway again, the ship entered the Red Sea where the cruising became very hot as our cabins had only porthole scoops for air conditioning. At night our kids slept out on the deck, which they considered a great adventure.

The ship made a short stop at Port Said, and we had a few hours to visit the city before we continued our sailing in the Mediterranean to the island of Malta on July 15. Here we were met by the Harold Flaata family, friends from our New Delhi days, who very kindly served as our guides for a full day of touring. (Much later, after we had moved to Jamaica, son Mike gave a report on our visit to Malta which was so well received that he was asked to speak to other classes.)

Another two days of sailing brought us to Naples, where we spent a day ashore touring the coastal road along the sea to a Roman grotto. After two more days of sailing, we landed in Genoa on July 19. Here we stayed at the Assarotti Hotel, Via Assarotti 42. It was “old home week” for the family, because Pegge and the children had stayed at the same hotel a few years earlier when the family had a “home leave.” (That adventure is described in Pegge’s book, *Diapers on a Date-line*.)

In Genoa we boarded the Italian liner *Giulio Cesare* (Julius Caesar) for the journey to New York. The ship made a brief stop in Gibraltar (daughter Mary remembers buying a crèche as a Christmas decoration) before heading across the Atlantic for New York.

One of the highlights was seeing Portuguese fishing trawlers off the Grand Banks still fishing in the time-honored tradition. Although it was summer, the weather was for the most part overcast with rough seas. After a week of sailing the ship picked up the Sandy Hook pilot and we sailed past the Statue of Liberty to berth on the West Side at Pier 57, arriving on August 10.