

Cox Sabbaticals Enrich Two Officers' Lives

By John Withers II and Patricia Scroggs,
as told to David Krecke

What would you do with a fellowship that paid your salary for 12 months and gave you the resources to pursue the project of your choice? Would you buy a Lexus, like J.J., a character in Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" comic strip who recently won a MacArthur "genius" grant? Or would you take the advice of J.J.'s ne'er-do-well husband, Zeke, and pay off your gambling debts? John Withers II and Patricia Scroggs, Foreign Service officers who received Una Chapman Cox Fellowships last year, chose far nobler pursuits.

John Withers II

Mr. Withers's project began with a World War II story his father shared when John was a child. Not the one about the Luftwaffe strafing his father's unit, Quartermaster Truck Company 3512, or the one about being caught between lines during a German counterattack. Not even his account of what it was like to be a black lieutenant in a racially segregated army. The story that impressed John most was the one about two Jewish boys.

"It began, in my father's telling, near war's end in the spring of 1945," John says, "when the 3512th was ordered to rush supplies to an obscure town in southern Bavaria." Preoccupied with the pending Allied victory and the prospect of going home, the soldiers paid little attention to the destination on the order, Dachau. When they arrived, they were horrified.

Products of an impoverished, rural South, the men of the 3512th were unprepared for the concentration camp's shocking conditions. They had no way of knowing the enormity of the Nazi's "final solution" or that their GI col-

Salomon, left, and Pee Wee
in 1945 with a GI from the
3512th.

Below, soldiers of the 3512th Quartermaster
Truck Co. in 1946 at the gate to their camp in
Staffelstein, Bavaria. Salomon is on the far right.



Photo by Pee Wee

Photo courtesy of John Withers II

leagues were discovering equally dreadful conditions in scores of camps throughout Central Europe. Yet, faced with the horrors of Dachau, basic instincts of sympathy and humanity drove them to act.

"Dachau was under quarantine," John recalls his father saying. "Typhus was rampant, and headquarters feared that a truck company traveling throughout the theater of operations might infect major portions of the Army. The unit was forbidden to have contact with the prisoners."

Despite the threat of severe punishment, the men of the 3512th became attached to two young Jewish boys from Poland, abandoned in the camp without families. When it came time to leave Dachau, the soldiers spirited the boys out, hiding them in the company's base in the small Bavarian town of Staffelnstein. For a year, the two boys—christened "Pee Wee" and "Salomon" by troops who found their Polish names too difficult to pronounce—were fed, clothed, nursed, employed and befriended by the black soldiers. By the time John's father left Germany in the winter of 1946, the two young men were ready to start new lives.

Lt. Withers's story ended abruptly. He lost contact with his two friends. But throughout his career with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Pee Wee and Salomon remained clear in his memory. Their photos



Photos courtesy of John Withers II

Photos of Pee Wee, left, and Lt. John Withers Sr. in 1946.

were always with him and so was the nagging desire to learn their fates.

Through the generosity of the Una Chapman Cox Fellowship, John can now answer his father's question. The fellowship's stipend and allowance of unencumbered time permitted him to search last year for the missing men. Using the meager clues at his disposal, searching the Internet, following the advice of numerous friends, pursuing all leads however unpromising and battling privacy restrictions at every turn, he sent inquiries to Israel, Poland, Canada and Germany. He examined World War II records at the National Archives and personnel records in St. Louis. He spoke with veterans of the 3512th and visited Staffelnstein.

What he learned largely confirmed his father's memories. Some of his dad's dates and places were slightly mistaken. For example, John discovered that the boys were taken, not from Dachau, but from a satellite camp a short time later. But the core of the account proved true.

In the end, his discoveries occasioned both sadness and joy. John was sad to learn from Salomon's widow and surviving daughters in Israel that he had died a few years before. But he was overjoyed to witness the reunion of his father, now 84, and Pee Wee, 72, a successful Connecticut businessman. They were reunited April 27, almost 56 years to the day after Dachau's liberation.

"I cannot express what I felt in seeing those two old friends embrace," John Withers says. "Seeing them pore over yellowed photographs of their Staffelnstein days, to hear them recount moments of darkness and renewal and to meet Pee Wee's gracious family, including his four-month-old great-granddaughter. It was rewarding to discover Pee Wee prosperous and well, and to know that he and my father would never lose touch again."



Photo by John Withers II

Pee Wee and John Withers Sr. reunite in a poignant embrace April 27, 2001, 56 years after parting in Germany.

Patricia Scroggs

Patricia Scroggs invested her Cox Fellowship in a different kind of search, inspired not by a parent's past but by her children's future. The mother of two daughters adopted from China, she explored the challenges facing families with children adopted overseas.

Patricia's search took her and her girls to communities throughout the United States, where they participated in events aimed at introducing foreign-born children to cultural practices in the land of their birth.

One rainy Saturday morning, they sat in a makeshift school in a church basement in Minneapolis. A group of children, parents and teachers opened their session with song—first the American, then the Korean national anthem. Soon, they dispersed to play Korean games, study language and feast on chopchae, a Korean staple.

It was a moving scene for Patricia, watching beautiful, happy children with features reflecting their Korean heritage; proud parents, mostly of European descent; and their Korean teachers, eager to share their culture.

"These gatherings of families formed through international adoption always affect me deeply," she says, "As an internationalist, I am heartened by the ties being formed between the peoples of two nations and the ever-increasing embrace of cultural diversity in our society. As the mother of two daughters adopted from China, I recognize the challenges these people overcame to become families and the special love that binds them together."



Photo by Denée Frazer

The author, left, with 50 girls and their families in Chicago in June 2001 for the first nationwide reunion of children adopted from Linchuan, Jiangxi Province, in southeastern China.

Elsewhere in the United States, parents accompany their internationally adopted children to Chinese dance and language classes, read Russian folk tales, attend culture camps, join outings with other adoptive families, organize support for overseas orphanages, welcome "big brothers" who share their children's heritage, participate in ethnic festivals and engage in activities to help their children develop pride and connections to their birth cultures.

Rekindling adopted children's ties to their country of origin, Patricia discovered, is a relatively new phenomenon. During the nation's first major wave of international adoption in the 1950s, social workers counseled parents to

Una Chapman Cox Foundation

By Clyde D. Taylor

Established in 1980 by Mrs. Una Chapman Cox of Corpus Christi, Texas, the Cox Foundation is dedicated to the proposition that the United States needs a strong, professional Foreign Service.

It was 1948, and Una Chapman Dowd was in Bombay, India, a city in a nation just emerging from colonial rule. Bombay was but a one-day stopover en route to Calcutta and the remainder of an around-the-world cruise. Mrs. Dowd wanted to go ashore, but the ship's purser, who had custody of passengers' passports, was hung over and either unwilling or incapable of obtaining the passports from the safe. Mrs. Dowd, the granddaughter of Philip Augustus Chapman, founder of Chapman Ranch, was undeterred. She went exploring on her own and was arrested and jailed for having neither passport nor immunization documents. An American vice consul responded to her plight but was unsuccessful in getting her released in time to board her ship. He stayed with her at the jail

and brought her "two good books, a bottle of wine and some sandwiches." The next day the vice consul arranged for her release and a flight via Kathmandu to rejoin her ship in Calcutta.

In 1980 Mrs. Cox told the story of the forgotten Foreign Service vice consul who went beyond the call of duty, an account still related in consular training courses at FSI. Mrs. Cox said she had a soft spot for Foreign Service personnel who do things like this that people never know about. The wealthy South Texas heiress never forgot her benefactor. She formed her foundation in July 1980. Having no children and few heirs, she left a portion of her estate in farm land and oil and gas rights in trust to the foundation for the benefit of the Foreign Service. A year before she died, in



Teenagers adopted from Korea perform traditional drum music at the Korean Institute of Minnesota.



Photo by Sung Chul Park

August 1982, Mrs. Cox began funding a new Department of State program to provide sabbatical leaves for Foreign Service career officers. Harvie Branscomb Jr., designated as foundation trustee in Mrs. Cox's will, continues as foundation president and in implementing her dream.

The foundation funds projects and activities that benefit the U.S. Foreign Service by enhancing outreach to build constituency, supporting recruitment of the best possible candidates, advancing professionalism to increase retention of the best career officers and improving the effectiveness of the entire service. With modest assets as foundations go, it has disbursed more than \$5 million for the benefit of the Foreign Service. Its first and still core Sabbatical Leave Program aims to benefit mid-level officers with demonstrated potential to rise to the highest levels of the service by giving them opportunities for personal rejuvenation and to reconnect with American society. The Department assigns the officer to the sabbatical and the foundation provides a fellowship to support the officer's activities. Since it began in 1982, the sabbatical program has benefited 40 officers.

Each year the director general selects two of its senior Foreign Service officers to participate with their spouses

in the Aspen Institute's Executive Seminar, which the foundation funds. Annual Awards for Excellence in Foreign Language Instruction, co-funded with the Department, serve as recognition of and an incentive to the excellent corps of instructors at the Foreign Service

Institute. This year, the foundation has partnered with the Department to fund a dramatic reform of the Foreign Service oral assessment. Each year, State's Diplomats in Residence select from among the most promising of students interested in the Foreign Service those who the foundation can provide a stipend to help offset their expenses as summer interns at overseas posts. The trustees this year challenged the newly

formed Foreign Affairs Museum Council to a matching grant to help the Department fund the initial design for the U.S. Diplomacy Center. The largest activities funded by the foundation were the 1991 documentary "Profiles in Diplomacy: The U.S. Foreign Service" and the Stimson Center's 1998 study, "Equipped for the Future: Managing U.S. Foreign Affairs in the 21st Century." ■

Our country cannot afford to be without the strongest possible Foreign Service.

—Una Chapman Cox

The author is executive director of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation.



Emily Bradford, Samantha Heczko, Stephanie Stringer and Angelica Frazer, adopted together, reunite for the first time in the United States.

Photo by Denee Frazer

assimilate the children into American life. With several decades of experience, the adoption community now offers dramatically different advice. To enhance the children's self-esteem and identity, social workers urge parents to expose the children to the cultures and people of their birth country. This approach gives them the resources to deal with racism and links them with their roots. Professionals counsel parents not to see the child as different but to view the family in a new light—as a multicultural family. With characteristic American energy, many parents have heeded the call, eagerly seeking out new activities, people and information to mix other cultures into their family lives.

"I have devoted my Cox Fellowship to studying these multicultural families formed through adoption," Patricia explains. "I have surveyed hundreds of adoptive parents, adult adoptees, adoption professionals and academics and look forward to sharing the results of this research. I believe the impact of these multicultural families on American life will be significant. Spread throughout the country, they bring the faces and cultures of their homelands to countless playgrounds and neighborhoods.

"These children are part of 'us' to families, schools and communities throughout America, giving everyone a stake in their success." She adds, "These families, organized through a network of adoption support groups and e-mail lists, are becoming outspoken voices on adoption and immigration policies and racial politics within the United States. Their incursions into foreign policy have thus far been rare, but their potential as important domestic constituencies is worth watching."

She is grateful to the Cox Fellowship program for this unique professional opportunity to explore an area outside her normal econom-

ic focus. She enjoyed traveling to different parts of the country, talking not only about adoption but also about the role of the Foreign Service. The fellowship was an incredible experience on a personal level—allowing an unabashed blending of personal and professional goals. The ability to involve her family in fellowship activities, to work from home and to set her own schedule was unprecedented in her Foreign Service career.

"My daughters danced their way through Russian, Chinese and Korean celebrations," she says. "We joined a playgroup with other children adopted from China. I devoted the time I would have spent commuting to playing with my daughters. I didn't need to negotiate how to be home for the telephone repairman. For once, I volunteered for community activities."

John Withers and Patricia Scroggs returned to the Department this summer, reacquainted with America after exploring matters of profound personal meaning during the past year. While their Cox Fellowship projects differed dramatically, two common themes run through the story of a black soldier's reunion with the Jewish boy

Photo by Patricia Scroggs



An Alexandria playgroup of families with children from China. They are, from left, Caroline and McKenzie Myers, Cailyn Lager and Ellie Bernstein.



Adopted sisters celebrate the 4th of July.

Photo by Steve Scroggs

he befriended 56 years earlier and a mother's search to connect her China-born daughters with their roots: love and friendship transcend racial barriers and there is, indeed, strength in diversity.

Una Chapman Cox could not have dreamed that the fellowships named for her would have been invested more wisely. ■

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