



The Reluctant Spy

**My Secret Life in the CIA's
War on Terror**

**John Kiriakou with
Michael Ruby**

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CIA'S WAR ON TERROR

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Foreword by **BRUCE RIEDEL**



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For "Katherine"

For my parents, Chris and Stella Kiriakou

FOREWORD

by Bruce Riedel

IN THE INTELLIGENCE business you learn early who you can rely on to get the job done right. John Kiriakou is one of those people. In a brilliant career he demonstrated the ability to understand what is important in confused and complex situations and how to judge information to discern how reliable and accurate it is. In this book he provides unique insights into the world of contemporary intelligence analysis and collection and into the real-world battle America is fighting against terrorism. Every American who wants to understand that battle needs to read this book; any American who wants to know what it is really like to work as an intelligence officer in the CIA should start here.

The intelligence business is a unique one. It is not a science, although it uses advanced science. As an intelligence officer, you try to peer into the future with only a few of the facts you need to see ahead. Your opponent will use deception and concealment to mislead you. You must always check and recheck your facts and your assumptions. An Israeli colleague of mine has aptly described it as more poetry than science, because those who are really good at it seem to see rhythms and patterns that are not obvious to most. In this book we see how that translates into action in the field, in trying to discern whether an enemy can be persuaded to turn sides, commit treason for our side, or provide information on what the enemy is planning. We also see how it works at headquarters where information from hundreds of sources must be deciphered, evaluated, and judged so that it can be presented to policy makers in a concise form with the insights they need to fashion our nation's future.

I first got to know John in August 1990. At the time I was deputy chief of the Persian Gulf Task Force set up in the early hours of August 3, 1990, after Iraq had invaded Kuwait. I was working without sleep for days at a time, often rushing down to the White House with the director of central intelligence to back him up at meetings of the National Security Council with President George H. W. Bush as we sought to assess Iraq's next moves from fragments of intelligence information. A relatively new officer but with expertise on Iraq and Kuwait, John was a crucial part of my team that was following the crisis around the clock from the CIA's watch office. I came to respect his judgment and knew I could rely on the analysis and information he gave me.

Our careers intersected at other times as well. We were both at the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in June 1996 within hours after Hezbollah terrorists blew up a U.S. Air Force barracks and killed or wounded dozens. We both were sobered by the scene of devastation which would be a portent of what was to come in the years ahead.

Much of the heart of this book is about the war against al-Qaeda that the CIA has been fighting since the late 1990s. Al-Qaeda is a difficult and dangerous adversary. Despite

inflicting many blows on it, we have yet to destroy its top leadership, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. We squandered our best chance to do so after we had routed al-Qaeda from Afghanistan in 2001 and had them on the run in Pakistan. The capture of Abu Zubaydah that John led was one in a series of dramatic takedowns that offered the promise of getting all the way to the top.

Instead, our attention and critical intelligence resources got diverted to an unnecessary war in Iraq. John's book provides important new insights into how that happened, what it meant for al-Qaeda, and how little serious analysis was done about the implications of going after Saddam instead of Osama. There are crucially important lessons to be learned from this story about how intelligence can be misused by those in power and the costs of doing so.

John also writes in depth about the torture issue and its place in the struggle against al-Qaeda. As a country we need to get to the bottom of what happened in the CIA and in the White House regarding torture after September 11, 2001. Accountability is critical in a democracy. Our national conscience demands no less. This book is an important milestone in that process.

Espionage is a dangerous business. The terrorists have killed some of our very best officers over the past three decades. I will never forget burying one of them at Arlington National Cemetery. John's dramatic narrative reminds us that this is neither a game nor an adventure story. The men and women of the CIA who risk their lives, and sometimes the lives of their families, deserve our understanding, respect, and gratitude. Above all they deserve political leadership that puts them at risk only for good reason and asks them to uphold only the best of America.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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This book went through several reviews by the CIA's publications board, which, to its credit, allows authors to appeal—and to continue to appeal—its demands for changes and redactions. In the end, we were required to change some names; to obscure or eliminate certain locales; and, on a few occasions, to obscure a true event or series of events. We understand the need for these changes: Much of the work of the U.S. government can and should lend itself to greater transparency. Much of what the CIA does can and should remain secret because the release of certain information could jeopardize ongoing operations or relationships or otherwise compromise U.S. national-security interests.

PROLOGUE

BOB GRENIER WAS excited, which was unusual because he was normally among the coolest of cool customers.

“John, get here as soon as you can,” he said. “Something very important has come up.”

It was late February 2002, and I’d arrived in Pakistan only a few weeks earlier—dispatched from CIA headquarters to become the new head of counterterrorism operations in a country with the third largest Muslim population in the world.

When I got to our offices, Grenier, the senior CIA officer in Pakistan, already had gathered a small group of FBI and CIA people to hear his news. We’d received information overnight from headquarters that Abu Zubaydah was in Pakistan. To be precise, he was in Faisalabad or one other Pakistani city.

“We’ve got to catch him,” my boss said, looking at me, “and we want him alive.”

He didn’t have to say it a second time. After the mass murders of September 11, 2001, we had taken the fight to al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, with the CIA in the lead. We’d ousted the Taliban and roused Osama bin Laden and his thugs from his stronghold in the cave complex at Tora Bora. But we hadn’t captured or killed bin Laden or many of his top people, who fled to mountain villages along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Abu Zubaydah was part of bin Laden’s inner circle, by some reckonings the number three man in al-Qaeda after Mohammed Atef was killed in Afghanistan in November 2001. He had American blood on his hands, and he could tell us plenty.

Yeah, I thought, I had to find this guy moving around two cities with a total of twenty-one million people speaking Punjabi and a bunch of other languages we didn’t understand. We had fragmentary reports suggesting many locations that Abu Zubaydah or his allies might have used in Faisalabad or the other Pakistani city. But our target was smart, and he was constantly on the move.

After two weeks of frustration, I asked for help and got it when headquarters dispatched the agency’s best targeting and analysis officer to Pakistan. Two days later, at 4 a.m., Rick Romanski arrived at a major Pakistani airport, managed a couple hours of sleep at a hotel, then pitched up at the office about the time the regular staff was arriving for the workday. I explained the problem to him: We knew Abu Zubaydah was in the country, and we were getting daily reports with long lists of locations and associates. But we couldn’t pinpoint any locations with real certainty.

Rick got his hands on a huge piece of butcher paper, roughly the size of a U.S. billboard, pasted it up on a long wall in the office, and wrote Abu Zubaydah’s name in the middle of it. As we received new reports, he would draw lines on the paper from Zubaydah’s name to names and addresses of known associates in Pakistan. After a week, the paper was a beautiful mosaic, a spiderweb of lines with heavy concentrations to fourteen locations.

“These addresses are so active I can’t cut any of them out,” Rick told me. “I can’t get the list below the fourteen”—each of them a house in Faisalabad or perhaps one other Pakistani city.

During my first month in Pakistan, we started out with practice raids on one site a night; eventually, we worked up to two sites a night—all of them targeting low-level al-Qaeda associates. Now Rick was telling me we’d have to set in motion an operation to take down fourteen sites in one night, all of them coordinated to the split second. I was going to need a much bigger team.

Fine, Grenier said when I went to him with the request. “Give me the details and a budget and I’ll pass along the package to Cofer with a recommendation that he approve it.” Cofer was Cofer Black, the head of the CIA’s Counterterrorist Center (CTC) at Langley and one of the agency’s true heroes. He came through in a big way, although the details of the package he approved remain classified.

Rick and I flew to central Pakistan, rented a suite at a hotel, and established our initial base of operations. The hotel was one of the city’s finest, but it reeked of rot and mold despite the housekeepers’ daily efforts to scrub everything in sight; maybe it was because they scrubbed down the carpets, too. The odor was literally breathtaking.

In a sense, the hotel was a reflection of its environment. The city suffered from desperate poverty, with twelve million people living on top of one another, pits of raw sewage along the roads, dirty air, and garbage everywhere. But the weather was good and the city overflowed with flowers, magnificent mosques, and forts dating back hundreds of years. As a result, the city even had a fairly brisk tourist industry. “Ah, yes, land of contrasts”—or so goes one of the clichés world-weary travelers use to describe such developing countries. But this huge city really was a land of contrasts, especially when compared with Islamabad—an immaculate planned city built barely a half century ago.

Rick headed back to another Pakistani city that the CIA won’t allow me to name just as an Arab American CIA officer named Amir arrived. It was time to introduce ourselves to the Pakistani security authorities—specifically to a man named Khalid, who turned out to be a good guy and a team player. He’d been waiting to hear from us because his headquarters in Islamabad had already sent word to cooperate with the Americans.

“They vouch for you guys,” Khalid told us. “I’ll do anything you want me to do.”

Khalid wasn’t really cut out for security work. He clearly had other professional and even artistic interests. Even so, he and his men were terrific people—smart, cooperative, and fearless. We couldn’t have asked for more.

What we really needed first, we told Khalid, was a real estate agent because we had to find a good safe house. He found a guy who showed us several houses that were either too small or too close to other houses. We required space and security. Finally, he took us to an area of the city that featured many large houses rumored to be occupied by retired military people. Big houses? These were mansions. *Either Pakistani generals receive exceptionally handsome salaries and retirement benefits, I thought, or they must be exceptionally corrupt.* My bet was on the latter.

Finally, the agent showed us a house with many bedrooms and bathrooms—plenty of

room to accommodate us.

“How much is it?”

The agent seemed slightly embarrassed: He quoted us a figure that seemed reasonable by U.S. standards but probably was extravagant in the local real estate market.

“We’ll take it,” I said.

He was so flabbergasted that he didn’t respond immediately. Later I learned that people generally don’t pay such amounts in cash for a house with absolutely no negotiation.

Then he recovered.

“Sir, do you mind if I ask you a question?”

“No, not at all.”

“What do you do for a living?”

I was tongue-tied—we’d been too busy to cook up a cover story—but Amir was nimble. “We’re textile barons,” he said, without missing a beat. “We own a large textile factory outside of town.”

“Oh, yes,” the real estate agent said, pleased with himself. “Textiles are very important to our country and employ many, many people.” Then, putting his hand over his heart, he welcomed us to Pakistan.

We got a second safe house in Faisalabad because it seemed possible that all of the fourteen houses were there. The mystery, once we began to track down the locations, was site X. Most of the sites were two-room mud huts with thatched or corrugated tin roofs. Another, site Y, was a house with the shutters closed in the broiling heat; we had reported that a large group of Arabs were living there. *We’ll need a big team on that one*, I thought.

Site X was on our list because Abu Zubaydah’s associates had referred to it several times. But site X was nothing—or more precisely, a vacant lot.

“How can this be?” I asked the Pakistani security guy Khalid had assigned to us.

“No, no, this is common,” he said. In large Pakistani cities, he explained, each plot of land is assigned a phone number, and the closest telephone pole is prewired to accommodate a line. But it’s relatively easy for someone to climb the pole, splice the wire, and run a new wire to a nearby house; the charges from that line would go to the owner of the vacant land, not the telephonic thief.

The Pakistani security man got one of his young techies to the site as quickly as he could. The kid climbed the pole, started sorting through this amazing Medusa’s head of wires, and finally isolated the one we wanted. On the ground, he walked the wire hand over hand down an alley. Then he stopped and pointed to an average, middle-class house. “It’s that one,” he said.

Amir and I smiled at each other and, this time, the words came to me first: “We go get him.” We were ready to go. Later, we headed out from the hotel to meet Khalid and hook up with our team at the safe house for a final briefing. Both of us were sick to our stomachs, victims of spoiled milk the hotel tea boy had inadvertently used in cappuccinos earlier in the evening. As we walked to the car, Amir wondered aloud, “So what do you

think is going to happen tonight?”

I couldn't answer the question directly because I wasn't a fortuneteller. But after thinking about it, I responded as truthfully as I could.

“By this time tomorrow, we'll either be heroes or our careers will be over.” In the back of my mind was an agency tour leader's remark my first week at the CIA. In the Operations Center of the original headquarters building, with its banks of television sets and clocks from around the world, he spotted a hunched older man coming out of a room and pointed at him: “See that guy? He predicted that the Israelis *wouldn't* attack in 1967. His career never recovered.” Maybe it was apocryphal, but the tale resonated with me that night in Pakistan.

Our plan required coordination, but it wasn't complicated. At precisely 2:00 a.m., our teams of U.S. and Pakistani security people would use battering rams to break down doors at all fourteen locations, separate and cuff all the men, and grab everything in sight—computers, phones, weapons, documents, whatever was or wasn't nailed down. The women and children would be taken to a detention facility and released the next day.

At two o'clock Amir and I were on the roof of the Faisalabad safe house. Seconds later we heard a sound not too far away: *boink, boink, boink*—metal on metal. “That's site X,” I said, then went to our walkie-talkie. “Base to site X, come in.” Nothing. Nothing a second time. Lesson learned: The first thing to fail is always communications.

I pulled out a cell phone and called the site X team leader. It turned out the door had been reinforced with steel, and they couldn't break it down. Then we heard shots.

“We got to go,” I shouted to Amir.

Site X was close to the safe house, so we were there in minutes. The place was chaos with people screaming and Pakistani security guys running everywhere. Outside the house one man was down and obviously dead; another was gone or about to be. A third was covered in blood and screaming hysterically.

I grabbed the senior Pakistani security guy: “Where is Abu Zubaydah?”

“This is Abu Zubaydah,” he said, pointing to the guy apparently close to death. The man had been shot in the thigh, groin, and stomach with an AK-47.

Amir was excited. “Oh, my God, we got him, we got him.”

I wasn't so sure. “This guy doesn't look anything like his picture. Honest to God, this guy's forty pounds heavier and has this wild hair. I don't think it's him.”

I called Rick and asked him what to do. “Get me a picture of his iris,” he said.

“Open your eyes,” I shouted at the man in Arabic, but his eyes were rolled back in his head.

“Okay, then get me a close-up of his ear.” This was a new one for me: I didn't know that your ear was like a fingerprint, nearly a foolproof identification.

I photographed his ear, plugged the image into my cell phone, and sent it to Rick. A minute passed.

“It's him,” Rick reported.

We got the good news to Grenier as quickly as we could. George Tenet, the director of central intelligence (DCI), had instructed Bob to let him know whether we'd been successful or not—and he wanted to know immediately. At roughly 3:45 a.m. local time, or 5:45 p.m. in Langley, Virginia, Grenier used a secure line to call Tenet, who had gathered the agency's top officials for a daily counterterrorism policy conference. Bob told me the room erupted in cheers and applause when Tenet made the announcement. Moments later my big boss, the director, passed the word to his big boss, the president of the United States. We made a lot of people happy that night of March 28, 2002.

THE RAID IN Pakistan was one of the brightest moments of my professional life. I had joined the CIA less than two years after I completed graduate school. I wasn't exactly a choir boy but I was a fairly provincial young man who had grown up in small-town Pennsylvania and who had few of the qualities the agency likes, especially in its covert operatives. I had no military experience and had never even touched, much less fired, a weapon. Survival skills and hand-to-hand combat were the stuff of spy novels and otherwise beyond my imagining. Foreign languages were Greek to me—literally. It was the language of my grandfathers and became my second tongue only through diligent study in college.

I grew up in a Greek American household, with first-generation parents who were teachers and who pressed me to excel in school and extracurricular activities that, save my fixation with baseball, had everything to do with expanding my education. Love of country was a living, breathing thing in my immigrant family of FDR Democrats. At the CIA, I had signed on as an analyst in the Directorate of Intelligence, figuring that I could use my education, build upon my fascination with international affairs, particularly the Middle East, and eventually make a real contribution to the nation's understanding of the forces beyond our shores.

But I wound up spending much of my career in the Directorate of Operations—the clandestine spy service—running foreign agents, tracking down bad guys, and, yes, risking my life more times than I care to remember. We get medals and awards for this stuff, and I've got a dozen or so in a sideboard at my house, but no one does the work for honors or for personal advancement. We do it because we believe it makes our country a safer place.

The CIA became a second family—one I came to respect and even love. Too often these days, at least in the popular mind, the letters "CIA" seem to stand for cutthroat, incompetent, and addled. In fact, the agency I know is largely made up of bright, capable, patriotic people who understand the contribution they can and should be making to the nation's security as well as the limits of their mandate. Many of them are hidden heroes.

I do not wear blinders. The CIA I know can also be dysfunctional and wrongheaded in how it goes about its business. Its culture is incestuous. It is too often risk averse when it should be bold or bold when it should be cautious. Its people can be mean-spirited and vindictive, sometimes at the highest levels. I left the agency because one particular boss, a careerist with a single-minded focus on self-promotion and no regard for those crushed along the way, demanded that I make a choice between access to my young children from a first marriage and my CIA career. What choice, then, did I really have? I resigned in March 2004 after nearly fifteen years of proud service. I wasn't quite forty years old.

Every officer, I suspect, has broken the rules more than once; I know I have. These lapses are not macho badges to wear with pride. They represent situational failures of character that any officer who cares about the standards of behavior in a tough business should find deeply disturbing. My own failures in this regard trouble me to this day. But I remain proud of the vast majority of my decisions in service to my country. I chose not to participate in the agency's program to use what were called "enhanced interrogation techniques" on high-profile al-Qaeda detainees, including the man captured by the counterterrorism team I headed in Pakistan. In the spring of 2009, Americans would learn from four declassified memos what that CIA interrogation involved and determine for themselves whether we tortured in the name of national security. As a measure of the strength of our democracy, that national debate continues to this day.

Certainly in the period since September 11, 2001, American journalists and contemporary historians have cast a particularly harsh light on the CIA. Much of the criticism is probably justified. The revelations in the so-called torture memos have muted my own enthusiasm for the way the agency conducts its business. The American people want an intelligence service that serves them well and honorably and that lives up to the nation's highest values, and the CIA hasn't always delivered.

This book isn't intended to excuse the agency's shortcomings or gloss over its excesses in the post-9/11 world. It is intended as an honest account of the CIA through the eyes of a former analyst and operative whose experiences suggest that America's spy service often does a better job than the critics think.



IT'S A REMARKABLE turn of mind in our country built upon wave after wave of immigrants: Most of us—the sons and daughters or grandchildren or great-grandchildren of foreigners—have come to take our American birthright for granted. In the land of assimilation and the melting pot, we don't spend much time puzzling over the circumstances of our citizenship or the potential consequences if our forebears had chosen a different path.

Maybe it's a Greek thing, but my heritage plays tag with my consciousness on a fairly regular basis, reminding me what might have been and how lucky I am. Yiannis Kiriakou, my paternal grandfather, was born in 1900 on the Greek island of Rhodes, then under Turkish occupation, and immigrated to the United States in 1920, when Rhodes was under an Italian thumb. It wasn't foreign occupation alone that impelled young Greeks to leave. Fighting between Greeks and Turks after World War I ended with the great population transfer, as the Turks called it, or the disaster of 1923, as the Greeks called it. Whatever it was called, the two sides expelled millions of the "others" from their lands. Greece was a mess. People were starving, there weren't enough jobs, and the government was actively encouraging young men to go abroad for work.

Yiannis, one of eighteen children, only nine of whom lived to adulthood, chose America as his destination. Other young Greeks decamped for Egypt or Lebanon, colonial capitals in Africa, reputedly untamed Australia, and the countries of South America in search of work. Many have friends and acquaintances in all those places and have visited many of them for business or pleasure; with all respect, I cannot imagine any of them as home.

My grandfather boarded the *SS Themistocles*, bound for New York, mainly because an older brother, Markos, had preceded him and had set down roots in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, eighteen miles southwest of Pittsburgh, where he worked in a steel mill. The idea was to find a job, work hard, save money, then perhaps move back to Greece and buy a farm or small business. John, my grandfather's Anglicized name in the United States, embraced this idea with a vengeance. He labored in the Canonsburg steel mill, pinched pennies, and managed to save \$10,000 in a decade. That's \$10,000 in 1930, the equivalent of roughly \$130,000 in today's dollars. It was more than enough to buy two parcels of land on Rhodes, one a forty-five-acre farm inland, another a smaller piece on the beach. He also came into an ample dowry with his marriage to my grandmother, Ekaterini Capetan Yiorgiou—Katina for short.

The newlyweds planted olive trees and some crops on the farm and settled in for the long run. But only eight months later, Yiannis got a letter from his brother in Canonsburg. Markos reported that the U.S. Congress was going to change the law and make it much more difficult for immigrants to become citizens. If Yiannis had any intention of bringing his bride to the United States, Markos said, he had better act immediately. My grandfather had always planned to return to America, a land he had come to love. That very day, he literally walked away from his fields and told my grandmother to pack the steamer trunks and make ready for the time of her life.

His first journey to America had been awful. The *Themistocles* was a small ship with cramped quarters on a long passage of several weeks. This time, the nearly illiterate peasant farmer would do it right. Yiannis booked first-class passage on the MN *Saturnia*; he and my grandmother arrived at Ellis Island in February 1931 and almost immediately made their way to Canonsburg, where they remained for two years before moving to Farrell, another Pennsylvania mill town. It was there in 1934, on the kitchen table of a rented house, that my father came into the world—the first Kiriakou boy born in the United States.

My grandmother Katina was an educated woman, fluent in three languages, who taught Greek and Italian for a while during the Great Depression. But for most of her life, she was a homemaker while my grandfather labored in the mill; he retired in 1965, taking over his sister-in-law's butcher shop for the rest of his working years. By that time, in the late 1960s, my own father had married, my kid brother and I had been born, and our family had moved to 307 East Fairfield Avenue in New Castle, a town about twenty miles from Farrell. That was where my two younger siblings, Emanuel and Tina, and I grew up.

New Castle, like many towns in western Pennsylvania, fell on hard times when the American steel industry got whacked by foreign competition, but in those days it was a thriving community of fifty thousand or so. In our household, education was everything. My dad, Chris Kiriakou, was a teacher and a musician with multiple degrees who eventually became an elementary school principal. He encouraged my mother, Stella, to further her education as soon as their youngest, Tina, was in kindergarten. She did, starting college when I was in fifth grade and graduating when I was a high school freshman; afterward, she got her second degree and taught school for two decades.

Both my grandfathers had been members of the United Steel-workers, and their children were union people, too—my dad in the American Federation of Musicians, my mom in the American Federation of Teachers. Kiriakou households were solidly Democratic: More than two decades after Franklin Delano Roosevelt's death, my paternal grandfather still kept a picture of FDR on top of his TV.

Because of their union backgrounds, the running conversation in the homes of my grandparents had less to do with things Greek than it did with the Depression-era politics that so profoundly influenced them. My paternal grandfather would recall attending a rally for Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants who had been tried and executed for murder—wrongly in the view of many—in the 1920s. I was curious about these and other larger-than-life characters of his youth, and I spent time in the local library as a young teenager doing my “independent” research on their exploits.

What I discovered in the process became a lifelong passion. These men and their stories had been immortalized in song, part of a canon of folk and protest music that preceded my grandfather's arrival in America and now reaches into the twenty-first century. Greek music was omnipresent in my life, but it was the songs and ballads of people such as Woody Guthrie, honoring Sacco and Vanzetti in recordings from the mid-1940s, that captivated me with messages of revealed injustice. The television era was coming of age when I was a kid, but I was hooked on the sounds of social justice—music created by people who, in many cases, were my grandfather's chronological contemporaries. Later, when I was in college, the great Pete Seeger and a host of other folk-music icons came into my life, singing about the

Big Muddy, the Swedish immigrant labor organizer Joe Hill, and more.

My grandfather also got me hooked on something else when he gave me a transistor radio. I was only eight years old, but my addiction to a technology that predated the television age by three decades began one night when I heard WGN in Chicago and thought, “Wow, if I can get a station that far away with this little radio, what can I get with a good radio?”

My father answered that question when he bought me a shortwave radio and helped me erect a forty-five-foot tower outside our house. Suddenly, I was tuning in to broadcasts from places that were thrilling and exotic, whispering in my ear in clipped British accents on the BBC World Service or in perfect, unaccented American English on Radio Moscow. There was a separate dressing room in our old house that I converted into my “radio room.” I pasted a big world map on the wall and put pins in all the countries whose shortwave stations I’d been able to verify. The alarm clock helped: I’d set it for all hours of the night so I could listen to some obscure station in Romania or the South Pacific or Africa. *Who are these people? I need to know more about them, what they look like, what they think, whether the kids are like me or different. And how different?*

School, for me, was a joy. The public elementary schools in those days were very good and New Castle High School was exceptional. We had teachers who had done things in life, who had had fascinating careers before they turned to teaching. One had been an economist, another a microbiologist with a Ph.D. Dorothy Poleno, my favorite, was a U.S. Navy intelligence officer before she retired to become a teacher. She taught a senior class called World Cultures, where we learned about the Soviet Union and its military. It was like taking a college course, with plenty of participation and interaction with the teacher.

I was active in almost everything—the American Field Service program, the debating society, the Key Club, and more—and I played baseball, my one sports passion. But it was the combination of stimulating teachers, my addiction to those radio broadcasts, and a gathering interest in politics that began to shape my future. November 4, 1979, turned out to be pivotal for me: On that day, Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held dozens of Americans hostage for what would be more than fourteen months. I was completely transfixed from the start: I listened to foreign broadcasts, read everything I could on Iran and its recent revolution, watched Walter Cronkite every night on CBS News—“And that’s the way it is,” followed by the date and the number of days since the hostage crisis began. I was barely fifteen years old, but there was talk of a military draft, and I wondered whether I’d be called up to go over there to free our people. The thought was at once exhilarating and frightening.

In short, I was a news junkie, even in my middle teens. There was an essay contest at school that I won, the prize for which was to become mayor of New Castle for a day. The real mayor let me sit in his chair, walked me around city hall and introduced me to all the department heads, gave me a personal tour of the city, then popped for a big working lunch—at Burger King. I asked him whether, as mayor for the day, I could fix a ticket for my dad. He said no. Then it was five o’clock and I went home.

With that I was hooked on politics, complementing my Iranian-inspired fascination with the Middle East. What sealed the deal was a one-week scholarship I won called Presidential Classroom. Two of us from my high school were selected to spend a week in Washington.

D.C.—a full day at the Senate, another at the House, a third at the Supreme Court, and, of course, a tour of the White House. We joined kids from other schools and listened to speakers from government agencies—the CIA, the FBI, and the Defense Department. And we heard representatives of a labor union and a right-to-work group square off in a debate. We also met our senators and congressmen and visited both the National Cathedral and the Islamic Center of Washington. It was a fantastic hands-on week. And it convinced me that there was only one school for me: the George Washington University in the nation's capital.

I had already circled GW as a possibility, which didn't exactly thrill my father. He wanted me to go to the University of Pittsburgh, where he had studied for his Ph.D., finishing all the requirements except the dissertation—the price he paid for my birth in August 1964. Pitt, he said, had a fine Eastern European studies program; besides, it was a lot less expensive for a Pennsylvania kid than GW would be. But I didn't want to go to college only an hour away from home. And, more to the point, I was more interested in another part of the world: Middle Eastern studies, which didn't exist in the Pitt curriculum. GW was one of only a handful of schools with a quality Mideast program, I said, and it was in Washington to boot. Dad said we'd talk about it again, but he never raised it as I moved forward. I applied for early admission to GW and got applications from Georgetown and the University of Virginia as well. I was naïve: Georgetown and UVA would be my backup schools, I thought, not caring that they were more competitive than GW. In any event, my grades were good and my SAT scores were strong; GW accepted me and the other applications went in the trash can.

I was ecstatic and told Mom and Dad of my good fortune. They sure knew how to deflate a guy. They sat me down at the kitchen table and explained the financial facts of life to the eldest child. They were happy for me and very proud that I had been accepted at such a fine school, but there was no way they could afford to send me—not with tuition of \$4,600 a year, plus the room and board and books and everything else. I would have to go to Pitt.

I walked away from the table like a whimpering pup whose favorite toy had suddenly been snatched away. But then I thought, *This can't be! I've got to make this work.* And I did. Before I was done, I had applied for and won more than a dozen scholarships. Many of them were small—the largest were \$500 and \$1,000—but they added up to enough to make tuition. I took out college loans and my aunt Chrysanthie helped, too. When I got to GW, I ended up qualifying for a half-tuition scholarship so long as my grades remained good. They did. With that, cumulative scholarships covered my tuition, room, and board—just under \$8,000 a year—and a job in GW's music department covered the cost of books and incidentals.

Washington for a college student who happened to be obsessive about politics was about as close to heaven as you can get in this life. Fortunately, my roommate, Ed Harwitz, was as fanatical as I was. We bought copies of *The Almanac of American Politics* and began to digest it, one congressional district or one Senate seat per night. The next day, we'd compare notes. We also used our copies as autograph books. This was the early 1980s, when security was the first order of business at the U.S. Capitol. You could walk around, buttonhole congressmen, even stroll right into the Senate cloakroom. It was amazing how few people turned us down. Ted Kennedy smiled slightly but said no, and Robert Stafford wanted to know if we were constituents. Neither one of us was from Vermont, so he just walked away.

William Proxmire lived up to his reputation for crankiness and wouldn't give us the time of day. But most everyone else was approachable and cooperative: Barry Goldwater, a gem of a guy; Bob Dole, very friendly; John Glenn, just great. Glenn and Gary Hart even stood for pictures with us.

Those were the days when *The Washington Post* published a daily political calendar, listing all sorts of events, including receptions on Capitol Hill. So in our dogged pursuit of autographs, we became party crashers, too. We'd put on suits, head out, and make an evening of it. Security at these things was practically nonexistent. We'd walk in, act like we belonged, and seek out every face we recognized. Once, we spotted Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, talking to each other, with no one else around. We walked up, and I extended my hand and said, "Hey, I'm a big fan of yours. Do you mind signing our political almanacs?" Then it started to go downhill, or so I thought.

"Are you from Tennessee?"

"No, I'm from Pennsylvania."

"Aw, come on now," said Gore, who was still in the House at the time. "You're not from my state, you're not from my district, so how're you gonna vote for me if I give you my autograph?"

"Well, I can't vote for you," I said, "but I'll wish you the best of luck."

Tipper had been silent thus far, but she suddenly broke into a big smile, looked her husband in the eyes, and said, "Al, are you being an asshole?" Really, she did.

"Naw, I'm just pulling his leg," he said with a laugh. "Gimme your books, I'll sign 'em, I'll sign 'em." He not only signed them; he and Tipper even posed for a picture with us.

Our closest friends thought we were slightly loopy with all this party crashing, and they started egging us on, challenging us, I suppose, to make bigger and better fools of ourselves. We took the bait happily. After all, these receptions generally featured so-called heavy hors d'oeuvres, which meant we got free dinners two or three times a week. Once, we spotted a listing for a big bash at the Republican National Committee headquarters, and our buddies dared us to crash it. No problem, we said. But there was a problem. When we showed up, there was a guest list at the door; obviously, we weren't on it, so we improvised, using my home state's senior senator as an unwitting accessory. "Ah, well, we're from Senator Heinz's office," I said. "Has he arrived yet?" We'd scanned the room and were pretty sure he wasn't there.

"No, no, he isn't here," the gatekeeper said.

"Well, do you mind if we wait for him?"

"No, by all means, please go in."

We did. Republican parties tended to outshine the Democrats' when it came to the quality of the food. The Dems always seemed to have hot dogs and burgers or barbecue. The Republicans had sushi—by the boatload, it seemed—and champagne. We got both, moved to a big window overlooking the sidewalk, and raised flutes to our friends gathered below. Then we wolfed down the food and drink and got out before John Heinz showed up.

We were shown the door only once. We had put on our best suits and tried to crash the b

dinner of a prominent political group in Washington. But we were young and white and carrying autograph books; we clearly weren't members of the Congressional Black Caucus and the greeters at its annual banquet politely, but firmly, invited us to leave. We went quietly.

I got involved with the College Democrats, naturally, and ran the group's speaker committee. Late in 1983, I read that George McGovern was considering a run for the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination. I knew, of course, that McGovern had challenged Nixon in 1972 and had managed to win exactly one state—Massachusetts—and the District of Columbia. He couldn't even carry his home state of South Dakota. Another run would be quixotic even under the best of circumstances, but I sensed an opportunity for GW and for our College Democrats. I wrote McGovern, introduced myself, and suggested that, were he to run, the George Washington University would be a fine place to declare his candidacy. I heard nothing for a couple of weeks. Then one morning I was awakened by the phone in my dorm room. I picked it up, still groggy from sleep.

“John?”

“Yes.”

“John, this is George McGovern calling.”

“Oh, come on, Tom, I know it's you.” My friend Tom Fitzpatrick knew I'd written McGovern and, I thought, did a pretty good imitation of the former South Dakota senator.

“No, really, this is George McGovern.”

Now I was on full alert. That high nasal voice—no one could imitate that! McGovern said he'd be delighted to accept my kind offer and announce for the presidency on a stage at GW. I made all the arrangements, lured the TV networks to cover the morning event, and even got to introduce the candidate myself. Later, after the press had left, McGovern turned to me to say thanks. “You want to have lunch at my place?” he asked. So we retired to his condominium on Connecticut Avenue along with his wife, Eleanor, and daughter Mary. The candidate made the tuna fish sandwiches.

I STUCK WITH my major, Middle Eastern studies, to the mild surprise of many friends and relatives. What could be better? The region was at once rich in history and contemporary and its near-constant tension. The Iranian hostage crisis was history, but now Iran was at war with Iraq, a conflict started by the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. No matter: In the Middle East, the maxim that the enemy of my enemy is my friend has special meaning, and our government was certainly leaning in Saddam's direction. Then there was the seeming endless Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt and Israel had signed a peace agreement in 1979, but it was a cold peace, and the region was plagued by political brushfires and worse. By the time I started at GW in late August 1982, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was two months old. I was consumed by the subject matter, adding to the core study program all sorts of related electives—the politics and economics of oil, for example, and course work in Judaism and Islam.

A year abroad seemed like a good idea, too, and I used it as a junior at the University of London, frankly to take a break from the Middle East. I'd been working part-time at the

United Food and Commercial Workers Union international headquarters in Washington my sophomore year, so I thought I'd study its counterpart—the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers—in the United Kingdom. An InterFuture scholarship paid for the second half of an academic year; when it was over in mid-May 1985, I spent the next couple of months traveling all over Europe by train, and I made my first visit to Greece.

By the time of graduation in the spring of 1986, I had accomplished much. My knowledge in my major field of study was considerable. I had taken advantage of a program among universities in the Washington area to study Greek at Georgetown. I'd learned the language at home, but it was all slang and idiom, with no formal training. By the time I finished the two-year course at Georgetown, I was fluent.

So there I was, about to be a freshly minted graduate of the George Washington University. Okay, fine. Now what? I wasn't quite ready to face the real world yet. But I was in Washington, where politics rules and public policy occasionally counts for something, too. I was still consumed by the game and reckoned I might be able to play at a higher level. GW had an unusual three-year program at the time, offering a master's degree in legislative affairs. It seemed perfect: The reluctant undergraduate could enter graduate school and learn how the legislative sausage is made, then land a job on Capitol Hill as a top aide to a senator or House member or as a key committee staffer.

What I didn't fully understand until I started was that the program was geared specifically to Capitol Hill staffers already several years into their careers. All the classes were held in the Hall of the States building on the Hill because it was easier for the young professionals to get from their offices to school. There were a couple of core courses on the philosophy and ethics of policy making, but most of the curriculum dealt with the arcane minutiae of the legislative process: budgetary policy making; handguns and public policy; agricultural subsidies and public policy.

GW was about three and a half miles away; to save money, I walked it most days instead of taking the Metro. I was, by a full decade, the youngest person in the program; I took classes during the summer and finished in two years instead of three. That last semester, I started to apply for jobs, shooting off résumés to the Senate foreign relations committee, the House intelligence committee, and dozens and dozens of House members and senators, especially the ones from Pennsylvania. By the time I graduated, I'd probably sent out hundreds of résumés. The other people in the program were either going back to their old jobs or parlaying their new graduate degrees into better spots in the vast network of unelected employees that make Capitol Hill function. But toward the end of that last semester, I was coming up empty and getting desperate. Finally, I accepted a position at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management as a federal investigator doing background checks on other federal employees seeking security clearances.

Then, on a May afternoon in 1988, just before graduation, one of my professors asked me to stay after class to discuss a private matter. I didn't know much about him, but I'd heard he had a big reputation as an expert in his field, and I'd certainly been impressed by what I'd seen in his class on leadership. In any event, I met with him after class, and it turned out to be the single most important meeting of my young life.

DR. JERROLD POST WAS a superstar at GW. He was a medical doctor specializing in psychiatry, and his principal course was on the psychology of leadership. What I didn't know was that he was also a former employee of the CIA. In the years since he left the agency, Dr. Post had appeared on many news programs as an expert in analyzing what makes various foreign leaders tick. He has been described in those interviews as one of the country's top profilers of foreign heads of state.

He asked how my job search was going.

Not so well, I told him, explaining that I was getting married in June and, because I needed income, had accepted the job at OPM.

"Well, have you ever given any thought to working at the CIA?"

"No, not serious thought." And I hadn't: I knew the CIA did analytical work, as well as a little of the spying, but it seemed to me as alien a government employer as NASA or the National Institutes of Health.

It turned out that Dr. Post, because of his love for the agency, tried to identify potential CIA candidates among the undergraduate and especially graduate student body at GW. He told me he'd been impressed by my analytical and writing skills in his class, and it seemed clear, he added, that I had a great interest in foreign affairs and international power politics. He didn't know whether the CIA and I would be a fit, but I was clearly interested in government service, he said, and the work at the agency might appeal to me. At a minimum, it couldn't hurt to have some preliminary conversations with CIA people.

He was right. Given my job search to date, what did I have to lose? Dr. Post picked up the phone and dialed up a guy he called Bill. He described my academic background and said a few nice things about me, then suggested to Bill that the two of us get together.

Less than a half hour later, I was ringing the buzzer to an unmarked office in an unmarked building in suburban Virginia, just across the Potomac River. A buzzer let me in, and Bill identified himself, first name only. We chatted for twenty minutes or so—in part about me, in part about the CIA, or at least the sanitized, unclassified version of the role the agency plays in the U.S. government and in the world. He asked whether I was game to take the next step in applying for employment. "Yes," I told him.

"Can you be at the GW medical school auditorium on Saturday at eight a.m.?" The reason, he said, was a battery of tests to determine whether interested candidates would move on to the next round or be shown the door.

Perhaps two hundred people showed up that Saturday morning; the vast majority, I would learn later, had answered a CIA recruiting ad. The drill involved three tests. First, they gave each of us a map of the world that had the borders of all the countries but no names; we had to fill in the country names. A lot of people, otherwise well educated, have trouble with this kind of exercise. They tend to identify large land-mass countries easily enough—China, India,

Russia—but smaller countries often trip them up. Think for a minute about the countries of Central America or parts of Africa. But I'd spent all those years as a child staring at the world map in my radio room. This was a breeze for map freaks.

Then it was on to a multiple-choice test. I still remember one question in particular: "The prime minister of Greece is (a) Andreas Papandreou, (b) U Thant, (c) Mao Tse-tung, or (d) Leonid Brezhnev." I'd had a paper route for five years as a kid and had read my production every day. And I was Greek. Still, this struck me as fairly elementary stuff for folks thinking about a career at the CIA. You didn't need to read *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. All you had to do is look at the front pages every day.

Finally, they gave us an extensive psychological exam. Most of the hundreds of questions were agree/disagree, such as "I like boxing." Well, I don't really have a strong position on boxing one way or the other, but there was no third option; it was either yes or no, agree or disagree. Just pencil in the appropriate circle. Okay, "I like boxing." Then, three hundred questions later, you'd get the same question again. I suppose you could have riffled back to the earlier question, but it would have been difficult, given the sea of penciled-in circles, and I didn't. It made me wonder what they learned about us from this kind of test, presumably not only from the answers but from contradictory answers. "My father was the disciplinarian in our house." Yes or no? There was no way I could screw up when that one was repeated. Answer: Yes, sir.

We had until noon, four hours in all, to finish these tests. I was done by 10:15 or so, got up, handed my booklet to the proctor, and walked out. I had absolutely no idea what to expect next.

A week later, Bill called. "Congratulations," he said. "You blew the doors off those tests." He asked whether I wanted to move forward. If so, the agency wanted to tee up a physical exam. If all was well, the physical would be followed by an interview with a team of psychologists. Actually, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and an anthropologist, the last striking me as a curious background for a CIA evaluator. But the exercise made sense: In effect, they were asking for expanded verbal answers to some of the yes/no, agree/disagree questions from the earlier test. One of the questions that has stayed with me all these years later: "Have you ever betrayed a friendship?"

"Good lord, I hope not," I said. "I don't think so."

"We'll readdress this question on the polygraph," one of my questioners said. But it was the right answer, and "absolutely not" was not. No one could know with certainty whether a friend had ever been betrayed. Words and deeds sometimes have unintended consequences. It's the ethical intent that matters.

Two weeks later, it was time to schedule the polygraph examination. I'd never taken a so-called lie-detector test in my life, and the prospect of one was unsettling. I called Dr. Post for some guidance; he was a psychiatrist, after all, and he probably had some experience with polygraph exams in his agency days. He was reassuring. The main thing, he said, was to try to make your mind completely blank. "Imagine you're at a drive-in theater, the movie's over, and all you see is the empty white screen. Visualize that screen and don't think about anything else." The questions would be yes or no, he said. Just answer them and you'll be fine. He also said the polygraph would probably be the last test: If you pass, you're in.

By the luck of the draw, my examiner was a thoughtful young woman who was both professional and sensitive to my visible anxiety. "I know you're nervous, just relax," she said. "I'm going to ask you some basic questions and I want you to answer me 'yes' or 'no.'" Then she wired me up: cuffs on an arm and an ankle, some sort of belt around my stomach, little sensors on the tips of my fingers. It was like an EKG. My nervousness was showing again. "Take a minute to calm down," she said, and apparently I did.

She asked all the normal questions: Have you ever stolen anything? (No.) Did you ever take drugs? (No.) Do you have a drinking problem? (No.) Are you gay? (No.) Are you responsible with your finances? (Yes.) I sounded boring even to my ears and wondered fleetingly whether the CIA could disqualify you for terminal dullness.

I'd answered everything truthfully, but there was still a small red flag. "You're reacting to one issue," she said. "So I'm going to ask you a couple of questions again." *Oh, great, what could this possibly be? I didn't lie. Oh, God, please don't be the gay question. Please don't be the gay question.*

In fact, she said I was reacting to something about my personal finances. "My finances are an open book," I said. "I've got one credit card with no balance, a few student loans, and that's about it." She asked me a few finance-related questions and we were done.

As I was readying to leave, I asked, "How'd I do?"

"You'll get a letter from us within the next four weeks," she said—and then she winked at me. The wink was my answer: I had made it. A month later, I got a letter. The return address just said "Office of Personnel, Vienna, Virginia." I was instructed to report to CIA headquarters in Langley on such-and-such day at such-and-such time to be interviewed by three offices for a possible position.

The first was in the Directorate of Operations. The group of people interviewing me liked my background in Middle Eastern studies and that I spoke a relatively difficult language. As the interview progressed, I thought it was going well. Then one person asked me an unexpected question: "What would your wife think about spending time in a hardship post—Sudan, say, or someplace like that?" The answer to that one was as close to a no-brainer as gets.

THROUGHOUT HIGH SCHOOL, I had never dated a Greek girl. This shouldn't have been a big deal, but our Greek American family was typical of most in America: There was incredible pressure to marry a Greek girl, and the pressure started early. By the time I was a sophomore in college, nineteen years old, Greek relatives and friends were looking for any excuse or opportunity to pair me up with this person's sister or that person's cousin. In May 1984, a friend of our family was getting married in Warren, Ohio, and naturally, we were all invited to the wedding. It was a huge affair, maybe five hundred people, Greek band, lots of liquor. Yeah, just like the movie. One guy at the wedding, Victor Tsimpinos, called his younger sister and invited her to crash the party; no one would know. I knew Victor but I had no idea he had a sister until my brother, Emanuel, tapped me on the shoulder and made the introduction. "John, have you met JoAnne Tsimpinos?"

She was attractive, and we chatted for a few minutes before wandering off to talk to other

people. But one of my aunts had spotted us, which was all she needed to push me to dance with my new acquaintance. JoAnne and I danced a couple of times, and I said after the last dance, "I'll give you a call sometime." Does that sound like a rock-solid commitment? Four or five days later, I got a call from a cousin, who immediately got on my case. "She's been waiting for you to call her," my cousin said. "If you tell a girl you're going to call, you should call." So I did. We dated casually until I left in January 1985 for the InterFuture scholarship, and we corresponded on a fairly regular basis while I was gone.

When I returned in July 1985, something was clearly bothering JoAnne, but I couldn't get her to say what. Instead, what I got were long, awkward silences over dinners or drinks or both. She would go silent for days or even weeks at a time, and I would have absolutely no idea what I'd done. It culminated with a scene on August 9, 1985, my twenty-first birthday, when we went out to dinner. This time, she wouldn't even make eye contact. We went to a bar afterward and it continued. Finally, I'd had enough.

"You know what? I'm taking you home. Let's go." I got up and left; she followed me out, and I drove her to her house.

"Call me when you feel like saying something," I said.

"Call me when you feel like apologizing," she said. *Apologize? For what? I haven't done anything wrong. This girl has some serious issues, but they're a complete mystery to me.*

Later, I learned what the problem was. A cousin of mine said that a friend of JoAnne's was telling her that I was probably cheating on her in London because that's what all American college boys do when they go overseas. JoAnne apparently was a true believer in the breathtaking theory of social behavior. There were only two things wrong with it: First, I had made absolutely no commitment to JoAnne—no expressions of love, no physical intimacy beyond the hugs and kisses permitted by Greek dating conventions. And second, I hadn't fooled around in London anyway.

I returned to school later that August. We had no contact until the following March, when I called to wish her a happy birthday. We ended up having a couple of dates, then no contact at all until the summer of 1987, when I visited her in Warren in June. Afterward, I invited her to come to Washington over the July 4 weekend. We had a great time, taking in a concert, seeing the sights, eating at some good restaurants. Just before she was to head back, I blurted out a proposal. Just crazy. And she accepted. Even crazier.

My buddies thought I'd gone off the deep end. A close friend, Gary Senko, reminded me of the repeated fights JoAnne and I had had and how, after the big one on my twenty-first birthday, I'd asked him to stop me—"physically, if necessary"—if I ever said I wanted to go back together with her.

"No, it's okay now, she's terrific," I told him. He remained skeptical. And with good reason: We married on June 25, 1988, as I was applying to the CIA, and almost immediately started to have problems. It was the silent treatment again, punishment for imagined slights that were never explained, much less addressed. Sometimes, it would last a day or two, occasionally, a week or two would pass without our speaking more than a sentence or two to each other.

SO, A HARDSHIP post, the CIA interviewer asked. Bullshit was not an option here. I had married a Greek American princess; our marriage, if not already in trouble just four months after the exchange of vows, had more warning signs than a runaway-truck lane on a mountain pass. Making this union work would be hard enough, I sensed, even in friendly confines. Her idea of comfortable living did not include Pittsburgh or Cleveland, let alone Khartoum.

“Honestly, she wouldn’t do it,” I said. “I know my wife. She’d hate it.”

There were a few pleasantries to follow, but not many: The interview was over.

A second interview, this one with the Directorate of Intelligence, seemed a success; they liked my academic background and the fact that Dr. Post had recommended me. But I learned later that they were oversubscribed with junior analysts and didn’t feel they could take on another one.

The final interview was also in the Directorate of Intelligence, where I was asked about my favorite graduate school course. “The Psychology of Leadership,” I said. That was Dr. Post’s course. I must have sounded so naïve to these people; they were all Post protégés, and here I was, a Post wannabe who knew nothing of their history. I stumbled blindly on.

“This guy did a lecture on Stalin’s mind-set during the Yalta Conference that I’ll never forget.”

“What did he say?” one of them asked. “What was it that really grabbed you?”

Dr. Post had described how Stalin had a much better understanding of Roosevelt’s and Churchill’s states of mind than they did of his. They underestimated Stalin, and he used that to his advantage to drive a harder bargain. Roosevelt was very ill by this time, and Stalin’s insistence on meeting at Yalta, along the Black Sea, required FDR to make a long, arduous trip. Stalin also strung out the meetings, I said, parroting Dr. Post, tiring the ailing Roosevelt and the aging Churchill and making them more vulnerable to his demands. In the end, FDR may well have agreed to things he otherwise might have rejected simply to get out of the room and get some rest.

They liked what they heard, but there was one more hurdle I had to clear. They gave me a fat folder of unclassified material, most of it newspaper clips, about Benjamin Netanyahu, who had just completed a tour as Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations. Take two hours, I was told, read everything, and write a two-page analytical profile that makes a prediction about Netanyahu’s political future in Israel.

My prediction was that based on his political support in the Likud Party and the respect he commanded among Labor Party leaders, Netanyahu almost certainly would be a leading candidate for prime minister by the mid-1990s. Netanyahu did become prime minister, a position he held from 1996 to 1999. (As of this writing, he is Israel’s prime minister once again.)

My extended Greek family, in America and in Greece itself, and my travel to a few Eastern European countries after my InterFuture scholarship in London, effectively held up all my clearances as the agency checked my bona fides. Meanwhile, I labored on at OPM, patiently checking clearances for other potential federal employees and waiting to hear whether I made the final cut. Finally, fourteen months after the interviews at CIA headquarters, I got my offer letter from the agency.

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