

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. RAYMOND A. SPRUANCE

20 December 1971 Middletown, R.I.

Q. Mrs. Spruance, before we begin talking about your husband's work as Ambassador to the Philippines, I would like to ask you some questions about his personal habits. What was his interest in music?

A. He enjoyed music but he did not have an ear for music. He had to learn about it but that that he learned about he enjoyed. He could recognize music and its composer almost as soon as the music began, whereas I would have to wait until I heard a great deal more of it before I could recognize it. So he certainly enjoyed and appreciated good music. I can remember however before World War II I enjoyed listening to the opera, but he had no interest in that.

I understand that he listened to classical music when he lived with Nimitz during the Second World War. After the war we owned a record player and I would buy records for us to listen to. After dinner he would say, "Let's listen to some music." If I played something that he did not recognize he might say, "I don't like that record." I would respond, "Raymond, you don't understand it. Listen for a few times and then perhaps you will like it." So he would, and once he understood it then he would like it.

One event in Monterey he particularly enjoyed was when Walter Bernstein and the New York Symphony played at the Fairgrounds. He really enjoyed being in the middle of all that classical music.

Q. Did he watch television?

A. I think we were the very last ones in the neighborhood to buy a television set, but when we did it was the very best, a color set. Up to that time we had been content with a radio. But he did enjoy watching the news and other amusements and he did watch television once we had bought one.

Q. What kind of programs did he like to watch?

A. He was indiscriminate. One of the last things he enjoyed was the Presidential campaign in 1968. He'd watch literally everything, the speeches, the candidates, and everything involved in a political campaign. In general, he liked to be entertained. For instance he would watch a television story that I thought was so corny that I couldn't stand it. (Note how he ~~would~~ was also entertained by movies during World War II, many of which were pretty bad.) He also watched Kennedy's funeral all day long but I couldn't stand it for that length of time. He seemed to have almost a childlike awe of the wonders of television. He enjoyed it.

Q. Did he like to watch movies?

A. He enjoyed almost any movie that was well done. He insisted on sitting through double features, even though the second feature may have been very bad. Even when I urged that we leave, he would insist that we see both movies. In the early years of our retirement we would go to movies two or three times a week, because we knew so few people. Moveis were usually preceded by dinner out. He also remembered what we had seen and what we hadn't seen, although they were all pretty much alike to me. He enjoyed a good play, although we didn't go very often because San Francisco was so far away. Seeing a play in San Francisco was a rarity.

Q. How about restaurants?



A. Well there are so many of them that I can't recall any particular favorite. In the early years of our retirement he took me out often in order to get me out of the kitchen. That would keep me happy. But he was always anxious to go out and see a movie in those early years of our retirement. But after we got stung by one or two bad ones, he would then trust my judgement as to whether or not a movie was worth seeing.

Q. What was his relationship with the Postgraduate School?

A. Simply great! When we first arrived out there, he was included in all the activities of the PG School. We were made to feel very welcome; sometimes I was overwhelmed that we received so many invitations to do things over there. So he was very interested in what was happening at the PG School. His being at the Postgraduate school seemed to have a great influence upon the young officer students. For example, one evening we went to see a musical called "South Pacific". When everyone was seated and before the play began the Superintendent, Rear Admiral Yeomans, announced to the audience that Admiral Spruance was a guest that evening. The entire audience rose and applauded. He was treated with great respect, and they would send a car and driver to pick him up for the various events. He really enjoyed it. Whenever a VIP was aboard, he was always included in the luncheon. However he did not get along well with the last regime. (That was Rear Admiral McNitt.) Mrs. Spruance became very quiet and was almost visibly upset when we talked about McNitt so I did not ask any more on that subject and we proceeded to the next subject.)

Q. Can you please relate the events that happened when you found out that President Truman wanted the Admiral to be Ambassador to the

Philippines?

Q. Raymond received a long distance telephone call from the Secretary of the Navy who was in Los Angeles at the time. He was asked to accompany the Secretary of the Navy on the flight back to Washington. I think the flight was on the day after Christmas. I was very excited and said, "This must be something very important." He said, "Why do you think that?" I said, "Maybe you are going to be recalled to Washington." I myself was very excited and raring to go! He was very quiet and was preparing himself for the trip. I was bustling around talking about Washington and how exciting it would be to move there. Of course at this time neither of us had any idea what would be asked of Raymond.

So we drove to Pasadena and had dinner with Helen Gunthur. He got on the plane away he went and that was that.

I stayed one more night with Helen Gunthur, and then I returned home ~~and~~ in a pouring rain. The house of course was empty and there was the Newport Paper lying in a puddle of water on the lawn. I wondered if it was worth going outside to get that paper. So I staggered out into the rain under an umbrella, picked up the newspaper, and read to my amazement the headlines that said ADMIRAL SPENCER HAD BEEN NOMINATED AS AMBASSADOR TO THE PHILIPPINES. I was paralyzed! This was such a shock to me, yet I was of course happy and delighted. It was just too much for me to comprehend. Then the telephone began ringing. Next day I received a letter from Raymond that began "Dear Margaret, keep this absolutely quiet. This is completely hush hush. I have been asked to go as ambassador to the Philippines and of course we're going because anything the President wants I shall do."



He returned the next day, and we were both very excited about going out to the Philippines. He looked upon it as a great challenge. We had been contemplating taking a trip anyways, because we had become restless in retirement.

We did not rent the house. We locked the door and away we went. At the advice of our insurance people, we left the house just as it was and we did not put anything away. While we were gone, our gardener went in the house every day to make sure everything was all right. We had a very busy time indeed getting ready for our trip to the Philippines.

I went up to San Francisco for 3 days to buy a new wardrobe. Raymond was told that he could find a good tailor out in Manila who could cut clothes to his size and in just two or three days. Of course we received a great deal of advice from the State Dept. as to what we should take and what kind of clothes, what weight was proper to wear. One of the most helpful things was a letter that I got from Mrs. Cruzens, who was the wife of the Naval Commander in Manila. She gave me a great deal of worthwhile advice on how to prepare for the Philippines, which I deeply appreciated. For instance she said that even though we were coming to the tropics I would find to my sorrow that formal clothes were worn quite often such as very ornate silk gowns. I think Raymond was told in great detail what he would need.

- Q. Did he talk much about what the problems would be out there?
- A. No, he did not. I don't think he realized just what was waiting for him out there. I asked him why he thought he had been selected. He replied that it was a very dangerous situation in Manila, that the HUKS were at the very door and that the State Dept. felt it

required a military man to handle the situation.

Q. Tell me about your trip?

A. It was a long trip by air. We stopped in Honolulu for a couple of days. It was a comfortable flight, the longest I had ever been on. I think it was a military plane, because I was the only woman aboard. He was busy every minute of the flight, talking to people about the situation in the Philippines. Engine trouble delayed our departure in Honolulu. That was fine with me because I got to see many of our old Honolulu friends such as the Dillinghams.

We arrived in Manila about 11 o'clock in the morning. We were a day late. We received an elaborate welcome and Raymond seemed to enjoy it. The press was there and he handled himself very well in a few brief statements that he made. I thought we were never going to get away from there. We then went to the residence and the very wonderful staff was lined up waiting to meet us. I had a personal maid, a little woman named Chakita. I was introduced to the number one cook and the number two cook and the launderer and the gardeners and I was very impressed. We staggered upstairs, worn with emotion and excitement. I said to Raymond, "What in the world am I going to do with a personal maid?" He said, "It won't take you long to find out." Years afterward at home when I had to be zipped up I would call "Chakita", and the Admiral would come to zip me up.

I found I was confined to the house until Raymond had been accredited by presenting his credentials. I wanted to get out of the house, but the secretary said I must stay inside until the ceremony was completed. The previous ambassador had left, so we had inherited an empty house. It was a lovely old residence.



It was a big, Spanish residence. It was where we should have stayed the entire time. It had a beautiful spacious drawing room, and handsome spiral stairs. You felt like a queen coming down those steps. It had a big, beautiful dining room. Our personal suite was very, very attractive. It had a big bedroom and a lovely sitting room. There was also a huge, old amusing bath. (It didn't function very well). I didn't mind that. And everything leaked when it rained. That's just the Philippines. We had plenty of people to move the great tubs that caught the water. The guest room was beautifully furnished, although it needed a bit of re-doing. One of our more important guests said it was one of the most beautiful bedrooms he had ever slept in. In summary, it was a very handsome old residence. It had a great wall and iron gate. The bedrooms and the lovely library were air-conditioned. The rest of the house had great fans, which I preferred.

The quarters we later moved into were air-conditioned upstairs only, because Raymond did not want the bottom to be air-conditioned. I would dress in the comfort of our air-conditioned bedroom, but when I walked out into the oppressive Manila weather it was like a physical blow; it was just awful. You just burst into perspiration! It was rather comfortable to sit downstairs; (as I did quite often) under those great old fans. It also kept the bugs and the gnats off you. Raymond had to make a determined effort to salvage those fans, because they were rapidly disappearing. They were perfect for the tropics.

We could not have candles in the dining room because of the overhead fans. Those candles were hot anyhow.

Q. How were you greeted and treated by the American staff?

A. They were definitely happy to see him. Raymond predecessor had been very unpopular. I don't think he Raymond could have gotten along without his secretary, Polly Hilburn who had been a State Dept. employee for years. She knew everything. He and the Deputy Chief of Mission, Julian Harrington, became great friends. I do suspect however that their initial attitude was that they couldn't understand why a military man had to fill that post when there were so many career StateDept. people available who were fully qualified.

In general though the Admiral was very happy and keenly interested in his new job. It was a real challenge. He seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. He suffered terribly in the heat, and I don't see how he managed to do what he did. His office was air-conditioned, and that helped. We would take an evening stroll in the garden of our second residence and that was very pleasant.

Q. In his letters home to Edward and Margaret he seemed well informed of the political situation. How did he make himself aware of what was going on?

A. He did not find this out through reading or research. On our trip out he had met a person who had written the history of Manila. (I can't think of his name, but you would recognize it immediately if I told it to you.) This man accompanied us on the trip to the Philippines, and Raymond talked with him a great deal. Raymond also read two books on the Philippines that this man had written.

Before Raymond went out to the Philippines, I don't think he realized what he was getting into. He loved the Philippines though



because of his earlier duty there, and he seemed to be very much aware of the political and economic abuses. The poor peasants had nothing, and Raymond would bring this up time and again but no one would listen to him.

Q. How did he feel about the Filipinos as a race?

A. They are a sweet and gentle people. They are like children.

He felt that, like most Orientals, they believed that honesty was not the best policy. (I hope that's off the record; that's a terrible thing to say.) He felt that the Filipinos approved graft as long as they did not get caught. The great crime is to be found out. The Chinese in Manila were a great people and hard workers. In contrast, the Filipinos are lazy. They had to be prodded. There was a bitter feeling between the two races, because the industrious Chinese were taking control of the local businesses.

The Filipinos are a clean people. I was always amazed at how clean their persons were in contrast to their miserable hovels. We had to go through a horrible living area in order to get to a new residential section. It was called "Forbes Park". We had to go through slums to get there, they just made me sick. There the Filipinos would be, dressed in elegant clothes and living in these slums.

Q. Did the Admiral circulate among the poor people?

A. Raymond visited the poor people in the country quite often when he was touring with Magsaysay. There was another man that went out with them then who had been sent out to help the people learn how to dig wells and to improve their agricultural efforts.

Those trips into the country were terribly hard on him. He would go back there in the hot weather in those rattly old planes, and he would return both thrilled and discouraged. He was very much impressed by the contrast between the American owned sugar plantations and those owned by the Filipinos. The Filipinos were well-paid and well-treated by the American owners, while on the Filipino owned plantations the peasants lot was just horrible. In later years after he had retired as ambassador to the Philippines, he grieved that the Philippines had regressed so badly. He was particularly sad on Magsaysay's death, and felt that it was a great blow to the Filipinos. He felt that if Magsaysay had lived, the Philippines would have progressed.

Q. What were the Admiral's general health and spirits?

A. He was very, very happy there, and years later felt that that was one of his greatest accomplishments, outside of the things that he had done during World War II.

Q. Why did he and Magsaysay get along so well?

A. Magsaysay was the man of the hour, and Raymond sensed that. Raymond knew the mood of the people and how unhappy they were with Querno. Magsaysay was just a large impressive man who seemed to be what the Filipinos needed. Raymond used to say, "I was a good judge of character." when he thought about how he sensed that Magsaysay was the man for the Philippines.

Magsaysay was adored by the people. On one occasion Raymond and I went to a party that was celebrating the 80th birthday of a man named Lopez. Magsaysay appeared and the people applauded and cheered him. He just radiated strength and honesty. We all looked up to him.



Q. Did Magsaysay and your husband become personal friends?

A. Oh yes. When Raymond finally left the Philippines, Magsaysay was very moved and said that he was losing his best friend. Mrs. Magsaysay was an exquisite person and never remarried. I still hear from her at Christmas time. In our early days in the Philippines we were wined and dined in great elegance and splendor by the people who were then in power. Magsaysay was really a country boy, and Raymond used to comment on how he must be so uncomfortable in those unaccustomed evening clothes.

Q. In that your husband advocated land reform, was there any tension or difficulty between him and the wealthy land owners?

A. I did not observe any tension. Raymond just felt that they had no intention of changing their ways, and they haven't.

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Q. But did they look upon the Admiral as somebody who was trying to upset their way of life?

A. Well I wasn't aware of it. But I did not sense any hostility from the wealthy land owners towards Raymond. We were always welcomed.

Raymond met monthly with American businessmen, and they approved of what he was doing.

Q. What kind of a person was Querno?

A. He was a typical Filipino. He was very wealthy because of his dishonesty and graft. He had every intetion of winning that 1953 election. He was a charming, gracious person. He never showed any of his antagonism towards the Admiral. But there definitely was antagonism there.

Q. How could you sense it?

A. I didn't sense it, but Raymond knew. Raymond was about to be declared *persona non grata*, because of his support for Magsaysay and his policies. In the heat of the campaign we were in Baugio. We fled up there as often as we could to escape the oppressive heat of Manila. We were sitting upon our beautiful balcony when we were told there was a telephone call for the Ambassador. After taking the phone call he returned and said, "Well, are you ready to go home?" I told him I was ready to go home, because I foolishly thought that something was going to happen to my husband. Some of the papers had favored Querno were being very hard on Raymond. Smiling like an imp he said, "Well, the Embassy just told me that Querno is about to declare me *persona non grata*." The implication was that Raymond would have to leave the country within 24 hours. My feelings were that it was all right with me, because things were in such a mess at the time. I was also worried because Raymond was suffering so much from the heat. Although he was well and did not look tired, I still knew that the heat was bothering him terribly. Well, Querno didn't dare do it, although there was a great *todo* at the time. And I think Raymond just enjoyed that more than anything. It was a perfectly amazing situation.

Q. What did your husband do to help Magsaysay get elected?

A. Magsaysay was Secretary of Defense, and constantly called upon Raymond and the Embassy to talk about the upcoming presidential elections. Magsaysay was very gloomy about the future of the country. Raymond suggested to him that he resign and run for president of the country himself. I suppose Querno knew about that.



Raymond said, "If you feel that way it's up to you." When he spoke to Magsaysay, in those times in the Embassy. Much to our delight and surprise he did resign and threw his hat into the ring.

The campaign got underway in a messy way, and towards the end we were all very discouraged. It was at that time that Raymond advised them to study what Querno was doing and then to do the same thing themselves. During the course of the election Magsaysay kept coming to the Embassy to see Raymond, until Raymond finally told him that he must not come again because it was against his best interest.

Q. How did your husband feel about Querno?

A. He knew what he was and felt very strongly that he had to get rid of Querno. Querno was corrupt, but from what I hear from friends who had just returned from the Philippines, he was not as corrupt as President Marcos. He had lots of money and his wife was just dripping in jewels.

Q. What were your duties as the Ambassador's wife?

A. Smiling! I was responsible for entertaining, which is an old, old story. I was involved in YMCA meetings, and things like that. I was also very much involved in an organization that took care of the illegitimate children that were given birth by Filipino women, whose fathers were American soldiers and sailors from World War II. Some were babies and some were college age. I had an obligation to help these groups when they tried to raise money. I was very interested in the YWCA. When I first got out there there was a prevalent feeling that the Americans

and the Europeans were doing all the work raising the monies for the Philippine Red Cross. We had to get across to these very intelligent Philippine women that it was their responsibility and not ours to raise the money. The Philippine President of the Red Cross came to me and asked me what I was going to do to raise money in terms of a great ball or something of that nature. The Chens who represented the Republic of China, were the dean of the Embassy corps. What the Philippines wanted to do was to have one grand ball where they could wear all their beautiful clothes, while the Americans and Europeans did all the work. That's still going on. I tried to talk to Mrs. Lopez, who lived across the street, as well as the other wealthy Filipino women who had slews of servants and treated them like dirt. I talked frankly with them but to no avail. But my work with the Red Cross and the YWCA are what ambassadors' wives all over the world do.

Q. Did you have a competent staff that could handle the social obligations of the Embassy?

A. The staff was very competent, and Polly Hilburn was a great help. We would get the younger couples within the embassy involved in the planning and execution of these events, so that they could have a better appreciation of how these things were run. I would give Polly a list of two or three attractive couples that I thought we should invite. Polly would respond that those people already been invited recently, and came back with her own recommendation of who we should invite so that we could "spread the wealth." Our protocol officer would check



the table settings very carefully, but nothing ever worked because the Filipinos were so informal. We just could not count on who would be there and who would not be there for our parties and dinner. After while we just gave up trying to do any formal seating arrangement. We never sat down to a formal dinner. Mrs. Cannon told me they had the same problem in Turkey, where you just couldn't count on anybody showing up. They finally gave up and entertained as the Turks did, very informally, I remember once my embassy official said, "Mrs. Spruance, we have to teach these Filipinos to do things formally." Of course that was ridiculous. The poor protocol officer. He would stay there until the last minute, frantically shifting placecards.

Q. What was your relationship with the other embassies?

A. We were very close to the British and the Chinese. We liked the Australians also.

Q. Did you ever weary of the many social demands?

A. Yes, I did, I really did. I was recently reading my diary, and I don't see how we did it. Of course, we were younger then. At first we went to nearly all the cocktail parties because we felt we had an obligation. At those parties we would only stay a few minutes and then leave. But after while where there were just too many, and we stopped going to all of them. The dinners were late, ~~and we~~ 8 to 8:30, and we would always leave immediately afterward. Ambassador Chen was there, and the moment he left the rest of us could follow. He always left early. Here is a typical occasion: There was a dinner for the vice president (presume of the Philippines) and there was a great to do about

whom to invite. Of ourcse Raymond didn't get at involved in that. There was much coming out and rearranging the seating. The dinner was set for 8:00, about 7:30 Conchita my maid came in and said that the vice president was downstairs. Well, I was ready a half hour early so I went downstairs and chatted with him. (This was the vice president under Querno). I asked him where his wife was. He responded that she had decided not to come down from Baugio, and that was the reason why he was early that evening. He brought his aide instead. And that happened often, that sort of thing. I caught the eye of our protocol officer. I think he sensed something was wrong. I got word to him that the vice president's wife would not be coming. So the ppor protocol officer had to rearrange all the seating. Of orouse it made no difference to the Filipinos, becuae they did not believe in formal seating arrangements anyway.

Q. What do you recall about some of your more famous visitors?

A. The Vice President and Mrs. Nixon were with us once for about 4 days. They stayed down in the Manila Hotel. We were with them constantly. We liked them very much.

Q. What were your impressions of the Nixons?

A. We were going from orning to night and everyone was exhausted. They didn't want any big parties, so we had several shoice dinner parties with about 10 people. Magsaysay thoroughly approved of that and was very relaxed with them. Pat Nixon was a vision of loveliness, with the most beautiful clothes. One night Raymond had a very small dinner with Nixon and Magsaysay and perhaps three or four others. I think Pat Nixon



has learned a great deal; at that time she was very brittle. Nixon was just marvelous. Raymond was most impressed with Nixon's ability to size up his audience and speak to the young people; Nixon was very popular with his Philippines audiences. He said, "I've never heard a better talker than I did when Nixon spoke to the Chamber of Commerce." But Pat Nixon was like a little icicle. She wasn't like Mrs. Roosevelt.

The request from Washington prior to their arrival was that there were to be no big parties. The Philippine ladies put on a very beautiful and elaborate luncheon for Mrs. Nixon. It was very fancy and everybody was dressed to the nines for luncheon. There were perhaps about 20 ladies that attended. Later Mrs. Nixon asked why there wasn't a larger luncheon for her. I replied, "Well, Mrs. Nixon we would have given anything to have had a larger luncheon, but we had a request from the Embassy not have any large affairs." I told her the difficulty we had had deciding who the 20 would be that got to attend the luncheon, because the feeling of position in the Philippines was very intense.

We had a visitor sometime later who were direct descendents of Theodore Roosevelt. I was mentioning to the wife how beautifully dressed Mrs. Nixon was, how she always seemed to have exactly the right thing for each occasion. Mrs. Roosevelt replied that she and Alice Longworth were both devoted to Pat. (At this point I think Mrs. Spruance implied that Mrs. Roosevelt told her that because she had lived in the Philippines years ago, that she was able to give Pat Nixon good advice about what

she should wear on her Philippine trip. She also said that Mrs. Roosevelt mentioned they were doing all they could to support the Nixon's politically.)

Q. Tell me about the visit of Eleanor Roosevelt?

A. She was making a general visit of the world. She won my heart; I thought she was simply great. I can remember how my family who are Republicans disapproved when I told them I would be entertaining Mrs. Roosevelt. Well, she just swept us all off our feet.

Q. How about John Foster Dulles and his wife?

A. They were very formal. But she was lovely and we paddled around together. I took Mrs. Dulles on shopping expeditions in an air-conditioned car, because Ambassador's car was an old thing that had no air-conditioning. I understand the Ambassador now has an air-conditioned car. Mrs. Roosevelt didn't want big parties, so Raymond had only two dinners for her and there were only 10 people at each dinner. They were great success because that's what she wanted. One of the dinners was in the old mansion (wonder what that is) and everything was so lovely and she really appreciated it. All of the guests were Filipinos, because 12 to 14 of them. Mrs. Roosevelt sat perfectly enthralled listening to the tales of one of the ~~Philippine~~ Filipino ladies about what she had gone through during and immediately following the war. This lady told about the terrible things that the Japanese did just before the Americans liberators arrived. Mrs. Roosevelt asked why we Americans had never been told of these atrocities. Somewhere along the line an American who had remained in the Philippines during the war had been setn to report the many



atrocities, but the story went that he broke down and never could tell all the things that had happened. Well, Mrs. Roosevelt said, "This must be written up!" Of course, it never has been.