

CHAPTER 17

FIRESIDE CHAT WITH RICHARD I. BLOCH¹

Interviewer: George Nicolau²

George Nicolau: I have an enviable assignment today. I think all of us celebrate the career and life of Richard Bloch in this Fireside Chat. We're going to talk about his skill and wisdom as an arbitrator, in addition to all of the other lives he has led. And, we hope to spend a little bit of time on his brilliance as a magician.

Rich knows, and he is somewhat concerned about it, that the questions I am going to ask today have been in the custody of Price-Waterhouse. But I have assured him that he is not going to be graded on his answers.

[At this point, after extolling Bloch's brilliance as a magician, interviewer Nicolau drops his cane and asks Mr. Bloch to pick it up. As Bloch leans over to do so, Nicolau pulls a full bouquet of flowers out of Bloch's ear, shouting as he does so, "Rich, I told you to leave this stuff at home!" Bloch and the audience could not stop laughing.]

George Nicolau: There was an article in the Washington Post a few years ago that was entitled *The Two Sides of Rich Bloch*. And, ladies and gentleman, if there was ever an understatement, that's it.

In addition to being the husband of a constitutional law professor and a father of two lawyers, Rebecca and Michael, who are public defenders, I can count at least 11 sides of Rich Bloch: magician, musician, music teacher, English teacher, hockey player, law school professor, founder of a magic effects company, mediator, arbitrator, National Academy of Arbitrators President, and theater owner. Should I go on?

While all of that has been successful, there's always been one problem. His English professor, Jim Cox, back at Dartmouth put

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it best: “Mr. Bloch, you write with imagination, with charged and passionate prose and literary impulse. But, sir, all of that is often being used as substitute for thought.” Oh, well, you can’t excel in everything.

Rich, we don’t have a lot of time. So tell me, what do you want to do with the rest of your life?

Richard Bloch: Get off this stage.

George Nicolau: Let’s begin at the beginning. Tell us about New Jersey, about your folks, and tell us about Billie Richards.

Richard Bloch: My mother’s name was Hannah, and everyone called her Billie. When my dad passed away, she tried to figure out what it was we were going to do. And she was a pistol. She went, initially, to work for my uncle, who was in the business of importing lingerie. He would put his label on it and then sell it in this country. She felt that was a pretty easy thing to do. So after a little while, she requested his permission to kind of split off and start her own little company. So she made up some labels that said “Billie Richards Company,” and she began that little operation. She wholesaled lingerie out of the trunk of her car up and down the Delmarva Peninsula and those states and kept us going. She was a terrific lady.

George Nicolau: Where did you grow up in New Jersey, what town?

Richard Bloch: Well, born in East Orange, New Jersey. I grew up, well, growing up might be a stretch, but I got older in Livingston.

George Nicolau: Did you ever think that was going to happen?

Richard Bloch: That’s not going to happen.

George Nicolau: I understand that when you were three years old or maybe a little older, you picked up magic in some way. How did that happen?

Richard Bloch: I did. I was seven, at that point. I was being raised by a very lovely couple, my aunt and uncle. My mother was on the road as a saleslady, and I had a lot of time on my hands. This is an absolutely true story. And I walked down the street—

George Nicolau: You mean the rest of it is not going to be true?

Richard Bloch: That’s pretty much the case.

George Nicolau: Okay.

Richard Bloch: I went down the street and there was a little magic store at the end of the street. I walked in, and there was a guy doing miracles behind the counter. I was just in awe. I was just hooked.

I said to him, "I want to work here. You need to hire me." And he said, "Well, what's your experience?" I said, "Experience? You know, I'm seven." But I really wanted to be there. And so I lied. I said, "Well, I don't have any experience, but my father is a great magician." I had seen a magician only once, the year before when I was in first grade. I didn't remember him, but I remembered his name. It was Ted Collins. I said to the guy, "My dad is Ted Collins." The guy was really impressed, and he said, "Okay. Well, if your dad is Ted Collins, you can work here. You come in after school, on the weekends, and I'll teach you the craft, and we'll have a great time." I was thrilled. As I was walking out of the store, I turned and I said, "I don't know your name." He said, "It's Ted Collins."

It was a true story. I worked there eight or nine years. In those days, magic shops were really a part of the magic community, and entertainers would stop by on their way to New York. They would take me aside and teach me. It was a pre-graduate education.

George Nicolau: What hooked you on that magic?

Richard Bloch: I don't know the answer to that. I still don't know the answer to that. It has something to do with a different type of performance, something where you're for the most part breaking that fourth wall. You're talking to the audience. You're having interplay. And you're working hard to overcome what might be an adversary relationship to entertain with that sort of an approach.

George Nicolau: Now at some point early on, magic went in the background a bit, and music took over.

Richard Bloch: Yes, I worked my way through college.

George Nicolau: No, no, before that. How did music begin in your life? Were you tooting a horn at three?

Richard Bloch: I think at six or so. My mother ponied up to rent a trumpet, which I thought would be a perfect instrument, mainly because it was shiny, I guess. I played that and other brass instruments while I was growing up and went through high school and college playing.

George Nicolau: Well, at college you were at some point even teaching music.

Richard Bloch: Yes, I was working in a restaurant during college. And I was playing with a band, and then in the breaks I would perform magic. One of the patrons in the restaurant—her husband was the superintendent of schools in a nearby town—I think it may have been that he was really impressed with my musical abilities. It might also have been that their district supervisor of

music was picked up on a morals charge. They needed someone to replace him immediately. So, they hired me. So, I spent the year teaching music in Windsor, Vermont. And it was just one of the great years of my life.

George Nicolau: Now, you'd teach the classes to the high school students?

Richard Bloch: Yes, I taught everything. I mean, the district supervisor of music did everything. They didn't have any music teachers, so I taught all instruments. I didn't know how to play them, but I could say, "Well, no, that's not right. Do something different." That was brilliant. At the end of the year, we held a concert out on the lawn in the middle of the town. People had limited means. It meant that if they were buying and renting instruments for their kids, they had scraped to do it. And they were very excited. I felt they came out for this springtime serenade with the band and the orchestra, and it was like the "Music Man" standing out there doing this. The people just loved it. I think it's one of the things that made me want to stay in teaching. I just absolutely adored it.

George Nicolau: Yes, when you were playing in this band in college, were you getting paid for this as well?

Richard Bloch: The one in the restaurant, yes, yes paid. Kind of. We may have gotten dinners, I don't know.

George Nicolau: Before we go any further, there's a wonderful lady in the audience who has many more degrees than you do. How did you meet her?

Richard Bloch: Sue and I met on a blind date that had been in the works for years. My grandmother and her neighbor decided that we really ought to get together, which needless to say was the kiss of death for both of us. We weren't going to do it. Finally, we both found our way clear to agree. I put aside an evening. Sue was a little more cautious.

Sue was a cheerleader in high school and wasn't about to bring some slug to a basketball game. So she suggested that I drop over that night about 10:30. And I said, "Okay." And then she said, "And by the way, I'm leaving tomorrow morning to be an exchange student in Brazil. So I have to be back by 11." And I said, "Okay." And so we went out. I talked as fast as I could. And when we got back, I really knocked her out. And I know that because in her diary she said and I read, "I met this nice guy this evening, Rich Black." And that was it.

George Nicolau: From that point on you went to Dartmouth. Am I right?

Richard Bloch: Correct.

George Nicolau: Was Susan there, too? Or was she somewhere else?

Richard Bloch: Sue went to Smith. And Dartmouth, at the time, was all male, but a lot more fun than Smith. So Sue would come up every weekend and—

George Nicolau: There's a rumor that the first time you asked her to come up, and she did so, and she had to drive or go on a bus for four hours. You weren't there when she arrived.

Richard Bloch: No.

George Nicolau: Is that rumor true?

Richard Bloch: I think it is, yes.

George Nicolau: Well, do you want to tell us what you were doing, because you were meeting this beautiful woman that came up in a four-hour trip?

Richard Bloch: I knew this wasn't going to be much fun. Well, I had been injured the year before playing hockey for Dartmouth, so my hockey career in that context was over. But I hooked on to a kind of a semi-pro hockey team, and I was playing with them. We were on the road. What could I do? So, I invited Sue before I knew that we had games that weekend. You're not going to stay home from a game, you know. My parents were up that weekend to watch the game. So my dad picked up Sue and brought her to the games. She loved that.

George Nicolau: She stuck by you for some reason or other. After Dartmouth Law School, where?

Richard Bloch: I went to the University of Michigan.

George Nicolau: Congratulations.

Richard Bloch: Thank you.

George Nicolau: What years were they?

Richard Bloch: Well, it was somewhat after you went, I know. I went to law school from 1965 to 1968. During that time, Sue came and got Masters degrees in everything I know, math and computer science. After that, we stayed on, and I joined the faculty of the business school briefly. Sue decided I was having too much fun doing that and law. Sue got another degree in computer science and then decided to go to law school. Sue basically just likes being a student. I think her next step was going to be a dental hygienist. She had run through all the other degrees. So we were in Ann

Arbor a long time. I went on for more graduate work at Michigan, and Sue finished law school there.

George Nicolau: I've been told by others, and I want to make sure that it's true, that while at Ann Arbor, you spent more time on the bandstand than in the study hall. Is that true?

Richard Bloch: It was a close race.

George Nicolau: How did that happen? You were in a strange town.

Richard Bloch: When I got there, I was looking around for work to pay tuition, and I found that the best-paying job was a musician. So we started a little band there. We played in a local beer hall, and it got to be very popular. The band was a good one, and we played there for a long time. In fact, it went on for some 16 years after I left. I did spend a lot of time there.

George Nicolau: You were really schooled in music at that point. And I understand that somehow, in Florida, there was an opportunity to really go forward on this; am I right?

Richard Bloch: Yes.

George Nicolau: What happened there?

Richard Bloch: Well, it's relevant to say that Sue and I had been married for a year at that point. We got a call from the Jackie Gleason Show. Some of you may remember that.

George Nicolau: I only remember Ralph Kramden; but go ahead.

Richard Bloch: Gleason had just moved from New York to Miami, and they asked us to come down and play on the show. And we did. So we went down to Miami, and they treated us like gods. I mean, they gave us the Presidential Suite in the Fontainebleau Hotel, and it was really amazing.

So we were there. We were literally on the beach, just looking around and saying, "How did this ever happen?" Gleason's agent, from the William Morris Agency, came over and said that he would like to represent us. They would keep us working all the time, and it was going to be great. I was pretty impressed. I turned to Sue—I had finished my first year of law school—and I turned to Sue and said, "You know, look at this. This is pretty terrific and this probably is going to give us a great life. What do you think?" And Sue said, "I think you should do . . ."—this is a theme that you will hear again and again—". . .you should do whatever lights that fire in your heart. But, you're going alone."

I should say this: I think at this point, contrary to those words, this has not been a solo flight. Throughout our life together, when-

ever I have done something good, Sue has been my cheerleader. And when I've done something muddy and crazy and impetuous, she has been my cheerleader. And when I've done something incredibly thoughtless and stupid, she has forgiven me. And we're into about 47 years of that, and I love you for it. Thank you.

George Nicolau: Now, Rich thought that his hour might end right here and he wouldn't have to—

Richard Bloch: Just hoping.

George Nicolau: Well, it isn't going to end. I want to take you back to law school. Even though you were on that bandstand playing your heart out, something else happened there. Did you meet some arbitrators?

Richard Bloch: Oh, I certainly did. There were basically three people who have changed my life. One of them George has already alluded to: Jim Cox, who was my English professor. That's an accurate quote from his letter. His personal remarks to me over the course of two or three years were far less charitable. He taught me to think. He taught me to be demanding of what is coming out of your head. The second person—I've said this before when I interviewed him a couple of years ago—was Ted St. Antoine. Ted absolutely set a fire, a blaze, in terms of my regard for what I saw as a life's calling: arbitration and getting involved in collective bargaining. So, Ted and Russ Smith and Bob Fleming and others who were not in the academic community in Michigan were incredibly supportive and helped me immensely, not only in school, but thereafter.

George Nicolau: When you were in law school and you had these other careers going, what really led you to become the least expensive person in the room?

Richard Bloch: When I left law school, I interviewed for a variety of jobs, and I did take one with a management law firm. But having left law school, I never wanted to do anything other than be an arbitrator. The venture into advocacy was something I wanted to do to learn about the real world with this thing, but there was never any question in my mind that at some point, perhaps when I got a little older, I would try to establish myself as a neutral. So I left the firm.

George Nicolau: You left the firm and then what happened?

Richard Bloch: Well, I went into teaching.

George Nicolau: That's number five, I think.

Richard Bloch: Back to Michigan. I went back to do some graduate work and began teaching at the business school at Michigan

and, thereafter, spent some years on the faculty at University of Detroit. Sue, at that point, had decided that prior to going for the dental hygienist degree she would go to law school. When Sue graduated she was offered a clerkship with Justice Marshall on the Supreme Court. It was very clear her job was a lot better than mine, so we left and went to Washington. That's when I went into full-time arbitration.

George Nicolau: How did that begin? I mean, where were you in full-time arbitration? Did you have a mentor early on?

Richard Bloch: Yes. There are, unfortunately, few people in this room who will remember Dave Miller. But Dave was one of the great, great arbitrators in our time and a former president of the Academy. Dave, at that point, was the arbitrator for Alcoa, among others, Alcoa and (then) the Aluminum Workers before they merged with the Steelworkers. Dave, at the urging of Russ Smith and Ted, took me on as an intern. I worked with Dave for several years. Dave died very suddenly in—I think it was 1970, I'm not sure, maybe a year later. They asked me to replace him as the arbitrator for Alcoa and that group, and I did. It was extraordinary. I mean, it was just terribly, terribly unfortunate and, of course, a great opening for me as well.

George Nicolau: Well, before that happened, you were working for him. Were you sitting at hearings, writing his opinions . . .

Richard Bloch: Yes.

George Nicolau: . . . and other things like that? Because that's the way a lot folks have started. Is that it?

Richard Bloch: Yes. Dave would take me along. I would sit in on the hearings. At one point he said that he had an enormous caseload, and he suggested to the parties that as long as I was there, as long as I was writing the decisions, I might as well sign them and be the arbitrator of record. He would countersign all the opinions. We did that for some years. He, too, was an amazing instructor and a brilliant arbitrator.

George Nicolau: But at some point, other than that chairmanship, you went on to be a full-time arbitrator.

Richard Bloch: Yes.

George Nicolau: I assume with all that experience you probably had a ton of cases the first year. Right?

Richard Bloch: I think there was one.

George Nicolau: Good.

Richard Bloch: That was a really good one, though. But, it was just one. I think the second year I might have had three. But it looked like things were really moving.

George Nicolau: Let's go back for a moment or two to magic. I want to ask you some more questions about that. For those of you who can't afford trips to Magic Castle or Las Vegas or Mediterranean cruises, I can tell you that this man is a brilliant magician, a master. How come you picked it up again, and when did you do that? There was another person here, I think, right?

Richard Bloch: Yes. When our children started to become of age where, in my judgment, they needed entertainment, I started pulling out the old trunks and picking out stuff and doing things for them and kind of fell back into it. I didn't have time to perform. It takes a lot of time. So I was just doing it for them. At some point, it got to the point where they were just pleading with me not to do another birthday party for them. "Why can't we have a pony like all the kids?" So I started to invent things for other magicians. These little gizmos and gimmicks were being marketed by various organizations in the country. Some of them got to be pretty popular. I got a call one day and my secretary said—

George Nicolau: But before that call, I want to go back because these two children, who adore you, said that whenever there was a dinner guest, you had taught them to disappear. He would ask everyone to close their eyes and count to three, and the children would run upstairs. They had disappeared. Well, I understand from both Rebecca and Michael that they began to understand this was a way to get them to bedtime, and they didn't want to get to bedtime, so they would come back down again. That cannot be true.

Richard Bloch: It is true. It was a scam that I had devised to get them to go to bed. I said, "We'll all do a magic trick. The guests will close their eyes. I'll snap my fingers. When I do that, you run upstairs and go to bed, and it'll be great." It worked for a couple of weeks. After that, they caught on. That's true.

George Nicolau: Now, that phone call.

Richard Bloch: Yes. The phone rang, and my secretary said, "There's someone on the phone who says he's Orson Welles." I said, "This is nonsense." I picked up the phone and I said, "Bullshit, who is this?" And it was Orson Welles. He had purchased something that I had developed, and he wanted to talk about it.

Orson Welles was an avid magician. Spent many years traveling doing shows all over the world with Rita Hayworth, at the time that he was married to her.

He was going to go on the Merv Griffin Show the next night. He just bought this thing, and he wanted to do it on Merv Griffin. I said, "Wow, you might want to spend a little more time," and then I thought, "Am I really going to tell Orson Welles to rehearse?" So we just talked for a long time about this. He said, "This is quite wonderful. Do you have anything else?" I said, "I have notebooks full. Yes." He said, "Well, if you're ever in L.A., call me and we'll have dinner." I said, "Great! How about tomorrow night? Eight o'clock." He said, "Okay." And I got on the plane the next night and went out. He had a favorite restaurant in L.A. on Melrose Avenue called Ma Maison. It was a very exclusive restaurant. It was so exclusive that it had an unlisted phone number. I walked in; I was a little early. The waiter was setting the table, and he's setting it for three places. I said, "Ah, will Mr. Welles be bringing someone else?" He said, "Yes. Monsieur Welles will be bringing his dog." I said, "A dog? He's bringing a dog to this restaurant?" And the guy said, "Oui, Monsieur, and be very careful because the dog bites." I said, "Okay." Welles came in, and he had this tiny little poodle under his arm. He sat down, and he put the poodle on the chair next to him. They had a dish of water, and the dog was licking the water. I didn't quite know what to say. I just said, "Nice dog." And he said, "Yes. And she bites!" So that was our initial meeting—and then he was marvelous.

He was absolutely head over heels, wanting to talk magic all the time. Had no interest whatsoever and would not—he was very clear—would not talk about cinema and the theater and things that I really wanted to hear about. We had these frequent meetings, and I did a little writing for him on a show that we were trying to get on television.

George Nicolau: Well, in addition to "Citizen Kane," there was someone else as I recall. Was it Davy Marlin Jones?

Richard Bloch: Yes. Davy Marlin Jones was a theater director in Washington, also an avid magician. About that time, I decided that I would like to try and start performing really for the first time. I had done shows as a kid and up into and through college, but I really didn't know anything about working my way around a stage. When I was sitting with Orson, Orson was telling me I should do this and that, and Davy was a theater director by training. He was

the third of the triumvirate that really changed my life. I would do performances. He was a blistering critic and a great teacher.

I would send videotapes back after each performance, and he would critique it. There was one prop I was working with that wasn't really playing very well. I didn't know why. I kept trying it, and I kept sending him back requests for guidance. He finally said, "I've got it. Here's why it's not playing well. That prop is far more interesting than you are. Get rid of it." So I did. He was amazing.

George Nicolau: Do you want to tell the group about Rebecca's wedding?

Richard Bloch: We have a long history—I don't know where this came from—but we have a long history of some practical jokes being played on one another. Our kids are inveterate jokers. Again, I guess they got it from Sue. So at our daughter's wedding, Mike, our son, and I had spent the better part of a year trying to figure out just what it was we would do, and we finally came up with it. I built a breakaway antique table. We had the hotel bake a surrogate wedding cake, not the real one. And so, the scene was set.

During the wedding, I went up and grabbed the mic and I said, "We had a wonderful disclosure today. Aunt Letty Steinhart, 96 years old, in Portland, Oregon, found out that Rebecca was going to get married. She can't be here. But she told me of a family tradition of which I was unaware. It's the wedding table. It turns out this table has been in our family since the 18th century, 1765. So, Letty, through the powers of Federal Express, has made it possible to have not only the table here tonight, but she baked a cake for the happy couple." And we put that on there. I said, "I think Rebecca and Jorge (her husband) and everyone should come, and let's cut the cake."

As planned, Mike, our son, was not there. He was way down the corridor. So when we got up there, I said, "Gee, where's Mike? Where is Mike?" And someone said, "He's in the men's room." I looked down and I said, "Oh, no. There he is." And here's Mike running full speed into the room. When he was about four feet from the table, he became airborne, as if he had tripped, and he fell into the table and the cake. The table smashed to smithereens, and the cake was all over him. I just said, "Ah, man. 1765. What a... I'm really sorry."

George Nicolau: Now, if you wish to see this out on YouTube, it is on YouTube. I won't ask you about Mike's Bar Mitzvah.

Richard Bloch: Oh, yes. Well, that wasn't intentional.

George Nicolau: What do you mean it wasn't intentional?

Richard Bloch: Was this the one with the watch?

George Nicolau: No; the tooth.

Richard Bloch: With the what?

George Nicolau: Tooth.

Richard Bloch: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, I told Mike that I didn't think he could get through his Bar Mitzvah talk without cracking up. He said, "You can't make me crack up." Well, it had to be subtle. So I took some black paper and papered over a couple of my front teeth. During one of his recitations, I just gave him a big smile. It looked like something out of a Willie Nelson concert. But he did not crack.

George Nicolau: I know. But he won't forget that.

Richard Bloch: No. It's war.

George Nicolau: Now, let me, for a moment, combine magic and arbitration. Houdini's real name was Erik Weisz. How did your real name surface?

Richard Bloch: Well, I was adopted. My father's name was Simon. When he died, my mother remarried and I adopted my stepfather's name, Bloch.

George Nicolau: Well, how did that surface during your arbitration period?

Richard Bloch: There is a great story about that. I was serving as the Chair of the Foreign Service Grievance Board for some time. There was a very, very heartrending matter before us. A man—it's public record, so I can say his name, I still remember it, Tiajoloff—Mr. Tiajoloff was a prisoner of war during World War II. When he was released, the United States government provided for a certain war reparation pay or hazard pay or prisoner of war pay. They wouldn't give it to him. From all appearances, he had been just royally screwed. So now he came to the grievance board and filed a grievance. He was about 20, 40 years too late. It was a little untimely. But the State Department was very rational about it. They waived any timeliness arguments, and we would hear the case.

The grievant came with maybe 10,000 pages of documentation. I mean it was just unbelievable. I kept setting hearing dates for him, and he never could bring his case. Within a day or two of the hearing, he would call and say, "I'm not ready. I've retained

new counsel. They need time.” And we kept giving him postponements. But it went on for several years. At some point, in fairness to everyone, I had to say, “Mr. Tiajloff, this is it. If you do not appear for the next hearing, I am going to dismiss the case for lack of progress. I have to.” So, sure enough, he did not appear, and I did dismiss the case.

He then sued me in New Jersey as Chair of the Board. He had gone to the East Orange, New Jersey, Hall of Records. I don’t know why. And he looked for my name, my birth certificate; he couldn’t find it. It’s because he didn’t know the name that I was born under. He then concluded and made part of his two-count complaint the following facts or alleged facts: That the State Department was controlling my decisions by systematically removing all records of my existence. That’s count number one. But count number two was genius. It was that, because I did not legally exist, my decisions were void ab initio. And that was it. The case didn’t make it far. If it weren’t such an unhappy circumstance, it would be a funnier story.

George Nicolau: Now in your magic career, I think you’ve been all over the world with a companion lecturer.

Richard Bloch: Yes.

George Nicolau: Your last trip, I believe, was an attempt to smooth things over with North Korea.

Richard Bloch: Yes. That might be a little overstated, at least from my standpoint. But, yes, three of us were invited by the North Korean government in April, to go over there and, from the United State’s side, what we were trying to do was to establish an exchange program, not unlike when Nixon did the ping-pong diplomacy. So our premise was we would go over there and perform a little bit, and they would send three of their performers back to the States.

So we went over in April. There were some 800 performers that had been invited by the North Korean government. We were all invited to what was called the Spring Festival of the Arts. There were performers from every aspect of entertainment. There were opera singers and gymnasts. We actually traveled with the Moscow Circus, and they were gymnasts. Everybody. And it coincided with the 100th birthday anniversary of Kim Il Sung, father of the country. It was... I don’t know how to describe it... there is the hope that this... we don’t know whether the program is going to work. We went over there, and there were performers over there that we were scheduled to meet. We did not meet with them. Part of that

delegation got to talk to them for a few minutes. It is not yet clear whether—they are scheduled to come over here in about three or four weeks—it's not clear whether that's going to happen at this time, mainly because when they launched their firecracker over there and it didn't work, then all the talk about nuclear testing and everything else, the State Department right now is not wild about giving visas to people to come over from there. But we're hoping that it will happen.

The trip itself was a mixture of—it was incredibly interesting. We were there for eight days. We performed three times in a 2,700-seat theater, and it was packed. I like to think that it was because they knew I was coming. The reality was they were all told to be there and to applaud.

It was a very frightening trip in a lot of respects. We were treated fine. There was almost never any question of personal safety involved. We were treated quite well.

The problem is that I had never been in an active, running police state. Our rooms were bugged. Our luggage was tossed when we'd be away. When I'd go out for a jog in the morning, I'd be followed. We were told we could not bring anything with a memory in it, that is to say, computer, iPad, iPhone; leave that. We were told to bring a phone that would be taken from us at the border, and it was. It would be given back to us when we left, but there would be a bug in it. So get one you can throw away. So we did.

It was just an enormously frustrating experience. I don't know best how to describe it. I almost feel guilty for having been treated well when two miles outside of Pyongyang people are starving, literally. There are by any count 150,000 to 200,000 people in concentration camps. If people are allowed to travel outside the country, it will be with the understanding that the family may not come. The families are left back there. If people choose to defect, the families are gone. So, it's a frightening place, and it was an amazing tour. I wish I could put a happier light on it, but I felt like a kid eating a candy bar in the middle of hell.

George Nicolau: Well, let's go to something less frightening: arbitration.

Richard Bloch: Sometimes.

George Nicolau: You remember that career.

Richard Bloch: Occasionally; yes.

George Nicolau: You were on the Foreign Service Grievance Board, and I assume that, because I see you in airports all the time, that you do a lot airline work. Right?

Richard Bloch: That's true.

George Nicolau: What are you doing these days?

Richard Bloch: Same thing you are. Yes. The airlines are providing a lot of very interesting questions these days, and really, I think questions that none of us have been exposed to on a routine basis before. It's absolutely fascinating. It's an industry that is providing, I think, a whole new era of arbitral questions. It's a remarkable time.

George Nicolau: Both Rich and I have done a lot of seniority integration cases. My record in that is more infamous than his. But we both think that there is going to be one airline soon, and we're vying for the last seniority integration.

Richard Bloch: I yield to you at any time.

George Nicolau: Well, you and I both know that they're probably the toughest things that we have to do.

Richard Bloch: Yes. I don't remember any disputes that are capable of raising more first impression questions, and it's true. I might say that my experience has been that almost without exception, the representation has been incredible. These people are asking really hard questions; very intriguing and very interesting stuff.

George Nicolau: Well, as you know, in seniority integration, because seniority means everything to pilots, everybody is concerned where they're going to end up when the list is integrated; when it is integrated, there's one happy person, the one on the top. The other one used to be on the top. Now, have you ever run into experiences in which all of that is displayed? I mean in anger and everything else?

Richard Bloch: Not during the hearings. But I think anybody who's done those has probably received his or her share of post-hearing suggestions.

George Nicolau: Just as an aside, I had one in which we were trying to put together the award piece by piece. I threw out a proposal, and one of the persons looked at me and said, "Mr. Nicolau?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I haven't felt so bad since I was shot down over Vietnam." That's the way those things are.

Richard Bloch: I do have one recollection of—I don't remember if this was the first one that I ever did—but it was Hughes Air West and Republic. This was back in the 1980s. The hearing was being held in Kauai. It was wonderful. We were all in the 19th hole at the golf course on Hanalei, and they had 6-foot windows or 12-foot. You'd look out into the bay and you'd see whales jumping.

In those days, they have changed the system slightly since then, but in those days, they would select the arbitrator and then there would be partisan appointees. However, they would come not from the competing pilot groups or those airlines but from other pilot groups, other members of the Airline Pilots Association, and other airlines. So those folks were pretty impartial. They had no particular ax to grind from either side.

Still, you don't know. You get there and you don't know who these guys are. You don't know how you're going to get along. You're going to be there with them for ... in this case it was going to be three weeks. Not all there, but different areas. I don't know them at all. We got over and we get together with them, went out for breakfast the first day, and I said, "These are two of the greatest guys I've ever met. This is going to be a ball."

So, we're hearing the case. We were just among ourselves, we were going out each night and just laughing and having a great time. And the one guy leaned over to me during the hearing—and this was just in the early days of using these very sophisticated computer programs or something. They had these print-outs and they had these charts, and they were trying to place where each of these thousands of pilots would fall. They had blue dots and red dots and green dots and purples dots all over these charts. You couldn't make heads or tails of them. This one guy, who later became the chief pilot for United Airlines, leaned over to me during the hearing and he whispered, "I forget what the purple dots are." And I leaned over and I said, "Jews." We had a great time.

George Nicolau: But at some point, Rich, you have to sit down after the hearing and write something. Who do you write for?

Richard Bloch: You know, that's a great question. I do have an answer, but it's not an easy one. Roberta alluded to some of this in what I thought was a magnificent presidential address.³ She talked about leaving a little of yourself in these opinions. Everyone who is an arbitrator knows that we take the writing function here extremely seriously, the decision making. But there's a craftsmanship, too, that I find to have been terribly, terribly important. That was the sort of thing that was imparted by people like Ted and Russ Smith and the pros that I worked with early on.

On the other hand, there can get to be a point where if you are simply writing for yourself and trying to make it a work of art, you

³See Chapter 1, "Presidential Address: The Human Condition: Its Impact on Arbitral Thinking," this volume.

may be doing something that people on the floor can't read and can't understand. It was Dave Miller, my mentor, who said, "For God's sake, I can't understand what you're saying, and neither will the people over there. It's too pretty or it's too legalistic or whatever." So, I think the answer is that I write something that hopefully lets the people who are reading it know where I'm coming from and why it is I've decided that, and in such a way that you're not inspiring more disputes than you're settling. Ultimately, that leaves it as a crafted document that will serve the parties because they understand what you've said and where you're coming from.

George Nicolau: Did you have a favorite umpireship in your career?

Richard Bloch: No. I was terribly flattered by the willingness of people to invite one person in as an outsider to this relationship, and I took them all very seriously. Some were easier than others. Some were much more folksy and communal. When I was the arbitrator for Alcoa, the advocates would be the board members. After the case, they would take off their advocate hats and put on the mantle of neutrality, which meant we would all go to the bar together, and it was lovely. It was a very cordial relationship. There were others where it's a much more formal situation. I think all of them had a lot to commend them. So, I don't think of any that stick out.

George Nicolau: What's your favorite case?

Richard Bloch: You could have asked me that beforehand, George. I would have thought of one.

George Nicolau: What about your least favorite case?

Richard Bloch: The least favorite one is one every one of us has had. The least favorite is when I was the associate umpire to Art Stark for General Motors and the United Auto Workers. The case involved a 52-year-old production worker who had broken the rule that nothing, nothing could leave the plant. There was no such thing as scrap. And they did that because there was lots of valuable stuff on the floor that could be looked on as scrap, could be recycled. Anyway, it was an inviolable rule. This gentleman took and concealed some scrap balsa wood, put it under his jacket, and left. There was no question on the facts, he had stolen it. He had violated the rule, and the company had fired him. The union did not contest the rule and almost didn't contest the penalty, although it did suggest that this is such an outrage, that after 25 or 30 years of work, that he should lose his job for 30 cents worth of scrap balsa wood. I sustained the discharge. I haven't

forgotten it. I wouldn't change the decision. It was clearly among my least favorite decisions.

George Nicolau: Let me go back to another career again. What is the Dickens Parlour Theater, and why that name? How much does it cost to get in?

Richard Bloch: I will see to it that you are comped. Sue and I had been doing these cruises for many years, just as some breaks and vacations. I would perform magic on the cruise, and they would take care of us very well. It was a good thing. But it was also very, very tiring. I will tell you one great story about Sue, if I may, on the cruise.

George Nicolau: Certainly.

Richard Bloch: Sue would lecture on the Supreme Court and other law-related topics. Her lectures were always very well attended and sometimes controversial. In 1999, we were on a cruise during the Clinton impeachment. Sue was going to lecture on the impeachment and it was a very, very hot topic and a very conservative audience. There were about 800 people in the room. I had already performed the prior week. They don't work me very hard, one show. So I was just sitting, enjoying. I went in the back of the hall, and Sue came in to give the lecture. She gave a balanced presentation, but not balanced enough for this crowd. They were peppering her with questions afterwards, aggressively. Sue held her own and did well. The thing was over, and we were all beginning to leave, and there were two little old ladies in front of me. The one leaned over to the other one and said very conspiratorially, "I hear she's been seeing a lot of that magician."

So, we had done a lot of these. After awhile, it was taking too much time. It was taking a lot of energy. I was lugging 200 pounds of crap all over the world, so I decided that we should just stop that. I really wanted to kind of keep my hand in on this affliction, so we found an old garage in Millville, Delaware. We have a little place near there. Another buddy and I actually built a little theater. Charles Dickens, the author, had been an amateur magician and a pretty good one. He used to entertain people in his parlor in Victorian London. So we named it Dickens Parlour Theater. I put the arm on every guy I'd ever worked with for the last 40 years, and they come in now every week and entertain. I can tell you, it is clearly the top magic theater in Millville, Delaware.

George Nicolau: And it's making a fortune all around. The money is just rolling in. Do you still perform there, too?

Richard Bloch: Very occasionally; not often. I don't want to wear out my welcome in the neighborhood.

George Nicolau: Well, there may be some time for questions. But, for a moment, with his permission, I really want to play Siobhan's friend, Jimmy Lipton, here. What's your favorite word?

Richard Bloch: Oh, my God. Time out.

George Nicolau: And your least favorite word?

Richard Bloch: George.

George Nicolau: Well, what profession would you like to turn to now?

Richard Bloch: I think I've got it down now. I think this is the right mix. I'm deeply enjoying what I'm doing. I love arbitrating. I love this other aspect of my life. I try to keep them very, very separate, and it's not because there's any sense of secrecy or anything else; it's just that they serve for me as a battery-charger, really. It has to do, again, with what I was talking about before with Bobby, about writing these opinions. You put a lot into it, and it takes a lot out of you. It's very serious work. It's a delight for me to be able to just walk through the door, close the door, get into this other much more frivolous existence, and then to leave that as well. I find that my batteries are charged on both sides that way. I enjoy it.

George Nicolau: And last, if Heaven really exists, what would you like to have God say to you when you get to the Pearly Gates?

Richard Bloch: Not time yet.

George Nicolau: His grade won't be revealed until next week, but we have a few moments, if you want to ask the honoree anything, he's available.

Audience Member: What is your professional name as a magician?

Richard Bloch: It's the same. I can't hide. It'd be a bad idea.

Audience Member: The Carnival Cruise?

Richard Bloch: Yes. Three years ago, I decided I just couldn't do the cruise thing. It was just too aggravating. I had an agent in New York and told her to take my name off that list. She said, "Look, there's one more that I'd really like you to do as a favor to me, because we've had some problems, and this would really help things. Could you just do this one?" I did it somewhat reluctantly. No, very reluctantly. So, her words were, you know, "What could go wrong?"

So we flew out to Los Angeles and got on board a Carnival ship. I had never worked for Carnival, and I didn't know anything about

them. I was in the foulest mood I'd ever been in recent months. We got on board on a Sunday night. I was bitching and moaning and I was terrible. Sue, as usual, said, "Suck it up. We're here for a week. This is ridiculous. Just stop." So we went to bed, and we woke up at six in morning; the ship was shuddering. I said, "What is this?" Like it's her fault. "What is this?" Sue said, "Oh, we're just docking." I said, "We're not docking. We're supposed to be at sea for three days." I got up and opened the curtains, and there's black smoke billowing up. I swear to you my first words were, "Yes! We're on fire. The cruise is over, and we're going home." And I was right. We were on fire, but we weren't going anywhere. It had knocked out every power system on the ship. We drifted for four days in the Gulf of Mexico. It was a character builder. There was no light. There were no bathrooms. There was no food. They brought up the Ronald Reagan Aircraft Carrier and airlifted food on. It was okay during the day when you had sunlight. But it was a long trip. The ship was called the Carnival Splendor.

George Nicolau: Well, Rich, I think a little bit of your career has been revealed, but more will come. Thank you again.

Richard Bloch: George, thank you, buddy. Thank you very much.