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Oral history interview with Volkmar Kurt
Wentzel, 2002 October 18-2003 January 24

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Volkmar Kurt Wentzel on October 18 and 24, 2002; November 12, 2002; and January 24, 2003 . The interview took place in Washington, DC, and was conducted by Anne Louise Bayly Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Lely Constantinople, Wentzel's studio assistant, also participated in this interview. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

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Archives of American Art

Interview with Volkmar Kurt Wentzel

Conducted by Anne Louise Bayly [Berman] and Lely Constantinople

October 18, 24, 2002

November 12, 2002

January 24, 2003

Track AAA_wentze02_7656_r is a test track.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Maybe we—I should close the door here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: In case the dogs—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Might be—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, in case the dogs come in.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Testing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Eighteen. Do you want me to—? Do you need anything at all? Are you sure?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Should we tell them downstairs not to call up or anything?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Um—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I guess it's all right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It will be okay. Thank you.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Okay. I mean, do you think Viola might need you for anything?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, I don't think so.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Okay. Okay.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This is Anne Louise Bayly [Berman] interviewing Volkmar [Kurt] Wentzel on October 18, 2002 with Lely Constantinople at Mr. Wentzel's home in Washington, DC. Would you be willing to spell your full name for—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: My first name is Volkmar, V-O-L-K-M-A-R, my middle name is Kurt, K-U-R-T, and my last name is Wentzel, W-E-N-T-Z-E-L:

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And Lely, would you be—uh, spell your name for us?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yes. Lely is L-E-L-Y. Last name is C-O-N-S-T-A-N-T-I-N-O-P-L-E.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: A lot of letters. [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's a long name, [they laugh] but the last one—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: But a beautiful name.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Thank you.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's a wonderful name. I like it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Everyone I tell your name to thinks that it's just the most beautiful name in the world. Well, if we could start, perhaps, with some background information, where you were born, somewhat about your family or siblings and, kind of, go from there. [00:02:03]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well, I was born in Dresden, Germany in Saxony. Actually, it was still the Kingdom of Saxony in 1915 when I was born, the year I was born on February 8. Dresden was the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony and so, uh—but that ended, of course, with the end of the World War I, and so I was born there. It was a beautiful city, and it just so happens that last night I went to a very interesting talk in the Carl-Schurz auditorium at the German Embassy about Dresden. And the talk was about the restoration of a famous Baroque church. It was a good, two-hour talk with slides about that beautiful church, which was totally bombed in World War II, and I used to go past it on my way to school and home from school, so—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —I remember that church very well. I haven't been back to Dresden since 1926 when we immigrated here to America. But that talk last night made me want to go back, and it says here, *Saxony, a fertile upland, lies in the heart of Europe. Its main river, the Elbe, is Eastern Europe's most direct trade route to the Atlantic during the Middle Ages, which deposits of silver, tin, copper, and iron, semiprecious gems were discovered in Saxony's southern mountains.* [00:04:06] *The Saxon monarchs took great pride in their title of elector as only seven German rulers held the privilege of electing the Holy Roman Empire.* So, it goes back, and it was a wonderful city. I remember it had a famous opera house built by Semper who was a famous architect. And we used to go there as children on Saturday afternoon when they would have plays of the fairy tales, usually the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and Andersen and all of those, which they would play them for the children, and that was wonderful. We had a nursemaid who always took us there and, uh, also to the—it was also the winter—Dresden was also the winter headquarters of a famous circus, the Circus Sarrasani it was called. We would go there when the, uh—they would practice their aerial trapeze things. I remember I was enamored with a very sexy-looking trapeze artist who—I mean it was the first, sort of, arousal in a boy to see that [they laugh] juicy woman up there. So, I loved going to the circus, and we did that. Then my school, I can't say what my—that I first went to, I can't say that I was enamored with that. It was a boys' school. It was very strict, [phone rings] and you had to stand up when the teacher came into the room. [00:06:01] Excuse me.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, yes. [Side conversation.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Volkmar, will you just push back those pads of paper? They're rubbing against your seat and make—yeah, there. There we go.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Okay. Where were we?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Your school.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: School.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: School? Oh, yes. It was a boys' school in an old building in the middle of Dresden, and the teachers were very strict. I remember, yeah, we had to learn that German script, which is—well, you have to keep practicing, you know, up and down strokes and so on. Of course, it was still with the—with the steel pens that you dipped into an inkwell. So, I was doing that, and this teacher—which is typical of this school, by

the way—this teacher would walk up and down the aisle. He'd come up from behind you and then he would stand and watch you doing these strokes up and down and dotting the *i*'s and all of that crossing the *t* and—but it made me nervous. Also, I knew that if you didn't do it right, he would whack you on the back of your head. He had a huge golden ring on his hand, and that really hurt when that ring hit—hit the back of your head. And so, I noticed—I could feel his arms swinging through the air. I took my steel pen, and I held it behind my neck, and his hand went right into it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And, of course—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —that put me on the S-list for the [they laugh] for the rest of the term. [00:08:04] And I had to stand in the corner for the rest of the term. There was a radiator there, a steam radiator and there was wallpaper, and the steam radiator leaked a little bit, and the wallpaper got full of interesting designs. And that was quite stimulating, I mean, even though I had to stand a whole class—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —while the others did their work. I had to stand in that corner for the rest of that term. But at—I'll never forget those wonderful designs that the steam had made on the wallpaper, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Discoloring it. And then there were—well, I did—just didn't like that school at all. It was terrible, very strict. And there was one boy—I don't know what they called that disease—but he had, uh—they called it a water head or something, yeah, a big, swollen face and so on. And the boys all made fun of him, probably including myself, but it was cruel, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was not the nice atmosphere that we have here in the American schools, so. But then my—on my way home from school, that was really very nice. There was the Prager Straße, which was sort of the main street—a main street running through Dresden, and there was the most wonderful toyshop. And, God, I'd love—I always loved going by there because they had the most beautiful trains, you know, in the window going around—beautiful toys. Many of them came right from Saxony, from the so-called Erzgebirge, which is the mountainous regions where the people made these, toys, and they were exported in all the world at that time. [00:10:08] I think that's gone to China now or something now. [They laugh.] But anyway, that—I loved that toyshop then I went and walked past the church I was just telling you about the—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And what was the name of the church?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. I've got it right here, one second. It was called—in German, it's called Frauenkirche, but it has a—there's a translated name, which is—I mean, it's here somehow. And I'm pleased to see that there's such a thing as *Friends of Dresden*. This is a newsletter and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —what?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Here in Washington?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: The *Friends of Dresden* is—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think it's all over. New York Avenue, New York, 1230 York Avenue, New York City, that seems to be the headquarters. Yeah, what was it called that church? It is—well, it's the Church of Our Lady or something like that and—[pause] Hold on a second.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And it's no—it's no longer standing?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, it was totally bombed on that terrible raid, which was right at the end of World War II when—it was mostly British and American planes who just totally leveled the city. And it hadn't been touched because it—up until the end of the war until—because it had no war industry in it. [00:12:03] But it was full of refugees from the east and so on, and—but I can imagine. I mean look what the Germans did to Coventry

and so on. I remember Goering saying, "Oh, well, let's bomb the hell out of it," you know, and that's what exactly what the Allies did. I mean, they probably looked at them at the map and they said, "Oh, well, why don't we bomb Berlin and we did this and we did that. Ah, there's Dresden, and it hasn't been bombed." And so, it got a hell of a pasting equal to—it's compared to Hiroshima and, uh, as bad as that. It was—the city was leveled including this beautiful church. Last night, this man, he was an architect, he told how they're rebuilding it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, they are?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They are rebuilding it, yes. And they've gotten quite far, actually, to now just doing the cupola, which is—was very heavy. It was built of stone and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Are they using any of the original—? Were any of the original materials intact enough to rebuild where they used—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, a few stones here and there but most of them, they had to recut and redo. But they purposely put—where they could fit it, they put them in, and that was all illustrated. I'm thinking of when we—when you—when we went through a writing, the editor of the *Geographic* and suggesting a story—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: A story, that's a great idea—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —about that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It is a wonderful story.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's a wonderful story.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And is it—is it along the same—? They're using the same plans, the same architectural plans as the original?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, yes. And the interesting thing is the man who designed it in the beginning back in the 18th century, 1736 or something like that, was a carpenter. [Laughs.] And he was very good, but he built it in stone. [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: That's interesting. [00:14:01]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. The whole thing is really fascinating. I must—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It is—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: See, I've got pictures here somewhere. This is all about Dresden here, and, you know, we had an exhibit of their artwork in—at the National Gallery. There's an English of—okay. Yeah, you can look at that while I find it. Read that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And this is from the *Friends of Dresden*?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And here, this tells it. It's called the Church of Our Lady.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And it was built in 19—uh, 1736, you said?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Wait a minute. I may be wrong on that. It was bombed totally in 1945 on February 13th and 14th during that night, which was a horrible thing. And—but I don't hold it against the Allies like some people do because that's what the Germans did to England and to others. Here, this, you can keep this. I've got several of them.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, thank you. And this is a picture of the—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's the church, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did you see?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Wow.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow, that's really, um, quite an undertaking.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: It's an interesting design, too, of that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It is, isn't it ?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, let's see, to get back to Dresden. On my way home to school, another place that I loved was the—was another—was a huge garden with a palais in the middle, in kind of a Baroque palais, I guess, you'd call it. [00:16:11] And uh, I used to go by there, and it was full of statuary, mostly classical things of Hercules wrestling with snakes or Medusa with hair of snakes or whatever. It was really fascinating, and that—I used to walk through that. And on the way [laughs], my brothers and I—they had streetcars, and whenever the streetcar came to a switch, the man, the driver had to take some sort of a long rod, iron rod, and set the switch from the front of the streetcar. And we used to put stones into the switch so that he couldn't do it [laughs] and that would—we got a great kick out of that. [They laugh.] And well, this, it was called the Great Garden, this garden with a palais in the center. In the winter, we'd go ice-skating there and then there were booths for where you could get snacks to eat, and so on, little sausages and things. So, it was—Dresden was a comfortable, wonderful city. We, ourselves, lived right near this palais here in this garden and in a rather tall house. We had a whole big floor and spaces, dining room and all of that, in that—in this building. We were on the top floor, and so the very first thing that I remember is one day, we were playing. [00:18:02] Well, our playroom was up there, which my parents had fitted out very nicely with shelves for all the toys, and my father gave us a workbench so that we could do woodwork and that kind of thing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And that was very nice. And one day, we were playing up there, and they had a—the place had a big window, and coming towards the—our house was a huge Zeppelin, you know a dirigible.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it looked as if it was going to come right for us and then we saw—we looked out, but we didn't realize that that would be dangerous—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —at the time, but we saw the men. We could look over right into the cabin of the dirigible where they were—they still had steering wheels like on a sailing ship and two steering wheels. One was for—let's see—altitude, and the other one was for longitude, I guess you'd call it. And then—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: How old were you?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I must have been seven.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's something so amazing to see.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And it came right for and it—and you could see these men in naval uniforms. The dirigibles were under the naval part of the military. And there they were wrestling around trying to turn the thing and making it go up again, which they did. They succeeded, but I never knew, really, what happened.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? So, there wasn't any—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: What—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —um, other commotion going on outside or—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, no. We saw it and then after it turned, it went—it went straight away. And that—in reading about Zeppelins—I have a book here somewhere—that must have been 1917. In 1917, the Germans had the biggest raid on England with Zeppelins. I think something like—it might have been 300 Zeppelins. [00:20:16] Can you imagine that going over London and bombing the hell out of it?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I can't imagine.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It must have been terrible. But the—from a military point of view, the Zeppelins were not effective. Okay, they dropped bombs here and there, but it was not effective. But that was the last, and so that always interested me about the Zeppelins. After this incident that happened, I remember—and that was at the time when I was little, and we were crawling around—my brother and I, who's a year younger, we would be crawling below on the dining room table while the elders talked. And one story I'll never forget is about the Zeppelin—also this is still wartime—the Zeppelin that they especially built to help a general, a German general, who was defending the German colonies in Africa. He was apparently a very brave man and a very resourceful man. He had African troops who liked him a lot who would do anything for him, but they had to make bandages out of bark and malaria medicine from God knows what. They were out of everything—ammunition and supplies, everything. So, they decided to build a special dirigible to give him relief, and this dirigible was built keeping in

mind that the fabric could be used for tents and—there's a lot of thought that went into this thing. [00:22:04] And then it took off from Friedrichshafen in Southern Germany on Lake Constance there, and it went—flew down to Africa. It crossed the Mediterranean, and they ran into terrible lightning storms, you know, and nobody knew what would happen if lightning struck a dirigible. But they got across to Africa, and they went deep into the Sudan. They were almost at their destination to help this general. [Paul] von Lettow-Vorbeck, that was his name. So, they were almost there, but the British are no dumbbells. And that's always what I think is such a tragedy since I have English blood too and German blood, how these two nations who are really one whole nation—how they could be—fight each other and try to destroy each other even. So, the British, as I say, were no dumbbells. They knew the German code, and they wired up to the dirigible saying that von Lettow-Vorbeck had surrendered, totally surrendered all his troops, everything. So, those people up in the dirigible, they wondered, "Well, there's no use going on, let's go back," and so they went back to Germany, which was a trip in mileage, I don't know, something like 2000-some miles and—or the equivalent distance, I remember that, equivalent distance as if going from Southern Germany to Chicago.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That was a huge unheard of distance at that time. And so, there was a lot of talk at the dining room table about the future of these things that they could bring the world together. You know, the kind of talk we have nowadays about one world and that kind of thing. [00:24:13] And so, we talked about that. I could overhear that and then—so, I was always interested in dirigibles and then came the time when the German—you know, there's also a lot of talk about the Treaty of Versailles, how terrible it was, how it totally prevented Germany getting on its feet again. Also we, ourselves, suffered because I remember going—standing in long lines at the bakery to get a loaf of bread. And then the bread was no damn good anyway because the flour had been mixed with sawdust and all kinds of—and such, sort of thing. So, times were hard. It was hard. It must have been especially hard on my mother to feed four kids, we were. Let's see my three brothers and myself, yeah, and so that was a tough time for her.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Certainly—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But we lived through it, and let's see. Oh, yeah, on the—getting back to the dirigible when—these reparations were so tough that this Dr. Eckener was a wonderful man, Hugo Eckener, he was a great dirigible fan. And he made a deal with some of our naval officers here in America that the Germans would build a dirigible for the navy, the American Navy if the reparations were reduced that the Germans had to pay, and that happened. [00:26:15] So to build that dirigible, there was tremendous enthusiasm in Germany, at the time, and I remember even going to my little piggy bank and emptying that for Dr. Eckener's dirigible that flew. Also, when it was found finally done and crossed the Atlantic, and everybody wondered, can one fly across the Atlantic? And so on. Well, it did successfully, and the dirigible, yeah, and it was given go the America. I think they—they called it the *Los Angeles*.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that was the dirigible. I remember as a child—and I have that here somewhere—making a map from the newspaper reports where it was, right, over the Azores and then it went north a bit and then it went over Bermuda, and so on. Now I may have put all of it—I showed it to Lely once, but I don't know where it is right now but anyway—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, a dirigible had a lot of effect. The—my final chapter with the dirigible was much later on when I came to Washington, and I was doing news photography. And my—the first news picture that I took in the White House was of FDR, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the Germans had come in the *Hindenburg* to negotiate for helium so that they didn't have to use hydrogen, which is so explosive. [00:28:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And they—and that was Eckener, and Captain Lehmann who had been—flown many flights across with the *Graf Zeppelin*, and the German ambassador, three of them, and Roosevelt. And I took that picture—I still have somewhere here—of them at Roosevelt's desk, and they were trying to negotiate for helium.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Of course, Roosevelt knew that there was a Hitler in the background, not that these people were hardened Nazis, but they—that's—they had to do it, you see?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The *Hindenburg* already had the swastika on the fins and so on. So, Roosevelt quite correctly said, "Well, I'll go and see our minister of—interior minister Harold Ickes, and see what—to see if he can let you have some." Anyway, he said, "No," that was it and rightfully because the Lord knows how that would have been—might have been used by *Hindenburg* with helium and that had the capacity to carry lots of weight, anyway. So, that was my last contact with the dirigible then—oh, and then getting back to Dresden—thank you, my dear, I'll put it here—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I thought you might need some of this.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: We had a very nice family life there, I dare say, thanks to my mother who was a wonderful—really, my father was sort of a scientific type, and he was a photochemist, which, at that time, was kind of a new profession because photography wasn't that old.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And Dresden was also a great photographic city. They had several places that made photographic film and paper, cameras and all of that. [00:30:04] And they say even that in the early days when they made the so-called albumen paper that you could smell Dresden from miles away. Because albumen paper is made from—with the whites of eggs, and that's kept in big crocks. Used millions of eggs, I guess, and that the chickens ought to be given credit for—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Hard work. [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —in the history of photography—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Photography, right.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Anyway, so—but that the—that albumen had to be ripe. In other words, it smelled to high heaven, and they say you could smell Dresden miles away [laughs] if the wind was in that direction. But it was a great photographic city, and my father was very active in that. And he—I remember he took me to one of the plants wherein the—by red light where women were cutting up the sheets of papers for a—darkroom work. Oh, and then my father, being knowledgeable in that field, jobs were very scarce. I mean times were really hard, inflation and all of that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Jobs in general or not just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Jobs in general—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —a photography job?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —but especially also—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Especially.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —in this field but—so, he, uh—I remember he had two jobs. One was in Czechoslovakia where he set up a complete plant for the manufacture of photographic paper. And he did the same in Spain and so. When he was in Spain during this inflationary time, I remember my mother waiting for the check to come—after all she had to feed us—and then hurrying as quickly as possible to the bank before the value got less. [00:32:12] You see everything was inflated or deflated, and it was a terrible time, so. And so, he—we managed to live along and then finally came the day when we decided to emigrate. And my father had—because he'd done these other things successfully—had an offer from the Ansco company, which is an—the oldest American photographic company. The name originally was Anthony and Scovill, and so they used A-N and S-C, Ansco, so. They were in Binghamton, New York State and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And when were they—when was that started?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, right very early. I would say in the 19—by 1840s. Yeah, right after the daguerreotype. And that first in New York and then they moved to Binghamton, New York, probably because of the air. Photographic manufacturing needs good, clean air, otherwise, because I remember my father coming home and he says, "Oh, we got brown spots again or white spots," all because of impurities in the air that get into the emulsion and then the emulsion is ruined. So, my father heard about this job or got this job offer by the Ansco company. And so, my mother who was—always had pretty good vision about things, she said, "Let's go to America." [00:34:00] So, in 1926, I think it was in June, we emigrated and in the—on a ship called the *Albert Ballin*, a passenger ship, and we crossed—we crossed the ocean, and so on. The most memorable thing was coming into New York Harbor. I'll never forget that, and my father described it very well in his book. We came—

was it—the ship came. It was early morning. There was a kind of a fog and haze over the whole harbor over the lower Hudson. We were just going by past the Statue of Liberty, and the first rays of the sun, they came from the east, they hit the crown of the Statue of Liberty. And there was the Statue of Liberty just caught by the first rays of the sun, and below was still fog and so on. You could hear the hooting of these little pilots ships that were towing the ocean liners into the harbor. The pilots, I think, they called them, and that was going on. And then others I—that was on the left Statue of Liberty, and on the right was the skyline of Manhattan. Also just coming out of the early morning sun, you see, being hit this, the skyscraper—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What an amazing view—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and that was impressive. My father—I'm going to get that and read it directly to you out of his book because he was very prophetic in a way. [00:36:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Here's this—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's all right. I can do that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What is the name of his book?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I'll show it to you. *Memoirs of a Photochemist*. [Laughs.] That's it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh wow. Oh, wonderful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —that's my old man. See, he was a German scientific type. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful. And you actually—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I'll find that. See—I know about where—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Is that in German, the book?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, it's in English.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: It is in English?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. You can read it any time. You—it's not that exciting.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But—let's see. I had it marked here somewhere. But it's a pretty good history up to a point. I'm trying to—there, oh, there. Here, you can read about my old man from that while I find this—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: [Berman reads] *Dr. Fritz Wentzel was born in Berlin,*

Germany, in 1877. As a boy, he became interested in photography and on graduation from school, his uncle gave him 15 gold marks with which he bought a—you'll have to help me pronounce this—Goerz?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Goerz.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —Goerz-Anschütz camera?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right. [00:38:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Is that the right pronunciation.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Goerz-Anschütz?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —couldn't tell you.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Goerz-Anschütz camera, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: *With which he made many fine pictures during the ensuing years.* What kind of camera is that?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, no, I've never heard of that kind of camera.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think it's a regular bellows—with bellows camera.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I don't even—it's described in here I'm sure but—I took this camera with me on my vacation to the country, okay, that's about that camera. And I had a—I bought a—yeah, he bought a—it had an English Thornton-Pickard roller blind lens shutter, whatever that was. Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Thirteen by 18 centimeters was the size of the thing or the—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: So, 13 by—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's right.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —eighteen would be what?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Centimeters—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Centimeters? But I mean what would that be in inches? What kind of a—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Inches—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —negative is that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, I think they got it. Here, this has both on it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: So—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And let me see if I can find—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Thirteen. How do you do that again? How do you convert it?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: One is centimeters

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, this is—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and the other is inches.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —in centimeters. So, 13 centimeters is here.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, I guess it would be—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, I see.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —one, two, three.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Six by—six by—four by six or something?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah, well, let's see, it's—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Thirteen by eight.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —oh, bigger.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, 18.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, six by about—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Weird.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Six by—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: What a weird negative.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —eight. That is a really—wait, let's see.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That is strange.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Thirteen. Here, I'll draw. There's 13. [00:40:00]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It must be so—a little larger than five by seven, wouldn't it?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah, yeah, six by eight.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, six by eight.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That's so interesting.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Okay, I've got it here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Wentzel reads] *In the early morning of June 16, 1926, our liner Albert Ballin who, by the way, is—was a German Jewish merchant who got rich, a very rich man, but he did a lot of good, you know. It was just one of the cruelties of the persecution of the Jews. Slowly—our liner Albert Ballin slowly came up the Hudson River. It was a bright day, but the sun had not yet penetrated the mist, which hung over the entrance to the harbor. As we passed the Statue of Liberty, we could see the fantastic and grotesque silhouettes of Manhattan's skyscrapers behind the hazy veil. It was an incomparable view, and it gave me the feeling that fate awaited to guide us to an uncertain but a new and better life.* And this is what I'm enjoying. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I mean, he was really quite prophetic. *At the pier, we were welcomed by Mr. Paul Zuhlke, a partner of the Hurlbut Paper Company of South Lee, Massachusetts in whose office I met Mr. George W. Topliff, the technical director of the Ansco company. Not long afterwards, I signed a contract with this firm and began to work on the 5th of July 1926 in their chemical laboratories in Binghamton, New York.* That's how we got to Binghamton, so. [00:42:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Now, when—um, to step back for one minute, when you were in—still in Dresden, was your father actively taking photographs as well as working?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes. He—I don't know how much time he had for—he took lots of wonderful family photographs, which we have in an album here. I can show it to you. And, yeah, he took photo—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Well, the Balkans.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The Balkans was earlier.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Ah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, the Balkan pictures was before he married, and when he was still a bachelor, and he could travel. They were well-off, and so he could do that and so—and the funny thing or the interesting thing is, he was a contemporary of Stieglitz, you know, who we hear about. They both had studied under the same professor in Berlin—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And uh, my father would go to the Balkans and Stieglitz would go to the Black Forest to take pictures. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? And wait—and this, the professor they studied under?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: His name was—his picture's in here I think.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Vogel I think.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Vogel.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Vogel.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, Ferdinand Vogel, wasn't it?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I think it's Hermann [Vogel].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, maybe Hermann.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It is Hermann.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Anyway—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think it is.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Anyway, he's in here somewhere.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And so, they were—so, your father was a student at the same time as Stieglitz? Were they—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: At almost the same time—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Almost the same time.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I don't think it was exactly but just about the same time. And the interesting thing is Vogel was a very worldly man. He traveled to the United States and had been around, and he, I think, was the first one to really consider photography as a form of art. And that—and it bugs me a little bit that that point isn't brought out. [00:44:00] And Stieglitz or when they write about Stieglitz, he's never mentioned.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Vogel?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Vogel, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Ah, interesting.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I think—and I think he should be brought out, and some day if I have time, I'm going to go into that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think we have a few things at the archives that I'll find for you if you want.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: On him?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, on him or his—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —you know and his—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, that would be an interesting point to bring out that that Vogel was the one who influenced Stieglitz and—I mean, we're all influenced by someone in everything we do.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, exactly. Certainly. So, did you—? How much, I guess—I mean did you have a lot of—spend a lot of time looking at the photographs your father took, or did you ever go with him—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —to take photographs?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —my first contact with photography was thanks to my father and if—whenever my brother and I acted up, you know as kids do, he would lock us into his darkroom [laughs], a small darkroom that he had. He would lock us up, turn off the lights, and there we were. For 15 minutes or so, he would lock us up. Well, that was pretty grim until I found the red inspection light, and that was then—that opened up a completely new world, you know, all this glass graduates and all these things that are—enlarger and trays and all of that. That was fascinating to see that by that red light. So, that wasn't a punishment at all. [They laugh.] It was—an—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It became more of a lesson.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: [Laughs.] Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was kind of a lesson of exploration and in photography. It was really my first contact [laughs] and then sometimes, he'd let me come in when he was doing enlarging or something like that, so. [00:46:00] But he was very good, and I still have quite a bit of his work here including the negatives that he took, glass plates that he took in the Balkans.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And as a young man—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Unbelievable.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —he would go to the Balk—he went there several times to take pictures. He loved—seem to have loved the place. It must not have been all that easy to travel in those days.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: No, certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: There were no cars, and I don't know how he got around but he did.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: He took hundreds of pictures too.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, and all glass plates.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: With heavy—yeah, heavy, heavy equipment.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, and with a—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That's incredible.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —Graflex. He had a Mentor Graflex, which was a famous kind at the time. And so, he took pictures there, and also, [laughs] on this—he traveled there on the Orient Express.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And one—on one of his trips going through Romania, in his—he was in a compartment with a young lady. He immediately was enchanted by her, and he looked at her luggage, and he remembered the name and all of it. And then suddenly in the middle of Romania, the train was stopped, in came some official-looking people in uniform probably, and they took her off, luggage and all. They took her off in the middle of Romania and, uh, among some wheat fields or something. He wondered, "What was that?" She was so nice, and he—as I say, he had taken to her right away, and so he wondered about that. [00:48:01] When he got back to Germany, he made inquiries. He remembered that she was from Cologne, and he went to Cologne actually and checked out everything, probably in the days before a phonebook and all of that, but he found her. She was the—not stepdaughter. What would you call it? Her own—she had been born in Africa, and her father, his name was Jatho, J-A-T-H-O, and that was kind of tragic. She was orphaned in South Africa in that little town called Ladysmith or something like that. I've got all that and then—then her—oh, yeah, and then her mother died in—when the third child was born, probably in childbirth or something like that. And then I have all of the letters of—would—that would be my grandfather, right?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That he wrote back to Germany, and you could—can tell by the letters, they're beautifully written. But you can tell from the letters that he was just heartsick about having lost his wife. His wife was English. Her name was Passmore, her last name, and the Passmores were still a big, banking family in South Africa. I'd like to contact them—[They laugh.] But he had built up kind of a trading post in the northern or South Africa and—but anyway, she—then my mother and her sister were orphaned and then they decided to send the two kids to England because of the English mother and so on. [00:50:01] But they didn't stay there long. They were then sent to Germany to their uncle in Cologne. He was a well-known and a very dynamic Lutheran pastor in Cologne. And Cologne being mostly Catholic or something, but he had a huge following, and he was against Bismarck who, at that time, was trying to incorporate the church and the state together, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And he was—he opposed that, and he had a huge following because there was a trend among the Germans to be independent and you know, have freedom of worship.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, let me see. Where are we? Yeah. So, that's where she—so, my father found her, and he proposed to her, and they became engaged and then married. Unfortunately—and this I have to look up a little bit more closely, then my mother—and there's a picture of her here in this thing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Why was she pulled off the train?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, because she—[laughs] that's a good one. She was pulled off the train because she was the educator, teacher for the children of some Romanian nobility. They had hired her to teach them, to bring them up, and that was her job. What do you call that a—?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: A governor or—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Governess, yes.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Governess, basically.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, like a governess, that's what she was and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: So, they happen to live in the middle of Romania and—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They happen to live—they happen to be in the—on the estate in the middle of Romania. Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: So, they could—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so they—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —stop the train?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and they could a stop a train, they could do anything they want. [00:52:00]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Whenever they wanted to.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's the beauty of being an aristocrat. [Laughs.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So that was that, and so—and let's see the—there's a picture of her here.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: There's a picture of her up there, too, Volkmar. Isn't there the one of her holding you?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that's me.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow. Well, maybe we should pause here at a breaking stop—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, and I have—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —and then we'll—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Am I talking too much?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: No, no, certainly not at all. We can pause here and then we can pick up when you arrive in America.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Here she is.

[END OF TRACK AAA_wentze02_7657_r.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Testing, testing. This is Anne Louise Bayly [Berman] with Volkmar Wentzel at the artist's house in Washington, DC, on October 24, 2002. And you're just beginning to tell us about a book.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, we were going to talk about Binghamton today where we—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —were—uh, we moved to right after we came to this country. I remembered this morning that I had a book. It's called *The Swamp Root Chronicle [Adventures in the Word Trade]*, which has some—mentioned of Binghamton about the time when I was there because Robert Manning who wrote this was a contemporary of—in high school of in the Binghamton Central High where we both went. And he, in the meantime, made quite a career. He became—he's now the—what is it here on the—? Well, at the time of the writing of this letter in 1955, he was president of the *Binghamton Press*, and the *Binghamton Press* was a very good newspaper. And he wrote this book, *The Swamp Root Chronicle*, and I always wondered where the swamp root—what was the connection? And it turned out that a very prominent and a very wealthy man in Binghamton —

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —was, uh, thank you. In Binghamton was a Mr. Kilmer, and Mr. Kilmer seemed to own everything in Binghamton. And the swamp root refers to a—kind of a miracle recipe for all kinds of ailments that was made from some kind of a root that was found in the swamp. [00:02:11] Actually, the whole thing was a fraud at a time when people believed in these kind of medicines.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, I wanted to refer back to this book this morning before you came to—uh, to see what he might have to say about Binghamton. It isn't very much, but it did recall some incidents, and, uh, of course, we moved there in 19—wait a minute—26 in—I think it was during the summer, July, August, and we moved to Binghamton. I remember we had nothing. We rented a—my parents rented an apartment and—uh in kind of a new area that was just being built and in the—yes. Yeah, and we had nothing. And so my mother who was always very—had ideas and so on, she got—found some old orange crates and that was our—those were our chairs. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And, of course, she had to start—I mean I admire her so much, now in retrospect but more than ever before, about how she cooked with all of that. I mean we came there with nothing. We had to start all—see all—one of her advantages was that she could speak English quite well.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And could you speak English at the time?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, nothing, and my father was not very good. He knew some but not that much. But it was my mother who pulled us through those very early days. [00:04:03] And of course, we had no car or anything, and my father had gotten a job at the Ansco company, which was the oldest American uh—the oldest, American, photographic-manufacturing place for films and papers, and even cameras. And that's where my father worked since he had—he was a chemist and he was a specialist in making photographic emulsions. I may have said this before.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Uh, anyway, so we lived there in that apartment and later on managed to rent a small house on 127 Crary Avenue. I happen to remember the address. [They laugh.] And, uh, we moved there, and by that time, some of our furniture had come from Germany, the—what little they decided to keep. But anyway, that—my parents fixed up that house very nicely, and that's where I grew up during my teenage years, and I have some happy memories of that. Of course, being a teenager, my brother Will and I—Wilfred [ph] is his real name—we engaged in all kinds of things as boys do. One of them was that we built kind of a boy scout camp that our parents and everyone who saw it was very proud of. We had tents and a fire, and we cooked over the fire, and we did all kinds of things that boy scouts are supposed to do. [00:06:05] But what they didn't know was that we—every night, we would go out, and we would go to the back porches of the houses in our area and—uh, and ask the milkman to deliver Angel Drink [ph]. And Angel Drink was a special kind of chocolate milk that we liked, and we would say, "Bring two quarts of Angel Drink," and so on, and then we would collect it ourselves. It was—real thievery is what it was.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But that's—that was one of the things we got away with. We also raided ice boxes. People in those days would keep their ice boxes on the back porch, and we would help ourselves to a pie or whatever we could find and then we would have these midnight feasts in our so-called Boy Scout camp, and that was very nice. Then another thing, there was the Susquehanna River. Binghamton is located on the confluence of the Chenango River and the Susquehanna River coming together. It's a very nice location. And I was always

captivated by the Susquehanna. The name perhaps alone, that wonderful Indian name, I don't know what it means, but it captivated me. And so, I built—oh, yeah. I used—my father had subscribed to a boy's magazine from Germany. It was called *Der Gute Kamerad*, the good comrade, but that was long before just [laughs] the communists used the word comrade. It meant, you know, a boyhood friend. In that, uh, magazine was a description of how to build a kayak. [00:08:09] And so, I built a kayak, and I stole all of the lumber and everything from new houses that were being built around the area, including the canvas because that this was a canvas-covered thing. And uh, so, I built one and then all the boys in the neighborhood wanted to have some, too, and it worked fine on the Susquehanna River, so we built 11 kayaks.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, all for—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: You and your brothers—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —or you—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —my brothers and the boys in the neighborhood.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: In the—? Wow.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And all of them were—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But it was all modeled after mine, [laughs] my first one. I have a picture of it somewhere. And we—finally, we got all—had all these kayaks, and we were like a bunch of pirates on the Susquehanna River. And one place that intrigued us a great deal was—were a couple of little islands where the city of Binghamton stored the fireworks from one Fourth of July to the next.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was full of firecrackers and rockets and everything. Well, we with our kayaks, we went to these islands, and we chopped a hole in the brick wall so that we could reach in and get fireworks, which, of course, for boys, it was perfect. But we were careful not to offset them anywhere where police might find them. And later on, I used some of the same powder in these six-inch, uh, firecrackers. I used it in some experiments that I made with rockets. [00:10:03] And I built some rockets, and it was wintertime—yeah, a rocket boat is what I wanted to do. And I built the boat out of balsa wood and put the rockets on the side, but it was wintertime, and there was no place with open water. So, uh, in front of our house, there was a garbage can, and I set the rocket—I wanted to see how much thrust it had, and I was only how old? I must have been 14 years old or something like that. And I lit the darned thing, and the rocket boat took off into the air [laughs], and it, sort of, went head over heels about the length of two houses. And that the end of my rocket boat experiment. The balsa boat, of course, it was totally gone. [They laugh.] And so, those are some of the boyhood things. Then, of course, we got—as we got older, we got interested in girls. And one year, my father had to go to Germany, and we—we listened to that. Oh, he's leaving on that and that date, and we got things ready in our basement to brew—homebrew beer. We had these big crocks, and we, uh, made wonderful homebrewed beer, especially my brother Will, he was very good. By adding potatoes, it got especially strong and so on. Then we bottled it up and we took it to the Endicott-Johnson pavilion, which was a huge dancing pavilion. Endicott-Johnson was a shoe factory. Binghamton was noted for the manufacturing of shoes. It was one of the things. [00:12:02] And so, we took it there, and all these young people came up, and they tried out our beer, and so on. We, ourselves, then got into the pavilion, and there were two—and that shows how—so kind of a racism and or whatever you want to call it at that time. On Friday nights where the—uh, came the girls who were from good families and where things were in order and so on. And on Saturday night, came all the people from the other side of the tracks, the Czechs and the Polacks and so on. They were perfectly nice girls, but they were easier and so on. [They laugh.] Yeah. And so, we catered to both girls.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah. [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But that was Endicott-Johnson, a big shoe factory, and Binghamton had had a big population of foreign people, especially from Eastern Europe who worked in these shoe factories. Then—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Is that what attracted your father to move there or was it the, uh—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was the AnSCO company—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It was the company not—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —purely the Ansco company. And they—I should say a few words about them because they were—it was an old-fashioned outfit and—but people like my father and then later on another group of Germans, they didn't always get along, from the Agfa company. They took over Ansco, and it became Agfa-Ansco. But they were all terribly efficient, and they made very fine products. They were just beginning to be a real competition to Eastman Kodak, which of course, was way ahead and so on. [00:14:08] So, Eastman Kodak and—well, the Ansco was a flourishing business, and I know my father was very valuable to them. He was head of the paper plant, but he also had his own darkroom in our house, and so that all helped to get me started with photography.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Was he taking photographs at the time? And I think I may have asked you this last time, but was he taking photographs, at the time, professionally or, um, was his—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, not professionally—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That was—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: There was—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: He was only with the Ansco company?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's his hobby. He always took pictures, and he got—he had some nice ones of Binghamton, you know, an album. I have to look for them. And so, he—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Had your mother died at this point?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No. That came when? In 1932, she died. '31 or '32, she died of pneumonia, and I think that was simply overwork. I mean, we would—we had to get everything new, you know, washing machine and all of those things that a household needs. We had nothing or she had nothing, and so she was overworked. I remember her hanging laundry, hand-washed, you know, on one of those corrugated boards and hanging it up behind our house on the clothesline, and it was a cold day. Binghamton can be quite cold, and she was hanging them, and I think that's where she caught her pneumonia. And then within a week or so, she died. [00:16:01]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And that was, of course, a terrible blow on my father and also my youngest brother who was—how many years was he younger? Well, he was just a baby practically when we came in '26, so he wasn't very old. And so, my father had to make a go of it, somehow. And he always tried to find some—a housekeeper, a housekeeper, and he naturally—he wanted—he would've preferred someone German and so he had these notices in the New York German newspaper there. And so, we sort of had one housekeeper after another because he was difficult. He wasn't the easiest man to get along with. [They laugh.] He was very precise in some ways, and they say that people used to set the clock—their watches or clocks by when he went to work at the Ansco company. [They laugh.] Very prompt, very—he walked there and uh, anyway, so. I was talking about my mother. Well, so we set up a new household then she died and then from then on, we had these different housekeepers.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It must have been so hard to come. You know you forget that especially at that time, coming to a totally new country with such—it was a large family and have—in a cold climate having to do such actual physical labor.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You know not only—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Absolutely, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —the emotional stress of it but the physical.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's very tough.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I mean with five boys—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And she did her best. I mean I—now, in retrospect, I'm amazed how well she did everything, and so let's see. [00:18:00] Well—oh, yeah, then came my teenage years and I went to high school, Binghamton High school. I should mention here that some people, Binghamton people were very, very nice. I especially remember two teachers. They were sisters who—at the Binghamton Central High school. Rogers was their last name, and they came to visit my father, and they offered whatever help they could. One place where they helped a lot was to get my older brother—his name is Wolfgang Friedrich who was then—who was called Fred [they laugh] immediately, he—to get him into college. They helped get him into Colgate College, which was not far from Binghamton, and that, I think it was a wonderful thing to do.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Also, when my younger—one year younger brother and I went to grammar school that we started, they sent us a special teacher to help teach us English. And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Because you didn't speak a word of English when you got here?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, not a word no, and we had to learn everything, but it was—people were nice, you know just plain, nice, helpful, and so on. I don't think my father always appreciated the ways of that, but that's the way it was. Then, uh—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: In high school, did you have any sort of art classes or—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —art training?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —[laughs] and that's a very good question. No, I don't remember anything particular, but it was a usual high school. But the thing that helped me the most, my brother and me, was that my father helped us build—we were—we both had Latin in—yeah, so whatever it was of Latin. [00:20:13] There was a Latin teacher, and my father helped my brother and me to build a *Castra Romanorum*, a Roman castle as the Romans had built along the Rhine and in Germany when they came up that far. And he had gotten the plan somewhere, and we worked on that thing at night, and he was very good at that, working with us and so on. Then we took the thing to school, and they were just aghast, and they put it on exhibit under a glass case in the—near the entrance, and so on. So, that was just one of those things that helped. It was good for my brother and me. But then came more difficult times as I got older. There was a man. He was one of the Agfa Germans who had come over, and he used to fascinate me by talks about South America. He had been in South America, and he would rave how wonderful it was and everything. I had a friend. His name is Bill Buckley, and not the Bill Buckley, but another Bill Buckley, a good Irishman with red hair. He and I would go to this man's house in the evening, and he would talk about—tell us the biggest tales about Brazil mainly. And so, Bill Buckley and I decided that we would seek our fortune in South America especially in Brazil and [laughs] so, uh—[00:22:04]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: At the age of 16?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, it was—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —or 17?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —more, 18, 19.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Eighteen, 19?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Okay. So—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was just before graduation.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Great ambition started, 18 and up—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Graduation was just another month or so off, and so we decided to look like explorers. We got khaki breeches and high-top boots against snakes in South America [they laugh] and when we crossed the Isthmus of Tehuantepec—that always fascinated me that name—which is somewhere down there [they laugh] and the Pan-American Highway. We—that was just being planned, the Pan-American Highway, and we thought, "Well, we'll follow the Pan-American Highway." Of course, it didn't exist. It was just—it's still being planned. So we decided—yeah, so we sold our bicycles, and I sold my boat, my kayak, and everything, and between us, we had \$140.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And the we—after we all had gotten our outfit, a hatchet that served as—let's see. The hatchet had two functions. Anyway, one of these tools that was supposed to be very practical but really was totally impractical [they laugh] and stuff like that. And so, we set up and thumbed our way south towards South America [they laugh] and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: South from New York.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. We followed the Susquehanna River as close as we could and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: You just left one day? Your father never knew that you were gone?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well, my father knew a little bit but not much. Poor man, I mean we just—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: You just left. Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —right, left and took off. You're absolutely right. The *Binghamton Press*, however, wrote a long article—I have it here still somewhere—about all the great things we were going to do. [00:24:08] Friendship with other nations—I mean we were way ahead of—world unity and that kind of thing. [They laugh.] And so, we started thumbing from Binghamton to Washington, and I remember we stopped. We spent one night in a little town, in a bed-and-breakfast place, and it turned out to be a Jewish place. I was fascinated. I mean this was to me—Bill Buckley [they laugh] didn't give a damn. But to me, this was the beginning of meeting other cultures and so on. They had one of these Jewish things at the door, behind the door, which Orthodox Jewish families have. It was beautifully done in silver, and I thought, “Oh, this is great. Now, I'm getting—” [They laugh.] And then—well that was just a night, and there was also a beautiful daughter in the place. I remember her. And I have to look on the map some time to see if I can find that place. And then we hitchhiked to Dickinson College, which is in York, Pennsylvania, I think.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: We had some friends there, and we stayed there for a night, maybe two nights. We had to talk to the students about all the good stuff we were going to do, so we repeated, more or less, what the *Binghamton Press* had written. [They laugh.] And also, the dean of the school, he wrote—we had a little notebook in which we wrote people who we'd met, kind of a dairy. [00:26:00] And we—we're also giving away postcards that we had made of ourselves, and it was a postcard of a globe with Bill Buckley pointing to Binghamton and me pointing to Brazil. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I still have one somewhere here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I've seen that, yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I was actually looking for it. And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, we passed those on. On the postcards, we somehow said that we would appreciate a contribution to this great work that we're doing. [Laughs.] Anyway, so we stayed at Dickinson College, and they all gave us a great send-off, including the dean who should have known better. [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I know [inaudible].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well then, we hitchhiked some more, and we finally got to Silver Spring, Maryland, and it was late afternoon or so. We looked at the map, “Aha, there's 16th Street that goes straight to the White House.” And so, still full of energy [laughs], and so we walked all the way from Silver Spring to the White House and for—and what made the biggest impression is when we got through U Street in that area where we—for the first time, I really saw black people, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I had seen some, of course, here and there, but I mean in a mass, and that was interesting. Again, I had that same feeling as with the Jewish—there's a name for that thing that they have—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: The one that hangs on the doorway?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, behind the door, really they have behind the hinges of the front door, and it's something like, Welcome or whatever it is. There is—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I know what it is. I don't know what it's called.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You know what—there's a name for it. Anyway, uh, what? [00:28:01]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: You felt looking—seeing all—a lot of black people

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah, seeing the black people—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —was similar—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —but then we looked at the map again, “Oh, no, it's just a few more blocks down to the White House.” Well, we had written Franklin Delano Roosevelt that we were doing this and enclosed one of our cards, you know? [Laughs.] And so we thought, “Well, maybe we'll be received there.” [They laugh.] Totally crazy. And we got to the White House, and we could walk right on in. There's no guard, nothing there. The fences were lower than they are now, the iron fences. We walked right up to the portico of the White House, and we looked in through the—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's amazing—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —glass doors there. We looked in, absolutely dark inside, no FDR, [laughs] nothing. And then by this time it was around 10, 11 o'clock, and it was very windy and cold. It was in February, and I'll never forget that big lantern swaying in the wind up there on these chains. And so, we thought, “Well, hell, we better find a place to stay. We're not going to stay in the White House.” We went to the YMCA, which was not far away, and they were full, and they said, “Oh, we have no room whatsoever, but maybe if you go up the street, there's a rooming house, you can—might find that you could spend the night there,” so we did that. We went to this place, and it was miserable. It was one room, and the wallpaper was peeling off, and there was just a tiny, little bulb hanging on a wire, you know a 25-watt bulb or something. [00:30:08]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And there were four cots in there, army cots, one on each wall. And two of them had already been taken by some people who might have been the last of the Bonus Marchers. The Bonus Marchers had been in Washington just before, and—see, because they looked a little bit like military gear. Anyway, we didn't know who they were. Anyway, we fell asleep, and the next morning, I woke up, and I heard Bill Buckley pounding his high-top boots around in different places, and I wondered what is he doing. I said, “What are you doing, Bill?” He said, “Oh, there's cockroaches in this place.” [They laugh.] And he—true enough, he was killing these big cockroaches that Washington had in those days. I haven't seen any anymore. They have gone—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: They're rare now.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Me too.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: You see those dry and those big worms.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But they were big and juicy, and he was killing them and so on. He was absolutely dumbfounded by these creatures, and he could not get them off his mind. Finally, I said—or finally, we decided to go to Pennsylvania Avenue and get some breakfast, and it was one of these old-fashioned places where they had—it was cafeteria style and where you sat in an arm chair, you know, with your tray, and so we had something to eat there. Every other sentence from Bill was, “Cockroaches” and so on. I mean he could not get them off his mind.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: How was he going to make it to—[00:32:01]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I do—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —Brazil.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You know—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, there you are—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —where there's much more than cockroaches.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah. [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Laughs.] You'll see. We then walked around in that whole neighborhood, Pennsylvania Avenue and Lafayette Park behind the White House, that whole area. We walked around for at least three, four hours, and the refrain was, “Wow, cockroaches,” and I would say, “But Bill Buck—Bill, we can't go back to Binghamton after all the things that the *Binghamton Press* wrote about us that we were going to do. We've only gotten to Washington. And what about when we get to Mexico and all these places?” Well, he was determined to go home, and finally in front of the old, State, War, and Navy Building, which is now the annex to the White House, that big building right in front of there. The streetcars were coming by, and there we parted, and we divided our money. He got \$70, I got \$70, and then he took the streetcar to Union Station and must have taken the train home back to Binghamton.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And there, I stood alone, practically in front of the White House with my huge backpack on, which had New York to Rio in letters about two inches high, New York to Rio on it. And, uh—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and people were looking at me and so on, I got terribly shy and annoyed and I wondered, well I've got to get out of this thing. So, I walked around some more, and finally at the house of Mrs. Robert Low Bacon, which is on—which is now the DACOR [Diplomatic and Consular Officers Retired] House, which is on F Street and—well right down in there. [00:34:05] It's an old mansion. Mrs. Robert Low Bacon was one of the great hostesses of Washington. In front of—and at her house, there was a sewer, and I took off my backpack, and I sorted out what I felt I needed and threw the backpack with New York to Rio on it into that sewer. [Laughs.] And that was the end of that. The funny thing is many years later, I would be invited to black-tie dinners at Mrs. Robert Low Bacon's who, as I said, was one of the great hostesses.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and I'll never—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —wonderful—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —forget that I was invited there. Carter Brown was there. His new wife at the time who was pregnant and who had morning sickness, and right at the dinner table, she plopped over—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh, my God.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and I helped her out with all I've got. But that was a place where I—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did you tell them the story that you had thrown out your—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, I didn't mention that at that time. Though, I've mentioned it later on. It's now also the meeting place of the literary society and I—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh, is it really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. They meet there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Which house? I'm sorry, which?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh, that's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, it's a house you must see.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I don't know where that is.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's wonderful.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's on F Street, you say?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think it's F.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: F and?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that's what I don't know, but right near the State, War, and Navy Building. Right near the White House, that big building, two blocks in.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: But it's a home? It's a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's a private house, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: A private house?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Currently, it's a private house too?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Pardon?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: But—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right now—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right now, it's a—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —it's a current? It's a—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, it's—now it's the DACOR House. Mrs. Robert Low—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, the Decatur House, is it?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, not Decatur.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: No, not Decatur?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: DACOR, and it's—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: D—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —mostly for state department people

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: D-E-C-O-R?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: D-A-C-O-R. [00:36:01]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: D-A—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: D-A-C-O-R.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I don't know what it stands for.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, I'll have to go and look.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah. I didn't know there—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I'm sure we've passed it a million times and have—you know?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I bet it's in Judy Frank's book here. Do you want to see it?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay, sure.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I would love to see it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yup.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Can you get that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think so, yeah. Look under Bacon maybe.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Okay. And that's just B-A?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: C-O-N.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —C-O—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He was the speaker of the houses or something and—yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, once you got rid of your backpack and what—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, yeah—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —was—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —then—good question. Then I wandered around some more, I thought, “My God, I'm going to need a place to stay,” and I went to the *Washington Post* offices.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: They just mentioned them, but this is not—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Does it say the DACOR? [phone rings] The DACOR House?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: General Marshall house built in—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Side conversation.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —in 1825 at 18th and F, a block north of the Octagon. Survives as the last privately-owned, in-town mansion. Oh, I see. So, it's 18th and F was the Bacon's House.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think that's it and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —Viola wants to get out.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh, sure.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Can you get her out?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah, I'll get her out.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Sorry about that.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: No, it's okay. I'll be right back. [00:38:00]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, so you can see—I mean, I'm just trying to show the contrast between the time that I stuffed my knapsack at the sewer at Mrs. Robert Low Bacon.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right. And—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Later on when I'd go to black-tie dinners in the same place, and I look at that sewer —[Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's such a great story.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, I look at that sewer in there, “Well, I made it” or something.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, a mark of how far you'd come.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah. Well now, your question. Yeah, so I went to the *Washington Post*, and it still being Depression time, there was a big line of people who wanted to read the *Post* free. There was a lectern made out of plywood, and there was a *Washington Post*, uh, laid out with a chain across so that people wouldn't walk off with it, even though a newspaper, at that time, was only something like five cents or so. But people lined up, and I took my turn, and I looked under places to live, you see, rooms. I was so lucky, I found an

ad for a room at 716 Jackson Place. Do you know where that is?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's right by the White House, right?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right by the White House, right down from the Decatur House on that street. And it was being rented by Corcoran, Tom or some—Corcoran was part of that name, a law office. They had their law offices on the first floor, and the rest of the house was a rooming house with all kinds of odd people in it. The room that I could get was a tiny room no wider than this and it might have been a closet or a servant room in the olden days in the garret way up on top. [00:40:11] There was no bathroom on that floor. You had to go down another floor and that kind of thing. Well, it was very primitive, but it was a place to stay. There was an even old, iron cot in there and so on. So, I rented that and thinking my \$70 isn't going to last very long. Well then, I soon made friends with Alberta Smith. I'll never forget her name. She was a—was a restorer of antiques and of paintings. She lived in the basement of that house, and there she also did her restoring work, and she also had a gas range on which she cooked. And I helped her with some of her restoration work, which meant sandpapering and that kind of thing. She would cook on that gas range, and so I, at least, had some meals there, and she was very nice. That's first thing—the first person I met there. Then I met Eric Menke, and he was to have a huge influence on my life. Eric was an architect. He'd studied architecture at Yale. He came from Germany, and he—he had a floor up there with some big rooms. He was very nice, and he showed me where one could eat in the neighborhood. There was a little restaurant called

the Clock, and you could—for 35 cents, you could get a whole meal. [00:42:02]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And 50 cents with bread pudding for dessert. [They laugh.] And very primitive, very simple, but I mean he introduced me to that kind of thing, and so I survived. And then through Eric, he had some friends who were sitting out the Depression in West Virginia, and they—and so we—so—one of them was Arved Kundzin. He was from the Baltic—one of the Baltic countries from Riga, Latvia. And Arved was a very educated man. He was an architect, but he'd also been a diplomat. He was one of these universal geniuses. Arved had a Buick Roadster, and in that Buick Roadster, we would go up to West Virginia, first weekends and so on and then sometimes longer. Arved had built himself some studio there—studios I should say, several little places, and, well, he needed someone to take care of those. And so, he offered me the job of taking care of these places and also to keep a garden going for—grow vegetables and that kind of thing, and I did that. I think he paid me \$2.50 a week [laughs] and I lived off of that and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How long did you do this for?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well about, perhaps a year. And so, I lived up there. I also—yes, and there was another chap Tom Hood. Tom Hood was a West Virginian who wanted to do—go on the road with puppets to have a puppet show, a marionette show. [00:44:08]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And he said, “Ha-ha, Volkmar, we'll make these marionettes,” and we already started carving them. I thought—I was all gung ho about that. I thought that would be great to go on the road and do that, have a puppet show. And there was Eric Menke who said, “No, you've got to finish your high school.” And he marched me up Aurora, which was about two miles or so from the woods where Arved Kundzin had his places. We went to the principal and the principal was very nice, Mr. Grant E. Nine [ph]. I'll never forget his name. He enrolled me, and so I got my high school—the rest of my points for graduation up there. So, I developed quite a love for Aurora, West Virginia, in that beautiful area there. It was really very scenically wonderful. The people are terribly nice, so. But then Eric also said, “You've got that camera there, why don't you make some pictures?” And so, I started making pictures around the area and made postcards, and I printed them on an old pump house that I converted into a darkroom, and I made these postcards. And I—there was also a tavern that they had built, kind of a bed-and-breakfast tavern place, and Mrs. Roosevelt used to stop there on her way to Arthurdale where she had a New Deal project. She bought three of my postcards—[00:46:03]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, she did.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And that was a tremendous ego boost. Eric said, “Well, you have to stay in this photography. Maybe you should come back to Washington.” So, I went back to Washington and got a job with Underwood & Underwood, which was then a very prominent portrait studio.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Now, they were a national studio with an office in Washington, is that correct?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I don't know quite what the—I know Underwood & Underwood goes way back in photography.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Whether they just took the name or what the connection is I don't know to this day. But at the time, they lived off making portraits, usually of society people and of diplomats. Whenever a new diplomat came into town, they had a bunch of telephone girls who would call up and say, "Oh, welcome to Washington, and we'd like to have your picture for the Sunday social page," and so on, you know, some talk that they couldn't resist. And so then the—Underwood & Underwood would send out a photographer with the eight-by-10 view camera and lights and everything to the house. And they'd make a picture of the lady of the house sitting by the piano or whatever, and that was the kind of pictures they were taking. I went along often when I could get away from the darkroom to—I went along to help set up lights and help those photographers.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And that was quite a big setup—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, a big setup—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —to take all the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —meant lights—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —equipment you—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and pack the lights and doing the thing, the formal type of portraiture. [00:48:05]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How long would it take a session, a portrait session?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, usually a couple of hours or so, yeah, depending whom you were with them. Some of them were more finicky than others, some very fast and—but it was a great lesson for me, not just the photography, but also I had a glimpse into Washington life, you know, the elegant houses, right around here, what was in the houses at that time. But that got me started and also in—at Underwood & Underwood, my first job was to mix the chemicals. This was long before they had—you could buy a can and just dump it in the water. No, you had to weigh out every ingredient on an old brass scale and formula were written on the wall. You could hardly read them. It was all—it was a dirty place and—but that was my first job then I helped to print portraits and that was very—is—it turns out to be very useful now working with Photoshop to see what place it could be lighter or darker or what to make the thing more dramatic.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Do you use Photoshop now a lot?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well, thanks to Lely sitting right here, we use it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Got it. So, you do feel that it's a direct—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, it's a direct descendant, yeah, and it should be recognized as such.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes. Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, no, no, Photoshop has its place in photographic history. It's—happens to be—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Certainly—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —the latest thing. In earlier days, it went from the daguerreotype to wet plate and from wet plate to dry plate and so on. [00:50:02] This is just another—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Another step—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —step.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —in that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. So, yeah. So, I got into—oh, yeah, and then one day, things were slow at Underwood & Underwood and there was this—they also had a news department of three news photographers. Jack Wilson was the head and then Robbie Robertson and—what the hell—the guy I'm trying to think of?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Clarence Jackson.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Clarence Jackson, yeah. And Clarence Jackson was a tough-looking guy. He was sort of—see, Lely has heard these stories of—[They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Not that much.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Who I feel sorry for.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: No don't.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And Clarence Jackson was kind of a Weegee—you know? You've heard of that photographer?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, of course.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He was that sort of guy. He was a little drunk half of the time, and he carried a hip flask. It was still prohibition time, and he carried a flask, and he was superstitious. He wouldn't ever change any setting on his Speed Graphic because he thought it would get out of whack, and he kept on his hat with his press card in the band. Anyway, he was a tough-looking guy, but like most news photographers that I've known, they have really quite a soft heart. They have to have it if you're going to be any good.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, you have to understand something about human nature. And he said, "Come on, we'll go up to the French Embassy, and we'll take some pictures of Madam de La Boulaye, the—"

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right across the street?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right across the street. "Of Madam de La Boulaye, the ambassador's wife." [00:52:03] And then he handed me an old Speed Graphic, really on its last legs. The bellows were in bad shape. It was really—it had been used a lot. And as we walked up the driveway, he gave me a lesson on how to use the Speed Graphic, and he said, "She'll be coming down to the landing and take one shot of her at the landing. Set your distance at 10 feet and stop down to—or open up to [f]5.6 and then when—then let her take a shot there. And then she—when she comes down, take a more close-up. Set your distance to six feet and stop down to f11 and take another shot." Well, I tried to do that, and I missed the second shot totally. I forgot to set the—change the focus and—but the first shot came out fine. Mr. Rubel, the head of Underwood & Underwood, he was so pleased, and it made the society Sunday—what do they call the brown pages? Sunday's society section and then Rubel said, "Oh, let him have that Speed Graphic." So, I had a camera.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It turned out the lens was very good, very sharp and good, but it was old. So, I had the camera, but I had no time to take pictures. I mean, the hours at Underwood & Underwood were long, you know, often until dark. You had to be there in the morning at eight o'clock and work all day until six or seven and so on. There was no time. [00:54:06] and then my friend Eric said, "Why don't you take some pictures of Washington by night?" And he gave me a book called *Paris de Nuit*. I have it right up there.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I can—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's in that. It's in one of those—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: If you've never seen any—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —sleeve up. You haven't seen it? It's—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: No, I think it's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's it. See, Lely's heard all of these so damn many times. [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's—I love hearing it.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It's a wonderful book, but my friend Eric—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's incredible.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —gave that to me, and that inspired me to take the night pictures.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's Brassai.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. By Brassai who was a Hungarian living in Paris. So that got me started in that and then—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: You had never seen Brassai or—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I had never seen.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —this book?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You hadn't seen this book.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But Eric had an eye for that kind of thing. He said if he hadn't been such a—he was incompetent with doing things, actually doing them, but he had the eye—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: His ideas—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This one I have hanging over my desk.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Do you really?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You know a little—a little—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Really?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —postcard of it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Postcard. From the show that was here?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's one of my favorites.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That show was incredible.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, well that—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That book is just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, the good is—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —it's mind-blowing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's marvelous.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Just the way it's printed and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, and then—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, this?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This reminds me of your photograph in the park.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's so—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: With the—with the movie house in the back?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, yes.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: The *Belasco*.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: *Belasco Theater*.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Which is one is the *Belasco*?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: *Belasco Theater*, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You're right. You see where the—? I'm glad you pointed that out. That's a good, good kind of thing to think of. [00:56:03] Anyway, then I printed up some of these night pictures on Mr. Rubel's best portrait paper. The paper was expensive, but I just did it underhand a little bit. And then when I had a set maybe of six or so, Eric said, "Why don't you send them to the Royal Photographic Society in London?" And I did that, and they were there for a couple of months or so, whatever. And then on the day I got them back, they had—some of them had golden stickers on the back of where they had been exhibited and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —they won some prizes and all of that. On the day that I got them back, I think it was in the summer, I had the package under my arm. I was walking past the *National Geographic*, 16th Street at that time only. The other building hadn't been built, and I thought, well—I had heard that they had such wonderful photographic laboratory up there, air-conditioned and everything. So, I went in and I asked the receptionist Miss Haney [ph], a nice, old, southern lady. I asked her if I could see the darkrooms upstairs, and she said, "Well, they're all out to lunch, but there is a young fellow up there who might show you around." She called up, and he said he would, and so I took the elevator to the fourth floor, and he showed me around. I was just flabbergasted. It was so wonderful. They had a special room for weighing the chemicals and mixing them totally, I mean like a beautiful kitchen you know? [00:58:09]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was totally different from Underwood & Underwood. And he showed me the different darkrooms that had knee pedals for turning on the water so that you could rinse your hand like in a hospital. So, I was just envious and thought, "My God, this would be wonderful. I would clean up the floor here if I could get in here." So, I asked this fellow—or as we were going along, he said, "Oh, this photography is for the birds" Those were his words. "And I'm going home to my old man's trucking business in Horseheads, New York." Horseheads is a little place in New York State. And I cocked up in the end, and I thought, "My God, why can't I get his job?" And I asked him, "How do you get a job here?" and he said, "Oh, you have to go to Eckington and Eckington is sort of behind Union Station and that's where the *Geographic* was mailed and even printed there by Judd & Detweiler, which was a printing firm next to the *Geographic* building. But also, the offices of the— personnel offices as it was called then. Now, it's called human resources. I don't—I could never see the difference. There was a Miss Strider [ph], and he said, "You have to see Miss Strider, and she'll help you," and so on. So, I took a taxi from 16th Street to Eckington, which at that time was a fortune for me. [01:00:08] You know, it might have been two, three dollars or something, but it was a fortune, but I took it. It was as if I would take the Concorde to Paris, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God [laughs].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was that sort of thing. So, I got to see Miss Strider, and she was a very formidable type of person with black dress with a pince-nez hanging down here. She listened to me and all that and then she said, "Well, here take one of these," and she had an old stack of employment forms on her desk—on her desk. She said, "Take one of these. Fill it out and send it back in, but I must tell you, we take only people of the highest caliber with experience," and so on. She didn't give me much hope at all. I was already at the door going out of her office when I remembered that I still had that package under my arm of the pictures that had just come back from London. I turned around, and I said, "Perhaps, you'd like to see some of my work." I showed her the pictures, and she looked at them but not so much the pictures, but she looked at the stickers on the back. That impressed her much more.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And then she set them up and looked at them with her pince-nez, and said, "Well, that's very nice," and so on but then I still filled out the form and so on. Well half a year later or almost half a year later it seemed just before Christmas, I did get a letter to appear—to come for an interview. [01:02:03] And I had an interview with the head of the laboratory Mr. Wizard [ph], and he looked at my pictures, and I have a guilty conscience because I—one of the pictures was not mine. It's a very good picture. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I forget what it was. But he looked at them all, and he thought that was great work. And then I got another letter to appear on January 2, 1937 that was, to come and start working there, and I did. Of course that worked out fine, and I worked in the darkrooms printing. They had these beautiful equipment enlargers that were just absolutely tops. You could tilt and correct lines, do anything with it. Anyway, I loved

that, and that's how I got started at the *Geographic*.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful. Maybe we should pause here. This seems to be a good break—

[END OF TRACK AAA_wentze02_7658_r.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This is Anne Louise Bayly [Berman]. Testing, testing. Okay. I'm here with Volkmar Wentzel on the 20—no, today is not the 23rd. What is today?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Inaudible.] Yeah. On the 12th.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: On the 12th of November 2002, at his home in Washington, DC. And when we left off last time, we had just gotten to start talking about when you began at the *National Geographic*.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You had told us how you had gone to the offices, and they gave you a tour of the darkroom, and you had hoped—you were quite impressed with it and hoped to work there and then you were hired on. So, if you'd like to start there, I guess, that would be a good beginning.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, going back to the—well, starting with the *Geographic*, of course, was a totally new life for me. I enjoyed going there. I couldn't get there early enough in the morning [laughs] to start work in that—those wonderful laboratory and the nice people that I was working with. In addition, I got twice the salary that I had gotten at Underwood & Underwood.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was a new life entirely for me. And of course, I was very much impressed also by what the magazine was doing. It was an elegant magazine still with the oak-leaf border on—the yellow and oak-leaf border. I soon found out that the real person behind all of this was Gilbert H. Grosvenor. [00:02:04] He was a remarkable man, and he had the vision to use photographs. He was very much for the use of photographs, and he boosted the photo lab and equipment, everything. He was behind all of that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And he was there when you started?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He was the editor and president, and he served for something like 50 years—he was in that position.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And he, himself, was a photographer? Is that—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He, himself, was a photographer. Outstanding about his work was he wanted to see for himself what it was like. So, he went to Russia in 1913—that was just before World War I—and he was—he went there with his father and some of the family, and they traveled around in Russia. I dare say they were most of the time in Petersburg or in Moscow. But the result is a remarkable set of photographs.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think I've seen some—some of them I've seen on your website, I think—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, you have? Yes, that's right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —that you have some.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Some of them are on the website. It's also interesting that right now I'm negotiating something that may show the—may end up as an exhibit in the—our embassy in Moscow, our American Embassy—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, really? That would be wonderful—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —in Moscow, an exhibit of the Gilbert Grosvenor photographs. And, of course, I'm all for that because I consider him a visionary, the one who started color photography, and that's perhaps the most outstanding thing that the *Geographic* has done. [00:04:08] It's never really been—we never really concentrated on that. There are several books out about the *Geographic*, but they never talk about the—or talked very little about the pioneering that Gilbert Grosvenor did with color photography.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: When did—when did they start using color photographs?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, [laughs] the funny thing is when they were throwing away a lot of stuff, I found

a little—I saved a little box, which was labeled “11 Lumières,” and that was another name for autochrome, which was the first process of color that came out in 1907. It was invented by the Lumière brothers in France, very bright and nice people, brothers, and they had come out with that process. Now, in that little box that I found, labelled “11 Lumières” were some picture—autochromes. They were very bad really. I can show you in there what it looked like. They, obviously, had been badly processed. It was very difficult to process autochrome. It took about 11 different baths and exposes, and was quite a ritual [laughs] to do that. But they were very bad, but they were of the—of Peary's ship in

the Arctic. So, what Grosvenor had done, he'd sent along—by the way in 1907, the expedition was in the winter of 1908 to [190]9. [00:06:05] He had sent some autochromes along and instructions of how to process it and so on. Well, the processing is very bad, but what it proves, those old autochromes—they were just four-by-five size. It proves the Grosvenor had an early interest in color. I mean as soon as the autochrome had come on the market in 1907, the next following year, he already sent some on an expedition with—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —with Admiral Peary. So, that is an interesting thing. But then it—then it's not all as simple as we think. I mean, there's the printing and then the taking of them was quite complicated. All had to be done in large format cameras usually five-by-seven-inch size, and they involve glass plates, and so on, which are heavy to carry it on. But it—but he was the one who pioneered in that, and the *Geographic* should be given more credit for being the first publication that lavishly used color. Of course, later on by—just about the time when I started at *Geographic*, it was already a magazine with—usually they came in sets, eight, 16, or 24 pages of color. Yeah. You know and—if it was a small article, it would be eight pages. If it was a big one, it might be as many as 24 pages of color. As I say, Grosvenor pioneered in that. [00:08:00] I should also mention that behind Grosvenor was Alexander Graham Bell. Alexander Graham Bell had hired a young Grosvenor who was also his—at that time, his potential son-in-law. He hired him as the editor of the magazine. But at that time—and that's just about a hundred years ago now—the magazine was not doing well at all. It was just a little pamphlet. It came out at irregular times, and the articles were really quite boring and the illustrations even more so because they were nothing but graphs and a few photographs, very few photographs. And those were not much good. So, Bell wrote or gave orders to his neophyte editor, son-in-law to—he said, “Put in some dynamical pictures into the magazine.” And Grosvenor did that. And he—the first set that he put in was in, I think, 1906—yeah, somewhere in there—about Lhasa, you know, the capital of Tibet. Nobody, at that time, had ever heard of Lhasa and had never seen any pictures. And by luck, he was able to get some photographs take—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did he take them himself?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No. He did not take them himself. They were taken by two Russian explorers, but the two explorers had sent them to the *National Geographic*. That name to, too, was a clever name, even to this day, *National Geographic* has an attraction as a name. [00:10:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Absolutely.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He and Bell and all the others, at that time, they coined that name, and I think it was a very good one to this day. And so, he published these pictures of Lhasa, and he noticed that, immediately, the membership went up. When he started out, it was less than a thousand here in Washington, DC.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But that was not enough to attract—to get enough funds together to do

anything with—you could hardly print the magazine with that. So then he published to—let's see—he did Lhasa. Oh, and then there was a congressman from Pennsylvania—Shiras was his name—who had taken remarkable flashlight pictures with flash powder in those days, of wildlife. And he—especially in Wisconsin or Minnesota, so one of those states, and he had a boat. In the front of the boat, he had a camera and he had his flash equipment. The flash equipment was very crude. I have some of it right there. I'll show you.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: This was—this was part of Shiras—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You compare this—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness, it's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I can't even get this down. If you—? That's supposed to—yeah, this. See, now what

happened was he—this was connected to a pen, which had flash powder in it. [00:12:06] And then he had rigged—in the path where the animal would walk, he would have a string, and that string was tripped—oops—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Thank you. And that would set off a little cartridge that exploded the flash powder. He got really remarkable—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness. What is this piece of equipment called?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He made it. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And he made it for God knows what [laughs], you know? That's it. I'll show you some of the pictures. I think I can find them right here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And this was? In what year was this?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That was—let's see—about 19—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —six?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —ten, somewhere in there, probably. See, this is kind of thing he—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's an amazing picture using—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, using that—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Looking at that equipment—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —equipment—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —it doesn't seem you'd get such a wonderful picture.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes. Always—but Grosvenor had an eye—the eye to see that that might interest people.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah, certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You can see wildlife like that, and that's a really—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Those are remarkable photographs.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And this is his arrangement. You see the camera? And then he could—he had two cameras. He could swivel that around, one exposure treated—you know, it's not like a Leica where you just turn something, and the next film is there. I mean it had to be reloaded carefully. But that's how he did it and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Anyway, Grosvenor had the vision to see that, to see that this would attract people with the interest of industry. Now when was that? [00:14:03] I would say right around 1910 or so. This was dedicated here to Theodore Roosevelt, and so that's that. But that's—I tell you, I think I can look up when that happened.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I can—I can also look it up too.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, but I think I have it right here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh. And so, these were the—those were some of the first photographs?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And then there are the ones from Russia and these wildlife—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Russia, wildlife, and there's some others I'll tell you right way. I think I've got it right here. [Phone rings.] Oh, excuse me a minute.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, certainly.

[END OF TRACK AAA_wentze02_7659_r.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Sorry about that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's quite all right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I wrote it down. It happened to write—oh, yeah, here it is. [Wentzel begins to read from his writing.] *Lhasa in 1905. In 1906, the flash-powder photographs of wildlife. In 1907, he featured American Indians by Edward Curtis who was a great photographer.*

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Sure.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And in 1910, you see there comes the color now, hand-tinted scenes of Korea and China. And he got some—I think a Japanese to take black-and-whites and tint them, and he published them. You see, always that interest in color and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And then I—what did I say? [Wentzel reads.] *With the autochrome process first available in 1907, Grosvenor pioneered the publish—publication of color photography. Under his 55-year leadership as editor and president, he was the architect of the popular, glossy, information-packed, monthly magazine that we know today. And at the time of his death, it had a circulation of five million.*

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's so remarkable.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, isn't that remarkable? Yeah. Then I went on. [Wentzel reads.] *It's evident that Gilbert H. Grosvenor clearly understood the cultural value and power of photographs. [00:02:03] His firm belief that geography could be fascinating, if told simply, accurately, and if fully illustrated, led him to engage a chief of—for illustrations, and his task was to establish—that was Mr. Franklin Fisher—his task was to establish the Society's own staff of photographers. No other magazine or no other publication had their own photographers.*

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And when did they—when did they start that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, that would have been mainly in the '20s. I was one of the early photographers, you see, or the last of the earlier photographers [they laugh] you could almost say.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How many photographers were there working at that time that you started?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Let's see. I can name them. There was Maynard Owen Williams. There was W. Robert Moore. There was Luis Marden. There were there Stewart brothers, Tony and Richard Stewart, and Willard Culver, and myself.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay. And were you—? How were you given assignments? Did you—were you given a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, practically—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —choose assignments?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —all the photographers, at that time, had to also do their stint in the darkroom. Of course, I was put in the darkroom, and I had to enlarge photographs. Many of them were Maynard Williams's photograph who was the—became then the head of the so-called foreign editorial staff, the guys who went out to travel and to write and to photograph and—which is what I became later too. [00:04:12] But I started in the darkroom, and then occasionally Mr. Wishard [ph], who was the head of the laboratory, he would send me out. Just, "Go get a car from the garage." The *Geographic* had its own garage and with cars, "and go to the canal, C&O Canal and take some pictures," and that's how I started taking pictures of the C&O Canal. Then came a time when Tony Stewart who was not a writer, but mainly a photographer and a very hardworking photographer and a very good one. Tony Stewart was doing pictures for an article about West Virginia. And he had—was nearly finished when they said, "Well you go," told me to go there and help him, and he would check me out, and I should finish West Virginia. That was, of course, very lucky because I had been in West Virginia. I may have mentioned that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I had been in West Virginia, and so I knew a little bit about. I started out with taking a quilting party in Aurora, West Virginia, and they loved that picture. They thought that's great and so on. So, they gave me complete carte blanche, and I traveled around all through the coal region and through all parts

of West Virginia.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How long were you there?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, it might have been a couple months or so. I don't know the timing exactly now, but they gave me plenty of time. And then all of a—then I was nearly finished and I had registered at—yeah, I had been in all that dirty cold country down there—coal country. [00:06:16] It was hard work, you know, working in those low scenes, which was sometimes no more than four or five-feet high, and trying to photograph miners hacking away, and I did all of that. And then I thought, I'll end up at White Sulphur Springs, that famous hotel. I got there one afternoon, and I got to talking with the manager, and we made all kinds of plans.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Is this at The Greenbrier or—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The Greenbrier Hotel correct. And we made all kinds of plans that, “Oh, we'll take the people at the fountain, and we'll do this and that.” So, we had it all worked out and then I went to my room, which was in the cottage that General Lee used to have. He put me up in the best cottage thinking, “Oh, well, here's a *Geographic* guy [laughs] who will—that'll be good publicity” and so on. I was in my room just getting dressed and cleaning up and so on when a Western Union telegram was shoved under my door, and that was from Mr. Fisher, the chief of illustrations that I had mentioned before. And he said, “Return Washington immediately and be ready to go to Sweden,” something to that effect. And I thought, “Sweden?” That's my first foreign assignment. [Laughs.] You know, I was absolutely thrilled. And then I went to the dining room, had a good meal, but I was just—you know, I couldn't believe it. So, the next morning, without ever telling the manager—[00:08:07]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, no.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —I did pay my bill and all that, but without ever talking to the

manager, again, I left and drove straight to Washington, and that's a long, long trip. And then—and I still have kind of a guilty conscience today whenever I think of the [laughs] Greenbrier and that poor manager that had planned all—made all these great plans with. But then I got back to Washington, and they gave me all the equipment I wanted and I uh—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And you were photographing in black and white at the time or color—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No both.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Both. Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Color and black and white, and it was really when the first Kodachromes had come out, but still—I still—there was, for a time, a large-sized Kodachrome, four by five, and three and a quarter by four and a quarter, and I used a lot of that to do Sweden with. And the essence of that assignment was that they gave me a manuscript, which was called “Under Swedish Roofs and Skies,” typical *Geographic* title. It had been written by an American lady who had married a Swede from that beautiful lake country in Sweden. And so, there couldn't have been a nicer assignment. And so, I boarded a ship, the old *Drottningholm*, which a famous passenger, Swedish passenger ship at the time, and I went to Sweden. Well, I did what I could. I covered all the things that were mentioned in the article, and every night, I would read that article again [laughs] until I practically knew it by heart. [00:10:03] They were very happy with that. And so, I did Sweden and then they sent me to Kentucky to do a state assignment there, and I did that. That was very nice. Kentucky is a beautiful state. I did the usual thing. I did something on the mountain people and on industry and all facets of—as we did. They were called state assignments, at that time, and they were very popular. Every state wanted to be featured in the *Geographic* and all, so it was good revenue for the magazine. Because people—the states or people in those states, they would advertise and advertising is what brought in the funds to send people out like people like me. And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, did you feel that—you were using such large equipment, I guess, at the time, larger than what you use now.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Were you—? Was it—? Did you find that there was any—it was difficult sometimes to get your subjects to act naturally or to be—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, it was. A lot of the thing was just plain posing. And the person that influenced me a lot were the covers of—was it *Collier's* magazine?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That famous American artist who did covers in—what is his name? He influenced me a lot because he saw American scenes, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, I tried to remember things like that, and I posed them. [00:12:03] A very corny one that comes to my mind, speaking of Kentucky, was Kentucky means horses. So, I went to those horse farms and then I got myself a very nice, little, in those days, colored boy, but now called Afro-American boy, a nice-looking kid. I got him to sit on the fence or door just outside of where these horses were where the horse could look out and he was—and I gave him half of a watermelon [laughs] to eat. I mean very corny. It's the kind of picture that might get some people thinking that that was racist in some way or what. I certainly didn't mean it to be. So that kind of picture. And or in the old Kentucky home, I took the women with the picture of painting of who wrote "My Old Kentucky Home"? Who was the composer?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, I don't know.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, with—anyway, I took what I thought was the old South and that kind of thing, and they were happy with that. So Kentucky—oh yeah, and then one other place in Kentucky, I shouldn't forget, was the monastery where—the Trappist monastery. Gethsemani was the name. Gethsemani monastery, a Trappist monastery, and I went there and I thought—I mean, I had heard about it and they were very nice. They can't—there's only one person who can speak to you. [00:14:02] The others are have to remain absolutely silent. They don't speak or anything. So, he says, "Well, come on in," and they invited, me and they gave me—invited me for overnight, and I thought, "Oh, that'll be interesting." And so, I stayed in a little, very narrow cell. I mean, it wasn't more than 10 feet wide and with a cot and a lantern or a candle. It's the only light. It was just absolutely simple, a crucifix [laughs] over the bed, and all that kind of—and—but I was tired. I went to—started to sleep, and it seems like I hadn't slept very long when there was a knock on the door, and there was a monk in a white habit with a candle. He says, "Time for service," and so on. So, I quickly put on some pants and followed him to the chapel or church, whatever it was. And that the most impressive. This was at two o'clock in the morning. They have a service every night at two o'clock in the morning. They were reading these big bibles and chanting beautiful Gregorian chanting. And that I—it was a—it was a wonderful memory and very impressive about the religion that keeps these monks going. So, I—well, that was interesting. The next day I—[Coughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And did they—and they allowed you to take photographs of this?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes. They did. But I didn't take any of that service, which would have been marvelous probably for two reasons: [00:16:04] One is I didn't know what was coming, and two, I didn't have—wouldn't have had the sensitive enough material to take it in that low light. So, I probably couldn't have done it anyway. But the next day, I took all kinds of pictures of the monastery, of them working in the fields in there. You know, I even went up on a big water tower to take the whole—as much of the monastery as I could. I only realized later how lucky I was to have gotten that shot because a German photographer had come afterwards and he had the same idea. He was traveling to the United States taking pictures, and he had the same idea. And at the top of the water tower—you had to climb up a regular ladder—and at the top of the water tower was kind of a walkway around and this trapdoor that went down. He was taking pictures, and he was backing up and backing up, and he backed up into that—a hole but that's—it's a trapdoor, so to speak, and fell and died.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. So that [inaudible] [laughs] from that point of view. So, anyway, Kentucky was done and then came the war, right—came the war and I wondered, you know, a lot of the people were, including some at the *Geographic*, they were all trying to vie, "Well, where can I get to be an officer?" or "Can I do that?" [00:18:08] Well, I didn't do that. I just thought, "I'll enlist and see what they want me to do." And I enlisted here at Bolling Field where. I had my boot training there and all of that. And then came the, well where should I go, and so they put me in the First Photographic Squadron of the air force, and that was mostly mapping, aerial mapping and so on. Especially they were mapping the whole northern part of Africa at that time by a special system called trimetrogon mapping, which was using [phone rings] three cameras—excuse me.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Are we getting what we want?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Side conversation.]

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VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —was the Farm Security Administration. And there were some people in that outfit who seem to realize that photography is history and history can be art. And I think that was—the groundwork was just being laid. I can't say that that was being done at the *Geographic*. As a matter of fact, the picture editors and people handling pictures, at that time, were not inclined in that direction. To them, it was just illustrations. And they wanted us to illustrate whatever we saw. Like I was saying about Kentucky and West Virginia, state stories meant that you covered every facet of it in some way or another, and so it—but it wasn't from an artistic angle. And I even dare say that people like Cartier-Bresson who were just getting to be known were not appreciated at all. Matter of fact, one of the editors said, "Oh, he's nothing but a snapshot artist." [Laughs.] And so that was changing rapidly. But the—but he point that you bring up is very important. When and where does photography begin as an art form? Now looking back—I'm looking at some of my books there—I think it began quite early even in the time that my father studied photography in Berlin in—at the beginning of the last century under Professor Hermann Vogel. [00:02:09] And Vogel was—uh, he'd written a book, something about photography as art. And I think that influenced Stieglitz at the time who also studied under Vogel just like my father, and that Stieglitz brought the idea here and it—and he cultivated it with his galleries in New York. And, of course, there were lots of imaginative American photographers who got into that, and that's, I think, where photography as an art form began. Now Grosvenor, the old man, I think, certainly, appreciated it as an art form in kind of an intuitive way. And he was really the first one who thought it was appropriate to give the photographer credit beneath the picture. And if you look in the *Geographic*, the credit is given to the photographer beneath each picture, and that originated with Gilbert H. Grosvenor.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And that hadn't been done before? I didn't—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It hadn't been done before. It was usually *Associated Press* or whatever, whoever published it, but not the photographer.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow, I didn't realize that was the case.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I think now, we're in a very interesting period, one of those great transitions in photography, as it was going from small—from large format to 35 millimeter or from plates to film. [00:04:03] We're now in this digital age, and I think many wonderful things can be done with so-called—I guess you could call it all digital photography. Now I, myself, have not done any actual digital photography, but I am working here, as you can see, with digital prints, and they can come out quite, quite well.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What do you think about the question now, especially using things like Photoshop, the ability to alter a digital photograph so that it's almost imperceptible to the human eye that it's been altered?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well—that's an interesting point, and it came up actually at the *Geographic* when we were doing a story about Egypt and the pyramids. And Bill Garrett, who was the editor then, he thought it would look better to move the pyramids closer together. I think it was on the cover, actually, of the magazine.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And he did move them together, and that caused a lot of flak at the time that that shouldn't be done. It's falsifying, giving wrong ideas, and so on, of what a place looks like but—and I'm sure that old Gilbert Grosvenor would—as far as I knew him, would not have approved of that, but there it is. I mean, there's the pressure of modern equipment and a young editor who wants to make a dynamical-looking [laughs] cover who says, "Well, if we move those pyramids together closer, it'll look better, be a stronger picture." [00:06:02] So, there are arguments on both sides.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And do you think that that—? Do you think, though, that that makes it less of a—if you're to look at it in terms of art photography and news photography, if that almost takes it away from being news photography because it's less factual or less—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, there's a—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —accurate?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —fine, dividing point there. I really don't know. Because on one hand, by making the picture more dramatic as Garrett did with these pyramid pictures, okay, it makes—that's good journalism [laughs] in a way. It's hard. I really don't know.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think a lot of people don't know. That's just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah. At least, we don't know at this point. I think maybe if we talk about this again 50 years from now, it will have resolved itself in some way.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How do you think that using digital photography will change what's either happening at *National Geographic* or elsewhere, just in the whole field of photography?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, speaking of digital photography, as I say, I've not done any of it. But I do understand that you can take many pictures and then select *the* one out of say—out of, say, 12 shots?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: One is always—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, even that.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —better than another or maybe a hundred shots. And it'll depend a lot on the eye of the photographer, what he selects. Is he just going to turn on like some of them do with 35-millimeter like a motor drive and take a lot of pictures and then they go through and find out which is the best? [00:08:00] Or does he have a very selective eye and say, "That is the motion that I want" or "That's the moment I want" and do it with two or three pictures?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, I think it does let you—I notice, and even in doing it myself using a digital camera, I'll take 75 right away and then I can go into—I can select one of them. I'm going to Photoshop and crop it and edit it and lighten it or darken it to define the outlines of things much better. So, it helps someone like me who doesn't take [laughs] a very good picture necessarily.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Now, I'm watching television for instance, especially those English movies like *The Forsyte Saga* and that kind of thing. We were watching some of that last night. They are—it's fantastic what they can do especially with close-ups, I mean portraits. Even the movement of an eye or even a twitch of a lip can give a total expression. And I think a good still photographer should probably look for those same kind of things, which the motion-picture people can do or are doing very well. Does that make sense?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, it does make absolute sense. [They laugh.] Well, to diverge on this and go back a little bit, before we started talking about this, we were talking about you working with the air force—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —other photographers. What is the—was the exact name of the group? Is there—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The First Photo Squadron.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Squadron?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And that was at Bolling Field, and there was Colonel Kaye who later—who was the son-in-law of General Arnold, therefore, had a lot of pull. [00:10:04] [Laughs.] I was his chauffeur really. I drove him always from Bolling Field to—you know I was a private then or a corporal or something, and I drove him to the—to the interior department, the Atlantic—no, the Alaska Branch of the interior department. And there they were mapping Alaska, and they were doing it by—with airplanes that would take vertical photographs with a certain overlap so that the overlap was just right so that you could see it in stereo, but that was just vertical. Then—and they were experimenting with vertical and one oblique. You could fly and by taking the oblique and being able to reconstitute it to the—like the vertical photograph. You could take huge areas. And Colonel Kaye, the son-in-law of Arnold, had the idea of taking a vertical and two obliques so that you could fly along and take huge distances, and, I'll say, fly over an island or an area and fly different strips, and they had—but they had to be a certain distance apart. And then after the photograph was taken, you would pick points—say a mountain peak that appeared on the vertical photograph and that also appeared on the oblique photograph—and that would be one of the points that you would connect. [00:12:01] And then they had a little gadget called the restitute, and that all brought it down so that you can make a big aerial map very quickly.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And the cameras were sophisticated enough to take a photograph at that speed that a plane or—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, they were. They were regular, aerial camera built by Fairchild. I forget the technical name for it. But they were a well-known camera with good optics and all of it. Oh, and then—yes. And so then came a quarrel—I guess you could call it a quarrel. I'm not sure what it really was—a difference that the corps of engineers said, "Oh, mapping is our job, and you're not supposed to do that." So, it came to the point where we had to prove to the corps of engineer that we could map very quickly. [Phone rings.] Sorry.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's okay.

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VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Where were we?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, we were at—you were told by the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh yeah—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —corps of engineers.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —the difference between the air force and the corps of engineers. Now, our maps, the aerial maps were not as accurate as the corps of engineers who did it, you know, by sighting and by measuring on the ground, but they were good enough for bombing purposes. I mean what's the difference? If it's just a few feet off, who cares? I mean a bomb doesn't care, and so—so we had to prove that the trimetrogon mapping or charting as we called it later on because it was not as accurate as mapping, so we called it charting. And that, we had to prove that to the corps of engineers. Now, [laughs] at the time, there were only a few people who knew how to do this. I was one of them, and so we're—it was a small group of maybe seven of us. But there was no officer who knew it, who knew the process all the way through. The officer understood what was going on but not to actually do it. So [laughs], I was—by that time, I was a tech sergeant or something, and I was put in charge of these privates and corporals, about six or seven of us to go to the big maneuvers in Louisiana where huge maneuver is going on, testing everything out, and so on. And there, we were supposed to demonstrate to the corps of engineers the trimetrogon mapping. [00:02:05] So, I took my little group, and we went down by train, I think, at that time, to Louisiana and we were given a—there was an old bunkhouse, like barracks, and we were put up in the top of it, and so on. And then the same evening that we arrived, a big burly, corps of engineer, master sergeant came in with a whole pile of prints, those—the contact prints of the area that had been mapped down there or that they—that had been taken. He threw them on the table, and he says, "Okay, you guys, go to it. Let's see what you can do." [Laughs.] It was a challenge, and they didn't think we could do anything. Number one, we were all very young-looking compared to those grizzlies, [laughs] corps of engineer people. Anyway, I divided my group up into shifts, and we got started doing this. We worked day and night, and pretty soon after the sergeant had come in, a lieutenant came in. He saw what we were doing and then the next day, a major and then a colonel, and finally, General Eichelberger, I think was his name, who was the big muckety-muck of the maneuvers, he came to see what we were doing. I was telling him, "Well, we mapped these, a hundred square miles here, and we got—we're working on that." I showed them, and they were all very impressed by what we were doing. [00:04:03] And so, we got, apparently, a commendation to General Arnold and then when we had finished what we were doing, I arranged—I think I arranged it or we were given, I forget, a certain—a week of leave [laughs] and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow, I see—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so I said, "Well, let's go to New Orleans" [they laugh] and so on. And I still had enough money. I mean, they had given me a certain amount of money, and we went to the—to New Orleans. We went right into the French Quarter, and we rented some rooms in a little, old hotel, and we had a [laughs] wonderful time in New Orleans—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's crazy.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That was our reward. And—but I dare say that that was perhaps the best thing I did in the whole war to help to steer this because otherwise, trimetrogon mapping might have been forgotten right there and then.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, that was—that was a good thing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That was—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Now, where do we go from here?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yup, I think this is actually a great breaking point, so—

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ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This is Anne Louise Bayly [Berman] with Volkmar Wentzel on January 24, 2003. We left off last time at the end of your time in the air force and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And you know, we're about to talk—and you came back to the United States and started working with the *National Geographic* again. And we're about to talk about where you went.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Okay. During my military service, that ended in Okinawa, and I was in a B-29 squadron for aerial mapping mostly. But I also—in the B-29, I saw the horrible destruction of Nagasaki that had been bombed by an atomic bomb and so on. I can't say that I did anything heroic, although I have some little medal for heroism in the big typhoons. We had two big typhoons on Okinawa when huge ships were just thrown onto the shore and everything was destroyed including our camp. And to survive, some other fellows and I, we crawled into an old tomb. The Okinawans have tombs that are built into the hills that are supposed to resemble the womb, so you go from birth back to the womb. And they're quite interesting, the tombs are. They have kind of a staircase in the back and in—on their doors are some beautiful urns, and in the urns are the ashes of the dead. [00:02:05] We survived in there. It was not very—it was rather smelly because there was a decomposing body in there that was—that hadn't been cremated yet.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But anyway, we—I survived the typhoons all right. While I don't think I did anything heroic in the war, I did get when I came back to the *National Geographic*, almost a hero's welcome. They were terribly nice to me, and I got my job back on photographic staff, and they gave a party and lunches and all of that kind of thing. It couldn't have been nicer, the whole *Geographic* staff. But among all these celebrations, Mr. Franklin Fisher, who was the chief of illustrations and under whom the photographic department was, he said, "We would like to have you do India." Those two words, "do India," they still ring in my mind today, the way he said it. It was followed up with something like, "Well, go down to Riggs Bank, and get yourself a \$2000 letter of credit, and be off as soon as possible." Well, in those days, the *Geographic* didn't have a travel office or any of that. You had to make your own travel arrangement and so on. So, I thought, "Well, how am I going to get to India?" and I found a freighter from Baltimore that would go to Bombay. It would take one month to go by freighter to Bombay. And I packed up all my photographic gear, which in those days, were still a large-format, color photography, which is the way it was done. [00:04:10] It was just the period of changing from large format color to the 35-millimeter. At this point, I should mention that the *Geographic* pioneered in the use of color. First with the large format, which goes way back to 1908 and [190]9 when Gilbert Grosvenor sent along some autochrome plates to—on the Peary expedition.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, yes, you told me that.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—did I mention that?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He sent them along, and I have a copy of that, which is proof how early he was interested in the use of printing color. And then comes—it's not just a taking of the color, but it's also the printing of it. And that was a big pioneer era that has—I don't think—ever really been published. And it should be because that is one of the pioneering things that the *Geographic* did. And it resulted in the magazine, as we know it today, with all its lavish color and—well my—as I—at the time I was doing India or to do it—about to do India, we changed from the large format, which was autochrome and—um, what was the other? Autochrome, Dufay color, and another color, an English process, anyway, they were very cumbersome. So, I had a lot of equipment, and off I went on this freighter to Bombay. [00:06:03] And I was the only passenger on board, so I had what they called the owner's cabin, which is usually next to the captain's cabin, a very nice cabin. The captain was a—had Swedish name, something like Lindholm [ph] or whatever, and he invited me. He said, "There's a deck chair. You can sit here on the bridge." And so, I had—I was very comfortable crossing the Atlantic, and we got to the Strait of Gibraltar, and we're in the Mediterranean Sea, and I started to read two volumes of *The Travel Diary Of A Philosopher* by Count Hermann Keyserling. Keyserling was or must have been a remarkable person. He did lots of travel, and he had been to India, and so I found these books—two volumes, I still have them—I found them very interesting, especially since I had a lot of trouble in Washington trying to find out something about India. I did go, of course, to the British Embassy because India was under British domination, and they were very nice, courteous, and so on, but I felt I never really got to the real core things. There were some people who were helpful. One of them was the only Indian I could find in all of this whole area—was a teacher. I don't know what he taught, but he taught at the reformatory in Lorton, Virginia. I called him up, and I said, "I'm going to your country, and I'd like to meet an Indian," and so on. [00:08:05] So, we agreed to have lunch together. I invited him to the *Geographic* for lunch. On the designated day, he came, and the receptionist—Miss Haney was her name, a very nice, southern lady, very well-bred, and all of that, she called up to the fourth floor. She says, "Oh, you've got a visitor here, but I'm not sure whether you really want to see him," and so on.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And at that moment, it dawned on me that he was dark, you see, a dark-skin man. She always is—you know, no one got past her desk. I thought she was a southern lady, but that's the way it was. I mean, she was a nice lady, she didn't mean any harm to those people, but that's the way it was. So, I said, "Well, please send him up," and so we did have our lunch. But it just shows you—or what I'm trying to say is how that was. Even at the *National Geographic* that deals with the world, we had cases of discrimination like that. He was quite dark. He was a Dravidian Indian. They are usually quite dark. They're from the south from Madrasa [ph], I think—believe he was. Anyway, he was very helpful. And so, yeah, I was in the middle of the Mediterranean and reading Keyserling's book, and I—that appealed to me so much. He said something somewhere, *Oh now I'm free, you know, and I can do as I please, and no bureaucracy, none of that.* [00:10:01] And that's exactly the way I felt. I felt just totally on my own, especially when we came—went through Suez and into the Arabian Sea. It was hot. At one point, we met a locust storm, I could call it, because there we were the—Captain Erickson [ph], I think, that was his name. Captain Erickson, and we were on the bridge, and I saw him with a Flit gun. The sky was fairly dark, and there were locusts coming all over the ship. I mean you—wherever you stepped, you were crunching—you were crunching locusts to death.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was like in the bible, and one of those storms. And here was Captain Erickson with a Flit gun going after these locusts. [They laugh.] It was really ridiculous, but—so the Red Sea then into the Arabian Sea and then finally to Bombay. In Bombay, I got off the boat with all my gear all piled up there, and I went. I did have a reservation at the Taj Mahal Hotel, which is a beautiful hotel that the British had built. And so, I tried to get a taxi, and there was no taxi, but I got three tongas. Tongas are these two-wheeled carts pulled by a horse, and I piled all this stuff in there and arrived at the Taj Mahal in three tongas. [They laugh.] And, uh, then I finally had everything carried to my room. I had a nice, big room overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Gateway of India, which is there that the British had built at some anniversary. [00:12:03] And so, here I was in India. The next question that arose in my mind was how am going to get around in this place? Well, I did take the train to Delhi. I thought I ought to go to Delhi. That was the capital, and there I could, perhaps, make arrangements to get some kind of a vehicle and find out what to do. I did have an introduction from a lady in New York, a sculptress in New York, to the viceroy of India, which is rather difficult to get, an introduction.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Sure.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But I also followed the old *Murray's Guide* was a kind of a Baedeker of—about India that the British had written of what the proper things to do is. The proper thing is to call on the viceroy, and he would receive you, and you would know where you are, who you are, and so on, and that not only to the viceroy, but to all the Indian states to the various maharajas. That was the protocol. So, I did that. The viceroy was very nice, and he said, "Well, about the only thing I can do is give you a chit as a British call it, and you can go to—you can go to Calcutta. In Calcutta, we have these huge disposal yards for vehicles that were used on the Ledo Road to China during the war," and I did that. I did go to Calcutta then. I left all my gear in Delhi. I went to Calcutta, and when I saw those disposal yards, I thought, "My God, this is hopeless" because they were—it was like a big junkyard. [00:14:07] One vehicle was in worse shape than the next. And I had hoped to get a little jeep of some kind in good condition that I could travel around in, and they looked absolutely hopeless. But then I made friends with an Indian army captain who was in charge there, and the army captain was very nice. When he heard that I was from the *National Geographic* and when I said, "Oh, I'll make you a member of the National Geographic Society," his eyes lit up. I could already see that he saw all these names—these letters behind his name like the British do: member, National Geographic Society. He said, "Well come back in a couple of days, and I'll see what I can do." I came back, and there he had an ambulance for me with the red crosses on each side and the tools, you know, shovel, pick, and all of that, and jerrycans for extra gasoline were all there. And inside were two stretchers, and the whole thing seemed to be in pretty good shape. The tires weren't all that great, but they were still usable. The only thing that was really bad was the battery, and the battery was weak, and I had to learn to crank that ambulance, but I did that. I'm not a great physical specimen to crank a big ambulance like that, but I learned how to do this, there's a kind of a trick to it, and so I had—every time I started it, I had to crank it. [00:16:01] I did that, and I drove it my hotel, which was a miserable kind of place. I think it was called the Grand Hotel, and I parked it there and then the next morning, I got up early to drive to Delhi, which is a long drive. It took me three days to do it, and I bought myself some British biscuits and maybe a can of sardines or whatever, something to eat. I drove what is called the Grand Trunk Road. This was the road that the moguls used to invade England—to invade India, and I traveled along that for three days, living and—I slept on the stretchers and I locked myself into the thing during the night, and the—and I finally got to Delhi. In Delhi, I stayed at a very nice hotel, the Cecil Hotel in Old Delhi, which was managed by a very nice lady, Mrs. Hotz, H-O-T-Z. She was a wonderful Swiss manager of a hotel, and everything functioned perfectly. The gardens were in good shape and so on. Anyway, Mrs. Hotz was very helpful and she helped me get a sign painter. He came, and we painted out the red crosses on the side of the ambulance. In their place, we put a big map of India in *National Geographic* yellow. And then in big lettering, I called it, "*National Geographic Photo Survey of India.*" That was

big on the top then the same thing in smaller in Hindustani and in Urdu, the three—other two language that are spoken in India. [00:18:09] On the door—on one door of the ambulance, I had an American flag and on the other door, I had the *National Geographic* flag. So, the whole thing looked very official.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I started driving it around in Delhi, also mainly to learn how to drive on the wrong side of the road, you know, as the British do. So, apparently, Nehru saw it, or somebody told Nehru about it, and, uh, so one day, a little soldier-looking kind of a messenger came, and he had a letter for me, and that was from Pandit Nehru. It said, "Oh, we—I'd like to know what you're doing and come to dinner," and so, I accepted the dinner invitation. Of course, Nehru, at that time, was nobody really. I mean he was kind of probably a thorn in the side of the British, although he had been totally British educated, so he know—knew the language. He knew the English culture and all of it, but he was also for Indian independence, and so I went to that dinner. I don't remember who else was there. I think it was some of his sisters and people—I mean, all people interested in Indian freedom, but it was very interesting. And so I thought, "Well—" Because I—at that moment also, I didn't know where am I going to begin here and this is—India is a big country, a big subcontinent is what it is. And so I thought, "Well, I'll ask him what." I said to Nehru, "If you were me, a photographer sent here to cover your country, where would you start?" [00:20:09] He thought for a minute, and he said, "Well, I would do the Ajanta Caves." The Ajanta Caves were Buddhist caves that had been started, I don't know, I mean hundreds of years before Christ, B.C. And he said, "They have beautiful frescoes, and they tell you of an ancient India that must have been really quite wonderful," and so on. So, I planted that in the back of my mind and then I went back to my hotel, and I thought, "Well, hell, that is not really what the *Geographic* wants. They want a travelogue kind of thing." So, I didn't do the Ajanta Caves. I went to Kashmir instead. I thought Kashmir has got the scenery. It's got everything. I would make it—it would also be relatively easy to start with because I knew that back in Washington—I've been away now for more than a month—that they were waiting for pictures.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, I went to—oh, yeah, and at the hotel, I met the head of the University of Delhi. I talked with him, and I said, "Do you think you can find me a student who might go with me who could be an interpreter?" and he said, "Well, I'll send you some fellows." He did, and I looked them over and talked to them. There was one that I thought was pretty nice. His name was Ram Roh [ph], and Ram, I picked him. I hired him, and he became my interpreter. And so, off we went in the ambulance, all packed up and everything, to Kashmir. [00:22:07] It's quite a trip, and we went to Jammu and all those places and finally got to the Banihal Pass. It's quite a high pass, perhaps 10,000 feet or something like that. I forget what now. And he—and we were standing there, and I had noticed that the ambulance was acting up a bit, but I thought, "Well, at least, we made it this far" and then I checked and I found out that the fan belt that cooled the motor was all shredded to pieces or was being shredded to pieces. So, we practically had to coast down the Banihal Pass to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. It was also the same road that the old moguls used to take because they used to go to Kashmir for their summer when it got hot in India, in the plains. And anyway, I coasted it, managed to get it to Srinagar and then I tried to get a new fan belt—not that simple.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And they tried to help me there to, uh, fix the old one, but it was hopeless. It was totally gone and then I found out it would take at least a month to get a new fan belt.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So there I was stuck in Srinagar with my ambulance and all my gear totally, you know, immobile. Well I—but I made friends with some very nice English people, a colonel and Mrs. Sevenoaks [ph], and they were very nice. [00:24:08] They lived on a houseboat, and I had tea with them, and I told them what my problems were and so on. They said, "Oh, why don't you go to Ladakh? And that is very nice up there, and we'll give you Mohammed [ph], our cook. He has been up there. He knows just where to go and everything, and he can be your guide." So, I accepted that, and I got Mohammed, the cook who had a red beard, which showed that he had been to Mecca. That's—a good Muslim goes to Mecca once in his life. So, he was a very devout Muslim, and I had the Hindu student. The three of us, we set off, and we left the ambulance in Delhi—in Srinagar at the hotel, Nedou's Hotel. Also interesting to show you that racism wasn't only here, as I told you about Miss Haney at the *Geographic*. We—I registered at Nedou's Hotel, which was the hotel in Srinagar and when we walked into the dining room, I would—took the Hindu student—the Muslim didn't want to come. He ate—he found something in the bazaar, but I took my—the Hindu student, and the English people looked at us funny, you know, "Oh, you don't bring a Hindu in here," and that kind of thing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So that shows you that that was existent in India just as bad as we have our

problems here, but anyway, it worked. So finally, we set off on foot to go to Ladakh. [00:26:09] And quite frankly, I had no idea what the hell or where Ladakh was. I just put my faith into Mohammed, the Muslim and so on. And so, off we went, and we went through some beautiful valleys in Kashmir, you know big oak trees and walnut trees and masses of wonderful walnuts, and we came across some interesting tribal people who were herding their sheep there, very, very nice. But it kept going up and up and up, and finally, we came to the Zoji La pass, which is about 11,000 feet, and we climbed up there. And all of a sudden, there we were in another world. I mean there was—the vegetation was gone. We were above the tree line and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And there were these prayer places of mostly Buddhists with prayer flags on them. And so, we got up there, and from there on, it was—the way you traveled was by the Dak system, D-A-K I think it's—and that's an ancient system, the same kind that Marco Polo used when he went to China. And it's—usually, the way it was, there was a road or a path from one village to the next. And so, every day, you traveled, say, 10 to 20 miles on foot. Or sometimes in these villages, they had horses or donkeys that you could rent, and you would do the 20 miles and then somebody would take them back to the original village. [00:28:03] It was the same way, as I say, as Marco Polo traveled. It was an old, ancient system. And so, that's what I used, and it got to be more and more interesting. We kept going higher, fantastic Himalayan scenery, and we were actually now in Tibet. Ladakh is Western Tibet, and there were Buddhist prayer flags and monasteries on top of hills. There were usually like castles in Europe, would be these monasteries. And sometimes, I even stayed in them. The monks, the Buddhist monks were very nice, very hospitable. Of course, it was all very primitive and lots of—not cockroaches—bed bugs everywhere. You know you—it was hard to sleep, but that kind of thing. And that's what you had to put up with. But I stayed as I—I stayed in the monasteries. I took pictures in some of their libraries, and finally, after at least a week of travel every day at 10, 20 miles, I got to Leh, L-E-H, which is the capital of Ladakh. And no automobiles or anything. It was all still caravans and the way it must have been for hundreds of years in the past. And so, in Leh, I think I stayed with some missionaries. Anyway, I—that became my base and then I started taking pictures around there and I went to some of the monasteries. [00:30:03] And in one of them, the—what was the name of it—Spituk, they had Lama Day. On Lama Day, the lamas are free from their vows. They can do what normal people do, and they had kind of a festival, and they all sat around drinking yak buttered tea and—which is all right when it's hot. But the temperature outside was cold, and so the tea got cold very quickly, and that yak butter was nothing but a big fat ice floating. It was awful. But here you are, you're a guest and the moment you thought, "Well, I'll finish this damn tea" then they'd pour you another cup and another cup and so on. Also, they had—uh there's a picture in the *Geographic* of that session, and they also had a bow-and-arrow contest. And here were these lamas shooting bows and arrows, and so on, at a target. Finally one of them said, "Oh, sahib, you try it." Now, I'm no—I know nothing about bow and arrow shooting more than I did as a kid. So, I took the bow and arrow, and I shot at the target, and luckily, by pure luck, I got very close to the bull's-eye.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so all of a sudden, you know, I was somebody among them [laughs] on the basis of pure luck. Anyway the stay in Ladakh was a fascinating experience. I mean I saw a bit of Tibet. I visited the queen of Ladakh who lived in a compound that—the way it must have been for the last thousand years with the women spinning wool. [00:32:16] And she had kind of a cobra headdress, which is the headdress looks like a cobra, I think, and it's set with—what are the stones? Those green—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Emerald?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Not emeralds, but you're close to it. Lapis lazuli, anyway with green stones. She was very hospitable, very nice, and I spent a day there. I wish I had made a lot more pictures there than I did, but also we must remember from a photographic point of view, my film was limited. I had to—you know film wasn't as abundant as it is now where a photographer can shoot hundreds of rolls. I mean I had to kind of say, "Well, for Ladakh, I can use 10 rolls, say, at the most because I have to still save for the rest of Kashmir" or whatever, and—because it would take a month or so to get more film.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's much more restricted than photographers now.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right. One was much more, and so you had to make each exposure count, but anyway, I did pretty well. So that was Ladakh then I went back to Kashmir. I took the usual pictures, I think, nothing spectacular, some—they grow—what do they grow up there? Well, market scenes and all that kind of thing and houseboats, all that kind of thing. It was—Kashmir was a wonderful place.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did you find that the people were, uh, open to being photographed or were—they were natural—[00:34:11]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They were quite normal—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —about it?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —quite natural and normal. Naturally, the women didn't want to be photographed. They were Muslims. Kashmiris are mostly Muslims. I think now, in retrospect, a great injustice was done to annex Kashmir to India under Hindu rule because the people are Muslim but that happened later on. Because the maharaja was Hindu ruling these Muslims, and so Kashmir became—came under India, but it really is unfair. I mean if you go by what—who the population is.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, anyway, I enjoyed my stay in Kashmir then I went back to India and then I realized that things were going on politically. But one of the things that Mr. Fisher also said, “Stay out of politics,” so I never knew quite where to draw the line. But things were going on and I made friends with an American who was writing politically about India, and I recommended him to do a story about Delhi because things were changing there and, which he did. And I must have that somewhere here. Let me see if it's here. I know, but I've got it. It's over here. Is that all right what I'm telling you?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, oh, that's wonderful. [00:36:01]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Here is Ladakh. They didn't want me to write the story, so they kept the pictures. Here's one of the monastery, and you can look at the picture. And the story was finally written by a very nice Indian lady. She was an actress, and there's the woman with the cobra headdress. I just had it here. There, that's the queen of Ladakh [laughs] and her daughter. So, it's all there, the stuff I'm telling you.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I'll see in there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: These are wonderful, wonderful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You can see it was another world.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Absolutely. Oh, these are amazing. The landscape is—and it does seem as though they were—in the photographs, it seems that the subjects were posed to be—[00:38:04]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, yeah they were nice, and those are monks—in a monastery. They have these devil dancers, and they put them on for me, and I gave them a gallon of kerosene and—what else—and some—a flashlight and things. I traded for—they put that on for me.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, really? Oh wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This is—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —just put that down there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And here the, uh, fellow that I teamed up with was Phillips Talbot, and he was an American writing for some American papers, and he was sponsored—and this is also, kind of, typical American, which I like. He was sponsored by some well-to-do or a wealthy man to document India at that time, and he did that, and he did it very well, very responsibly. I got him to write the story for the *Geographic*, which was called “Delhi, Capital of a New Dominion,” and this is it here, and you can see right here is my ambulance in the back. And that was Delhi at that time.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow. Oh, that's great. It does—the ambulance looks very official—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, it was—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —and not as much as like an ambulance.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Oh, when I went to the—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's wonderful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —Indian states later on, I was saluted, you know [laughs], because—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —it looked so—it looked like something—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that is wonderful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —official.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, why don't we pause here? [00:40:00]

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VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —or Ladakh or whatever.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So—and these two issues were—let's see. They were May 1951 and then November 1947.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: The other way around. These are wonderful. Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, what I'm telling you can generally be documented visually.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It is—what—visually documented more or less. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So here, I was in Delhi and, uh, I did that and then—oh, yes. And then there was still, of course, all of southern India and there were the maharajas and so on. And one maharaja who invited me, and I made friends in Delhi, all kinds I mean, and it was very human, in a way, the way it worked. Anyway, I got an invitation from the maharaja of Jaipur. Jaipur is one of the leading states, and I was invited there. And I drove there in my ambulance and also—another person who was invited was a couple of people from the American embassy and a representative of a Swiss company, uh Fulkar Brothers [ph]. I took them in my ambulance. We went to Jaipur, and on the way to Jaipur, the ambulance broke down, some motor trouble and so on, and we were there absolutely in nowhere and, uh—was it a tiger that came?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Anyway, we finally—we had trouble getting there, and so it got to be very late when we got to the gates of Jaipur. [00:02:11] In Jaipur, the gates were locked just like they were in medieval Europe. The city was locked up at night, big gates, bolts, and things. And so there we were in front of Jaipur, the gates of Jaipur, and didn't know how—what to do next. But we did find—we walked along, and we did find a little door that we could squeeze through, and we unlocked the gates [laughs] of Jaipur, drove in into the palace. And, uh, the maharajas, and so on, they stay up late. They eat very late—and usually 10, 11 o'clock, and so we were received very well. And then I—yeah, and it was like going into—what—another world with all these wonderful saris that the women were wearing, these princesses, and the maharani of Jaipur, she was very nice to me. I still correspond with her now.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. She was considered to be the most beautiful lady of all—in all of India. So they were very nice and then finally came the day—I stayed there a number of days and took pictures in Jaipur and then I went—I had an invitation to go. See, one maharaja was kind of vying with the other and said, "Well if he goes there, I want my state presented, too, in the *National Geographic*." And so, I went to the state of Bundi. [00:04:01] I don't know, it was perhaps 200 miles or so away, and I'll never forget, on the terrace in front of the palace in Jaipur, they toasted me off with champagne and were very nice. And I drove off towards Bundi, and that was through a lot of desert country and jungle country, and so on, pretty wild, but there was a way of going. And so I got going and then towards afternoon, my ambulance began to act up again, and suddenly, I was stuck in the middle of absolutely nowhere.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, no.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, um, I tried to fix it. I got all greasy and dirty trying to fix it, but I couldn't—it was something in the spark plug system, which turned to be out—turned out to be some burned out coils, and there was no way I could fix those. So, here, I was sitting there in the middle of nowhere, and pretty soon, a

tribe of people came—of migrant people, and they decided, oh, there's a white sahib, and they decided to stay there with me, and they built a campfires and so on. And fortunately, I had a lot of K rations. K rations were leftovers from World War II, the rations that the soldiers got. I bought quite a bit of those, and each little package had some cigarettes in them, and they craved those cigarettes. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, I traded cigarettes and made friends with them and so on, but I had absolutely no private—privacy. I mean every step, everything I did, I watched. [00:06:01] They looked into the ambulance where I slept on the stretcher and so on. I couldn't even go out and have a pee by myself. [They laugh.] I would

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was, in a way, terrible. Anyway—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How long were you here or there with them?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, yeah, so that, it got to be around 10 o'clock, nine, 10 o'clock, and I was just getting ready. I thought, "Well, I'll go sleep now." I had been in an eventful day, and a car came along, and the car was driven by—or it was—he had a driver. It was driven by a—I forget his name—but he was the head jeweler of Jaipur. And Jaipur is famous for jewelry, and he was a head jeweler with his sons, and they were in a nice, big car. I told them what my problem was, that I was guest of the maharaja, and when they heard that, they bowed and scraped in deference. I mean the maharaja was still somebody looked up to, you know, very much. And they said, "Well, we'll take you back to the palace." We got—and then so—it was an hour or so drive back, and we got to the place. By this time, it was nearly midnight, and they were afraid, of course, to go into the palace, and so they let me off by the gate. And here I was in a dirty, old, khaki clothes just standing there and wondering, "Well how—? What am I going to do next?" Well, the only thing I could do is find my friends, the maharaja or the maharani. And I went in, and pretty soon at the gate, there was a guard with a turban and a sword across his knee, and he was sound asleep. [00:08:05] He was a guard, and I slipped back [laughs] past him, and I got to the palace, a famous palace called the, uh—I forget the name—Rambagh, Rambagh Palace, R-A-M-B-A-G-H. Rambagh Palace, which is surrounded by Lalique fountains, beautiful fountains made in France with water pouring from them and lit from inside. I mean, it was really magic, the whole place. Well, I went, and I knew that the place I would have to go to is the ADC—that's the aide-de-camp to the maharaja, and I knew one of them. His name—they called him Rabbit. He was always in uniform, but his nickname was Rabbit. And so I went to the ADC room in the palace, and I asked for Rabbit, and he came, and he said, "Oh, wonderful. And so, you must come. We're just finishing dinner," and so I was ushered in, and there was this beautiful, long table, also Lalique glass made in France, lit from below, and beautiful china. I mean the best things that you could get. I mean money, apparently, was no question. There were all these—Indian princess, the maharaja and the maharani and British officers with epaulets and all kinds of decorations, and so on. I was introduced in my dirty, old—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Still in your—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —khakis, "Sit down," and so on. So, they served me a meal, and I told them what my problem was, "Oh, don't worry," and so on. [00:10:01] So, I had a wonderful evening. I mean, I was really received royally. Then I was taken back to the room I had before right in the palace, and the next day the maharaja said, "Well, I'll give you some of my soldiers to go with you, and they'll fix your ambulance," and so on, and they did.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, well, that's great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They had coils. They had—that burnout coil, they replaced it, and so on. So, I could go on to the state of Bundi. I got there, and it also got late in the afternoon, and it—and they had lit up. There was also the other guest of honor. There was a lord—not Mountbatten [ph] but lord. He was a—he was famous. He had fought Rommel. Field-Marshal Auchinleck. Yeah. He was also a guest. And as I arrived in Bundi, they had the whole town—it was a fortified town—lit up with Diwali lights. And Diwali lights are nothing but little, clay containers with a wick and a little oil in it, and they place them about two feet apart, and the whole city was lit up. It was beautiful. And so, I pulled up my ambulance, and I got up on top. I put out my tripod on top of the ambulance, and I started to make time exposures. And while I was doing that, a big, open, touring Rolls-Royce drew up besides, and there was Field-Marshal Auchinleck, the maharaja of Bundi, they're saying, "Oh, what are you doing?" [00:12:04] I said, "Well, I'm taking some pictures." They said, "Hurry up and come to the palace, and we'll have dinner," and so on. So, I had dinner with them that night, and one of the other guests there was another friend whom I still correspond with was Robin Mirrlees. He was an Englishman or a Scotsman, a very educated guy, spoke fluent Hindustani, and uh, he was also a guest. And we had a—we stayed in a guesthouse. The next day, the maharaja and his private secretary, an Englishman, Robin Bundi [ph] or Robin something. He

—they said, “We are very sorry, but we have to go to Delhi on business, but you two can stay here. You can do what you like. It's yours,” and so on. And so, we—the palace people were given orders to take care of us.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And we did, and Robin I, we got along very well. And, uh, that night for instance, we had dinner, and he said, “The maharaja had dancing girls, doesn't he?” And so, he said, “Well, we'd like—while we eat, we'd like to have the dancing girls dance for us,” and we did that, and it was wonderful. And the next day, we had the elephants howdahed up, you know, so that one could ride them, and we rode through the city of Bundi on elephants. And I have a picture here somewhere. Yeah, that's Bundi there, and that's me on top of the ambulance taking pictures. Well, we came through that gate on elephants. [00:14:03]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, uh—oh, and we also dressed up like—as much as we could as Indians. We got turbans and put on sherwanis and rode the elephants through the city. We also went to the armory. I mean it was like going back hundreds of years.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And in the armory, Robin knew a lot about armor. He put on some chain mail armor, and I took pictures of him in all that. So, we had a great time. Well, if you—when you come up the steps, you saw that shield and the swords?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I took pictures of a blacksmith during those days, and there was a pile of junk, a lot of junk, and that shield and those swords and those weapons, they came out of there. I got them for pennies from that blacksmith.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my goodness.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, anyway, we had a great time in Bundi, I mean, practically owned the place for a few days.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—yeah. So, uh—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, why don't we pause here?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Um—

[END TRACK AAA_wentze02_7664_r.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Testing. This is Anne Louise Bayly [Berman] and it is the—?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Fifth?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —fifth of November 2003. I'm with Volkmar Wentzel and Lely Constantinople, and we will be talking about Volkmar's time in Africa. So, do you want to begin with just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —giving us a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: My first contact with Africa came in connection with an assignment that I had that took me all around the Atlantic Ocean. And together with—I was with the photographer on this assignment together with another chap, who was a writer and who was from the map department of the *Geographic*, his name was Newman Bumstead. We—our assignment was to go around the whole Atlantic Ocean starting in Newfoundland going all the way down the east coast of North and South America to Cape Horn. Cape Horn was a picture that I had to take and then go across to Africa to Cape Town and then start up the west coast of Africa and then the west coast of Europe all the way to Spitsbergen in—on the European side.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And what year was this, did you begin?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, those are questions I'm hazy on right now. But we will check those—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I can certainly—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and if you'll remember some of those things? Dates I'm very poor at.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Sure.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But we'll get that. We'll look up the assignment. Okay. So, after Cape Town, they—we—Newman and I, we wanted to go up through eastern—through western Africa there. [00:02:13] We didn't see very much until we got to the Namib Desert, which was former southwest Africa now called Namibia. And that coast was—is very interesting. It's also called the Skeleton Coast, and we wanted to photograph some of the diamond mining. And it had been a German colony, and the Germans had found diamonds there, and so we wanted to photograph some of that. So, we flew up in a Piper Cub or Pacer, or one of those little, light, one-engine planes. We flew along that whole Skeleton Coast. And one incident that might be worth bringing out is there wasn't much to photograph except this endless desert on one side and the ocean on the other. Now, we did come to a kind of promontory, and there was a wreck of a ship, a rusty, old freighter or whatever it was. And so, I thought, “Well, hell this might make a picture,” and I told the pilot to circle it. Actually, this was on a kind of an offshore island, a little island. I told the pilot, “Let's circle that, and I'll get a few shots of this rusty, old ship.” I even have the name of it, I remembered. Anyway, it's in the story. And so we circled around, and I got my pictures and then I told him, “Let's go on now to—” I think, Windhoek was the next place, another 75 or 100 miles. [00:04:12] And then all of a sudden, I noticed that the pilot could not get the airplane out of the circle. He kept circling around, and I said, “No, go on,” and he couldn't.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Somehow, the rudder got stuck, and he kept circling around, and we were also losing altitude. So, I looked down and I thought, “Well maybe we have to ditch this thing.” And so, I looked at the desert, hopeless, huge sand dunes and there's no place land—I mean it would have been a terrible crash—or ditch it in the water. And there were these huge, beautiful, aquamarine-colored waves, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They are part of the Benguela Current, which comes all the way from the Antarctic where the cold waters meet this hot desert. There's also often a lot of fog there. It's geographically interesting. Anyway, I looked down, and I thought, “Well we may have to crash in these waves, you know. That would be the other alternative.” And then I saw lined up just like a bunch of submarines, these huge, I guess, sharks, they were, and I want to check that—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —in some kind of—what those—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: What they were?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —those—they were a huge fish. They were a good—you know as long as this room here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I know that coast has a lot of sharks and I don't know what the—how would the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, they might have been big sharks. They were white, and they were bobbing up and down, but they were lined up beautifully. And so, I thought, “My God, that's no place to land.” [Laughs.] [00:06:05]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right. [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, we—the pilot struggled around some more, but finally, he got it out of the turn and we headed—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Was he panicking? I mean was he—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I don't know.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —noticeably—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —he was a pretty cool fellow. But we had to fly like that all the way to Windhoek. I mean it was the—there was something wrong with the plane.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Jesus.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, we—that was one incident. The other was later on when we wanted to go—the next country would have been Angola, but the pilot said, “I can't go to Angola. I don't have a visa.” But Newman and I, we had visas for Angola but, of course, not to go in through the backdoor. That was—would have been through the Luanda, the main city. And, uh, but we persuaded—we bribed the pilot. We said, “We'll give you another \$100” or whatever. [They laugh.] And so, we persuaded him to fly on, and I forget the name of the town, a little, hick town in the—in the—near the border of Angola—on the border of Angola. And so, we circled and so on and landed, and in no time, we were surrounded by police. They examined our passports. We were okay, but the pilot, they were going to arrest him.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, we had to persuade them to ease off. I don't know whether we bribed them or what. Money was—wasn't much of a problem for us. We've been given a good expense account. [Laughs.] But finally, also in typical Portuguese fashion, they—we said, “Well, he's going back. He's not staying here.” [00:08:00] We talked them out of it, and they took us to a restaurant, and we had a few drinks—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But that's typical Portuguese.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Turned into a party.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You know, it starts out very bureaucratic and then it ends up quite friendly. So, those were—that was a little bit of that part of Africa. Then the next—yeah, and then we quickly went up through the Belgian Congo and—I mean there are some incidents I could tell you how I tried to photograph the Congo River. Yeah, that was with some—we worked with some Belgian health people or a hospital plane of some kind, and they just—they said, “We'll take you down to the mouth of the Congo.” What I wanted to photograph was the Congo River, it goes out into the ocean and then for many miles there is muddy water and then there's the clear ocean water, Atlantic Ocean. And I thought that would make a good illustration for this kind of a story, Atlantic Ocean and all of that, and so. We saw that, but that was kind of dull, you know? You just—you see the mud and you see the clear water, and so I thought, “God, let's wait until a steamer comes along. Maybe some ship will go through that and if I get it just at the crossing, it'll make a more interesting picture.” So, we circled around, and we got to know these Belgians—it was still under the Belgian rule—and we got along very well with them, and I finally got the picture. [00:10:01] I think that was published. Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: With the—with the ship—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's wonderful.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —going through?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, with the ship going through.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How long did you have to wait?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, quite a while. It seemed forever. Probably wasn't that long, but it seemed forever, you know being in the air there. Well then, we went on—then Newman all of a sudden got homesick. [They laugh.] And we got to Léopoldville, and he saw somewhere that a plane was leaving for Washington or New York—I forget—for the United States.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Much like your traveling partner when you first came to Washington who—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right, who bailed, right?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —who bailed—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. He got—he said, “Let's—” He had enough, I mean, and we had been through a lot. Oh, we made one forced landing on that trip to Angola in the Ethosha Pan. And the Ethosha Pan is in Namibia, and it's one of the wildest animal regions there is. It's now a much sought-after game, wildlife region, and we landed there in the middle of it [laughs].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God, what did you do?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: By mistake?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, it was a forced landing. There was something—the pilot thought there was something wrong with the engine, and we had a forced landing there.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Got it—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What did you do once you landed?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah where did you—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And there we were in this paradise—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: In the middle of nowhere.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —of wildlife not knowing—I mean I—not knowing whether we'd ever get out of there with the plane, but we did, it was no problem. Well, anyway, then we—then we went back home and then came back to finish the rest of Europe, Brittany and Norway, and Sweden and all of that for the Atlantic story. So, that was—that was—the touch with Africa was just Congo and so on. [00:12:02] So, the next, uh, episode with Africa was the Weeks Africa Expedition, and Mrs. Weeks had been a good friend. Her original name was Gertrude Legendre. That was her first married name, and she had lost her husband in—again date you'll have to check.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She lost her husband and decided to go on a trip to Nepal, and that's where I met her. I met her in Nepal. She was a good friend of Dillon Ripley who was—head of the Smith—later the head of the Smithsonian—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —and at that time, was heading up an expedition to Nepal. Dillon had invited Gertie to join the Nepal expedition, the last third of it, and that's how I got to know her. He sent me to Calcutta to pick her up, and we immediately became friends. And she's a very wealthy lady and has a wonderful plantation down in South Carolina and so on—that was—and a really distinctive person. So, I picked her up and got to know her and then after the Nepal expedition, she just—she met another man [Carnes] Piggy Weeks was his name. Piggy, I don't know. He was a pig [they laugh] but who was—had been a doctor, a naval doctor, and probably got on to dope or something during World War II in the navy in the Pacific. [00:14:05] He was, I think, on one of the big ships as a medical doctor. Anyway, Piggy Weeks married her, and she thought to get him out of this doldrum of what, I think, was drugs—but that's just my conjecture, I shouldn't say that even—said, “Well, we'll have an expedition to Africa,” and she thought that—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That'll cheer you up.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That'll cure it.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah. She—exactly that's the way she was. And so, money was no problem, so we organized this expedition to the—I never know quite. It's in Mali, I think.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think it's right—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: What I told you?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: The Weeks Expedition to Central Africa in 1952.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that could be it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Because Volkmar—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —why didn't you leave after the disastrous, you know, he aborted mission, he left and then she just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that's what I'm coming to.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Okay, sorry.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It says—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And that's when you all went to go see [Dr. Albert] Schweitzer, is that right?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, afterwards.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: After that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Okay, sorry.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You got it right. But we got on to this idea of going to this place through a distant cousin of mine who married my cousin, an Austrian. His name was Ernst Swilling [ph]. And Ernst Swilling wrote this book. It's that—Rey Bouba [ph] wrote the script for a movie. He had organized an expedition up to this fellow Rey Bouba. [00:16:03] And so, I told Gertie about this and she's, "Well, let's go there" and so we had to get—and this was in French territory by this time. And we had to get all the visas, and we organized a regular expedition with jeeps and trucks and everything.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And it says here that it was cosponsored by the—is this correct—the National Geographic Society and the American Museum of Natural History?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: In New York. Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay. Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's right. So, we decided to go there and, uh, my cousin Ernst, he was to meet us in Yaoundé in the Cameroons there and then we went to a place called—what—Fort Archambault I think it was. I can get the exact dates. And we—and that's where we organized the expedition. Then it turned out that this Piggy Weeks didn't like my cousin. I mean, it was one of those cultural clashes. My cousin was from, well you call, an aristocratic family, an Austrian, very courteous, very well-brought-up, and a real hunter. I mean he didn't hunt from a jeep. He went right out on foot no matter—he had guts. But Piggy Weeks and he didn't get along, and so Piggy, being the new husband and so on, he went out and they disengaged my cousin. They gave him some money and said, "Go," which was terribly embarrassing for me. [00:18:01]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Certainly.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But it put me in a hell of a spot. But then Gertie—yeah. And then Piggy Weeks, we were there camped in—outside of Fort Archambault in tents and everything and—but he had to have caviar.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: On the expedition?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes. And so, he sent a plane to Paris to get caviar and things like that. I mean he was totally spoiled and totally cuckoo.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—but he was now in charge but then Gertie took over, and he decided to go back to the Riviera, and I'll never forget a more touching or horrible departure. I mean, here was Gertie who had organized all of this for him, and he got on to a plane in Fort Archambault and went up, never looked back at her—just got into the plane, and the hell with it. And so, it was up to Gertie to take over the expedition.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Was that the end of their marriage?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think so, yeah. Yeah, that was pretty much the end. And he went then to the Riviera, whatever, and I've never seen him again. And then Gertie was in charge, and she did that very well. I mean, she was a responsible person, and I'll never forget. I was with her—how was that? Yeah, we were sort of an avant-garde thing to see what was ahead. The object was to get to this Rey Bouba, which was on the Benue River was the border of his land, and his land was huge. [00:20:04] It was as big as Belgium or something like that. But he would not allow any jeeps or trucks or anything into his place. So, he sent horses for us and then we had to cross the Benue River in dugouts with all our gear and then carry on in the other side, and he had horses and things to carry our things to his capitol, which was an all-day trip. And we got on our horses, and we started riding and so on and then as we got close to his capitol, these riders came in chain mail armor and with the seals and everything and they were so called to spy on us, to see, you know, that we were coming, and to greet us I guess. And they would rear up and then go back to report to Rey Bouba, and it was really fantastic. So, we got to

the capitol, and there were lots of people there, all his subjects. And finally, he was brought out in a palanquin, with a huge umbrella held over his head, and he got out. I think I got some of that in the movies, some of it may be here, and anyway—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And so, you were filming with the—a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I was—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —movie camera at this?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, I was filming a lot of it, and that film is in the Geographic files. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So—[00:22:00]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: And what was the purpose of seeing him? Why was he so important?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, he—yeah, he was the last of the real autocratic Islamic sultans. I mean he could say, “I want you killed,” you'd be put away. He was a total autocrat and that was the—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, I see.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: We saw the last of that. So finally, he was carried out and then he stood up, and in front of him was this interpreter. We could never really understand. It was French, too, his language or whatever it was. And the interpreter would throw dust in his face as a sign of subservience, you know, that he—that he was nothing and so on. There was Rey Bouba, Sultan Rey Bouba and—but it was a terrific reception and there were drums like these here that were part—they were carried on the heads of these guys, huge drums.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And was he interested in what you were doing?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, he wasn't really that much as much as we had hoped he would be. My cousin took wonderful pictures here—these are great pictures, and so. But he—we were assigned a beautiful hut, quite large, I mean, I think, probably as big as this room. And what struck me is the hut was made of mud that was like marble. You know it had a beautiful finish, a glossy finish, and I inquired about that, and they made it by mixing eggs, egg white with the mud.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Can you imagine, I mean, how many eggs that must have taken [laughs]? [00:24:05]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: A lot. [They laugh.] [Phone rings.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [Side conversation.] And then also, there were wonderful presents for us—some of them are still around this house—beautiful baskets full of food, eggs, and different things for us to eat. Here, I saw some pictures here. Wonderful stuff. Here, like these baskets here.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, wow.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And how long did you stay here?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, not long enough. I'd like to have stayed much longer. I think we were there three days, which is nothing if you want to really do photography but—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: And were you shooting this for the *Geographic* or you were just on this—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, I was shooting it for the *Geographic*.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: So, there was an article done on it?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Got it.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But the article I never really liked. I think Gertie wrote the article finally, yeah. I have to check up on that a little bit. But it was—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, right there—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —a fantastic experience, I mean, to see that.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That's unbelievable.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was the last of the Islamic rule there and so—so that was another thing. Well, that was the Weeks expedition. Oh, one incident that I'll never forget that haunts me at times. It was terribly hot, you know, 110, [1]20 degrees, or whatever, really hot, and so I decided in the morning, early, before all the others are up, I'll go and have a dip in the Benue River. [00:26:09] I stripped down and started wading in, and I was in maybe up to here or so, and I looked there and there and there. There were three crocodiles.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, my.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was muddy water, but their eyes stuck out. You could just see them.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What did you do?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And boy, I was never so scared in my life. I retreated slowly, but God, they could have got—they would have gotten me in no time—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Eaten you alive, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Wow, how close to you were they?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, as far as you are there.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. One, two, three.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And they didn't come towards you at all?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, they were waiting. No, they didn't come. I mean I saw—they must have come toward me when they saw me come in, and I didn't see them because in that muddy water that they were and their snouts, everything was—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Camouflaged?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Wow. Did you go sprinting back—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, that haunts me at times, yeah. So, that was—that's another incident that could be described more in detail and so on. Okay. That's the Weeks Expedition. Oh, yeah, no, it's not the Weeks Expedition—then we disbanded things, and, uh, the jeeps and everything were shipped back home or whatever we did—the expedition was disbanded but then Gertie had been giving food—not food—medicines to Albert Schweitzer, and she said, “Do you think we can still go to Albert Schweitzer?” and I said, “Yeah, why not?” So, she chartered a plane, a Beechcraft, I think it was, to take us to Albert Schweitzer. [00:28:02] And in—what is that area called—called—anyway, where Schweitzer lived.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That's in Camerouns.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Lambaréné.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Lambaréné, yeah, in Gabon.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, Gabon, right. You'll soon know more about this than I do. [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Well, you've taught me much—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And this pilot said, “Yeah, I'll drop you off there,” and we flew over this vast, vast jungle, I mean. And the jungle, it scares you because if you ever went down in that, it's like going into the ocean. You'd never be seen again or heard again.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so we got there, and there was a kind of a meadow and we—the plane landed, and he just let us off, and we took our gear, put them under a bush, and then we wondered, "Well, where is Schweitzer?" [They laugh.] And that was also next to a river. It's a famous river, right?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How did you find him?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, that's—comes next. Then we saw a dugout canoe with a native boy in it, and we asked him, "Where is Dr. Schweitzer?" and he knew. He's, "Oh, it's up here" and he offered to take us in his dugout canoe.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That was lucky he was there.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. I think it's the Ogooué River, a real jungly river, a wonderful—well, really wonderful to think about it here. [Laughs.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, he paddled us up to Lambaréné, which was nothing but a little group of houses, some of them thatched, and some of them were tin roofs. There was a dock, and at the dock there, we saw this man working who away with hammer and saw, nailing away, doing things and that was Schweitzer himself with an apron, sort of a denim apron. [00:30:15] And he—yeah, he—we introduced ourselves and so on. Gertie had written him that we would be coming, and he welcomed us very nicely. We were shown some quarters, rather simple but quite adequate and then, yeah. And then we had dinner with them, and the dinner was interesting because it was a long table and in the—it was sort of like *The Last Supper*. [Laughs.] Schweitzer sat in the middle, and on each side sat these two German or Belgian or whatever they were but real European types, and they hated each other. [Laughs.] But they loved Schweitzer. I mean they were jealous—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's something.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Some—some feminine conflict there. And Matilda—Emma and Matilda, I think, was their name. They had big [inaudible] and very self-important people, anyway, but Schweitzer sat in the middle, and did I say it was like *The Last Supper*?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He also had two doctors there with whom I befriended. One was a Percy was his last name, he was Hungarian, and the other was an American, his name was Bill Wyckoff. We got to be friends, and they also had a pet gorilla. [00:32:03]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Which that was as cute as it can be. So, yeah, we got along fine and I—oh, and gorilla Schweitzer said, "Now, I can't allow you to take pictures of me—"

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Why was that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Because he had—there was some high-powered—I think her name was Erica Anderson maybe. Anyway, a high-powered, American journalist woman had been there, and she had bribed him with all kinds of gadgets, radios and whatever, and said, "Don't allow anyone else to take pictures of you." And that, of course, made it difficult for me. He said, "You can take anything else here that you want but not of me." Uh, I should go back for a moment, jump back before we ever went on the Weeks expedition. I had an inkling that we might be going to Schweitzer's. On the night before we left Washington, I was guest of Caresse Crosby. She was—lived down here on N Street opposite where [inaudible] is going, yeah, in that little white house. Caresse Crosby was an interesting woman. One of the other guests had been the mistress or friend or whatever of—what's the poet that was in St. Elizabeth's for so long?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Ezra Pound.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Ezra Pound. She had been a friend of Ezra Pound. She had a music school in Florence, a cultivated woman. [00:34:06] And she said—and she said, uh, "I have some manuscripts that Ezra rescued from Dresden—my hometown—during the war." You know here we—Ezra Pound, you know, was out, spy, everything else, but he had rescued these Vivaldi musical manuscripts from Dresden. So, we got talking, and she said, "If you're going to Schweitzer's he would probably like to have a copy," and so she gave me some and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: That's unbelievable.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It is. It's funny how these things—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I mean, that is just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —hooked together here.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —mind-boggling these connections.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, she gave me that, and here all the time, I stayed away from Schweitzer not wanting to photograph him or not being allowed to photograph him. On the last evening, he invited Gertie and me to his study, and—oh, I—on the last evening, I gave him those. The mistake was I should have given him these when I arrived, but I thought maybe it's too pushy or something. Well, I gave it to him on the last evening. He said, “Oh, come to my study,” and so on, and that's why I took that picture of him—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah, and the kittens—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —with his kittens and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Do you know the picture?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: It's a fantastic picture, yeah. It's really great.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I see—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —that's how I happened to get that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, well then that expedition disbanded, but I did make one more trip alone. Yeah, that's kind of interesting. [00:36:01] But I made one more trip alone to the interior of the Cameroons because I wanted to pick up some souvenirs, masks or things, and I heard this town of Foumban is it—? That picture there of me on the throne?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's in Foumban, which had been—the Germans had been there, and they, apparently, got along very well with the natives. So, I went to Foumban, and there was a huge market, a real, wonderful native market, I mean really. I was offered Nubian girls to buy [laughs] and things like that. It was just fantastic, I was just overjoyed, you know here I am in the middle of the real thing. And then it got time, I got a little bit hungry and I wanted to eat, and I saw some houses on the edge of the market that looked a little better than the usual native huts, and so they had a European touch. I went there, and it turned out there was a woman who had a bakery there and a little restaurant, a French woman or Belgian she was, Belgian. So, I went in there and I got something to eat and so on. I got talking with her, and she turned out to be very nice. Also, I was wondering why where I was going to stay. Well, there were some guest quarters there, and I had this native boy with me, and we went to see the guest quarter, and they were miserable. [00:38:01] Somebody had just died in there, and it still smelled of phenol and stuff. It was pretty terrible. But I had them clean it up, and I stayed there and—but then for breakfast, I went to the nice, Belgian woman, and I got her story. Her story was interesting. She had been in Douala and had some kind of a colonial husband who was pretty terrible to her, who beat her, and everything else. And some native from Foumban, a subject of that sultan there, he rescued her and took her up there. So, she became the mistress of the sultan of Foumban.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And she knew not only the sultan who happened to be away in Paris agitating against the French right under their nose. And so, she said, “Oh, you want to meet some of the other wives of the sultan?” and she took me around. Each wife had her own hut, some of them quite elaborate and with her own children, and so that's how that system worked.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He had a number of wives. I forget how many and so—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: But she was white.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She was white, yeah, but she got along very well with the other wives, and so I had an insight that, perhaps, no one else would ever have.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Then comes the final touch. Then I was back in my little guest quarters, which were terrible, and now a messenger came with a fez and these rolled things, leggings, and he had a letter. [00:40:10] The letter was from the French commissioner or whatever his title was, the headman there, inviting me to dinner. And I thought that was nice, and I actually didn't know where the hell to get in touch with any of the officials, which I would have done normally. But here was the invitation, so I accepted, and I went there, and there were all the French officials, the schoolteacher and the tax collector. All of them were there with their wives, and the wives started questioning me. [Laughs.] And they said, "Where are you sleeping? How is the guest house?" I go, "Oh, it's pretty terrible." "Where do you eat?" and I said, "Oh, there's that nice place down on the market, the Belgian woman," and the moment I mentioned her name, we're up in arms, "That awful woman," and so on. I don't know whether they called her a prostitute or what. She was really a nice person, the only one with some kind of a heart. So that was that. Yeah, and there was—oh yeah, and they had this—it was a Belgian—a French national day, Bastille Day.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Bastille Day.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Bastille Day.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah. Bastille Day in the schoolhouse, and the women had prepared some kind of smorgasbord, and they had a little Victrola and I did—I danced with various women. I did my duty, so to speak. And I forget who the wife was, but one of the wives who was the most incensed, I was dancing with her and so on. [00:42:09] She said, "When are you coming to Paris?" and so—[They laugh.] I said, "Well I'm on my way home. I'll be in Paris a bit" and she wanted to date me in Paris. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The one who was the most abhorred by the—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Right by the—by the woman who was—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's unbelievable.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —supposedly the—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, and it turned out—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: That's so funny.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —the Belgian woman was also—the only friend she—real friend she had among the French community was the doctor who was very nice, a very civilized person. But it's interesting these—these different—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Well, she considered that because she was the mistress of a sultan of a—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Probably, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —native so to speak?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Oh, I see.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Probably, that all entered in. So that was that. That's the Weeks expedition. And then the next thing that came was, oh yeah, Angola and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Angola and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —Mozambique. Angola began right here in the Museum of Natural History beneath

the tusk of the elephant that was being dedicated. There was Dr. Carmichael, and they had a huge shroud over the elephant, and they pulled it up. It was very—done very well with some music and so on. And that's where I met Jose Fenykovi, the man who shot the elephant in Angola. And he was a Hungarian and sort of the old school, you know the old, hunter-type school and—but we became friends almost immediately. [00:44:03] He invited me to lunch at the Carpna [ph] Hotel where he was staying. He was quite well-to-do. We had lunch, and he said, "Why don't you come to my hunting lodge in Angola?" I proposed that to the *Geographic*, and they said, "Yes, we haven't done anything about Angola since 1910" or some early date when it was mentioned. And so, they let me go. And I eventually then flew to Luanda, the capital of Angola and then to Sá da Bandeira where he waited for me. And then drove out to his hunting lodge, which was a beautiful, almost like a motel type of place with couple of wings and—I mean it was very well done, and there was his wife. His wife was Russian. Sonya was her name, a nice person. So then he said, "We'll have an expedition soon in the Moçâmedes Desert." And I had no—I knew nothing about the Moçâmedes Desert, but it's a huge desert, and we crossed it, and we saw lots of wildlife. And then we went, eventually, to the *fin da mundo*, which means the end of the earth in Portuguese, and that's where he had shot the big elephant. And that story in, itself, would make an interesting little bit how he shot it, how the British wouldn't take it because it had taken, I think, 21 shots to kill that thing. [00:46:13] They thought it was unsportsmanlike and so on. And yet—and there's always two ways of looking at things. I mean, okay, maybe it was unsportsmanlike to have to use that many shots—an elephant is supposed to be shot behind the ear and so on—but he killed it. But what he had done, he went—being an engineer, he had prepared himself very well. He brought big enough trucks and salt to salt the different parts down, the skin and the bones and everything. He measured them carefully so that the taxidermist would have no problem putting the thing together again, and he did that very well, very scientifically. So then he offered it to the British Museum and they said, "No, we don't want it to—it wasn't done sportsmanlike" or something. But the Smithsonian here, I think, with Dr. Carmichael or the actual head of the Museum of Natural History who was a wonderful man, they said, "We'll take it." And they put it together, and I happen to be making pictures around the Smithsonian. I took the taxidermy at different stages, and naturally, I was interested in the final product, and that's how I met Fenykovi, and that's how I got to Angola. Then we—then he took me through many parts of Angola, all the way up to that fin da mundo and all of that. Finally, he had to go back to Spain where his—where he lived for business reasons, but he turned me over. [00:48:06] He said to the Portuguese, he said, "Let him just go where he wants to," and they did, I mean, which was very unusual because everyone thought the Portuguese were—would be lurking everywhere, which could not have been the case because lots—I would make myself a list of things that I wanted to cover. Let's say I want to get to the Duque de Bragança Waterfalls scenically, and I want to get something of that tribe of natives. I made myself little lists, and I never knew in the morning where I would be going. I mean I depended on the weather and all kinds of—and so nobody could have thought—I had total independence, which was wonderful. And so, I got to know the land very well, and I think I had the unique opportunity of seeing more of Angola than any other photographer or journalist. And that was—that was a—that was interesting. Also, it was just before the troubles began, which came in from the north from the Congo, and mainly because the—there's a tribe I forget the name of it right now—that originally was both in the Congo and in Angola, and so they felt there shouldn't be any border and so on. And they were roused by, I think, communists or somebody to cause trouble, and they started terrible rage into northern Angola. They would come at night and finish off a whole family who might have been planting coffee or something like that. [00:50:10]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Raising coffee is not easy. It takes years to get those plants to produce. And I know one German family that was—that perished because of that. So, that was the beginning, those troubles and—but I can honestly say that the Portuguese rule to me was not bad. I saw, for instance, they have what they called [inaudible] where it means a white man sits in one area and he has that, sort of, under him. Well, I saw—and they were usually very poorly paid and really in the boondocks. And one of those families I'd visited, they were bringing up black children just as their own. And I said, "Where did they come from?" and they said, "Oh, their hut burned, and they were orphaned, and nobody wanted them," so they brought them up just as their own. the Portuguese had no color bar as we did. They mixed and that actually began—I was just reading recently about Goa, that one of the early Portuguese administrators, he urged mixing of the races, which is interesting now because we have some brilliant Goanese, Goanese writers and thinkers and people, and that is the result after several generations now. [00:52:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So that that would all—I'm not saying taking sides one way. I'm just saying that's all stuff that would be interesting to study.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, actually—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Why?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well—

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[Radio playing in the background.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that black thing. And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah, that thing is amazing—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And you'll see why—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Do you want water for your talking fest?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, maybe. It might be nice.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Do you want water or tea or coffee?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Water would be great.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Water would be great. Okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, wonderful, Lely.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I'll get that and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —you guys can start, and I'll just [cross talk]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Okay. So now, this is your—the Indian travel diary.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, for only a part of India. He wasn't with me all the time. A lot of it, I did alone, totally alone, but he came with me for good sections up through South India. And that'll give you an—and he kept this diary.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's very thorough, very, very thorough.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: He was a very thorough, somewhat bureaucratic Englishman but perfect for what I needed. I mean, he was good—we're still friends.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And his name is Francis Leeson?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Francis Leeson is his name, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And was he also a photographer or was this—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, no. He learned a little bit—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: They helped—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —from me while we were going. I gave him a Rolleiflex to use, and he took some pictures.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So now, let's see, when you—how long were you in India that—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Almost two years.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Two years. Now, I think we got through—the last time, you had just finished discussing riding on elephants when you were staying, I guess, at the maharaja's palace and he went out of town.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, in Bundi yes.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The state of Bundi.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, from Bundi, where did you go?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, that's what I'm—I don't remember exactly, but I went to some of the other Rajput states. [00:02:03] But I have no particular great incident to remember there. What else could I say?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well now—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —when you—we could—you know, we can jump on, come back. And so, was that towards the end of your stay in India?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No. That was actually—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: In the beginning?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —part of the beginning. It so happened that the—that when I was driving my ambulance around with the map and—I talked about that, didn't I?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, yes. Yes.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. That some of the maharajas saw that in Delhi—they had their offices and things also in Delhi—and they thought it would be interesting to be featured in the *Geographic*. I guess they already saw—might have seen what was coming, and so Nehru invited me, and Nehru was nobody. I think I mentioned that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, you did. You did.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And then in competition, you know, the maharajas wanted to be featured thinking *National Geographic* was a good thing. So, I was invited by them, by Jaipur and Bundi and even some of the others and—let's see. They—yes. And so, I was passed from one to the other, and that, of course, was fantastic because I saw the very last of that splendor that India's associated with, which a lot—many times was like *One Thousand and One Nights*. Like when I went into the palace of Jaipur, the maharani—one time, the maharaja was away and there was Ayesha [Gayatri Devi]. [00:04:04] They said she was the most beautiful woman in all of India, which she probably was. She was a beautiful woman, and she invited me and the young chap from the— from the American embassy into the Zenana quarters. And I had brought along—I heard that she liked American records, you know, the latest jazz music and that kind of thing, so I bought her some. It was easy for me to get at the PX in Delhi. [Laughs.] And I bought some, and I took them along, and she said, “Oh, let's go and play them” on the gramophone in the Zenana quarters, which is only the quarters for women. Jim Billman [ph] was his name from the embassy and I and also the representative of a Swiss company, Fulkar Brothers was the name of the Swiss company. He—the three of us were invited in because I had those records, you see. And there were all these beautiful sari-clad women. Some of them—the other—the maharaja had several wives but they all seem to get along perfectly friendly. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? And where they all—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —did they, um—did you feel that were they open? I mean were they free to talk with you and socialize with—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, they were free. Although, they were shy, and the one who was the most open, of course, was the maharani and Ayesha was her name. I still correspond with her a little bit. She—well, so we played the American records, and that was a lot of fun. [00:06:05]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: What were the records?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I don't know the exact, what it was but—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And were you—were you able to take photographs at this time? Did you—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, I didn't take photographs. I should have. That would have been nice, but you don't want to barge in. That would often spoil the whole—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How did they—? When you were visiting and I know that they had wanted

somebody from the *National Geographic* to be photographing, but how often were you able to do it and what—how much leeway did you have in what they would let you photograph? Were they all very staged—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, for instance, I remember taking some pictures when my stay at Jaipur came to an end, and I was destined to go to Bundi, which was a neighboring state—they toasted me off with champagne on the terrace and so on. And then I drove away alone to Bundi. It was quite a wild drive, a very jungly country and roads practically nonexistent, but I started out for that. They toasted me off. I mean there, I could take pictures as I felt like it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And so did—I mean at this reception for instance, did you take photographs for dinners or did you have to—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I had to be careful—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —set up special times—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —for two reasons: One is my film was rationed. I had to always think, you've got enough for this and enough for that, and you couldn't plop away like they do now, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, sure.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They'll spend a whole roll on one subject. I couldn't do that. And so, I was always a little bit—had to be careful there. And also just plain courtesy, you know. You don't want to barge in on everything, and have them get suspicious. So, it was kind of a test between courtesy and diplomacy, and just the need for the film. [00:08:09]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Were there any opportunities that you think you missed because your film was rationed and you really couldn't? You were restricted in that way, so that you really couldn't just—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: None that I saw at the time.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Okay. So, nothing that you really thought, “God, I wish I had—”

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: “—been able to shoot that?”

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And for entertainment, they put on an elephant fight, but the elephants wouldn't really fight. [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And also a tiger. The way mahaj was—they put a tiger in a moat, too, and the tiger swam, which was unusual, you know, to see a cat swimming.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

[Radio is turned off.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I took pictures of that sort of thing. That was no problem. And then—oh yeah, and then one time, there was a festival where—a traditional festival, I forget the name of it now, but that might be in the—no, that wouldn't be in there, but I've got it somewhere. A festival where the elephants are all decorated, and it's a big procession to the city of Jaipur, which is called the Pink City. It's a beautiful place. So, the maharaja said, “Come on with me, Kurt.” He called me Kurt by my middle name. He says—and he took me along where they were painting the elephants. And there, all of a sudden, I realized that this maharaja who seemed like a westerner, know like an Englishman—he'd been trained probably in England and all around—all of a sudden, turned totally Hindu or Indian.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And he knew—he talked with the people and with the people decorating the elephant and he said, “Do this and do that.” [00:10:05] I mean, he was totally another person when I was with him, and that was kind of a revelation. I mean on one hand—and then the next thing was then he'd go out and he'd—and he was flirting with some English woman at that time—I forget her name. And then he would go out there, and he'd be just like an Englishman [laughs] and then—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: So, he had to lead a double life?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah. They led kind of a double life, and I'd like to bring that out somewhere more. I have to think about it a little bit, but that's what was happening.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow. It says a lot, I guess, about English colonialism and out—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And that—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yes of course.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —brings me to one of the great faux pas in my life. [They laugh.] I had a little flirtation with one of the granddaughters of the [inaudible] maharani of Cooch Behar. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh my.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Is that a wonderful name?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It is.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's not so great. [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And she was also the mother of the maharani of Jaipur. And because I had this little flirtation with this girl, she invited me in Bombay to her apartment for lunch. We talked, and so on, all was fine and then came lunchtime, and the servant came in and, he said—through her said, “Do you want Indian food or English food?” And like a jackass, for some reason I don't know, I said, “English food,” which was a big mistake because there—finally we sat there, and there was the [inaudible] maharani just enjoying eating with her hands, you know, as they do, then enjoying one thing after another. [00:12:05] and I sat there with some—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Fork and knife and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Knife and fork, right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh my gosh—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And a piece of roast beef that wasn't good at all. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And that kind of thing happened.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's those little things though that are so indicative of—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yeah—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —of just—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, you will just never—you would never know, too, that that would be—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She was a character this [inaudible] maharani. There is a famous engraving of Queen Victoria holding court in England and one of the children there is the maharani of Cooch Behar.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think she had her hand on her head [laughs] or something like that.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Really?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Wow, how—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes. That whole relationship between the English and the Indians is interesting because there many really good friendships there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you find—I mean did you witness more good friendships than bad relations or did—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's hard to tell. I don't know. But I now there were some very good—I still have a friend who lives in the Outer Hebrides, Robin Mirrlees. He spoke fluent Hindustani, and he had very good friends among the Indians. Yeah. So, there was that. That relationship is also interesting and then how terrible it must be wherever it broke down, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And as I look back, the traveling in those days, days when the British Empire was still on top, I mean it was safe everywhere, thanks to them. [00:14:00] And yet, they're being damned for this and that. I'm sure they made their mistakes, and I don't know which is worse is or better, but there were—it was easy to travel in—when the British were controlling things.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, when you—because you go back to your kind of— [Side Conversation.] Now did you—? When you were going out to outer India, was most of your time spent with sort of, kind of, uh—I don't really know the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, in India—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —the class system but more, I guess, wealthier or upper-class type of people.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Probably. Yeah, probably, yeah. In other words, I wasn't thinking of making any kind of a social study or I wasn't—that wasn't my job really.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You were just—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well, perhaps, it should have been my job, but I didn't make a social study.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, you really—and so you had free rein to take photographs of what you wanted?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And, um, it seems like you just—I mean, did you ever have a—did you ever question what you should be doing or how you should go about it or did you just kind of—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, yes, I wondered. For instance, take the problem of the Harijans the outcasts, you know the lowest, and I wondered, How am I going to present that, you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Fortunately, and I think this was at Jaipur, there was a compound where they all lived together. [00:16:02] And I saw that, and I thought, “Uh-huh [affirmative], there might be some pictures there,” and I went in, and there were wonderful wall decorations. I mean, they had an artistic trend there, and they put tiger hunts or whatever. They painted—oh, and things from their religion, they painted on the walls. So, I took pictures there, and that was my representation of Harijans or the outcasts.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right. That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I thought, “Well that was a nice way of doing it.”

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That is. That's a wonderful—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But I didn't try to make a real study of it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right. Now when you left India—was this 1949—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It would have been—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —or?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —'48, I think, '47, '48, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Where did you go from there? Did you come back to—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Then I came back to Washington here, and I needed a place to live. I found myself an apartment in Georgetown at 2501 Q Street, right, looking over the park there. I had a nice little apartment there and then I got busy and decorated that. I made prints for it from my travels, and I lived there until I bought a house, finally, on N Street in Georgetown, so. But India had a big influence on me.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In what—in what way? I mean, what do you think are the most—? I guess, which ways stand out the most in that—its influence?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: [00:18:00] Well, it opened my eyes, too, that there are other worlds that are functioning and that are quite different from ours. And that there was really lots to know about their religion about their way of life and that was certainly—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What was—I mean, about their way of life, how—what did you find it was like? Was it much—was it slower paced or was it this—you know the difficulty between the British influence and the Indian background or what were—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, number one, I found out there are many kinds of Indians just like there are many kinds of us. And some of them are really—they're very trying, especially the bobwus [ph] as they call them. They were government clerks and the tradespeople. They were just out for their profit and so on. But then there were also very educated Indians that you could have wonderful conversations with. So, there are all kinds and that was an eye-opener.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How would your—I mean what would—? How are your days spent? Were you photographing every day and developing or were you—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, I took—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —would you travel for—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —sometimes, I'd take a week off and just goof off [they laugh] or something. I remember Bombay, I did a lot of—you know, I took it easy for a while. And I needed some kind of a rest. You couldn't keep going all the time. In Bombay, I often went to Juhu Beach, which was—where sort of the elite gathered and also to Malabar Hill. [Laughs.] [00:20:08] On Malabar Hill, I'd be invited to parties where there were princes from various states—you know all of them what would you call sort of—what do you call that kind of society? You know the—oh I—you know, the ones who spent money and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: The sort of leisure—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that kind of class.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —class.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And then among them were some movie actresses and the good-looking people and such, and I was invited by them, and I enjoyed it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow, what a great invitation.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Well, it was an invitation [laughs] in more sense—ways than one. One night, I was up there at a party in Malabar Hill, and somehow, we got talking about where I was staying and so on. I said, "Well, I'm staying at the Taj Mahal Hotel," which was the biggest and best hotel in Bombay. And afterwards, this beautiful, Indian princess came up, and she said, "Can I have a ride with you back to the Taj?" and I said, "Sure." And when we got there, it was a beautiful moonlight night, wonderful, like spring weather here, a huge moon over the Arabian Sea and the Gateway of India that the British had built. It's right there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: In next to the Gateway of India in the ocean, there were bobbing up these dhows, these Indian dhows with tall masts and lateen sails and so on. [00:22:00] And I thought to myself, "Hell, it's too early to turn in," [laughs] and I invited her. I called—my servant was waiting for me. Tundi Ram [ph] was his name. And Tundi Ram, I said, "Go and get a magnum of champagne and some ice and also rent one of those boats." I mean money—I had the money to do it. This is no problem. And so, he talked to the guys who were running a dhow, and they unfolded the lateen sail and then—and he got the champagne, and I took the princess for a ride out into the Arabian Sea. It was very romantic. It was really beautiful.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That sounds amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was amazing. And I just loved that. That was—and she did, too, apparently because the—[They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, boy.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —the—it—then she invited me and she said, “Come to my room. I want to show you something.” [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: We got to her room and the moonlight, that same moon was still streaming—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Should we turn the tape off? [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, you might [laughs]. You might want to, yeah. The moonlight was streaming in, and she opened a big footlocker about this big and opened it up, and there were all kinds of trays in there full of jewelry.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And beautiful jewelry, everything. She said, “Kurt—” [They laugh.]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Kurt—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She had been educated in France and was good-looking and everything. She said, “We will—we can take this to Tiffany's in New York and sell it and live happily ever after” something to that effect. [00:24:07] And I thought, “My God.”

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I know.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I, [they laugh] of course, still wondered. You know, it was beautiful jewelry like I had seen some in a *Kama Sutra* book. [Laughs.] Anyway, she turned out to be a good friend, but the next day, I want to—I mean she was married to a—what do you call them—the brother of a maharaja, Rana or something, wasn't it? Raja. I forget what the title is. And so, I thought the next morning when I had my breakfast there on the terrace of the Taj Mahal Hotel, I thought to myself, “My God, you are skating on thin ice here” because in those hotels, the servants talked to each other. They know exactly what's going on and so forth. And I thought to myself—and I just read that diamond dust was a way of killing somebody off, and so I wondered, “Is that diamond dust in my coffee [laughs] or in the sugar,” you know? I really thought that I was—could be in real trouble, which I could have been I think. [They laugh.] And so, well, that was Bombay. Bombay was really fun.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That sounds like a story that not—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: It's totally—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —it's such an amazing you know way to be in Bombay, and I don't think it's far different, I'm sure, from the way most photographers now are—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: How often did you have to check in—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —in Bombay.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —with your superiors as it were? I mean how did you—? [00:26:00]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I just—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: You just did what—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —found—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —what you want.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —I had to feed them something—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Every so often.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —every so often, and that's all I did, whenever the spirit moved me. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You just send them?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah. Just contact sheets here and there and—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. But in Bombay, I think it was where I met Francis Leeson too.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, okay.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's where that diary started.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: That diary is mind-blowing.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's amazing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: In the back there's the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And the first thing we did together was we went to Goa. It was some Easter time, I think, in Goa. And Goa, of course, was Portuguese, was a Portuguese colony and—but is that Susan Kuruvilla?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah, yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Sorry, I don't want to interrupt.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's one of the mysteries of India is that stigmata case that ran the course—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah. They're very interesting.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She bled twice a week from her—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: From her hands?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Her hands only on her feet?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And her feet too?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No. On her hands and beneath her breast, and I didn't really look there, but it came through her sari, the blood. And where else?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Was she very religious?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, she was. And the interesting thing was it was not connected to any commercialism. Usually, the Indians are very commercial-minded, business-minded, and there was none of that, not a trace. As a matter of fact, her father said that he hoped that this would end. He wasn't at all for—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Would and was it—? Did you see this happen? It was—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, it looked like a couple of cuts.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: In her hands?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Like, as if you've taken a razorblade and made a cut, and there was the blood —

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Do they heal right away again or—? [00:28:02]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, just the bleeding happened twice a week. I think it was Tuesdays and Fridays, something like that. We decided—I was with two other chaps Francis Leeson and a young Dutch—he was an engineer with a sugar company. The three of us, we took turns staying up all night, and she prayed all night long, beat her chest, and there was something really strange about her.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: God, that's incredible.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And what—?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And then—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And then would her father—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And what happened?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —call you over when she would start to bleed, or how would you know when she was—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —bleeding?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: The bleeding usually was in the morning and then her brothers came, and she would get really aroused and walk around—pace around, and pray, and so on, in her little—she had this little, separate little house, not very large, but just about this size here. She would pray in there, and that went on all night long. And then in the morning, she got more aroused and then she fell to the floor in sort of a crucified position, and then her brothers helped her.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Which is what's going on in this picture here or—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Brothers restraint.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right, yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And it was hard to know what to take when you're, all of a sudden, faced with that story. You don't want to keep banging away.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I know. You don't know want to be that intrusive—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —on such a—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, that's all I got was those pictures there.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: But they're—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Then—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —incredible. I mean—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —what became of her?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I know.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: That's what I wondered. I wonder what became—what—where is she now? What—? Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:30:00]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, that's funny.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's—the—these photographs are so—you know they almost look like—you know that's something that's—it's so unreal.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, it's like—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's almost like out of a movie or—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, and it doesn't—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, you would think that when I went to India, I was brought up by these fakirs [ph] throwing up a rope, and the rope stays in and something. Then climbing—a boy climbing up and then the fakir [ph], himself, climbing up and then there—pieces of the boy would fall down. You know, it's stories like that I had heard as a boy. And I—to me, India was full of—in my mind only, full of mysteries like that. But this is the closest I came to a mystery like that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's amazing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: And so, that she's Christian or what?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes, yes.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I mean that's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: She's Christian.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —the other—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They have that—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —oddity.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —special Christian sect there, which was started by—who the hell was it—anyway, very early Christians. And I also took pictures in a church that goes way back with interesting murals in it and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Is that in Goa or somewhere else?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, in Goa and also outside along that coast.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Hmm. Very interesting.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And the coast incidentally, these Malabar women are quite something in their own right. They—it's a matriarchy. Women—inheritor and everything is—goes down on the women's side.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow. So now, when you—unless you want to talk more about India, which I'm sure we could—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, we can—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —for—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —we can go wherever want—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —ages and ages. When you came back, you came back to Washington. And then how long were you here before you went out on another assignment? [00:32:05]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Probably not very long [laughs]. Let me see. What was it? What would have been the next assignment to India? Then I did a whole number of smaller assignments like Kings Point in—where the coast guard is trained. I did a little story there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But I'd have to look, but a lot of little things. Also, that was part of—I was getting too well known or too admired by a certain group, maybe, and then I think it was part of little jealousy to take me down a few notches [laughs].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. Because all you're given, you know that, but it's human, it's the way the it is.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: You mean—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: In the *Geographic*, there was a lot of little—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —in the *Geographic*, there was just petty—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —petty, pettiness, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh gosh.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, you got less desirable assignments—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Prestigious assignments?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Right, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How many—and how many photographers were working at this time?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It varied. When I started, there were only four and then it got built up, especially when Bob Gilke joined. They got a whole new group came in, and we had up to 10 or 15 even photographers and —

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Now, how many do they have?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think three.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, they have no staff—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: They are all freelancers. It saves them money. They don't have to pay benefits or—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Sure.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —do anything.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Emory Kristof, I saw him yesterday.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, did you?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, yesterday, too.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, yeah, they don't have anybody at all because they just rely on freelance.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did you read in the paper the story—I guess it happened two days ago—about the *LA Times* reporter—[00:34:07]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yes.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —who had, I guess, taken two photographs and then doctored them in Photoshop and made them—?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, I saw—I almost did—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: [inaudible].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Maybe I did clip it out. I save that kind I think and then I put it in a book related to that kind of stuff. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And he was only—he was caught because the *Hartford Courant* ran a very large two-page spread of the photograph, and they noticed the same people in the frame next—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Twice

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —twice.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, the scene wasn't—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's just—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, but the interesting thing is—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —mind blowing—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —that when Bill Garrett was the editor of the *Geographic* for quite a while and he was, in many ways, a very bright guy, and he initiated a lot of interesting things. And he was the first one to doctor up the pyramids in Egypt.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yes, you told me that. When I read this, that's exactly what I thought of.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Oh, that's interesting.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, I think that's another first for the *Geographic*. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well did they—when—?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: How did he do that? What did he do?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, they had a horizontal of the pyramids spaced apart, but he wanted it on the cover, and so he crowded them together to make a better cover.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Did—what was the reaction to that? I mean—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah, what was the reaction?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —do people know was this coming out?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Was it open that he did that?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: There was quite a bit of reaction at the time. Now, of course, it's nothing. I mean it's being done all the time, I suppose.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Well, but that's where the line now, you wonder what's the difference between someone—I guess it's just their intention. I mean, this guy intentionally deceived his readers, or whatever, his viewers but other people—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Whereas Garrett wanted just to make a—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Right. There's a line.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —better presentation.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: There's a fine line, I guess, between manipulation and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, the two pictures that he—what was his name, the photographer of the *LA Times*? [00:36:03]

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I can't remember.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I think his last name began with a W. But the two pictures were similar but when he put together, it was a much more compelling image because it's much more dramatic and it really changed the lot. But it seemed very, sort of though uh—I don't know, kind of flip for him to do that and think he could get away, but do such a poor job in Photoshop, manipulating that thing. You could tell—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Right, right. Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I mean—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: And not knowing that that's something—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, that it's something—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —that any moron, if they blow it up, can see the difference.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It seems like it's almost as though he's not giving much credit to his editors, which I guess—I mean they went ahead and printed, so I guess they didn't look closely at it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: There was another similar featured in one of those magazines that I meant to save of—let's see—a man climbing down a ladder from a helicopter over the ocean. And in the ocean is I guess a whale or a shark jumping up, and that's two pictures.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: One of the whale or a shark jumping up was combined with putting it under the ladder of the man on the ladder coming out of the heli—as if the shark was trying to get the—and that was—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And this—where was—? This was in a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: In one of these magazines here.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: A photographic—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Intentionally?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: No, it was—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It was brought—it was published—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: They were showing—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —as if it were a real photograph?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, it was published as a real thing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: As a real moment.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And then people began to question it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That's amazing.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But the story is in one of these.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And that's—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It would be interesting—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —incredible.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —to collect a few of these stories.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Well, what's interesting about the *LA Times* thing, too, and then obviously, anyway, you can move on from—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: No, no, this is—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —but it's very interesting the meaning of the photograph itself because it was of a British soldier right—[00:38:02]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —pointing his gun at an Iraqi man or a family? I didn't actually see the picture. It was—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, the picture—well, the two—the two pictures that he took, there was a group of Iraqi men and some children sort of—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Women and children—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah, sort of in a horseshoe shape kind of beyond him. And in the one picture, they were all, sort of, seated and he—I remember this correctly. He was holding his gun but he was not towards them. You know he was—had that kind off to the side and was looking out—oh, no. He was—I guess he was holding gun and telling them, like putting his hand out in a motion. It was just sort of like, “Okay, you all—”

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: You go over there.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —over here.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And then there's another picture where a man starts coming towards him holding a baby or a small child. And in that picture, the soldier just had his hands down and wasn't doing anything. So, it's almost as though you could read into it that had he continued to step forward, the soldier would have said, "Oh, okay, what's wrong with—?" You really don't know. But when the picture was put together, it looks as though the soldier was much more menacing towards the man who was approaching with the baby. So, it really —

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It changes completely the message. I mean—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It totally did.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think we should perhaps try to do that save some of these incidents especially since—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Definitely—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —the *Geographic* was among the first—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right to do that, yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —to do it where we could say, "Yeah, it happened here and here and here," and we could use that probably.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You really should because it's such an interesting question now.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, yeah—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I mean it's so—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Because it's—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —easy to manipulate photographs and then—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: And change their message.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Literally, I mean—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And totally different from what they thought in the beginning. When the daguerreotype came out, they thought, "Oh they counted the bricks in the wall and then, oh, it's absolutely correct."

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And, of course, now it isn't.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: That's—yeah, exactly.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, it's gotten—no, it's really interesting.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: When do you decide what is right and what is—[00:40:03]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You know the French were absolutely convinced that photographs were absolutely correct.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Right.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: And now, it's so—yeah. It's such a blurry line. Oh, have you been looking at photographs? Having been over—you know having been in that part of the world, have you been looking at a lot of photographs from news reports in the newspapers and stuff from the Middle East?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I can't say that I know much about the Middle East. India is about the only thing that I did thoroughly—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: As close to that that you—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. And sure, I'm always interested in anything that comes out of India. We have a file called Wonders of India [laughs] something like that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There was something just the other year about the untouchables gaining political—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Control, yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —control and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, I was telling—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —and you were very interested in that.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —Annie Lou about how—I had a problem featuring the untouchables until in Jaipur, just outside of the city I saw this compound of where I was told that's where the untouchables lived. So, I went there, and I found out they had all these wonderful frescoes that they had painted. We have a picture here somewhere. And then I featured that as the untouchable, which was a nice way of doing it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Why couldn't you otherwise? You, literally, could not get close to them and—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well I mean they—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: —and photograph them?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —live in miserable conditions and so on. But here, they were all together in this compound living quite happily there. And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: So, you were showing a different, a happier side of their existence—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: A happier side, yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —than a—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But also something happened—I don't know whether I ever wrote that down—where you notice the shadow of a person—no, of an untouchable. If the shadow of an untouchable goes over the food of someone else say a regular Hindu then that food is thrown out. [00:42:23]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. It goes as far as that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that's really—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That's incredible.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Well, maybe we should stop here at this point and then—

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VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And their job was to find these guys and see—you know find out about them. And they told me about them, and they said, "But that would be a hell of a good story for you." Whereupon, I wrote my chief Mr. Fisher, and I said, "There are these two men up there, and they've become the closest advisors to the Dalai Lama," which they were. The Dalai Lama liked them, and they did all kinds of things in Lhasa, built a water fountain and system and all kinds of things. And so, I wrote that to Mr. Fisher, and he said, "No, we don't

want you to have anything to do with these Nazis [laughs]. Go. You want—we want you to go with Dillon Ripley to Nepal.” And Dillon Ripley was, at that time, just organizing his Nepal expedition, which was mainly to collect birds and small mammals. That’s what he was interested in, especially the bird life. He had some theories about birds living at different altitudes, and so on. Also, he was looking for the *Ophrysia superciliosa*, which was a mountain quail that had been seen in India a hundred years before when the British first came there [phone rings].

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And they even had a skin of it and feathers in England. Ripley studied that and wondered, “Well, probably, that mountain quail has gone into Nepal. That’s where we could find it again,” and that was part of the mission. So, I met Ripley in Calcutta, I think, it was and then we—oh yes. [00:02:01] We—and then we went to the border of Nepal. I drove the ambulance there, which was very tricky getting it across the Ganges River for instance. And it had to be on a boat, and I—I thought that boat’s going to tip over with that heavy ambulance and then everything of mine would’ve been—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Yeah, all—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —gone.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: —all your equipment, all your cameras, all film.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: It was hair-raising, but I got it and that—and Leeson went along on that trip. There must be something in there about that. And we crossed the Ganges, and we got up to the border of Nepal and got things started. The first thing Ripley wanted to do was make contact with the king and with the maharaja. They had a very strange system. The maharajas, which was the Rana family, they controlled Nepal, and the king was nothing but a figurehead. You know, they pushed him aside, and so there was nothing he could do. It’s like—I think the shoguns in Japan was a similar situation.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, we went to Kathmandu, which in itself was quite an adventure. It’s all on foot, very high, it’s very steep and so on. And we got finally to Kathmandu, and we were received by the Rana family and even by the king. And those were—those are rare pictures.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Where are those?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think some of them I have.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: Do you really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Some must be at the *Geographic*.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLE: I’ve never seen those.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. So, we got the go-ahead to go to Eastern and Western Nepal, but you couldn’t—they wouldn’t let us go directly through Nepal. We had to go back to India and then go west first and then go up again into the area where Ripley thought this *Ophrysia* might be, and we did that. [00:04:12] We had to go back to India, go west and then go up into Nepal, and there, we went on elephant back into Nepal. I think that picture there will show some of it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How did you bring all of your equipment?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, I took only what was necessary and, again remember, film was still rationed. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Right, right.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, anyway, we went into Western Nepal, and we came to—oh yeah, and Ripley, Ripley was a brilliant man. He had a terrific memory and he had vision and all of that. He was the right one for the Smithsonian, I think, but he was also very stingy or we—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —that's what we thought at that time. He kept us on very tight rations. There was never enough to eat and so on. And that was to keep the number of coolies [ph] down. You see you carried the food. We had sometimes 30, sometimes even 40 coolies. In Eastern Nepal, we had 40 coolies and so—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I should show her the photographs you took of the Sherpas, though. Those portraits are incredible.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, and—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: It's really beautiful.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —so—well that, it dawned on me only afterwards, you know, that that's quite an operation to keep an expedition going like that. And we came up there to this place in Western Nepal where the woman—there was a woman in charge there. The men had all gone to India to work or something. [00:06:01] And she said, “Oh, you're coming from across the black waters,” you know that was in their mythology or something. She had never seen white people before or westerners, and it was just wonderful.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But we found no *Ophrysia superciliosa* there. And then we went into Eastern Nepal, and we got into an area just south of Mount Everest, and there I took the first pictures of Everest directly from the south and that made the—the clipping I think is right—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: I know. Where is that clipping, Volkmar?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think it's right there somewhere. I put it there the other day but just temporarily. It's very fragile.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Okay. I think I see it.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: I think that's it. And yeah. I took the first pictures, the views of Everest from the south, which made the *London Times*, I think it is.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: You can see it there.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: And didn't Hillary—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah and Hillary, they say—I don't know how true it is—Hillary studied that picture to make his ascent of Nepal.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? These are amazing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Yeah, they're really incredible. That's the view of Everest, and Everest is which one, Volkmar? I never—it's the one right underneath the *Rhododendron*.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, right beneath that one—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That one—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —in there. I did that because I knew that caption writers—

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Would need a—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —would have a hell of a time identifying it.

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: That's brilliant.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow. So—and Hillary studied this?

LELY CONSTANTINOPOLE: Supposedly. Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, that's what they say. So, there's still that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Because that was, you said, the first southern view—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: First view of directly south. [00:08:00]

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Directly south.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: From the south. The other views were always from Darjeeling, more to the east and so on, but this was the first. How many do we have? Two of that?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: We have two, yup, that I can see.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah. We ought to protect that somehow.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I know. We should laminate it, Volkmar.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Because when we—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: I'm going to put it in just a plastic sleeve.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, put it in—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Here's—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: —a plastic.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: You should—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: That's Volkmar.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —copy it too. Yes.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, you said—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: I was looking and this is—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Leeson?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: —who wrote the travel journ—? Wow.—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: It's very fragile.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: This is really amazing.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Tell her if you don't—if you're not too shy. But tell Annie Lou that great story of you and Gertie falling down the—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, [they laugh] falling down into a rice paddy.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: [Laughs.] I love that. Yeah.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Well, Dillon Ripley was very social conscious. He always knew the right people there and cultivated them. One of his friend was Gertrude Legendre, a very wealthy woman, perhaps one of the wealthiest in the country. She used to go on expeditions to Africa hunting and still in the hunting era. And he had invited her to go on the last leg to eastern Nepal with us, and so he sent me to Calcutta to meet her and to take her up to Nepal and then she would join us there for the rest of the expedition. So, I went to Calcutta and stationed myself in the lobby. And then every woman that went to the desk, I thought, "Well, this might be Gertie Legendre." [00:10:07] Well, it wasn't. There was a missionary woman and all kinds. Finally in the afternoon, late afternoon, came in this woman full of—I mean you could sense her presence and interesting costume jewelry and that kind of thing. She—that was Gertie Legendre, and she immediately said, "Well, we've got to get some weapons permit. We've got to do this, and we've got to do that. I've got to go to embassy," and all kinds of things. I mean things would ordinarily take three days to do in India, and she did them. The train left around eight o'clock that night for the first train that we had to take partly. She went and rented a sikh with a taxi, and my God, we went through all that stuff and got all these permits, did everything, a very efficient woman, a dynamic woman. Finally, we got on the train and a miserable train, a couple bunks you know?

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And there were a lot of cockroaches in there, and I said, "Oh, Mrs. Legendre, I've got

the thing,” and I had some DDT. I sprayed it around and then the cockroaches really came out.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah. [They laugh.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: They really came out and then it was crunch, crunch and well—but we finally got to the—um, it took a couple of days to get up to the Nepal border. And—oh yeah, and then she joined the expedition, and as I said, food was scarce but she—whenever she saw a shepherd or someone with sheep or goats or whatever, she would buy something for—to eat that evening, and was very generous always. [00:12:09] And finally, we got into the interior near the area where this was taken, and I always tried to get ahead of the rest so that I could take pictures of them coming and going or whatever. I came to this village, and I saw—in a hut, I saw an old woman trying to make fire by rubbing sticks together. So, I watched her for a while thinking mainly of pictures but then I pulled out some matches and I helped her. [Laughs.]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Whereupon, she reached up into the [inaudible] and got out a jug and gave me some rice wine, rakshi it was called. It's very similar to what you get here in a Japanese restaurant.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Sake.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Sake, yeah, very similar to that. And so, I started drinking sake, and I helped her with the fire and so on, and it was warm. Outside, it was rainy and cold. And finally, the rest of the expedition caught up with me and then I saw Gertie, and I said, “Come on in,” and she came and several of the others, and we sat around the fire. We let Dillon Ripley go on to make the camp—you know that we had to have a camp that night. He went on with the coolies and so on. And so, we got started drinking rakshis and pretty soon, she made some soft-boiled eggs and or hardboiled eggs, and we ate something, and we're very happy in there. And Gertie, now [laughs] we drank a lot of that rakshi [they laugh] and got fairly looped. [00:14:05]

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Really? [They laugh.]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Finally, we said, “Well, we better catch up with the rest of them,” and we skipped through that village. The next thing I remember, we went salto mortale down a bank into a rice paddy, a muddy rice paddy. And—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: What did you do?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: She broke—what did she break?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, she broke—she broke some ribs—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Ribs and—

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —and your nose right then.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And I broke I think a clavicle, and she broke a clavicle, and I broke also some ribs. It was very painful. And we got to the camp, which wasn't far off, and Ripley was just absolutely—he had no pity on us whatsoever. And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Were you still kind of loopy, I mean kind of drunk and—?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, we were still looped.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: How is pain—was it getting to be painful?

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah, but we stuck out the rest of the expedition. [Laughs] But she was a great sport. Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yes, I love that.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, that is such a great story.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah, that's really funny.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: So, we had our moments, you know, even though Ripley was—he was not like at the

time. There was even—I think it was Christmas Eve that we were kind of separated and some of the boys—we had some Yale graduates, young fellows, and they said, “What would happen if we just pushed him over a cliff?”

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Oh, my God.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, my God.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Dillon Ripley. [Laughs.] Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And so, uh, Ed Migdalski who was Ripley's assistant and sort, and my age. I must have been around—how old would I have been in '40?

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: You would have been—

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Seven—

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: —thirty-five? [00:16:03]

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Oh, anyway, in my early 30s or something

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Thirty-two

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: Yeah.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Thirty-two.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: And, uh, Migdalski and I, we said, “My God, no, we can't do anything like that because this will be forgotten that we were hungry and—” Anyway, we prevented it.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: Oh, wow.

VOLKMAR KURT WENTZEL: But that's—that—those are the things that can happen on an expedition.

LELY CONSTANTINOPLÉ: Yeah.

ANNE LOUISE BAYLY BERMAN: It's unbelievable. Well I will—I'm—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]