



Colette Shulman

Discovering One Another

I LISTENED WITH THE EAR OF MY HEART

BY COLETTE SHULMAN

Introduction

I lived my adult life close to the center of the Cold War, the long one that began soon after the combined efforts of the Western Allied Forces and the Soviet Army defeated Nazi Germany in World War II in 1945. I did not consciously ask myself why it was that being allies in this gigantic struggle we so quickly became opponents, and concluded that I needed to know more about the nation on the other side. It was more like gravitating there, following an impulse.

I got engrossed in the history and life of a country that from its very formation could not have been more different from mine. America was blessed in being protected by two oceans, with a population largely of immigrants who, in succeeding individually, helped the prospering of an entire nation. For Russia, the course of history over many centuries led in 1917 to a revolution that promised Utopia and brought a civil war, another world war, and a dictatorship inflicting suffering on an immense scale.

Starting soon after the dictator died in 1953, I lived in the Soviet Union for several years and reported to the outside world how Russians were recovering from both fighting the

Nazis and being tyrannized by Stalin. Destalinization had dimensions that were political, economic, and above all human. I observed, I listened in the spirit of the Benedictine Rule—through the ear of a heart as open and cleansed of prejudice as could be. Trying to understand and articulate all this was a totally absorbing experience, continuing throughout my life.

In 1960 I married a compatriot, Marshall Shulman, who was also engrossed in Soviet-American relations, and whose main concern was the nuclear arms competition and the need to reduce and stabilize it. He worked at high levels of government and academia, and I in the grass-roots of journalism and community activism. We complemented one another; our various responsibilities took us often to Moscow; we were stimulated, frustrated, our aspirations raised and disappointed, it was never dull, and the genuine friendships we made over there were for life. Our marriage repeatedly rendered me “surprised by joy,” in the stunning phrase from Wordsworth. We were also seared by pain, yet the joy kept on re-emerging, and I share some of this richness in the memoir that follows. It is especially about my working life, informing Americans about the Soviet Union, and bringing Russians and Americans together for dialogue, hopefully to reason their way to better judgements.

[Editor's note: What follows is an excerpt from *Discovering One Another*, by Colette Shulman, published with permission from the author. You can access the full text of Shulman's family memoir at the Harriman Institute, at 420 West 118th Street, 12th Floor, Room 1201.](#)

Marshall Returns to DC, 1977–1981 Special Advisor on Soviet Affairs for Cyrus Vance

I remember a day in early February 1976, when Marshall and I were lunching in the Columbia Faculty Club, and Zbigniew Brzezinski came over to our table full of enthusiasm for Jimmy Carter, recently the Governor of Georgia and little known beyond it, who was already running for President. Carter belonged to the Trilateral Commission, whose dominant members were the U.S. Eastern Establishment with access to money, advice on policy and strategy, and favorable media coverage. Zbig was the Trilateral's director (and a colleague of Marshall's at Columbia), and he had for some time been tutoring Carter on foreign policy issues and writing speeches for him. By late March, Carter was gathering support so quickly in the public opinion polls that he was practically assured the Democratic nomination. Carter won in a close election, succeeding Gerald Ford, and named Cyrus Vance to be his Secretary of State. He told Vance he wanted to make Zbig his National Security Advisor and asked, Would they be able to work together? Vance, who was also a member of the Trilateral, said he thought they would.

Marshall had been at the university's Russian Institute for a decade, directing it, raising money, and teaching courses and seminars on Soviet foreign policy, military strategy. He was now well established in the academic world. In December Cy, whom Marshall had long known, asked him to come to Washington as his advisor on Soviet affairs. Marshall did not want to go back into government—he liked teaching—and he urged Cy to look for someone else. But in January, when we were on a brief vacation in Jamaica, Cy called him again, saying please come, I need you; and Marshall gave in partly out of respect for Cy, with the understanding he would have the title of Special Advisor on Soviet Affairs, with the rank of Ambassador, an office close to the Secretary's, and his own staff. I relate the above to set the scene for four years, 1977–1981, that were more frustration than fulfillment for Marshall.

For the first months of the Carter administration, Marshall came down half-time since he was teaching a spring-term course at Columbia. He, Zbig Brzezinski, and Dick Holbrooke each had a bedroom in Averell Harriman's next-door second house that his earlier wife, Marie, had hoped to make into a museum open to the public for her art collection. The Georgetown residential community said no, so the house became a “catch-all”:

The objective was to create strategic stability, a balance, and also a degree of invulnerability, with systems on submarines at sea, mobile, or under hardened concrete.

Averell's office, library, reception rooms, suites for guests, extra bedrooms, the family chef's basement apartment. Zbig moved to a house he and Muska bought, Holbrooke stayed, and when the Harrimans heard I would be commuting down from New York for

half the time, they offered us a small back apartment above the chef's. This was felicitous in a way I'll get to later.

Slowing the Arms Race

What particularly drew Marshall back into government was the hope of achieving arms control agreements that he and his colleagues had worked to prepare the ground for. Since 1960 he had been part of an informal study group of defense scientists and political experts given formal sponsorship under the American Academy of Arts and Sciences that had been meeting regularly with a similar group in Moscow under the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Their discussions over the 1960s–early 70s were a process of mutual education, especially of the Soviet military and top political leadership. Marshall recalled Wolfgang Panovsky of the American group showing the Soviet scientists on a blackboard how their initial reliance on the anti-ballistic missiles they were building around Moscow was futile and would only exacerbate the arms race and encourage the buildup of offensive forces by the Americans. Or, Harold Brown later explaining to Soviet negotiators, that if they brought down the number of their heavy SS-18 missiles from 300 to 150 or 100, they wouldn't be able to take out our Minute Men missiles in a first strike. The objective was to create strategic stability, a balance, and also a degree of invulnerability, with systems on submarines at sea, mobile, or under hardened concrete. It was in the self-interest of both sides.

The Soviet leadership characteristically responded at the time as Alexei Kosygin did to President Johnson and Robert McNamara in 1967: How could we, a responsible Soviet leadership, say to our people, "We're not going to defend you as much as we can"? Their conception was, the more weapons and the bigger the better. But it changed. The

Soviet scientists came to understand this was counter-productive and persuaded their leadership, such that by 1969, when the first official talks between the two governments began, the Soviets were ready to negotiate what became the two-part SALT I, signed in 1972—the ABM Treaty limiting both the number of anti-ballistic installations and the missiles in them (it was in force for 30 years until the U.S. unwisely pulled out of it) and an Interim Agreement on measures limiting strategic arms, lasting five years.

Marshall recalled a Council on Foreign Relations discussion on the technical aspects of nuclear weapons, which he had to get to know, and George Kennan sitting next to him leaned over and said, "Marshall, I don't understand your fascination with these weapons." Bob Belknap, a colleague at the Russian Institute, perceptively wrote of Marshall, "He mastered the technology of weaponry, but he concentrated on the goals and fears of those who gave, or preferably did not give, the orders to use it."

If the challenge of educating and getting the Soviet leaders into negotiations was considerable, the challenge in Washington was even more difficult because of the hidden agendas that Marshall said existed in every discussion on how to respond to the Soviets. In the back of some minds, the purpose was to ratchet up the pressure on the Soviet Union, forcing over-strain; in other minds it was to reach a working relationship, easing tensions, that might encourage evolution over there. Rarely, he observed, did either get articulated.

Secretary Vance's deep conviction, Marshall said, "was that the security of the United States could be better assured by moderating the level of competition," whereas Brzezinski was inclined to emphasize the "more malign aspects of the Soviet system" and was "more concerned that the U.S. would be led by illusions to be insufficiently resistant to the Soviet Union."

Carter had campaigned partly as a peacemaker, and as President he gave a speech in 1978 on the "inordinate fear of Communism," warning against excessive preoccupation with the Soviet Union when there were other more important foreign policy matters. It was an uncharacteristic speech, but there was that side of him.

At the start of the administration, Carter exchanged letters with Brezhnev, who had worked to get his military to accept the Vladivostok agreement negotiated with President Ford, and wanted to resume negotiations on that basis. Conservatives in the capital—Washington Senator "Scoop" Jackson and consultant Richard Perle—urged Carter to aim

higher, for a major reduction in the Soviet heavy SS-18 missiles, which Marshall and Vance knew would be unacceptable at this stage. They flew to Moscow in March 1977 with that as a maximum position and Vladivostok as a fallback. As Marshall recalled, Brezhnev and Foreign Minister Gromyko “blew up” in anger; it was a “disastrous” beginning, setting back the negotiations.

That whole period was one of continuous deterioration in the Soviet-American relationship. Two American reporters in Moscow were arrested and another harassed, perhaps a response to the American positions on human rights, Jewish emigration, and most-favored nation status for trade. Their leaders had been told they wouldn’t get the latter unless they raised Jewish emigration, and it did double to 30,000. Instead we gave most-favored nation status to China—we were playing the China card against the Soviet Union, which saw the U.S.—China reconciliation as anti-Soviet. And there was growing Soviet influence in Africa now that they had the transport capacity to reach that far: Gromyko told Carter they did not have any Soviet officers in Ethiopia helping to manage the fighting there; Carter took this as a lie and was angry.

Another Year of Disappointments

Then, over Labor Day 1979, our intelligence reported new Soviet military activity in Cuba, and at the State Department Marshall got to the bottom of it through a good CIA analyst he knew well, who said this was yet another CYA (cover your ass). “The intelligence community was trying to protect itself by the most alarmist kind of projections, contradicted by material they had showing there were no newly introduced Soviet forces in Cuba.” The Soviets thought this was a deliberate effort to derail the SALT ratification. It wasn’t, Marshall said—just inadvertent and badly handled. His own experience, looking back on the Soviet missile brigade hullabaloo, was that “the process of presenting intelligence reports to the President became more and more topical and politicized over time.”

In mid-autumn of 1979, however, our intelligence was not exaggerating in noticing large loading compartments



Top to bottom: Averell and Pamela Harriman blowing out candles at Averell’s 90th birthday lunch at the Harriman home in Georgetown; cover for Discovering One Another: I Listened With the Ear of My Heart. (The book was laid out and produced by Lynn Stowe Designs.)

on Soviet airfields in southern Russia and flights of transport aircraft going to Afghanistan. In November–December Marshall made five approaches directly to the Soviet embassy in Washington or through the American embassy in Moscow cautioning the Russians we would take it very seriously if their troops went in. He repeated the warning to Andrei Kokoshin, a young specialist in military-political affairs at the Moscow Institute of the U.S. and Canada, when he came to our apartment for dinner. In December the Soviets invaded, a decision essentially made, as we later learned, by just two members of the Politburo: Yuri Andropov, head of the KGB, and Dmitri Ustinov, Minister of Defense, who had come up through the defense industry and had no personal military experience.

Opinions in Washington differed about Soviet motives. Carter in his re-election campaign called the invasion the greatest threat since the Second World War. Cy Vance said, “We have an analytical problem of trying to discern whether this is primarily a local matter for the Russians,” a response to complex Afghan politics which disturbed them sufficiently to feel they had to have a military presence. Others saw this as part of a larger strategic offensive. Was Afghanistan an area of interest to the United States? There were some, Marshall recalled, “including myself at that time, who saw it as an area of importance to the Soviet Union, an area that had been fought over for a long time with the history of



Marshall’s habit, when sitting down to write something—going back to his reporter days—was to put on his green visor and light up his pipe. Before going into the Carter administration he gave up the pipe, but he never gave up the visor. When the company making them closed down, he ordered several, and I still have them.

“I wanted as much as possible to cleanse myself of the experience I’d just been through in the administration.”

British and Russian rivalry in Afghanistan.” He continued, “Those who took the most malignant view of Soviet intentions used this as an occasion to throw at them the full list of the punitive measures that had been building up over a period of time, and there was of course a hidden agenda in the background that led to a military buildup on the U.S. part . . . and it really wiped out all the cooperative arrangements that had been worked out with the Russians in previous years—the exchange agreements, trade; it limited the sale of grain and United States participation in the Olympics in Moscow . . . the possibility of the ratification of SALT.

“Even those who had a more nuanced view of Soviet behavior,” Marshall said, “nevertheless felt this was a very egregious act. . . . So that, although Vance sought to protect SALT from getting involved in this—he was unable to—he did, as I did, endorse very strong measures against the Russians.”

Earlier, in February of that awful year, 1979, our ambassador in Kabul, Adolf (Spike) Dubs, a former student of Marshall’s, was abducted and killed by militants of still unclear identity. There were several conflicting political groups and shoot-outs of opponents in Kabul. It fell to Marshall to coordinate the State Department’s

response—requests from the media, drafting Secretary Vance’s tribute to Spike Dubs, and Marshall’s own eloquent eulogy, for which he received letters of appreciation from the Dubs family and foreign service colleagues. I remember the attention he gave to those colleagues asking for an appropriate lasting commemoration.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was, as Marshall put it, “a very serious mistake on their part, and our reaction to it got tangled up in American domestic politics, with the election coming on, with the rising conservative tide, with the divisions within the U.S. government about how we assess the Soviet Union, what our objectives should be with the Soviet Union.”

Back to Civilian Life

In April 1980 Vance’s accumulating frustrations reached the point where he resigned on his opposition to the

White House plan to go into Iran and rescue the American hostages—he deemed it unfeasible and likely to result in the deaths of hostages and others. The rescue effort was aborted, yet because of a helicopter running into a transport plane, there was some loss of life. I remember Marshall and I had dinner with Gay and Cy Vance right after his resignation. He urged Marshall to stay on and help Ed Muskie, former Governor of Maine, who took over as Secretary. Marshall did stay on for a few months, reluctantly, and left the government at the end of August. He said in his oral history, “I wanted as much as possible to cleanse myself of the experience I’d just been through in the administration.” Marshall’s brother, Lee, and his second wife, Joyce, were by then living in the Los Angeles area. Borrowing Lee’s Honda, Marshall and I took a motorcycle trip up the California coast from Los Angeles, through Santa Barbara and Big Sur, all the way through the vineyards and wineries of the Napa Valley. “It was a wonderful way of making the transition back to civilian and academic life.”

Over the Carter years I observed how hard Marshall worked in the State Department. He had an able, dedicated staff of young Foreign Service officers and a fine Deputy Assistant Secretary for Soviet and East European Affairs, Bob Barry, who later had two ambassadorships. Every day dozens of calls came in asking Marshall for interviews, to speak at meetings and conferences around the country, brief groups going to Moscow, or bestow the prestige of his presence on various major gatherings. He was often in the public eye; the long hours and especially the deterioration of relations gradually sapped his energy and spirits. After Reagan’s election in 1980, it was no surprise, yet still a blow to Marshall, that the conservative *Detroit News*, for which he had once been a reporter, carried an editorial saying “good riddance” to Secretary Vance and his special assistant Marshall Shulman. The *News* published Marshall’s letter in response, perhaps the most direct, succinct statement of what he aimed for in government and public advocacy work during his entire life.

Throughout the Carter years, I would drive down to Washington for many long weekends and ten-day stretches. I succumbed to the pleasures of reading, swimming in the backyard pool, exploring Georgetown and beyond, and reconnecting with friends. Avis Bohlen gave a dinner party to welcome us to Washington—Ambassador “Chip” Bohlen had died—and I got acquainted with grown-up Celestine, now a journalist, and at some point with the Bohlen’s eldest daughter, Avis, who, inspired by her father, joined the foreign service and became an ambassador.

“This war may perhaps not occur through evil intent, but could happen through miscalculation.”



At the Harriman home on Barbados in the mid-1980s; Colette Shulman in the foreground, and Pamela Harriman all the way in the back.

It was a treat living in the Harriman compound. I remember how gracious Averell was. We were invited to many of their next-door dinner parties with Washington notables, to weekends at their country estates, and visits to the house in Barbados, where there was always a stimulating group. When the Schlesingers were there, one evening after dinner Arthur and Marshall got Averell talking about the Katyn Massacres of Polish officers—who had done it, the Nazis or the Russians? In his effort to give Soviet troops what they needed to keep the German army engaged and bogged down on the eastern front, Averell had accepted the official Soviet explanation that the Nazis had done it. The conversation irritated him because by then, over 30 years later, there was enough evidence to show the Soviets had committed the massacre.

Once on Barbados we all went to Claudette Colbert’s for dinner, another time to Rex Harrison’s—Pamela had been married to producer Leland Hayward and knew many people in the theater and movie world. One evening, in the thatched roof dining pavilion of a house the Harrimans were renting, Marshall made bananas flambé, with the flambé flames dancing so high, the butler rushed over to put them

out. With each telling, over laughter, Averell further embellished the story until the pavilion itself was nearly on fire.

At a reception at the Harrimans in Georgetown, I recall meeting and having a longish conversation with Bob Strauss, former Chair of the Democratic National Committee. He immediately walked over to Marshall and said to him, “I’ve just talked with your wife. We have a saying in Texas, ‘Man, you outmarried yourself.’” I found that so amusing, I applied it on a festive occasion to Peter Kaskell, the second husband of my friend from Wellesley days, Joan Macy.

Our relationship with the Harrimans continued beyond the Carter administration through the eighties, when Pamela and Averell devoted themselves to nurturing possible Democratic Party candidates for Congress and the White House, in particular Bill Clinton, for whom Pamela held evening “salon” discussions on various issues. As Averell declined with age, Pamela increasingly took the initiative, gathering round her a group of talented men, rising young ones and men of experience, of whom Marshall was one, who briefed her and drafted talking points for her appearances before various groups. Pamela never hesitated to say that in the political world she knew, starting in World War II with her first father-in-law, Winston Churchill, men were more important than women. At first I think she was a little wary of me, but judging that I was no threat to her, she and I got on well, and Pamela was warm and exceedingly generous to us both.

At age 91 Averell Harriman made a final trip to Moscow for a promised meeting with Yuri Andropov, the new leader of the Soviet Communist Party. Pamela went too, and Marshall and I were invited to accompany them. The foremost impression that both Harrimans took away from their meeting on June 2nd with Andropov was, as Pamela put it, “the General Secretary’s grim reading of Soviet–American relations.” Just a few months earlier, in March 1983, President Reagan had given two speeches that escalated the rhetoric of the cold war—his first recorded use of the term “evil empire” to characterize the Soviet Union, and his intention to begin installing a missile defense system, popularly called “star wars,” which was widely opposed in the arms control community. Andropov was responding to this heightened tension when he said to the Harrimans, “Today the Soviet people and the American people have a common foe—the threat of a war incomparable with the horrors we went through previously. This war may perhaps not occur through evil intent, but could happen through miscalculation. Then nothing could save mankind.”

Seven months later Andropov died of kidney failure, after serving only fifteen months as Communist Party



Marshall with Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in 1977.

leader. Chernenko, who followed him, died after eleven months. No wonder our Moscow friends and colleagues felt depressed at that time of their country's deep stagnation.

The Russian Institute Becomes the Harriman Institute

My decision to come to Washington only part-time had led to our living in the next-door Harriman house instead of renting an apartment elsewhere. Proximity nurtured a friendship that had not before existed, which in turn led to Marshall's learning during a walk on the beach in Barbados that several universities had submitted formal proposals to Averell to house his papers and receive supporting funds for studies. Marshall quickly mobilized the Columbia University Development office and with the help of Anne McSweeney, experienced in high-level fund-raising, they drafted and submitted a Russian Institute proposal.

When learning that Averell's available resources were far less than applicants realized, they revised it so that grants would come as installments over several years. This made the Columbia proposal financially possible for Averell, and it appealed to him that the Institute would be strengthened as

a place of advanced research on the Soviet Union and would be named after him.

On October 21, 1982, there was a formal inauguration of the new W. Averell Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union. In his talk Averell said, "My objective is very clear: I want to stimulate and encourage advanced study of Soviet affairs . . . essential to this country now when there is so much misinformation about what is going on in the Soviet Union." He noted that the Institute would have Marshall as its director, "one of the most capable men in his field." Years later, Marshall's colleague at Columbia wrote, with characteristic perceptiveness, that when the Harrimans gave enormous wealth to the Institute, it was "because of their sense that Marshall's reason and reasonableness would enlist us all in the pursuit of peace." ■

Colette Shulman has been a journalist and public speaker on the Soviet Union/Russia since 1956. In the 1990s–early 2000s, she created and coedited a magazine for women starting NGOs in Russia's emerging civil society. She is a member of the Harriman Institute's National Advisory Council and a narrator in the Institute's oral history project.