

International Civil Servant Extraordinaire... George F. Saddler @98

When I arrived at the Five Star Premier Residences, a retirement community facility in Yonkers New York, George was queued up along with other senior residents of the building, for his 4th Covid-19 vaccine booster shot. Right after that, he motioned to his aide, Patricia, to lead us to the dining hall room where we were served a sit-down meal, with options from a printed menu, prepared daily by the dining crew led by the residence's excellent chef. George ordered Chicken Tenders and Pasta Fagioli soup. He also asked for hot sauce – a constant additive to his food. When I asked him if he observed any diet, he said, “no, I eat anything. The only thing that I don't eat are the table legs!” Obviously, he has not lost his sense of humor.

George Saddler turned 98 years old on September 27, 2023.

He is known to many UN retirees as the 2nd President of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) which he served with conviction, excellence and committed leadership from 1999-2004. He recalled some of the retirees that he dealt with closely at that time, among them, FAFICS first President that he succeeded, Amir Ali, and the one that followed his term as President, Witold Zyzz who was FAFICS 3rd President. Both Presidents Ali and Zyzz have passed away.



Photo with the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan during one of his first meetings as FAFICS President.

On the origins of FAFICS, George said, “*perhaps I am the only one remaining from those days when FAFICS was initially organized with the five original members: GENEVA, NEW YORK, ROME, PARIS AND LONDON.*” He was pleased to know that FAFICS has now grown, some 2 decades later, to 64 member Associations.

He added, “*I believe that I am the only person still around who was at the original meeting with the Secretary General UThant when he authorized the creation of AFICS NY when he stated that AFICS NY would be financed within the resources of the UN Regular Budget.*” He mentioned another retiree, Molly Bruce, apparently the one who wrote the Document on the origins of AFICS NY.

"The first association for UN retirees, to my recollection was created in the ILO because the ILO which was the International Organization that dealt with the workers. It's normal and appropriate for the ILO to be the International Organization that created the first AFICS. In fact, the first UN Pension Scheme was also created in ILO." While talking about ILO, he also remembered a friend and former UNESCO colleague Charles Lamuniere whose mother was known to be one of the last surviving persons who continued to receive her pension from the original ILO pension scheme because all of ILO staff were given the option of transferring their pension entitlement into the UN Pension Fund and they did when it was created.



"The ILO created AAFI/AFICS in Geneva that became the first Retiree Association in the UN System because in New York there were obviously no UN retirees and initially the retirees when there were a few were considered within the umbrella of the NY UN Staff Association. This arrangement continued until the number of retirees grew and the NY UN staff association was not concerned with the same group of issues as the retirees, i.e., pension and insurance, as opposed to salaries, working conditions, home leave, etc. Thus, there was a division between the two groups, UN Staff and UN Pensioners that remains even today, to me at least, it appears that there is a gulf between the two UN groups even though all staff who become eligible will someday retire and thus they should, in my view have a concern for their future status. But they don't appear to be that concerned about this issue.

His advice to the UNJSPF and all UN System agencies, they must ensure that those agencies have competent people to handle retiree pension benefits.

His experience with FAFICS was made more significant by the fact that he was also President of AFICS New York at the same time. He said there was a lot of work involved but, it turned out good for him, in a way, because his supportive and loving wife had died shortly before he became President of AFICS NY. ***"My grieving was not as severe as it could have been because of the work involvement with FAFICS and AFICS/NY"***.

His introduction to FAFICS did not come overnight, it was based on his long career with both the public and the private sector that made him best suited for the job. After retiring from the US foreign service, and UNESCO, he was asked by several AFICS/NY friends and former UN colleagues to join AFICS/NY and shortly after, he was appointed the Secretary by its then President, Freddie Freidgut. Then he was elected President where he met Aamir Ali, the FAFICS President during a FAFICS session in New York. When Aamir Ali stepped down, he was asked to be a candidate as his successor to the FAFICS Presidency, for which he was acclaimed without any competition or opposition.

During his time as FAFICS President, he recalled several issues that were major concerns at that time. One issue, which persists today, was the case of the former Soviet UN staff members whose pension entitlements were very difficult to resolve. This was due to the entrenched Soviet Government position that Soviet staff members who became UN staff members, would not receive a UN pension at the conclusion of their UN service and would instead receive a Soviet

pension. Additionally, he recalls some challenges then in the relations with several South American AFICS that had been newly admitted to FAFICS.

He remembered a personal circumstance that stood out when he was the President of FAFICS. He had a major colon surgery in New York, but he did not let that surgery interfere with his functions as the President of FAFICS. He still traveled to Geneva with a colostomy on his side; and was closely monitored by his doctor in NY who made contacts with a doctor and hospital in Geneva to treat him if a problem developed. Fortunately, he survived the surgery and managed to successfully conduct the scheduled FAFICS session.

His work as President also involved dealing with the UN Pension Board. He had good relations with the UNJSPF CEO and Secretary as well as the Secretariat of the Pension Fund, owing largely to his long association with some of the staff before he joined FAFICS. When he was Minister Counselor for Resource Management at the US Mission to the UN, he had the primary responsibility in New York for US participation in the Pension Fund and Board.

Also, as a former member of the UN ACABQ, he had access in several capacities and in several ways to influence the actions and decisions of the UN Pension Board, all of which he feels were done for the benefit and best interest of FAFICS and all UN System retirees. Also, in UNESCO, as the Assistant Director General for Administration, he was responsible for the UNESCO participation in the Pension Board and Fund. This experience gave him access to information about the governments, the heads of UN agencies and the retirees' views and their positions on various UN pension issues. In his words, ***“I believe that this experience and knowledge aided and benefited all UN system pensioners”***.



Overall, he found all aspects of his being President of FAFICS very rewarding. ***“Just being of service to the UN system retirees was the only reward I could imagine. I was very grateful to be able and competent enough to provide the “pro bono” services to FAFICS”***. He added that he truly appreciated and enjoyed the contacts with other UN Retirees and Associations on top of the opportunity to pay back for all the rewarding benefits he has had being in the UN System secretariat.

Mindful of his condition, at this point I asked if he was tired and if we should stop the interview. He quickly replied, ***“I am not tired”***, hence I continued. Mr. Saddler has an amazing memory for details – mentioning names of people in the early days of FAFICS, with clarity and fond memories from at least two decades ago such as colleagues Freddie Freidgut who was earlier mentioned, and Patricia Tsien and Molly Bruce, all AFICS/ NY officers.

George Saddler was born in Memphis, Tennessee on 27 September 1925. As the proud son of a single Mother who was schoolteacher, he believed that teaching is the most honest profession in the world. He described his mother as strong very loving and willed and remembered that in 1941, with only \$200 sewn to his underwear, his mother decided to send him from Memphis to

New York City with the prospect of his going to college, which seemed to have laid out his eventual career path with the UN.

But he also knows that one should start from the bottom. Before he joined the US Army at the young age of 18 in 1943, he has had various odd jobs, the first one being as an office boy at a Shoe Company New York City. In the US Army, he fondly recalls being deployed to the island of Leyte, in the Philippines, where then General Douglas Mc Arthur said his famous words, “*I shall return*” while serving as the US Army field marshal to the Philippine Army.

As a professional, George has had practically every experience in the world. Graduating with an Accounting Degree from NYU, he has worked as an Accountant, Budget and Finance Officer, Assistant to the UN Comptroller, Adviser, and Consultant on such matters with the private sector, the US Government, and the United Nations. But one of the most significant positions he recalled were those of his role as Supervisor of the Accounting Department of a large mid-Western Corporation, the Chief Accountant and Assistant to the City Controller for the city of Chicago, and as a senior US Foreign Service Officer.

In one of these capacities with the US Government and having been a Senior Officer at the US Mission to the United Nations, he landed a job in the UN as Deputy Director of the UN Budget Office, and as Assistant to the UN Controller, subsequently as Director of Finance at UNDP, and eventually as, Assistant Director General for Administration of UNESCO in its HQ in Paris, France.



Having retired at age 60, he spent some 4 decades of his time serving in these various capacities and always leaving a fine legacy of competent service, management, and leadership.

On a more personal note, he started to talk about his family. He stated that he comes from a large middle-class family and enjoyed a happy contented life in his hometown Memphis, Tennessee. He describes his background as multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious in a neighborhood where all the children got along and played together harmoniously. He was part of a large family with a great grandmother, at least 4 grandparents, several aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and sisters, plus many playmates.

As a person, he describes himself as easy to deal with, he “*likes what he likes and says what he likes*”. He was quite athletic in his younger years, playing basketball, football, and baseball. He was also on a college football team, and active in several organizations that he worked with when he joined the army. He says he learned something important from playing football which he considered very important later when he moved into the working world. “*You can have all the talent in the world, but you must have a team! You should always seek to have a team.*” He proudly says his single Mother raised him simply as a human being, recalling his childhood to be simple, pleasant, and being raised without regard to race or skin color. As kids, “*we just played together*”. Later in life, he realized that his mother used him as an experiment on how to raise a child.

“I met the girl I later married in high school. She was 13 and I was 14. We later married when I was 18 and she was 17. I had registered for the World War II draft at 18 and was drafted shortly thereafter and sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, then to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then to Camp Crowder, Missouri, all for specialized training in communications. I went overseas to the Pacific Theater of war and for a period, I was attached to General McArthur’s staff at the lowly rank of cable splicer in the Philippines to maintain communications between Manila Hotel and his other location. After being discharged from the US Army, my wife and I moved to New York City where I attended New York University, graduating in June 1950 with my degree in Accounting” His marriage to Pauline blessed them with two daughters, Paula, and Paulette and one granddaughter, Rebecca.



Still going strong in his twilight years, he seems to maintain a daily routine that defies aging and any health challenges he may have. At 98, George still uses the computer, sends, and receives emails – just uses all caps for readability. Two private duty health care Aides take turns assisting him daily in this nice senior assisted living facility, Five Star Premier Residences in Yonkers, New York, a place adequately furnished and decorated with photos and memorabilia of his family and oil paintings by his late wife, Pauline.

His day starts around 8 am. and by 10 a.m., he is on his computer to check emails and to keep in touch with friends around the world. He then eats lunch at his apartment, then attends personal affairs like paying bills and all; and by 6 pm., he goes downstairs to his senior living facility to join some happy hour. Dinner is usually between 7 and 8 p.m., after which he goes back to his apartment to watch TV, or western movies, until about 1 a.m. when he almost always just naturally slips into sleep. He wears a life alert pendant, just to be on the safe side, in case of emergency.

About socializing with others in his building, Mr. Saddler says, he doesn’t do it every day because sometimes he doesn’t have much in common with the other senior residents of the building who are mostly locals. As a former International Civil Servant, he doesn’t always have much in common topics to share or discuss with other residents. It was in this context that he said *“the UNJPF should consider building a retirement facility for UN retirees.”*



When asked about his secret to healthy longevity, he said, “ *although I have dealt with people since I was 8 years old when I began selling pulp magazines to the neighbors where I lived, I am fortunate to have been able to avoid stressful situations in my long personal or working situations plus, I guess, I simple have good genes from my father and mother. I was always alert with a very good memory, as a student I always scored high marks on tests because I could recall exactly what and when the teacher said something or what I had read in a book. I have a glass of wine, red or white, with my dinner each night.*”

On the same point about having an incredible mind, he remembered that in 1944, when he was 18 years old and drafted in the US Army, he scored so high on the test given to new recruits that the recruitment personal gave him the same test a second time to validate the results of the first test, and he scored even higher on the second test because he remembered all the answers from the first test! They classified him as a genius and offered him a position at the Officer Candidates School, but he refused because he didn’t want to have a military career in the future. Well, I guess, the UN is happy because you joined the secretariat and we had you in FAFICS.

He had no advice for his younger self as he said, “*I’ve had a contented and pleasant younger life without any calamities or bad occurrences except the deaths of some close relatives that I missed very much. My mother taught me that while I was no better than any other individual, I was no worse than any other individual, that I was simply a human being who should respect all other individual human beings and groups as human beings, but of course, it is normal that one should like some individual human beings better than others*”.

His advice to anyone involved with FAFICS in any capacity “*to put the best interest and welfare of the UN System retirees before their individual concerns, desires, and interests. Don’t become involved in FAFICS because of the possibility of traveling to its meeting, which unfortunately is what some AFICS participants see as the main benefit of getting involved in FAFICS. In addition, do your homework and come to FAFICS sessions well prepared to have open and unbiased discussions of important issues facing the UN System retirees, be it health insurance, pensions, safety, or welfare*”.

As a final message to UN retirees around the world, Mr. George F Saddler had this to say. “*It is an honor and privilege to work or to have worked in the UN System, and we should all feel blessed to have the experience of being an International Civil Servant. In my opinion, if FAFICS did not exist, it would certainly have to be created because its importance is beyond question. Even colleges and schools have alumni associations to maintain and protect the honor and traditions of the college or school. Therefore, AFICS and by extension FAFICS are important to maintain the honor and traditions of the International Civil Service. FAFICS is extremely relevant to the UN System retirees.*”

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Written by Delia Barcelona, FAFICS Secretary, based on her interview with Mr. Georges F. Saddler on 6 November 2023 at his Five Star Residences apartment.
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