

EPISODE 498

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] AH: Firstly, it's a pleasure to speak to you, Christopher. And the second question is how did you get mixed up in the crazy world of intelligence?

[00:00:08] CB: Well, I'm going to blame that on my father. You see, I was the son of a foreign service officer. And my father was with USAID and took us abroad when I was tight. So I did all of my primary and secondary school education abroad. When I came back to the United States, surprise, surprise, I underwent culture shock, right? I went to university. I didn't fit in. I wasn't like the normal kids. And I grew up in Turkey and Thailand. I didn't grow up in Illinois. And so university wasn't for me. And the university agreed, I agreed, my parents agreed, and I left university at their invitation.

And so, literally, I was working delivering bank checks in Northern Virginia. My three brothers were at Georgetown School Foreign Service. They'd all matriculated out and were in the Foreign Service. And my father took me to lunch one day, because my route took me under his office down in Roslyn area, and he said, "I want you to meet somebody." And what he did is he walked me into the recruiting office of the CIA where his old cribbage buddy from Vietnam days happened to be running the recruiting office. And he introduced me as, "This is my son, Christopher. He's number four son. He's different." And with that introduction I was about to learn all about the CIA.

Now mind you, this gentleman there, he's looking at me. And I'm long-haired. I am wearing a tie because I work for a bank. And he goes, "Well, what skills do you have?" And I said, "Well, right now I pick up checks and I drive a car." And he goes, "What you're saying is you really don't have any?" And I see that pretty much. And so he gave me forms to fill out, and he said tampered down expectations. But he said it's not zero, but it's really close to zero that we have anything for you, because you have absolutely nothing except a high school diploma.

So I filled out the paperwork. The SF86 then was only 45 pages, not 145 like it is now, and laid my life out. My parents reviewed it and said, "Really, this is your life? We thought you were far more dangerous than that?" And 10 months later I get a call and they say, "Pending a polygraph, we'd like to offer you a job as a clerk." And so I took it. And that began my career in the file room of the old headquarters building with qualifications that I knew A to Z and zero to nine, and I could put them in order, and I could punch holes in paper. And my very first job, which I was very proud to have, paid me \$95 a week, was putting file paper in security files at the CIA. So that is how I got in.

And from that point on, it was truly, Andrew, a look for an opportunity to do something different in advance. Learn something more. And I was always being pushed, "You should get your education. You should get your education." They offered to pay for the education. I took a course here and of course there, but opportunities internally would appear. And I dive, put my fingers through the door, drag myself in, and take advantage of those. And that is my entrance to the world of intelligence at the ripe age of 20 years old.

[00:03:35] AH: So tell us a little bit more about that. Obviously, that could be the topic of a very long conversation. But give us an overview before we start diving into some key moments along your journey.

[00:03:47] CB: Sure. So my career took place over the course of 30 years, almost exactly 30 plus years. And during that time I had the pleasure of working within all of the directorates of the Central Intelligence Agency. I started off in the Directorate of Administration as a file clerk. I continued there for the first 12 years of my career, but in different functions. I was a communications officer. I was a programmer. I invented stuff for the agency in covert communications. And I got to work with the folks over in the Directorate of Science and Technology. That was great.

Then I made my transition to the Directorate of Operations. I did something that's unheard of in the world of government, and it's not recommended. I gave back a GS grade so that I can make that transition from the Directorate of Administrations to the Directorate of Operations to start a different career path. It didn't seem to hinder me, but it certainly raised

a ton of eyebrows when you give back a promotion so that you can have another opportunity that's completely different from what you're doing.

So into the Directorate of Operations I went. During that time I received a fellowship to the Directorate of Intelligence, where I worked over at the Center for the Studies of Intelligence and Histories. Did that for a little while, a year or so, then back out into the field, because frankly I'm a field person. I was never very good at the headquarters thing. I was allergic to hallways I found. I much more preferred the street. So out to the field I went and finished my career in the field as a Chief of Station at a field location. When I left, they were very kind to me. They recognized the span of my career and some of my accomplishments and awarded me the Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal. So that's my agency career. After that, I jumped into private sector wrote a book, *Secret Stolen, Fortunes Lost*, and worked at startups, and worked for Fortune 50s, etc. And that's where I am today, is I'm riding full time on national security events.

[00:06:05] AH: Wow! And what year did you join the CIA?

[00:06:07] CB: That would have been 1976. So right in the sweet spot of the Cold War, but also at a pivotal time in the history of the CIA with the church committees.

[00:06:21] AH: In time of troubles?

[00:06:23] CB: Exactly. And so things were changing internally. And I was a young whippersnapper who didn't know anything, but I was watching the elephant stumble.

[00:06:37] AH: Yeah, '76, that's basically the fallout of, I guess, in many ways for the CIA the terrible year that was 1975.

[00:06:46] CB: Yes, indeed. So that continued from '75 to about 1980. This is me telling you from my personal feelings that you had a five-year period of adjustment. And I recommend to everyone who is a scholar or wishes to understand this to take a look at the multiple volumes of the church committee hearings, because they absolutely go into depth and detail of the way the Central Intelligence Agency was from its inception in '48 to about '76.

And then the adjustment that occurred in '76 onward, you can say that's the pivotal moment. About 1979-ish there was a purge within the Directorate of Operations and hundreds of Directorate of Operation officers were rift. And that's a reduction in force. I remember because I was in the field when the note came in with the list of officers who were being told that – They're in the field. They're doing work and they're being told they were redundant.

Now, part of it was there was a bloat of officers that were still present post-Vietnam conflict. And they were fitting them in to different places. And not all of them were great fits. There are a lot of placeholders. On the other hand, there are a lot of good officers that baby in the bathwater thing that got thrown out too. So it was turbulent times. But again, I was so young. I was so early in my own trajectory that it just kind of passed over me like a jet, right? Because it wasn't affecting me. I was in the administrative side. I was in the support element. I was always going to be needed. I had job security, right? I wasn't making decisions. I was carrying water.

[00:08:45] AH: You always need administrators.

[00:08:47] CB: Well, you do. There's an old joke that the body will suffocate without certain body functions, or the brain will suffocate without certain body functions.

[00:08:57] AH: And so how long are you in the administrative branch? When do you make the switch over to operations?

[00:09:03] CB: I took an internal opportunity and switched over to communications. And that's what they taught me, how to be a radio operator, cryptographer. And that's what got me abroad. I had to wait to turn 21 to go abroad. But once I turned 21, they sent me abroad to a far-flung location, and I did a tour there, came back, got into computers. An opportunity came to go into the Soviet Union. My brother had just left there. So I took it, because there was an emergency. So I spent six years in the Soviet Union. After I left the Soviet Union, I made the switch. And it was a great time to do it. The Cold War was hot. During the period of '81 to '89, you had the turbulent era of the Soviet Union where the perestroika was in place where they were shifting. You had four secretaries of the politburo die. The transitions

that occurred in rapid succession, which – I'm sorry. There were three. But you had four leaders in rapid succession. That just kept things on its toes.

And then you had perestroika. And the change started. And then the wall came down and that changed everything. What it didn't change, and that's what – And it was one of the reasons that I was heading, I shifted over, is that those who were following the Soviet Union always realized that even if the Soviet Union fell, Russia would still be an adversary. That their interest in the United States would not wane, and history would tell us that. As a historian, you were familiar with the Venona project, right? The Venona project was taking place when we were allies with them. So why would they hesitate to conduct espionage operations against us during a period when we're in competitive mode, not in alliance mode, when they were willing to invest so much during the period when we were allies? So just plain logic says they're not going away. And as our hindsight of 2020 shows us they never did, right? We have the Hansens, the Ames, the Howard, all of these individuals from within the United States intelligence community that made their way to the Soviet Union and then continued on servicing Russia in their intelligence arms.

[00:11:25] AH: Did you have a particular geographical region that you specialized on?

[00:11:30] CB: I did not. I had the pleasure of having worked in Latin America domestically in what was then known as the Soviet Bloc, the Middle East and South Asia. So I got around. And I didn't have a specialty, because again, I was an anomaly, right? I'm the kid that came in as a file clerk and worked his way in and went and got ad hoc training in order to do things. When I would apply for work they would always say, "Well, where's your college education?" And I would say it's right here in the hallway. It's called hard knocks. I grew up in the agency. This is where I learned. And I truly did. I learned in the hallways of the CIA, figuratively speaking. When somebody says, "Where did you learn how to write?" And I said, "I typed up a lot of cables for people who knew how to write." And that's true. I've got thousands of cables. So I saw different writing styles. And so you learn by osmosis.

And looking back in history, you don't realize it at the time, but I worked with some tremendous legends of the organization. One that I can speak of is during that period where I had my history fellowship. I was the classified researcher within the agency

archives for Ambassador Helms in his memoir *Look Over My Shoulder*. He had an agency historian that was helping him, but I was the one who was going through the DO archives with him. And that was just a tremendous opportunity to sit side by side with somebody who had his finger in so much of the early history of the organization and crawl through the archives on his behalf. And his co-author of his book was Bill Hood, who he himself wrote the first book on the first Soviet spy for the United States, and the title of the book is *Mole*, right? And so interesting folks.

And you learn a lot when you have folks that are putting – Whether they made mistakes or not, but they were always putting the nation first. And so that was one of the reasons that I stayed all throughout my year is it was always mission-oriented. And I think that's still true today even though I'm well outside the beltway. And frankly, since my retirement, have had little to no contact with my former colleagues, etc. And this is frankly the first time I'm talking about my career.

[00:13:56] AH: Well, thanks for taking the time to talk to me about it. I mean, it's fascinating to hear you discuss Richard Helms. And just for our listeners that don't know, he was the Director of Central Intelligence in the late 60s, early 70s. He was the US Ambassador to Iran. And then he wrote this book, *A Look Over My Shoulder*. And it's a really great memoir from the point of view of a Director of the CIA. So could you just tell the listeners a little bit more about your engagement with him and with that book?

[00:14:30] CB: Well, he was in his 80s then, and he needed somebody to go through boxes, order up boxes for him. And I was on the history staff as a fellow. And so I was assigned as a DO officer. And the circumstances of my being there made it perfect, because all of this was historical. So I was looking at anything active.

And so he and Bill Hood would remember something and they'd say, "Well, let's go look at it." For example, when the Cuban crisis was building up, they walked into the White House with a machine gun. And they wanted to show it to the president. And I always heard the story, but I didn't know if it was true. And lo and behold it's true. He walked into the White House with a machine gun and showed it to the president because they wanted to show

him that it was Soviet markings. And you go, "You walked into the White House with a machine gun?" Who does that, right?

And then you have the period of time where he refused to testify and was held in contempt by congress and fined two thousand dollars. He never paid that fine. Others raised money and paid it on his behalf. Then he would share a little bit about his private life or his pre-OSS days. Many people don't realize, he was an AP reporter in Europe. And one of the individuals he interviewed in the late 30s was this guy named Hitler. And so you know I'm sitting there with this man who has not only written about issues of historic significance, but he was a prime participant in so many issues of historic significance. And that was very much in line with my own childhood, because my father was present and my brothers were present in events that would later prove to have tremendous historic significance or even minor historic significance, but you're a participant, not an observer. And personally, that's a driving force of why do people serve your nation, is to make a difference.

[00:16:45] AH: You mentioned your fellowship there, and I know that that arose out of certain set of circumstances. I know that had a significant impact on your personal and professional life. Can you tell the listeners a little bit more about that?

[00:16:57] CB: Sure. So I had already switched over to the Directorate of Operations. And one of the things I had done before I had gone over is I'd taken a one-time pad and automated it and created an algorithm for it. And people thought that was pretty cool. And then when I –

[00:17:15] AH: Sorry to interrupt, Christopher. Just briefly, can you tell our listeners that aren't part of the community what a one-time is?

[00:17:22] CB: Sure. So one-time pad is a means to encrypt information. There are cryptographic machines. There is cryptographic one-time tape. So the key is used one time and one time only. Then there is a one-time pad. And most of us who are not in the intelligence world will know this as five letter groups or five digit groups. And you've seen them in movies where they encrypt them and they use an A and a Y encrypts to a B, for

example. Or they use false subtraction. And it's just a means to have secure communications between point A and point B. And for years it was done manually.

Well, when the personal computer came out around 1979, 1980, I bought one. I was doing one-time pad as my job. And I created a little program that automated it and was error-free. And it was one of those things where I thought of myself as really, really, really clever. My supervisors thought I was really, really clever. And then I learned a very important lesson about the unintended consequences of one's actions. They employed my hammer. They used it for years and years and years. But the little office that I was working in had 27 people and all they did was one-time pad because they could do it so fast. And they were all redundant at that point, because now we had a machine that could do it even faster and with no errors.

And so I learned a real lesson then that being a smart guy is okay, but you want to perhaps temper it a little bit and figure out what the next step might be if you do X, Y or Z. I'm not saying it was wrong that progress should have moved forward, and it did. But perhaps I should have tempered my exuberance a little bit that I was so clever at 23 years of age.

But back to your question about the CSI history. So I'd come back from abroad. I was doing counterintelligence work within the organization at the time. And unbeknownst to me, the intelligence world was looking for Robert Hansen. Well, the FBI at the time, and I've written this in my writings at Clearance Jobs, is that that individual who's providing information to the Soviets, now Russians, had to have come from the CIA, because that's where Ames came from. That's where Edward Lee Howard came from.

And so like any investigation, you take all your clues, you put them up on the wall, then you start throwing up all the people that touch any of those clues. And I was one of the eight people that touched a lot of them, because I was active. A gentleman who is well known and publicized, Brian Kelly, touched more of them than anyone else. And so we got caught up in the switches of the Hansen investigation. And what that meant was they took us out of active work and sent us home.

Well, I petitioned to the Directorate of Operations, the Deputy Director of Operations and the DCI, and the Deputy Director for Counterintelligence that instead of me sitting at home thinking about getting a lawyer, that perhaps there might be another way that I can contribute to the mission while you guys sort out this idiocy, because my exact words at the time was I'm stupefied. This is absolute BS. And I don't know what the hell you're doing. But I'm now on ice.

So they said, "Okay, if you can find a unclassified position, we'll consider it." And so I did. I found they were looking for a historian, which I wasn't, over at the Center for the Studies of Intelligence. The directorate there at that time had a conversation with one of the seniors within the agency about taking me on. Making sure I wasn't working on anything active, but I'd be a history fellow. And I am forever grateful to that individual for doing this, because that wasn't without risk, right? The investigation was ongoing. All they had was here's their puzzle and they had Burgess saying it's not me, right?

So he took a risk, but he took a risk because people he respected and knew said I was worth taking that risk for. So I went. And I let the FBI do their investigation. I enjoyed what I call a season of polygraphs, like seven months of polygraphs. And then finally the FBI said, "You know, it's not you." And I said, "No. It's not me." And I was allowed to go back into rotation. And I was put in rotation and it was fortunate they were still working on the Helm's memoir. Former Director Helms wrote a memo to the DDO about my assistance for him, which I don't know if it helped or didn't help. But once they declared that I was no longer in the hopper, I had a field assignment within four to six weeks. It wasn't without its cost though. My family was tossed upside down. I went through a divorce. That's how it happens. It's rough when you're isolated out. And some of the old hands would say, "Well, that's what happens when you dance close to the fire. You get singed on occasion." And it's absolutely true. The agency had to do everything it had to do to protect itself given the circumstances. I wish that the bureau had looked inside as well as outside and not just confined itself for so many years to the agency. But that's me speaking in hindsight and from a personal bias.

But I will say that I went on to achieve some pretty significant accomplishments post-event in the field and enjoyed the rest of my career and advancement, etc., though it set me back.

And it absolutely helped me in my decision that when I became eligible to retire after 30 years in age 50 to take that retirement, because that setback had meant that I wasn't in rotation anymore. If you follow what I'm saying, Andrew.

[00:23:39] AH: I think I follow.

[00:23:40] CB: It sets you back. Therefore, those that your peer group has moved ahead.

[00:23:44] AH: Do you feel that it was more the pause button was pressed on your career and that's what held you back? Or do you feel that this is something that followed you around the mark of suspicion?

[00:23:56] CB: The pause button was hit, and there wasn't an explanation provided to others on why I was sitting in timeout over at the Center for the Studies of Intelligence, because I was actually doing a function. So to others it looked like I took a time out from operations to go write histories. I was a conflicted individual. Does he want to write histories or does he want to run operations? And that was just fine, because you know what? I really didn't want people in my business and I didn't want them judging, because it's just human nature to why would they suspect him, right? And well, they'd suspect him because he was active in the same things that were being compromised by Hansen. That's why you'd suspect someone.

We're talking the mid-90s, '96, '98 time frame, those years there. But it was a few years later that Hansen finally was identified. And I should have written down the note, but it was just the recent anniversary. I wrote an article about it for Clearance Jobs the anniversary of his sentencing occurred this past April, a significant one. And the guy did a lot of damage not only to our national security, but his actions and the subsequent investigation destroyed a number of people's lives. I always viewed myself as one of the fortunate ones, because I bounced out of it as having a pause, not a destruction, and my career moved on. But others, they never recovered. And it's just a shame.

[00:25:32] AH: Tell us about some of those people that you don't have to –

[00:25:35] CB: That's not my story to tell. But when you're taking on a rotation, you're told to go sit at home, your families are called in and said we think your spouse is committing espionage. That puts so much pressure on a family that I don't know how many of them can withstand it, right? Especially when why would they accuse you?

[00:25:58] AH: I mean, I can't even imagine how disorientating that must have been. I mean, that must have been scary as well, because the consequences for this type of thing are extremely serious.

[00:26:07] CB: It was very scary, because you're not involved in the investigation. You're just one being asked questions. And I will say, what's what saved my fanny was that my records were complete verbose. For the first time in my life, being verbose paid off. And the paper trails were all there. There was nothing that wasn't verifiable, if you will. And so I figured that saved me a lot of the angst. Again, I never knew what it was that pointed them at me. I never was informed of it. I was just put on ice.

[00:26:51] AH: So to this day you don't know why they fingered you?

[00:26:53] CB: Nope. Or nor do I have a desire to go figure it out. I'm just too damn old now and life's too short. I'm sitting here looking at my calendar and I have fewer days ahead of me than I have behind me. And so I don't want to waste any of those ahead of me. And so when I retired a lot of people laughed and they go, "Well, what did you do when you retired?" And I said, "Well, I broke my rear view mirror, and I just looked forward." Yeah, I have this tremendous experience, but I'm not going to lean on it. I'm going to use it, but I'm going to go create new opportunities for myself and I'm going to go do different things. And so I did. And that's where I went on to write this book *Secrets Stolen, Fortunes Lost*, which is a guide to preventing economic espionage and intellectual property theft. My co-author and I focused on writing it so that small and medium businesses could protect their life's blood who didn't have the resources to bring in the five big consulting firms with their phalanx of advisors. No. This was written for the small mom and pop, a team that can't afford an IT shop, and frankly, post-agency. I've dedicated myself to helping folks understand the threat from espionage, the threat from insiders, the different motivations. You've had guests on your program that have talked about the motivations of a spy. Dr.

Charney, he's always a delight to talk to, because he has looked into it different than anyone else. And you've had him on your program. I just feel that we're looking at a conveyor belt of opportunity to educate. And that's why I write and that's why I'm hoping my writing and sharing of stories about bad things happening to good people, or malevolent people engaging in bad things will help companies and organizations protect their intellectual property, protect their personnel, and not become a victim.

[00:28:54] AH: Just before we park your time in the agency off, tell us about more about Horatio Alger.

[00:29:02] CB: Well, there are a few individuals who have entered the CIA as a file clerk and popped out at the other end as a Chief of Station. There are a few. Less that didn't have a college education. And that's why I got coined as the Horatio Alger, because as I alluded to earlier in our chat here, I received my education within the halls, if you will, of the organization. I spent well over 20 years of my career abroad. And to me, that's where – And I'm speaking only for me. That is where I thought I could make the biggest and the best impact. And let me preface that. I said abroad. I should say in the field. I was not built for headquarters. It just wasn't me. And frankly, my reassignment from the field to headquarters also helped me in my discussion on should I retire? Because as much as I like foggy bottom and as much as I like April in the Washington, D.C. area with the cherry blossoms, I never liked dealing with staff meetings bureaucracy and headquarters antics, if you will.

[00:30:13] AH: Just on that topic, where were you born and raised, Christopher?

[00:30:17] CB: So I was born in Massachusetts. I had my early life predominantly in Northern Virginia. My father was a labor unionist. And then when Kennedy became president, my dad was asked to join the USAID and help with labor relations. And he did. And we went abroad in the early 60s to Turkey. And then we went to Thailand. I say we went to Thailand. My dad went to Vietnam. We were safe haven in Thailand. So from age 10 to 18, I saw my father every six to eight weeks for two to three days. He'd come out of the war zone and visit with his family in Thailand. And so I say I grew up abroad, Turkey and Thailand.

I have to say, my dad always said, "I'm a simple man. I don't have a lot of means. But what I did do is I gave you the view of the world." And he did. Every time we transferred or we went on home leave, we stopped at different places so that we would be exposed to different cultures. And frankly, it's what put the bug in me. My dad always knew the bug was there. That's why he walked me into the recruiting office. I watched my three brothers go through Georgetown University School of foreign service and then on into the foreign service peace corps and USIS and that. So they were all making a difference there. But they were different than I was. I really think my dad thought I was going to go into the world of crime, and this is why he put me over there to save me. It was more attractive than other options, I think. But to his dying day, he kept saying, "I knew you were different."

[00:31:49] AH: And just on the topic of your global travels, and you said you were there for six years, can you tell us a little bit more about –

[00:31:53] CB: I was there from '81 to '86. So that was the end of the Cold War. I arrived right around the time that the KL007 airliner was shot down, the Korean airliner.

[00:32:04] AH: And you were in Moscow?

[00:32:07] CB: No. I was in St. Petersburg, then Leningrad. And then I went to Moscow. So I had the benefit of living in both areas. Sadly, I wasn't fluent in the language when I arrived, because I arrived under emergency circumstances. But because my brother had served there prior, his contacts took me under his wing, under their wing, and absolutely made sure I learned how to get around St. Petersburg and what have you. And it was just fascinating. I mean, how many people can say they have walked the streets of Dostoyevsky, right? You read Dostoyevsky, and as you're reading them, you can walk the street with the characters in the book. I mean, it's just fantastic. Go visit Pushkin. How many folks realize that Pushkin was African, right? Not many.

So I really enjoyed the Russia. The Soviet Union part, not so much. But it always kept my interest. I learned a lot while I was there. I've learned a lot more after I left. I would say that

that renaissance type education you get from reading reading, reading, reading, reading and discussing with folks. It was important time. And being in the presence of others making these decisions about the Soviet-US relationship as it was cascading. The Soviet Union was on its path to evolutionary change. It was just an exciting time to be there.

[00:33:28] AH: I'm assuming that you were in St. Petersburg in Moscow ostensibly as a diplomat.

[00:33:34] CB: I was working there. And what my attribution was we don't discuss.

[00:33:40] AH: Okay. So we've walked up and tell you the Berlin Wall comes down. You're in the CIA. You get caught up in the Hansen investigation in the mid-90s. And then walk us up to you leaving the CIA. When do you leave?

[00:34:00] CB: I leave the CIA at the end of 2005.

[00:34:02] AH: Okay.

[00:34:03] CB: And there was no event that propelled me out the door. It was I was eligible.

[00:34:09] AH: Where were you when 9/11 happened? And what was that like –

[00:34:12] CB: 9/11, I was in the field. And it was terrible. I remember showering and my wife says, "You have to come and look at this. A small plane ran into a building." Then it became clear what was going on. And the next 10 months were a rush of 24/7 activity that I truly don't remember everything, because I was working non-stop the whole time, as were all of my colleagues. It was just all hands on deck. Everybody just doing the best we could with what we had to figure out what the hell happened. And as you recall, again, there's been books written about it, etc. CIA officers were on the ground in Afghanistan within 40 days of September 11th. And they were persecuting their hunt for him immediately.

So that was all going on. But the predecessor to that, and I have to say that's what jinned me up in the counterterrorism world where the attacks on the embassy in Dar Assalam and

in Nairobi by Al-Qaeda. And it was at that time that I had been receiving or my office had been receiving requirements, and we were able to satisfy some of them to help us in that regard. I won't get into the analytics side. I'm a collector, right? I'm not the analyst. But I can say that post-9/11, it changed everything and how we looked at things.

I will say one of the enhancements that came from that was a more streamlined means by which interagency coordination took place. If you look around the United States, you'll see repeatedly appearing in indictments and in news programs, etc., references to the joint terrorism task force. Those absolutely were great things that stood up. But folks don't realize that the attorney generals also had their task force, terrorism task force, that they stood up. And then you had the United States Secret Service set up their, organized financial crimes task force. And so we were participating in all of those. And to me, that was a great turn of events.

But when I became eligible to retire, even though I was in the field doing work leading a tremendous group of officers in the challenge of the agency mission, it was time. We did a financial analysis with my financial advisor and we realized that for every year I continued to work after being eligible, I would increase my annuity by nine dollars a month. And it was pointed out that I could flip burgers for more than nine dollars a month and not have to work the hours and take the risks that I was and have my life dissected every year with the financial disclosures and the periodic polygraphs, etc. It was time for change. And so I took that change.

[00:37:03] AH: Do you feel that like after the Hansen investigation was put to bed, did that mark of suspicion over you completely disappeared? Or do you feel like it always followed you around a little bit?

[00:37:14] AH: I had no idea. I do know that on a couple of occasions when I was interviewing for some senior positions, individuals would say, "What's this BS here that instead of going to Bosnia you went to Center for the Studies of Intelligence? Or instead of going to Iraq, you went to the Centers for the Studies of Intelligence?" right? It was that sort of thing that would come up from time to time. But mind you, all my career, I was always told I couldn't do things because you didn't have a college education. You didn't go through

the career training program. You didn't do this. You didn't do that. And all my life I just kept saying, "Hold my beer." I made those as personal challenges. Not as impediments.

[00:37:55] AH: And tell us a lot about more about the types of things that you've been up to since you left the CIA, because we got connected through a mutual acquaintance who works for Clearance Jobs. And I know that you do quite a lot of writing for them. And I just wondered how much is your writing informed by your past experience.

[00:38:15] CB: So in 2013, May of 2013, so eight years ago, Clearance Jobs and I were introduced. And they asked me to write on cyber security and intelligence topics, national security intelligence topics. And the National Industrial Security Program specifically, because that's the clearance world of the private sector. Part of the interest that I had in writing about it as well as their having me write about it was the fact that during my period at CISCO, I oversaw the government security office that supported the classified programs. That fell under the NISPOM and the DCID. And the NISPOM is the National Industrial Security Program Office Manual. And the DCID is the Director of Central Intelligence Directives that private industry must adhere to in order to engage in a classified world with government, which is what Clearance Jobs is. They are a forum with bulletin boards and networking engagements for the contractor world as well as the government world to help individuals become educated as well as to find their next gig.

So it was kind of nirvana for me because it was such a sweet spot. And I looked today and I've had like, oh, well over 350 articles that I've written for them over the last eight years on a variety of subjects. You'll find a ton of them on Insiders. You'll find a lot about the Chinese initiatives and the Chinese espionage action that's targeting the United States and the government. You'll find a lot about Russia. I did a long series about Devins, Andrew Devins, the Special Forces captain that left the military, went into as a contractor in the intelligence world, and was just sentenced to prison. He was recruited while he was a student abroad in Chelyabinsk, Russia.

So I write on a whole span of things. Today, for example, I wrote about the CISO within the Department of Defense that had her clearance suspended while they do an investigation about the alleged inadvertent disclosure of classified material. So allegations don't mean

guilt, but allegations absolutely provide an opportunity to educate. Because people do break trust, people do break rules. And my writing is designed to help those that are charged with protecting secrets protect those secrets. So that's my symbiotic relationship with Clearance Jobs. And we've been doing this for eight years. and I'm very grateful for the opportunity they give me.

[00:40:55] AH: What are some of the skills that you learned as an operative that you can use as a journalist? Is there any crossover?

[00:41:02] CB: Yeah, there's a tremendous crossover. Number one, the BS detector is a finely honed tool. And so the ability to cut through BS is priceless. Secondly is put the benefits up front, right? Why do I care? Put it up front. Tell the story and then give the lessons learned. So I've got a format that frankly I stole from my operational days, because I was always proposing things. I was doing things. I was writing intelligence. I was prolific intelligence reporter and collector in my younger days. And so I took those writing skills, and I just transferred them over to this. It's what I do now. I write for a living.

[00:41:42] AH: What does the future hold for you, Christopher, other than continuing to work for Clearance Jobs? Is there any other –

[00:41:48] CB: Well, if they'll have me, I'll keep writing for them.

[00:41:51] AH: Any other books in the pipeline?

[00:41:52] CB: I do. I've got two books in draft stage. One of them is a series of vignettes stories like we talked about today. Some that impact me personally. Others that are just bonehead stuff that I saw over the course of my year. That one is further along. Then the espionage novel that I'd like to write based on the history. The beauty is that getting it through the publication review board is a whole lot easier when you're an old fart and you're not talking about newfangled ways that espionage is conducted. You're talking about sticks and bricks, and dead drops, and foot surveillance. So I am working on that.

I'm also working on my own interest, which is senior online safety, as well as security while traveling. I started a site called securelytravel.com. And the whole purpose is to keep people safe while they're traveling, be it domestically or abroad. And so it's the words that keep me busy, keeps the mind engaged. I don't have any career aspirations now. As I have said to my spouse many times, my future is behind me. And so I don't know how many more days, years I have left. So I'm going to try to make the most of them.

[00:43:05] AH: When you get yourself over here to the other Washington, do let us know and I'll make sure we get you some tickets for the museum.

[00:43:11] CB: Well, I'd appreciate that very much, and I look forward to it.

[00:43:15] AH: Absolutely. Well, do you have anything that you want to ask me or anything that you would like to share before we close off, Christopher?

[00:43:22] CB: Yeah, actually I do. And that is I would encourage the current generation of university students, postdocs and graduate students, to look into a career in the intelligence world. We need really sharp people in our intelligence community. We need people who are level-headed. We need people who have lots of skills, language skills predominantly, different cultures, different ethnicities. We can't just think it's going to happen. We need people to step forward and say, "I want to be a part of this."

[END]