



# APPRECIATION

## *The Best Among Us* Charles W. Bray III 1933 – 2006

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Charlie Bray came from the classic old-school background: the prep school, the “tweedy” intellectual years at Princeton University. Yet, far from using this advantage for his own gain, Bray chose a career and life of public service. He is remembered as a diplomat, philanthropist and scholar; and, as his friend Peter Krogh points out, he was “equally at home” in each role.

After an overseas tour with the U.S. Army from 1956 to 1958, Bray joined the Foreign Service in 1958 and served with distinction in Cebu and Bangui before returning to Washington in 1965. Beginning in the mid-1960s, he played a major role in transforming the American Foreign Service Association into a vehicle for reforming the Foreign Service and American diplomacy.

The AFSA Foreign Service Club was a fitting place to celebrate the life of Charlie Bray, the man who helped establish the “Young Turks” reform movement in the 1960s that eventually led to the establishment of AFSA as a union, and as the exclusive bargaining agent it is today for the 14,000 members of the Foreign Service. AFSA is sometimes even called “the house that Charlie Bray built,” referring to both the AFSA headquarters building as well as to AFSA as an institution. The Oct. 17 event, attended by about 100 of Charlie Bray’s colleagues, closest friends and family members, paid tribute to his extraordinary life of service.

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Each participant shared thoughts about the life of Charlie Bray, weaving the pieces of his life together to create a rich picture of Bray the diplomat, the reformer, the philanthropist, the academic, the loyal friend and devoted family man. The many three-minute tributes (the timing strictly enforced by host Tex Harris) all made clear that Bray was a man of vision, a man of action, someone who believed in and empowered the people around him. He was also, as many described, a lot of fun.

Remembering their days together at Princeton in the class of 1955, Amb. Tom Boyatt used three words to describe Bray: “tweediness, intellect and leadership.” Early evidence of his leadership skills was illustrated, Boyatt says, by the fact that he was chosen to lead the Tiger Club, a club for “sweaty jocks,” even though he was distinctly not one of them. Boyatt closed with this description of his lifelong friend, from the *Iliad*: “The mildest manners, and the gentlest heart. In death a hero, as in life a friend!”

### **The Young Turks**

In the mid-1960s, against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Bray was co-founder with Lannon Walker and Dean Brown of a reform movement inside the Foreign Service. The press dubbed them the Young Turks. They sought, in the words of former AFSA president and Young Turk Tex Harris, “to expand the connections between the Foreign Service and Americans involved in foreign affairs and to modernize the Service’s personnel system.” Charlie Bray is credited with figuring out how to win an AFSA election so that the Young Turks could take over AFSA and use it as a

launching point for reforms. His efforts led to the election in 1967 of all 18 original members of the reform group, a group that came to be known as “the Group of 18,” to the AFSA Electoral College, which was charged with choosing the new board of directors.

Bray realized that AFSA needed someone who could work on the reform agenda full-time, and he volunteered to go on leave to do it. Under his leadership, in 1968 AFSA published “Toward a Modern Diplomacy,” a book-size document that laid out the reform agenda. Some of the issues driving the support for AFSA becoming a union had to do with basic inequities in the Foreign Service system, such as discrimination against women (among other practices at that time, FS women who married were forced to resign).

The Young Turks established the core principle that the professionals in the Foreign Service accept active responsibility for the conduct of their profession and the making of rules that govern their careers. They raised the funds to convert a run-down office building into a modern headquarters for AFSA and a Foreign Service club. Significant successes of the “Bray Board” included the creation of the Dissent Channel for employees to voice differing views on policy; the launching of the first demands for an impartial grievance system through which employees could address unfair treatment; and creation of an AFSA awards program. (Note: For more details on the Young Turk reform move-

ment and AFSA’s expansion into a union, see the June 2003 *Foreign Service Journal* at [www.afsa.org/fsj/2003.cfm](http://www.afsa.org/fsj/2003.cfm), especially “AFSA Becomes a Union: The Reformers’ Victory,” by Tex Harris.)

Ambassador Lannon Walker, whose remarks were recorded at AFSA prior to the celebration, noted that Bray was the first to push for Foreign Service members to go to Capitol Hill and speak out on behalf of the Foreign Service. Ambassador Ted Eliot, also in prerecorded remarks, remembered that he and Charlie testified before the Democratic and Republican Party Platform Committees in 1968 to gain support for the career Foreign Service.

### A Standard for Truthfulness

Dean of the State Department Press Corps Barry Schweid was covering the State Department when Bray was serving as the press spokesman for Secretary of State William Rogers, beginning in 1971. Calling Bray a dedicated spokesman for Sec. Rogers, he noted that Bray “set a standard of truthfulness and he set the standards for kindness,” and was appreciated for “his directness and dignity.”

While Bray was still press spokesman and Henry Kissinger was about to move to Foggy Bottom as the new Secretary of State, Bray heard news of the Nixon administration’s wiretapping of several Foreign Service officers. Bray resigned from that position. He was quoted as saying



*The Bray Board at a meeting in 1970. From left: George Lambrakis, Alan Carter, Erland Heginbotham, Barbara Good, Richard Davies, Charlie Bray, William Bradford, Princeton Lyman, Bill Harrop, Robert Nevitt.*

that he did not want to work for anyone who would wiretap his subordinates, noting that “loyalty goes both ways.”

During the Carter administration, Bray served as deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency. Former USIA Director John Reinhardt spoke at the AFSA celebration, calling Bray a different kind of Foreign Service officer, not a “striped-pants diplomat.” He explained that when he became head of USIA, he turned to Bray as “someone who knew what to do.” With his leadership skills, “he led a number of people down the right roads.” In 1981, Bray was tapped by President Ronald Reagan as ambassador to Senegal.

One of his many contributions outside of diplomatic service was as a founding member of Princeton Project 55. Bray responded to a challenge posed by Princeton classmate Ralph Nader at their 1989 reunion, Ken Webster explained, “to attack systemic ills” by putting Princeton graduates to work in public interest programs and public service projects. Bray served as president and chief executive for the project, which is still going strong and

***Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope; and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.***

— Robert Kennedy (as quoted by Charles “Chip” Bray at the Oct. 17 AFSA celebration of the life of Charlie Bray)

has placed over 1,000 graduates in grass-roots and other nongovernmental organizations.

Charlie Bray was a leader in the purest, most organic, sense. He was a man who “thought everyone had a place at the table,” explained Tony Schaffer of Ten Chimneys, who worked with Bray to turn the Wisconsin home of Broadway legends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontayne, which was a retreat for numerous artists, into a museum. He loved conversation and “loved what each person brings to it.” Bray knew how to

bring people together, whether it was to reform the Foreign Service, to explain administration policy to a feisty press corps or raise money to save a historic landmark.

Bray later served as president of the Johnson Foundation Conference Center at Wingspread in Racine, Wis. He was also instrumental in establishing Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, and taught classes there.

Though he accomplished so much inside and outside the Foreign Service, Bray was not all about the work. He enjoyed life’s pleasures and delighted in friends and family. He enjoyed birding, major league baseball, poker, good food and wine, a wide variety of books and, most importantly, his wife, children and grandchildren. In a moving tribute, Chip Bray said that his father thought everyone had something to say, and he was “full of ideas and he put them to use for the common good.” He spoke of the way his father held an “unwavering belief in the power of human potential” as well as in the power of fate and the power to create your own luck. He also believed strongly in the importance of “travel as educator.”

Charlie Bray was, indeed, in the words of Lannon Walker, “the best among us.” ■



At the Charlie Bray Celebration Oct. 17, from left: Charles “Chip” Bray, Christopher Krogh, David Bray, Dean Peter Krogh. Inset: Charlie Bray with his daughter Katherine Bray-Merrell.