

column: *Parisien Portrait*

An Anglo-American Francophile

by Raana Haider

PAMELA Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman, Ambassador of the United States of America to France died in Paris in February 1997. Mrs Harriman had gone from the American Embassy just off the Place de la Concorde for a swim during lunch-break to the Ritz Hotel at the nearby Place Vendome. Following a cardiac arrest in the pool, she passed away the following day at the American Hospital in Neuilly, Paris.

"Where Ritz goes, I go," said Edward VII of England, as he came to stay, and he and all the creme de la creme of Europe's high society did the same. According to *The Historic Hotels of Paris: A Select Guide* by Wendy Arnold, "The Great Paris Ritz was the creation of the doyen of the world's hoteliers, Cesar Ritz, who insisted that his hotel should have 'all the refinements of living that a prince might hope to incorporate in his town house.' At its opening in June 1898, the Ritz set the highest imaginable standards. Lit by the new electricity, it provided a spacious bathroom for each bedroom, as well as a marble fireplace, Louis XV furnishing, wall-to-wall carpets, and walls painted rather than papered, so that everywhere could be kept spotlessly clean and fresh... Between the World Wars, the Ritz became the meeting place of America's millionaires, but the Thirties' Depression, followed by World War II, began a long decline, ending with the sale of the hotel by the Ritz family in 1979. Thanks to its new owner, Mr Mohammed al Fayed, the Ritz has been restored to its fully glory, at a cost of many millions. Air-conditioning, a splendidly elegant basement pool and health club, and a nightclub with a fashionable late-night disco have been discreetly added.... Charming staffed, impeccably maintained, hung with tapestries and glittering with chandeliers, its suites vast and magnificent, the Ritz is indeed once again a town house fit for a prince."

In 1997, the Ritz Hotel hit headlines the world over with the collapse of Mrs Harriman in the "splendidly elegant basement pool" and the last photographs taken of Princess Diana and Dodi al Fayed entering and leaving the Ritz Hotel which is owned by his father and where they had been staying, before they left to meet their tragic destiny.

Pamela Digby was born 20th March, 1920 in England, the eldest of four children. "Pam" as she was known in her intimate circle, was the daughter of Lord Edward Digby, an English gentleman farmer and The Honourable Constance Bruce.

Pamela began her life-long association and love of France in 1936 when she went to stay for a year with a French family in Arcueil in South Paris. Just turned sixteen and having finished school in England, she was sent to France to "embark on a finishing process which was designed to transform uneducated aristocratic girls into marriageable young women," notes Christopher Ogden, a Time magazine journalist

in his biography of Pamela Harriman — 'Life of the Party' (1994) which I bought at Brentano's, an American bookstore opened in 1895 on Avenue de l'Opera. Her life-story reads like a chronicle of this century. She witnessed and participated in some of the landmark events of the period and interacted with the leading characters of the day.

He writes that in the late 1930s, "France was the international language of the day and the language of culture. Paris, the capital of elegance and art, was the most popular destination. Britain was still shaking off the impact of depression in the mid-1930s but Paris was alive. Picasso was painting, Cocteau was writing and making films; Josephine Baker was singing; and Gertrude Stein, who had hosted in the twenties such 'lost generation' writers as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, still maintained her extraordinary salon.... Everyone had a sense of style, even the lower-class French women she passed on the street. It was not only that their dresses looked smarter than anything she saw in England, but that they wore their outfits with a certain insouciance that she found very appealing. Sometimes they just added a pin or the latest fashion accessory, an artificial flower, which seemed to say, 'Look at me.'.... There was far more color and verve in Paris, whether it was silk fabric draped on elegant shop window mannequins or pyramids of fancy pastries and chocolates or the strange but intriguing new smells trailing out of bistros and boulangeries."

Happily, such an ambience still remains.

In 1939, Pamela married Randolph Churchill, the only son of Sir Winston Churchill... then Prime Minister of Britain and Lady Clementine Churchill. Randolph Churchill had been a journalist with the London Times and then joined his father's regiment, the Fourth Hussars and then became a Member of Parliament. Their only child and Pamela's only child, Winston Spencer Churchill was born in 1940. Pamela and Randolph divorced in 1945.

Pamela and Averell Harriman first met in 1941 in London where he had been appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt, Lend-Lease expediter, i.e. chief coordinator of American-British cooperation during the ongoing Second World War. Nearly thirty years older than Pamela, then twenty-one, their close relationship ended in 1943 when Harriman was appointed Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

From 1948 to 1959, she lived once again in Paris. "The City of Light was re-lit after the war. Pamela could speak the language, had friends, knew her way around, and would have plenty of opportunity to enjoy life and expand her horizons when Gianni was not present. Paris was politically acceptable: Charles de Gaulle had organized the Free French forces while living in London during the war, occasionally dining at Downing Street with the Churchills, including their daughter-in-law." (Ogden). Gianni Agnelli, the Italian Fiat

magnate was a close friend of Pamela and he bought her a third-floor apartment near the Place de l'Alma at 4 Avenue de New York overlooking the Seine and the Eiffel Tower. Coincidentally, this apartment which she later sold, overlooks the Pont de l'Alma where a fatal car crash claimed the lives of Princess Diana and her friend Dodi in 1997.

France in the post-war period was a good time to be here. "Her decade in France was fun, profitable and offered a spectacular education. Begin there fit an important criterion: from the long hemline and full skirt of Christian Dior's 'New Look' to the Marshall Plan, NATO and Jean-Paul Sartre, France was the place to be, the center of the postwar social, political and intellectual action in the late 1940s and 1950s," writes Ogden.

A number of notables of American journalism thronged to Paris in this vibrant and stimulating era. Susan Mary Alsop, the American columnist arrived in Paris in 1945 and stayed till 1961. Theodore White came to Paris in 1948. He went on to become a member of John F Kennedy's inner circle and author of a number of books on the Kennedy era and American history. Janet Flanner described the rebirth of France post-war to 'New Yorker' magazine readers in descriptive dispatches. Ben Bradlee arrived in Paris in 1951. He went on to become the editor of 'The Washington Post' and took the lime-light during the Watergate scandal of the Nixon presidency which 'The Washington Post' first broke. Stanley Karnow reached Paris in 1947 and worked for a period as a 'Time' magazine correspondent. He went on to become a Pulitzer prize winner and author of a number of acclaimed books on Vietnam and Philippines. In 1996, he wrote, 'Paris in the Fifties'. Art Buchwald arrived in Paris in 1948 and became a columnist for the Paris 'Herald Tribune', an honour he still holds at the close of the twentieth century. Art Buchwald went on to become a household name in journalism and a prolific writer including 'I'll Always Have Paris' (1996). (See 'I'll Always Have Paris'). This was the heady Paris of the late 1940s and 1950s. An epoch where Franco-American relations were warm, friendly and ultimately left all the residents of that period enamoured for a life-time with La Vie Parisienne.

Pamela once again left Paris, after an eleven year stay for New York in 1959, where she married for a second time, the American film and theatre producer, Leland Hayward. Hayward was the film producer of 'The Old Man and the Sea' starring Spencer Tracy; 'The Spirit of Saint Louis' with Jimmy Stewart. He also produced the plays, 'Gypsy', 'The Sound of Music', 'Anne of a Thousand Days', 'Mister Roberts' which he also produced as a movie with Henry Fonda, 'South Pacific', 'Peter Pan' and other well-known classics. Leland Hayward died in 1971.

She threw herself into the role of producer's wife and was highly active in

the film and theatre worlds. Writes Ogden, "Touring opened up a whole new world of places, close contact with creative people and nonstop action. She loved every minute." Pamela Hayward commented that, "I look on myself as a backstage person, really. But backstage people are very important. They're the ones who get the show on the road." Her self-assessment was particularly correct as time would tell.

In September 1971, Pamela and Averell Harriman both now widowed were married in New York. They had resumed a relationship after a gap of twenty-five years. She acquired an American citizenship in December 1971.

Averell Harriman in 1946 had left his post as Ambassador in Moscow to become President Harry Truman's Secretary of Commerce. In 1949, Harriman was Marshall Plan administrator for the recovery of post-war Europe. He was onetime governor of New York in 1954 and twice unsuccessful candidate for president in 1952 and 1956. In the 1960s, he was the chief negotiator for Laos neutrality, the arms control agreement between USA and the Soviet Union and the US envoy in Paris for the Vietnam peace talks. During President Carter's administration in the 1970s, Pamela and Averell Harriman represented the US government at a number of events. "In recognition of Harriman's tenacity and stature, Vance (Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State) saw to it that he and Pamela were included on a succession of ceremonial delegations around the world. They went to Panama after the negotiation of the Canal Treaty and to Zimbabwe in 1980 to celebrate independence. They attended more state funerals than Vice-President Walter Mondale: that of Robert Menzies, their wartime blitzmate at the Dorchester, in Australia; in London for IRA bomb victim Earl Mountbatten of Burma, whom Averell first met in the 1920s; Tito's in Yugoslavia." Notes Ogden.

In 1980, Pamela Harriman began active participation in fund-raising for the Democratic Party — the Political Action Committee (PAC) in time to become popularly known as Pam PAC in acknowledgment of the major organizer of the committee. Averell Harriman provided moral and financial support but no active involvement. Nearing ninety, he was preoccupied in writing his memoirs. Averell Harriman died in July 1986.

Pamela and Averell Harriman hosted 'Issues Dinners'. Christopher Ogden remarks that, "Issues Dinners became the focus of the PAC. Very quickly they evolved from being solely a means of bringing people together to discuss ideas to a method of attracting money from people inside and outside Washington who wanted the thrill of being in a Georgetown living room with big-name political players." Al Gore Jr., senator from Tennessee was one of the key speakers of the 'Issues Dinners', often on environmental matters and always a favourite. What started in a

light-hearted manner "had become one of the most successful political action committees ever, having raised, by her accounting nearly \$12 million from all sources in a decade," writes Ogden.

By the late 1980s and now in her late sixties, Pamela Harriman was easing off her involvement in the PAC and looking for another cause to sponsor and throw herself into. With the forthcoming 1992 presidential elections coming-up, she gave her full backing to the Democratic candidate, Bill Clinton. She raised \$3.2 million in a ten-thousand-dollar-a-head-Day in the Country for Clinton and Gore as funds for their election campaign. "She liked Clinton very much for his brains, charm, confidence and omnivorous interest in policy. His stamina impressed her too. Clinton could talk issues for hours, down to the arcane details of welfare reform or international trade legislation, and draw out the best from other participants by incisive questioning," remarks Ogden.

Pamela Harriman remarked of Clinton and his unsuccessful bid for reelection as Governor of Arkansas, "It's very important in life to have success, but it's even more important to have failure, and to know how to handle it." Her life experiences and insight had taught her this.

Upon victory of the Clinton-Gore Democratic ticket to the White House in 1992, Pamela Harriman and Vernon Jordan, Bill Clinton's close friend were the two post-election dinner hosts in Washington DC. In 1998, Vernon Jordan hit headlines in the Monica Lewinsky/ Bill Clinton furore.

Nothing succeeds like success. The old adage worked successfully for Pamela Harriman who was first rumoured to be appointed as US Ambassador to Great Britain. The British press went wild with speculation. The 'Times' wondered whether there was to be, "A Churchill Connection for Grosvenor Square"? The 'Evening Standard' wrote, "Diplomatic circles here are alive with the rumour that the queenly 72 year-old Harriman is poised to come over to London as the United States Ambassador to the Court of St. James." If she had really wanted the post, it may have been hers. As Ogden points out, "the biggest impediment of all to Pamela's returning to Britain was that she still cannot tolerate Britain or most Britons. She dislikes the country, its pessimism and compulsion to look to the past, and the empty-headed arrogance of too many men in high position and their attitude about her. She spent her adult life avoiding the place." Her interest lay elsewhere.

At the end of January 1993, soon after Bill Clinton was inaugurated as President, Pamela Harriman was offered the post of US Ambassador to France. "The US Embassy in Paris, on the other hand, was a perfect choice. She had lived in France for a dozen years, through the Churchills knew President Charles de Gaulle, the architect of postwar political France, maintained good cultural and social con-

tacts, spoke the language and knew well — and adored — Paris itself. The post met her standards: it was big, luxurious, in the middle of Europe and, in the post-Cold War shakedown, plenty substantive," remarks Ogden.

Her nomination made headlines both sides of the Atlantic. Reaction to the nomination was generally favourable, if not effusive. "At 73, the most powerful kingmaker of the Democratic Party has retained the allure and the charm that made her, in half a century, a legend of both sides of the Atlantic. A veritable heroine from a novel," wrote 'Le Figaro'. 'Paris Match' headlined, "Pamela, the Enchantress, this woman of exceptional destiny". Le Point noted, "Clinton's gift to Pamela", 'France Soir' described her as "The iron lady in the silk suit." France's Consul General in New York, Benoit d'Abonville remarked, "An excellent choice. She knows France, is certainly well-connected to the Clinton administration, and will be, I am certain, a splendid representative."

At her confirmation before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, she remarked, "I come before you today conscious of one great difference between us and one great similarity. Unlike you, I was not born in this country. I am an American by choice. But, like all of you, I have a deep love for this land that has long been my home and I am proud to serve it in any way I can."

Pamela Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman moved into 41 Rue de Faubourg St. Honore, Paris as US Ambassador to France in 1993 at the age of seventy-three. It was a long road from her first trip to Paris in 1936 as a sixteen year old school graduate.

With her death in office in Paris, Mrs Harriman's personal possessions at the American Embassy residence at Faubourg St. Honore beside the Elysee Palace, the residence of President Jacques Chirac and her properties in Washington DC and Virginia in the United States were put up for auction.

Sotheby's New York sold the private collection of paintings, furniture and objects of art of Pamela Harriman in May 1997. The collection estimated at \$5.9 million fetched \$8.7 million.

A painting done in the 1930s by Winston Churchill, her then father-in-law of a jug and two bottles estimated at \$30,000 sold for \$184,000. A pair of palm trees of Russian origin in crystal, white marble and gilt bronze sold for \$46,000. A painting of the 'House of Flaubert at Crosset' by Paul Cesar Helleu who had a brilliant career in France and North American sold for closer to \$1 million.

As noted in 'Demeures et Chateaux', "It is clear that, as for the auction sale of the past year (1996) of the collection of Jacqueline-Kennedy-Onassis, the extraordinary personality of Pamela Harriman incited amateurs to raise the prices."

An exceptional sale for an exceptional destiny.

poem

An Elegy for A Cow

by Ahmed Sofa

I mourn for the cow. For she is killed in the university campus. I pondered much over the issue, whether this poor helpless creature could be honoured as martyr. I am yet to reach any conclusion and remained hesitant till the last. Well, it is no denying of the fact that the word martyr contains some poignant element, which pierces the very core of the heart. Of late, the word's cutting edge is dulled by the misuse and overuse. And the word 'shaheed' lost much of its pristine purity. The departed cow is really unfortunate, the term martyr could not be attached to it.

One can guess easily about the open crime committed by the cow. If she was responsible for any secret crime, well I have had no knowledge about that. The cow intruded into the knowledge manufacturing factory, it is clear. On the other hand, if one intends to stand for the cow, there could be many relevant arguments in favour of the cow. It could be argued, both the parents of the cow are Australian citizens and the girl child was brought to Bangladesh. So it is quite likely that she had no prior idea about the do's and don'ts of Bangladesh. If she committed any crime at all, that was done out of ignorance. However, the crime of ignorance is also crime and liable for punishment. But the fact is, before the case is properly argued, the judgement was passed, and executed, the poor cow had to leave its ghost. Now it is pointless whether the cow was fully or partially guilty. Hardly and chance left for verification. The cow killed, will not come to life again. A fresh trial could be started for the case, which has already been tried. I should not pray for the peace of the soul of the cow. Sacred scriptures do not show any indication that a cow can possess a soul.

Still, there left some scope for consideration. What emboldened the cow to take her stand in between the two groups of feuding armed cadres? Who were the elements inspired the cow to make such a fatal step? Was it the personal decision of the cow? What prompted her to run towards the execution ground? Was it her death wish? Did she feel concerned about the unborn calf of the womb? Or personal security got top priority in her mind? Who knows? Might be that she was carrying some message from the international cow society to the leaders of



the feuding armed cadres. Nothing could be known. What exactly prompted her to run headlong in the midst of two feuding armed groups? The reporters did not miss this delicious news item. But what they printed is the outer shell of the real event. Newspapers showing tendency to support different political parties, printed the coloured photograph of the killed cow, swelled up belly with unborn child in their front page.

I mourn for the dead cow. And I feel it became important for all to mourn for dead cow, beheaded goat, pest ridden fowl, caracas of stray dog or runaway cat. Even if it is the trampled rat of the poet Jivananda Das, also it would serve the purpose. Whatever wisdom human being might have amassed in the meantime and whatever may be the splendour of his technological superiority, to my mind it is sheer waste of breath to mourn for human being. Even with passionate slogans, when the cadres of the contending political parties claim, dead persons of their own party can only have the right to be honoured with the title martyr. I

shall never have the slightest consideration for any such bogus claim. Who is real martyr? Who is fake? Hardly one can distinguish. The sad grandeur of the word martyr no longer stirs my soul. To my estimation, a martyr is also a dead person. In this small country of ours, if we continue of make rooms for dead, where the living persons will go?

The word mourning contains some element of natural truth. Sanskrit sloka had its origin in the death pang of a copulating crane. The word mourning is quite akin to the sloka. The pathos of the mourning is the very soul of literature and music. In swift streaming the flow of life in the veins of nature, mourning plays a vital role. Any event, whatever insignificant it may be, when gets the touch of mourning acquires a new dimension. At some particular point of time and space the word mourning gets congealed and hardened like a solid black diamond.

The irony is, human being is no longer in a position to own and carry this most precious jewel. But the truth is, if the concept of mourning is not kept following over the generation, like the black thread, art and literature will cease to exist. There shall not be any charm left for poetry, no pathos in music. It became imperative for those, who claims that they are the conscience keepers that they have to keep alive the concept of mourning. This is only possible by mourning for dead cows, beheaded goats, caracas of stray dogs or cats trampled rats and the uprooted plants.

Death is more important than mourning. For death creates space for life. Death cleanse the foul portion of the created beings. Death purifies life. To keep the idea of death bright by polishing constantly, is important for all. In the silent grandeur of death we get hint of the ultimate destiny of life. Human being is so foul, so useless, so fragile, so pretentious no longer he is capable to carry the burden of these two concepts mourning and death.

This is the reason, I am mourning for the cow killed in the University campus and its unborn calf.