It was sometime in November 1941 that just as I was leaving the Embassy for home I received a telephone call from Washington, and to my surprise President Roosevelt was on the telephone. He informed me that he wanted me to go to Mexico as Ambassador. He said, "As you know, George, our good friend Uncle Josephus has to leave Mexico. His wife is not well and her son has told them that she can no longer stay in the altitude." He said that he wanted me to go to Mexico as soon as I conveniently could after Mr. Daniels had left Mexico. I was really very dumfounded. I had known that Mrs. Daniels was not well and that she had been confined to a wheelchair in the house for several years, but I knew that both she and he were very much attached to their life in Mexico. I knew that Ambassador Daniels was very much interested in his work in Mexico. I also knew, or rather I had been told, that his two sons had been endeavoring to persuade him to return to the United States as they were of the opinion that Mrs. Daniels would be much better off in a lower altitude.

I had not the slightest indication beforehand that I would be asked to go to Mexico from Cuba. My first reaction to what the President so kindly said to me was one of consternation. My wife and I were very much attached to our life in Havana. My work had been most agreeable. Our relations with the people in the government had been most happy. Our personal life had been pleasant and we had been able to have some time for relaxation which I had not had for years. I felt very much better during the two years that I was in Cuba than I had for some time. While the work had been exacting, it was work which I could do without being under constant pressure. When I had gone to Cuba both the President and Mr. Hull had told me that it was likely that I could stay on there for some years. They had indicated to me the principal things which they wished to be done during my stay in Cuba and they felt that it would take more than a couple of years. In fact, the President had said that if we got done what we wanted to get done to improve the situation between the United States and Cuba, it might take as much as five years. Fortunately, because of the collaboration of President Batista and his associates,
and of the understanding of the Department of State, it had been possible to do practically everything that I had been asked to do in the first two years of my stay. My wife and I had both been looking forward to a rather pleasant continued tour of duty in Havana. It was in this mental attitude and one of consternation and surprise that I said to the President, "Well, Mr. President, what in the world have I done that you want to move me out of Cuba just after I have done most of the things that we wanted to do? It is very kind of you to think of me for Mexico City but I have never been in Mexico and I really do not know the country at all. I wonder whether you really want me to go there." The President said that there were special reasons why he wanted me to go to Mexico and that he would not talk about that on the telephone but that I should come up to Washington at the first opportunity and that I would readily understand the reasons why he wished to make this change. I told the President that I would be very happy indeed to undertake the mission in Mexico.

Max Mrs. Messersmith and I left Havana towards the 10th of February 1942 for Mexico City. We left by plane from Havana for Miami and from there we took the train for Mexico City.

I think in this connection it may be interesting to note that when I informed the Department of State that I intended to take one of the ferry steamers between Havana and Miami or some other steamer calling there, and had made all my plans to that effect, it was either the Military or Air Attaché of the Embassy who came in to see me to tell me that he had had word from his people in Washington that they did not wish me to travel by boat to Florida or any other port. I had also considered the possibility of taking a steamer leaving Havana for Veracruz. The Attaché said to me that a number of submarines had been noted in the waters between Havana and Florida within a week or so after it became known that I was planning to travel by water from Havana to Florida or to Veracruz, that they considered it unsafe for me to travel by water. He said that what was so curious was that although these submarines were there and had been noted by our people, that
they had not made an attack on any of our vessels. The only conclusion they could
draw was that they were waiting for some special ship to attack first. The con­
clusion which they drew was that in view of the fact that I had taken such a
strong stand against the Nazi government during my stay in Germany and Austria
and in view of the fact that without any question Hitler had very strong feelings
about me in particular, and certainly some others in the higher hierarchy of the
Nazi regime, and as it was felt in certain Nazi circles that I had had a good
deal to do with the formation of policy towards the Nazi regime, that they were
planning to take the ship on which I might travel and take me off the ship.

It seemed pretty far fetched to me and at first I was very insistent
that we proceed by steamer. My wife had never flown and had great reluctance to
fly. She did not even wish to make the short trip by air from Havana to Miami.
While I knew the Nazis so well and knew what a long memory they had for those
whom they did not like, and while I knew that they would like nothing better
than to get a man like me into their hands, I thought the whole thing was rather
far fetched. My first reaction therefore was to say to the attaché that I felt
I had to maintain my travel plans. He was very insistent that I should not do
this. I remember making several telephone calls to friends in the Department
about the matter and they were inclined at first to share the point of view which
I held. A few days later the attaché returned and said that his people in
Washington were most insistent that I not travel by steamer. The continued pre­
sence of these submarines without their taking any action was too significant.
I still maintained my travel plans, but when I talked about this insistence to
friends in the Department further, they changed their point of view and said they
thought that I should take heed of this situation and proceed by air. They knew
that Hitler was known to have "frothed" at the mouth when my name was mentioned
already during the time that I was in Germany and in Austria. Without therefore
making any public notice of my change of plans, we went from Havana to Miami.
about February 10 by air and proceeded from Miami to Mexico City via Laredo by
train.

We had a very pleasant and comfortable train trip from Miami to San
Antonio. Mrs. Messersmith's mother, Mrs. Mustard, was traveling with us. When
we arrived in San Antonio we found it had been impossible to get anything better
then one drawing room from Laredo to San Antonio to Mexico City. It meant that we
would be very crowded with Mrs. Messersmith and myself and her mother, and our
favorite dachshunds in a single compartment, especially as we were carrying a
great deal of baggage with us. Our household effects and baggage were being
sent by sea from Havana to Veracruz and Mexico City. Our faithful servants,
Arturo and Mary, had preceded us to Mexico City.

We had no more than comfortably settled ourselves in this compartment,
or at least as comfortably as we could settle ourselves in such small space,
when we were joined by Robert McGregor, a foreign service officer attached to
the Embassy in Mexico City who had very thoughtfully come from Mexico City to
meet us and to accompany us to Mexico City. This filled up the compartment
more.

Some half hour or so after the train had left San Antonio a Mr. Allen came
into the compartment accompanied by another man whose name I do not recall and
introduced himself as the owner and editor of the Laredo Times. At that time I
knew nothing about the Laredo Times nor of its reputation nor of its owner, Mr.
Allen. The trip from San Antonio to Laredo is some hours and Mr. Allen showed
no inclination of leaving the compartment. He definitely fastened himself on to
us. As we were quite crowded and uncomfortable I became somewhat uncommunica-
tive and Mr. Allen addressed himself more particularly to my mother-in-law, Mrs.
Mustard, who was a very amiable person. He should have realized that he should
not stay in the compartment, but he remained there until we came to Laredo.

At Laredo we were met by the Consul in charge and by the officers of the
Consulate, as well as by some Mexican officials. We were told that there was to
be a reception in the Consulate after we crossed the bridge and before the train left for Mexico City. It was a very pleasant occasion and quite a number of Army officers stationed in Laredo and Mexican officers stationed on the other side of the border, as well as the mayor of Laredo and other officials attended the reception. Mr. Allen stuck to us until the train left. His attentions reached the point where they became somewhat obnoxious and I said to one of the officers of the Consulate that I thought he was not being very considerate, and he then gave me a little of the background concerning Mr. Allen, of which I was to learn so much later. It appeared that Mr. Allen had not been in too much favor with the Embassy for many years because of the character of his activities and of the articles which he carried in his paper, and for some reason or other he wished to take occasion of my coming to Mexico to establish better relations with the Embassy. I was perfectly willing to be courteous with him if it served any useful purpose.

In Mexico City we were met, as is customary, by a considerable number of the staff of the Embassy and by the usual Mexican officials. We had been told already before our arrival that it would be impossible for us to stay in the Embassy Residence and arrangements had been made for us to stay at the Hotel Genova, which is very close to the Embassy, in fact only 100 yards from it. Mr. and Mrs. Daniels had been at the Embassy in Mexico City for some nine years and during that time very little had been done towards repairing and keeping up the residence. There was a strong feeling in the staff in Mexico City as well as among some of the people in the Department of State that the Embassy Residence should be abandoned as a residence and should be used as offices, and that our government should build, as a part of its foreign buildings program, a new residence for the Ambassador in one of the residential areas on the outskirts of the city.

Among the first things that I did in connection with the many things one
has to do of a formal character on arriving at a new post, I examined into the situation and I decided that so far as Mrs. Messersmith and I were concerned we would do everything that we could to conserve the Embassy Residence as the home for the Chief of Mission. It was located in the center of the city. It was an old Mexican residence which had been purchased by our government. It had a very nice garden. Across the garden was a considerable building which was used by the Chancery. It was also an old Mexican residence which had been purchased by Mr. Doheny and I believe presented to our government. The whole arrangement was a delightful one. It seemed to me it would be a great mistake to move the Embassy Residence to the outskirts of the city, where it would be more difficult not only for the Ambassador and his family but also for those whom he wished to invite to the residence. Distances in Mexico City are considerable, as it is a very large city.

Besides that, the residence had a tradition. It had been the home of the American Ambassadors in Mexico for many years. It was in many ways a delightful house with large, airy rooms. The location could not be improved upon. There was really a tradition behind the residence and the Chancery. It seemed to me that it would be a mistake to destroy all this for a new and what would probably be a modernistic residence in the outskirts of the city. On the other hand, it was quite obvious to my wife and myself that the residence needed very elaborate repairs. Central heating would have to be installed, the whole place cleaned up and the place made more livable, and that this would take at least three or four months. I presented the matter to the Department and we were very happy indeed, as were the Americans and I think the Mexicans, when our government decided to make these alterations in the building and to keep the residence where it was.