

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

**AMBASSADOR HARRIET C. BABBITT**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*  
*Initial interview date: November 21, 2002*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: You go by "Hattie?"*

BABBITT: Yes, I do.

*Q: I'm wondering if you can tell me when and where you were born - something about your background.*

BABBITT: I was born in Charleston, West Virginia on November 13, 1947. My father

worked for the Union Carbide Chemicals Company, so therefore we moved around, as he was moved around to manage plants. I lived on the Canadian border, Niagara Falls, New York, for fifth and sixth grade. We moved shortly thereafter to the Mexican border in Brownsville, Texas. It was that move that kind of whetted my appetite for the international arena.

*Q: Well, what was the background of your father?*

BABBITT: He was a chemical engineer.

*Q: Where was he from?*

BABBITT: Missouri and Wisconsin.

*Q: Where did he go to college?*

BABBITT: In Missouri. My father died when he was 60. My mother, who is almost 90, just told me how he got from Missouri to Charleston, West Virginia. It was in the middle of the depression, and he got a job, when he got out of college. But the banks in Missouri were closed. He didn't have any money anyway, so he hopped a freight train. It was the only way to get to Charleston, West Virginia, to take this job. They, of course, were embarrassed by that. I thought, "Why were they embarrassed?" I thought it was wonderful. It's something I would never have imagined.

*Q: What is the background of your mother, her maiden name?*

BABBITT: Her maiden name was Edmunds. Her family was from Virginia and West Virginia, for a very long time, a very traditional family.

*Q: Did she go to college?*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: Well, that wasn't traditional, was it?*

BABBITT: I guess not. But, sort of a southern family...

*Q: Well, did the southern Virginia, West Virginia, rub off on you much?*

BABBITT: Well, some of it did. My mother moved back to Charleston, and her 92 year old sister is still there. We are headed there next week for Thanksgiving, so we kept that kind of family get-together stuff. My mother lived in a traditional kind of... She was a Colonial dame, Daughter of the American Confederacy, and a member of the DAR [Daughter of the American Revolution], and a member of the Junior League. I didn't take

any of those routes.

*Q: Do you have brothers or sisters?*

BABBITT: Two brothers.

*Q: How old were you when you got to Brownsville?*

BABBITT: Seventh grade, so 12, 13, something like that.

*Q: As you go to school, what sort of subjects interested you?*

BABBITT: If you look on a map of the United States, and look at the places that have school systems which are described as “tragic,” I hit them. Other than the two years in Niagara Falls, NY, I was in an awful public school system. Texas was something like 47th in the nation, South Texas was the worst. So, I really didn’t have an academic experience... I won the English prize. I won all the prizes, but there was nothing academic about it. It wasn’t until I went to law school, and kind of got compelled by anything more specific than a raw interest and a love of reading.

*Q: You know, so many people who are achievers, no matter where they go to school, they end up educating themselves, reading and all that. How about you?*

BABBITT: Oh, yes, I’m a reader. Now I’m reading about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I just got back from there.

*Q: Do you recall any books in particular that caught your attention when you were young?*

BABBITT: I’m a child of the 1960s, so I read what at the time was terribly important, I now realize I read all the books that children of the 1960s read; Herman Hess. I don’t know if I read that now whether I would think it was silly or insightful.

*Q: Well, it does give a generational feeling to this.*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: What was Brownsville like?*

BABBITT: It was terrific in many ways. My father thought he had died and gone to heaven, because he liked to hunt and fish. It is right on the coast. There’s an island that separates the coast. So, you can fish in the bay, you can fish in the ocean. He would come home early from the plant, about 4:00, take a cooler out. He could shoot his limit of white wing by sunset.

*Q: A white wing being a bird.*

BABBITT: An especially tasty type of dove. I wanted to go away to school, because the schools there were so terrible. My parents said, "Oh, honey, you're our last one, stay home." So, I did, and got an entirely different kind of education. Living in a border town was an education. It was a Mexican border town with a very friendly relationship with Matamoros, which was on the other side. Now the combination of truck traffic and all of the security makes the border anything but inviting. But, it was a very easy life when I was there. We could run over and have dinner in a Mexican restaurant, at the drop of a hat. The whole dinner cost \$5.00 for the family, and it was fun - the nightlife.

*Q: Did you learn any Spanish while you were there?*

BABBITT: Yes. Then, I graduated from high school early and went to school in Mexico City.

*Q: When did you go to school in Mexico City?*

BABBITT: 1966.

*Q: Did the students of the 1960s revolt in Mexico City? I can't remember when the Olympics was.*

BABBITT: All the killing was in 1968, I think. In 1966, it was fairly tranquil, in a political sense.

*Q: Did you get a feel for Mexican politics at the time?*

BABBITT: I didn't. I was 16. I went to what used to be called, a long time ago, Mexico City College, and then was called University Americas, and now it's been transferred to Pueblo. I'm sure you know other people who have gone there. It was a wonderful time. Mexico City was paradise of the western hemisphere. It had not gotten over populated. It was a beautiful climate. I learned less Spanish than I should, because I hung around with interesting American friends. But, I learned my lesson. When I went to school in Spain, I made sure I had no American friends, and only spoke Spanish.

*Q: Well, didn't the 1960s penetrate the Americans you were running with, expatriates, whatever you would call them?*

BABBITT: The people I hung out with were less political and more into art, mainly. Writing the great novel.

*Q: Well, you were helping the Mexican economy.*

BABBITT: I was. That was important too.

*Q: Well, going to Mexico was designed, essentially, to bring your Spanish up? Was this it?*

BABBITT: It was designed to get me out of Brownsville. I had taken all the courses there were to take at Brownsville High School. I was very young. I had started school early and graduated early. I just wanted to spend six months in Mexico, doing something interesting, getting my Spanish up.

*Q: Well, where did you go after that?*

BABBITT: I went to five different undergraduate schools, so it will take a while.

*Q: Well, all right, let's talk about it.*

BABBITT: I went to school where I wanted to be, geographically. So, I saw lots of the world, but didn't end up with lifetime college chums. I went to the University of the Americas. I then went to Sweet Briar. I went back to my roots.

*Q: I was going to say, that was the quintessential of southerners, wasn't it?*

BABBITT: Absolutely. In a graduating class of 350 something from Brownsville High School. I was the only student who went out of the state of Texas to college. I do remember this, quizzing my advisor. I wanted to go to a girls' college. I was quizzing her about whether I should go to Bryn Mar, where my aunt had gone, or Hollin, where my cousin had gone, or to Sweet Briar, where my sister-in-law had gone. She hadn't heard of any of these. I picked Sweet Briar, because I liked my sister-in-law at the time, better than my aunt.

*Q: That's sound judgment.*

BABBITT: I had never seen any of them, and didn't know anything about any of them. It was a much more casual era in picking schools.

*Q: I would think - I keep coming back to the 1960s, especially toward the end of the 1960s, it was such a turbulent time. Sweet Briar would strike me as the one place where nothing moved at all.*

BABBITT: Sweet Briar was a terrible choice for me. I had gone from an urban, interesting, exciting life in Mexico City, to rural Virginia. I was, at that time, very committed to the civil rights movement. Sweet Briar was, at the time, either intentionally isolated from it, or many students were not interested, so I was miserable.

*Q: Were there any blacks at Sweet Briar?*

BABBITT: Penny \_\_\_\_\_ came either my first or second year. She was the first African-American. The will, the landowner of the college, donated for the plantation for the education of superior young white women. The school had gone to court to challenge that so they could admit blacks. They were successful in either 1967 or 1968, and Penny came. She found Sweet Briar to be a wonderful experience and went on the board of overseers, and is a big fan. She was more generous-spirited than I.

*Q: Well, how did this work out? You said you had five colleges. What happened?*

BABBITT: I knew I wanted to go to school in Spain, my junior year. I thought that maybe nobody would accept me in Spain, if I'd already gone to three colleges before my junior year, maybe I'll look like I'm not a serious student. I was, in spite of all the traveling around. So, I stuck it out at Sweet Briar for another year. I went to University of Texas for summer school, after my freshman year in college, in order to go back to Texas where my family was, but not to Brownsville, which had grown too small and close.

*Q: While you were at Sweet Briar and the University of Texas, were you concentrating on any particular course?*

BABBITT: No. It was the general curriculum, and I ended up with a gazillion credits.

*Q: Then, off to Madrid?*

BABBITT: University of Madrid.

*Q: How was that?*

BABBITT: That was wonderful, really in every way. It was, by then, 1967, 1968. The entire universe was focused on Vietnam.

*Q: As a student, did you come away one way or the other?*

BABBITT: About Vietnam?

*Q: Yes.*

BABBITT: I was opposed to the U.S. being in Vietnam. I wasn't particularly active, and I certainly wasn't active in Spain. I remember drawing the line and saying, "I'm not going to demonstrate against my government someplace else. I was going to demonstrate against my government on my soil, but not in Spain."

*Q: How did you find Spain at that time? Was Franco still alive?*

BABBITT: Oh, very much so. Spanish was the only language I had. I spent the summer before, going to Spain, traveling in Europe. I remember vividly crossing the Pyrenees, heading to Barcelona, with this knot in my stomach, certain that I had made a terrible mistake. That I was going to a country which was run by a dictator, which denigrated the position of women, and which was explicitly and aggressively Roman Catholic. I had strong feelings about population issues, and that I had just made a terrible mistake. In spite of all those things being true, it was a wonderful year.

*Q: In what way?*

BABBITT: I made friends with extraordinary people in Madrid, where there was great intellectual ferment. It sounds a little lofty, but it in fact is what it was, at that time in life. We were reading and arguing and traveling, and drinking and talking and arguing, reading.

*Q: Did you or your fellow students feel the oppression of Big Brother watching you?*

BABBITT: I certainly never did, because it was a time when if you were an American in any place, nobody was going to mess with you. So, I never felt that. I had a number of friends who were from Latin America, and were there to get away from dictatorships at home. They certainly felt they needed to be careful all the time.

*Q: Well, what about the Spaniards? Did they feel that they shouldn't talk about certain things in certain places?*

BABBITT: No. In a talking-about-things basis, they didn't worry. There were always serrenos around, watching when you came and went, but it didn't impact much on a daily basis.

*Q: By the time you finished in Madrid, I guess your Spanish was quite good?*

BABBITT: Quite good.

*Q: Spanish, Spanish.*

BABBITT: Spanish, Spanish.

*Q: Did you get a feel for international things, while you were there?*

BABBITT: The summer before, I had met a friend in Paris. Our intention was to hitchhike to Israel, but the Six Day War complicated that, during the summer of 1967, so we only got as far as Istanbul. But, that was France, Switzerland, Italy, hitchhiking down

the Dalmatian Cove, from Belgrade across Bulgaria, to Istanbul, and back through Greece.

*Q: You were in Belgrade during that time? I was chief in the consular section at about that time.*

BABBITT: Oh, well you may have given me a visa for Bulgaria. But, I combined a lot of travel both before that year, and after that year. I spent the summer of 1968 in Prague.

*Q: In the Prague spring, was there a feeling that things were really going to blossom out and happen?*

BABBITT: Oh, it was extraordinary. I think it was the most extraordinary place I had ever been, in the sense of excitement about possibilities. It was electric. The Soviets invaded a week after I left. What did I know? I was 20 at the time, and not plugged in. I was another student, but I'll never forget Wenceslas Square, and listening to Dubcek speak from the balcony with Ceausescu. "Your enemy's enemy is your friend." It was so visibly wacky. So, I was surprised by the Soviet invasion. I don't know whether I should have been or not.

*Q: Were you able to keep up with your friends, people you had met in Czechoslovakia, or did that stop?*

BABBITT: I didn't really. I continued to watch it with great interest. I was back in Prague in 1990, 1991, and I was just there again, last summer. The whole process had met a lot to me, but it's not because of Czech friends, it's just because of an interest in the process.

*Q: Well, you finished in Madrid, then where did you go, college wise?*

BABBITT: The summer between my first year at Sweet Briar, I went to summer school at the University of Texas. I was a standby in the airport in Dallas, Fort Worth, and saw an interesting looking kind of guy, also on standby. We were seated together on the plane, and began dating. I was 18, he was 28. I spent a wonderful summer in Austin, Texas. We then met in airports around the world for three years. He thought it was time to get together, geographically. He, at that time, had gone back to Arizona to practice law. So, I went to Arizona. He had asked me to marry him, and I said, "Sure." So, I went to Arizona, and finished up at Arizona State University.

*Q: Again, was this still pretty general courses you were taking?*

BABBITT: It was political science courses. By that time, I was destined to graduate from any American university, with a degree in Spanish. The economic courses I took in Madrid, and any I took in Mexico, transferred back as Spanish courses, no matter what the subject matter was. So, I had a million credits in Spanish.

*Q: Well, this young man you met, was he talking politics at that time, or not?*

BABBITT: Getting involved in elected politics?

*Q: Yes.*

BABBITT: If he did, I don't remember it, although he may have. I was 21 when we were married. But, he then ran in 1974. We were married in 1969, so it wasn't a long period of time.

*Q: How did you find Arizona?*

BABBITT: It was horrible at the time. We lived in the outback, from Madrid to Tempe, AZ. It was grim. I ended up loving Arizona. We've been there 25 years, and I have a wonderful life, and a wonderful family.

*Q: But, at the time... This is Brownsville, again?*

BABBITT: Well, no. But, I remember when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, the only people who cared about it in Tempe, AZ were the Young Americans for Freedom. This was a group, with which I had nothing else in common. I felt so isolated. My heart was breaking because what was going on in Prague, absolutely nobody cared.

*Q: This is more indifference?*

BABBITT: Yes, just indifference. Part of the life in Tempe.

*Q: How about your teachers?*

BABBITT: I had wonderful professors. Because I had the luxury of not having to take classes because they filled my major requirements, I asked people who the best professors were, what the best courses were. I had some dogs, but mostly I had one year of wonderful professors. I was in an honor's program, so I got to take graduate level courses. I took a Shakespeare class that was absolutely marvelous.

*Q: So, you graduated in 1969?*

BABBITT: 1969.

*Q: Was Vietnam still around? Was it doing anything on the university campus?*

BABBITT: It was.

*Q: Where did you go to law school?*

BABBITT: Same place. By this time, I was living in Phoenix, Arizona.

*Q: Why law?*

BABBITT: I couldn't think of anything else to do. I talked with Bruce about it at dinner one evening, who said, "Well, when men don't know what to do, they go to law school." Literally, the next morning, I went out to the law school, and said, "I would like to go to law school." It was a new enough law school, that they would take you if you had good LSATs. This was May or June, the year I started law school. They were accepting if your academics were good enough, even at that late date.

*Q: Were you married at this time?*

BABBITT: We were married in August 1969, and went on a honeymoon. We got back late one night, and I started law school the next morning.

*Q: How did you find law?*

BABBITT: It was a good thing for me to have done. I practiced law for 19 years. I found some of it fascinating. I loved constitutional law. I found some of it completely incomprehensible, commercial law. I thought it all added up to a very satisfying thing to do. I was on law review, and that was helpful.

*Q: Were you involved in the "women's movement" at this time? Were you beginning to see that this was a cause?*

BABBITT: I went to law school before the revolution, there were six or seven women in my law school class out of 150. Not too many years later, it was one-third, and then one-half. But, I was there before all that happened. So, by one's presence, every single day, you were making a statement. Those were the days where people didn't just think, but they said to you, "You shouldn't be here, because you're taking the place of a man, who otherwise would use this degree to support his family."

*Q: So, you were getting that?*

BABBITT: Yes. They didn't just think it, they said it to you. So, that was something to deal with all the time. When the time came, I was certainly a big proponent of the Equal Rights amendment. I spoke often, and loudly in favor of it. But, that was a little later. Most of my women's movement activity was a function of simply doing things that women didn't traditionally do.

*Q: Well, what about your husband? Was he putting out feelers? Was there a political*

*society out there?*

BABBITT: Arizona is a very Republican state. It's a Barry Goldwater state. The opening for a Democrat came because of Watergate. So, his first run for office... He and Tim Wirth, and all kinds of Democrats from that generation, got into the political life, because of an opening created by Watergate, in what would have otherwise not been a very friendly constituency. His first run for office was the statewide office. He ran for attorney general.

*Q: How did that come out?*

BABBITT: He won.

*Q: Did you get engaged in this?*

BABBITT: I just started practicing law in January 1973, the 15th of January. It was the anniversary of the day my father died, my parent's marriage. It was a big day in the family. He announced that he was running for office two weeks later. I was so busy, trying to figure out how to be a lawyer, and working unforgivable hours. I'm not sure I was particularly useful in that campaign.

*Q: As a lawyer, did you sit down and say that you were going to move into this field or that field, or did you say, "Who will hire me?"*

BABBITT: I was confident when I graduated from law school that I did not want to do trial work. I had been on the law review, and had clerked for the Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court when I got out. So, I saw myself drafting appellate briefs. Women didn't try cases, so how would I think of that? But, I ended up going to a law firm that did trial work, and doing trial work. It was exactly the right thing for me to have done. I've tried dozens of cases, jury trials to conclusion, which is a lot, as a lawyer. That is more than most trial lawyers have done. It was a nice match.

*Q: How did you find working in Arizona? You say it is a Republican state, how did you find the law work?*

BABBITT: It was a remarkably comfortable place for women to practice law, relative to the rest of the United States. My theory is this: that the coasts are so traditional. If you are a lawyer in New York, and you don't wear the right suit, or the right shoes, or have gone to the right school... There's sort of a checklist, where if you walk into a conference room, you are not taken seriously unless you can check off some of those. In Arizona, highly regarded male lawyers wore white belts. It was a place where people went for independence, "We'll do it our way." The fact that I had non-traditional genitalia didn't really disqualify me, in a way that it would have, in other parts of the country. I found that part of it remarkably friendly.

*Q: What type of trials were you involved in?*

BABBITT: Bruce won that race for attorney general, so 11 months after I started practicing law, he became the chief prosecutor for the state of Arizona. This meant that I had to avoid all cases with the state of Arizona. Even where there wasn't any conflict, we wanted to avoid the "appearance of impropriety". That is the ethical phrase, and it's a useful one. It's the phrase from bar ethics, avoiding the appearance of impropriety. I wanted to do it for ethical reasons, but I also wanted to do it because I didn't want to create any political friction for him, my taking some case that I didn't need to take anyway.

*Q: What sort of cases were you getting?*

BABBITT: Miscellaneous cases. I tried many more personal injury cases, than I would have chosen to try. I tried commercial cases: deals that would come together, and then fall apart. One of the electrical districts had bought a huge generator. It was damaged on the train, along the way to the electrical district. Who was responsible? Was it Union Pacific, General Electric, the seller, and how did the bill of lading interact with the Uniform Commercial Code... I remember that one well, because I tried it before Judge Sandra Day O'Connor.

*Q: I was going to ask you about her. Sandra Day O'Connor is now a justice of the Supreme Court, but there weren't too many of you ladies doing that in Arizona, were there?*

BABBITT: Very few. I tried many courses in her court. But she was a brand new trial judge when I was a brand new lawyer.

*Q: Did you get involved in water cases?*

BABBITT: No, because all of the issue-related cases, in one way or another, involved the state of Arizona. Bruce went from being attorney general for three years, and then governor for nine years. So, it was 12 years.

*Q: How did you find being a lawyer and the first lady of Arizona?*

BABBITT: There was a much larger role for the wife of a governor, than a wife of an attorney general. When he became governor, we had a newborn and a two year old. I had a full time law practice. We went to a political dinner on a Friday night in Mesa, I think. The governor, after the political dinner, dropped over dead in his bathroom, and Bruce, who was the next in line, became governor. So, it wasn't if we had planned on it We woke up on Saturday, and Bruce was supposed to take the two year old to the grocery store, a Saturday adventure for a father and his son, but instead, he was sworn in as

governor. I found lots of interesting opportunities. But we did live a normal life. We stayed in the same old house, in the same old neighborhood.

*Q: Of course, later on, you'd be dealing with inter-American affairs. But, how did you find the relationship of the Mexican part of the population to the Anglo part of the population mix in Arizona?*

BABBITT: It depended, of course, on what part. You asked me before when I left Madrid, did I speak "Spanish, Spanish." I left Madrid speaking with the lisp of a Madrileño. When I went to Arizona after my first year in law school, I worked on the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, in the melon fields of Yuma, Arizona, and the grapes in fields in Maricopa County. So, I lost my Madrid lisp very quickly. The culture of Arizona was a much richer one because of the Latino influence. It's something I've always liked about Arizona. The issue of agricultural workers and their lives is with us to this day. We had a lot of Latino political support, and a lot of people Bruce appointed to office, and a lot of our friends. I don't think I can characterize it only way.

*Q: But, by this time, the mix had gotten more mature. Anglo and Hispanic were pretty much mixed up.*

BABBITT: Oh, yes, it was a huge economic issue. A much larger percentage of the Latino population was poor, than a percentage of the Anglo population. But, from a society standpoint, there wasn't any issue of who did you invite to your home. Nobody paid any attention to that.

*Q: The governors of the states get together at least once a year.*

BABBITT: A couple times a year, a summer meeting and a winter meeting.

*Q: A couple times a year. How did you find this? I mean, did this introduce you to greater politics?*

BABBITT: The wives were also quite active. There's a summer NGA, National Governors Association, and a winter one. The winter one was always in Washington. The summer one was in different states. There were a number of non-traditional governors' wives at the time. We learned a lot from the traditional governors' wives. There were many from the south. When their husbands won, they assumed the mantle of the chair of the Magnolia ball. It was all quite traditional. There were five or six of us who didn't fit that mold. Dottie Lamm in Colorado, Kitty Dukakis in Massachusetts, Hillary Clinton in Arkansas, and me and a few others. Certainly the four of us didn't. So, getting together was fun and a great help.

*Q: Did you or any of the others find yourselves being called upon to speak the issues concerning international affairs, or women's rights?*

BABBITT: Well, we were all involved in our own states, certainly in women's issues. Governors don't govern too long if they pay too much attention to international affairs. So, there wasn't a big international focus. The reality is, of course, a lot of the people who were governors at the time have gone on to become senators. Bob Graham, in Florida, and Jay Rockefeller and Bill Clinton. If I had another minute, I could name ten. A lot of them became cabinet secretaries, like Bruce. So, it was a set of relationships.

*Q: One hears so much about the relationships between the American/Mexican border, and the American/Canadian border. There are a lot of ties that really aren't going to Washington.*

BABBITT: Oh, yes. That was a very nice part of the governorship. There was an Arizona Sonora Commission, Sonora being a Mexican state right across from Arizona. It was quite active. Depending on the times, and who was the head of each of them, the focus might be on health care, rather than on something else. I remember the issues but I also remember the realities. There were truckloads of tomatoes on the Mexican border, ready to come to the Arizona side. There was some issue. If it had been left to be resolved by... (End of tape)

*Q: You were saying that there was a lot of...*

BABBITT: There was a lot of operating as neighbors should, between the state of Arizona and the State of Sonora, and a lot of very close connections.

*Q: Did you find that you were making connections with women's groups at all, in Sonora?*

BABBITT: No. I had two small children, and a full time law practice. So, I wasn't looking for ways to fill the empty hours.

*Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop. Will pick this up the next time when you move to Washington.*

BABBITT: You ought to pick it up in a slightly different place. When Bruce ran for the democratic nomination for presidency in 1988 that put us in a national political arena, where the issues were international. Where the issues were foreign affairs. That process, participating in a presidential campaign, and joining the Board of the National Democratic Institute, and working on human rights issues from Arizona, were really what put me into foreign affairs stuff in a concrete way.

*Q: Good, well then, we'll pick this up at that point.*

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*Today is the 10th of January 2003. When did your husband announce the run for presidency? What was your interest in foreign affairs at the time you did it, and what happened, from your perspective?*

BABBITT: He finished being governor in January 1987. All of the seven dwarfs, (they were known by that term then), and that term has been resurrected, I see, in the 2004 campaign. Mostly all had the notion that they would replicate Jimmy Carter's emergence from Iowa.

*Q: This is Iowa caucus.*

BABBITT: So, everybody started going to Iowa in 1986, two years before the caucuses. We rode our bikes across to Iowa, from the Missouri River to the Mississippi River, and met people along the way.

*Q: Good exercise.*

BABBITT: So, we got engaged in the presidential campaign, really in the summer of 1986. My interest in foreign affairs had really been mostly focused up to that point on Latin America. I had traveled a lot to other places, but in terms of focus, it was on Latin America.

*Q: Was there a foreign affairs interest in Iowa? I would imagine corn subsidies, something like that.*

BABBITT: Iowa was a place I knew nothing about. I had never been to Iowa, and had no notion that I would ever go to Iowa. Iowa was a big surprise for me because I was astounded at the usual stuff. It has 99 counties, and if you are running for president, you have to go meet the Democratic head of each of those 99 counties, and attend some function. It is a very time consuming process. But, the state is full of small colleges, some of them quite wonderful. Arizona didn't become a state until 1913, and had three big universities, but no liberal arts colleges sprinkled around. Iowa is full of them, and has quite a remarkable education system. Because of the trade issues, they have much more of a concrete interest in foreign affairs issues than you would find in a normal Arizona campaign. Having said that, it was a supremely depressing set of issues, because it was Dick Gephardt rallying support against the Japanese on trade issues. So, it wasn't as if it was an uplifting experience.

*Q: The Japanese are sort of the designated scapegoat for everything that goes wrong?*

BABBITT: Exactly. It was in 1986, 1987 when the Japanese economy was strong and people in Iowa were worried about jobs.

*Q: Did you find as a candidate's spouse, that you were being dragged in front of a microphone and asked about what you thought about subsidies?*

BABBITT: Bruce's candidacy at the time, and particularly in retrospect, was a cause, not a candidacy. He did not emerge victorious out of Iowa, and his campaign sank like a stone shortly after. But he was the media darling, so that was the fun part of it. We had so little money that there wasn't any notion or opportunity to have the candidate and his wife go places. The candidate went one place. If he was in New York raising money, I was in Iowa speaking. If he was in New Hampshire at an important event, I was in Cedar Rapids doing something else. So, we covered different events. I was the surrogate candidate. Different candidates and their wives handled that differently. Some candidates' wives had an issue, such as literacy, Barbara Bush's issue at the time. But, I just did whatever Bruce wasn't able to do that day.

*Q: Who was bringing you up to speed?*

BABBITT: The issue section was one guy, and a college student. The one guy, Bart Gellman, who now writes for the Washington Post, was as smart and thoughtful an issues person you could have. He was better than most teams other people had, frankly. Mike McCurry was our press guy. That is an A+ team.

*Q: Did you feel they were running the intellectual high point...*

BABBITT: That is how we felt about it. The voters, I don't know. We had a very small, but classy crowd. I didn't feel under prepared.

*Q: I take it that in the long run, this was an interesting experience - the Iowa campaign?*

BABBITT: Well, the Iowa, New Hampshire and New York. It was an enormous growth experience. I've never had a growth experience like this. (My hands are putting to the ceiling.)

*Q: Your hands are point straight up.*

BABBITT: It was fun. I had practiced law for 15, 17 years, whatever. I liked the firm, and many things about it, but it wasn't nearly as interesting as being part of a presidential campaign. It was really hard, but it was fun.

*Q: But you came out enlightened also.*

BABBITT: I came out enlightened, the way I saw it.

*Q: Did this set you off in a different mental course, after this? First, a question about New Hampshire and New York. In New Hampshire, were there any international issues*

*there?*

BABBITT: Well, the New Hampshire population is so pampered. If the candidate hadn't been in your kitchen, then he really hasn't touched base, like he should have. For a tiny little state, there is a very deep population of people who really follow these issues, whatever they are. They follow lots of issues, and are really fun to talk to. They really ask some hard questions. You're going to have to figure out why you're right and they are wrong, or maybe change your mind.

*Q: Well, when you got down to New York, I always think of one of the issues as being moving our embassy to Jerusalem, which has been going on since 1948, practically. Did you get involved in the Israeli connection?*

BABBITT: Happily, we didn't. I don't know why that didn't happen, but it didn't.

*Q: Did you and your husband continue to campaign for Dukakis?*

BABBITT: A little bit, but mainly we went back to Arizona and tidied up our lives. I went back to the law firm, and put in more hours than I had been able to spend. He went to a different law firm. We got involved in new sets of things. One of the pivotal things I got involved in was joining the Board of National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

*Q: Could you explain what that is?*

BABBITT: In the Reagan administration, legislation was passed to fund four entities to promote the building of the democratic institutions abroad. One was IRI, International Republican Institute, and one was NDI, National Democratic Institute. One was one affiliated with business and one was affiliated with unions. The two most active ones were the two once related to political parties. At the time, I thought it was a recipe for disaster. I thought there was absolutely no way this could be done in a way in which wasn't so offensive to other countries' sovereignties, and our meddling in their international affairs, that it was a doomed endeavor. It turned out not to be. I was wrong. In 1988, I participated in the NDI work in Chile during the Plebiscite.

*Q: When you say, "No" campaign, what do you mean?*

BABBITT: There was a Plebiscite which Pinochet had called under the Constitution to say "yes" or "no" to his remaining in power. That wasn't exactly how it was phrased, but you get the idea. Everything had been stacked against the opposition to Pinochet, including giving the opposition, in favor of change, no as a campaign goal. Everything about it was difficult. The Chileans, since the coup in 1973, had not had any capacity to organize politically, or any capacity to organize opposition work. But, NDI went and said, "Look, we're here on the ground. We are capacity builders. This is who we are, and this is

how we can help you.” It was fabulously useful to the opposition, in terms of organizing themselves, and successfully doing a campaign. I went back in 1989 for the presidential campaign and Allwyn was elected. In the early days, these were monitored elections, which was the new thing, 1989, 1990. I went to Nicaragua with Jimmy Carter in 1989 and 1990, and then Guatemala in 1990.

*Q: In the Chilean campaign, Pinochet lost that, didn't he?*

BABBITT: He did.

*Q: I'm told that they were planning to cook the books, but an Air Force general came up the steps and told the correspondent, "Well, we lost."*

BABBITT: The reason he had the ability to do that was there were parallel vote counts. One of the things that NDI supported were parallel vote counts.

*Q: What is that?*

BABBITT: Well, that you have people at voting booths. The votes are counted at the table after the vote. One set goes to the supreme electoral council, or whatever it is called, and then another set goes to another center. So, if it turns out that the supreme electoral council says that 10,000 votes were one way or the other. The parallel vote council says that that isn't true, then the international community has the capacity and the data with which to say, "This guy is stealing the election." So, Pinochet knew and the general knew. We provided the background so that brave people could step forward, with confidence, that the international community could enforce it. So, it was a great moment.

*Q: You got into some other election monitoring things, you say, within Latin America?*

BABBITT: In Nicaragua, and in Guatemala. Then, in Czechoslovakia, now Czech Republic.

*Q: How did you find Nicaragua when you went there?*

BABBITT: Ah, Nicaragua was such a mess. This may not be true. But, the UN was there in force. If I'm not mistaken, there were three parallel vote counts in that election. One was done by the UN, one by the Nicaraguans, and one done by... Oh, I think there were only two. Then, an official count. But, it was a place that has been without good government in the memory of man.

*Q: Well, as you came back from these things, was there any follow through for you? You were doing your law and then you went out to these things?*

BABBITT: Well, I was always interested in going to Cuba, but of course couldn't, when

Bruce was involved in elected politics. So, he and I both were invited to speak in Cuba. I went to speak about electoral politics, believe it or not. I got a cool reception. I brought out with me a document that had been drafted and signed by the Cuban intellectual community. They asked me for very basic things, freedom of expression, opportunity for elections, the nuts and bolts kind of stuff. But, counter-revolutionary in Cuba, so unthinkable there. Anyway, they asked me if I would take the document out. I said, "Well, let me read it." So, we met over mojitos, in a bar someplace. I read it. It was exactly the kinds of things that any Anglo, liberal society would support. I said, "Sure." I took it out, and was immediately condemned on the front page of Granma as a CIA spy. I gave it to folks in Madrid who distributed it widely. Then, I wrote a piece for the Washington Post and another for the L.A. Times, and some other stuff about that. So, it wasn't just a matter of occasionally getting on a plane, flying someplace, and then going home.

*Q: Were you forming any ideas about our relationship with Cuba, going there? This is very controversial. Some would say that our embargo actually kept Castro in power. From this trip, and other places, what were you coming away with?*

BABBITT: Well, I'm a believer in engagement. You can quarrel about lots of the details, but I'm a believer in engagement. I have, as recently as this week, been very involved with a guy named Oswaldo Paya, who has done the smartest thing I've seen in all the years I have been watching folks trying to do things in Cuba. He is a Cuban living in Havana who looked at the Cuban constitution and realized that if you get more than 10,000 signatures asking for "X" then, the National Assembly must call a referendum on "X." So, at great personal peril, (the guy spent a lot of time in prison) he got 11,000 signatures. Imagine in Cuba what that takes. He submitted it to the National Assembly. Of course, it has never been seen since. It was a great secret to most Cubans until Carter was there, last fall. In the middle of this press conference, he brought it up, on television. Most Cubans, of course, hadn't heard about it. Paya is in town this week. He was not permitted to leave to come to the United States, but got the European parliament Andre Sakharov prize, was permitted to go there, and decided to stop by Washington on the way home.

*Q: Did you run across the Cuban community in Florida?*

BABBITT: What I was doing was sufficiently in sync with their desires, because what I was doing was publicizing this manifesto. It was a declaration. I can't quite remember what the name of it was. I was getting condemned on the front pages of Granma for my efforts. So, I didn't get a hostile reaction.

*Q: Well, then, when did you move to Washington?*

BABBITT: We moved to Washington with the Clinton administration. The years here are about right, but not necessarily exactly right, but about right. Bruce Babbitt and Bill

Clinton became attorneys general in 1974. Bruce Babbitt became governor in 1977. Bill Clinton became governor in 1978. Clinton lost, and was out of office from 1980 to 1982, but then was back in office for another eight years. They had two year terms in Arkansas, for part of Clinton's time. Bruce was governor then until 1987. So, those tracks were parallel, in very different states, but parallel. We got to know them. Bruce, and then Governor Clinton, Hillary and I, got to know each other.

*Q: You and Hillary both being lawyers too.*

BABBITT: Same age. She is two weeks older than I am. Both lawyers, and both having babies, and trying to juggle all that, and being very A-typical governors' wives. So, when the Clinton administration came in, the president asked Bruce to be his Secretary of the Interior, and Secretary Christopher asked me to be the ambassador to the Organization of American States. That is why we moved to Washington.

*Q: Did you and your husband get involved in the 1992 campaign; the one that brought Clinton into office?*

BABBITT: Some. I was the co-chair, I think, of the Clinton campaign in Arizona. Arizona doesn't have very many electoral votes, in the best of times, even now, but it had many fewer then. It has grown a lot. So, I did that. I remember campaigning with Hillary on the Navaho reservation, and doing some event in Phoenix with her, early on.

*Q: Did the North American Free Trade Agreement play at all in Arizona? Because of the border with Mexico, was this an issue?*

BABBITT: You know, I don't remember much. I remember being always very supportive of it, the idea. NAFTA was an idea long before it was a trade agreement. It wasn't a trade agreement in 1992, it was still an idea.

*Q: But, you didn't find yourself on one extreme, and the others in Arizona... Split down... I mean, it wasn't something that remained memorable, as far as the battling of it?*

BABBITT: I don't remember that. Arizona is a very Republican state. So, Bruce and I were often on the other side of issues, from the rest of state. But, NAFTA doesn't stand out.

*Q: Well, okay, that's really the answer. When you came to Washington and were asked to go to the OAS, how did you feel about that?*

BABBITT: I thought it was a wonderful opportunity. I had traveled a lot in all of Latin America, but didn't really know it very well, and certainly not as well as I needed to know it. My Spanish was pretty good. It had been excellent in 1968, but I used it mostly to talk to housekeepers, and waiters in restaurants. So, it needed some brushing up. But, I

was interested in what the OAS did.

*Q: Did you have any problem getting confirmed? I think Jesse Helms was sitting in OAS.*

BABBITT: No. I was confirmed so quickly that people wondered why the OAS job was such a priority. I remember going up on the Hill and talking to Sarbanes. Sarbanes thing always is language proficiency. He sat me down and said, "Hattie, I asked the same question of George Bush's appointee, and I'm going to ask it of you. I think it's important that people have language proficiency and how is your Spanish?" He sort of tested me out. But, then he said, "Why is the OAS ambassador up here before the assistant secretary. There is nobody at the NSC on Latin America. What is this all about?" Frankly, I think it was just that they got around to me sooner. But, I had no trouble being confirmed, either time. I went to the State Department, and was in my office, a little tiny office, down the hall. This was the first working day after Bill Clinton took his oath of office, and then was confirmed in early April, which is lightning speed.

*Q: The way this place works, yes.*

BABBITT: That was good news in one sense. It was quite tough for me in another sense. It had been 12 years of a Republican administration. There was no one at the White House or at the State Department who was involved in Latin American affairs, from the new administration. So, I was alone. For someone who didn't know the State Department... I mean, I read all the books on foreign policy, but you guys...

*Q: It's a different culture, a different world.*

BABBITT: It was a completely different culture. It was a much harder culture for me to learn than the OAS culture, which is new and odd for everybody.

*Q: How did you bring yourself up to speed, and how did the State Department get along? I'm talking about the apparatus. How were you treated by them?*

BABBITT: I made a very good decision, initially, which was to say to the DCM, who worked for the outgoing ambassador, "I'd love for you to stay awhile."

*Q: Who was that?*

BABBITT: Sarah Horsey Barr.

*Q: Oh, yes, I've interviewed Sarah.*

BABBITT: Sarah is a character. We still walk our dogs together.

*Q: Her father was Ambassador Outerbridge Horsey.*

BABBITT: Sarah liked the OAS, which many Foreign Service officers don't. She didn't mind at all managing people, which many Foreign Service officers don't like.

*Q: And aren't very good at either.*

BABBITT: She was endlessly generous in saying to me, "You really shouldn't do it that way, ambassador." She lived close to where I live. I live close to where she lives. She and Al still live in the same place, as do we. So, it was a very helpful relationship. She already knew a lot about the OAS. She was endlessly generous in filling in gaps for me. I had some wonderful officers, and some real turkeys because the OAS was not viewed as a great launching pad.

*Q: No, it's sort of a stepchild. Who had been the ambassador to the OAS, under the Bush administration?*

BABBITT: Luigi Einaudi.

*Q: He went back to?*

BABBITT: Policy Planning. Sam Lewis was there. He had a good relationship with him, so she went to work with Sam.

*Q: Did you find that the Bush administration had used the OAS, or ignored it? What were you picking up as far as how the OAS had been operating, prior to your arrival?*

BABBITT: The secretary general was a career Brazilian diplomat, with all of the assets and all the liabilities that that implied. Baena Soares had been there a long time. He woke up every morning determined to protect the sovereignty of Latin American countries, and keep the colossus of the north from intervening, interfering, too much in their affairs. He had a chief of staff, the snake, Hugo de Zek, who would just sort of implement, in his shadowy ways, his agenda. It was not a healthy U.S./OAS dynamic.

*Q: Well, you mentioned that the NSC, with the Clinton administration, came in, and didn't have anybody lined up for the NSC to do Latin America affairs. When one thinks of the Clinton administration, it certainly wasn't a place where it had any priority at all.*

BABBITT: There was a fair amount of stumbling around.

*Q: How do you operate out there? I mean, you're in Washington, with an administration that really hasn't found its sea legs yet. Did you feel sort of exposed, or work on instinct? Did you get advice?*

BABBITT: I felt exposed, but of course, I didn't know enough. I was dealing with the

culture shock of operating within the framework of the State Department, which is tough for a political person coming in for the first time. I wasn't sure how much the exposure was a function of my personal inexperience in that building, and how much was a function of a larger set of issues within the administration. I woke up in the middle of the night, a lot.

*Q: What am I doing here? This is always a problem with any new administration, anyway, when they come in. Some come in with fairly fixed ideas, but others really go in under the assumption that they can ignore things, and that they will pick this up later on. But, the foot soldier is out there having to deal with the problems on a daily basis. Did the assistant secretary come in right away or later on?*

BABBITT: There was a big deal about who was going to be his assistant secretary. Bernie Aaronson stayed on for a while. Actually, Bernie went with me for my first general assembly in June of 1993. Then, there was a big discussion about whether there was going to be some guy from New York. Isn't that great? This great episode in my life, and I can't remember who the players were. Anyway, there was a great discussion about who it was going to be. The resolution was that Alec, who was headed off to be ambassador to Brazil, the supreme job of a lifetime...

*Q: Yes, he spent a lot of time in Brazil. He was really prime for it.*

BABBITT: He was asked by Christopher to be the assistant secretary. So, Alec eventually got confirmed. I don't quite remember the timing.

*Q: Looking at it, what was the culture of the OAS?*

BABBITT: Well, there were many countries there who weren't quite happy with Baena's approach to, "It's been a successful day, if I can keep anything from happening." That's really the best you can do with the United States of America, to keep anything from happening. So, the culture was quite full of the traditional flowery speeches, wasting enormous amounts of time. That would have been alright had the culture been more inclined to produce something. During my predecessor's time, resolution 1080 had come out of Santiago's general assembly, which was a resolution that supported democracy, and calling on the organization to come to the aid of... I can't quite remember the language now... But, come to the aid of countries where the democratic system is in jeopardy. But, that's not the exact language. Shortly after I took office, there was an auto coup in Guatemala. So, I then quickly became charged with the responsibility of using that resolution to return Guatemala to its constitutional order, which I did.

*Q: How did this work? We have an ambassador in Guatemala. This could be a government to government thing, and that would be the ambassador, I guess.*

BABBITT: I'm sure our ambassador, whoever it was, was busy doing that on his end.

What was useful on our side and what is useful about the OAS is the power of all of the countries of the hemisphere, coming together as a unit and saying, "This activity, this attempted out of coup goes against our agreed upon democratic commitment in the hemisphere, and we condemn it. The first thing I did was accept the Guatemalan OAS ambassador's invitation to come over. He didn't want to come to the State Department. He was pretty insistent. I agreed. We discussed this. At his mission office he kept trying to get me on the phone with his president, so his president could explain to me why that behavior was appropriate. Nothing the guy was doing was appropriate. The other countries in the hemisphere rallied around, and de Leon Carpio, a human rights advocate, came into power. It was amazing.

*Q: What was the roles of Mexico? I always think of Mexico as keeping a very close eye on the United States, and its concern that we might overstep the bounds. How did you find Mexico?*

BABBITT: Mexico was the key, always one of the main protagonists for the protection of sovereignty. The role Mexico played was really quite interesting, because in the bilateral relations, they knew they had to deal with us in a more or less rationale way on a thousand issues. So, at the time, they reserved their really hostile, ideological anti-anything behavior for the OAS, and to a little lesser extent, the UN. They had wonderfully prepared, hardworking diplomats who got up in the morning, every morning, and went to bed every night, figuring out how to insert that language in every resolution, declaration or other utterances of the OAS and how to avoid moving away from anything with the most traditional language.

*Q: Things have changed, but it used to be said that within the Mexican government, all these intellectuals and those who really didn't like the United States' influence, went into the foreign ministry, because in a way, for Mexico, that wasn't a very big game. Our CIA, and FBI and immigration, are back and forth with each other all the time, really very close relations, but they allowed the foreign affairs to be the designated nasty person.*

BABBITT: That was certainly the case. The ambassador who was there when I first came was an anomaly. His name was Alejandro Carrillo Castro. His father had been Alejandro Carrillo Marcor. His father had been governor of Sonora, when Bruce was governor of Arizona. So, I knew his mother and father quite well, and his sisters. I hadn't met him, but I spent a lot of time with his parents, and other members of his family. Low and behold, Alejandro was Mexican ambassador. He tried very hard to find ways to satisfy his ministry and allow things to move forward. He was succeeded by people who saluted the flag of sovereignty and non-intervention.

*Q: I would have thought you would have arrived at a very interesting time, because President Clinton, with some exceptions, accepted the North American Free Trade Agreement. At this point, it met with Mexico, and extending it from the Canadian and American one to the Canadian/American Mexican one. Since the administration was*

*pushing that, I would have thought that this was very popular with the Mexican authorities.*

BABBITT: But NAFTA was, of course, a bilateral treaty. That was Alec Watson's and USTR's turf. I would almost say that the more that was going on, on a bilateral level, the more Mexico used the OAS arena as a place to vent the opposite, because there wasn't as much penalty for it. Most administrations see the bilateral stuff as more urgent.

*Q: Did it ever come up about the one-party rule in Mexico that was going on at that time, and continued to, the PRI in power, 40, 50 years, or something. We're talking about spreading democracy. Could you raise this issue about Mexico, or did we keep our mouths shut on that?*

BABBITT: I wouldn't have raised it in a permanent council meeting. I raised it quite often outside a permanent council meeting. In fact, with the election in 1994. Do I have my years right? Mexico, for the first time in history, allowed foreign monitors, not very many, but some. I was very eager for the OAS to have a slice of the external monitoring opportunity. The Mexican foreign ministry and authority, everywhere, basically said, "We'll let in the UN, we'll let in the Swedes." I can't remember who went, but this and that, from various sources. But, under no circumstances, can OAS monitors come in, because they really saw it as a tool of the United States.

*Q: Did you feel the OAS responded to the United States, or did you find it to be a pretty independent body?*

BABBITT: It would depend on how the other member states responded, and on a variety of issues, how they were set up within the OAS, and how much attention the State Department paid to it. My first job was to say, "Nothing is going to happen here." "We need a new secretary general." Baena Soares was scheduled to leave in 1994, but wanted to stay on. Much of my early time there was spent identifying a successor, secretary general, and working to get that successor elected, our choice elected.

*Q: In a way, you were paralleling Madeleine Albright in the UN, and Boutros Gali.*

BABBITT: It preceded that. I remember Madeleine saying to me one time, when she was in the throes of some horrible thing with Boutros Gali, how smart I had been. "Hattie, good job." Then, she proceeded to do the same thing, in a much more complicated venue. Lord knows, Kofi Annan was a thousand times more helpful than Boutros Gali.

*Q: This is tape two, side one, with Hattie Babbitt. You came in at a time when the dictators, in Latin America, were pretty well gone - the military government. This was the first time ever, I guess. You had a pretty democratic Latin America, didn't you?*

BABBITT: We did. Paraguay was not exactly all in one piece. There were pockets

around. We all called Mexico a democracy, but how democratic is it with 70 years with the same party? Fujimori had come in democratically, but then behaved undemocratically. There were lots of things going on that needed improvement.

*Q: Were there Latin American lobbies, or American lobbies about Latin America, that played on your mission?*

BABBITT: Some. The big triumph of my time there was to get the world's first anti-corruption convention negotiated and accepted by all the member states. It was a huge thing to do. As you know, when you are drafting a treaty, you essentially take the first 14 paragraphs in the last similar treaty, and the last 14 paragraphs from another one, and then you quarrel about the three paragraphs in the middle which actually add whatever it is that changed the law. In the anti-corruption context, there wasn't a single model. We just made it up. It was complicated, because of that and because of the extradition and jurisdictional issues. If you commit fraud in the following way, if somebody in the United States is using the telephone to call Brazil to do an illegal act in Peru, and the money ends up in Jamaica, who has jurisdiction, and how you decide that? Well the civil law in the Commonwealth countries have very different approaches to jurisdiction. Sorting through all that in an already complicated environment was difficult. Then, it's very difficult whenever you start from the very beginning in any new issue.

We, the United States, put an enormous amount of pressure in the OAS and the bilateral agencies on making that happen. Christopher had wanted to, for a long, long time, in effect, internationalize the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), and it got nowhere in the OECD in spite of lots of effort by lots of talented people. I don't know how much of this is in retrospect, and how much was in the thought process at the time. Getting them done in the OAS, embarrassed OECD into moving.

*Q: Well, it's a little harder for the Europeans to sit back and see that Latin America is ahead of them, and civilized behavior.*

BABBITT: So, we really put the arm on people to cooperate with that, successfully. This is in response to your question. I remember Clinton was about to take a trip to Mexico, and someplace in the Caribbean, and then Argentina. When we were planning the trip to Mexico, the Mexicans really wanted a small arms trafficking convention. Everybody said that it couldn't be done. The Justice Department was crazy, the NRA was going to go crazy. Everybody said it was impossible. Bill Clinton, in a Bill Clinton kind of way, said, "We owe it to them. The Latin Americans are saying that we are condemning them for exporting drugs to our country. We are trying to be helpful there. You are filling our country full of arms, and we deserve some help there." Clinton said that they were right. But, what it put in place was negotiations with the NRA guys sitting in the back seat all day long, every day.

*Q: I was just thinking that when one hears about the NRA, National Rifle Association,*

*they don't take prisoners. They don't compromise, or anything else. How did you find them?*

BABBITT: Well, one of the things I did was recognize that it wasn't the best use of my time, nor was it the best interest of the United States, for me to be the lead negotiator. It needed somebody who was much more familiar with these issues. This wasn't an earn-while-you-learn-kind of operation. There was a wonderful guy, Jonathan Winer, who was in guns, drugs... Whatever that bureau is called.

*Q: It's the Bureau of Narcotics and International Crime, something like that.*

BABBITT: He took the lead on the negotiations, and was splendid.

*Q: Did the bill come off?*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: The NRA went along with it?*

BABBITT: Yes. I wish I could tell you all the details, but I've forgotten them.

*Q: You must have had an awful lot to do with raising awareness and trying to do something about narcotics.*

BABBITT: It was a terribly tough time for any ambassador in OAS, because there were two parallel things happening on this side, both of which were creating white, hot anger in Latin America and the Caribbean, to a certain extent. One was unilateral drug certification, and the other was the Helms-Burton legislation.

*Q: Why don't you explain what drug certification was?*

BABBITT: Drug certification was a federal law which in effect requires the Secretary of State to annually certify which countries in the world... Not just Latin America, but since most of the drugs come from Latin America, it impacted Latin America the most... Which countries in the world are cooperating with the United States in the battle against narcotics trafficking. The response from the Latin American countries was outrage that it was graded by the United States, and while we were this enormous magnet. They were sellers, but we had this enormous country full of buyers, where selling wouldn't be a problem, if there weren't all these buyers. So, how did we get off grading them! Then there was the Helms-Burton legislation.

*Q: Would you explain what that was?*

BABBITT: The Helms-Burton legislation was legislation introduced by Senator Helms

and Dan Burton, which basically had the United States punish other sovereign countries whose nationals did business with Cuba. The rest of the world, not just Latin America, thought that was none of our business.

*Q: Yes, the Canadians were particularly outraged.*

BABBITT: My unhappy lot in life was to be ambassador at the point at which those issues were at their most red-hot. It was different than being a bilateral ambassador, because the other 33 countries in the case of Helms-Burton disagreed with the United States. They didn't just not think much of it, they really hated it. In the case of drug certification, there were a few countries around that didn't care very much, because they didn't actually export. But, the whole notion... They were symbolically there with their brethren. Those were tough.

*Q: How did you find the fit? One thinks of OAS and Latin America, emphasis on the Latin... But you've got this significant hunk of the Caribbean where English or Dutch or French is the language. How do they fit into this thing?*

BABBITT: There were mostly quite new members. One of the first things I did when I became OAS ambassador... There are all these celebrations, inaugurations, where somebody needs to represent the United States. The strangest one I ever went to was the tenth anniversary of the independence of St. Kitts/Nevis. St. Kitts/Nevis is one country. Nevis has 7,000 people, and I think St. Kitts has a few more. It's two little spots in the Caribbean ocean, without the wherewithal to be a nation in any real sense, at all. The Caribbeans had very different levels of preparation. One of the most, talented, smartest, hardest working able ambassadors in the whole place, was the career ambassador from Trinidad and Tobago. Most of the Caribbean ambassadors were not nearly so prepared, partly because they didn't have Foreign Services.

*Q: Diplomacy with other countries is always a problem, but the real problem is... How did your diplomacy, your mission to the State Department work, particularly through the Latin American bureau?*

BABBITT: It worked differently with different assistant secretaries, of course. First, it was Bernie, who was kind of hanging around because Warren Christopher wanted him to, but trying to sort of melt away. Bob Gephardt was the PDAS. Gephardt doesn't melt away. Alec was preoccupied by the bilateral issues, but fiddled around in OAS stuff some. He didn't have too much time for it. Jeff Davidow was great. He didn't care much about the OAS.

*Q: He was what at that time?*

BABBITT: He was ambassador to Venezuela. Then, he came to be assistant secretary. By that time, I really knew what I was doing, for one thing. I was able to use them, and relate

to the assistant secretary, in a more experienced way. Jeff was generous in doing what I asked him to do. I was thoughtful in not asking him to do very much.

*Q: That's the way to get along.*

BABBITT: In each case, I went to everybody's staff meeting every morning, and was very much part of things.

*Q: I keep thinking of Jesse Helms, I think of all his staff, who was very interested in Latin America. According to the Foreign Service, overly interested, particularly Central America. Did you find this?*

BABBITT: I didn't. Helms' staff was quite aware of my work with Cuba. I think I had been, in some ways, inoculated by having been condemned by Castro on the front pages of Granma. That was sort of good enough.

*Q: How about Cuba? Did the subject of Cuba come up much in the OAS?*

BABBITT: People were always trying to get in on the agenda. Other countries, I felt, were not useful. I was already in the position where the organization was lined up, more or less, thirty-three to one, on drug certification, and more or less, thirty-three to one on Helms-Burton. The last thing I needed was a more or less, thirty-three to one. It was another one of those issues. So, I was happily successful in beating back all the attempts at the OAS to deal with Cuba.

*Q: I don't know about how much lately, but there was certainly a perennial Puerto Rican independence, or desire for an investigation. Shouldn't Puerto Rico be freed, and all? This was coming out of the left wing of the countries that didn't care for them. It was to try to embarrass the United States. Did that happen at OAS?*

BABBITT: No.

*Q: They were too close to it to know that it wasn't a real issue?*

BABBITT: I don't know. I don't know why, but it wasn't. I don't know what else you have on your agenda, but the other thing I don't want to forget to talk about, which is the other arena, where I think we had a very positive influence. That is, strengthening the Human Rights Commission. I spent a lot of time and effort on that. I feel very good about what I was able to accomplish.

*Q: What could the ambassador on OAS do on that?*

BABBITT: There are two things that make the commission either strong or weak. One is having enough money to have staff. There's a vast amount of documents to read and

organize, hearings to conduct, preparation for hearings, and all that to do. One of the easy things was to get more money. The other thing was that every so often commissioners are elected, replaced. I was very involved in helping to identify, in one case, or maybe two cases... I can't quite remember... But, strong advocates for human rights, real top-notch, respected people, and working the system, to get them elected.

*Q: Where were there human rights problems in Latin America, during your time?*

BABBITT: Some of them were leftover problems. So, there were old issues arising out of former military dictatorships, for example in the case of Guatemala, and a few places.

*Q: I assume we are talking about what we call indigenous, Indian population there?*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: How about Latin America prop, the southern continent? How were things there, human rights wise?*

BABBITT: I have a wonderful story. In the elections, to try to get Bob Goldman elected... Do you know Bob?

*Q: No.*

BABBITT: Bob lives in Washington and teaches at AU law school. Bob is very aggressive, very knowledgeable, and cares a whole lot about these issues. People either love him or hate him. Almost no one is indifferent to Bob. I thought he would be a good commissioner. I talked to people who liked him, and hated him. I ended up thinking that whatever baggage he carried, he would overwhelm with his energy and intellect. I thought he ought to be elected. So, we set about figuring out how to get this vote, get that vote, whatever vote. We really wanted the people who were in power, who had been helped by Bob, whose allies had been helped by Bob, when there was a military dictatorship, were easy votes. There were just some people who didn't know him, and every shade of variation. But, we really wanted Brazil. Itamaraty wouldn't have a thing to do with Bob Goldman. He was way too uncontrolled for that very conservative body. I went to a lot of the inaugurations because Bruce would represent the president, and I would go. So, I knew a lot of the foreign ministers, and spoke with them frequently, and saw them repeatedly. I really tried almost everything with everybody.

The secretary, of course, signed off on the candidacy. Whoever was the assistant secretary was trying to be helpful said that I wouldn't get anywhere with Brazil. Peter Bell, who was the head of CARE, and who had been head of the Ford Foundation... When Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who was president of Brazil had been exiled to the United States, the Ford Foundation had provided for him, and given him money so he could live in exile. He knew Bob Goldman from those days. Peter Bell told Fernando Henrique. The president

said to the foreign minister, "Brazil will support Bob Goldman." So, we got our votes every kind of way. That is how it worked.

*Q: How did you find the commission during your time worked?*

BABBITT: It was uneven. It got steadily better. One of the problems had been that Baena Soares had fiddled around with them. He didn't like the idea of the commission pronouncing anything that the member states didn't like. Of course, the member states aren't going to like if the commission says you violated human rights. Baena and Hugo were always trying to pressure the commissioners to not do something, or to delay doing something until somebody died or got transferred, or got posted someplace else. One of the good things about Gaviria was that the human rights committee was so suspicious of him that it was easy for me to say to him, "You really, really, really want to stay out of this. Because you are suspect, because of Colombia's record. There is no meddling in this." Gaviria absolutely felt that that was the smart thing to do, and did it. So, we got better and better commissioners. We got the secretary general out of the Commission's business. We got better and better staff, because there was actually money to hire and keep them. So, it was a good run.

*Q: Well, you were there from when to when?*

BABBITT: 1993 to 1997.

*Q: Did President Clinton pay much attention to OAS?*

BABBITT: Oh, he would come to speak there, but I can't...

*Q: There was no point where things were in such critical state that you thought you had to at least try to get the president to weigh in or something like that?*

BABBITT: There would occasionally be issues where the president would weigh in, and would be part of a coordinated effort. There would be a Peru/Ecuador crisis. Peru and Ecuador would have to go to war over the Upper Cenepa Valley. I think the president weighed in. We were in the middle of it. The bureau was in the middle of it. Everybody was in the middle of it.

*Q: We were a guarantor, I guess, from '42, or something like that?*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: Along with Brazil and Chile, I think. How did that play out, from your angle?*

BABBITT: Well, eventually Mahaud of Ecuador and Fujimori said, "This is not smart. This is not a good use of our resources." Wheezy came back in as the negotiator. They

settled it up.

*Q: Did you find Fujimori of Peru, who was popularly elected, and then took on more and more authoritarian rule, to be a problem? From the OAS perception?*

BABBITT: My husband tells this story all the time, so I will tell it now. We went to, at least, one of Fujimori's inaugurations. We were at the palace, meeting with the president, after the swearing in and all that. It was Bruce, Alec, and me. Bruce is the Secretary of the Interior, and loves Peru. He went to the University of Huamanga where the head of the Shining Path, was a teacher. Bruce was there. He and Fujimori would tell these stories to each other - the great patting of backs and all that. Then, Alec, the quintessential diplomat, would have his three talking points on something that he went through in a very careful and thoughtful way. I, as I always did with Fujimori, would get on him about human rights. We had more than one meeting like this. I remember the one at the inauguration. We had a little trio, different approaches to Fujimori.

*Q: Was there any effort on the part of Castro to get back into the OAS?*

BABBITT: Every so often, the Mexicans would try. I would go to some Mexican event, and realize that there were an awful lot of Cubans at this event. Of course, the Cubans don't belong to the OAS. If there are Cubans at an event, you wonder what is happening. They didn't try hard enough to get very far. I assume if they really wanted to they could have made my life more miserable than they did.

*Q: Were the Canadians in the OAS at this point?*

BABBITT: Yes.

*Q: What sort of role did they play?*

BABBITT: They were enormously helpful most of the time. They were Canadians, boy scouts, girl scouts. They believe in the right stuff. They have a much easier history with the Latin America countries, and with the Caribbean, than we do. So, it was useful to have two voices on the same page.

*Q: Well, during this 1993 to 1997 period, was there an issue or episode that we haven't covered?*

BABBITT: Four years worth. Haiti.

*Q: Haiti, oh my gosh. Yes. How about Haiti. How did this play in the OAS? You might explain what the problem was with Haiti.*

BABBITT: Oh, the problems with Haiti. They are still going on. Aristide was elected, but

living in a little apartment in Georgetown. The United States' position was that, although he would not have been our choice, he was the people's choice. Therefore, we were going to get Aristide back. That was the right thing to do. In OAS, it played in a whole variety of ways. It covered a long period of time. There are many chapters in the saga. Many countries in the hemisphere was completely indifferent to Haiti. Many Latin American countries were not officially racists, but were unofficially in every way.

*Q: Yes. Brazil, which makes great play in being multiracial, no problem. Yet, I talked with people who served in Brazil who said, "Don't believe it for a minute."*

BABBITT: Many other Latin American countries feel exactly the same way. They couldn't imagine wasting time on this country with its illiterate black people. It was hard to get the level of interest in Haiti that we wanted. The Caribbeans cared about Haiti because it was in their neighborhood. When we, the United States, were getting ready to intervene militarily, and all the build up to that, Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbot had Haiti as his task. We would meet in his office at 8:00 every morning to kind of refine the strategy for the day, who had spoken to whom and what. One of the things that we wanted, and Strobe was responsible for, was a UN approval. I now have forgotten exactly what form that was to take... For United States military intervention. I assume it must have been a coalition of the willing. The Argentines gave us a boat or something. Somebody else gave us something else, so that it would be a multilateral endeavor, but essentially it was U.S. military. We were negotiating with the Turks and Caicos, and almost everybody else, for taking Haitian refugees. So, there were many parts to this. But, the political OAS task was to pass a resolution expressing to the UN the desire for the United States to invade.

*Q: Yes, it was very popular.*

BABBITT: So, I remember at the general assembly where we were to carry this off, was held in Baena's honor in his hometown because this was his last general assembly. This was a town poorly equipped to host a general assembly. It was hot. The hotels were awful. The transportation was terrible. Our U.S. ambassador to Brazil was brand new and indifferent to logistics. I can't quite remember who it is. Remind me who it was.

*Q: It will come to me.*

BABBITT: A smart, able guy. He had a heart attack. He was not interested in logistics, and apparently his folks weren't either, because there weren't enough cars. It was awful. Anyway, we flew down, and drove. The African/American preacher from Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, who was a wonderful man... anyway, his job was to mind Aristide. So, we were all trying to get this out of the OAS. My job was to deal with the Mexicans. They, of course, were going to be hard to convince about the worthiness of this cause. "Gringos go home," was repeated because of our invasion of Vera Cruz. Our members spent a lot of time sitting in the stairwell. I don't know why we sat in a stairwell. I think in the

inadequate quarters in this little Brazilian town, the stairwell was the only place where you could predictably have a quiet spot away from everybody else. So, I was sitting with Jorge Pintos, who was vice minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico and Alejandro Carrillo Castro, working out language, which we essentially did.

We said that if the government of Haiti requested an invasion, then it was no longer an affront to their sovereignty. We crafted some language for Aristide to give in his speech at the OAS general assembly, which would, in effect, request an invasion.

*Q: Aristide, living in Georgetown at the time.*

BABBITT: Right. But, the constitutionally elected president of Haiti. That satisfied the Mexicans need from a legal basis, because the constitutionally-elected president has requested it. They didn't care very much about Haiti anyway. It satisfied Strobe's need to go to the UN saying that the important hemispheric body had requested this. So, we got our motions.

*Q: Ah, such is diplomacy. In 1997, what did you do?*

BABBITT: Brian Atwood had been the president of NDI, and I was on the board there.

*Q: NDI being the National Democratic Institute...*

BABBITT: ...For International Affairs. He was, by that point, administrator of AID. He asked me if I would be his deputy. I had loved working with Brian. I had never been a deputy. I had always been a big fish in a small pond. I had never been a deputy. But, I took a vow of deputy hood, and went over to be Brian's deputy, knowing him, and knowing that it was going to be a comfortable kind of thing.

*Q: You did that for how long?*

BABBITT: Four years.

*Q: What were your principal tasks during those four years?*

BABBITT: It varied. I went over to be Brian's deputy. He really wanted an alter-ego. That is what he said he wanted. Whether that's a good way to use a deputy or not is another issue. But, that is what he wanted. It's a hugely complicated, interagency job. There was more than enough to do. You could have had three more alter egos and it wouldn't have been too many. He had been without a deputy for a long time. So, he was really happy to have a deputy. Brian was nominated to be ambassador to Brazil and got into a fight with Jesse Helms. Jesse wasn't ever going to confirm him for anything. Brian left to go to Massachusetts, to go run Citizens Energy. I inherited an old friend of the president's from Arkansas, as the next administrator. He didn't know anything about

Washington or the State Department, or AID, and by that time, I did. So, part of that package was that I agreed to stay.

*Q: How did you find the AID personnel? This has always been something apart from... In and out of the State Department. But, these are very particular people. How did you find them?*

BABBITT: I found some parts of it absolutely wonderful. A lot of women who wanted to do something in international affairs, who were more or less my contemporary, a little younger, couldn't get into the Foreign Service at the State Department. So, they went to AID. There were lots of them. They were wonderful. They were really smart. Barbara Turner is as good as anybody in the Foreign Service. So, part of it was wonderful because I was surrounded by experienced, good women in positions of authority. If you have always been the only one at the table, it's really nice to walk into a room with other women. You're just doing the business. There isn't any tension about it. You're just going about it. I loved that part of AID.

The part that was tough and where I thought I was most useful, and I don't think the larger group at AID understood how useful I was, was many of the career people at AID are always afraid that somebody at the State Department or at the White House is going to tell them how to spend their money, and they know how to spend it better. There's this psychological tendency to stay under the radar screen, rather than try to mold what is going on. "Maybe if they don't see us, they won't notice and will get to keep doing what we are doing." There was far too infrequently a strategy, within the interagency system to try to craft things a useful way. Sometimes the State Department ideas were wonderful, important. Sometimes they were not wonderful, but important anyway. Sometimes they were just crappy. If AID had been a player and had been at the table with an idea, they would have prevailed. But, they just didn't play the game very well. Having been in the belly of the beast at the State Department for four years, and then knowing a lot of people in the White House, my highest and best use was to operate in the deputy's committee system, and really use that process to make sure, to the extent possible, that AID's ideas would reflect the newest policy.

*Q: One of the criticisms, particularly in Africa, is that there are so many projects that are started, good ideas and all, but as soon as we tell them they are on their own, they die. Or else, we put a forestry man into a country, and the next person that comes along is a rice grower. It is continuity more than anything else, and also making the program stick, instead of being a program we just support.*

BABBITT: It's a terrible problem. It's more of a problem the smaller the operating budget is of AID. A number of things affect that. If AID has the best strategic plan of all, and the right people in the country to implement it, and an ambassador who is supportive, the next thing that happens is the president schedules a trip through. The president's person says, "The president's trip is going to be about education." Well, shucks, all the

money that has been put in the strategic plan, and is being implemented by the right people for the long term, half the money is sucked out, and put into an education program, so that the president of the United States can announce that he is committing \$20 million in whatever country it is, in education. Then, in the old days, and I wasn't there in the old days, but there would be a health officer, or this officer, or that officer. Now, the missions are tiny. So, you end up with the same person doing the ag program, and election monitoring. It is a very tough way to run a railroad.

*Q: How did you feel, essentially how AID money was being spent during your watch?*

BABBITT: Some of it fabulously well, and some of it not. There were two overriding themes that made it hard to do well. One is the one I talked about which is operating expenses. Helms was at the leadership of trying to minimize the operating expenses. If they could just starve USAID to death, he could kill it. If we don't give them enough money, that they will do such a terrible job, and everybody else will see its money down a rat hole, when he already thought he saw that it was just a big rat hole. The effect of operating expense cuts that that has, the effect on the real ability to provide a secure environment for people. Nobody had the right set backs. Nobody had the right...

*Q: You're talking about security problems.*

BABBITT: Security problems.

*Q: Concern about embassies being blown up.*

BABBITT: And images. A terrorist isn't going to say he will attack the people who are providing maternal and child health care, first. But, if you harden the embassy, then where do they go?

The increased security expenditures just sucked all the operating expenses out of the budget. The other problem was getting money appropriated in ways that was most useful. Sonny Callahan was the head of the relevant committee during either all or much of my time at AID. Before his time in Congress, he had driven an eighteen wheeler truck. He was from a rural, southern district. He was quite comfortable going back to his district, talking about voting for appropriating money for starving babies and their mothers. He was not comfortable going back talking about appropriating money to build democratic institutions in the caucuses or Central Asia, or whatever else. Some of the AID resources were quite well spent, doing that kind of stuff. They were always starved.

*Q: Well, you left in 2000?*

BABBITT: 2001. I think I left four days before that, but right at the end.

*Q: When you left, how did you feel AID fit into the State Department?*

BABBITT: Well, while Brian was there, he had negotiated this uneasy relationship. It has always been uneasy. It is uneasy. I don't know what the right answer is. So, if your question is going to be "What should it be?" I don't know. Warren Christopher and many others, but importantly Christopher felt that he ought to be in charge. If I were Secretary of State, I would want all of the AID resources at my disposal, because they are in effect tools of diplomacy and I'm the chief diplomat and I ought to be able to control them. On the other side of that, the reality is that Foreign Service officers at State are not trained to be, and don't want to be managers, and are not trained and don't want to be managers of money. So, the reality of moving into the other arena is probably not an easy solution either. But, Brian had negotiated with Christopher and Gore, and ultimately the president. This was an arrangement whereby the AID administrator would report to the president through the Secretary of State, and that somehow made everybody feel slightly better. AID remained an independent agency. That is the language in the statute. At the same time, the Arms Control Agency and USIA were absorbed into State.

I'll tell one story about the influence my thinking on it a lot did, but it didn't give me too much wisdom at the end of the day. When I went to the OAS, I thought the OAS could be a really important tool for the United States and I hoped that I could be useful in making it more clear that that was the case. But, with more importance will come more scrutiny. This joint isn't up to more scrutiny, it's really not gotten the kind of accountability and transparency that it needs. Since a significant percentage of the money it spends are from U.S. dues or from U.S. contributions, that is not good enough. Sarah Horsey and I sat around her coffee table in our Bermuda shorts during the summer of 1993 and talked about how we would work the budget process at the OAS and how we would make it more accountable and more transparent. We agreed that she would join the budget committee and eventually chair the budget committee at the OAS. We did a lot of other things. One of which was to say to all of the political officers and the economic officers in the mission, it's your responsibility. If it's a democracy program, where we are giving them money to monitor elections someplace, to make those kinds of decisions. Do they need to go in six months ahead of time, or is three months good enough? Do they need to go in six months ahead, not the six weeks they planned, because the vulnerable period is the pre-election registration period. These are management types of decisions you make about running a program. All those officers hated it. Some of them actually said in almost these words, "We are not trained to do this. We don't know how to do this, and it is beneath us to do this. We are political analysts." We don't manage trucks and money. Well, that is not a culture which is ideally suited to managing an assistance program. My little test of the State Department/Foreign Service and their interest and willingness to do what is necessary, related to managing hundreds of millions of dollars, didn't leave me to think that this was really a very easy choice.

*Q: Well, in 2001, you're here. What are you doing now?*

BABBITT: In 2001, what I did was go to the Wilson Center as a senior public policy

scholar, which was a wonderful decompression time. Lee Hamilton is a wonderful guy. There were lots of extraordinary people there. It was a great six or seven months. Now, I am the senior vice president of Hunt Alternatives Fund, which is a foundation, where the main program is an operating program called Women Waging Peace. It recognizes that there are women working across conflict lines around the world. They are often the only ones working across conflict lines, in Bosnia. We have women from across conflict lines in 21 conflicts around the world. Sri Lanka, Israeli members, Palestinian members, Northern Ireland, Colombia, really all over the place. They are almost always marginalized from both the formal and informal peace process. Rina Amiri, who is one of our members, was here earlier this week. She is an Afghan woman, and is now working with the UN in Afghanistan. We helped to gain the visibility and capacity. Rina is an enormously capable woman, but women get overlooked. The concept is that women deserve to be at the table because they are more than half of humanity, and because they are often the victims of war. But, more importantly, they are assets. They often don't carry into the post-conflict process, the baggage that men do. They have been less often the combatants. These are people who are committed to restructure. So, it's a waste of an important resource for stability to exclude them.

*Q: Excellent.*

BABBITT. So, that is what I am doing.

*Q: Okay, well I thank you very much.*

*End of interview*