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

AMBASSADOR SALLY GROOMS COWAL

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Initial interview date: August 9, 2001

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 9th of August, 2001. This is an interview with – let me make sure I get the name spelled correctly – Sally, S-A-L-L-Y, Grooms, G-R-O-O-M-S, Cowal. Is it pronounced Cowal?

COWAL: It is.

Q: C-O-W-A-L. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Sally, don't you?

COWAL: I do.

Q: Sally, let's get going, then. Could you tell me when and where you were born, and something about your family?

COWAL: I was born in Oak Park, Illinois, in August 1944. My father was a second-generation immigrant from Bohemia, and my mother's family was part Swiss and part Scotch Irish, and the Swiss were fairly recent immigrants. That was my grandmother, who was born in the United States, but to a family that had recently immigrated. So I'm sort of three-quarters recent immigrant and one-quarter DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) type.

Q: Well, now, you say your father came from Bohemia. What was the family name? Do you know, or was it ...

COWAL: Well, of course, because it was my name. Actually, both Grooms and Cowal are married names for me. So my maiden name was Smerz, which was originally spelled S-M-R-Z, and to which my grandfather, who was the first one who went to school in this country, was told to add a vowel, so he added an "e," and he put it in the middle. So my maiden name is Smerz, S-M-E-R-Z.

Q: Sounds like it meant something like snow or something like that in Bohemia, in Czech.

COWAL: I don't know what it means in Czech, and I unfortunately don't speak any Czech. And those of you, and I gather you're one of them, who speak German, sometimes would confuse it with *schmerz*, and say ...

Q: Pain, yes.

COWAL: ... pain, and I had a professor in college who said that he had decided when he looked at the list of the class roster, before he had ever met any of the students, that if I

were a good student, he was going to call me good grief. And I guess he decided that I was, so that's how I became known. But I don't think it means the same thing in Czech as it does in German.

Q: Now, tell me a little about your father. What was he doing, and what do you know about his background?

COWAL: Well, of course I know a lot about his background, because he was alive until I was 40-something, so I knew him well. My parents I guess, both of them might be characterized as children of the Depression. I mean, they hit their early maturing life just as the Depression hit, so I think that very much characterized what they thought and what they did and the opportunity that they had or didn't have in their lives.

But my grandfather, who was also born in the United States, was the eldest of 10 children, and in quite a poor immigrant family, and they had originally gone to Chicago. I mean, they had always been in Chicago. And as the eldest of 10 children, he went to work when he was 10 or 11 years old because there were a bunch of kids behind him. He went to work in the construction trades as a hod carrier, and then trained as a carpenter. Then he built his carpentry business into a general contracting business, and in fact became very wealthy. So that by the '20s, he was building probably 50 new houses a year, the sort of bungalow-ization of Chicago as the city grew and as many new immigrants came. And so one of my father's earliest memories is being well off – I mean, driving a car, which would have been in 1920 more or less – 1920 or 1921. They had a car and he was the driver, because his mother was not well, and so he would take her to the grocery store.

But this rather affluent lifestyle also came with the necessity of moving, as my grandfather would finish a house, or get it to the point where it could be sold, then his family would move out of it. But they always stayed in sort of the same neighborhood on the south side of Chicago.

His mother died when he was 18 or 19, and he had already met my mother, because they had met as high school students. But very shortly after his mother died, his father lost probably a considerable fortune, I would say well over $1 million, that he had accumulated through this successful construction business. My father had been awarded a scholarship at the University of Chicago, which he got because he was the valedictorian of his Chicago public high school. The University of Chicago gave a scholarship to – I think there were 18 public high schools at that time in the city – and they gave the valedictorian of each high school class a full scholarship to the University of Chicago. But, nonetheless, he had to drop out because it was not only the college tuition, but the necessity of then helping keep the family together.

So he dropped out after a year at the University of Chicago, worked a few years, and then went back to school, I think mostly at night, at what was called the Armor Institute of Technology, which became IIT. He got a more technical education so that he could help

his father in the building trade. He studied architecture and construction and mechanical engineering.

Then, of course, like many men of his generation, he got caught in the war. Because he had a mastoid as a child, he was 4-F, so didn't serve in the armed forces, but did serve in a defense plant. And it was the Chrysler Corporation. One of their automobile assembly factories got turned over into a war production factory, and they were making aircraft engine parts, and my father was the designer of the packaging into which the propellers would go and whatever it was they had to ship out to the Pacific.

So he spent the war, which accounts for my birth in 1944. I had an older brother, who has also died, but he was born before the war in '39, and then I was born in '44. So he spent the war years close to home, but working in a defense production facility. And the day the war ended, in August 1945, when I was exactly a year old, having studied mechanical engineering and knowing about it and having been associated with the building trades, he got a bright idea: that the future of the world – and it's a good thing we're talking today, because it's so relevant to what's happening today – the future of the world would be much affected by this new invention called air conditioning.

And so in 1945, having been released from his duties at the war plant, he sat down with the Yellow Pages of the Chicago directory and looked up air conditioning, and I think there were three companies. And he went knocking on all of their doors and said he was a mechanical engineer and he wished to work in air conditioning. And one of them hired him, and he later came to own that company, and they air-conditioned most of Chicago, all of the hotels, Marshall Field, all of those things.

Q: We're mentioning this, today being the hottest day of the year. It is bloody hot. Thank God for air conditioning.

COWAL: So I guess one of the things I didn't grow up with was a hot house, because, of course, like the shoemaker's children, we did have an air-conditioned house from the time I remember, and I think our first air-conditioned car was a 1949 Buick Roadmaster, which had some sort of a retrofit job in it, so I guess air conditioning was part of my life.

Q: I was going to ask, before we move on with your father, could you bring up your mother? Her background and her ...

COWAL: Well, my mother's name was Virginia Coleborne. Her parents were show business people. Her mother was a dancer and an actress, and her father was a behind-the-scenes guy. I mean, I guess you would say a stagehand or a theater producer, or whatever. My grandparents had met at the Shubert Theater in Chicago, where my grandfather was sort of permanently employed and my grandmother came dancing through in a vaudeville show. And I never knew my grandfather, who died when my mother was 18 or something, but my grandmother I knew quite well.

My grandmother was the Swiss immigrant from a Swiss Calvinist, very strict background, who had nonetheless sort of broken out of this and decided to become a dancer. And my mother had one older sister who was also a dancer. My mother, who I guess was forced into the ballet lesson mode as a child, hated it from the beginning, and in every way that they were non-conventional, she was sort of conventional.

Q: Well, that's typical of what kids do.

COWAL: Right, right. And so my grandmother was sort of like a butterfly who never really was very happy being in one place for a very long time. I think my mother, as I then joined the Foreign Service and began to be a butterfly in my own way, I can remember saying to me once, "You have just found a legitimate way to be a gypsy." And I think she was not real pleased by that, because she saw the good things in life as being settling down in one community, with one husband and one house, and one thing which did not move. And she saw my desire to break out of this mold as somehow a throwback to her mother.

But my grandmother, as I knew her, never lived in anything but a hotel room, and she never cooked a meal. She always, to the end of her life, she dressed every afternoon. I mean, she would stay in hotel rooms for long periods of time. When I was a child, a young child, she lived at the Windermere Hotel in Chicago, and she had enough money from I guess my grandfather's pension and stocks and stuff that she could afford to do this.

Q: And this was a way of life for many people. I mean, you could live in a hotel, you could rent an apartment, without killing yourself.

COWAL: Right, right. That's what she did. She never owned a car, she never drove a car. She lived in the Windermere Hotel, and I would go over – we lived in Chicago also, and I would go and visit her many Saturday afternoons. She would take me to the theater and she would take me to the Museum of Science and Industry, and she would take me to the planetarium and the Art Institute. And so an awful lot of my early sort of cultural background – and she would read to me. From the time I was a very small child, she would read to me, and those are early and important influences in my life, that I have always loved books, I've always loved the theater, I've always loved art.

I began my Foreign Service career as a cultural specialist.

Q: Well, Chicago, particularly in that period, was exceptionally rich.

COWAL: Yes, it was.

Q: Looking at the Wright and Sullivan architecture, and then the Museum of Science and Industry, and then you had Sandburg and other guys mucking around there.

COWAL: My father had studied architecture, and that was his real love. I think had it not been the Depression, and had he been able to graduate in 1933 or '34, he would have hung out a shingle as an architect. He adored Louis Sullivan and also Frank Lloyd Wright. We would go and look at all the Sullivan buildings, and we made little trips to see Fallingwater, and of course Oak Park was rich in Frank Lloyd Wright.

Q: Of course, they have a wonderful auditorium building.

COWAL: And we saw the adjoined (ph) building. Being in the air-conditioning business, he had the opportunity to sort of air condition some of these famous things, and so was very interested in showing his children the architectural history of Chicago. So, yes, I'm very much I think influenced by that. I've always been a terrifically urban person. I wouldn't say urbane, necessarily, but I would say urban. I'm certainly not a suburban person, and I'm not even real happy in the country.

Q: It's nice for a while.

COWAL: I mean, I like cities. I function in cities. All those things come into your mind, I think, as you make career choices.

Q: With your mother, now, you say your mother and father met in high school?

COWAL: Yes.

Q: And then what happened? Did your mother go on?

COWAL: Well, my mother had a scholarship to Oberlin College, and for the same reason as my father, because her father died. I mean, I think one of the things they had in common was as they were sort of high school seniors, or right thereafter, each lost a parent. They had the Depression and then my mother lost her father and my father lost his mother. It affected both of their lives to the point where they were – I mean, my father was the valedictorian, my mother couldn't have been far behind. I mean, they were both extremely intelligent people. But my mother, instead of taking the scholarship, went to some sort of a commercial training program and learned how to be a secretary. She went to work in a company that I think made flavors and fragrances of some kind, and worked up to be the assistant to the president for, I guess, probably – they married when they were 23, so I supposed she worked five years. Always with the intention that she was going to marry my father as soon as they had enough money to do that. And so that's what she did, and she never worked another day in her life.

Q: An interesting thing about the Depression is, I saw a statistic somewhere, actually, women did better than men, because women could end up sort of in secretarial jobs and this sort of thing, where men usually had skills and they were paid more, so they were let go more. So it's harder for a man to get a job than a woman.

COWAL: Well, so I supposed, when you think about it, the Depression in many ways affected their lives quite fundamentally, but in another way, they were some of the fortunate few. I mean, as far as I know, they never went without a meal. They never starved. I mean, she had a job from the day she left high school, and I think my father did too. By then, his father, who had lost the whole business, nonetheless got a job in a lumberyard, selling lumber, because I guess although the business was depressed, there was still a certain demand. You had to replace things that were falling down or whatever, and my father worked with him.

So I think they had not jobs – or not educations, that they might have had otherwise. And when you think about my mother getting married in 1936 at age 23, and never working outside her home, that's pretty remarkable. And my grandfather was able to build my parents a home. He had all this land. He had all these lots that he had bought in Chicago. And for something like – I'm sure my father helped, but for something like $3,000 or $5,000 or something, they built a very nice brick, brick all the way around two-story house, and that was the American dream.

Q: And where? I mean, where in Chicago?

COWAL: In Chicago, on the southwest side of Chicago, near Midway Airport. It was a newly developing area. I mean, I think one of the things that was interesting about it was that it wasn't ethnic. It was of course ethnic, but it was multiethnic.

Q: Because so much of Chicago, still today, is pocketed by ethnicities.

COWAL: Well, of course. My father's family was from 26th Street, and 26th Street was the Bohemian neighborhood in Chicago, but they were both from the south side of Chicago and that's where they built their home. They became Episcopalians because my father was a Roman Catholic and my mother was a Swiss Calvinist, and my father had the experience of his best friend the year before marrying a Protestant girl. His best friend, almost by definition, would be Catholic. And he was the best man at his best friend's wedding. Ray Lecture married Eleanor Hall and they had to get married in the rectory of the church, because she did convert, but I think she hadn't yet converted, so they couldn't get married in the church. And she had to agree, of course, children would be raised Catholic and so on.

My father just said he never wanted his wife to be a second-class citizen, and they would have to find a place that would be compatible with them both, and so they became stalwart Episcopalians.

Q: I was just going to say, if you were to take the Catholics and the Calvinists and add them together and divide by two, you'd come up Episcopalian.

COWAL: More or less, and so that's what they did and a very logical decision on their part. They were married in St. Bartholomew's Church on August 1st, 1936. And that's where we were baptized, and that was then their church.

Q: What are your earliest sort of memories of growing up on the south side of Chicago?

COWAL: Well, for me, it was a good compromise. You don't think about these things, but it was fairly rich, culturally. I had, through both my parents and my grandmother, a pretty steady diet of cultural stuff.

Q: Theater was a solid theme?

COWAL: Yes. Theater was, music was. I mean, I don't think it's quite as intense as my friends who grew up on the upper west side of New York. I mean, the southwest side, you could get everywhere on public transportation, and we always had a car, but you didn't walk down the street and find a theater. You might walk down the street and find a movie theater, but not a theater.

I went to Chicago public schools. For my parents, it was just a tenet of faith that you went to public schools. They were public school graduates. I mean, it was not within their realm of possibility to have thought of anything else, but it was also – it was not just an economic necessity, it was a belief. And so in my neighborhood, kids were either called Catholic or public, because the Catholic kids went to the Catholic school, by and large. And there were parallel institutions. There was Hubbard School, where I went, but there was St. Agnes's, or something, which was the Catholic school next door. When I got to high school, when I went to Lindblom High School, there was St. Rita's High School, and then the girls' school, whatever that was.

So the kids were Catholic or public and sort of separated themselves that way. But this was a new part of the city, and I suppose every house on that block was probably built between 1936 – my parents' was one of the older houses on the block – and 1950, I suppose. And so we knew all of our neighbors, and I would say all of them were upwardly mobile, white, middle-class Americans of second and third generations. I mean, that's the way I would characterize the whole neighborhood, and everybody had two kids. I mean, it wasn't suburbia, it was urbania, but it was the same kind of thing, so our playmates were within two blocks of our house.

I've just been to my 40th high school reunion and made arrangements to go with the girl who lived across the street from me, and we were in school since the first grade, and these are absolutely lifelong friends, and I think that's wonderful.

Q: With Chicago being such a diverse city as far as ethnicity, did this place have any smacking of different areas?

COWAL: Oh, very much so. It was not Hispanic, and it was not black; but it was almost every variant, because I think, unlike these neighborhoods which were ethnic enclaves of a single ethnic group, by the time these folks, who were second or third generation, moved away from where they had been brought up, where they had been brought up was probably some other part of the Chicago which belonged to their ethnic group. But then in a way they were assimilating by taking their families a little farther from the center of the city. In our block we had Italians and Germans and Polish and we were Bohemian, and Lithuanian and Ukrainian, reflecting, I would say, basically, the European immigration to the United States in its late 19th and early 20th century phase. The majority of the immigrants were coming from Southern Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe.

So that was the ethnic makeup of my neighborhood. We had a dentist, we had a couple of doctors, our next-door neighbor was a United Airlines captain. I mean, people were doing well. This I remember being the sort of early '50s.

Q: Yes, when you went to your friends' houses, was there a different smell of cooking in each house?

COWAL: Oh, yes, there was definitely ...

Q: This is one of the things I always remembered, going into a Jewish household and those wonderful kitchen odors.

COWAL: Right, and my mother's best friend – it's interesting, I later served in Israel, which we'll come to much later – but my mother's best friend when she was growing up was Jewish, and they didn't remain terribly close. But my mother learned how to make things like blintzes, and so it was not only walking into these other houses, but it was in a way beginning to become a melting pot, to absorb other cultures into your won. And so we had a little bit of a touch of other things that carry ...

Q: Let's do elementary school, work up to graduate. What do you recall about elementary school?

COWAL: Well, I recall that in, I think, the fourth grade, four of us or five us got double promoted, so we skipped a grade. I don't think that was because we were so smart. It was because we were really the cusp of the baby boom generation.

Q: Yes. More babies, basically.

COWAL: Yes, and we were a little edge, because I was born in '44 and my friends were born at the end – I mean, I was born August '44, and these kids were born in August and September and October. But by '45, you had masses of kids coming along, so I think they needed more space in those lower grades, so they were in those days, of course, standardized testing everybody. And so based on the standardized testing, and I suppose

how well you had done in the first three grades, they said, "Well, these kids don't need the fourth grade." And so we went to the fifth grade.

I can remember this friend who lived across the street from me and was my friend since kindergarten. As she recalls this story, originally, there were going to be four of us and she was not going to be in that group. And she just started to cry, because she and I were best friends and she couldn't imagine not sitting next to me in school. So, as she says, they took pity on her and they made her the fifth. I don't actually remember that. I remember that she was one of the five.

Those were kind of my closest friends, in a way, because we were separated out, and there were these three girls and two boys – my friend and I and then another friend whom I also just saw, who is now a judge in California. The five of us were kind of put on this fast track and told we were fifth graders. But you know what I remember about the Chicago public schools? And I think this is one of the tragedies of our age is that as little as 40 years ago, or 50 years ago, you could get an excellent education, and I assume in the public schools of any large city in the United State. I'm not sure that tragically that's not the case anymore.

Q: My son's kids are going to private school in Pasadena because the public school system isn't very good. When I grew up, I went to the South Pasadena school system back in the '30s, and it was considered one of the top systems in the country at the time. It's sad.

COWAL: So we had teachers who really developed our interest in things that stayed with us. I remember my fifth grade teacher was a man. It was the first time I think I had ever had a man, so there we were, younger than everybody else and in this fifth grade class, and it was Mr. Mulcahy. And Mr. Mulcahy taught all the subjects, but it was clear that what he was passionate about was history. So we were all into Egyptian history, and we were making pharaoh's temples, and I'm sure that it was all at the time that Tutankhamen was beginning to emerge.

So we went downtown to the museum of – I don't remember whether it was natural history or science and industry, but there was a big ...

Q: There was a big exhibit about that time.

COWAL: ... Tut show. And we went to the Museum of Science and Industry and we saw the captured German submarines, and we went in the coal mine, and we saw ourselves on television for the first time, and we learned about how sound moves. I think the classes were small enough or controllable enough or something so that in these ages, the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, I think the school and the community resources worked quite well together. Those were the advantages, again, of being in a big city like Chicago, is that we would be taken to really enrich our education by these extracurricular activities, but which were directly related to the curriculum. So I had a wonderful ...

Q: How about reading?

COWAL: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you read much?

COWAL: I read all the time. My grandmother, I think, had sparked this early interest in books, but my mother picked me up from school, me and these two friends, every Friday and we went to the library.

Q: A Carnegie library?

COWAL: Probably. A Chicago public library that was a few blocks from school where I think my father had gone to the same library and the librarian had known my father, who was also a reader. But the idea every Friday, you could only take seven books, and so every Friday we would return the seven books that we had read and we would pick up the next seven books.

So, literally, in those years, I read a book a day, and that was terribly important, again, to seeing a world that was beyond your world. I can remember, reading through, there was this whole section of biographies for children, basically, and I read every – and it was mostly, as I recall, American heroes, but I think I read those from A to Z. There were probably, I don't know, 200 in the series, and they were little orange books and they were probably 75 pages, so you could read one every day. But each week's sampler would have one biography and one history and this and one Nancy Drew or something totally fun.

Q: Yes, I was interviewing Theresa Loar, L-O-A-R, and saying she liked Nancy Drew, but the Hardy Boys had a bigger vocabulary, so she went after them, too.

COWAL: Well, I remember, I guess I wasn't as advanced as Theresa. I was hooked on Nancy Drew, I think, and everybody, or certainly my parents, knew that a big part of every Christmas present would be the latest books, I mean, the ones that I wanted to own. My grandmother and my aunt would on every occasion give me books, and unfortunately it's one of the things that's been lost. I don't know where they are, but they would give me really lovely editions of Alice in Wonderland and all the Louisa May Alcott books, but they would do these sort of luxury editions that were obviously meant to be just not read, but meant to be kept – keepsakes.

So, yes, reading was a huge ...

Q: Books were kind of sacred in the house?

COWAL: Yes, I mean, books were sacred, and I think my mother, who never had a day of what we would call higher education, I never saw without a book in her hand, and she

read exclusively nonfiction. For some reason, fiction just didn't interest her. Fiction interests me, but my mother read from the time she – well, she was her own housekeeper and her own cook and her own nanny, and we never did anything around the house. My mother said, "Your father goes to work and you go to school and my job is the house." So, I must say, I was lacking in those household chores, because she thought that was her job to do it. But between whatever she did to keep the house, she read books.

Q: I think this is one of the things that somebody who is looking at sort of the bare facts of the lives of people of your parents' generation and before, they'd say, well, when they got through high school or something like that, have no conception of the self. Harry Truman is a typical example, I mean, reading heavily. You didn't know a thing. You probably got as good, frankly, if not better, an education because it was done yourself, but it was done through reading.

COWAL: Right, absolutely. And my mother, for instance, wrote better than almost anyone I know, and for her entire life, I don't think there was a week that she didn't sit down and write – when I was not with her – when she didn't sit down and write me a quite long and interesting letter. And it wouldn't necessarily be a great treatise on a book she was reading – she might mention what she was reading – but it would be simply what was going on and the daily tasks.

One of the things that was very interesting to me was many years later, when she died – and she died about 10 years before my father – and my brother and my father and I went to see the lawyer who was doing her estate and so on a couple of weeks after she had died. And the lawyer was inquiring of my father what part of this was Mrs. Smerz's, what part of this money or whatever had been acquired by her own work and her own investments and her own whatever. And my father looked at him, totally shocked, and he said, "Well, you don't understand. It's all hers, because I couldn't have done any of it without her." And this was not some bullshit line for some interview.

I mean, he was just looking at it and he said, "Well, it was all hers," and that's true. I mean, he came to run his own business, this air conditioning firm, and he would come home from work every day and they would sit down, and we would all sit down at the dinner table, and they would discuss something about what was going on in the world, but then they would talk about what was going on in his business. She was never a partner in a formal sense, but she was clearly extremely involved about whether they should expand or not, or invest or not, or fire Charlie or hire Paul. So the sort of macroeconomics of business in the '50s and early '60s was something I learned about at the dinner table, because it was a topic of discussion.

Q: Since eventually we'll move to foreign affairs, what about both in your reading and dinner table and newspaper reading experiences, was there any focus – we're talking about the Cold War was cranking up by this time. Was there any look at that or travel?

COWAL: Not much travel. I mean, that was very interesting. We traveled extensively in the United States. I know I have been, and I think all of it with my family, I've been to every state in the continental United States by car or by train, with my family, because that was an important value. So we would jump in the car and travel every summer, and every winter, too, actually. Again, we would have fun, but we would stop at the roadside stops to read the roadside signs, and my mother would keep a travel log so that we could go back over what we had learned about Chattanooga and its history and the Civil War and what battle was carried out there and who had won it and who had lost it. And this was probably, by the time you got it home, had mustard on it because we'd have lunch in the car also maybe at one of these spots.

But there was this definite – and I think that's part of being immigrants, this feeling that it's our country and we should know it. I mean, essentially, I would say a rejection of the rest of the world. My dad was enough of a traditionalist that he never drove a foreign car, for instance. He was a great believer in the American experience and the American industrial experience. He had watched his father, I guess, gain and lose, and then I must say gain another fortune.

He had decided to sort of be an industrialist on a rather small scale, but profitable enough. He was associated with big companies like Carrier because he was the Carrier dealer for Chicago, and went off to Syracuse from time to time to get trained or to participate in a business conference or whatever. So they were very much focused on the American experience, but some things I remember from my childhood. My mother was absolutely in love – well, she was in love with several people. One was FDR. A second was Adlai Stevenson, who of course they felt very close to, because he was the governor of Illinois. The third, for my mother, was Abba Eban, because while she was doing her household tasks, when she ironed every day, or however often she ironed, she listened to the radio.

Q: He had a wonderful voice.

COWAL: He has a wonderful voice, and he was the ambassador at the United Nations. I do remember the coming – I don't remember, of course, the war ending, but I do remember some of the early discussions in the United Nations and the sort of forming of the United Nations, and it was an important value for them. I mean, after all, they had been through two World Wars. They were very small at the time of the First World War, but affected by it.

Then they had the Depression, and then they had the Second World War. So, for them, a world of peace and prosperity was very related to the United Nations. And then the other thing I remember from I think being about eight years old, was coming home and my mother would be glued to the radio, and she was listening to the Army-McCarthy hearings. My parents were very liberal ...

Q: It's odd, because out of that background you wouldn't think they'd be more conservative.

COWAL: Yes, but I mean, for instance, my mother refused to have the Chicago Tribune in the house – refused.

Q: With good reason.

COWAL: I think with good reason. By the way, it's now a very good paper, but in those days – and so they knew the whole McCormick tradition and stuff and despised it, and rejected it. And McCarthy they saw as a threat, a threat to what they wanted America to be like. Everybody in our neighborhood had "I Like Ike" signs, but not us. We were for Stevenson. And they all took the Tribune, and we didn't.

I can remember having early discussions with my mother, who was the one you saw when you came home from school, about why we didn't have an "I Like Ike" poster, and why we didn't like Ike, and why Governor Stevenson was the person whom we thought ...

Q: This was the '52 election.

COWAL: It was '52, so I was eight. Yes, I was eight. So all of those things I remember as being sort of both national and international issues of the first memories that I have. Then I remember also early discussions – I mean, I think I was always sort of brought up to be pretty passionate about the civil rights issue. And some of that was brought starkly home to me because my mother had a cousin who had married a man from Mississippi and who had gone to live there, and we would visit the cousins in Mississippi.

Q: Where in Mississippi.

COWAL: In Sardis, Mississippi, which is in the delta.

Q: Oh, boy.

COWAL: It's 50 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee. There are several things I remember from those trips. First of all, we would go down there, usually on the train. We were the Illinois Central, and that's how my cousin had met her husband, because he was the engineer – not a train engineer, but an engineer for the Illinois Central Railroad. And that ran from New Orleans to Chicago. So that's how they met. So they went back to Sardis, Mississippi, and started an extremely successful business based on the fact that the TVA had come in and the black people were leaving.

So that caused them to start appliance stores, because they thought people had to do their own washing and their own vacuuming, and they'll be able to do it because there's electricity.

Q: Well, the train you're talking about might have taken you down, but it was ...

COWAL: Well, that's what I was going to say. Then, when they would come to visit us, which they also did once or twice a year, we would go to meet them at the train. And it was the City of New Orleans, it was called, and it was the daylight train, and it takes about 12 hours, I think, this train trip. But they could get on in the morning and we would pick them up in the evening. And then there was the overnight train, which is called the Crescent City, I think, and we would sometimes take berths on the train.

But we would typically meet them, and there's the main Union Station in Chicago, but then there was a stop south. In fact, it was I guess before you got to Union Station as it was coming up from the south. And since we were southsiders, they would get off the train there. And of course the south side of Chicago is – maybe wasn't then, certainly is now – predominantly African American, but even then. And the reason it was becoming that so quickly was in part every time we would go to this train, and I assume every single day, you would see probably 1,000 black families emigrating to Chicago.

We talk about the movement of the Chinese internally, but this period of the '50s, every time we would go to meet that train, Howard and Lorraine and Joan would be the only white people on that train, the only white people. And 1,000 other people were getting off the train, and they mostly had enough stuff with them – or many of them had enough stuff with them – that you knew they were moving to Chicago. So that was one of the currents of life.

Then, around the same time, my aunt married a Mexican, named Louis Ramirez, and he was a barber and she was a dancer. After a couple of years of struggling, I guess, they decided to move back to Mexico. So, early memories, you ask me about my early memories, which I do remember the Cold War. I remember the bomb shelters that people had in their houses and I remember the air raid drills ...

Q: You would get under your desk.

COWAL: You'd get under your desk, and I also remember when I was in the 8th grade the Russians launched Sputnik, and suddenly we all had to study science, because as Khrushchev said, "We will bury you," and we became convinced that they would. And so we all had to become scientists, because the Russians were going to bury us.

But a very close experience for me was this Mexican experience, and again, because of the resistance of my parents to anything outside the United States, we never went to Mexico. My grandmother did, and stayed for long periods of time. My aunt would send back lots of photographs, and she would bring and send back lots of toys and stuff. So I would have little painted chairs, and she would always call me "*muta chita*" and "*mi mita*". Harriet was extremely fluent in Spanish. Even after she got typhoid fever and almost died, my grandmother went down to bring her back. Then the marriage ended and she came back to Chicago, and she remarried someone else, who was also very close to me.

But I can certainly remember Uncle Louis, who looked like the typical Latin pretty boy from the movies. He had a little hairline moustache and he wore pinstripe suits and a fedora hat. And my aunt would speak to me in Spanish, and even after she moved back to Chicago and became sort of a *gringa* (American, foreigner) again, she would listen to the radio all the time, too, but most of the time in Spanish.

So I can remember going into her house, and for her entire life, she remained interested in Mexico, in Latin America and in speaking Spanish and sought ways to do that. So, foreign influences, yes, there were some. There was some notion of history.

Q: When you got to high school, you went where to high school?

COWAL: I went to Lindblom Technical High School.

Q: How do you spell that?

COWAL: L-I-N-D-B-L-O-M.

Q: What's that from, do you know?

COWAL: A Swedish immigrant to Chicago, I believe.

Q: Well, it was a technical high school. What did this mean?

COWAL: Well, it meant that – it's a high school of about 3,000 kids on the south side of Chicago, about probably 2,500 of those kids were not going to go to college, were pursuing what they would call technical careers, which for boys meant they had workshops in automobiles. They had carpentry, they had electricity. I mean, you could learn a trade. Essentially, it was a trade school.

And the girls, you could study a commercial program, which was stenography and typing, and you could study home economics, which was sewing and cooking and whatever else they taught you. And then because it was also the public high school for my area, and it was where my parents had gone to school and where they had met and so on, so it was our public high school, and that's where we were sent to school.

We took the bus, the public bus for the city, the CTA, the Chicago Transit Authority, bus. It was a trip of about 30 or 40 minutes on the bus every day. We walked down to the corner of 63rd and Keillor and we got on the bus, carrying at least six books. We didn't have backpacks. I don't know, they hadn't been invented, I think.

Q: They had book bags, but these were considered to be a little ...

COWAL: We had – this was me, going to school.

Q: You're putting some folders and all together.

COWAL: Over this shoulder was my gym clothes, and then you could somehow get the token out of your pocket and get it into the box. So we went down – for those of us who were in the academic program, and they had what they called a track system, and they would take, I think it was 25 or 30 kids. And we spent all our time together, because we were in advanced college prep classes. And so we went through a rigorous high school curriculum, including trigonometry and calculus and world history and United States history and languages, the full college prep, what you had to do to be an educated person, and I think we got a pretty good education.

I know, also, things have changed these days. The whole tracking system is considered to be, I don't know, one which discriminates against minorities and so on. Our track system, we had no Hispanics, and we had – I guess of the 30 of us, there were a couple of black kids, one of whom was my very, very good friend, our very good friend. But that's where we went to high school.

After school, we stayed at school for hours and hours and hours because there were extensive after-school programs. We were involved in all of the clubs and between me and my 10 friends, we pretty much ran it. Somebody was the president of the student council and I was the editor of the year book and somebody else was the editor of the newspaper.

We did all this athletic stuff so I was on whatever it was, the girls athletic council, or some such thing, and taught fencing, played volleyball and swam in swim meets. So, one thing or another, school and after-school activities absorbed – and homework was our life.

Q: When you started getting into history and I guess world affairs and all, how'd you find that being taught?

COWAL: History was always a passion of mine, and I really think I early on settled on really liking American history and really enjoying the studying of American history. I think that was encouraged both at home for me, and in my high school classes. I can remember, again, a brilliant history teacher – American history. We must have been juniors, and the whole semester project was sort of a very, very, very elaborate treasure hunt of facts, which had to be traced down, and could only be traced down by seeking out public libraries in the city.

So we would be at the Chicago Public Library, which is a magnificent institution, but not the little branch from which I got seven books every week when I was in elementary school, but the Chicago Public Library on Michigan Avenue, with the library lions in front of it, the Carnegie Library. We would go down there and we would spend hours trying to figure out – it would be a clue which would lead you to a clue which would lead you to a clue, and these were projects which were teaching you something about facts in

American history. And I think we were in teams, or something, and there was a competition, of course, so the red team had to get all the answers before the blue team did, or whatever.

Of course, we loved it, and it not only taught us some history, but it taught us, again, about the resources that are available in an American city, or were available in an American city in the late '50s, early '60s, to any citizen who wished – before the Internet – who wished to take advantage of them. But you could go, and these things required you to use all the resources of the library. You would have to get into the microfiche and the microfilm to go back through newspapers, and the only way you could find some reference to what they were talking about was to get the New York Times on microfilm for 1845 and begin to look for whatever.

It was ingeniously done, one of the best projects that I have ever seen, and I can't remember the teacher's name, which is awful. One of my friends would remember it. And we had a wonderful English teacher, Ms. Garrety, who had been there since my parents' time and who remembered my parents. Despite the fact you were in a school of 3,000 in a rapidly changing ethnic mix on the south side of Chicago, there was a fabric there, and there were people who remembered your parents and had known your brother and connected you with something, and I think made you part of a tradition.

You couldn't misbehave, because Ms. Garrety knew your mother. Among other things, she was an absolute stickler for grammar and punctuation – I guess all English teachers are – but one of the ways that she would get us there is that she would read columns. She would read Sydney Harris, who was a syndicated columnist, I think in the Chicago Daily News, who was beautiful – I suppose maybe he didn't have the political hang-ups of Safire, but I suppose like Safire he cared a lot about language and how it was used.

Q: William Safire being a columnist who has written much about the language, but comes out of the Republican tradition. He had actually been a White House writer.

COWAL: Right, I think so. But Sydney Harris is one of his forbearers, or William F. Buckley, or somebody who makes extremely good use of the language. And so Ms. Garrety, one exercise one day each week was to read us one of his columns and simply to dictate to us. And we would have to write it down and get all the words spelled correctly, and all the semicolons where they belonged, and all the colons where they belonged. I would never put an apostrophe in its where it's not supposed to be, and would put it where it is supposed to be, which is something I learned in high school.

So we diagramed sentences and we parsed sentences, and I think that that strong grammatical base has helped me enormously to learn foreign languages. Although our foreign language teaching was terrible, the structure at least of the English language, I know what a pronoun is, I know what an adverb is, I know how they function in a sentence, and I learned that from Ms. Garrety. And I think that's been an awfully important building base to the rest of my education.

Q: You mentioned language. Were you taking a language?

COWAL: Yes. I took Spanish, but I must say I remember very little. I think traditionally languages at that time were not well taught at the high school level and by public school teachers. Somehow, although they tried to have language clubs and stuff, what I guess I remember more was having some exchange students in our classes, and we would have an exchange student from Ecuador or something, and the AFS student, and that would ...

Q: American Field Service.

COWAL: Yes, that would get – I ran Youth for Understanding, which is another large high school exchange program, just a couple of years ago. I remembered being the president of the AFS club in high school for a year, and the club was to welcome the student and to learn – they would try to say, "Well, Juanita's coming from Ecuador. Let's learn about Ecuador before Juanita comes so that we can welcome her." And Juanita would bring some pictures and whatever she would bring from Ecuador, and we would learn a little bit about other countries that way.

By then, they were getting into a little bit more deference to our own ethnic backgrounds. That only developed really much later, but there was some feeling. They would have a bunch of flags up on the stage, representing the countries from which our forbearers had come. But, mostly, I think if you came from an Eastern European background, you learned about Communism, you learned about the Cold War, you learned about the Iron Curtain.

Now, we were too far removed to actually have relatives that we knew about who where there. Some of my friends were not, however. Some of them had these experiences of being totally cut off. I mean, ours, as far as I know, had all come to the United States. But I think if you were Irish, that was something that you could somehow be sort of proud of. People knew what being Irish was all about, and there was St. Patrick's Day and there was corned beef and cabbage and there was the leprechaun.

I won't say that we knew much about it, but ...

Q: Good songs.

COWAL: But we knew good songs. And if you were German, there was still a big German influence, despite the war. And one of my good friends was German, and that was for a while somewhat embarrassing, that she was German. They never anglicized their name – her name was Ulleweit. They never became the Allwhites or anything. Nonetheless, it was something that you didn't want to talk about what grandpa's background – "was daddy a Nazi?" was not much discussed.

World War II was in the past by the time I got to be to the point of consciousness. I don't remember anything about the war. I don't remember victory gardens, I don't remember any of it. I don't remember rationing. I'm just that post-war generation. But I do remember some discussion, but if your ancestors were from Czechoslovakia, that wasn't something to be proud of, and I think one of the reasons that that was true was because they had been sort of run over by the Russians, and they had become Communists. And I don't know if we knew what Communist was, but it certainly wasn't good.

Therefore, somehow, you wanted to distance yourself from this ethnicity, the way you might not have wanted to distance yourself from being French or German, and the same was true of the Poles.

Q: I remember talking back in the '70s to the consul general from Poland, and he said, "I've got a constituency second to Warsaw right here in Chicago."

COWAL: It was huge, but it was mostly buried. I think that was because – first of all, it was culturally not so identifiable, whereas the Poles and the Czechs knew who they were and knew they weren't the same thing, and even up through my father's generation. He knew that an S-K-I was Polish, but an S-K-Y was Bohemian, or at least that's what he thought, and I guess that's generally true, although I think S-K-Ys are often Jewish, too.

But, anyway, for him, if your name was spelled S-K-I you were a Polack, and he was a Bohunk, and neither of those was particularly a flattering term, and I don't think they particularly mixed between themselves. But they all got somehow under the same tent with the rest of them. And I think even being a Russian was somehow distinct, because it seemed to be a more distinctive language, and a more distinctive history.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire never particularly separated itself out for anybody in my generation or social class. So we went around, outside the house, not paying much attention to that. Inside the house, whereas my father spoke no Czech, and of course my mother wasn't Czech, food was important. And our house often smelled like dumplings and sauerkraut and roast pork and roast duck when it was a festive occasion. My mother learned to cook it, and she learned it from my father's stepmother.

So, the traditions of making the *koláches* (Czech wedding pastry) and making the sauerkraut and dumplings, I think the Bohemian tradition stayed through us more through food. It was certainly not through language. We got a little Dvorak, but it was just part of the musical mix. It wasn't anything particular. I think I knew who Tomas Masaryk was, but the history of it, and therefore the language of it, were somewhat embarrassing.

Q: Well, it didn't resonate very much.

COWAL: No.

Q: And the Poles were considered the workers and the Bohunks were in the mines, this type of thing.

COWAL: Right, right.

Q: There was a very definite social caste to this. Did you learn Bohemian cooking?

COWAL: I can cook, yes. I can cook, and I like to do that, and I still do.

Q: That's a great inheritance.

COWAL: Yes, it is, and it wasn't more than a week ago that I prepared – no dumplings, because it's too hot – but I made some sauerkraut in the Bohemian way and did a pork loin and sauerkraut, and it's pretty good stuff.

Q: It is damn good stuff.

COWAL: And when I go back to Chicago, I often seek out a Bohemian restaurant that I will want to go to and eat at. I will make *koláches* at Christmastime, and stuff like that. So, yes, I learned to cook it, and it's one of the things that remains vibrant to me about my heritage.

Q: What about movies and TV? Do they play much of a role? I mean, you're reading, you're active in all these things.

COWAL: Well, we were the last ones on the block to get a TV, and I think I was 10 when we got the TV, which was 1954, and by then I was a reader. So, TV never played much of a role in my life. We watched I Love Lucy on Monday nights. I do recall that. And we watched The Kraft Theater on Sunday nights. And when I got a little older, I think I watched Dragnet on Friday nights.

Of course, we went to the movies, and I mean, I can remember some of the blockbuster movies. We had to go all the way downtown to see South Pacific because it had the surround sound and it was this huge screen.

Q: Cinemascope screen.

COWAL: And Mitzi Gaynor and whatever, on that screen. I remember stuff like that, but I said, I think that I had become a reader before TV, and so I was not, and have never been – I mean, I will go now whole weeks without – I have I think five televisions in my house. But I can't tell you how little I watch them. Even news for me still comes for the newspaper. I mean, I'll watch the Lehrer News Hour if I remember it and I'm at home. The rest of them I won't watch, because I just don't find anything very interesting.

Q: Well, they're not very good, I must say.

COWAL: They're not very good. And we were newspaper readers. My parents, I said, would not have the Tribune, but we got the Sun-Times in the morning and the Daily News in the afternoon, and those were read by everyone in the house, and discussed – discussed, read and discussed.

Then, later, when I came to Washington, which we're skipping ahead, but I came for a year as part of my undergraduate school, I decided that one of the reasons I could never go back to Chicago was because it was so provincial, because the newspapers in Chicago really – I mean, at the time I was here in Washington, it was about the Tonkin Gulf. And of course I was following these notes in the Congress daily, and I went to Chicago and I couldn't find anything about the Tonkin Gulf. So it was way too provincial for me and I could never live there.

Now I look on it and I say, of course, Chicago is a city you could live in, but my horizons were by then international.

Q: Well, I think most of our experiences, that if you – I mean, when I go to Houston or San Francisco or something like that – or Chicago – I feel I've fallen off the edge of the world.

COWAL: Right, absolutely.

Q: Because you get to the raw meat of the New York Times or the Washington Post and the rest of the stuff, it just isn't there.

COWAL: Right, and USA Today doesn't exist for me. I mean, I just ...

Q: Frankly, it's better than most of the local papers.

COWAL: I know it is, and I have to admit that, and then I hate it, because I think that there is something charming about a local paper. USA Today is basically the CBS News translated to print, and it's ...

Q: All little capsules.

COWAL: All little capsules, and it's all to be in an attention span of no more than three seconds, and it's all national. Obviously, it's not local. And I want a local newspaper that I can get my toes into the mud on, and you have that. In those days, you had it in Chicago to a certain extent.

I mean, The Chicago Daily News had bureaus all over the world. I mean, they did. They had a Washington bureau and a London Bureau and a Moscow bureau, so you got coverage from all over. They had some wonderful columnists that you looked forward –

Sidney Harris – and you read and you discussed and debated, and we would use those newspapers in classes as the basis for current events discussions and all that kind of stuff.

Q: Well, one of the things – I like to sort of make these asides – that you were building up, and I find that I think it's worked for all of us, if you're brought up in this environment, you're building up a real database that you'll be using as a Foreign Service officer to a great extent. Because you're familiar with a lot of things that you really weren't paying a lot of attention to before, but it's the reading, both the newspaper and books, magazines.

COWAL: Right. It really is, and again, we didn't get The Economist, which I don't even know if it circulated then, which is something also I wouldn't be without today. But we got – and Time was too conservative. Remember Henry Luce.

Q: Yes, old Henry.

COWAL: We didn't want Henry Luce's thing, but we had Newsweek. So, every week Newsweek came, and that got read cover to cover, too, I must say, and it got read the day it arrived. And then, somehow, the Reader's Digest got let in, which I thought was very conservative. It was a little condensed, and if you were on the bus or something, it was easy to read ...

Q: To put in your pocket.

COWAL: ... to put in your pocket and to take with you, and, again, it was learning about the world. And then they had these word games in there that you played the game. One of the other things my mother did every day was I think the Sun-Times would reprint the New York Times crossword puzzle. So she would do the New York Times crossword puzzle, and my father, also, and they were damn good at them.

I mean, to this day, I can't do a crossword puzzle, but my father, I think to the day he died, he would read the paper, beginning to end, and then he would turn back to the crossword puzzle. And then, in ink, he would do the crossword puzzle. It forced them to have their brains work.

Q: Sure.

COWAL: And their brains worked, and their vocabularies grew, and they were wonderfully articulate.

The other thing, because we may not get back to this in a later session, that I think is awfully important to me and to my career – not only to me as a person, but to my career, was the wonderful relationship that my parents had. I think that is so fundamental to everything that I admire and envy, because I'm not sure I've ever had that kind of relationship. They were so much to one another, and they were so secure. They were

secure in their relationship, and each had such a clear identity. They knew who they were, and therefore their children knew who they were, and I think that that is so important. I mean, that's something that I'd like to say to the next generations about me, that that was so important.

Of course I knew that, but after my mother died and I was in Israel at the time, but came back, of course, and my dad asked me if I would clean out my mother's dresser and so on, and take what I wanted, of course, and give away the rest. It was a thing that is a part of one of life's rituals, I guess, that we have to go through. So I did.

They were very private, too. I mean, they shared so much with their children, but their life as a couple was very much their life as a couple. So I don't ever recall going through my mother's underwear drawer until she had died. I mean, you just wouldn't do it. So, there I was, kind of going through my mother's underwear drawer and finding all that very strange, that why should I be doing this. And at the bottom of the drawer there was a birthday card, and it was of course to my mother, and of course it was from my father. It was from – she died in August, and her birthday was in October, so it was the October before she died.

And the note on it was "Dear Ginny, today is your 69th birthday, I've known you since your 16th, and I've never loved you more than I do today." And it breaks me up every time I tell it. It broke me up then and it breaks me up today when I'm telling you the story, but that was so fundamental to their relationship. And it was this incredible, almost 50-year relationship, and I was very lucky to have been born into it.

Q: Well, I think, actually, this is a good place to stop.

COWAL: I think so, too.

Q: And I put at the end, sort of, so we'll know where to pick it up. We've gotten really up to, I'd say, about the end of high school. And we'll pick this up the next time. When did you graduate from high school?

COWAL: Nineteen-sixty-two.

Q: Nineteen-sixty-two, and we'll pick it up in 1962, and it's with Sally.

COWAL: Good.

Q: Great.

COWAL: Thank you.

Q: Okay, today is August 21st, 2001. With us, Sally, 1962. You're on.

COWAL: Okay, I'm not sure.

Q: Well, where'd you go after you graduated from high school?

COWAL: I went to DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, which is a small – not so small – a medium-size liberal arts college, a safe choice for me, and I think mostly directed by my parents, who wanted me to have some degree of freedom. In some ways, they wanted me to have a lot – degree of freedom – but within a world that for them had limits on it. And those limits were, I guess, Christian in a way, although certainly not fundamentalist, but Christian, Midwestern, safe.

So the kids who went to school at this place were generally very good students, but not as good as the students who went to Harvard, by and large. I mean, they were good students from upper middle class families from the suburbs of Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis and a few easterners and westerners thrown into the mix. But I would say, basically, it was 200 miles from home, it was a Methodist school, and it turned out to be a fine choice for me.

It was not quite as broad a gauge as I would have liked, but it was the only time in my life I've ever lived in a small town. Greencastle, Indiana is 40 miles from Indianapolis. This is a Methodist school, which meant strict social conformity, no drinking, obviously, no – I don't remember about smoking. I never smoked, but I guess you could smoke. No cars on campus. Girls had to be in at – women students had to be in at, I think, 10:00, as I recall, except on Fridays and Saturdays, when you could be out until 12:00, but a strict curfew. And this little town of 5,000 people in the middle of the Indiana cornfields, but I say, with a student body composed mostly of young people who had grown up in non-rural environments, although they continued to give some more scholarship assistance and so on to Indiana kids.

So you had this mix from all over the Midwest, and then you had some real Hoosiers from little towns, from Kokomo and all these funny little places. I guess I learned I would never want to live in a small town for my entire life.

Q: Well, it does sound like, in a way, you were – particularly with no cars, that you were trapped.

COWAL: We were trapped.

Q: What courses, what sort of turned you on? What activities did you get involved in?

COWAL: Well, let me mention one thing before what courses turned me on, and for all that I seem to have put it down, it was a very – it was what a liberal arts education was meant to be, and that was to expand the mind. It was a pretty good grasp of what were important pieces of literature, what were important writing skills, what was it like to have a good debate or a discourse. I had many professors, and this was a place that focused on

teaching, not on research, and so while I think virtually the whole staff had a PhD and so on, they were not, with a few exceptions, eminent scholars. But they were people who cared about the life of the mind and cared about sharing that with students, and in that sense, it was a very rich and wonderful experience.

The day I got to university, and I was reminded of this last night because I saw a little thing on the ABC 11:00 news about parents taking their kids to American University. It was just one of these little vignettes, so all the kids were going up to the dormitory, and of course today they all have CD players and computers and DVD players ...

Q: And refrigerators.

COWAL: And we had two trunks of whatever we had trunks of. But I do remember my parents sitting down with me the first day we were – the day they delivered me to school – and my father writing me a check, which was for all four years of my education. And he handed me the check and he said, "This is what your mother and I have saved for your university education. It's yours. It's yours whether you choose to put it toward your education, or whether you think there's something better for you to do than education. I don't think you should keep it all in this check. I think you should go and open a banking account and put some of it into an interest bearing account which will get you some interest and get a checking account with the rest of it."

I never had a checking account, and this was four years – a hell of a lot less than it would be today, but still, at that point in time, a significant amount of money. And he said, "If you run out of money," he said, "you just let me know and I'll sign a work permit for you."

So the limits were very clearly set. I wasn't meant to have to work, I wasn't meant to have to get a scholarship, but I wasn't meant for this to go on forever and ever, either. This was to be my university education, and it was a place that I had chosen, but within some pretty carefully drawn parameters, some of which were probably limited by my ability and my background, where I had come from, and some of which were definitely they had certain expectations and they had certain rules and they had certain limits. And you chose, in order not to be in conflict with them, within that defined set of rules and regulations.

But, at any rate, I got all the way through college. I worked in the summers to supplement what they had given me, but with the money that they gave me, I did everything I needed to do and I bought clothes and I bought books and I did whatever traveling I did. Although, every time you traveled, they had to sign permission for you to be away from campus. And it took me to Washington, DC, when I finished college and sort of tided me over until I got my first paycheck.

So it was a terribly thoughtful gift, very well thought out. If I could do that for any kid of mine, I think it's a wonderful way to promote responsibility: "and now it's yours, and it's

not ours anymore, and do with it what you will, and there isn't any more where this is coming from. This is it." So I thought that was a pretty good touch.

I guess I immediately, in terms of coursework and so on – I immediately got enamored with history, which I think is something that I had been turned onto earlier on in high school and even in elementary school. But I continued to find history being, I think, the subject that most interested me.

In later years of college, I concentrated the history and built around it, political science, sociology, literature, all of which concentrated on what today we'd call American studies. I became very, very interested in post-World War II America. I guess that's what I liked, and that of course turned out to be perfect preparation for the Foreign Service exam and all the rest of it. But that was not a career goal. That was what interested me.

I liked 20th century American literature and I liked 20th century American history, and I liked Depression, studying the Depression and what Roosevelt had done to strengthen the federal government. Those were all the things that I came to find fascinating and interesting. And that led me to, I guess, the formative experience of my undergraduate years – well, one of the formative experiences, which was coming for a semester to Washington, DC, to participate in American University's Washington semester program. And that's how I found out about the Foreign Service.

But the reason I came to Washington was – well, two. I was very interested in the subject matter, but secondly, I had wanted to do a junior year abroad, and that didn't fit in with my parents' notion of how far away I should be and what I should be doing. And so that was very discouraged, but coming to Washington for a semester was okay, and, of course, ironically the coming to Washington for a semester is what told me there was a State Department and a Foreign Service and how you could get into that Foreign Service. That's what then led me to all ends of the Earth, not something they would have chosen for me.

Q: Well, and noting, looking at the times, you went there in '62. Did foreign affairs, international affairs – you arrived just almost in time to have the Cuban missile crisis.

COWAL: Oh, yes.

Q: I was wondering whether that and sort of the spirit of Kennedy, who really pushed the button of youth, really said government work and get out into the ...

COWAL: Right, and that's ...

Q: Did that permeate what you were ...

COWAL: Absolutely. I suppose that and the Beatles were permeating experiences. But I think my whole public service career was really certainly stimulated by Kennedy. I mean,

I, as a 16-year-old, had handed out leaflets for Kennedy on the streets of Chicago to people getting off the trains and so on. So I think there were probably not very many – I was 16 in 1960, when he was elected. So there probably weren't many 16-year-olds in the country who wouldn't have voted for him, had they been able to vote.

There were a lot of us who were turned on by that, but for me, it did become the vocation. There was a sense that we had, I don't know, not even so much an obligation – there was a sense that this was fascinating and this was larger than the world of business, which was where I had grown up, and that this was something to be passionate about, and to be socially committed to. And I guess the third influence in there was civil rights and the civil rights movement, and getting involved – again, this Methodist school, which was very conventional in many ways, was also – there was a part of it, and of the Methodist Church and so on, which was pretty socially conscious.

We went on voter rights organizing trips in the South a couple of my spring breaks, and so I was very involved in, I would say, civil rights at home. But things such as the Cuban missile crisis – and then, of course, I was a junior when Kennedy was assassinated. And like everybody else in the United States who was alive that day, I can tell you just where I was.

Q: Probably were a sophomore.

COWAL: All right, thank you, I was a sophomore. I stand corrected.

Q: It's a historical record, you know.

COWAL: I do stand corrected. Exactly. It was fall of '63, and so I was a sophomore. The first fall, the fall of '62, my mother also had a heart attack, so that was the first notion I think I ever had of their mortality, of the fact that they might not be around forever. So, there were personal things and there were non-personal things in life that were important to me in those years.

Q: What about on the civil rights side? What did you do?

COWAL: Oh, we went to Mississippi. I mean, first of all, there were a couple of incipient groups on campus. There were almost no blacks on campus. It was a very, I say, upper middle class, WASPy school from the cities in the middle West. But the girl who lived across the hall from me – and of course, I grew up in Chicago, I had black kids I went to school with, and suddenly I was in this atmosphere which was almost entirely white, except for the girl across the hall from me, whose name was Doc Campbell. I mean, we called her Doc. I don't even remember her first name, and she was this magnificent, wonderful human being from – I think she was from Mississippi. And she was one of the handful of black students on the campus.

I guess through her I got involved with what passed for civil rights groups, which centered around the sort of Methodist student groups, really, that then decided to reach out. One spring we went to sort of hand out leaflets and do a little tour in the South and so on. So I was not a leader of the civil rights thing, but I was certainly aware of it, and I think watching, again, as with many Americans, watching the events in Selma and Montgomery and the power of television.

Well, I think my civil rights involvement came from a few people I knew, a few meetings I went to, and then coming from, I must say, parents who were very liberal in that sense, as I described the last time. They were Stevenson Democrats, and they were very – they weren't very liberal in the sense that I now understand, having a much broader group of friends, and friends whose parents were Communists and who were very, very liberal. My parents were not, but certainly within their social group and their economic status and so on, they were quite liberal, and they very much believed in civil rights and equality and so on.

So it was not a rebellion for me to believe in those things, but the most profound experiences I had I think were not personal experiences so much as watching Selma and Montgomery and places like that, and Birmingham, on TV, and watching the cattle prods and the water hoses. That was probably also what led me to the government, because I had this position of believing that the United States government, the federal government, were the good guys, and the federal government was Bobby Kennedy fighting organized crime, and Jack Kennedy doing the Peace Corps. So these became very much the good guys to me, and of course that's what led me to a government career.

I have to say the other thing that led me to a government career was equal opportunity for women, and the lack of equal opportunity for women, at least as perceived by me or as told to me by my father, in the business community. He asked me early on whether I wanted to teach or I wanted to be a nurse, and I said I didn't want to either teach or be a nurse, and he said, "Well, I think you better go to secretarial school in the summers."

That wasn't meant to be a putdown. That was meant to be a realistic view of if I wasn't going to be a teacher or a nurse, therefore I was obviously going to work for business. I was going to have a business career, and the only way I'd get my foot in the door was as a secretary. And through coming to Washington, I realized that there were these federal exams, and if you could pass the exams, you could get in.

Q: Was there at DePauw an atmosphere of the women who are going through there, were they going after the so-called Mrs. degree, which, to explain, means this is almost – it's not quite a finishing school, but you end up getting married, or something.

COWAL: Oh, there was an overwhelming number of women who planned to do exactly that. I joined a sorority, and certainly that was where most of – most of my sorority sisters were, of course with some exceptions. And I guess I fell into that exceptional group. I can remember being in one gabfest or meeting or whatever we called them, and everybody

was expressing how many children they wanted, and this ranged from two to 10 or something. I mean, it was this huge number of children, with I think, honestly, most people settling on about four as about the right number of children.

I would say most of them didn't really come from families of four so much. I mean, after all, this is not Catholic school. This is a Protestant school. Again, coming out of the sort of post-Depression years of their parents' childbearing ages being affected by the Depression and then the war, I would say most of us came from families of two or three, but most of us thought, again, with now growing up in the affluence of the late '50s and early '60s – a growing affluence – and I suppose the influence of the movies and so on, that the proper number of children to have would be somewhere about four. And those who were ambitious said six, and so on. And I said none, and that was considered to be utterly shocking. I mean, I can still remember that.

It wasn't that I hated children or anything. It was just I always had in mind that I was going to go and have a wonderful career, and I didn't see quite how that fit into the box of having children. I admire my younger colleagues who seem to have been able to do all those things rather better than I could see doing.

Q: It was a generation, still, of the super-mom mom who did everything.

COWAL: Right, and I say, I, at any rate, didn't see myself as having children. I saw myself as having a career, and that was going to be very important to me, and I was always focused in the direction of what was next after school for me, what would I do next.

Q: Well, did you find anybody who was in the faculty at all, either mentoring or sort of helping you, or was this purely internal?

COWAL: I'm sure there were people helping, and I can't focus. I mean, first of all, there were almost no women role models. There were no women role models in my little world. I have to say that. Because, if you didn't want to be a teacher – my mother, as I had explained early, never, quote-unquote, "worked a day," in her married life. In fact, reaction to that was clearly a motivating force, watching this woman who was terribly bright, and very engaging, and very well sort of self-educated, and read extensively and wrote wonderfully and thought. But it seemed to me that she also spent most of her life doing ridiculous things, like playing bridge and taking care of a house.

By the time I went to college, I had thoroughly rebelled against that. That wasn't what I was going to do. I wasn't going to live in the middle West, and I wasn't going to raise children, and I wasn't going to learn how to play bridge, and I wasn't going to take care of a house, and all that became very clear to me. That was I carry a brief case, not a shopping bag sort of thing.

Some of my "girlfriends," quote-unquote – many of my girlfriends – were certainly planning to have their mothers' life, only slightly better, slightly richer, maybe. But they came from a country club set, and they would join a country club set, and they would marry a young man who was going to be a doctor or be a lawyer or go into business with his father and be professionally successful. They were going to love this guy, don't get me wrong. This was not going to be an arranged marriage. This was going to be somebody they were head-over-heels in love with, but they were going to play a decidedly second role. They were going to be second fiddle in this orchestra, and I didn't want to do that.

How I came to believe that, or want that, or have those ambitions, I don't really know. I was certainly encouraged academically at DePauw to believe that I was as good as any male student. I mean, I was certainly in the top 5 percent of my class or whatever I was. I mean, I did as well as anybody did. I got elected to Phi Beta Kappa in my junior year. I was a very good student, throughout. And, of course, by the time you got to college, you didn't have to take any more math classes, so I could choose the things that I did well at and the things that I liked. I continued to read and read and read and read, and loved it.

Q: Did you find yourself – something I'm told, I went to all-male schools, so I can't comment – that there was any problem of speaking up in class, because I'm told so often that it gets to be a competition. The guys sort of edge out the women.

COWAL: I don't know, I don't think I found that as a problem. I think I was encouraged to find a voice fairly early on, and again, maybe that's because it was not such a cutthroat competition school that there was – it was a rather civil atmosphere. I mean, clearly, there was friendly competition for grades and for whatever else.

I also found a boyfriend early on, and that was wonderful because he felt very much the same way I did about an awful lot of things and he was also a very good student, and most of our dates were library dates. So we would go to the library every night, and then he would walk me home by 10:00, when I had to be back to my room. And that, I think, also took a whole lot of social pressure off of me, because like everybody else I had a boyfriend, and that was fine.

That's a whole other story. We later married and we later divorced, and finally we still remained extremely good friends, which is what we always were, extremely good friends. And we were good friends. We met as 17-year-olds and we are friends to this day at – I'll be 57 this week. It's been a long and good friendship. It didn't work particularly well as a marriage, but that's a whole other story.

So I carved out a life for myself there, which I would say was focused on the kind of national issues and academic pursuits, and not socially ostracized, but not trying to be the homecoming queen either. I must say, Dan Quayle lived next door to me for four years, I guess. I never knew Dan Quayle, because I think that Dan Quayle spent most of his time on the golf course and in the bars, or wherever he was, but certainly not doing the things

that I was doing, which were very much – what was I involved in, again? I was involved in the year book and the debating societies, the things that essentially attracted the kids who were mainly there because they wanted to get a great education.

But there was a whole range, because this was a school of rich pretty boys, there were a whole range of students who, as George Bush got gentleman's Cs at Yale, who could get gentleman's Cs at DePauw, and they could get out of school and they could be assured of a job. They could either get into a business school – probably not into a law school, for which you had to be a little bit more rigorous, but they could probably, in those days, get into a business school. And they could aspire at the end of the day to either working with dad in the family business, or using the DePauw connections or their fraternity connections, which were pretty good, to start on the ranks of corporate America.

Q: Within the basic orbit of DePauw, in a way.

COWAL: Yes, but I say, that orbit – I mean, Bernie Kilgore, who owned the Wall Street Journal was a DePauw alumnus. Vernon Jordan is a DePauw alumnus, for that matter. There was a net that was not confined to the pharmacy owner in Greencastle.

Q: I've got you.

COWAL: It was an Inland Steel net, or it might have been primarily Midwestern, but not exclusively so, and it could move you up the corporate ladder, even though you spent ...

Q: You're talking about a male.

COWAL: A male. A female could not do that. A female could teach or she could nurse, and there was a nursing school, and a lot of my friends were in nursing school. I would say, in that respect, girls were not encouraged to be premeds, because it was just not thought that they would use that education. They were supposed save the medical school slots for the young men.

The draft still hung over our heads. That was certainly an issue for the young men. I mean, it was not all sweetness and light, because they all faced military service. I would say, whereas my years there might have begun with the Cuban missile crisis, by the time I was a junior, we were very focused on Vietnam, and we were getting very involved. Of course, for me, that was decidedly helped by coming to Washington for the semester. The semester that I was in Washington was when Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf resolution and we followed that stuff every day. We were there, every day, for this debate. We were intensely interested.

I can remember my spring break, I was going home to Chicago for spring break, and it was right when they were debating the Tonkin Gulf. Johnson was president. I went to Chicago and Cardinal Cooke, who was the Roman Catholic cardinal of Chicago, died, I think the day I got there. And that moved all national news out of all of the newspapers

and television stations. We could only concentrate – and this was the Irish influence you talked about – we could only concentrate on the funeral of Cardinal Cooke. And that's when I said, "I will never live in Chicago. It is far too provincial." Which, of course, 40 years later it isn't, but for me at the time, it seemed like Washington was where your hometown news was national news, and that was something that very much attracted me.

Q: How about newspapers when you were doing this? What does one read at DePauw in the '60s?

COWAL: Not a whole lot. I'm trying to think where we got national news. I think we lived in a vacuum, I really do. I think in classes, when we would get into civil rights or foreign policy, we would get certainly Time and Newsweek. I mean, I always subscribed to Time and Newsweek, or both.

Q: They were much more newsmagazines in those days. A little point of view, but they were news.

COWAL: You got the Indianapolis Star, which was run by Dan Quayle's family, of course, which is a terrible newspaper. You could get the Chicago Tribune, which was in those days as bad, and this is not only before the Internet, but this is before the New York Times made its way, and before USA Today existed, by a long shot. And I don't remember listening much to television news, either. Of course we did when something like Kennedy's assassination, and immediately classes were suspended.

Four of us went to a friend's house. She was from Indianapolis. And we went to her house and we stayed glued to the television set for the Jack Ruby shooting and the funeral, I mean, the whole – all of those days will forever live in my memory, I think. But classes were immediately suspended, and we went off onto this mode of being involved with the Kennedy funeral.

But on a day to day basis, I guess we got the radio, and beyond that, we didn't get a whole lot of news. The only other event that I remember is some of us got involved as juniors and seniors in – what was it called – the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, which was Rhodesia. And by then we had a couple of Rhodesian students, and we got all involved in Rhodesia, and of course I was taking classes all along in foreign policy.

Q: This was Ian Smith, the ... (CROSSTALK) *Very much a cause which any liberal was opposed to this all-white government.*

COWAL: Some of the things like that flashed by, and since I was studying foreign policy and international relations and Hans Morgenthau and all of that kind of stuff – did I have any complaints about DePauw? Not really. It was a four years that was kind of an incubator. It was in many ways way removed from the real world, but it provided a chance to, again, know yourself better, and I think – especially for success in a career that takes you to so many different cultures and so many different locales and geographies and

everything, knowing yourself is pretty important. Knowing yourself is then being able to see yourself against these many different backdrops, and saying that I know who I am. What's important to me? What makes me me? What is it that I don't just give up for the latest trend or the latest bend in the wind or the latest this, that or the other thing? And those were some of the important things that I learned as a student. It was a very self-indulgent time, to get to know something about me.

Q: But you're also learning about the country, too.

COWAL: And learning about the country, and learning with a focus on 20th century America. It was learning about the two world wars, learning about the United Nations, learning about the party system and politics, reading Theodore Dreiser and reading all of the great 20th century authors and 20th century American authors, and going through all the muckrakers, and really, I think, getting a sense of what this country was about. That added onto – as a child, we had traveled almost everywhere. We had studied a lot of American history by walking. Now I was able to study it by looking at different intellectual perspectives on it, and I think that was great.

Q: Was Middletown done in Indiana?

COWAL: Yes.

Q: Now, this is a book by the Lynds, L-Y-N-D-S, which was a study of a town in the '20s, which was quite interesting.

COWAL: Yes, yes. I don't remember all that much about it, but yes, I think it is Indiana. But, of course, Indiana is so quintessentially sort of mid-America. It goes through its basketball phenomena, and, yes, it's interesting.

Q: How about when you were in Washington at American U, did you get any involvement with the State Department, Foreign Service, or anything?

COWAL: Well, the program at American University was taking two graduate courses in political science. This was a program for political science honor students all over the country, so I think there were 100 of us. American University is also a Methodist school, so I think the core of this affiliation was a lot of Methodist schools, and then a lot of not Methodist schools. So it was kind of a real broadening for me, because there were students there from Occidental and there were students from Redlands, but there were no – there were students from Stanford – but there were no students from large state universities, as I recall. It was all from small- or medium-sized liberal arts schools around the country, but it was a much greater diversity in student body than I had been used to.

We took two graduate courses at night in the AU graduate school, and then the rest of our credits, which I think was – whatever it was, the equivalent of three three-hour courses or something, nine hours of courses – was an independent study project and what they called

the Washington semester seminar. And the Washington semester seminar was divided – first of all, these 100 students were divided into three groups, so you had a seminar group of 30. Then the semester was divided into three parts to study the three branches of the federal government, and you studied the three branches of the federal government, and you did a lot of academic reading and so on on what they were and how they were composed and what the Constitution says about them, where they come from. But then it was really three or four different meetings a day with individuals from that branch of government.

So Gerald Ford saw us, who I remember was then the minority leader, who of course would become the president. And we probably had meetings with, I don't know, 30 or 40 congressmen. I got to know the halls of Congress and how you got from the Senate to the House of Representatives on the subway underneath and where the best cafeterias to eat on the Hill were. And we sat in the galleries for hours and listened to debates going on. I mean, we followed certain issues. We went to committee hearings.

You came to know that your government was really open to those who sought to study it. We would go to the Supreme Court and listen to oral arguments being presented. We met many of the Supreme Court justices, where they would come in and talk to us for half an hour.

We did the same thing in the executive branch. We moved around from government department to government department, but certainly one whole segment of this was foreign affairs, and that was the State Department and USIA (United States Information Agency) and the Voice of America. So those were my first encounters with the State Department, and I was fascinated, and I can't tell you specifically who talked to us.

I remember we were able to go to a noon briefing or something, but, again, the people who set up this program were terrific. I mean, they would get – they knew people. They had been doing this for years, so they knew if the Greek desk officer was terrific or not, and we'd get a room in the State Department and we'd go over and somebody from the Greek desk would come. Then someone from the Turkish desk would come, and then you'd understand that there was this thing called Greece-Turkey.

And we did a lot on Vietnam, and we were able to ask questions. It was the beginning of being able to ask some critical questions about the conduct of our foreign policy, and it was great. So, yes, that was very much to me, then, what turned me on about Washington, and I came to think that you could be in the Civil Service or you could be a Foreign Service officer, and clearly the elite was being a Foreign Service officer. So that was a notion that was formed for me during my junior year, which was here.

I went back home to Greencastle, or back to school, for my senior year, with the idea that I would take the Foreign Service exam, and that I would prepare to take the Foreign Service exam, and that's what I did.

Q: From your education, you really were prepared to do well on the exam?

COWAL: Yes, I was.

Q: With the exception of the math side.

COWAL: Right, but, I mean, I don't even remember the math side being in it in those days.

Q: There's some economics.

COWAL: I don't know. Economics, yes, but math wasn't. Trigonometry wasn't part of it. It might have included economics. I think it was while I was here that I – well, I know while I was here – that I had never heard of the Foreign Service. Well, yes, that's not true. My freshman roommate at DePauw was a Foreign Service child with whom I'm still in touch, and her father was the consul in Cali, Colombia, when we were freshman. His name was John Ullmans.

He had gone to DePauw, and her mother had gone to DePauw, and so then he had joined the Foreign Service and they had spent – they had had these three kids and they had spent all their – she had gone to the American school in Venezuela and the American school here and the American school there. I think the parents didn't know anything other than send a kid to DePauw, because that's kind of – they had been out of the United States.

We were very good friends from the beginning, and that was the first exposure I had to the Foreign Service, and her father came to town and took us to dinner, and I thought that was wonderful. The other thing I must say I thought was wonderful about it, and I told her this and she says she doesn't think it's true, but I think it's true, that she seemed to have been the only person I knew who didn't do laundry for the first three months that we were at school, because she saved it all up to take back to the maid in Cali, Colombia, to wash at Christmas time. And I thought that must be a pretty good deal, to have somebody wash your clothes for you.

So I had heard of the Foreign Service, and I did know from John Ullmans how he got into the Foreign Service. But I think it was coming to Washington that junior year that convinced me – that gave me a broader perspective on really what it was all about. And I met at that time many Foreign Service officers, and that's what motivated me to think about this as a career choice, at the same time that I was saying, "I'm not going to be a nurse and I'm not going to be a teacher." So that was how I got here.

Q: Well, you took the Foreign Service exam I guess in '65, I suppose. You graduated in '66.

COWAL: I took it in '65. Yes, I took it in '65.

Q: What happened?

COWAL: I passed it, and much to my – no, not to my surprise. I didn't know that you were supposed to sort of be working on your PhD at Harvard or something just to pass it. And I say, as it turns out, I had a lot of curiosity about current events, so I read a lot. I had a good but narrow academic preparation in just the kinds of things that that exam tested for, and then I had this six months in Washington. And I don't mean to say that I hung around the State Department every day and I figured out how you would take this test, but I do remember they gave the written test in Indianapolis, I guess, and I can remember having to get up early on Saturday morning to go take the bus to get into Indianapolis to go to some federal center.

The other thing that helped me was I was a terrific test taker. I mean, I've always been a terrific test taker. One of my friends, who was a psychology major, and I studied no psychology, and she said – and she was an okay student, she was not a brilliant student, but she was a smart woman and certainly interested in the subject matter. She was my roommate at some point, junior or senior year. She said, "I want you to come with me and take one of my psych tests. It's a huge class, it's 100 students or something, and they'll just pass out these multiple choice exams, and you can take one. You don't have to turn it in, but just take it, and then when I get mine back, we'll grade yours." Obviously, you couldn't have had the test graded because I wasn't registered for the class.

So we did this, and we grabbed the test, and I did better on the exam than she did, and that's just because it was an all-multiple choice exam, and I could do very well on multiple choice exams. So it was a natural for me.

Q: Where'd you take the oral?

COWAL: I took the oral in Chicago, I think.

Q: This would have been in '66, I guess.

COWAL: In '66 – no, I took the oral in Washington. I was coming back to Washington for spring break and I took the oral in Washington.

Q: How did that go?

COWAL: Oh, it was great. Again, in those days, they didn't seem to be – it was more of a conversation than it was an oral exam. Sort of some hypotheticals, "What would you if you were in this kind of situation?" and then discussing one foreign policy issue, which was – I don't even remember what it was, but something that was not so obscure that you wouldn't know something about it.

Q: Well, did you get a job offer, or what happened?

COWAL: Well, I got on the roster, and while still sitting on the roster, my boyfriend and I decided we were going to get married. And so of course if you were, in those days, female and in the Foreign Service, you had to be single and without dependents, and so they said, "Well, you can't join the Foreign Service if you're going to get married. Maybe you want to take the management intern exam for USIA." I wanted to be in USIA anyway. I opted for USIA. I mean, I liked this idea of telling America's story to the world. I mean, that was what really interested me, and it fit in with my interest in literature and contemporary culture and all this kind of stuff.

So I guess it was USIA which said, "Well, you're on the roster. We can't give you an appointment in the Foreign Service. We can't just convert you, but we would encourage you to take the management intern exam and then choose USIA, because we're able to select off of that exam, if you can pass that exam," which was also a written and an oral. So I took that written and oral and passed them and came to Washington in the fall of '66 as a management intern, and I must say, always with the determination that I would get into the Foreign Service.

Q: What about your husband? You were married by this time?

COWAL: We got married in '67, so he came to Georgetown Law School and we didn't live together, because you didn't do that.

Q: Of course not.

COWAL: But we lived around the corner from each other and knew from the day we got here that we were going to get married, and a year later, we got married, and then we moved into the same apartment. He had two more years of law school, and I was doing a master's at George Washington, which was one of the benefits of the management intern program, because they paid for a master's degree in public policy – what was it called? It was actually public administration, but political science was the major in public administration.

We sort of each had our stacks of note cards and our projects and so on, and that's what I did. At the same time, I and a lot of people were lobbying, I must say, the Foreign Service for changes in the Foreign Service. And that led to the Women's Action Organization, and I think the Women's Action Organization really led to some of pioneering kind of lawsuits, and basically pressure on the Foreign Service that they had to change.

In 1970, they allowed women into the Foreign Service, and I ...

Q: Married women.

COWAL: Married women, and I immediately petitioned to join the Foreign Service, at which point I again took the oral exam. They didn't make you go back and take the written exam. I took the oral exam and became a Foreign Service officer.

Q: Okay, let's talk about this – well, '67 to '70 period, you were with the USIA.

COWAL: Right.

Q: What did you do?

COWAL: Well, I spent a year as a management intern, which was basically moving around through – getting an orientation to what USIA did, but I think you had six-week assignments. First of all, there was a class. It was like a Foreign Service class, so there were five or six of us – I don't remember – smaller than a Foreign Service class, but very good people, recruited most of them. I think maybe except for me and one other woman, they all had master's degrees. We had some programs with all the management interns in Washington, some seminars that they would put under the Civil Service Commission or something like that.

But we changed jobs in the agency I think every six weeks, and they were all meant to be training assignments, and most of them were meant to make you a good administrative officer. So I spent six weeks in personnel and six weeks in contracting and six weeks in budgeting, and then you had some of the more fun parts were I think I spent three months in policy and research, working on public opinion polling and stuff, which is something else USIA did. I spent two or three months at the Voice of America, working as an administrative officer and meeting all these zany and wonderful Eastern European exiles and all these people who were habitués down there at the voice of America.

I spent three months, probably, in one of the geographic area offices, which in my case was the Office of African Affairs, which was very exciting at that point, because there were all these places becoming countries. We just got to work alongside the Foreign Service officers, but with the idea that we would understand how to do the administrative work. And I guess one of the interesting things that happened in that period of time was that there was formed by agitation from the younger – mainly Foreign Service officers, but with some of us civil servants along for the ride – we formed a group called the Young Officer's Policy Panel, the YOPP. And the YOPP, I think you had to be under 30 or under 35, probably – under 35.

It was the first time, and this was probably 1968, or '69, and that was the first time where I really knew a lot of Foreign Service officers, because this was 90 percent a Foreign Service group, and we were going to change the world. We were going to change the Foreign Service exam and we were going to change how the Foreign Service worked and we were going to change what USIA's message was and we were going to change how they did their message. I still had never been abroad, by the way. I had never been abroad.

Q: I might say, you were the generation that was untouched by original sin.

COWAL: Absolutely, absolutely. There were these issues then. More and more people of course were getting scooped up into Vietnam and some of them didn't like being scooped into Vietnam and there were these occasional protests, and then we had the additional one of the women and what were we going to do with all the women who couldn't be in the Foreign Service. So we had our issues, and I would say they were women and Vietnam, and black officers and the integration of black officers and how would we get more black officers and so on.

But we got fairly much noticed, I think, again, because USIA was smaller than the State Department. There were at that point, probably in the whole agency, maybe 1,000 Foreign Service officers, of whom 200 were young. And so we became a really effective pressure group, and they elected me as the president, the chair. I was 23. I had not been in the Foreign Service. And it was a fabulous experience for me, because we met with the senior management of the agency.

Frank Shakespeare was the director of the agency in those days – well, Leonard Marks and Frank Shakespeare, as we moved out of the Johnson period and into Nixon. But we had open access to them and Frank Shakespeare – I think it was Shakespeare came up with this wonderful idea I think of sort of buying us off, but I also think it was genuine on his part. Of course they had a permanent inspector corps, and the inspector corps was to find out whether agency posts were doing what they were supposed to do and PAOs (public affairs officers) were working, PAOs were culturing and whatever.

So, he decided that the members of the Young Officers Policy Panel should serve as inspectors, should be able to go on inspection teams. So, if they had two or three of these permanent inspector corps people, then they would add a young person, because he wanted these missions to not just say, "Well, does the library have enough books on history?" But to say, "Why do we have a library here?"

So he actually saw it as bringing something new to the process, and of course as the president, or the chairman, or whatever I was, I was the first one selected to go on a trip. The trip was to Chad and the Sudan, and I had never been abroad.

Q: Oh boy.

COWAL: Because these were small posts, they had one permanent inspector, and then I was added on. I went with a wonderful Foreign Service officer who became something of a mentor to me. He's dead. His name was Cher von Val Anorascu, and he was a Romanian. His father had been a Romanian diplomat. He was enormously cultured – I mean, grew up speaking four or five different languages, and when he was 17, I guess, was sent by his – well, somehow got to Harvard without speaking very much English and had a Harvard – obviously spoke English beautifully. Got a Harvard education and when he was 21 or something got dropped behind the lines in Romania, at the end of World War II and I don't remember exactly what he did, but spent some time and then went

from that into the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), and then went from the OSS to become a Foreign Service officer.

By then, I suppose, he was 50 or so and had served – I can't remember where anymore, but in many places. He was like a divine person, like a God to me, that he was so sophisticated and he was so smart and he was so nice to me. At any rate, we went off to go to Chad and the Sudan, and we first flew to Brussels and some Polish émigrés he knew picked us up and took us off to lunch. They sort of looked at me and said, "Do you speak Polish," and I said no, and they said, "French?" and I said no. So, finally, we would all speak English because of course everyone spoke it, all of these things, except me, who didn't speak anything.

Then we went onto the Congo and had to overnight there and some other friends of his picked us up and the same thing, and we spent a night. Then we went to Chad and we were there for two weeks, I think, and then we went to Sudan to repeat this whole process. It was just – that was when I really became convinced that I belonged in the Foreign Service. I so got involved and appreciated what they were doing, but I will never forget, and then maybe we ought to stop here, the going in to meet the ambassador, and asking the ambassador ...

Q: This is in?

COWAL: This is in Sudan – asking the ambassador what he considered the essential mission of the United States embassy in the Sudan today, and he said, "To survive." And I think three months later, he was assassinated.

Q: This is Cleo Noel.

COWAL: Yes. And so I had this experience, and in the middle of this inspection, which was meant to be two weeks or something like that – everything was a slower pace, those days. I guess it was two-thirds of the way through this inspection. By now, I'm a veteran inspector. I've already done Chad and we've written the last – one of the reasons we were there such a long time is that you were to write the first draft of the report in country and to give it to the PAO and the ambassador to discuss it before you left. So you inspected for a week and then you had three days to sit in a little office and write the report, which we co-wrote, and then two days to discuss it with everybody and then you would leave and go on to the next country.

So we were probably in the report-writing phase when everything in the Sudan froze, or was about to freeze, because all the planes were going to be used to fly pilgrims to Cairo for the funeral of Nasser. I mean, it was this huge event.

I can remember standing on the balcony of our hotel, and looking out – it must have been on like a 10th floor, and you could see most of Khartoum. You could see the rivers and you could see the whole thing, and everybody was out on their prayer mats on the street. I

mean, this is an overwhelming experience, and my wonderful friend, Val, Val Anorascu, had to be – he was then the head of the European branch of the VOA, and he had some terribly important conference to do with the BBC or something, which was going to take place in a week's time. And he decided he better get out immediately, or he might get stuck there and not be able to get to this conference. So he left on the next flight, I guess, and I wrote the report.

So from somebody who had never been abroad to three weeks later or something, I'm writing this report on what USIS Khartoum ought to be doing, and I must say, if I didn't have the bug before, by the time I left from that trip, I was hell bent on getting in the Foreign Service.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up the next time. We've just finished off your inspection trip to Chad and the Sudan, so we'll pick up next time. You said you had picked up the bug to Foreign Service, one, because it was very important – well, it's important any time, is how did this fit with your husband's plans, because this was not a very conventional thing to do in those days?

COWAL: Right, right.

Q: So we'll pick that up. And also, I'd like to talk a little more about your time as president of this young movement you called ...

COWAL: Young Officers Policy Panel, the YOPP.

Q: The YOPP. Because I remember you and I think Genta Hawkins at the same time was with something called JFSOC (Junior Foreign Service Officer Committee) and all, considered sort of bomb throwers.

COWAL: I've always been a shit disturber, if not a bomb thrower.

Q: So let's talk a bit about what you were dealing with there, and also about Vietnam, because this was really the protest. We haven't really covered that. And then your entry into the Foreign Service.

Q: Today is the 21st of September, 2001. I should add for historical interest, exactly 10 days ago, on September 11th, I appeared here to interview Sally and we received word about the terrorist attack on New York and the Pentagon and obviously that was an important event. We were so shocked.

Well, Sally, sort of to go back to normal here, or try, first place, what were you doing in this young officers thing? I mean, what were your issues and all?

COWAL: Well, I think our issues included issues of gender, sex discrimination in the Foreign Service. They included issues – I mean, obviously, we were all young and

therefore we thought, as all young people do, that we had a great deal more wisdom than our elders.

Q: Well, your generation was born without original sin, I think.

COWAL: I think so, and so I don't recall us so much as getting into the ideological arguments over foreign policy, particularly Vietnam, as we got involved in the more procedural issues of both how we were treating blacks, women and other minorities in the Foreign Service, how Foreign Service posts were structured, whether or not there should be a greater role for young people. I remember we had a plan that nobody ever bought into, of course, that USIA should take one post in a country not of terrible importance to us, and I think we picked Bolivia for some reason or another, and simply turn the entire thing over to those under 30, so we would have a young PAO and an even younger CAO (cultural affairs officer), because we were not so bureaucratically hamstrung as our elders. And, after all, the world was very young, and so were we, and we were the Kennedy kids, the postwar generation, and we would know how to appeal to young people around the world and that's where the future of the world was, and so on.

So I don't remember – although I remember Vietnam being, particularly in the bombings in Cambodia and so on, as being a point in which a lot of us personally engaged with one another, and there were officers who wouldn't go to Vietnam, and there were officers who had to leave the service because they wouldn't go to Vietnam. I mean, we were all conscious of the fact that we were needed to be worldwide available and ready to serve our country wherever we were sent. Of course, that was a huge sort of gaping maw at that point into which more and more people were thrown, so that everybody seemed to be facing this prospect of serving in Vietnam, and what did we feel about serving in Vietnam.

I think it was the first thing, probably, that came along for me that took off some of the idealism with which we had joined the service, and for me because in those days I was working on the administrative side. I mean, after all, I was a management intern and I was learning how to be a good administrative officer. One of my training rotations was in the contracts office, and I was reviewing the contracts for a film that USIA had made in Vietnam, the name of which now escapes me, but it was one of these great productions in those days. They had made one called Years of Lightning, Day of Drums about the Kennedy assassination. So this was a similar great – maybe Charles Guggenheim, I'm not sure – but great saga that was going to show why the American presence in Vietnam was justified, and why we were on the side of the right, and why the North Vietnamese and their allies were on the wrong side of history, and so on.

But when you reviewed the contracts for the making of this movie, you realized that there were all kinds of contracts for building the bridge and then blowing up the bridge and then building the bridge. So clearly it was a propaganda film, and of course bridges were blown up justifiably and not. But it was, for the first time, I suppose, for me to confront

something – mind you, I'm still 22 years old here, 21, 22 years old – to confront that there is some nasty reality in this, and it's not something that makes me feel real good.

Others, of course, dealt with much more profound issues than that, but I think for all of us it was kind of, yes, it was still the greatest country on Earth, but it wasn't without flaws, and we came to have some doubts about what it was we were doing. I think that underscored the fact that we were willing to address all kinds of issues and was probably brought more to the surface by our discontent with some of U.S. policy.

Q: Now, on sort of the decision to move from the Civil Service into the Foreign Service, I mean, here you had already been looking at the discrimination against women. You had a husband. I would have thought these would be certainly negative aspects of the thing. How did kind of …

COWAL: Well, first of all, after having taken these trips abroad, and it was the trips that I took abroad as an inspector, and the fact that I was heading this Young Officers Policy Panel that put me mostly into contact with my peers who were Foreign Service officers, but who were mostly back on their first Washington assignments after three or six or eight years abroad. They were all full of wonderful stories about where they had lived and what they had done, and I admired the languages that they spoke.

So I sort of moved to a place, philosophically, where I thought that this was, after all, a foreign affairs agency, and I think maybe my goals at the beginning were modest. My goal at the beginning was probably I would come back to Washington. My career would be domestic, but I wouldn't ever really be able to write those contracts unless I understood from the experience of having lived and worked abroad what it was we were actually trying to do. And I didn't think you could see that on Pennsylvania Avenue as clearly as you might be able to see it if you were in a Foreign Service post.

So I worked very hard to be able to get myself into a position to do that, and that was not only personal, but because of the rules of the time, it had to become an organizational struggle as well, that is, to get over this prohibition of married women in the Foreign Service. And that's how the whole Women's Action Organization and others came to be with Genta and other people who were working on this. And then I became a good poster child, a good model, because I was clearly very well qualified.

I had already passed the Foreign Service exam. There were other people who had actually been in the Foreign Service and had to get out, so they were similarly good cases, but mine was also a case.

Q: What was the rationale on the thinking that you could see of some of the old Foreign Service and why a man could get married and take his wife, but a woman couldn't get married?

COWAL: Oh, because you had to be a nun, I think. Women, if they had other interests in their life wouldn't be dedicated enough to the service, whereas a man would be able to handle having a family but still keep his eye on the ball. We tricked them, of course. This was all about guerrilla warfare, in some ways. I mean, about a lot of things, not just the married women issue, because we had a lot of single women also.

I remember one case where they wouldn't assign – another discriminatory thing was that supposedly they wouldn't assign single officers to Eastern Europe, because they believed that the single officers would be more subject to being enticed, shall we say, by spies of the opposite sex. At that point I had moved from being in the Office of Policy and Research, where I was the administrative officer, to being the counselor for all junior officers, both Foreign Service and domestic, at USIA, although I had never been a Foreign Service officer. So I was preparing all these classes and assigning these new officers.

Q: This is what time?

COWAL: This is 1970. And, of course, because of Vietnam, mainly because of Vietnam, I think, the money that the foreign affairs agencies were getting, USIA had never had a higher intake of Foreign Service officers. I think 1970 was probably the highest year. I think we brought in 60 new officers that year in five different A100 classes of 12 each. And so I was responsible for the training and orientation and assignment of these Foreign Service officers, and we had to negotiate their assignments. Of course, the officers would come in and some of them already had language and area background; some of them didn't, but they all had choices and desires and so on.

Of course, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were for a certain kind of Foreign Service Officer very interesting. I mean, that's where the war was.

Q: Incredibly attractive. I served in Yugoslavia for five years.

COWAL: Right, right.

Q: And a good career move, a good bunch of people.

COWAL: It was a good career move, and great people, and for the people who had good language ability, either had languages or high language abilities, they could learn Russian or learn Serbo-Croatian or learn whatever it was, and they saw this as a way to make a career. After all, I think for USIA particularly, the Cold War was a war of ideologies, and USIA was our propaganda agency. It was our war of ideas, that's why we were there, and that's what we hoped to do.

So it was very appealing. For every person who wanted to go to Africa or Latin America, you probably had three who wanted to go to Eastern Europe, so these were highly sought after. As the person in charge of these young people, getting them assigned, one of the

things that I had to do was to negotiate with each of the geographic bureaus to place the right officer in the right position, and that usually involved dealing with the executive officer and dealing with what we called area directors in those days.

So I realized, of course, that while there were supposedly no single officers going to Eastern Europe, which of course was ridiculous also, because the ones who got into much greater trouble were those who were married. But, anyway, that's a different story. While it was supposedly against all single officers, in fact, they would take male single officers but they wouldn't take female single officers.

So once I had gone through assigning, I think, in three successive classes a male junior officer to Eastern Europe, the fourth time around I presented a super-qualified female officer who became, by the way, a superstar in USIA and became ambassador to Tajikistan, or whatever it was – one of the 'Stans. I mean, that was her focus from the beginning. She was a Russian language specialist, that's what she wanted to do, that's the only place she ever wanted to serve. So I presented Anne to ...

Q: Who was it?

COWAL: I'm stretching for her name. Anne, Anne Sigmund, who became a real superstar. Anyway, I presented Anne Sigmund to the assistant director for Eastern Europe, who said, "Oh, well, she looks like she's extremely well qualified, but we don't take single officers." And I said, "Well, you took Bill Keel last time." And so we finally got Anne this assignment, and that broke down still another barrier about women in the Foreign Service, where could they serve.

Q: This is guerrilla warfare, salami tactics.

COWAL: Absolutely, and so then we established that beachhead, and so with a lot of people in both State and USIA, we never did, actually, on the women's thing have to bring a court case. We had to rattle some sabers and say that we would do that and we would obviously win. And so in I guess it was in summer/fall 1970, they finally revised the regulations and said that there was no distinction made between married women and unmarried women. I mean, if women were qualified to be in the Foreign Service, they were qualified.

So I immediately began my move of where did I want to go. And looking around for the right assignment, and of course since I was in the personnel office, I had a pretty good idea of what the right assignment might be, and I decided on India. That was partly thinking about it for my spouse, who was a lawyer, and who thought, perhaps, since it was an English-speaking country and we supposedly had some common roots in the English common law and so on, that was a place where he might also find something to do.

But let me say from the beginning, we were both very young, we were very adventuresome. I don't think we thought of it as a whole career, but we thought of it the way young people might think of the Peace Corps, as something they would do for a while. So that wasn't very usual in those days, but we were in our mid 20s and we didn't have any children, and the thought that we would go and do something exciting for a couple of years was very exciting to both of us. They had a position in India as the special assistant to the public affairs office.

Q: This was in New Delhi?

COWAL: In New Delhi, and it seemed to me like that was a place where I could both make a contribution and also get a pretty broad perspective, I mean, sort of catch up for the 10 years I hadn't had abroad where I might have worked in a cultural office one tour and in an information office the next tour. I could kind of get a bird's eye view of the whole operation at what was in those days our largest post, I believe. It was always sort of neck and neck with Vietnam, but we had 45 American officers and 500 Indians and a $10 million budget. So it was an enormous operation with branch posts in six cities, I think, and a whole continent, really.

I remember when they finally sent out to the PAO the cable, in those days, it was all very civilized. And, actually, the posts and PAOs and ambassadors got asked whether they would accept so-and-so as the appropriate candidate for filing this post, so they proposed me as the candidate for the special assistant job. The cable came back saying, the assignment was approved, "If husband, no problem."

Q: It shows the mindset then.

COWAL: Who would say, the assignment is approved, if wife, no problem. But, if husband, no problem. So that's how I got to India.

Q: Then you were in India from when to when?

COWAL: I was in India from 1971 to 1973.

Q: Who was our ambassador in India?

COWAL: Well, our ambassador was Kenneth Keating, and then Keating was – before the end of my tour, Keating was replaced by Moynihan, and Moynihan fired the PAO, and that was my boss. So that was kind of the end of my assignment, also. I was coming to the end of my assignment in any case, but after all of this happened, we decided to speed that up a little bit. Of course, by then, I was absolutely gung ho, going to be a Foreign Service officer.

Q: Well, this is fun of it. So many people enter this flytrap. They think they'll come in and try it for a little while.

COWAL: Right, right.

Q: And very few really leave, I mean.

COWAL: Right.

Q: Well, okay, how did you see the state of relations between India and the United States, 1971? The Vietnam War was kind of running down.

COWAL: Oh, no, it was extremely difficult, because if you'll recall, Henry Kissinger was the secretary of state, and Kissinger – in fact, some I think secret dispatches came out indicating that Kissinger had instructed ambassadors at the State Department, or whoever he had instructed, that our policy should be one of tilting toward Pakistan.

Q: This is over the Bangladesh peace ...

COWAL: Bangladesh, but it really had to deal with larger issues in the world ...

Q: Opening to China.

COWAL: ... and the opening to China. The Soviet Union and India had become quite closely affiliated, and so this was more than just Bangladesh, but the Bangladesh war really made that even more difficult. I had a fascinating time in India. One of the things that – I had, obviously, a multiplicity of jobs as sort of a catch-all ...

Q: Who was your PAO?

COWAL: A wonderful man named Dan Alexi, who was a sort of larger-than-life figure, huge Ukrainian American, six-foot-five-inches tall, and had been for 10 years the USIA area director for East Asia, meaning the whole Vietnam buildup. Then, after 10 years, he and the assistant director for the Near East, whose name was Alan Carter, sort of changed areas. And Alan went and became PAO in Vietnam, which had been the largest post in Dan's area, and Dan became PAO in India, which was the largest post in Alan's area, so these were the two giants of the agency, around which whole satellites sort of revolved.

So it was wonderful to work for him because it was not only focused on this huge post in India, but also at that point he was around 50, I guess. He had been in the Foreign Service maybe 20 years, maybe 25 years. He had risen, obviously, to the pinnacle of what you could do in USIA. He must have been a minister counselor or whatever he was at that point, had all of the intrigue and politics and power that within this rather small – but for us it was our whole world at USIA. Being able to sort of be mentored by somebody like this and following somebody like this around, two steps behind.

Q: ... I'm doing this because ...

COWAL: Absolutely, absolutely, so it was a chance to learn from a real master, and he had lots of enemies. He had as many enemies as he had friends, but it was fascinating. The first, I guess they had put a little – he hadn't had a special assistant, but the whole post, clearly, in this huge operation, and he had eliminated branch PAOs who had run their own little empires, because he thought the whole thing ought to run more centrally, out of one philosophy, and a country team, and so on and so forth. So the special assistant job was really supposed to make sure that these now four branch posts, which had no PAOs, which had cultural affairs offices and information officers, were nonetheless part of the central team. So I traveled to each of those posts every month.

So I saw, of course, the whole country, which was wonderful, because out of every month I would spend three days in Madras, three days in Bombay, three days in Calcutta, or so. So I made the circuit, and of course I would use the opportunity to see what was around those places, so I really think I was in all of the Indian states. That was a fascinating experience.

Q: How were your received? Usually, somebody who comes from the head office is considered a son of a bitch from outside.

COWAL: Right, well, it was rough, and the fact that I worked for Dan, who was not everybody's cup of tea, in a way made it rougher. But in other ways, I think being a young female made it easier, because I wasn't perceived as a heavy or a threat, and so I would hear things. And, of course, I was good eyes and ears. I mean, he also wanted to know what they were thinking and what they were doing and whether they were onboard with his program or they weren't, so I guess I was a little spy in some ways.

But when I wasn't out traveling in these places, one of my jobs was to work with the information officer every day, or the press officer, to do a media reaction summary of the Indian press, which if you know anything about it, was a very lively press. I think there were seven dailies in English and countless numbers in Indian languages, which I didn't read but which we had people who read and analyzed and so on. So each day, we were responsible for preparing a telegram to the department about what the media reaction in India was to important events, whether that was Vietnam or the conflict in South Asia or whatever it was. I guess there were certain themes that we covered every day.

Because the Ambassador was a former senator from New York, Keating, who was not in agreement with Henry Kissinger and with American policy, because he thought it was the wrong policy in terms of India, being a politician he thought – well, they didn't have – they, meaning Kissinger and Nixon – didn't have to pay any attention to him. But they would have to pay attention, in a democracy, to the media – what was the free press saying? – because he was a politician.

So this was a cable that he cared more about than he cared about the cables that his political section was preparing about their conversations with Indian government officials

or whatever. This was the most important thing for him every day, and so he wanted to see it, personally. One of my jobs, then, was to go every afternoon – we were in a separate building. USIS was across town from the embassy. But I would have to get in the car every afternoon and ride over to the ambassador's residence, which was next to the chancellery. And the ambassador would be at his swimming pool, this being his after-lunch little break from the workday, and I would go out to the swimming pool and sit there with him while he read through this cable. He would have the newspapers piled up next to him. He would have been reading them on his sort of lunch break, and he would often want us to throw things into this cable that weren't already in it.

So it was a very nice also exposure to much more than a junior officer would normally have to the ambassador, and to someone whom I watched being a loyal servant who nonetheless disagreed in many ways with his government's policy, and that was a very, very, very interesting experience.

Q: Well, you're giving me a view of Ambassador Keating that I haven't gotten from others, because most people talk about him as sort of, well, a nice man but out of his element and getting on in years.

COWAL: Well, I say, in some ways, that was the case. The very fact that he wasn't in his office at 2:30 in the afternoon, but in his swimming pool. But he was very sharp. I mean, he was quite sharp, and he was quite disturbed about some aspects, and of course we were running into this war. I had a very interesting experience, also, of meeting Mrs. Gandhi, who at that point, they knew we were tilting toward Pakistan, and there was absolutely no love lost.

We had full diplomatic relations, but the Indians had always thought of the Americans as their best friends. I mean, every place that you went as an American diplomat, people would say to you – and I'd get a lot of lecturing and stuff, too. I mean, I would be out there working with women's groups or university groups or something, and people would always say to you, "Oh, you're not like the British," because of course they didn't like the British. "You're so friendly, Americans are so accessible."

But they would hark back to these days when Chester Bowles was the ambassador, and Chester Bowles' wife's name was Sally, so being named Sally was always helpful. Nice Americans like Sally Bowles were named Sally and were very sympathetic to India, and we were in clearly a different policy environment, but despite the fact that there was a lot of love and respect for the United States, we were clearly at a very different point, politically. And that made it difficult for embassy officials – I mean, particularly higher-up officials like Keating – to have I think a real dialog or a real impact. We were kind of shut out.

But I got a chance to meet Mrs. Gandhi in a very interesting way. It was one of these trips around the country, coming back from one of these trips, and I was on a puddle-jumping plane. I couldn't get the direct flight from I think it was Bombay to Delhi. So I had to get

a plane that went from Bombay to Ahmedabad, Pune to wherever. It was a puddle jumper, and it was a DC-3, and everybody describes to you their days of flying around in the third world in the early '70s, and it was a plane that was loaded with peasants and chickens and munitions, I actually remember. So every time this plane landed, and I think it was like three stops between Bombay and New Delhi, they would get all the passengers off the plane, and then they would unload whatever cargo was being taken to this place. And while you were off the plane, you had to stand under a tin roof.

You can imagine the tarmac in a little provincial airport in India and it's 45 degrees centigrade and you're under the roof, waiting for them to tell you that you can get back on the plane. So as we were standing there, and I was probably the only foreign passenger on the plane. So we're standing there under the roof, and the pilot, the cockpit window was open, and the pilot is sort of hanging out the window, kind of waiting for them to do whatever they're doing to his airplane, and so I waved, and the pilot waved back.

So we got back on the plane and we took off, and the stewardess came back and she said, "Well, the pilot would like to know if you'd like to come up to the cockpit." So I said, "Sure, I'd like to come up to the cockpit." So I spent the rest of the trip riding between the pilot and the copilot, I'm sure against absolutely every civil aviation regulation in the world. The pilot was Rajiv Gandhi's best friend. The pilot was not Rajiv, but if you remember, Rajiv was an Indian Airlines pilot. So that put me into the social circle of this group of young Indians, many of whom were married to foreigners, as was Rajiv Gandhi, of course, married to Sonia, to an Italian woman.

So I came to know people outside of the embassy circuit by having met the pilot on this Indian airlines plane and having met Rajiv and having Rajiv take me one day to meet his mother. She revealed no great foreign policy secrets to me, but we had tea or something. Those are the kinds of things that if you talk about career-enhancing moves, at a point when Mrs. Gandhi wasn't seeing anybody, the fact that I had been invited to tea at Mrs. Gandhi's house I suppose gave me a certain notoriety, if nothing else.

I also think that being a woman worked greatly to my advantage, because it was at a time when there were very women out there. It was very much ahead of the curve. After all, we admitted very few women to begin with. Very few women wanted this career, number two, and then we hadn't admitted any married women. There was – in a Foreign Service class of 100, there would be two or three women, very, very few. And those, the minute they got married, had to get out. So the number who stuck with it more than five years was minuscule.

So I don't know that I understood it then, but I would say almost from that point on, if you were a woman and you were good and you were somewhat gutsy, or you had a certain amount of panache or something, you were on a very fast track, I would say. I'm sure there were lots of roadblocks, but I'm also sure that for every one of those roadblocks, there was a push that a man would not have had. So I think it was helpful to me.

Q: I interviewed Frances Cook, very much that experience. When you went around to these various parts, was USIS able to sort of key our message to the Tamil-speaking area or to the Sikh area. In other words, it's such a diverse country. Could we fine-tune our message?

COWAL: Well, yes and no. One of the reasons why Dan, my boss, had eliminated the branch PAO position was that he was trying to save positions. Although he had 45 officers, he felt that there was a need to get beyond the bureaucracy and get beyond these whole little establishments in each of these places, where you replicated what was already going on in New Delhi, and you had exactly the same thing working around the consul general, in the same way that they all worked around the ambassador. And that what we desperately needed was to get out into the sticks more – not to the sticks. We were under no illusion – it was already 500 million Indians – that we were reaching everybody. but we had a very, I think it was early for the agency, very strict look at what our objectives were and who our audiences were, and how we would convince those audiences of those objectives, of those messages.

One of the ways that we would do that is we would target universities and university students and university professors and university faculty. Therefore, he took the four positions, which had been these bureaucratic let's-run-these-little-posts positions, and he made them what he called resident specialists. The Indians respond very well to intellectual things and academic things. They're very learned people, and so we had an expert on history and an expert in economy and an expert in foreign policy and another – literature, maybe. They were Foreign Service officers, but who had PhDs in these respective subjects so that they could get easy access to university classes and classrooms and faculty.

Again, Dan made lots of friends and lots of enemies because he would say, very openly, "Well, these are second-raters for second-rate audiences." But he was recognizing that every once in a year you would get John Kenneth Galbraith out to lecture and you wouldn't get him to the university in Bangalore, because he'd do one lecture and it would be at Delhi University or something. So the fact that we would have an economist on our staff who could respond to these thousands of requests of, "Please come and talk to us about the American economy."

Those were the days when we were doing the first currency convertibilities, and there was a whole lot of discussion about where was America's economy going, and it was ...

Q: One of the Nixon shocks.

COWAL: It was one of the Nixon shocks, and so there was probably 100 requests a week for a speaker, and, again, the speakers were just a vehicle. The vehicle was to get Americans into these university settings so that we could, yes, talk about the American economy, but also, knowing that traveling Americans do exemplify American values and

you do understand more about us if you come to know us. In this huge country, I think what we were trying to do was sort of paint a pointillist portrait, sort of put color dots on people's maps of what the United States was all about. Because for all that we might have been tilting toward Pakistan, India was tilting toward the Soviet Union, no question about it, and shutting out America. So that was the battle that we saw.

Q: Well, I would have thought that there would be almost a natural disconnect between the Soviets and the Indians, and the way of thinking, culture, style, everything else. I mean, the politicians could make the calculation, but I would think that – and this would be a real nice wedge that we could hammer away at all of the ...

COWAL: Yes, and to a certain extent, that was true, and one of the things that we did to exacerbate that wedge was we had a lot of what we originally called Leader Grants, which came to be called the International Visitor Program grants, and of course those were to send people from India to the United States – leaders, and those might be government people. But they might also be academics or businesspeople or scientists or scholars, or whatever.

We came up with this notion that we would send as many of them as we could to the United States via a short stay in Russia. Everybody said, "Well, why are you doing that?" Well, we were doing that precisely because somebody would have a couple of not very interesting and positive days in Russia and then go to the United States.

Q: How could you both justify and get the Soviets to agree to let these people through?

COWAL: Well, in many cases – we didn't do this with all our grantees, but we did it with a number of them, and they were people who had contacts and links and whatever in the Soviet Union, and the Soviets were working very hard on this. We had a big information center, I think they had a bigger one. I mean, it was a real battle for the minds of men, in those days, and they were trying to address the Indian society with the fact that Communism was the answer to the economic woes of India, and I think they were making certain inroads.

I don't think there was a whole lot – I mean, we had so many advantages. We had the English language. We had the natural tendency of Indians, I think, to be pro-American, the two world's largest democracies, and all these kinds of things. But we had a real battle. So we sent some people to make the point fairly clearly that they were very different kinds of society and we were very different kinds of people.

I don't think there was any particular love lost between the Russians and the Indians, but it was also very convenient. If you wanted to get more from the United States, couldn't you do that by indicating that you were really about to go sleep with the Russians, and so it was a gain. I mean, after all, Nehru was one of the founders of non-alignment, and they saw that as their only salvation, along with some other great leaders – Tito and Nasser and Sukarno and Nkrumah was the five, and the Bandung was the morning of the world,

and that was, what, in '68 or so? And so this was very shortly into the beginnings of the non-aligned movement, and that's where India really saw itself, and it was trying to balance these two forces so as to get taken in by neither, or to get involved in neither's battles in Asia or anywhere else.

Q: What about the universities? One of the legacies of the British rule was that a lot of the Indian professors and leaders and all went through the London School of Economics and were tainted with Fabian Marxist – my personal prejudice is this is much worse than Communism to Africa and all over. It loused a lot of these societies up for decades. But I would think that India, you would have your professors talking Marxist or extreme socialist talk to their students.

COWAL: You're thinking right. And there were certainly parts of India and some universities that were much more of that tendency than others. There were places where we couldn't go and where we weren't welcome and where we weren't invited, and lots of places where we were. It was a battleground.

Q: Well, what were the elite universities, as we saw them, at that time?

COWAL: Oh, gosh, my memory sort of fades.

Q: You mentioned Delhi University.

COWAL: Delhi University was certainly one of them. I can't any longer remember. If you put a list of them in front of me I suppose I could. Benares was good. I mean, the technical institutes, the Indian institutes of technology were super, and I think they had five campuses, or so. They, of course, eschewed Marxist rhetoric to teach technical skills, and when you think about it and you think about how important Indians have been in this country in terms of our high-tech revolution, how many Indians are today in the United States either working at Microsoft or teaching.

I think I heard something not so long ago about the professors of engineering at U.S. universities, there's a huge percentage of them who are Indian born and Indian trained. Those come out of these very, very, very good technical universities. One of the things that I've always been very lucky at in my Foreign Service career has been basically to be in places which counted, to be in places which were important, and where in some ways the history of the world was going to be written, and where there was a decidedly strong culture and the country had an idea of what it was and where it had come from and what its history was. Certainly, India was my first and extremely powerful experience in that regard.

Q: How did the East Pakistan – it happened on your watch.

COWAL: Yes, it did.

Q: Can you tell me how that hit us, how we responded, how the people in the embassy, the policy from Washington and how you all felt about it?

COWAL: I recall that the ambassador saw this coming and was kind of ineffective in doing anything about it, basically. I think that affected the whole staff. I don't remember there being great morale. What I remember, interestingly, and I've gotten to know – I mean, I somehow, again being a pretty junior officer, nonetheless I swam every day at lunch time. I would swim with the DCM (deputy chief of mission), the political counselor and the econ counselor. They had a big swimming pool at the embassy, and I would go over there and swim.

So these guys became my friends, or at least somebody that I knew more than a junior officer would have known anyone like that in this enormous embassy, but somehow, Galen Stone was the DCM, Dick Viets was the ambassador's special assistant. All of these people of course went on to their own formidable careers, I would say, in the Foreign Service. So I had a tremendous experience in meeting all of these people.

I would say that people in India, the American officers in India, kind of sometimes fell too much into three categories. I mean, the ones were those who were still living with this notion of the '50s and '60s, the romanticized India, that we're best friends, we'll be best friends forever, they look to us, we must support our little Indian brothers. We'll wear saris and try to be as Indian as anyone else.

Then there was the whole category of people who really wanted to bash the Indians, who really didn't understand why Mrs. Gandhi was not Nehru, although he had been difficult enough for us, but why she was this particularly difficult woman who seemed to be particularly interested in going her own way. So that was a second category. Then the third category were those who were there for the good time, and a very good time could be had.

One of the things, and this gets into Moynihan and actually the firing of my boss and all the rest of it, but we lived on these rupees. I mean, at one point, I think the United States owned 10 percent of all the rupees in the world because of the PL-480 programs, where we had sold India large amounts of food in the '60s and they had paid us in rupees, which we kept in accounts in New Delhi. That's one of the reasons why we had such an enormous presence in India, because we had no other way to spend all these blocked rupees. So not only did we have 500 people working for USIS, but probably 5,000 working for USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and of course an enormous Peace Corps and an enormous everything else. You could imagine. It was all running on this funny money. It was all running on rupees.

So AID not only rain its AID projects, but AID had a staff house for its staff to live in in New Delhi, which rivaled the Ritz Carlton hotel next to me. Here we were in the middle of extreme poverty, and AID officers who lived on a compound, associated only with one another, had their own swimming pools and bowling alleys and restaurants and

commissaries and all this kind of middle class America, but upper middle class America, sort of writ large. I think there were a certain number of people who were out there for that.

I should be more generous than that. I mean, it sounds like everybody fit into one of these three categories, but there was an awful lot of that, of the people who lamented what had been, the people who hated every day about where they were, because they hated this government, and then the people who were just kind of along for the ride. It was an extremely difficult time. I felt sorry for the ambassador and his country team in trying to really put this forward. Then, when you knew that the policy from Washington was to sort of side with the enemy of the country where you were, and the country knew that, too, made it a very difficult situation.

Q: Galen Stone was a DCM?

COWAL: Yes.

Q: Now, I've known Galen close to the time – I was consul general in Saigon, '69, '70, and he was the political officer, the head of the political section there. I would have thought he would have brought over some of this real resentment about Mrs. Gandhi and of her considerable spanking of what we were doing in Vietnam.

COWAL: Yes, well, I think he was one of those. But I think what Galen was, you also saw in folks like that the sort of Foreign Service aristocracy, in a way. Galen came from an enormously wealthy, patrician, New England family. So you also saw – part of the good parts of this, in some ways, were as we got onto sort of a war footing, which we did, there was a rallying around the American community to support one another. Keating didn't have a wife. Galen had a lovely wife, and they became kind of like George and Laura Bush these days, to us there. After all, this went on for weeks, this discussion about whether there would be a war, wouldn't there be a war, how it would come, whether it would involve Americans, whether we would be targeted, whether we should evacuate. We never evacuated, but we would talk about that.

That was very interesting, too, being there with the first male spouse in the Foreign Service, because they would have community meetings and so on, and they would say things like, "Well, we're evacuating dependents." And then they would, in the next breath, say, "The women and children will be evacuated." Of course, irony of ironies, the place where we were to be evacuated was Iran, because that was then our anchor and our friend.

My husband was extremely interested in going to Iran. It was a place that he wanted to visit. In fact, he's no longer a lawyer. He works in design and architecture and so on, all of which came out of this experience of being sort of freed from what he had been expected to do, which was to be a lawyer and provide for a family. Women's liberation is also men's liberation, which is something that I learned. At any rate, he was very anxious

to go to Iran, because he wanted to go to Isfahan and see all these beautiful mosques and all this kind of stuff. So he kept running around this meeting saying, "Now, what are we talking about here? Who are we evacuating, because I want to be on that plane."

It was kind of funny, and he did it with a certain lightheartedness, but we also sort of knew what we were doing, and that was we were stretching everybody's minds around a new concept of who was working and who wasn't working here, and who was the dependent and who was the officer. I think whenever you're in a crisis, like the one we're in right now in the United States, sometimes things rise to the surface that otherwise sort of stayed buried. That was the, I guess, leitmotif through those years, was the personal story of Tom and me meeting people and shaking them up about what the Foreign Service was about, and what the roles of men and women were about. It was interesting.

Q: Here's a lawyer, how did he fit in? I mean, he's young in this fascinating country, how did he make his way?

COWAL: Well, I think he did a terrific job at it, actually. I can remember some funny little anecdotes. We had been there a couple of months and he got sick, as a lot of people did in India. I mean, he didn't get real sick, but he picked up whatever it was that was going around and ate something or ...

Q: The food in a Delhi deli or something.

COWAL: Yes, whatever. So he one morning found himself at sick call, seeing an embassy nurse, one of those things about third world posts, where you line up sort of for sick call. The nurse said, "Okay, your name is Tom Grooms, and where do you work?" And he said, "Oh, I don't work, I'm a dependent." She looked at him and he had this sort of law school furrowed brow and was already beginning to get a little gray hair, although he was in his mid 20s. She kind of looked at him and she looked at him again and she said, "Who is your father?" Because she couldn't imagine that anybody was there as a dependent. He obviously wasn't 15 years old, he was a grown man, and so what was he doing sponging off of some father at age – Tom must have been 25, 26 at that point.

Again, by heading straightforwardly into these conversations, rather than hiding from them, I think we provided a service. We had a role to play. Tom decided that he couldn't find work as a lawyer, after trying for a couple of months, and that he wasn't going to stay home everyday, and that something he had always been interested in, sort of avocationally was design. So he went out and got himself – well, first, he did our house. He needed to keep busy, so of course we were assigned an embassy flat like every other junior officer, and, of course, because it was India, it was the size of my house today, and that was probably the smallest house anybody had. But it was enormous. It was a two flat, and we had the downstairs and another Foreign Service officer lived upstairs from us.

So we were assigned all the embassy furniture like everybody else's, and Tom got to know all of the markets in Delhi, because he decided that he would slipcover this

furniture and paint these walls and put in these plants. So, for the first two or three months, I think that's what he did. He made that his project. He needed something to do. He knew everything about where to find anything in Delhi. I mean, he had been there, and he didn't speak any Indian languages, but there's enough English spoken anywhere in Delhi that you can kind of make your way around.

Pretty soon, everybody was coming to see our house. A couple months after that, he went to work for a big interior design company in Delhi, which wanted to get as a slice of its business the American embassy business, or any embassy business, because a lot of people came and said, "Oh my God, why do I want red velvet chairs in the middle of this tropical country?" So he built it into a little specialty business, and then left after a year and went back to school at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. He got a degree in environmental design and today runs a federal design awards program. It sponsors competitions for the best new federal building and the best stamp and the best bridge, and the best this, that and the other thing. He has never practiced law one day since. It led him into a whole new turn and course in his life, but not without some controversy, I suppose. I don't know, it was interesting.

Q: Well, going back now to the – could you explain for the listener what was the issue, and what were we doing? I mean, what were our concerns with these Pakistanis?

COWAL: Well, it was one of the many chapters in the long-running war between the Indians and Pakistanis. It starts, certainly, with the partition, and geographically, deciding that religion should rule over geography in terms of deciding how the subcontinent would get carved into two separate states. It left the province of East Bengal, which was Muslim dominated, was made part of Pakistan, which was 1,500 miles away to the west, with the whole of India in between. I mean, that was certainly what began this whole thing, and what I think remained at the core of it. The ethnicity and the religion cut different ways, also, because the Bengalis, whether they were East Bengalis or West Bengalis, also had certain things in common as Bengalis, being within the Indian culture, very literate people, very cultured people. They're the poets and the writers and the artists.

The Bengalis in East Bengal became ever more dissatisfied to be ruled by people who were quite different than they were. I don't know about so much ideologically, but certainly culturally, and 1,000 miles a way. So there were constant attempts by the East Bengalis to get out of East Bengal and to go into West Bengal. I mean, I think it was a refugee issue as well, that they were then overrunning West Bengal, which didn't get along all that well with the central government of India either, because West Bengal had a Communist-dominated government.

I was way below the pay grade where the real issues were I dealt with on a daily basis, but I think the tensions just kept escalating and escalating. It was not anything that the United States was particularly a part of, except insofar as we were seen to be supporting Pakistan in this.

Q: Well, I mean, also our people out of the Consulate General in Calcutta were involved, but were Indians trying to make us support the separatism? Was this something we felt we were under pressure from the Indians to do?

COWAL: Yes, I think we were, and I think we were under pressure from the Pakistanis not to do that. Forgive me for not being all that involved in what was actually going on there. From our point of view, it was simply one of the many issues in which the Indians found a reason to criticize U.S. policy. At the end of the day, I think we were much more worried about a major conflagration in South Asia in which somehow we would be asked to take sides than we were about anything else. I think that we allowed the coming into being of Bangladesh, then, when it finally became sort of inevitable that this is what would happen. I think the United States responded sort of immediately to grant diplomatic recognition to this new country and to begin an aid program and to do all sorts of things. And we've had pretty good relationships with Bangladesh ever since, as far as I know.

Q: Did you observe or get involved with the perpetual tension between our embassy in Pakistan and in India? There's almost a tradition of these telegrams coming in from both places.

COWAL: Oh, yes. Right.

Q: And somebody up there is talking to somebody who is on the Indian desk who is also – or maybe the Pakistan desk. They had an interconnecting door, and what they would usually do is take these telegrams, coming from almost like two hostile powers, and sit down and try to resolve the thing so it didn't get any farther up in the ...

COWAL: In a way, it was a beleaguered embassy. A whole lot of people, I think, and starting with the ambassador, felt that we weren't listening enough to the Indians and to their genuine concerns about this refugee problem that they were experiencing. I think those of us who were on the Indian side of the border, I think most of us sympathized with the Indians.

I remember taking one trip to Pakistan during the time I was in India, and I had to go over and deliver something. Maybe I was a courier, I don't remember. It was not a big, high-level trip, but I had two or three days I think in Karachi and Islamabad, and coming back and thinking that India was a much better place than Pakistan. For all that India could be difficult, both difficult just on the creature comfort level, and overwhelming. India is overwhelming in so many ways. It was kind of round and complex, whereas Pakistan seemed to me to be narrow and straight, and a single line, sort of motivated much more by Muslim fanaticism – or maybe it wasn't fanaticism in those days – but it seemed like a sharp edge, and India seemed like a round ball.

There was so much in India. There were even so many religions in India. I mean, after all, there were 60 million Muslims in India. It was not as if it was all Hindus, and the

multiplicity of cultures in India, with the south Indians and the north Indians and the Bengalis and the Gujaratis, and it should not have been surprising. After all, it's 1,800 miles long and 1,200 miles wide. That's bigger than the European continent, so clearly there would be distinctions, but I came back saying, "Oh, I wouldn't want to serve in Pakistan at all."

Q: So you caught the disease ...

COWAL: Right, I caught the disease, to that point. I thought, "That's black and white. It's very sharp, and this is so much richer, and it's more complex, and it's got so many more strands." So I got caught up in it to that extent of thinking it was quite a wonderful place.

Q: Particularly during this difficult time when the United States was picking up some flak from the Indians because of Kissinger – he had a broader game that he was playing.

COWAL: Right.

Q: He could have played it better, but anyway, he was doing it. What were you getting from your young pilots' association, and how did that go?

COWAL: Well, I think by then I was pretty much – remember, this is before e-mail and cell phones, so our communication, I would occasionally get visitors from Washington who had been colleagues of mine. I think that during those years that I was in India, the antipathy to the policy in Vietnam deepened and became rather dominant, but I was out of that. I was away from that.

So I was more or less focused at home and doing what I was doing in India and not any longer particularly connected to the larger world with Young Officers'.

Q: What about the crowd around Rajiv Gandhi and all of that? Was this affecting your social relations at all? Contacts with the young Indians?

COWAL: Well, it was sort of my social life. I guess I determined I became one of those people early on in a Foreign Service career who said I'm not here to associate with Americans, simply because if that's what I wanted to do, the gene pool at home is larger. So if I want to associate with Americans, I think I'll live in Arlington, Virginia and have American friends. I'm here to know something about the rest of the world. Whether that's altogether India or – I had a lot of German friends, I had a lot of British friends, I had Australian friends.

I mean, we were all kind of a broader international community, and I also reacted unhappily to this. A big post like India or Mexico where I later served can really have its little Americana section, and I think the joy of being a USIS officer was probably you couldn't do that job unless you were out. I mean, an admin officer, by definition sort of

needs to stick close to whatever the assignment is, and a consular officer I have great sympathy for, because I think they have to interact, more than anybody else, obviously with people from the country where they're representing, but also in extremely difficult ways. Whereas, basically, a USIS officer might get into ideological arguments with somebody, but is there bringing goodies, whether it's a film or a speaker or a chance to go abroad or a book for the library.

So you're out in quite the nicest way, really trying to win friends and influence people. I spent as much time as I could out of the office. My social friends were not at the American embassy, and my work colleagues were at the Indian Institute of International Relations in different universities around the country.

Q: Did you feel a divide with the people you knew in the political class who were following the pro-Soviet line, or anti-American line?

COWAL: I don't think I was that involved in it, other than being at dinners at embassy residence or dinners at the PAO's house. We were always trying to engage people who didn't necessarily agree with us, who were the editors of the newspapers or the Foreign Ministry people. I had friends who I still have, but they were mostly, I would say, nongovernmental friends in India. One of our best friends was a dentist and is still there. Obviously, he is still there, he's an Indian, and I see him and his wife whenever I go, and we remain friends. I suppose of any country, if you walk away and 30 years later you've still got a half a dozen people that you would call friends and care about and who care about you, that may come down to being what it's all about, what a lot of it is all about.

I think I was always one of these people who threw myself passionately into wherever I was. I watched Foreign Service officers who more or less came in and said, "Well, it's an inbox and an outbox. So today it's an inbox and an outbox in New Delhi, and tomorrow it will be an inbox and an outbox in Islamabad, and not really a whole lot of difference here. I know what I'm doing. I'm professional, I'm good, I know how to do it, but I'm not going to let it really affect me."

It was always the opposite for me. I always threw myself into it as if there were no tomorrow, as if I were always going to be there. I mean, this was my life, and it was as if I were never going to leave, although I knew of course in some part of my mind that I was going to leave. So I really made friends with people in the community, just the way you make friends with anybody in Arlington, Virginia. You went to a swimming pool and you made friends, and you went to dinner and you made friends, and you did what you would normally do, and you made friends.

Q: Well, how did this work when Daniel Moynihan came as ambassador?

COWAL: Well, that was very interesting, watching a power struggle, essentially. Moynihan came and he – well, first of all, his name was Daniel Moynihan and my boss's name was Dan Alexi, and they were both like six-foot, five-inches tall. I think it was clear

who was going to dominate, because I had the sense that my boss, among everybody on the country team, was the strongest person on that country team, in many ways. He was intellectually extremely bright, but he also had quite a forceful personality, and I wasn't a member of a country team until many years after that, so I was obviously never at a meeting. But I've been then, of course, a member of a lot of country teams and run some also, and it doesn't matter whether it's the military guy or the PAO or the ConGen (consulate general), there's usually somebody who emerges, maybe in opposition to the ambassador, maybe with the ambassador, but there's another power player there. And I think that was the head of USIS, which had its own operation and so on.

The first meeting that Moynihan had of this country team, which I suppose was the first or second day he was in Delhi, he immediately started on this idea that we should give back these rupees, because we had too many of them. It was sort of obscene, it was unseemly. We couldn't pretend that India was a sovereign country while we had all of these, and so on. So he expressed this as a point of view, and then he went around the table, because he wanted to know what every member of the country team thought about it.

When he got to my boss, my boss said he absolutely agreed with him, and that in fact he thought that given what U.S. policy was toward India, the fact that we had all of this money was misleading to the Indians in terms of how important they really were to us. It was clear that to Nixon and Kissinger they weren't very important, and yet the fact that we spent so much money in aid and we had a $10 million USIS budget and we had these huge things that we were doing, it really was unfair to the Indians, because it mislead them about our real interest in this country, which was pretty little at this point.

So he said, "I completely agree with you, and, in fact, last week in my Washington consultation, I made the decision to cut 10 percent of our staff, and Moynihan said, "You're cutting my staff?" And Dan said, "Well, sir, it's my program responsibility," and that was it. The meeting ended, apparently, on that note, and the ambassador gave him 72 hours to pack up and get out.

I watched from a pretty close-up view what I can only assume was a power struggle. Whether it did so infuriate the ambassador or whether he figured that the way you get to be the top dog is to immediately make sure everyone knows who's boss, and you won't tolerate, especially, the guy who might be the power center being there. It was quite a lesson.

Q: It must have been a real cold shock or whatever you want to call it to the entire embassy to have this.

COWAL: Right, and I can remember, of course, the meeting ended, the ambassador didn't say anything. Dan came back to our office and he had a deputy PAO and he had me and he had a couple of other people who were close to him, senior staff close to him. He called us in and he said, "Well, I've just had my first brush-up with the ambassador here."

He said, “I don’t know, I’ll have to go see the old man and work it out.” I think within an hour he had a call from the DCM, giving him this message, and nobody was going to buck the ambassador, so that’s what happened, and it was pretty amazing.

I guess that was April, and I was supposed to leave in June and then go to language school, and I just decided that I wanted to leave sooner rather than later, that I didn’t want to wait around for a new PAO to come.

Q: You really wouldn’t have had a chance to do anything.

COWAL: No.

Q: People must have been huddled in the halls.

COWAL: Yes, they must have been. We were all just in such shock. Dan – our Dan – was a giant guy. He was a real leader and I guess he immediately picked up the phone and called the head of USIA, who I think by then was Jim Keogh, I think, and told him what had happened, but never bucked it. I mean, didn’t say, “So you have to convince them.” In those days, we said, “The ambassador is the head of the country team, and if the ambassador wants you out, you’re out, and what’s the point in trying to stay.”

He said, “It will ruin USIS if I try to stay. What I need to do is get out so we’ll make the deputy the acting PAO and I’ll come home and I hope you’ll have a job for me.”

Q: What did he do?

COWAL: He became the head of the inspection corps for USIA. He’s alive and living in Florida, and we’re still in touch, but I don’t think he ever really did anything of great note after that. I mean, it pretty much finished him. Those were the days when there was really no integration in the Foreign Service. I mean, the highest thing that a USIA officer could aspire to be was the PAO, and if you were the PAO in the biggest place, you had no where else to go, I mean, really. That was, I think, one of the best things about the integration of State and USIA is that it should give a little bit more recognition to some of the really extraordinary people who chose to make their careers in USIA, and that didn’t happen in the ‘70s.

So he would have been a wonderful DCM, he would have been a wonderful ambassador, but that was just never in the cards. He never expected it to be and it never was. I think he probably worked another five years or so and then retired.

Q: Could you talk a little about the Indian members of USIS?

COWAL: Oh, gosh, terrific people, terrific people. USIS has its strange and wonderful complexities, because it seemed to me that as the American officers, we should always be prepared to tell our local staffs what it was we were trying to do, period, and then we

needed very much to count on our local staffs to tell us who we needed to get that message to and how we would get it to them.

So, if I tell you that my job is to convince Indians that the U.S. economy is strong and vibrant, and that's one of my messages, the U.S. is number one, I would expect the Indian staff to be able to say, "Okay, if you really want to get that message across in India, the people who carry the economic message are the podiatrists," or whatever it is, because when anybody goes to their foot doctors, that's when they talk about economics – or the barbers, or whatever. But something that wouldn't be obvious to you from the outside, necessarily – and you know that the one magazine that every podiatrist reads, or the one radio program that they all listen to is so and so. So this is your message, here's who you have to get it to, and here's how you're going to get it to them.

I've always thought that, and it always worked extremely well for me, but I had the luxury of thinking that because we had in India a staff that was absolutely intellectually and educationally prepared to engage in that kind of a dialog. I think in many third world countries, one of the best things the American embassy has is its staff, because it's usually regarded as a position of some prestige, and so in many countries, I thought our local staff was far better than our American staff, just because what are the alternatives to you as a middle-class person in India? Where do you go and work, for the Dodridge or for the American embassy? And an awful lot of people chose the American embassy, either because they idealistically believed in what we were trying to do, and I think many and most did, or because it was just a damn good place to work, competed very well with salaries and prestige offered anywhere else.

We had a number of spectacular people on the staff, and they were also your window on the world. To be a friend of Kamla Kapur's, who was the librarian, and enormously savvy, had her master's in library science from Cornell or something, but had been running this very prestigious American library for 25 years by the time I got there. There wasn't a member of India's intellectual elite who didn't know who Kamla Kapur was, because she was their gateway to getting – before the Internet and stuff, people would call her routinely from the president's office, or from the university or from the Foreign Ministry and say, "We absolutely need to get this speech that Henry Kissinger delivered. Kamla, can you help us?"

I mean, you could meet anybody you wanted through Kamla Kapur. One of the other things that I did was I was the PAO's liaison to the senior Indian staff, and so I met with them I guess once a week or so, and we would have a dialog about what they thought about American policy, and how we could accomplish it, and how we could best get the message across, and what was good about the message, and what would never go over about the message. Again, that was a very important experience for me that carried me through my whole Foreign Service career, is where would I go for help and how would I learn. What was the crash course in learning what we were all about in Colombia or anywhere else – ah, it was the good people on your local staff. So we had spectacular people.

Q: Well, we'll stop at this point and, next time, you're leaving India in 1973 and you're off to do what?

COWAL: To study Spanish and go to Colombia.

Q: All right. Well, we'll pick it up then.

COWAL: All right.

Q: Right, today is the 15th of November, the ides of November 2001. Nineteen-seventy-three, you're going to take Spanish and off to Colombia. Had you taken Spanish before? I can't remember.

COWAL: No.

Q: Had you had any connection with Latin America at all?

COWAL: No, and, actually, the decision was I went to India, as I described the last time, without any language training, because I was going to work all over the country and English was, although spoken by only I think 2 percent of the population, it was the 2 percent we were really trying to reach in India. That might or might not have been the correct policy, but that was certainly our policy, although I must say many of my fellow officers there were language qualified. It was always in one of the regional languages, and there was the feeling that English was as good as anything else if you were really going to be working throughout the country, which was what my job was.

So I hadn't yet taken a foreign language, unusual for a Foreign Service Officer, but because of the way I had come in, through the management intern program, that's the way it was. As my time in India came to an end and it was clear, I think, to me and everybody else that I would make a pretty good Foreign Service officer and therefore shouldn't be recycled back to Washington but should go on to other places in the world. The question was really did I want to study Spanish or did I want to study French?

Q: Getting you up to speed.

COWAL: Getting me up to speed in some world language. Well, I thought that studying Spanish didn't get you to Madrid and studying French didn't get you to Paris, but studying Spanish got you to Buenos Aires or Santiago or Mexico City or Bogotá, and studying French got you to Fort Lamy or Niamey or Kinshasa. And being a very urban person – I think we've talked about my growing up in Chicago and close to the museums and the concert halls and the libraries, I didn't see myself as being off somewhere in the bush in a little town of 3,000 people, trying to eke out an existence. So I said, "Aha, I will study Spanish and that will lead me toward a world civilization of some kind or another."

That was essentially correct, although I got to Bogotá after – so I was assigned to Tegucigalpa, I believe, initially.

Q: Not exactly a major world capital.

COWAL: Not a major world capital. Of course, it later became in its own weird way for a brief moment in time sort of a major world capital when we were funding the Contras and worrying about a war in Central America, but that would come almost 10 years later. So Tegucigalpa, the more I looked at that, the more I thought, "That doesn't fit my definition of a major world capital either."

I suppose, and maybe this is the first time ever revealed here, that because I had worked in the personnel office at one time, I still had some good connections in it, including the director of personnel.

Q: Who was the director?

COWAL: Well, USIA at that time. His name was Lionel Mosley, and he had been there for a long, long time, was a civil servant and a very good one and a very dedicated one. I had worked for somebody who had worked for him, so he knew me quite well, and I went to him and explained that I didn't think my aspirations would be fulfilled being the cultural affairs officer in Tegucigalpa, and this was literally right before I was supposed to go. And he said, "Who is the public affairs officer," and I gave him the name, which I have forgotten, but someone who wasn't all that well respected, I must say. This was, after all, the backwater of the backwater.

At that time, there were maybe 600 Foreign Service officers in USIA, and he literally knew every one of them. It was a small agency, and upon hearing who it was I was supposed to work for, he stopped and he said, "Oh my God, you'll kill him," and squelched the assignment on the spot. Then they scrambled around a little bit and decided that I would be the book officer in Bogotá, Colombia. The book officer's job was to travel around the continent – this was a regional job – promoting the sale and the placing of American books translated into Spanish.

The books were published in either Buenos Aires or Mexico City, which is where the publishing industry is. But in Bogotá they had this regional job that said you'll take these 20 or 30 titles, which were well-known books, basically, on history and on political science and on American literature, and things that I really loved and liked dealing with. You'll travel around the continent and you'll go to book stores. You'll go to newspaper book review sections. You'll go to television shows which interview authors. You'll go to university deans and professors. And you'll try to get these adopted as textbooks, and you'll try to get the bookstores to buy them, and you'll try to get some publicity about them, so that somebody will want to read them.

I thought that was a great idea, and it gave me a chance to not simply see one country in Latin America, but in fact to see all of Latin America. The only problem with it was that I had a certain budget to do this promotion, and I was so active and got so many things sort of going, that of course I ran out of the amount of money that I had to spend on it much before the end of the fiscal year. Then I was sort of sitting around, figuring out what else I would do since I didn't have much of a budget left. As I was trying to decide that, the person who was the head of the cultural center in Bogotá was suddenly replaced. I was in the right place at the right time and asked to – essentially grabbed by the PAO as a good resource. Rather than waiting for six months or something for Washington to assign him a new cultural center director, they asked me if I would do that, and I was delighted to oblige.

Q: Let me get some dates here. You got out there in '73?

COWAL: I got there in November of '73.

Q: And how long were you book officer?

COWAL: I know I was book officer less than a year.

Q: So '73 to '74. Let's talk just a bit about being a book officer. What was your impression, I mean, was USIA doing anything for these publishing houses to translate and print out these books?

COWAL: Yes, it was a huge subsidy program, really. AID and USIA were both in this business, and I happen to think it was a terrific business. But AID stuck to the more technical books. They had the agriculture books and the electrical engineering books and so on, and USIA's field was more the humanities broadly speaking, so we had books on art and literature and music and history and philosophy.

They were heavily subsidized, insofar as we paid for the rights and then we paid for the translation. Then we would go to a publisher to get more or less a commercial deal on the publication, hoping that the publisher would take that in as part of his own line, his own stock, whatever he was going to put out, but the advantage to the publisher being that he didn't have to negotiate for the rights and he didn't have to do the translation. So, if it was an American book he was interested in, it was a much better deal for him. Then we provided some supplemental services such as publicity materials, and me, to go around promoting this list. In a way, it helped the publishers also, because if I was talking about one book, we might sell five others that weren't part of our list. But I thought it was actually a very, very valuable program.

Q: What was your impression of the American studies within Latin America, because you were right in the guts of it. I mean, that's what it was all about.

COWAL: It was. That's what it was all about. It was really not about commercial book publishing, so it got me on a lot of university campuses, as well. It was really, I think, very important in terms of my understanding of who we are. This is 1973, interesting things are going on in Chile. Vietnam is still very much underway. Campuses are pretty anti-American, by and large, but we're promoting books like Neither Marx nor Jesus, the Jean-Jacques Ceron Shriver, translated Ni Marx, Ni Jesus, and trying to get some discussion going on college campuses through the medium of these books as to whether or not Communism is a system which succeeds or fails. Is it a workable economic and political system or is it not?

My impression is that the public universities in most of Latin America had already become pretty much entrenched in Marxist thought, but not all that effective, because not only were they in Marxist thought, but they were also in a completely chaotic situation as public institutions of how they would run. So it was often the case that they were closed or that they didn't run at all because the professors were on strike, or the students were on strike, or the university workers were on strike. So the Catholic universities and the private universities across the region, which continued to function, were certainly allowed to move into a position of having more influence because of the disarray in the public universities.

Q: I've never served in Latin America, but one gets the feeling that you had these faculties that were full of Marxists and they had the kids all excited, and as soon as they got out, Marxism, except for a very small number, didn't take at all.

COWAL: Right. I'm wondering whether it wasn't only that it didn't take after they got out or the fact that it also was pretty poorly taught. As a philosophy or a system of government, it was sort of a catch word, but I'm not sure that people really studied it or learned it all that well. It might have succeeded better if they'd been more efficient at doing it. But, yes, it was a very hot time in Latin America, and certainly, as always, and this is even before the Central American real conflagration, the United States was the pole of opposition around which much rallied. We were simply trying to, in our own small, modest way, inject a different point of view into the dialog that might have been there without it.

Of course, we didn't just parachute into the campus. We would work with the USIS missions in each country and we would use their contacts, but their contacts sometimes didn't extend to the book review digests in the local newspaper. They would know the news editor. I think we were fairly successful at getting a degree of interest in these books that we were promoting, at least in some of them. Some of them were real dogs, and they would negotiate all the rights stuff in Washington. Of course, we didn't select what books or the price, so sometimes you had the people in Washington who didn't understand Latin America very well and what would be interesting to students in Latin America. Then the U.S. government was trying to do everything on the cheap, so when they couldn't get something for free, or almost for free, they sometimes abandoned it.

Now, some of the best stuff got out by itself anyway, and got translated by itself. If there was a hot new novel by John Updike, they didn't need us. It was going to find its market in Spanish and in Latin America anyway, but for a lot of books that I think probably affected, if not a lot of people's lives, at least for a moment in time their thought process, we were able to get it.

Q: How did you find you were received, one, at the newspapers and maybe there are stories or episodes of different places or different campuses? How did you find this?

COWAL: How did I find the reception?

Q: Yes.

COWAL: Well, pretty good. I mean, again, it's not so often, I suppose, that an American Foreign Service officer comes to call on a campus bookstore manager. If our philosophy in those days was that we should be working with the political leaders, the media leaders and the economic leaders, or people who would become one of those things in the fairly near future, then to seek to influence a university market was a good thing to do. I suppose it to a certain extent taught me some things that I'm still using today, and that's if you can have your point of view buttressed by some hard facts, you're in a much better position than if it's simply your point of view against somebody else's point of view.

I use that even today in the work I do on Cuba, where I'm out here. We're looking at this book on my table which is a draft report on economic impacts of U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, and it's a survey that we've just had done by Texas A&M University, which is showing on a state-by-state basis just what we're losing because we have an embargo against Cuba. Okay, USIA is the foreign policy agency charged with propaganda or charged with public diplomacy or whatever you want to call it. You're a much more effective advocate when it's evidence based, or facts based. I think I learned that very early on and it sounds silly to say, but I've always loved books. From the time I was a little kid, I was a voracious reader, so actually to have a chance to not simply say what did Sally Grooms believe in, because who the hell cares, but here was a point of view which was different, in many cases, from that which was being taught as the truth revealed in Latin American universities and because of our subsidies and because of our working. But we weren't changing the facts, here.

We were simply taking the facts that we found useful, and not always facts. Maybe it was a Mark Twain book. Maybe it was a novel that reflected something about American society. But by providing a way for those thoughts to get to people in a language that they could read them, and at a price that they could afford – this was never a giveaway program. This was always, "You will care more about this book if you buy it."

Q: Oh, absolutely, yes.

COWAL: Even if you buy it, it's a book that costs $1.00 and the other book costs $2.00, so maybe we think you'll buy our book if you don't know the difference because ours was half price, but we never gave it to you. I mean, we might give a professor a copy so that he would read it and get enthusiastic about it and put it on his syllabus, but this was not a wholesale giveaway program. Sometimes AID's were. They would just provide the text book.

Q: That doesn't work very well.

COWAL: So I learned a lot of things. I learned that you're on much better ground when you're standing on the facts, and I learned that giveaway schemes don't work, but selling schemes do. So I guess I liked it because it was a place where the marketplace had a role, also. It was not just straight government. I also liked it because I traveled to every country in South America.

At the time I went to Cuba last year, Cuba was the only country in all of the Caribbean and Latin America that I hadn't been to. I'd been in every single country, from Paraguay to St. Kitts and Nevis through my various jobs in the department, but I hadn't ever been the Cuba. So I traveled. Three weeks out of every four I was on the road.

Q: How did you find the Latin Americans? Are they readers? One thinks of the French as being readers, and of the British being readers, but I was wondering whether one can draw conclusions, or is it broken down by country?

COWAL: Well, I think it's broken down by social class and by country, and that, in some ways, has something to do with climate. For instance, Bogotá, the people of Bogotá are huge readers, and that's because it's got a climate about like London. It's damp and dark and wet for nine months of the year, and so there's a lot of emphasis on music and on theater and on reading. I mean, people pursue indoor activities, whereas Rio, everybody goes to the beach nine months of the year, and maybe they read under the palm trees, I don't know. Of course, I should say Brazil is the exception because of Portuguese being the language, and I was the Spanish-language book officer, not the Portuguese.

Literacy has never been very high in most countries in Latin America, certainly compared to some other places, except Cuba, where it was pretty high, but of course we didn't go to Cuba. But there are reading publics in Latin America, and ideas are important, and the discussion of ideas is important and I think there's a pretty good education.

Q: Well, was there a Sally Grooms working for the Soviet Union running around North America?

COWAL: I'm sure that there was, and I don't know that I ever actually met that person, but I do know that one of the jobs that I also had to do when I went into each country was sort of a survey of what was being sold. Of course, I could find evidence that Sally Grooms had been there. I mean, Sally Grooms of the Soviet Union had been there,

because there were certainly things that wouldn't have gotten there translated from Russian if somebody hadn't been promoting their translation, so I would say very definitely so. And, of course, we thought ours were a superior product, both in their content and their presentation. Ours, though they were published in Mexico or Buenos Aires, they were kind of American standard in terms of their publishing quality.

Q: Did you find places on the campuses where you're up against the local Marxist mafia, within the faculties?

COWAL: Yes, there were places we were totally shut out, no question about it, and then there were places where people wanted a dialog. I don't think that those campuses were ever totally monolithic. There were always those who had been trained in Britain or in France or in the United States – well, some of those trained in France certainly ended up being Marxists, and some of those trained in the United States did as well, and some of those trained in Britain did as well.

I think the relationship, and I guess this is something I learned early on, too, in my first assignment in Latin America, which was this one, is that the relationship between the United States and Latin America is one of the most extraordinarily complex in the world, simply because of where we sit geographically and where they sit geographically. So that was also an important lesson, that while in most places I think it could be genuinely described as a love-hate relationship.

In most countries, the foreign policy elites, or the economic elites and the political elites, initially gravitated toward Europe, primarily France and Spain. Then a couple of generations before me they certainly gravitated toward the United States as being the pole, the place where they didn't want to go to the Sorbonne anymore, they wanted to go to Harvard. They didn't want their kids to go to Oxford, they wanted their kids to go to Princeton, and that all began to change. Then you had Vietnam, I suppose, and Vietnam simply revived the anti-Americanism, which was always latent and which probably goes back to the Monroe Doctrine, the feeling that who are these upstart gringos who are going to tell us what to do, just the way they're trying to tell our Asian brothers what to do? And despite the fact that we like the music and the food and the universities and it's certainly closer for us to get there than it is for us to get to Europe, among a certain class, both I would say the artists and philosophers and some of the political elite, we'll totally turn our back on that. We'll reject that.

Certainly you lived with those two worlds, but I must say, my own experiences with personally directed anti-Americanism were few and far between. As usual, when people got to know you, as they did, as a person, or dealt with you as a person, it always also came out how much of the United States they admired and respected, and how much their constitutions and bills of rights and so on were more or less founded on ours. That was the system in which they were steeped.

Q: How about Mexico? I would have thought that there you would have found a different reaction range and all than different parts, being so close, and the love-hate relationship being much more intense.

COWAL: Well, you know what they say in Mexico, or they used to Mexico, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States," which was something said by a Mexican President, Porfirio Diaz, in 1910. It still, I think to this day, expresses the feeling of many, many Mexicans. I think if you scratch the surface of a lot of Canadians, you'd in fact find very much the same feeling of Pierre Trudeau said, "Well, when you sleep with the elephant, you always worry whether he wakes up and rolls over in the middle of the night," which is pretty much a way of saying the same thing, that it's just so close that if we get a cold, Mexico has pneumonia, and so on. We're seeing that in the economic recession right now, which is badly affecting Mexico.

Q: Well, did you find a different caliber of people, say, on the campuses of bookstores in Mexico than elsewhere? Because of the closeness, more people go to school in the United States and all that?

COWAL: Especially in those years of the early '70s, I don't think so. There was a feeling between Mexico and the United States, very distant neighbors. We used to say in the United States, we were willing to do anything for Mexico except think about it. In Mexico, after the loss of the territory, this is the only country in Latin America – well, with the possible exception of Cuba, perhaps, where we still own Guantanamo Bay – but where in the case of Mexico, we actually lopped off about a third of it and annexed it to the United States in 1848. And then Mexico went through a very difficult period in the 1860s, with the French essentially taking over the governance of Mexico, and then the Mexicans sort of coming out of that with the Mexican Revolution in its various incarnations. But the Mexican revolution being a total rejection of anything that might have the power of dominating them, whether another country or a religion. They were the only country in Latin America that totally separated church and state to the point where a cleric couldn't appear on the streets dressed as a cleric, and a religious wedding in Mexico doesn't count. Your wedding has to be done by civil authorities, so even a more complete separation of church and state than we have in this country.

That was all part of, I think, the Mexican desire to be as fully independent as they could be, living where they lived, and to sort of seal themselves off. I think for many years, there was this huge gulf. I mean, the Rio Bravo or the Rio Grande, as we call it, was in some places no more than a few inches wide, but it was as if it were a different planet. I think you only saw this sort of gradual pirouetting and turning to face each other along this border, instead of turning our backs to each other, it really didn't begin to happen until I would say the mid 1980s.

Q: Well, did you plan to yourself as you were lining up your trips, were there any countries where you were saying, "Oh, God, do I have to go there?"

COWAL: Well, I was never very fond of Central America, because it was a poorer and less developed region of Latin America, and that was true. And of course, I didn't in those days go to the Caribbean, because I was only doing Spanish-language books, and I guess nobody bothered with the Dominican Republic. Cuba we weren't doing, and the Dominican Republic we left aside, and we didn't go to Haiti, either, and we didn't do the English-speaking Caribbean because we didn't have anything to offer there.

So, for the places that I went, I would simply find the intellectual dialog less rich in most of Central America. After all, they were smaller populations, they were much poorer. There was maybe one university. Anybody who could get out got out, and few people came back, because there was not much reason to come back. The famous El Salvador was controlled by 14 families and whatever, so I must say I didn't terribly look forward to the trips to Central America, but I loved going to Mexico and I loved going to Argentina and I loved going to Ecuador and Bolivia and Peru. I also have to say Venezuela has never been one of my favorite countries, because it doesn't seem to have a sense of what it is as a culture.

Most of the rest of Latin America has a very strong feeling about national identity and culture, and I think the Venezuelans – I don't know whether it's the oil wealth or what it is, but I don't think they've ever quite known who they were. So that was sort of less interesting to me. But I think there was always this contrast between what you thought if you hadn't been there and what you thought, having been there, in terms of perception of people and their respect for the United States, or their desire to have some contact with the United States, was usually much stronger than was perceived if you simply saw Nixon being stoned in Caracas, or another of these anti-American manifestations. The Cubans also, whom I've come to know only much later, I think there was never any love lost between the Russians and the Cubans. There is simply something about Russian culture, Soviet culture, that has basically no appeal for Latin America.

Q: Well, it also didn't have in the Arab world, either. It's interesting – and in the oriental world. I mean, it doesn't translate very well. The type of government, too, didn't allow sort of the scholars and the interests to go out, so sort of xenophobic.

COWAL: Right, right. So the Latin Americans wanted to preach Communism or that they were all very pro-Russian or something, but that was more a way to stand up to the United States than it was a genuine feeling that this was something that they wanted for themselves. After all, they wanted the freedom to criticize both their own governments, and ours, and I think the brighter of them realized that in a Communist system you didn't have that freedom. So there was a real contradiction in terms there, and brighter people were smart enough to recognize that if they hadn't been living in at least quasi-democracies, they wouldn't be able to do what they were doing.

Q: Did you find any problems of cooperation with the Church? I'm referring obviously to the Roman Catholic Church in those countries.

COWAL: Actually, it was an interesting time for the Church in Latin America. I think because of the whole liberation theology movement, there was a real conflict within the Church between the more repressive voices within the Church and the more liberal voices, and Vatican II playing into all of that. So, in my year of being the book officer, I didn't deal with so many church people, although I do recall having had pretty good reception at Catholic universities. The Catholic Church did provide a fair percentage of the tertiary education in most countries in Latin America. But when I actually then stayed home in Bogotá and worked running this cultural center, my relations with the Church were actually very good, actually quite good. That's when I discovered that the Church wasn't a monolith either, and that there were progressive voices in the Church, as well as repressive ones.

Q: Al right, well then, let's see, from '74 to when were you running the cultural center. We'll talk about that.

COWAL: Well, from '74 to '78.

Q: Good God.

COWAL: So I got another four years in Colombia.

Q: They sort of lost you there.

COWAL: They did.

Q: They threw you into that briar patch and they never ...

COWAL: They did. They did, and I would scream about the briar patch for the same reason Brer Rabbit screamed about the briar patch, because I hoped everybody would leave me alone. The first time I had really run my own show, and this was a cultural center that had 6,000 students and 200 faculty and I think an annual budget of a couple of million dollars a year, as I recalled, 90 percent of which was generated by student fees.

Q: Student fees, I was going to say.

COWAL: So the only subsidies that this center had, which was a bi-national center, and they were all over Latin America. They were in a few other places in the world, also, but Latin America is where the model stuck. The genesis for them was actually out of Nelson Rockefeller, in the early days when he was working on inter-American affairs, right after the Second World War, in the late '40s. If you remember, the Rockefellers have a big association with Venezuela, among other things, but Nelson Rockefeller had this wonderful collection of pre-Columbian art. David Rockefeller has a huge connection with Latin America. The Rockefellers that I know are very much connected to Latin America.

So, when Nelson Rockefeller was in the State Department, which was briefly after the war, the whole genesis for these things – it's very interesting looking at the situation we're in today and saying we need to do a better job on public diplomacy and we've lost the young people of the Arab world, and how will we get them back and how can we influence them? So these bi-national centers were set up I think in every country in Latin America. Maybe they didn't all stick, but most of them did and were having a real heyday, again, in the '70s. Most of them then got set up in probably the early '50s, and their mission was to be English language institutes which would also provide cultural programs, and they were a way of reaching the young people with a product that young people wanted, namely, English language.

We would take any adult. We didn't take anybody below 12. We didn't have kids' classes. So our population was basically secondary school and university. So we had these 6,000 students. We charged a fee. It was enough to break even or a little bit better. We had a bi-national board of directors. In the case of Colombia, we had nine people, five Colombians and four Americans. It was a corporation – they owned the facilities, they hired the staff, but like the Alliance Français and so on, there was a close affinity with the U.S. embassy, but my office was not in the embassy, my office was in the bi-national center. Every American worked for the ambassador, but my day to day responsibilities were to this board of directors. While I was there, I think three out of the four years, the chairman was a Colombian.

So it was a Colombian institution, as it was a Mexican institution or a Peruvian institution or a Venezuelan institution. In Colombia, I think we had five or six of them, so these were not just in the capital cities, but we had them in Barranquilla and Cartagena and Cali and Medellin and whatever, but of course the jewel in the crown was Bogotá, and, in general, the bi-national centers in the capital cities.

Oh my, it was a wonderful job. That's why I hoped they'd forget me in the briar patch forever. I had quite a lot of autonomy, because it was unclear what the reporting relationships were. I mean, the embassy could certainly crack down. I think the cultural affairs officer sat on the board, as one member of the board, but he was only one member of the board. So I ran the show, and what I decided to do with that cultural center was that instead of making it an English-teaching center that sometimes did cultural programs, I'd transform it into a cultural center which also taught English.

So we really stepped up the cultural activities, and we presented everything from film series to concert series to lecture series. We had really quite a good library. That was when some of the technology was beginning to transfer things so we could do – you couldn't do online searches in those days, but we were a research library, and for Colombia, we were probably the best American research library. I mean, if you really wanted to know how many tons of steel were going into the World Trade Center, we could get you the answer. Also, we began to use fax machines and copies of articles and stuff, so we would get 100 periodicals, I suppose, but the librarian would make up a little bibliography of 10 articles from 10 of those periodicals and we had a little list of high-

powered people that we'd send them to say, "Check off which of these 10 articles you want and we'll Xerox it and put it in your mailbox within 48 hours," or whatever it was.

We began to not only have the very young, who were the students, but to have a way into a different segment of society, and we did spectacular exhibitions. We did a complete revamp of the whole building, and we ended up with an art gallery that was as good as any art gallery in the city. Then we would do great publications of catalogs, and so the whole artistic community would come there, and that would get me on TV, talking about what we were presenting. Because we were a bi-national center, sometimes it was American and sometimes it was Colombian, or sometimes it was a Colombian photographer's look at New York City or something, and sometimes it was purely Colombian.

I mentioned the Church, and we did one exhibition on Church artifacts and vestments that had never been seen outside of the Church before, and the cardinal agreed to loan them to us, with the popular insurance policy and everything. But, suddenly, as *objets d'art* you had these great monstrances and chalices and Church vestments on display and in a catalog, and the cardinal thought that was great. The ambassador wanted to make the cardinal happy, more or less, so the ambassador thought it was great because the cardinal thought what the Americans were doing was fantastic. And I got them all funded from American businesses, basically. We would go to Pepsi-Cola and say, "Will you underwrite this exhibition," and we would get – we're not talking about a lot of money, but you'd get $10,000 or $20,000, and with that we'd do a spectacular show.

So we really put this thing on the map, and it was a wonderful experience for me. It was like a little university and a little Kennedy Center and we had a cafeteria that served American food, a little snack bar. We had a genuine American cook in there doing French fries and hamburgers and hot dogs. So it became a place where – this is pretty much pre-McDonald's – where if you had some nostalgia about things American or you thought you wanted to be American, you could go there and pretend like you were in little America.

Q: So the Colombian students dropped by?

COWAL: Right. I mean, we were close to three of the major universities, and a little farther from the national university, which was good, because it was usually on strike and it was usually very anti-American. But we were close downtown to three of the major universities, and those students, many of the university students had in fact been our students as high school students. So they knew about it and they would continue to come.

Then we started a whole sort of Berlitz program for executives, where we'd do intensive English, high powered, six weeks, put them through a basic English course, and that, again, it was a vehicle. It was not an end in itself. It was a way of reaching a target audience with the product that audience wanted, which again they had to buy. You didn't get a free hamburger. You didn't get a free book. You didn't get a free English course.

You got one which was meant to be priced at a place where you could afford it if you were the high-powered executive. It was a lot more expensive than what the student paid, but it was not a giveaway. I never had such a good time in my whole life.

Q: Where did you get your English teachers?

COWAL: Americans. Many of them returned Peace Corps volunteers, or Peace Corps volunteers who never returned, I should say. These were young people who had come to Colombia in the Peace Corps for two years and then just couldn't face going home. Again, we're talking about the '70s. Some of them didn't go home because they were going to get drafted, and some of them didn't go home because they discovered that there was a whole world out there that was different than Poughkeepsie, and they liked it. So they spoke Spanish very well and they stayed on.

I think 80 percent of our staff was native speakers of English, and the other 20 percent spoke English extremely well. It was a highly qualified staff. It was also unionized, and so one of the first things I had to do upon becoming director was go through arduous negotiations with the labor union, so that was a good learning experience also. It's something that typical Foreign Service officers don't have to do, but I learned how you would deal with the president of the union or a union negotiating team, and we avoided a strike. And then some of these bi-national centers in Latin America essentially went out of business because they did run into labor and other problems.

Q: Bolivia comes to mind.

COWAL: I think you may be right. Mexico, actually, and they just couldn't get it done, but we followed a curriculum that was from the English teaching office of USIA, and they gave us the basic curriculum. I think we brought our books from Mexico, from a brother or sister English-teaching institute in Mexico. It was very professional. I mean, our teachers were all trained. We had good teacher training programs. We went about this extremely professionally.

We graduated, which was, like, 12 courses and a proficiency exam, I don't know, maybe 500, 600 kids a year. We were the ones who gave the TOEFL, the teaching of English as a foreign language, which students needed to qualify for admission into the universities in the United States. So we became just a wonderfully vibrant and alive sort of student center, and everybody just said, "Oh, where are you going today?" "Oh, I'm going to the Colombo." Well, the Colombo was the Centro Colombo Americano, and to this day, when I meet Colombians and I say I was in Colombia and such and such, they'll say, "Well, what were you doing," and I said, "Well, I was the director of Centro Colombo Americano in Bogotá." And they'll say, "The Colombo!" It's still open and it still has a bit of that, I think, aura about it, and it was just a wonderful job.

Q: Being close to three universities, were there demonstrations against you a lot or not?

COWAL: I never remember a demonstration against us. The demonstrators went to the embassy.

Q: That way.

COWAL: Yes, exactly, "That's up on 36th Street." The Colombo was theirs in that sense.

Q: Tell me, I mean, you were in Colombia from '74 to '78.

COWAL: Seventy-three to '78.

Q: I mean, '73 to '78. What was your impression of Colombia as a country, politically and economically and all of that type of thing?

COWAL: Well, it was in a very interesting period, politically, because they had had for I guess maybe 40, 50 years something that came to be known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), which was essentially politically driven. I mean, there were two political parties, the liberals and the conservatives, more or less standing for what you would think they would stand for. I mean, the conservatives being more church oriented. I guess we would call them maybe Christian Democrats, and I guess the liberals were more or less socialists. They were actually both reasonably centrist, and the conservatives tended to be more pro-American, and the liberals tended to be not pro-Russian, but more pro their own sense of nationalism, perhaps.

This came to be much more the case in Mexico than in Colombia, but the move was to nationalize the means of production and to provide this import substitution model which said we're going to put up high tariff barriers, and there's no reason why we should import water from the United States, we'll bottle our own water. And that took over in all of Latin America, or that was the dialog, essentially, whether you ought to have higher taxes and more social services provided by the government, or if you need to go to the private sector to do that.

It was the same sort of fight in Colombia. The problem was that in Colombia, in the '20s and '30s, it became extremely violent, and a town was a conservative town or a liberal town. You knew that. I mean, this is not Bogotá, but for all the *provincia* (provinces). Most buildings in Latin America are sort of adobe, or stucco, painted white, and then they usually have shutters on the windows, and the window shutters have a particular color. And in Colombia, if the village was a liberal village, the shutters were red, and if the village was a conservative village, the shutters were blue. You could go anywhere in the country and you would know what was the political persuasion.

If you, Stu, were wearing a blue shirt, you shouldn't be living in that red town. There would be incredible pressure on you to change or move, and there were also these armed gangs going around the country and saying, "Well, we're all wearing red shirts. Let's go to that town where they've got blue shutters and shoot them up." So, after many, many,

many years, the Colombians somehow a national peace process got together in the sort of ‘60s and ‘70s and they said, “We want democracy and so on, but each of our elections, ‘48 with Rojas and stuff, has been incredible massacres, incredible bloodshed. So we’re going to do democracy in our own style, and that’s going to be to essentially allow primary elections so that the conservatives will fight the conservatives and the liberals will fight the liberals, so that we’ll see who the conservatives really want as their leader, but we’ll agree to trade off every four years. So ‘60 to ‘64, the president will be a liberal, and then they’ll have a primary and they’ll figure out which of the liberals it is. And ‘64 to ‘68 will be conservative, and ‘68 to ‘72 will be a liberal, and we’ll trade back and forth.”

That actually worked extremely well, and so when I was there, they were on the last period of this agreement, and it was a liberal president, named Lopez Michelsen, and the election which came in 1978 then was the first one in which they would see again whether the two parties could contest one another without their being a huge blowup. I would say, politically, it was a very interesting time to be there, and it worked. In 1978, it worked. The drug trafficking apart, and we can talk about that a little bit, but in terms of achieving a certain maturity as a political system, I think the Colombians managed to do, and so there hasn’t been a military government in Colombia for, I don’t know, a long time, 50 years or so. The military was out of politics, was always out of politics, and they got to the point where I think the guy who succeeded Lopez was a liberal, but the next guy was a conservative. They have gone back and forth, as they do today.

Economically, it was also the best-managed economy in Latin America, and I learned why while I was there. I didn’t learn completely by accident. I guess I had heard something about this, when we closed down this cultural center over the period of six months, in the same location, but greatly expanded cultural facilities. We had enough money that we more or less financed it ourselves. While it was closed, I rented a huge house in the old part of town and I simply moved the cultural program to my house. So every night I would have a movie show or a lecture or something.

But for the grand reopening, we wanted to have a concert and a lecture and a feature film, and every night we would do something to show the kinds of programs we did in total. So, for the lecture, I decided it should be an economic lecture, and called up John Kenneth Galbraith at Harvard University absolutely cold, out of the blue, and said, “Would you come to Colombia and give a lecture for the opening of this cultural center?” And he said, “Sure, I’ll come.”

I said, “Well, what would we have to pay you or whatever,” and he said, “Well, a first-class ticket for myself and my wife, and take my wife on a shopping trip.” A $500 dollar shopping trip, and she only spent $300, and I tried to give him a check for the other 200, and he said, “Well, keep it to buy books for the library.” And I said, “Should I buy Galbraith?” And he said, “No, I’ll give you all the Galbraiths you want,” he said, “Buy pornography.” But, at any rate, I found out through having the Galbraiths, and the Galbraiths came and stayed with me for three or four days, and he gave this lecture, that

one of his professors, who was a Canadian. If you remember, Galbraith was a Canadian. And his name, I think, was McLaughlin, a Scot, was actually the architect of the whole Colombian economic system, had been a consultant to the government of Colombia in the '30s and had really put in place an economic system which worked extremely well.

Again, had it not been for the last five years or so – even the drug trade didn't overwhelm them until about five years ago. They were always sort of free marketers. There was always a fairly free market. There was always a fairly free peso/dollar exchange. So they didn't get behind all of these nationalist barriers. As the means of wealth, they had enormous coal reserves from oil, more or less enough to take care of themselves, although not to export. They had very good fish stocks. They had cut flowers in abundance, horticultural products. And then, of course, they had emeralds. They had mineral wealth that had an enormous export value.

So they were handed some good cards, but they also, over all the years of changing between the conservative government and the liberal government, they had a number of people, the governors of the central bank, the minister of finances, the minister of the economy, who were always well educated and well chosen. That provided a huge difference. There was always an American private sector there, or a foreign private sector. There was always foreign investment. There were reasonable rules of foreign investment.

Q: There wasn't the threat of nationalization.

COWAL: No.

Q: It so screwed up the economies of many ...

COWAL: Despite the fact that they had these terrible internecine sort of political battles, they were able to leave the economy out of it, and I say, that's probably why they could survive as well as they've survived. The drug thing began when I was there, and I think we didn't quite know it, we didn't quite recognize it. I remember the first manifestation of it being up on the coast, up in Cartagena and Barranquilla, just traveling, doing some weekends. Those were beautiful places to go. And going to someone's house and realizing that all the faucets in the bathrooms were gold, and so you suddenly had all these people with so much money, and nothing to invest it in. So they had wonderful art collections and gold faucets and stuff in the bathroom. You just sort of said, "Well, what's all this about?" But you didn't know.

I left in 1978 and still didn't know, I must say, and went back for my first visit in 1982, and I'll never forget what one of my Colombian friends told me – '81 or '82. And I said, "Well, you know, Pedro," or whatever his name was, "in the three or four years since I've been gone, what's changed here? Tell me about how is Bogotá different than when I was here." And he said, "Well, you know, Sally, when you lived here, if you were walking down the street and you somebody coming down the street toward you in a Mercedes, you waved, because you might not know exactly whose Mercedes that was, but you knew you

pretty much knew everybody who had a Mercedes." And he said, "You don't wave anymore, because those aren't the people. It isn't our friends who own the Mercedes, it isn't the doctor and the lawyer and the head of the business corporation, it's the drug traffickers."

I thought that was always very profound, that now the Mercedes are in different hands. You know, it was obviously already happening before 1978, but in the years '78 to '82 was when it got a really, really, really strong foothold in the country.

Q: You mentioned the violence, La Violencia. From what I've gathered, the Colombians were renowned sort of in the United States as being more violent. They and the Jamaicans were sort of within gangs or what have you. They're more likely to pick up a submachine-gun than anybody else.

COWAL: Well, as I said, drug trafficking – and, of course, drug trafficking is also linked to arms trafficking. A whole lot of drugs going out of the country are paying for arms coming in, so the fact that they had a lot of drug trafficking certainly caused an escalation in the number and sophistication of the arms going in. The other thing about Colombia, I mean, one of the things that was totally not successful about it, was a large number of orphans and abandoned children.

I suppose this is in part the anti-abortion policies of the Catholic Church, but there were more children born than could apparently be cared for by their families. So I can remember, even when I lived there, that there would be these gangs of very young children, starting maybe at age six or seven, who were called *gamines* (street kids), and they would be on the streets, and they would usually live under the protection of an older boy, let's say, or an older child. These were mostly boys, not exclusively, but mostly.

Of course, the way they survived was they stole. Now, in the days I was there, it was relatively petty stuff. It was relatively innocent. But I think it became also much more violent. And, again, for all that it was a well-managed economy on a macro sense, there was a lot of corruption. One of the things, for instance, was I think, as I recall, the emerald mines were guarded by the army, but they had to change the soldiers every six weeks or something like that because they discovered nobody stayed incorruptible longer than that. Because all you had to do to get out with a handful of emeralds in your pocket was to bribe the soldier who was supposed to be inspecting your bags. If you could get a pocketful of emeralds out, you didn't have to work for the rest of your life, or the next 10 years, or whatever. You would constantly be offered emeralds on the street, or green glass. Of course, I stayed out of trouble, because I actually knew whether it was green glass or emeralds, so I was never really tempted to buy much of it.

I knew a society which was intellectual, sought learning and had a wonderfully sort of almost English kind of climate and people who walked around with their rolled-up newspapers, their umbrellas and their Hamburg hats. That was a whole Bogotá, but the other parts of the country, and even within that large metropolitan area, of course, there

were a huge variety of social classes. But for me, it was a wonderfully stimulating sort of heady time.

I suppose next to the ambassador, I became one of the best-known Americans in the country, because I was constantly out in front of the center, which was doing so many great things, so it was a nice experience.

Q: How did you find the hand of the ambassadors – I assume there were several – and of the public affairs officers?

COWAL: I was very lucky. I had by and large people who either liked it or could tolerate it. It was a flash learn for the ambassador, too.

Q: Do you remember some of the ambassadors or public affairs.

COWAL: Oh, sure, I remember them all, I suppose. The first ambassador I had was Pete Vaky, Viron Vaky, and he now must be 80, I suppose, but remains very involved in the Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-American Dialogue, and was after that I guess assistant secretary of state a couple of times. So he was a really spectacular guy, and he was followed by a not-very-spectacular guy who was a political appointee of the Nixon administration, who was a businessman from California named Phillip Sanchez, who I never had any problem with. But after having somebody like Vaky, the Colombians found this not-very-interesting, not-very-bright, not-very-well-educated Hispanic American to be not their cup of tea.

When he got ready to leave, I suppose after two or three years, they were going to name another – it was quite interesting – they were going to name a similar kind of person. Actually, I think it was somebody who would have been very good. It was Amanio Baesa, who is a Cuban American who is quite intellectual and Harvard educated and so on, but the Colombians wouldn't give him agrément because they were so sure they were getting sort of once again handed this piece of political baggage. And so the State Department came back at them with, "Okay, you won't give agrément, but we won't totally give into you, so we'll name a career person, but it will be somebody of Hispanic origin." So they named Diego Asencio, who to this day is also one of my friends and serves on the board of directors of the Cuban Policy Foundation.

Q: Of course, Diego, unlike most, is Spanish born.

COWAL: Is Spanish, absolutely. So the State Department thought it got what it wanted. It was able to name somebody whose last name ended in a vowel, and the Colombians thought they got what they wanted, because they got a career officer with good preparation and not some political hack from wherever he came from, so that was the compromise, and those were my three ambassadors.

Q: Were you there when Diego was kidnapped?

COWAL: I was in Israel by the time he was kidnapped, but it was very shortly thereafter. I think I left in August and it was November.

Q: How about the public affairs officers? Did they leave you alone?

COWAL: They were great, basically, great supporters. The first one was Bob Chatten. I don't know whether you've interviewed Bob. He was a terrific guy.

Q: Is he around here?

COWAL: Yes, he's in Arlington.

Q: How do you ...

COWAL: C-H-A-T-T-E-N. He would really be great to do an interview with. He's a very interesting guy, he's extremely articulate and had a career, some in Japan, mostly in Latin America, and a spectacular guy. So he was the first and he was the one who really – I came as his book officer and he decided that I could be a terrific person in this job, and he picked me for it and he was always very supportive. He was replaced by a guy named Don Gilmore, who just seemed to me to be kind of nothing, but didn't really get much in my way. He was replaced by a guy named Mike Kristula, who was again very supportive. So I had three ambassadors and three PAOs, and not too much of a problem, although I think sometimes I was probably a headache for them and they just were nice enough not to say it.

It would sometimes get a little out of hand. Things were going on faster than they could keep up with, and now I know, having been a senior manager, that nobody likes surprises, even if they turn out to be good. It was the jewel in their crown, so when Henry Kissinger came, I met him because he came to the center. After Carter was elected, one of the first things he did was he sent Rosalynn to Latin America. He couldn't go, so his wife came, and she came to Bogotá, and where did she come? She came to the center. Because it was just so refreshing for someone who thought that the whole continent was anti-American and that we had no influence and we had no way to work with these student groups who were perceived to be very against our policies.

Then you would come to the center and you would see all of these people who were not necessarily the rich elites. This was the striving middle class, and I think one of the things that Colombia managed to do in those years also was expand the middle class, and that's what didn't exist in Latin America. There were these huge extremes, and because they had a good economy and a reasonable social policy, they did better than most countries at achieving that. Our target market was not the kid whose parents would send him to Exeter, but the kid whose parents wanted him to be able to go to the University of Florida, or to be able to handle a curriculum in English, the middle class. That's pretty much the basis of most societies, so I think we did a pretty good job of reaching those.

Q: How did the Rosalynn Carter visit go?

COWAL: I think it was fine. I have some pictures of it, but I don't remember that much about it except that the DCM was all flapping around.

Q: Who were your DCMs?

COWAL: Well, actually, I had some good DCMs, too. The first one was Bob White, who then became very spectacular because he was ambassador to El Salvador and got very upside the policy and currently is the chairman of something called the Center for International Policy in Washington, but again, I think a terrific guy. He was the first. The one who got all nervous, I think his name was Dexter, and I don't remember very much about him. So I guess I don't remember any of the other DCMs except Bob, who was great. All of our posts at that time were somehow small enough that even though you were a junior officer, the ambassador and DCM knew who you were.

Q: This was still in the mid '70s. How'd you find being in a macho society and all as a woman running a very big operation? Any problems there, either from the embassy side or the Colombian side?

COWAL: No, if there were problems, they were not very well known by me. My experience was always much more positive than negative, but if you were good and you were female, it was so much easier to stand out, because there weren't 10 of you who were all good and who all looked more or less alike. There were 11 of you who were good, but only one was a woman. So people would go away from that experience, meeting 11 of us who were equally bright, and they'd remember me.

I always though that worked very much to my advantage. Those were still in the days where it was about one-tenth, I suppose, maybe a little bit more than that. But, certainly, I think about all those PAOs I mentioned were male, and all those ambassadors were male and all those DCMs were male. When I was there, one of the assistant cultural affairs officers was a woman, and that was about it, that I remember. So a male-dominated room ...

Q: Were you married at the time?

COWAL: I was married at the time, but my husband was living in the States, basically.

Q: How did that work out?

COWAL: Well, it eventually didn't work out very well at all, but through those years he would come and I would go and we felt ourselves lucky that I was no longer in India, which was a 24-hour trip away. Bogotá wasn't all that bad a trip. He was in New York, and then in Washington, and I was ...

Q: It does point out one of the problems of the Foreign Service, of finding suitable employment for both, and then there wasn't much effort to try to do anything about it, was it? That was your problem.

COWAL: There was none, really, and there was not even an effort to make the laws work better, the local employment laws work in your favor. Somebody who came as a spouse came as a spouse, and that's what they were expected to do, is to be a spouse. I do remember one little incident, and I say this just reflecting the time, not really a reflection on Ambassador Vaky or his wife, whose name was Luanne, and who is also still alive. They were both lovely, lovely people, but the word went out shortly after I got there that Mrs. Vaky would like all the spouses and the female officers to call on her. She was very much a white glove type, and I refused. I said I meant no disrespect to Mrs. Vaky, and I thought it would be a lovely idea if she asked all officers and all spouses to call on her. However, she wanted to do it in groups or individually, but I didn't see why she only wanted the spouses and the female officers to call on her. I'm sure she was doing it as a gesture, to be nice, and I saw it as an attempt to say, "Well, we're all the same, except Sally will go call on Luanne." So Sally didn't call on Luanne, and I guess she understood that.

Q: It was part of this transition.

COWAL: It was.

Q: There were all sorts of little – I won't say slights, but nobody was really sure how to handle the damn thing.

COWAL: Right, and that comes up. We'll talk about that some other day, but it comes up later in my career, also. I never tried to be belligerent, but I always tried to say, I just don't understand why we're doing it this way.

Q: Well, they do it, since I'm trying to pick up the period and the time and the culture, because it is changing and has changed so much.

COWAL: I mean, can you imagine in this day and age a female officer getting the post and being told that she would call on the ambassador's wife when her male colleagues weren't asked. But I think the Vakys were on their second or third embassy. She had always done it, and it had always been nice, and the women had talked about running the servants and homes, which God knows, I needed some advice about, but I didn't want to get it in quite that way.

Q: Well, probably a good place to stop. You left there in '78, and in a way, I think it would be you were spoiled, weren't you, having run your own little – or big briar patch.

COWAL: After all, remember that I celebrated my 30th birthday there, so I was still very young.

Q: You'd be spoiled rotten. I'd hate to have you around.

COWAL: I was on top of the world, and of course, my boss, Bob Chatten, had gone on to become the head of Latin America for USIA, so he was offering me all kinds of wonderful jobs, PAO Bolivia or something, which was three steps up, and so on. This was when Kissinger was the Secretary of State, and Kissinger said, oh, no, every officer has to have at least two areas of expertise, and two languages, and two this, and two that. So we won't give you another assignment in Latin America. You've got to go somewhere else. That's how I came to go to Israel.

Q: You were Glop'd.

COWAL: I was Glop'd, or whatever it was.

Q: Which is G-L-O-P-D, which is global outlook or something. Anyway, my understanding is that Kissinger went to a meeting of chiefs of mission in Latin America, in Mexico City, and found that some of them really didn't even know what NATO (North American Treaty Organization) was. I mean, I'm exaggerating, but he said, we've got to stir this culture around.

COWAL: Right, and to a certain extent, he was right, and it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. But, I must say, I sort of went kicking and screaming, because I had found my little oyster and my little niche. I was by then a four-plus in Spanish. I was extremely comfortable. I said after being in India as a first experience, being in Colombia or anyplace where you could buy Tampax and pantyhose in the grocery store had to count as civilized. So the studying of Spanish did everything for me that I wanted it to do. It was a language I could learn, I understood the culture, I spoke the language well, I identified with the people, I could buy Tampax and pantyhose and go to a concert and listen to a lecture and I was in my element and I didn't want to go anywhere else. So we'll leave it there.

Q: So we'll pick it up in '78, left for Israel.

Okay, today is the 14th of January, 2002. Sally, you were in Israel, just to get the dates, from '78 to where?

Q: Eighty-two, an interesting time, too.

COWAL: There hasn't ever been a non-interesting time in Israel, but it was clearly marked. When I got there in '78, it was just at the time of Camp David, the first Camp David, the successful Camp David under Carter's presidency. I noticed over the weekend Cy Vance had died, of course, and he was a big player in that. I left in 1982 as the Israelis

invaded Lebanon, so those were real bookends. You knew when you came and you knew when you went, and it was a very different feeling upon coming than upon leaving.

Q: Well, let's take '78. I can't remember, had you gone into why you wanted – did you ask for this, or was this ...

COWAL: No, this was part of Kissinger's policy.

Q: You were Glop'd.

COWAL: And I was Glop'd. The Latin America Bureau at USIA was interested, of course, in keeping me in the region since I now had a language fluency, and I think they wanted me to be the public affairs officer in Bolivia. I remember it was Bolivia and I don't remember whether I was supposed to be the cultural affairs officer or the public affairs officer, but at any rate, it was something that I thought would be wonderful. I had visited Bolivia. I found it a very interesting country and I thought that would be wonderful, and suddenly it came along that Foreign Service officers should have more than one area of specialization, and out of the blue I got a call from I guess the Central Personnel Office offering me the cultural affairs officer job in Israel.

In a second, I decided that that was something I wanted to do, that it would be a really interesting place to be and it would be sort of new horizons and new issues. I mean, I must say, I'm not Jewish, I didn't know very much about Israel, really, other than having read Exodus, or some of the very popular books. I'd read a lot about the Holocaust. I think one of the first serious books I ever read as a child was William Shirer's The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, which I think came out when I was about 12 years old, and it was not a book for a 12 year old.

Q: Not at all, not at all.

COWAL: I devoured it. I can remember getting absolutely fascinated by this book, which I think had come as – my parents were members of the literary guild or something that delivered books once a month.

Q: Book of the month club.

COWAL: This one arrived and I glommed onto it and read it from cover to cover. So, when they said would I like to go to Israel as the cultural officer, I jumped at that chance.

Q: Before we talk to the relations, could you talk about the composition of the embassy at the time, who was the ambassador, how was the cultural affairs, the information section, USIA's section, set up?

COWAL: Well, the ambassador was a person who I think has done one of your interviews and who remains a great friend of mine, and that was Sam Lewis.

Q: Oh, yes, Sam's on our board.

COWAL: Oh, okay, and I didn't know he was on your board, but I think he's one of the great diplomats of our time, one of the great ambassador's of our time, one of the great foreign policy thinkers of our time, none of which I knew when I accepted this assignment, of course. But we came to have a very close working relationship, because he understood that in a difficult, sensitive relationship such as the one between Israel and the United States, which was so focused on the political, and I guess you could say Political with a big "P" and political with a little "P," but there needed to be some counterbalance to that. Being a very smart guy, he had been in Israel a couple of years by the time I got there and he had absorbed enough about the society to know that in that society the counterpoint to things political was things cultural; that there probably isn't a country in the world where more people have Stradivarius violins in their closets, down to a more middle-class, average member of society, than in Israel. So he and I became very close partners in trying to put the political aspects of our relationship into a larger context, and that was the cultural context. It was a wonderful experience for that reason, among others, but of course I didn't know that when I came.

The public affairs USIS was headed by a very capable Foreign Service officer named David Hitchcock, who had been the public affairs officer in Japan. USIA usually sent – I think as did the State Department – usually sent very highly qualified officers to Israel because it was such a difficult assignment. It was difficult and important and interesting, certainly for the political section of the embassy, and USIA felt exactly the same way about it. Although it was only one small country in the Middle East region, in some ways, it was half of it, since it was half of the equation, since what dominated that whole group of countries was the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. To serve in Israel in a way was to be the counterweight to all of the Arab countries. So, although David had no particular Middle Eastern expertise, he was known as a person who was highly intellectual, highly articulate, a workaholic, a press junkie, and he came in. He had also been there, I think, a year or so by the time I got there. He had studied everything he could on the region, and although he didn't learn Hebrew, which I later did, because I thought it was an important part of my feeling good in that place, he certainly established contacts with all of the important people in the country.

I think one of the other interesting things about Israel was that because of the unusual character of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, Israel was in many ways a first world country. It was a first world country in terms of its political importance. It was on the front page of the New York Times three days out of five, but it was also a first world country in terms of their accomplishments in so many things, scientific fields and agricultural fields and musical fields, certainly many cultural things. They were often on the front page of the Arts section of the New York Times as well, but if you were an American embassy representative, it was third world in terms of its access. In other words, all of us at a fairly senior level in the embassy, and I guess I was probably the most junior person on the

country team, I and the information officer were both included, although we were not heads of section, because it was felt that we played such important roles.

But I would say that every member of that country team, which was probably the larger country team, which was probably about 20 people, had extraordinary access to Israeli government and private-sector figures. So that Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin were my neighbors, because I haven't to live in an apartment building about two down from the apartment building that they lived in. I was at both of their houses more than once. There was almost nobody that you couldn't and didn't meet and know, so it was an extraordinary experience in that regard. They were not only people that you knew, but they were people who wound up on the front page of the New York Times from time to time, and those of them who are still alive still do wind up on the front page from time to time.

Q: How would you describe the state of American-Israeli relations when you got there in '78?

COWAL: Well, I think the state of our relations has always been extremely close and has always been extremely difficult, both. I think when I got there, or certainly in the ensuing weeks and months, as we went through Camp David together, those were pretty high points in the relationship. As it became clear – Lebanon was a leitmotif throughout the whole thing. There was always Lebanon. Something was always blowing up in Lebanon, and that was certainly a difficult issue. It was a difficult issue for Israel and it was a difficult issue for the United States, and it was a complicating issue, certainly, in the relationship between the United States and Israel. But I would say that relations as a whole were extremely good, if extremely difficult.

Q: When you got there, first place, did you have a feeling for the other side of the equation, particularly the Arab world, the Arab claims, complaints against Israel and all. Did you have any feel for that?

COWAL: I certainly had never served in the Middle East. I had never traveled in the Middle East. I didn't really know anything about the Middle East. I knew there was something called Israel. I don't know if I knew there was anything called Palestine. I think it was only as I began to meet, and I never met many Palestinians. I mean, after all, I was in the embassy in Tel Aviv, and Tel Aviv didn't cover East Jerusalem or the West Bank, which was covered out of a consulate in Jerusalem, which was, by the way, an often-contentious relationship between officers at the embassy in Tel Aviv and the consulate in Jerusalem.

We all get a certain amount of clientitis, and I think we each fall into those roles a little bit. But I learned mostly about the conflict and the Palestinians from my Israeli friends, who covered a wide spectrum, I must say, of ideological views. But, again, being the cultural attaché, I suppose there's somewhat in most societies a natural gravitation of the intellectual and academic elite toward the rather more liberal or open or whatever you

want to call it part of the political spectrum. Certainly, in Israel, that was no exception, so that there are seven universities in Israel, and I think I – well, I know I knew a great number of people at each of those universities, and I knew the writers and I knew the artists.

They educated me to the fact that this was the twice promised land: really the whole history of Zionism and Herzl and essentially the coming back of the Israelis to what they considered to be their historic lands, and the whole Balfour Declaration and the working of this out with the British and the whole post-colonialism. Not unlike the Pakistan thing, which I had dealt with in my first assignment and which continues to be an issue today, sort of twice-promised land of whose house is that in Jaffa? The person whose ancestors might go back to biblical times or the person who's ancestors might go back to the Ottoman Empire who left it in 1947 and has not seen it since, but who still feel it's really his house there on that nice little street looking at the Mediterranean in Jaffa.

I think that during my time there that I regret that I didn't have more to do with Palestinians, but that was fairly difficult. What I did have something to do with were Israeli Arabs who compose a fairly significant minority in Israel and I can't remember any longer the figures, exactly.

Q: It's 10 to 20 ...

COWAL: Something like 10, 15 percent. The Druze community, which lives in Israel, which is kind of an offshoot of Islam and they live up in some mountains and villages near Haifa, which I visited. We also were responsible from the embassy in Tel Aviv for Gaza, which was then and still is an occupied territory by Israel. And the Sinai stuff before the pullout in Sinai. So I had a little bit of a chance to see people on the other side, and I did as much of that as I could, but I really became educated in these issues by Israeli friends.

Q: To me, and I'm an outsider to this. I had a tour in Saudi Arabia early on, but that was it, and I'm not an Arabist or anything else like that, but a certain disquiet about the development of Israeli policy, which was one of maintaining itself. By the time you got there, it was beginning to be expansionist under Begin. We're talking about a colonial power, really, and there was at least at one time, and I don't know, I'd like to check on this, seemed to be an attitude that reminded me very much of the white South Africans, the Palestinians or ...

COWAL: Stu, you're right and you're not right.

Q: The four years there taught you?

COWAL: How complicated the situation is. All the factors are complicated. Geographically, first of all, it's a very tight space, as you know. South Africa, of course, has nothing to compare with it, although South Africa was an isolated little white

majority down there at the tip of Africa, their territories were vast, and nobody was really threatening them. Whereas before the '67 war in Israel, the way the green line was drawn, and still is drawn, is just north of Tel Aviv. If you're on the highway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, which is a major city about 50 miles to the north of Tel Aviv, the whole country is less than nine miles wide. If you're in the Golan Heights, including the Israeli parts of the Golan Heights, the Syrians have all of the top of the Golan Heights, and therefore the embankments from which they can and have for years and years and years shelled the villages below them, which are part of Israel, as negotiated in the 1947 Accords.

So, geographically, it's very small. I think the size of the state of New Jersey, and it's certainly one state of New Jersey surrounded by a country which they haven't done very well at making friends out of, so that's one complicating factor. I certainly think the second complicating factor has to do with the history of Israel: how it came to be a state, and of course for that you have to go back to the Nazis in World War II and the persecution of the Jews and the fact that there are still, to this day, many Holocaust survivors in Israel, and certainly many children of the survivors of the Holocaust in Israel. For these people, they kind of wake up sometimes, I guess I would say from a collective nightmare, in a collective sweat. I don't think anybody who hasn't had that kind of experience can ever quite understand the psychological scars that it leaves on a people.

Although I believe, and I would say most of my Israeli friends, and probably 50 percent of Israelis today, would say that their security would actually be enhanced by giving up these territories – ironically, the less they have, the more secure they are – that's hard to get across to somebody who can look out of his window and see what he perceives to be hostility virtually in sight of him. The other thing that's so very difficult about it is that the extremists on both sides have frustrated the will of the majority on both sides for a number of years, and they hold the cards. There can always be the one guy who throws the bomb and the one guy who kills the soldier, and that makes it almost impossible for the politicians in Israel who would like to see a settlement to move forward, because then everybody says, "Well, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If we're hit upon, we've got to hit back. It's the only survival we have."

Of course, what does Israel depend on? It depends on superior military power, support of the United States. That's what it depends on, and so it's armed, in many ways, to the teeth. It also depends on very preemptive moves to ensure that there are no threats on their borders. One of the important events that happened while I was in Israel, having nothing to do with cultural relations, was the bombing by the Israelis of the Iraqi nuclear facility, the Osirak facility. Which in some ways you could say was a total provocation. The Israelis created a total provocation. They recognized that this nuclear site was being outfitted. It was clearly within a missile launch, and there was clearly, as we saw later in the war, the Gulf War, we saw SCUDs coming into Israel from Iraq.

Clearly, if the Israelis had not preemptively taken out that nuclear facility in, I think it was 1980, they would have faced the threat of a nuclear attack from as close by as Iraq. So

you live in Israel with a clear and present danger. It was interesting, to me personally. I mean, coming from a place like Colombia, where there was certainly also – and we talked about this a little bit in our previous conversations. Although it was a much more peaceful time then than it has been in the last 15 or 20 years, there was already some drug violence, there was a lot of kidnappings, mostly for money, sometimes for political reasons. And so you always thought as a member of the American embassy staff, you could be targeted, you could be somebody that the guerillas would go after.

In Israel, you felt perfectly safe from things like that, but no safer than anybody else from the possibility of a terrorist attack if you crossed the street at the wrong time or you got on the wrong bus or you went to the Carmel market on the wrong Friday morning. There was a terrific sort of perceived vulnerability, and Israelis live with that, so it's historically complicated, geographically complicated.

I remember something once that I heard Golda Meir say, and it struck me then and it's always stuck with me. She died when I was there, but she said, "You know, we can forgive the Palestinians," or the Arabs. I don't think she said the Palestinians. "We can certainly forgive the Arabs for killing our children, but we may never be able to forgive them for making us kill their children." Because this state of warfare imposed on Israelis, who after all went to Israel, most of them, either as refugees from the Holocaust or those who got there in the early '20s and in the 1930s, they went basically as incredible idealists. They were socialists, if not communists, they believed in a different way of society being organized. They actually thought that some of the plight of the Jewish people over the centuries had been because they were special and apart and separate and too well educated and too wealthy and too egotistical, and so they set about to try to create this perfect little world in their little mini-state, in which there would be total equality. Obviously, this never happens anywhere, but there would be ...

Q: Sort of the Walden ...

COWAL: Yes, exactly. There would be great equality between men and women and all children would be raised in loving homes, and everybody would participate equally and work, and everybody would divide up the spoils equally. So the whole forming of the kibbutz movement, for instance, which was never more than 3 percent of the Israeli populace actually lived in kibbutzim, but they thought of themselves not any longer as the merchant and the furrier and the jeweler and the doctor, but as the noble farmers, the Walden Pond, the Grant Wood, with the pitchforks, sort of thing.

So I think it was a terrible shock to many of them to discover that they were once again reviled and hated by many around the world. I don't think that was their idea in forming this state, so it was a very interesting place to be and to learn.

Q: We'll move on, but within the embassy, you're the new girl on the block.

COWAL: I must say, the only girl on the country team.

Q: It's interesting, we'll talk about that, too, but when you arrive at a new country and many of the people are wrestling with the problems and all, how did you find it? Did you find the embassy at all divided, because we present a rather solid front politically about Israel of firm support, but certainly within the Foreign Service there is disquiet on a broader front. It seems to be – every time we do something for Israel, it ends up as a negative in the broader context of the Middle East.

COWAL: Right. Do remember that if we're talking about particularly the beginning of my tour there, by having achieved Camp David, which I must say I'm sure your talks with Sam Lewis talked about that a lot, but I think he played a very key role in Camp David as well. I think there was great unity of purpose, both in the embassy in Tel Aviv, and to a great extent, certainly between the embassy in Tel Aviv and the embassy in Cairo, if not always so much the other countries. But there were certainly in the State Department Arabists. By and large, the Arabists never served in Israel, and there was no such thing as Israelists, because there was really one country, and despite the fact that it was a big embassy, there were at any given time only 100 American positions there or something. So, although some people went back to serve in Israel more than once because they liked it, or because they learned Hebrew, or for all these reasons, you couldn't make a career out of it the way you could make a career out of serving in Arab countries.

But certainly through 1978, 1979, probably into 1980, there were some annoyances with the Israelis, and those could be felt by all of us. Although they were our best friends, they didn't always act as our best friends, and they certainly often did some things politically unilaterally that I think drove everybody nuts. They were very, very anxious to show all visitors their side of the story to the exclusion of other sides of the story.

There was also this incredible interest in Israel by American domestic interests. That's not unlike Cuba, that I'm working on now, of course, but it made it very difficult to achieve a policy. Whenever the American embassy would take kind of a strong stand against something the Israelis were doing or planning to do, of course, the Israelis could always run around your back and go directly to the Congress. One year that I was in Israel, if I'm not mistaken, one-third of all the members of the U.S. Congress visited Israel, in a 12-month period of time. So imagine a country where you have 200 individual members of the Congress or the House of Representatives or the Senate visiting in one year.

You had all the politicians who always had to make the Ireland, Italy, Israel swing, because they had to appeal to the Italian, the Irish and the Jewish voters in their constituencies. So you had governors, you had senators, you had congressman and you had wannabes from all of these political constituencies in the United States. Certainly, there were sometimes annoyances that what would have been the prerogative normally of an American ambassador or an American embassy, particularly in a country that was as dependent upon us for foreign aid as the Israelis were – by the way, that foreign aid comes in the form of I think it's a quarterly check written to the Israeli government. I mean, there is no such thing here as an aid mission, because God forbid that we would try

to tell them what to do about development issues. It's pure ESF, pure economic support funds. There's no development assistance in that equation at all, and as we all know, it's about a quarter of our whole foreign affairs budget. And it used to be more than that, proportionately, until Camp David, and then we felt obliged to try to match Egypt, which is of course a country with much more population than Israel. But at least we tried to match the dollars going to Egypt, which I assume was part of the settlement, with the dollars going to Israel.

Certainly, there were people annoyed at Israelis at given times. They were not easy people to work with. They made things very difficult, and I think for a lot of American embassy folks who had served in countries that we could say were a little bit more pleasant or compliant or less defiant, especially when we saw that, from our point of view, they couldn't survive five minutes without our assistance, I think there were those natural tensions. But there was also a lot of admiration for the people who had sort of put themselves on a world stage, and not only in political terms, who had put themselves on a world stage for the really remarkable achievements in agriculture and in medicine and in science. I think my job, particularly, gave me an exposure to the beautiful side of Israel.

Q: There's something I'd like to ask. As a cultural affairs officer, one of the things that has struck me in looking, say, at what happened in Germany, after the Holocaust, basically the elimination of the Jew in German cultural life, Germany is no longer a world player. The movies, the arts and all of this, Germany is – it's sort of like taking the salt out of the thing. There's nothing there, yet the United States in all these deals has prospered so much, to a large extent because of the exodus from, particularly Germany, of German Jews to the United States. Yet I don't see, except in, say, maybe music and all, and please correct me if I'm wrong, much Israeli cultural impact on the world – Israeli literature or Israeli movies. Perhaps, the few of the painters one thinks about are really holdovers from another era. Could you comment on that?

COWAL: Yes, well, I mean, I think that's an interesting point of view. Some of it I agree with, some of it I don't. Obviously, the music is world class and world renowned, not so much in composition, but in execution, and a whole lot of the people who we consider to be Americans now were Israelis, I mean, were born in Israel. That would be Itzhak Perlman and Pinky Zukerman and Daniel Barenboim and Emmanuel Ax and Gil Shahan. I could name 100 who are really now just – they live on a world stage and that takes them from here to here to here.

Q: They're international.

COWAL: They're international performers of the highest caliber, but they happen to have been born in Israel, and actually many of them got their start as child prodigies through a foundation called the Israel-America Cultural Foundation, which was not an American embassy thing, but to which I was always invited when they would do concerts and judgings and recitals and so on. They'd be brilliant kids. I mean, they are kids, five year olds, seven year olds, violin virtuosos. Their money mostly comes from wealthy Jews in

the United States. Isaac Stern gave them enormous amounts of money and would come out and do these trials, judging which kids were really the musical geniuses. So certainly it's in music.

The Weizmann Institute of Science is a world-class institution. I can't name you their Nobel Prize winners in medicine in science, but there are a number of them, so there are achievements in that field. The plastic arts are alive and well, if maybe not world class. The architecture stinks, for reasons I don't quite understand, because again, if you think about the Bauhaus and all of that, it was largely Jewish, or certainly heavily influenced by Jews. I think people who needed to build things requiring a lot of money went somewhere else, and that was usually to Western Europe or the United States. So that's one of the reasons. After all, it's a tiny country.

In terms of literature, there are several absolutely wonderful writers, who of course write in Hebrew. The most famous of them I suppose is Amos Oz, who I wouldn't be surprised if one day he gets a Nobel Prize. It's a really marvelous body of mostly novels, but some short stories and some plays as well. This year, I was very pleased that Naipaul got the Nobel Prize, who comes from Trinidad, where I later served. I think there's essentially the fact that we don't know more about Israeli literature is because it doesn't all get translated. I think there are some absolutely wonderful writers, and there's some wonderful theater there. There are three, or at least there were when I was there, really outstanding dance companies.

I would say, compared to – here's a country of a few million people. I don't know of any country that size which has as vibrant a scene in the plastic arts and the performing arts and literature as Israel. So, in that sense, I think to compare it to much larger places, Germany, with a population of 80 million people, and the United States, with 260 million people, I think you could say on sort of a per capita basis, Israel is really right out there. But it's a tiny country.

Q: Well, now, you're the cultural affairs officer. When you got there '78, what did you see your job was? Who did you replace, by the way?

COWAL: Well, I replaced a guy named Tony Cassanov.

Q: I think it was Louise Taylor, I think, had the job later.

COWAL: Yes, who was later in the job. The embassy in Israel had a lot of power, but even at that time, headquarters didn't want USIS posts, or, God forbid, ambassadors and embassy, to muck around in personnel policy. After all, the personnel decisions were supposed to be made by the Bureau of Personnel Management. There would be five candidates for a job, and in some kind of a bidding process the most qualified would of course always be selected, and then appropriately trained, and then sent out to the post. The embassy would simply receive this person and say, "This is our new cultural affairs officer. This is our new political officer."

Because Sam Lewis thought that culture was such an important part of this whole equation, and he'd gotten along very well with my predecessor as well, he made it a requirement that I come out and be interviewed by him for the job, unknown to the Foreign Service. So, on some pretext or another, he got USIS Tel Aviv to pay for me to fly from Colombia to Israel, and to meet the country team. It was some pretext, because obviously you couldn't be flying people around the world to be interviewed for jobs, that just wasn't the way the process worked. So it was something my urgent consultations were needed for, and I think it was, I don't know, April or something of 1978, and I went out to Israel to be interviewed.

What did I see as I looked around? I saw an ambassador who unusually cared about cultural affairs. I saw the ambassador's wife, Sally Lewis, who was and is a fantastic individual, and the two of them, in part because we were who we were and they were who they were, and they had an incredible entrée to this society. If the rest of us had it, they had it in spades. But they understood that country extremely well. They were very sympathetic, but they were not without factors of critical judgment, particularly Sam. Sally was, I think, even more taken with it in some ways than Sam was, and her job wasn't to be critical. Her job was to make friends, and she made them, and she made them from every single segment of that society.

Insofar as I became a favorite of theirs, which I would like to think that I was, it was having entrée yourself, way beyond what an official position on the embassy staff would have done for you. But I was lucky enough to be given this access to many dinners at their house and many events that they sponsored. One of their outreaches to the community and to do things that they thought would put U.S. presence into some kind of balance was to do a series of cultural events at their house. Sometimes we invented these from sort of local talent, but usually we were lucky enough that virtually all – not virtually all – a huge amount of talent from the United States found its way to Israel on its own steam, because they came to perform with the orchestra, for instance.

We would try to work with their managers and ask, whether it was Marvin Hamlisch or whoever, would so and so be able to give us a night, a free night, at the residence, playing for the ambassador's guests. So, once a month they would have a little buffet supper – these were organized by me – a little buffet supper for 65 of their closest friends and a Daniel Barenboim or a Marvin Hamlisch who would put on a wonderful performance, a little 45-minute, hour, presentation, a little chamber music group, a little piano, a singer or a poet. These were really wonderful and magical evenings, and I think I understood then and I think I probably used it forever onward, that understanding that you could get people to come to things like this.

Of course, Sam, in addition to having the 65 Israelis he wanted there would have 15 members of his country team there, and this was a chance for informal interaction with members of the Knesset, with ministers of government, with presidents of universities. Sam and Sally's house was a beacon of light, it was a place that people wanted to go. It

was a place where there were often interesting political discussions, and these sometimes took place around these soirees, these cultural evenings. So, again, I felt like I was a very important member, I was helping them accomplish their mission in Israel.

One thing that we would every year do an orientation for the Fulbright professors who were coming to live in Israel. I think each year we brought maybe 10. We had an America-Israel Cultural Foundation which was the Fulbright Foundation in Israel and America, Fulbright Program, in which the Israelis also contributed stuff like housing for the professors and so on. I was on the Fulbright Commission. I think I was treasurer of it, by virtue of my role as the cultural attaché. So each year we would sponsor a whole day-long orientation for the new people who were coming, and we would always ask Ambassador Lewis to sort of lead this off with just an off-the-cuff sort of thing about how he saw the state of relations between the two countries and what was the reality of Israel.

I can remember one of them where he spoke probably without notes probably for an hour, and it was absolutely fascinating. One of the people who was there was a member of the Fulbright board and he was at that time the head of cultural relations for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, an ambassador who later became ambassador to Washington, Moshe Arad, a very, very good diplomat and career foreign service officer of Israel. I remember very well the day he came to Tel Aviv for that little talk, and we didn't talk after it. He got right back in his car and had to go back up to Jerusalem, and he called me that day and he said, "You know, I had tears in my eyes when he was talking, because I've never heard anybody explain our reality so well, not even an Israeli. The degree to which this person understands, doesn't necessarily condone, but understands this complex reality in which Israel exists is remarkable."

I think I was just extremely fortunate to serve with these people. Basically, the whole country team were sort of superstars. The DCM was first Dick Viets who became ambassador in Jordan and ambassador to other places, and he was succeeded by Bill Brown, who became ambassador in Thailand.

Q: And came back.

COWAL: Right, and then came back more than once to Israel. The political officer was Bob Blackwill, who has now left the Foreign Service and has been appointed as the political appointee ambassador to India. A smarter person I have never known – not an easy person, but a super-smart person. The head of the economic section was Sam Hart, who became the ambassador in Ecuador.

Q: Incidentally, Sam Hart, when I interviewed him, was quite unhappy about his time in Israel, because he said, "We would do the normal thing that any good economic counselor does, analyze the Israeli requests and all, and submit it." He said the Israelis would sort of laugh and say, "Go ahead, it makes no difference." And they'd go to Congress and get exactly what they wanted.

COWAL: Didn't I tell you the same thing? I mean, whenever they got an answer they didn't want from us, they had 435 ways of getting what they wanted, and they usually got it. So, yes, it could be extremely frustrating. But here you sat in country team, it was for me like really playing in the big time. When I went to India, we were tilting toward Pakistan, so we had an outstanding embassy, too. It was Galen Stone and it was Louis Stahl and they were also very good people.

India wasn't quite the same because you weren't with Henry Kissinger going to make your career by being out there in India, because he didn't care about India, but everybody cared about Israel. In some ways, it was like playing in the major leagues, and then I went to Colombia, which in those days, nobody cared about, and then suddenly I went to Israel and it was really like moving up from the farm leagues to the major leagues. You knew even at the time that these were major league ballplayers. I think that made it fun, and I was describing the USIA staff, which had a public affairs officer, an information officer, an assistant information officer, a cultural officer, an assistant cultural officer and a center director head in Jerusalem, and I think that was it.

It was a tiny post by USIA standards in those days. Now it would be a large post by USIA standards because USIA doesn't exist anymore. But in those days, it was probably half of the size of the staff in Colombia, let's say, the USIS staff in Colombia, but enormously well selected with kind of an enormous staff. I think most of the staffs in the embassy were like that. There was a very good station there, I must say.

Q: Was that Philip Jessup? Was he there at that time?

COWAL: I can't even remember.

Q: Philip Jessup was the one who did a very long interview, which we have, I think with Sam Lewis, I mean, a very compelling interview.

COWAL: It may have been and I can't remember. I just remember it was a good station and a good military attaché's office, headed by a general whose name I also don't remember. But across the board, and as you see if Sam Lewis on interviewing me before I came, and I was not a section head, he hand picked that staff, or at least what he considered to be the 20 or 30 key individuals on that staff were hand picked by him. He just knew that he had a big job and he needed everybody on that staff to be capable of carrying out a role.

I can't speak highly enough of the job that he did there, or the job that the Lewises did, because they were very much a team. He could shout, he could be completely out of control. He was a person with strong opinions and strong emotions, and I've been on the carpet. Others I know have been on the carpet, but you came away with this enormous respect for this figure who was sort of larger than life. That's what it took not to be totally boxed into a corner by these Israelis who were larger than life.

My transition from a cultural career to a political career, which I came to have, was because I was control officer for Joe Califano, who was at that time the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. For the same reason that all politicians came to Israel, he came to Israel, and he had already been to Italy and he had already been to Ireland, and he was signing education agreements with these countries. Now, we later learned that the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare had no power to sign an agreement with a foreign country, so we had to redo this whole thing with the ambassador signing it. But he came out to sign an educational agreement for scientific exchanges and academic exchanges between the two countries, and he had also done these in Ireland and in Italy, because obviously that would be very popular with the U.S. Congress.

He was a larger-than-life figure, too. He was very prominent politically. So he came to Israel, and because I was the education officer, the culture and education officer, rather than a member of the political section being his control officer, I was his control officer. So his visit to Israel called for him to call on the prime minister, who was Begin. So Sam and Califano and I went to see the prime minister. Califano came with two or three members of his staff. So we went to see Begin, and I don't think I had ever met Begin. Maybe I had met him socially, but I had certainly never been in a meeting with him, and I had never been the note-taker in a meeting. I find lost ballet shoes for the dance company, I don't do political reporting.

So, this meeting, which was meant to be a 20-minute courtesy call, stretched into an hour-long substantive discussion, I think mostly about Lebanon, but all of the issues. Begin decided that Califano was close to the president and a political figure and he wasn't going to miss the opportunity. He wasn't just going to talk about this little education agreement they had signed. He was going to launch into a full deal.

I was very interested to be in the prime minister's office. I had never been in the prime minister's office. So, as they were chatting, I was sort of paying attention to what they were saying, but I was also looking at the curtains and wondering about this, that and the other thing. We came out after this meeting, and Sam Lewis looked at me and he said, "Well, you'll have the reporting cable on my desk by 4:00 today." Reporting cable? What's a reporting cable?

So I wrote my first political cable, which I must say he went through, I'm sure making more corrections than he left things in place, but it was a damn good education. Of course, I learned that whether or not you've got a piece of paper in hand, you're in there in a meeting with a foreign head of government, you're always doing a reporting cable. You're doing it in your head if you're not doing it on paper. I had so many learning experiences of that kind in Israel, but mostly because Sam Lewis believed that I could do that kind of a job. I think those things are very important to people being able to see themselves as doing something other than what their current role at the time might be.

It was my exposure in Israel that really paved the way for Jeane Kirkpatrick asking me to be the political counselor to the U.S. mission to the UN (United Nations) in New York.

When I said, "Why do you want a cultural officer to be the political counselor up here?" She said, "Well, it's because the UN is all about political theater anyway," which to a certain extent she was playing on. What you need in the UN is somebody who can present this case.

Nonetheless, I got my first exposure to things political while serving as the cultural attaché to the American embassy.

Q: I mean, I'll put down a couple of things that I'd like to ask you about for the next time. How did you find – I mean, this is relatively early on when women were beginning to rise to the executive ranks, the places where you could do things? How did you find being a woman there, and also being a woman vis-à-vis the Israelis? Two, what about the Likud? You mention all these cultural things, and somehow I think of so many of the people that one thinks about in the Likud party were rather dour?

COWAL: I'll comment on this before we quit. You should know that Ariel Sharon had symphony season tickets which happened to be right in front of my symphony season tickets, so the days when he didn't show up, I began to wonder who was being bombed. But, nonetheless, again, this incredible – in Israel, everybody loves music and everybody loves sort of cultural things. The other responsibility I had as cultural officer that brought me very much into the political mainstream was that we ran a very large, for the size of the country, International Visitor Program, what we used to call Leader Grant program. I think we sent about 20 Israelis to the United States every year on grants.

Of course, because the Likud was in power and the political grantees were picked not by me, but by the country team or by the political section of people they thought were up and coming in both parties, and indeed they turned out to be – we didn't ever send Barak, because he was a military officer in those days. But we sent Yossi Beilin, who was a very important adviser to the Labor government, minister in the Labor government. We sent Ehud Olmert, who is currently the mayor of Jerusalem, who is a Likudnik. We sent him on a grant.

So I got to meet all of these people, because although they might have been, and were, selected by the country team and the ambassador, when it came time to planning their program in the United States or figuring out what they wanted to do, I was the one who took care of it. So I got to know everybody who went on that program to the United States quite well, and that was another insight for me into Likud politics or into national politics.

The Likud is very hard line on a whole lot of things, and I must say, if I were an Israeli, I probably would not be in favor of the Likud. I'm almost certain I would not be in favor of the Likud. I think it would be wrong to say that they were not equally as cultured and interested in the arts, because they are.

Q: I imagine that they had their religious right which was sort of beyond the pale as far as your reach was concerned?

COWAL: Yes and no. I mean, there is one university called Bar-Ilan University, and it's the religious university. I guess it would be the equivalent of Catholic University in Washington. I mean, it's quite definitely a religious university, where virtually every professor wears a yarmulke, and I think most of the students who choose to go there are religious. We certainly had good contacts at Bar-Ilan, but if you remember, you couldn't – the chief rabbi would come to the 4th of July party, for instance, and there's a chief Ashkenazi rabbi and a chief Sephardic rabbi, and they would both come. But you had to learn, for instance, as a woman that you couldn't shake hands with them.

Most of my Israeli friends, including my friends in the Likud, who are on the right side of the political spectrum – I would say there's a great religious and non-religious divide. People will joke in Jerusalem about leaving a neighborhood because it's gone black, by which they mean that the people with the black hats and the black coats have moved in, not with black skin. They are way less than 10 percent of the population, and yet because of the historic roots of the state of Israel, they are able to control – and because of the political coalitions, which have been needed in order for anybody to govern in a really fractured political system – they have held incredible sway over lots of things in life that may not be very important, but nonetheless symbolically are. So that El Al doesn't fly on Saturday, and food on El Al is kosher food, and all hotels in Israel have kosher kitchens, which 90 percent of the population doesn't care about at all.

Q: I'm told the cuisine there is not something you would seek after.

COWAL: Insofar as it's adapted to the Arab world around it, it's pretty good. But insofar as it tries to transfer sort of not very good Eastern European food to a Mediterranean setting, not so great.

Q: Yes, this is tape five, side one, with Sally Cowal. We're going to pick this up, you were in Israel '78 to '82. We've talked quite a bit about your relations and how as cultural officer you worked with Sam Lewis and his cultural team. I did want to ask how you found being a woman, both in the Foreign Service and serving in Israel, how this played there. We'll want to talk, obviously, about the reaction to events in Lebanon and the invasion of Lebanon, and prior to that, how things were building up. Dealing with Gaza, how did this play out? You mentioned you have other stories, and I like stories, so do you have any ones that come immediately to mind that you can just sort of give a keyword or something like that.

COWAL: Well, I'll tell you about John Glenn's visit.

Q: John Glenn's visit, and also how the arrival of Ronald Reagan on the scene hit within Israel, when he took office in 1980.

COWAL: Right, and, of course, the other thing that was an important part of all of that was the hostages in Iran, which weren't so far away from us, and the fall of the shah and

the militarization of Iran, of course, also led to a huge influx of refugees and Jewish immigrants from Iran to Israel. So those are all interesting and important things.

Q: Today is the 26th of February 2002. Sally, I almost shudder, because things are changing so rapidly that it no longer really makes a hell of a lot of difference about whether one's a male or a female, except in the personal relationships. I'm still trying to go back to the time. How did you find, by this time, serving both in Israel and the Foreign Service, being a woman? Did this make any difference, or did you see nuances or anything like that?

COWAL: Well, I think there was a time when there were so few women in the Foreign Service that it was in many ways easier to be a woman than it was to be a man. On the one hand men could get away with – and using a good Israeli word here – could get away with being real schmucks and sort of get lost in the anonymity of the grayness of, certainly, part of the Foreign Service, or anything else, I suspect. Business or anything else, any bell-shaped curve, 60 percent of the people are sort of in the middle and you might notice the outstandingly good 5 percent or the outstandingly bad 5 percent for other reasons, but the rest of the 90 percent are probably just sort of indistinguishable.

Women couldn't get away as easily with being foolish, but on the other hand, if they didn't seem to be foolish, they became noticed much more quickly. There were just so few of us. And the time I spent in Israel, the expanded country team – I obviously wasn't the head of the section, so I wouldn't have been a normal member of a country team. But I think once a week there was a meeting of what they called the expanded country team, which involves about 20 officers in the embassy, and I was the only woman. After all, I was on the expanded country team. So there was not a woman head of section, not the head of the political section, the consular section, the economic section, whatever all the other sections were, not one of them was headed by a woman.

I think in many ways it made you the object of a lot of attention, and if you did that well, if you did whatever you were supposed to do in a way that people saw as noteworthy, it was easier for them to see that. I guess it probably had some downsides. There were speculations many times, I know, about my career and would I stay with it, or "She's just going to go and get married and go off and do something," lots of unfair things. But also, I think, a tremendous advantage, and also I guess that was true in the countries I worked in, too – well, India and Israel, not so much in Colombia, but certainly in India and Israel. Although large categories of women were still second-class citizens in some ways, there were more women professionally, in percentage terms, I think, doing important things such as being members of the parliament, or doctors, or lawyers, than there were in the 1970s of women in the United States doing similar things.

So I guess all of us who were women in the Foreign Service at that time, whatever our role in the embassy was, we also became the sort of women's affairs officers, because there was this thought that, "Well, maybe she can meet Indira Gandhi or Golda Meir and we can say something about women in our society through spotlighting some of the

women who we do have who are making some strides, inroads." So I think we were also used a little bit as poster children, and therefore had some experiences that our male counterparts of a similar age and rank probably didn't have quite as often.

Q: Looking back, I think that's very true. All right, let's turn to Lebanon. You got to Israel when?

COWAL: I got to Israel in 1978.

Q: How, as you saw it, because things really kept moving up and up and up, but how were events in Lebanon in '78 when you got there, as reflected in Israel, and how concerned were you?

COWAL: Well, I think as I recall, I was not the political officer, I was the cultural officer, as you know, so I was much more concentrating on Israel proper than on anything else going on around Israel. But certainly, my deep sense of it was that Lebanon was certainly always the leitmotif, that whatever else was going on, there was always Lebanon. Even though we were USIA officers, and in my case cultural officers, therefore not even all that involved in the press, which tends to be more political, we all served as embassy duty officers and so on. I remember being the duty officer for the first time and not knowing what to expect, getting called, and this must have been '78 or maybe early '79, but during one night, getting called into the embassy three or four separate times.

I'd have to get in my car, drive to the embassy, read the message, and those were always Lebanon. Later on, I seem to recall duty officers actually just spending the night in the embassy because the pace of the cable traffic was so rapid. There were certainly other momentous events, many of them on the good side. The bookends for me were arriving there and immediately having Camp David, and leaving at the time of the invasion of Lebanon. Although Camp David seemed to be pointing in a different direction, there was always this undercurrent of the constant attacks on the northern part of Israel coming out of Lebanon. There was Israeli unhappiness with that and with the guerilla groups, which had their bases in Lebanon and then Syria. They felt they would never be secure until they did something about, and constant U.S. pressure that we would regard any Israeli invasion of Lebanon to be a very grave and serious act.

Some of that, of course, is good prelude for trying to work on Cuba and so on, because we have somewhat of the same situation of having very strong domestic interests, which are really trying to drive our foreign policy. Then you have the United States having a foreign policy which it wishes to be something else. We attempted to rein in Israel, because we didn't consider Israeli aggression to be useful to our overall foreign policy in the Middle East and what we were trying to achieve in the Middle East: whether that was secure oil or whatever else, was constantly at tension with people in the United States and the Israelis who could work those people very well in the United States to essentially be putting the bonds on the U.S. diplomatic establishment every bit as we tried to put the reins on the Israelis. I think there was a constant tug of war in that situation.

Q: Was there a feeling when you were there that the Israelis were getting ready to do something? Concerns that the Israelis, their frustration level to reach a certain point where they would go, and we were considering that this would be a bad thing?

COWAL: Right, we did consider that that would be a bad thing, and we did see that tension level rising. I think what made it so difficult is that the State Department, or the Foreign Service, wasn't the only deliverer of messages to Israel. The messages that the Israelis got were clearly mixed, as they saw their friends in Congress and their supporters. I guess that's the context in which I was going to mention the John Glenn visit.

Glenn came out shortly before I left. It was probably the spring of '82. Again, because Sam Lewis was a pioneer and didn't think that all assignments for carrying forward on important embassy projects should always be in the hands of State Department officers, as well as making USIA and other people duty officers, we were also control officers. I was asked if I would be the control officer for John Glenn, or I was assigned to be the control officer for John Glenn, although he was coming not for a cultural visit. He was coming to observe, as a senator ...

Q: He was a senator.

COWAL: He was a senator at the time. The Israelis would do a wonderful job at briefing members of the U.S. Senate. They, of course, had a story to tell and they were good about telling it. You could easily come and understand what remarkable things they had achieved, which indeed they had, whether it was in agriculture or it was in science or it was in cultural things. There were a lot of achievements, and they would keep every visitor busy from day until night running around and seeing all the marvelous things that they had done, and they had a very good public diplomacy program, and they particularly worked on people who were key political officials in the United States.

We also wanted Glenn, during that visit, to deliver the message that the State Department was trying to deliver, reinforce that a popular and well-known senator who happened to be a Democrat with a Republican administration, nonetheless also carried this message that unbound Israeli expansionism or playing around with Lebanon was not something which we perceived ...

Q: Lebanon and the settlements are sort of tied together at that point, or not?

COWAL: No, I think they're somewhat separate issues.

Q: I mean, we were treating them as separate issues?

COWAL: We were certainly treating them as separate issues. At any rate, we were put into the hands of the Israelis who wanted Glenn, among other things, to understand how difficult it was for Israel to protect its own citizens and its own property, surrounded as

they were – and in a way, the issues touched – surrounded as they were by what they regarded as hostile forces. And in the case of the settlements, had they not had the settlements, the 1948 boundaries of Israel meant that in one part of the country, there was exactly nine miles between Jordan and the sea. So, of course, the Israelis saw the settlements and the whole West Bank, Judea and Samaria, as being a way of pushing that enemy back to a position where that enemy couldn't so easily perpetrate terrorist actions or anything else on the Israeli population.

I happen to think that all of that in fact made them less secure, rather than more secure. But at any rate, there was a popular perception, at least in the Likud party, and shared by many Israelis, that after all you just had to look at the map, and what you had to do was push this line back and provide greater security. So the settlements played a huge role in that, because, first of all, you had this influx of population coming out of Lebanon and later out of Ethiopia, and of course later out of Russia and so a real strain on the population base in Israel, and a wanting to expand your territory into these other issues, playing into the political issue of "this will make us safer" also. The expansion of Israel to what they would call greater Israel, biblical Israel, played into a very practical terms as well as political and religious, so it became very important.

The other place from which Israel was extremely vulnerable was being shelled from Lebanon and from the Golan Heights, which was controlled – the top of the heights had been controlled by Syria until the Israelis in the 1967 war took, as well as taking the West Bank, they took the Golan Heights – or the top of the Golan Heights. They pushed the Syrians back. Some of those same Syrian factions then went into Lebanon and shelled the settlements – we'd call them settlements – but kibbutzes and stuff in the north of Israel from their base in Lebanon. So the Israelis wanted John Glenn to understand that not controlling the Golan Heights was extremely dangerous to the Israeli towns and cities and farms beneath the Golan Heights.

The problem was that the United States never accepted Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. They always considered that to be occupied territory which would be part of an eventual peace agreement. In order to indicate our unwillingness to accept their sovereignty over the Golan Heights, it was forbidden for any member of the diplomatic community to go there. The ambassador wouldn't go. You would never go there in the company of Israelis, because that would be indicating that you respected their sovereignty, and they were always trying to do this creep. They were always trying to make facts on the ground, essentially. The settlements became facts, and people visiting under their auspices became facts.

We were on a helicopter and supposedly going to visit some of the Israeli towns, and the helicopter landed and we realized we were on the Golan Heights, which of course was where I wasn't supposed to be. Of course, as we got out of the helicopter, they had all the press there, and all the TV crews. Essentially, we had been duped. So Glenn said to me, "Just stand behind me, nobody will ever see you," because he was much bigger than I was, of course. And so that's what we did. I stood behind him and the press never caught

the fact that there was a U.S. embassy official on the Golan Heights, which they would have exploited.

It was a situation of – it was very interesting because it also showed that even governments that are supposedly the best of friends, when they're trying to achieve a political objective, will not necessarily hesitate to embarrass their friends. Personally I did have many good Israeli friends and certainly our countries had the best of relationships, but there were nonetheless always tensions in that relationship, because they were never very happy with U.S. policy. It was always "what did you do for me today?" sort of thing. Whatever we had done, it wasn't quite enough. We could never quite prove our unconditional love, and I think that was an issue and a problem.

Q: Which brings up a question. I haven't served in Israeli, but I've felt they've done a number on so many Foreign Service officers who are, quote, "Arabists," unquote. "These are just prejudiced people and against us," mainly because they were speaking about Arab concerns, about disinformation coming out of the Israelis. Did you feel that, particularly coming out of the military, but other things, that they spoke with a forked tongue often? Does one take everything with a grain of salt, or did you feel what you were getting was pretty straightforward stuff?

COWAL: Well, about what?

Q: Well, I'm thinking about incidents particularly dealing with what the Palestinians or other people were doing.

COWAL: Oh, I think none of it was casual. They had a particular story and they had a particular line, and that's certainly what you were going to hear.

Q: Well, I mean, would there be – the Israelis would announce something, and you, say, on the country team kind of look at each other and say, "Well, that's just the Israelis." Or say, "Well, gee, I didn't realize that," or something like that.

COWAL: It was a very interesting embassy setup, because we had a consulate in Jerusalem that didn't report to the embassy. Brandon Grove was the consul general in those days, and Sam Lewis was the ambassador. I don't think there was a great deal of love lost between them, to tell you the truth, but I think they tried very hard to make sure that there was one U.S. policy in the region and not two U.S. policies in the region. I think that the great emotionalism attached to this issue, maybe by the Arabists, or by the people who liked and supported Israel, but people did have horses in this race. I think there had been a tendency, which continued, but which I think they tried in a very professional way to lessen those tensions. Brandon would come to this expanded country team meeting every Friday morning, which I think had not happened in the past. It was like we were on two entirely separate tracks, and at least it was a reality check for us, also, from what we were getting from the Israelis, which was what the Israelis wanted you to hear.

They, I think, had no hesitation, particularly about lying. They had a job to accomplish, and they weren't going to be able to accomplish that unless they had the unconditioned backing of the United States. I want to hear Sam Lewis's interviews someday.

Q: It's there, and Brandon's too.

COWAL: Okay, a much better position to understand it than I was.

Q: But it's interesting. A very strong team, because I know both Brandon Grove and Sam Lewis. These are two very strong people, but very serious professionals.

COWAL: Right, and highly principled. I think it was difficult for them and for all of us, because we lived in separate realities, and we saw things from separate realities. I mean, you don't have that situation probably anywhere else in the world, really, and haven't we seen all of that also since September 11th? I mean, we've seen an awful lot, and a whole of these tensions and so on that I saw then have become very, very blatant now. But we lived in separate realities. None of us was duped. We didn't 100 percent believe what the Israelis told us, and they didn't 100 percent believe what the Palestinians told them, or the Jordanians told them. Nonetheless, your whole vision of something was organized in a different way. Now, the embassy in Tel Aviv did take care of the Gaza consular district, rather than the consulate in Jerusalem.

After the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979, after the Camp David agreements leading to the peace treaty, we began to offer cultural programs to Gaza such as International Visitor grants and a very limited – not really a Fulbright program, because we had a Fulbright Commission, but that didn't work outside of Israel, but grants for some university studies. We would occasionally want to bring a speaker who was coming to talk to the Israelis about – it might be about something very cultural or U.S. universities or the U.S. economy, but we would bring speakers on a variety of fields, experts from American universities, typically, to give a series of lectures and talks and speak to the press and so on.

We increasingly began to expand that program to include outreach to Gaza. I guess I got my own window on that other part of the equation by going to Gaza from time to time to accompany speakers or to interview potential grantees. So I got I guess a broader view than somebody whose total job was simply within Israel. Oh my, it was shocking, of course. It was totally shocking. Even compared to Jordan or – I never went to Syria, but to Jordan or Lebanon, the conditions in these refugee camps in Gaza, the conditions in these towns, were simply appalling, simply appalling. You had to question yourself about why was that, and I think it was a real eye opener for me, it was a real education.

When you lived in Israel, you could almost pretend like you were living in Western Europe or the United States, with a few exceptions, I guess, but there was some poverty. There was certainly no misery, and everybody had an opportunity to go to school, and

everybody had good health care, and to a certain extent there was a democratic political system which included everybody. You went to Gaza and the conditions were certainly as bad as anything that I had seen in India 20 years earlier, people living in dilapidated hovels or tents or corrugated cardboard boxes, who had been there at that point for 30 years.

Q: What was the feeling, your feeling, or maybe others, about this? Blame is passed around. One part of the blame is, why don't the Israelis or why don't we do something about this? And the other is that it's been sort of Arab – I'm quoting the broader Arab policy – to keep these people as refugees in order that someday they may return. Were we looking at this to say, "Get out of this and let's get on with ..."

COWAL: Well, Stu, I think you're very accurate and I would say it was some of each, but probably the base of a lot of it was both the leadership in the Arab world and the Arab community was such that they never wanted people to feel that they were settled there. They wanted these to be temporary houses. There would be these examples of trees being pulled up. Nobody wanted you to plant trees. This was never supposed to be more than your temporary place until you would go back to your home in Jaffa or your home in Ramallah or wherever your home was. That was certainly a part of it.

Q: Did you find in running programs in Gaza that you felt that Israelis or were concerned about what we were doing there?

COWAL: Yes. We had permission to go, but I think there was close scrutiny, also, of what we did.

Q: Any sort of veto, or did you ever get somebody who said to you aside and said, "Let's not do that." Did you feel any pressure one way or the other?

COWAL: Well, I think you felt a lot of subtle pressure. I don't remember anyone ever saying anything so directly as "Let's not do that," but they would have ways of making things somewhat difficult. I mean, they had roadblocks all over the place. So unless you were very determined to do things, did you really go ahead and do it? If you only had your speaker out there for three days, and you knew that he could get a terrific audience at Haifa University and a terrific audience at Bir Sheva and a terrific audience here, and you would say, "Well, of these three days we should take him to Gaza for one day." But you would know that that day could well be spent standing at roadblocks or sitting in roadblocks, and then you would get there and maybe somehow the word that you were coming would have never gotten out. So you'd sit four hours in roadblocks and five people would show up. Now, was that because they didn't want to come or they never heard about it? It was occupied territory.

So the next time somebody was going to come and you had a real hotshot and you'd say, "Gee, where do I put my priorities here? Do I have five lectures with 500 people each and this guy's going to reach 2,500 people who also want to hear what he or she has to say, or

am I going to reduce that by half in order to sit in a roadblock for half a day and see five people?" So they made it difficult for you, and the logistics also made it difficult – I mean, the fact that there were no good facilities. The Israelis didn't really want large numbers of people gathered anywhere. But we saw that as an important political objective and we tried to resist.

Q: Was there a Gaza Palestinian organization you could deal with, or was it sort of ad hoc each time?

COWAL: I honestly can't remember. I'm sure we built a little base of people that we could go back to, but they were ultimately not the final arbiters. So the Israelis would just close the borders because there had been an incident across the borders, so there was nothing that these people at the little community center or wherever we planned to carry out a program could do about that. Again, I think I said that earlier, being the cultural attaché put me in Israel within a milieu which was in general not in much agreement with the Likud government, with the Begin government. So most of my Israeli friends, and I would say friends and contacts, I think with the exception of the people that I came to know in government and politics who we sent on International Visitor grants, and a lot of those of course were Likud Party politicians – because they were the party in power, and obviously we wanted and needed to work with them. But I would say my work with the cultural institutions, the Israeli Philharmonic and the dance companies and the seven universities within Israel, the people that I knew in those contexts were overwhelmingly opposed to government policy and shocked by it in many cases, and frustrated by it.

You had an awful lot of people who basically agreed with me, and it would take the form of sort of wry humor and wry jokes, and one of them that I remember was the grandfather was walking along with his little grandson, and he says, "Oh, when I was a young man, I planted those trees." The grandson sort of acknowledges this. "When I was a young man, I put these sidewalks in, and when I was a young man, we built that school." And, finally, the little boy says, "Grandpa, when you were a young man, were you a Palestinian?" Because these days, nobody does that work.

There was this feeling that the effect of this whole two-class society and all this kind of stuff was that the ideals of the state of Israel itself, which after all was this Zionist thought of Jews shouldn't just be bankers and intellectuals, they should be farmers and builders and workers and policemen and criminals, and ordinary things in an ordinary place, particularly after 1967, and the large influx of Arab labor began to undermine that, and that was seen by a lot of people.

Q: What you're saying sort of parallels what happened in Saudi Arabia in the Emirates and all of that, in that with the oil money, the native population didn't work. They sat at the top and brought in – it's a different problem – they brought in Koreans and Indonesians and ...

COWAL: Oh, and Indians.

Q: And all that, but at the same time, it saps the work ethic.

COWAL: And that happened, but the difference was also that – I never served in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf – but they didn't have this, I don't think, this whole philosophy and thought and idealism about what they were as people, and what they should be as people was this honest, humble, working person, who worked with his hands. Which is not traditionally a Jewish thing, but was one of the goals of the founding of the Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionist ideal is that somehow we will be all right with the world if we just have a number of bricklayers. Then, the fact that 30, 40 years later, that was no longer the case, because of the overwhelming nature of cheap labor on your doorstep. So even in the kibbutzim, which were the idealist of all the idealists, less so, but in order to produce enough, a lot of them, their work became not just agricultural but manufacturing. Things would be produced on a kibbutz, but in order to produce at a scale, whether it was an agricultural commodity or a part for an automobile, in order to produce at a scale which was economically viable, most of them got into hiring outside labor, and most of that labor was Arab. It affected lots of things.

Q: I was just curious as you were saying this, what about teenagers and young college students? In the United States, most of us had time going out and being waitresses or waiters, or working in a factory, or doing sort of manual labor, but picking up pretty good money for your college education, and it's part of the American growing up. Did you ...

COWAL: In Israel, it's quite different, I think. It's maybe closer to the United States than Latin America is, where if you're from a wealthy family and you're going to go to college, you're probably not going to work in the summer as a waitress, the way we might. In the Israeli context, all that skewed because of army service and all this stuff, so that makes it very different. And there are some good things about that and some bad things about that.

First of all, it makes the universities much more serious places, because nobody goes to the university, male or female, until they've had two or three years in the army. So a lot of people who would in our system go right from high school to college without really having a purpose or knowing why they wanted to be there, what they wanted to do, or whether or not they wanted a university education at all, they have two or three years to sort of sort that out. Then they almost all take a year after army service to bum around the world. It's a very Israeli thing to do, to go to Australia or India or whatever.

Q: Australians do this, too.

COWAL: Australians do this, too, but Israelis do it in huge numbers. It's kind of a different thing, and Israeli children are very spoiled. In part, I think it's because their parents are so worried about them, in many ways. The fact that they know at age 18 they're going to go off to the army means that they want them to enjoy age 16 on a

surfboard and not carrying glasses. Again, then you have here's all this cheap labor, so it probably keeps the cost of labor down, and your university education is probably not a huge cost factor, either. So I would say that by and large, kids work, maybe at home they mow the grass, they do various kinds of things, but I don't think there's the same "we all work in a fast-food restaurant," the way American teenagers tend to do.

Q: What about, getting towards the end of this Israeli time, what about Iran? You were there, I must say, during very momentous times in that part. I mean, you had Camp David, you had Iran and you had the Israeli problem and the hostages and all that.

COWAL: And we had Iraq, too. That was when the Iraqis were, at least according to Israeli intelligence, and I think this has been corroborated by other sources over time, were building a nuclear weapons capability under the guise of building a nuclear power capacity. But they had fissionable material, and one day, and it must have been in, I suppose, about '81 – I can't remember exactly the date. But the Israelis just went and took it out, using F-16s, of course which they had bought from us, which were never supposed to be used and things like that, and largely getting away with it, I must say. In some ways, if you think about the Gulf War, 10 years after that, if they had been sitting there not simply with SCUD missiles coming in, but with nuclear weapons being directed at them, it would have been a very different place. So it was a preemptive strike, apparently based on very correct intelligence, and I think the world sort of blinked and said, "Fine, you did it."

Q: Absolutely. There are times and places when one just goes ahead.

COWAL: There is an "Axis of Evil," after all.

Q: Well, first place, before we go to Iran, in Lebanon, were the hostages there – this is the time of the Lebanese civil war, or when Americans were being taken hostage. Did that have any reflections on life in your business?

COWAL: I left right before Sabra and Shatila happened. I left in June, and that was in September of 1982. I think the reflection was that between the huge hostage taking in Iran, when the Iranians took over the American embassy, and the fact that journalists and others were getting kidnapped on a more individual basis in Lebanon, made the whole world seem less secure to us.

Q: What was the Israeli reaction to the events in Iran?

COWAL: Well, first of all, the events in Iran generated a new influx of Jewish refugees, many of whom settled permanently in Israel. It was a time when I can remember the luxury hotels in Israel looking like refugee camps, because the Iranian Jews who had stayed until 1979 I think were basically fairly well off. I think the very poor Jews had left in 1948 and so on, but the people who had stayed were those who were bankers and lawyers and people who were well off.

Q: And the shah had solid relations with Israel.

COWAL: The shah had solid relations with Israel, as being the two non-Arab countries in the Middle East, and they had very close relationships, military, economic. So, as I said, those Jews who were living in Iran were in pretty good shape, economically. Then the shah fell and the revolution came and they had to get out very quickly, and, of course, one of the things that Israel offers is it's the home for any Jew who wants to make it his home. So there's no question there of whether there would be – as there would be in the United States about whether you would be accepted as a refugee and so on. You are accepted, if you can prove your mother is a Jew. It's all about your mother, you know. If your mother is a Jew, you're a Jew.

So you would go along the beachfront in Tel Aviv from the Sheraton Hotel to the Dan Hotel to the Hilton to the other fancy hotels, and in every lobby – I can remember this going on for months – it would look like a refugee camp, because people were renting these very expensive hotel rooms, but the place where they had – and this was winter time. You do get a winter in Israel. The Mediterranean whips up and the rain comes. And so the playground for the children and so on was the lobby of the Hilton Hotel, so you would come in and you would realize there was a vast array of people who were essentially camped out there. They were camped out in $100 a day hotel rooms, but their play space was the downstairs lobby in the Hilton Hotel.

That was a dynamic that was going on, and then I suppose the loss of the relationship of the state to state or government to government made the world even less secure for Israelis and caused their paranoia to go up even higher, I suppose.

Q: Well, did you find that the cultural program, the stuff that you were doing, changed, or were you sort of preaching to the choir as far as our concerns about our hostages and all?

COWAL: Well, I think we were preaching to the choir, basically, the same way I suspect if we're talking about our concerns of terrorism post 9/11. It must be a very different lecture in Israel than it is in Saudi Arabia.

Q: We're going through a very difficult period, certainly, the Israelis and the Palestinians are right now. I mean, there's practically an all-out war, with suicide bombers and all that. But life, I take it, within what we would call present-day Israel, was secure, wasn't it?

COWAL: No, it wasn't secure. It was, I suppose, statistically rather secure, but certainly during the time I was there there were some high-profile incidents which involved very normal people. Not at the scale we see now, but I remember one incident in which an intercity bus was captured by a terrorist, or terrorists, and one of the places it went was on the highway right in front of my apartment. I don't remember actually seeing this, and I

think the Israelis were successful at finally halting the bus, storming it, killing the hijackers, but during which time several of the people who were on the bus also got killed. It wasn't before the bomb days. Again, the pace of it, the level of the violence, was much less than what we have today, but I don't think it felt like a secure place.

I'd come from Colombia, and there you either had a feeling that you were targeted or you weren't, as an individual. That might be that you were a foreign oil company executive or whatever and, again, these are conflicts that go on and on when you hear about the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) getting Ingrid Betancourt the other day. But it was that kind of thing. They were after Ingrid Betancourt or Nicolas Escobar, who was the Texaco president when I was there. But they weren't after Sally Grooms. So you lived in a fairly secure world. You got to Israel and it was much more terrorism, as we've now come to define terrorism, and that was to make the whole civilian population feel unsafe. That could take the form of extreme security consciousness on the streets and in the airports and in the supermarkets. You were always being asked to look around for any suspicious packages, and if you saw a suspicious package. We didn't come to that in the United States until maybe this year. I'm talking about 1978.

The first night I was in Israel, I was given a ticket for Joan Baez concert at a Roman amphitheater called Caesarea, outside of Tel Aviv, 30, 40 miles outside of Tel Aviv. Somebody had this ticket, and I guess as the new cultural attaché I guess I was supposed to go hear Joan Baez, so out I went. A driver took me or something, I wasn't with any Israeli or something. I just walked in and was seated in this amphitheater along with everybody else, and they had metal folding chairs arranged around the Roman amphitheater kind of thing, and before Joan Baez came on stage, some guy walked out on the stage and he said something in Hebrew and everybody stood up and they went like this. I thought, well, it's a prayer or something. It's a theocracy.

Q: You were standing – to get this on tape – you were standing up, bowed over, looking down.

COWAL: So we stood up, everybody bowed over and they looked down and I thought, "This is my first day in Israel, I'm not Jewish. I guess this is what they do." I later came to find out that there was a bomb scare and he was asking everybody to look under their seats and see whether there were any packages. So that was my first introduction to the fact that there might be something under your seat that you should worry about, and I think we became, all of us – you didn't know whether you would be in the Carmel Market on Friday morning and pick up the wrong orange and it would be a bomb.

I say, much smaller scale than these terrible things that have happened in the last couple of years, but certainly you were not without that sense that acts of violence, acts of terrorism, would be random and it could just as well be you as anybody else who was caught up in them. I don't think we felt very secure, and I suppose the greater the tensions in the Middle East, the less secure we felt. Now, we didn't feel that our embassy was

going to be taken over and we were all going to become hostages the way our neighbors in Tehran were.

Q: As always, it was a difficult time. I mean, the Middle East is always – and you had things going on. I mean, Lebanon and Iran. Was there any ...

COWAL: I also had another interesting experience while I was there, and then we should probably end this. But I was single in those days, and I had divorced from my first husband and was in Israel as a single person. It was the time when the first Egyptian ambassador arrived and he was also single. Much older than I, he had been a diplomat for King Farouk. He had begun his diplomatic career, he was probably 20 or 25 years older than I. We never had what I would call a romantic relationship, but I was sort of a convenient person for him to take along when he wanted or needed somebody to go with him to a dinner party or a concert or whatever to which he had been invited.

It was another sort of whole slice of life, seeing this in a way through the eyes of the first Arab representative in Israel, and that was also fascinating. The way that he was welcomed by Israelis was fascinating. He was like a rock star. People would recognize his car and start waving. There was, on the part of the Israeli public – every place you would go, after Camp David, there were doves up in all these little statues, little banners and stuff. All the signs at roundabouts and stuff in town, they would say, "Peace, Shalom, Salaam," and it would be in the three languages, and there was this great feeling. In some ways, Saad Murtada, who was the ambassador, was the recipient of many of these warm feelings, so here you've got this Arab nationalist. He's gone through King Farouk, and then Nasser, and then Sadat, but a very cultured, educated person, nonetheless an Arab nationalist or whatever, and he's sent to this position – very interesting.

Q: Did you get any feeling from him about how he was looking at Israel at that time?

COWAL: Well, I think skeptically, but he was also I think very moved by this warmth that poured out toward him. I must say, I knew the Israeli ambassador to Egypt, also, because he had been an academic, a guy named Shimon Shamir, and he was at Tel Aviv University. He was the head of, I think, an institute for the study of Arab cultures or something, at Tel Aviv, so the Israelis had named him as their first ambassador to Egypt. Of course, they're not comparable. Here, he goes to Egypt, which is a country at that time of 40 or 50 million people, most of whom are uneducated and illiterate, so they don't even have the foggiest clue that some person from a strange planet has come to their midst. Whereas in Israel you have at that time maybe 3 or 4 million people, all of whom are highly political, highly literate, and every single one of them knows there's a new Egyptian ambassador, and most of them are excited and enthusiastic about it.

But Shimon Shamir, it was a very cold reaction on that side, where it was a very warm reaction on the Israeli side. So he had his official contacts. I think people were correct with him, diplomatic. Sadat received him, and later Mubarak and so on, but there was not in any way the same kind of thing.

Q: Before we finish this, I wonder if we could just do one last thing, and that is to talk – you left, the Israelis had already invaded.

COWAL: Yes.

Q: What was the reaction from the embassy and from your contacts, because it looked like Sharon was running away with it? He was defense minister.

COWAL: I was at the meeting when Glenn went to see Begin. Of course, so was Lewis, and we were constantly briefing, Sam was, high-level visitors like that that they had to deliver the message that there was no green light there, that whatever they might think the American people thought or the American Congress thought, that the American government would take a very negative view of an Israeli invasion of Lebanon. I heard Glenn deliver that message. Anybody who says that, "Gee, they didn't know, they never heard from the American government that this would be something we would regard very adversely," doesn't understand the whole story. They might have gotten winks or nods from their particular friends in Congress, but they got a drumbeat from Sam and from every person who came to visit. I saw that part of it.

I would say that most of my Israeli friends, and I've already described them – and the tension began to build. You began to know that it might well happen as Sharon ran amok. I would get calls every day from people, either at the office or at home, and they would say, "You," meaning the American government, not me, Sally, "You have to stop these people. You are the only thing they will listen to. You have to stop them, because they are heading for disaster." I can remember that extremely clearly.

I was originally supposed to leave in August and go to the Senior Seminar, and suddenly I had to take over, and we'll get onto that next time, but I had to take over this job, the way it always is in the Foreign Service. It simply had to be done and could only be done by me, and must be done tomorrow and not in August or any other time. Therefore, I would leave in two weeks and get on a plane and go to work the next day and have deferred home leave and all that sort of stuff. So suddenly I was on a fast track to doing something else. I think I got my orders the day of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which was in June sometime, and I had 10 days. I was going to leave 10 days later, after I got my orders, and really I had been there four years, and really I had an enormous number of friends and contacts, and despite the fact that all this was going on, everybody wanted to have a farewell party for me.

So I would have, sort of always gone through, the kind of breakfast, lunch and dinner when it's all sort of a blur and you think you're never going to get done having these parties, but you do want to see everybody. It was so surreal, because every night I would be at a group of friends, a party sort of for me, and many of the men who would come would have earlier in the day been in Lebanon. In other words, they were soldiers who were sort of mobilized for day trips, and then they would come back at night and go home

and sleep in their own beds. It was a very strange situation. Or somebody would have been there the week before or whatever. Because of this whole reserve thing, everybody got called up.

I mean, obviously, the regular troops were doing what the regular troops were doing. The reservists were usually on logistical missions or they were doctors or they were something or another, whereas they weren't actually mobilized but they were required to do certain things. So it was very surreal, were we in a war? Then, of course, my own emotions, my own at leaving, but I think one thing really sticks out in my mind, and that was going to the largest hospital in Tel Aviv, and it's called Tel Hashomer Hospital. The director of the hospital was a friend of mine, a medical doctor, who was also the chairman of the Fulbright Commission, and I had obviously worked very closely with them.

I can't remember his medical degrees, but whatever they were, he was at that point running this 1,000-bed hospital or whatever, with six operating rooms. I went to pay a farewell call on him as the chairman of the Fulbright Commission, and he was maybe 15 or 20 minutes late to the meeting, which was uncharacteristic for him, and he walked in the room and he apologized for keeping me waiting. He said he had just been in a meeting of the whole board of directors of the hospital, because they had been called together to make a decision about whether they would tie up one of the operating theaters for an eight-hour operation on a small Lebanese girl who was a blue baby, and who had been brought back in an Israeli military hospital by Israeli soldiers who had seen her on the street and realized that she needed an operation.

Q: I might add that in present-day terms, a blue baby was a child who was suffering from heart deficiency.

COWAL: Right, and it looked that way. So this was a baby whose heart – apparently, probably one of these medics who was up there saw this child on the street, recognized immediately, without doing a CAT scan or something, what the diagnosis was. They had somehow brought this child and the mother on the helicopter to Tel Hashomer Hospital, along with some wounded Israeli soldiers who had been evacuated. So the hospital board had had a long meeting to decide whether or not the operating theater and doctors should be occupied to do this operation, and they had decided that it should happen. That, to me, said so many things about Israel, and my own sort of conflicted notions of what it was all about. Was it this power country invading a small neighbor, or was it this humanitarian "we have something to offer the world and maybe we can express that in the form of an operation on a child who won't live another year if she doesn't have." I guess we'll leave it there.

Q: Well, then we'll pick this up the next time in 1982 in the late summer of '82, and you're going back to the United States. Where, to do what?

COWAL: I'm going back to the United States because the Reagan administration has decided that youth are important, and we have a successor generation problem with

European youth who don't understand the United States, and we must immediately – this reminds me of what's going on today with Arab society. But we must do something for the youth of Europe, principally the youth of Europe, our seven economic summit partners, so that we continue to hold the same values that came about after World War II, and we've now at that point, 35 years later lost those values. And we have a successor generation gap, and how are we going to address this problem.

Q: So that as your responsibility?

COWAL: That was my responsibility.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick that up then, 1982 and you're going to change the whole face of Europe with its youth.

Q: Today is the 8th of April, 2002. Sally, 1982, so you're back in Washington.

COWAL: Yes, I'm back in Washington actually for the first time in Washington since 1971.

Q: That's a long time away.

COWAL: A long time away and a little bit of culture shock, I guess, as most of us feel after a long time away, and sort of thrust into a position at USIA. This is the early years of the Reagan administration, and one of Reagan's good buddies was a man named Charles Z. Wick, whom he appointed to be the head of the United States Information Agency. Wick was a Hollywood movie producer, and sort of legendary for a)not being very diplomatic, b)not being very aware of the world outside of Hollywood, such as foreign countries and foreign policy, and, third, being a good friend of the president's and being put in this position as the head of USIA to do a job for the president.

I guess I have to say, in retrospect, having done some very good things and some spectacularly stupid things, but one of the things that he did periodically was chewed up and spit out Foreign Service officers on a very regular basis. So I think by the time I got there, he had been in place maybe three or four months and had run through a whole number of senior Foreign Service officers in various positions, none of whom were found by him to be really up to the job. So although I had been headed for the Senior Seminar as it was then called, I guess, which is kind of one of those Foreign Service perks, of essentially a sabbatical year to go off and do another Washington semester project, to do a year in which you actually think about foreign policy and how the foreign affairs agencies work, and usually a long trip abroad to focus in on some particular issue. It's meant to be the kind of entry level into the senior-most ranks of the Foreign Service. It's both, I suppose, an honor for what you've done and supposed to indicate that you're one of those people who has a further career potential.

That was what I was supposed to do, but instead of doing that, they decided that I would become the latest cannon fodder for Charlie Wick, because he had decided that one of the very important things that USIA could do would be to address more of its programs toward very young people, as we talked about last time with this idea that there was a successor generation gap, and we needed to do something to fill it. I was thought to be a person who could stand up to him and give him what he wanted and give it to him fast enough to meet his Hollywood versus Washington bureaucratic timetable for how things ought to get done.

Q: Well, I imagine when you went there, it's like going to a foreign country. You were trying to get yourself indoctrinated into the world of Charlie Wick.

COWAL: Right.

Q: What were they telling you, what seemed to be the problem with the regular USIA types who would have been chewed up by him, and how did you feel you could deal with this?

COWAL: Well, I think that the problem had been that he was very frustrated by the bureaucracy, and as all of us who have worked at the bureaucracy know, with some justification. He thought if USIA was supposed to be a communications agency and a creative agency that it was too bogged down with people who did things by the book and had been doing the same thing for 20 years or 30 years, and who didn't have the same zeal about Reagan politics as he did, and didn't have the same energy and drive. The kind of energy and drive – this was an entrepreneur that produces a new movie. Besides movies, he had then gone into nursing home management or something, and he was every week establishing a new nursing home.

He was one of these people who was truly creative and had a million ideas, and 999,999 of them weren't worth anything, and you needed somebody who would spot within this vast creativity the five ideas or the 100 ideas that were worth pursuing, and work on them. Of course, it wasn't anything I knew from the beginning, but I think he also was a little cruel and he sort of enjoyed doing this to people, he enjoyed spitting them out. I guess I had been there about three days when he called me into his office and he said he needed to get a letter to Nancy Reagan immediately, because she had proposed something on this youth exchange idea. So he needed to get that done, and I was to get that done.

I think it was probably 48 hours later when I was trying to get that done. This program didn't exist before. The U.S. government had never done anything with high school below university exchanges, so I was obviously trying to carry out what he wanted done. At the same time, I had to do that within the constraints of what was proper and legal and for which we had or could get congressional funding, so there were a million problems. I can't even remember the circumstances, but I had tried to get this letter answered, and the legal counsel had to see it, had to get State Department clearance, so needless to say that wasn't done in 48 hours. So within 48 hours, he began to spread the word all over

corridors that I might be the hotshot – somebody thought I was a hotshot, but I really wasn't any better than all the rest of these failures because I couldn't get it done, either.

So I began to pick this up, that I was on my way to being the latest spit-out Foreign Service officer who couldn't keep up with Charlie, so I asked to see him, and that was very unusual. I mean, he asked to see people, you didn't ask to see him. By the way, I worked for somebody who worked for somebody who worked for somebody who worked for him. Although we all knew that this was a project that he thought was very close to his heart, because it had the Reagans' involvement in it. After all, as the head of USIA, he was running a several hundred million dollar a year operation with Voice of America and senior officials in 100 countries, huge cultural exchange programs and Fulbright programs. So this little youth exchange office reported to some associate director, who reported to an assistant director, who reported to a director for this, who reported to the deputy director, who reported to him. But, nonetheless, when I began to pick this up of "well, Sally Grooms isn't so hot, after all," I asked to see him, and I went to see him, and I just sat down and I said, "I'm very glad that you're talking about your disappointment so openly with how this project is going, because I'm sure that that will get us the kind of speed and attention toward these things which need to be done, that you and I are both looking for. So I'm happy that it's been so widely reported that you're unhappy with this," and I got up and I walked out.

I must say, that was the last time I ever had Charlie Wick on my case. In other words, he was a bully, and as long as he thought you'd break into tears or could be bullied, or could run away, he would keep at it. When he figured that you couldn't, that sort of ended that one, and so then we got to work. We got Nancy Reagan's letter answered, whatever that was all about, which I no longer remember. But what we did was we then said, fine, we have a wonderful opportunity here. The President of the United States is interested in the exchange program. For whatever reason, or why ever he thinks he's interested, how can we use the power of the presidency toward a cultural program when cultural programs of the United States haven't really had very much high-level attention?

So I set about on the one hand trying to look at what the field was, what was happening with exchanges of young people around the world, obviously not with the U.S. government, because they hadn't been in it. But what were the good programs and what were they doing and what were their hallmarks, and if this was meant to be with our six summit partners. If this was the seven partners, then to find out whether there was any, in the Brits or the French or the Canadians or the Italians, any similar desire to address these issues, which the United States saw very clearly.

I went through a little review process of seeing what was already going on in the field and then what other countries thought about it, and within a pretty short period of time, we put together something called the President's International Youth Exchange Initiative, which instead of creating its own program really said that the issues here of why we're having a hard time with this in the country are that young people don't want to go abroad. Young American teenagers don't want to go abroad, and American families are no longer

as willing to host teenagers from abroad and give them a home for a year and put them in public school systems, as they once were. And public school systems are also not as they were in the '50s, with however many kids you had, you just hired more staff, so they're fearing the pinch, also, of budgets and all this kind of stuff.

We set about to design a program which essentially relied on the large organizations that were already there by saying we would raise the money from Congress and from the private sector, to strengthen their programs, so that they could handle more exchange opportunities. And we would get the attention of the American public for how important a component this was of sort of changing the world a friendship at a time – bring home the world, even if you're a person who isn't yourself going to spend your life abroad, you could give an opportunity to a kid from Italy for a year to live in your house, and, by the way, your kids might learn Italian. So with Charlie Wick's great connections, we got the Advertising Council to make this one of its priorities for that year, which means like Smokey the Bear, they created a whole campaign about why it was a great idea to send your teenager abroad or bring a teenager here and have him live with you.

We got the economic summit countries at their summit meeting to actually have a discussion about youth exchange, so it turned into being a pretty exciting time, and I had to travel several times to Europe and Japan with the great Mr. Wick, who created flurries wherever he went.

Q: How did he operate when he traveled?

COWAL: Because this was the Reagan administration, our summit partners, I think they were, to a person, as far as I can recall, all of these American ambassadors were friends of the Reagans. There wasn't anybody out there in France or whatever who wasn't a personal friend of the president's. Therefore, he either knew these people, because they were all very wealthy donors. I should say, in addition to being a friend of Reagan's, he was a big, big donor to the Reagan campaign, to the Republican Party. So he either knew these people – they had been all, I don't know what they called it, Golden Eagles or something who were, prior to campaign finance reform, people who had given hundreds of thousands of dollars of their own money. Most of these people knew each other.

He used the USIA bureaucracy a little, but really he went to his friends who were the ambassadors, and then asked his friends the ambassadors to set up meetings with the head of state or the Foreign Minister or whoever it was. In a way, it was personalized power, and not altogether misused. I mean, clearly, if you had gone in from the bottom up and you'd said, "Now we want to talk about teenagers. We'd really like to sit down and talk about 15-year-olds," I can't imagine that you would have gotten the attention of the French Foreign Ministry above the level of some desk officer in either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and nothing would have happened. But he was able to parachute in very much closer to the top, by having something in the summit platform. I think like all things in my Foreign Service career – or like most things – it was important and interesting in and of itself, but it was even more interesting because of

some of the things that it taught me about, for instance, the use of these economic summits.

By then, maybe they had been meeting for seven or eight years. Now they're on summit number 30 or 27 or something. The concept was that the heads of state of the seven most powerful economies in the world would meet once a year for sort of a chat, and they would rotate that. It would be in Italy one year, and then France the next, and then Canada the next, and then so on, and that this could be apart from the regular foreign policy channels a way for countries to take on special themes. I mean, I came later to use that on other things such as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), which comes up much later in my career, but having heads of state discuss this and then getting it into the summit, communiqué itself then guarantees you a lot of press on an issue. Then you had, "Well, what's this youth exchange thing? Why does the prime minister of England and the president of France and the chancellor of Germany think it's important that the young people of these countries know each other?"

Q: So we were promoting not only to the United States, but internally within this group.

COWAL: Yes.

Q: Japanese coming to France and that sort of thing.

COWAL: Right. Now, what, of course, we lacked, because we weren't the United Nations, was any rim on this wheel. I mean, it was the United States clearly at the center, since we were the ones who were interested in driving for it, and we had all the spokes going out. There was the Germany spoke and the France spoke and the Japan spoke. There was never really a rim on this wheel, but I'm of the opinion that a lot more happened between Germany and France, let's say, than would have happened if you hadn't had these summit discussions. So, yes, in a way we were saying that this alliance was dependent on everybody's relationships with everybody else, not simply the United States to everybody else.

Q: What had driven this? When you came there, it sounds like somebody had done a survey and found that the teenagers in Germany didn't have any idea what an American way of life was.

COWAL: Well, I think what had driven this was the Vietnam war. There was suddenly a lot of criticism of not only they didn't know what America was, but what they knew about it they didn't much like. On the one hand, you had the sort of popular culture stuff, which of course continued to spread all around the world, but on the other hand, you had the sort of legacy of Vietnam, although this is the early '80s. Vietnam by then was already over. Surveys were done, indicating that in the eyes of many of our European allies, there was sort of a moral equivalency between the Soviet Union and the United States, and that I think was deeply disturbing to American policymakers.

The Soviet Union appeared to be fairly strong. Communism as a system, which will you choose, Communism or democracy. There was a feeling that unless we, as the great Democratic nations of the world, couldn't figure out that we had much more in common and much greater shared values, that our whole system would be at risk. To what extent this was really true, I don't know, but I think you're right to say there were some surveys. It became very much in vogue in the European magazines and the thought journals in the United States and Europe, Foreign Affairs and so on to say, "What happened to the alliance? What went wrong?" And then to say, well, the 50 and 60-year-olds, they had this experience, they fought this war, they knew what this was all about. Or in the case of Germany and Japan, they lived through the Marshall plan, the reconstruction of Europe done with American assistance, or General MacArthur in Japan and the creation of a Japanese post-World War II economy and political system.

So it wasn't the 50 and 60-year-olds who had a problem, or even the 40-year-olds, it was the people who had been born, let's say, 1965 and after, whose forming experience was not World War II, but Vietnam. These were the people who were now teenagers or teenagers and in their 20s, university students, who seemed to doubt this and who might have even thought that there was some moral equivalency here. It was meant not as the only thing to attack that, but as one of the things that we would do.

We also put, I think, in those years a lot of student centers in places like France and Britain, not only for the French and the British, but for the Africans who would study in Britain and France as a way of reaching out to the university students, in other words. But this was particularly the younger kids. Reagan wrote, or had written, a number of fairly powerful speeches that I must say the youth exchange programs are still sort of using. One I remember was he said something like, "There is a spark in us all, which if struck at just the right time, makes us different kinds of international citizens for the rest of our lives," and I happen to believe that's true, and he said it very well and he captured it. So that's what I did.

Sometimes I call that year the travels with Charlie, because we got on a lot of airplanes and visited a lot of countries and sort of swept through them with trembling Foreign Service officers waiting for his arrival and then celebrating his departure. Along the way, he fired three or four people and was, generally speaking, out of control.

Q: I sort of have the vision of him as sort of the character of the Hollywood type hitting the French foreign minister or something like that. I'm not talking about ...

COWAL: There was a great deal of incredible skepticism, but you remember how popular Reagan was at that time, so, since Mrs. Thatcher and Reagan got along, what could the foreign minister do? But I do remember being at one of these trips when we went to Germany, and he was truly awful. I don't even think I'll quote it, it was so awful. Then the next day we got to Britain, or on the same trip we got to Britain. These trips would generally be we would have meetings all day with embassy types, and then we'd go the foreign ministry and whatever, and he had briefing books. This might as well have

been nuclear disarmament talks. All this stuff, he was briefed, and in some ways, there was an underpinning to it, but it was all somewhat silly, also. At any rate, we had that.

Then, in the evening, there would usually be a dinner given by the ambassador for him, in his honor, and they would invite the foreign minister and a couple of other government ministers and several parliamentarians and then, depending on whether it was a small dinner or a large dinner, a number of others. I think it was the last night of this particular trip, when we were in London, and of course we're staying at Claridge's. The whole thing was done very first class. We had a dinner, the ambassador gave a dinner, and it was maybe 30 people or so at three or four round tables. I happened to sit next to Robert Morley, who was a well-known British actor and a very humorous man.

So, typically at the end of the dinner, the ambassador would introduce Charlie and give a nice little toast and say a couple of words about why it was so important he was here and what this was all about. Then, Charlie would get up and reply, and that's when you always sort of sat there and wondered whether you were going to get through this or not. But this particular night in Britain, compared to what he had done the night before in Germany, it wasn't bad. He sort of had the talking points and he kind of got out what you thought he should get out. So he got to the end of this and I went kind of like this, I guess.

So Morley leaned over to me and he said, "Well, I just don't quite understand." He said, "Are you here to get him a press conference or to keep him from having one?" That was Charlie on his best night, so whether this was terribly convincing, I don't know. And it didn't matter, because he had the power. He has the president's ear, and the president had their ears, and therefore something was going to happen, and something did happen. We got a $10 million appropriation through the Congress to fund these projects. I think we doubled the number of youth exchange in the period of a couple of years, meaning from 20,000 students or something to 40. It got very much bigger. We got these advertising campaigns free behind it, and we put together a private sector council. This was a very early example, therefore, of a private-public partnership, which has come to be the vogue, but in 1982, nobody was talking about that. It was either a government program or it was a private program.

This got the person who had just been recently the chairman and CEO of the Equitable Life Insurance Society, a very large company, who had just retired, and so they made him the chairman of the President's Council or something on youth exchange. He sent out letters to all of his friends who were the other CEOs of all these major corporations, and I think we raised, I don't know, $5 million or something that way. So, suddenly there was $15 million in new funding. It also caused a lot of new organizations to spring up that hadn't been there before, because suddenly there was interest in them and there was some money for it.

Then this office that I was running turned into more of a grant-making body. We had some money from the Congress and some money from this private-sector entity. What would we do with it? So we were suggesting that people give us proposals for – how did

we address German youth? A large program that exists to this day was called the Congress-Bundestag program, and that said there'll be, I think, one young person's exchange for every member of the U.S. House and Senate and one for every member of the Bundestag. And the German government will put in several million dollars and the U.S. government will put in several million dollars, and we'll have a scholarship program, a premier program that 500 Germans and 500 Americans every year will travel on, high school students, and spend a year in each other's country. That will be administered by private-sector organizations, these youth exchange organizations.

It caused some things like that to be put in place, which still exist, and it's a wonderful program, and I think we have now, what, almost 20 years of experience of Germans whom if they're well selected you would hope and believe are now sitting in the German Bundestag, and the same thing for some of the young Americans. We created a Japan Senate prefecture program, so that it was smaller, because it was 100 kids, but 100 Americans would go to Japan and 100 Japanese who were selected by the prefecture would come to the United States. It remains an enormously successful program.

Q: I would think you would have more a problem coaxing Americans to go abroad than foreigners coming to the United States. The United States has been extremely receptive of foreigners, but these other countries, it's a little more difficult.

COWAL: Our problems were really getting American teenagers to want to go abroad. That's to me amazing, because I think I always wanted to go abroad, but the average American teenager is pretty focused, I guess you would say. Maybe that's changing a little bit now, but either focused on "Oh, it's my football team and my junior prom," or focused on "How am I going to get into Harvard? And I might go abroad and, yes, it would be a wonderful personal experience, and yes I would learn Spanish or French or German or whatever it was, but it might not be as good on my SAT tests as if I stayed here and did the prep course for the SAT, and how am I going to get into my number one college choice? I'm never going to get off that track. I might even lose a year because sometimes your credits don't transfer." So there was always a huge number of Germans, French, Italians who wanted to come to the United States, much bigger than we could accommodate because we couldn't find enough host families to take them all, but a reluctance of the American teenager, and I guess that says something about the American-centric way that the world works. Everybody thinks they need to learn English, and we somehow don't think we need to speak French in order to survive in the world. So it's sort of a disequilibrium.

Q: Was there any part of the program that dealt with courses on the United States in high schools abroad?

COWAL: Yes and no. I mean, too little emphasis, I think, put on that. I think through deciding that we would reach a lower level there was some imperative or some reason why you might try to get into high schools and not concentrate everything on post-graduate education. In many places around the world, USIA sponsored American studies

at the high school level, or at least working with curriculum developers, whether in India or in France to see if you could get a more balanced presentation of the United States in the commonly accepted history textbooks or civics text books, or whatever. So, yes, I think there was some of that. And we tried to promote in the United States, whether or not the kids went abroad, promote foreign language learning, how important it was for our people to know and understand the world outside, but that's never been very successful in this country.

Q: Were you running into things such as – I've talked to the people representing Germany, and saying that it's harder and harder to get Americans to study German, for example. They'll study French or Spanish, but mainly because these are sort of tourism places and all. But a place like Germany and Japan and other places, it's very difficult.

COWAL: Right, it is.

Q: Were you finding yourself having problems with – is it the American Field Service or there's some outfit that has been promoting for a century, for a very long time, Americans going abroad, and I think the reverse, too, doing this sort of thing.

COWAL: Well, that was exactly where when I came in and analyzed this at the beginning, I said the American Field Service and Youth for Understanding and the Experiment in International Living are doing a wonderful job. It's just they're having a hard time getting enough kids and they're having a hard time getting enough families. We don't need to create something in competition with them, we need to strengthen them. So this program was sort of meant to do that, and again, it had some interesting and long-lasting repercussions, one of which was it caused all of these organizations to work together for the first time. They had been certainly in some ways competitors. To a certain extent they still are competitors, but we put them together into a consortium for international exchange. And that has over the years evolved into something called the Alliance for International Education and Exchange. It's now an organization that represents, I don't know, 60 or 70 exchange organizations, from NAFSA (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers) to these high school programs, the American Council on Education. It becomes kind of a lobbying organization on Capitol Hill to make sure that in our foreign affairs budgets some attention goes to exchange programs, or even things such as simplifying the visa requirements for students who wish to come to the United States.

The genesis of that was really this youth exchange program. I don't regret at all that I did it. I learned some things for myself that stood me in good stead, such as the power of getting really senior levels of government committed to something that it would have taken you forever to start from the bottom up. You also create a lot of enemies as you do that, because then you're in some ways stepping on somebody's rice bowl. If funding isn't going up and you're diverting some of it to work on high school kids who've never been there before, it means something else loses. And they say, "How come they get all that money? Well, only because Charlie Wick went to President Reagan and that isn't the

way that foreign affairs ought to be done." But as it got launched and was a big feature at the Williamsburg Summit, which Reagan hosted of course, so he could have more to say about the agenda, we were working toward that. We got it into that summit agenda, and we brought one kid from each of these countries. So we have a wonderful photo with President Mitterrand and the French kid and Reagan and the American kid and all the seven of them together with the seven kids, all the stuff.

Then it turned into, I say, both a grant program, like other grant programs that the federal government does, and the kind of job where you get a call at midnight and someone saying, "My 16-year-old is in Paris and I understand that she stayed out all night last night, and how come nobody's supervising her." I decided that that wasn't my calling in life, to worry about things like that. I also knew that since, Mr. Wick by then was ecstatic with me and what we had done, there was no way I was going to be able to just skip out of this and get another assignment in USIA, because nobody would do that. This was his number one project and he was happy with how it was running. So I was, I don't know, I guess lucky enough to meet Jeane Kirkpatrick. She asked me to come to New York and be her political counselor at the U.S. mission to the UN. I knew the only thing that could one-up Charlie Wick was Jeane Kirkpatrick, and so that I would be able to do.

Q: Just before we finish this up, did you have the feeling that you were also sort of blotting your copybook in USIA by being too close to Charlie Wick?

COWAL: Yes, and Stu, that's a very good point. I remember some of these old-time and very honorable sort of people would look at me and say, "How can you do that?" Well, I would have two responses. One was, "Well, we're all whores, it just depends on the price." The other was, "You don't think you aren't doing it, too? The day that you haven't resigned and said 'I am not going to stay in this organization one minute longer because I don't agree with this man's bull-in-the-china-shop approach to foreign affairs' is the day that you're as complicit as I am. I just happen to be at a more visible level."

Q: Well, also, a point I'd like to make, and maybe you'd like to comment on, was that in many ways the time when Charlie Wick was there, everybody has stories about Charlie Wick and all, but what comes through is that, one, he had clout with the president, and as the head of an agency, he got stuff done.

COWAL: Yes.

Q: Clout is really more important than finesse, whether diplomatic or the other ...

COWAL: And he really had that. I mean, I think the other thing was that he was not a product of history. So he really moved USIA into the television age. It hadn't been there. Here you are in 1981 and these folks had, like, one little camera and a few guys out there playing with the camera.

Q: They were so wedded to the shortwave radio.

COWAL: They were still wedded to the shortwave radio, and he said, "What do you mean? What is this all about? So I think he broke a lot of crockery, and my own feeling is that he shook that place up in ways which were very beneficial to it and to the conduct of our foreign-cultural diplomacy, and he ought to be thanked for that, really, and he isn't always. Despite the fact that he's not a guy I'd like to have dinner with every night, I think that's irrelevant. He was a doer and he did things, and he served his president well, and no question about that. And I think being a Hollywood figure, he had some star quality and he could attract some of these stars. I think that was something else I learned, that maybe clout is more important than finesse. I learned how important it is to be able to use whatever you have to reach out to ordinary people who don't read Foreign Affairs, but who might listen to a Hollywood figure do a one-minute commercial. So he had that drawing power, and he was a showman, and he was an entrepreneur.

Q: Great, so we'll pick this up the next time in 1983, when you're off to the United Nations to deal with the problems then.

Okay, today, after a long hiatus, is January the 17th, 2003. Sally, 1983, what assignment did you have and how did it come about?

COWAL: In 1983, I was assigned to be the deputy political counselor at the U.S. mission to the UN in New York. I had never worked in a political position. I had always been a USIA officer. I hadn't even really done much press work, although a couple of times in Israel, including that one really important juncture, I had been the acting PAO, and the juncture was when the Israelis bombed the nuclear reactor in Iraq, which seems also relevant today, 20-some years later. So I had had some brushes with the more political side of foreign affairs work, and also I think you couldn't be in USIA without having everything ultimately be political. I can remember once being the control officer for John Glenn, for instance, who visited. The Israelis in trying to pull a little scam flew us up to the Golan Heights where of course U.S. embassy people weren't supposed to be. Glenn was savvy and said, "Stand behind me and the TV channels will never see that you're here," and so on.

I wouldn't say my whole focus on the use of ballerinas. I always saw myself as a USIA cultural affairs promoter: how did you reach people? The job of a cultural affairs officer, it was nice if you were passionate about the arts, and in many ways I am. They're my life-long abiding interests. I'm still an opera subscriber and a symphony subscriber, and I wasn't doing that for my job. I was doing that because they were things that I loved. But I thought it was more important to be a manager of cultural affairs rather than a devotee of a particular performing or visual art. Being manager of cultural affairs meant working to have the most results with the least amount of money and reach more of the people who were defined as the target audience. And if that target audience liked to read books or go to theater, or if they're more likely to be persuaded by American pop art or American classical books, then you needed to know those things and to not let your own desire to

listen to Beethoven every night, or to watch La Bohème influence the cultural program. Having said that, I had then never had a job which was in a political section.

Q: In 1983, this was the two years into ...

COWAL: It was pretty early still in the Reagan administration.

Q: Reagan one, you might say. Who was the ambassador to the United Nations, and how did ...

COWAL: Well, it was Jeane Kirkpatrick who was the ambassador to the United Nations. Of course, my name didn't come up on a list that the State Department sent for the deputy political officer, who was George Moose, who got ready to go off to be ambassador, I think, in Benin.

Q: I think it was, too.

COWAL: At any rate, Jeane was looking to replace George Moose, whom she had agreed could be nominated by the president to be an ambassador. Of course, I think I came into the process fairly late, because I didn't know Kirkpatrick or any of those people, and I wasn't looking for a job. I was running this youth exchange program in Washington. But through some mutual friends – I guess he was legal counsel for the mission, and a political appointee, named Alan Gershon, and I met Alan at a dinner in Washington one Friday night. We got into a long discussion about the Middle East and about U.S. policy in the Middle East. And still being pretty fresh from my Israeli days, it was something that I knew about and thought about, and at the end of the conversation, he said, "Have you ever met Jeane Kirkpatrick?" And I said, "No, I've never met Jeane Kirkpatrick." And he said, "Well, would you like to meet Jeane Kirkpatrick?" I said, "Well, of course I'd like to meet Jeane Kirkpatrick." As one may or may not remember, she was certainly a major figure on the world stage.

Q: And was a cabinet member.

COWAL: And was a member of the cabinet, and certainly not only for this reason, but one of the highest-ranking women in the government. I thought it would be a wonderful honor to meet her, and that was that. I walked out on Friday night, and much to my surprise, on Monday morning, I had a call from Jeane's office in Washington saying Ambassador Kirkpatrick will be here tomorrow and would like to know if you could come over and meet her. I sort of knew this was about a job, and so I went to see Jeane, and I think we had a pretty instant rapport, or good chemistry. She was very interested to get somebody in the job who had a sympathy for Israel. That was clear.

You didn't have to be slavish about it, but it was where her own feelings lay, and I think she perceived a lot of the State Department as if not anti-Israel, certainly leaning in the

direction of being rather more pro-Arab than Jeane was. So I think that was probably the instant appeal of having somebody who spoke Hebrew and who understood the issues.

Q: You'd been in Israel how long?

COWAL: Four years, as the cultural officer. Culture is very important in Israel, as we talked about. And secondly, you can't be in Israel in a position in the embassy without observing a whole lot of policy. And, in a way, I don't think you can be in Israel for a long time without understanding something about the dimensions of the region, while it's only one country, it's half the problem. I had some opportunities while there, because we had signed the Camp David agreement and so on. I think we had a program to promote the cultural normalization between Israel and the Arab countries via using our cultural diplomacy as an instrument to do that: in other words, inviting Arabs, all Sunnis, Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians and others and Israelis on common trips to the United States; and meetings to develop this seminar, in places where they would be able to meet outside of the region on a common professional basis and hopefully establish some kind of relationship to understand the other in his or her complexity, and not as a cartoon. So I had been very much a part of that, setting that up and seeing it run.

Nonetheless, I was very surprised when at the end of our conversation, she said, "Well, I would really like you to consider being the deputy political counselor at the mission. I'd like you to go to New York as soon as you could and meet a couple of my deputy ambassadors and to meet Warren Clark, who is the head of the political section and see whether they all feel about it the same way I feel about it." I said, "Well, of course I'm very flattered and I would be very honored, and it would be fascinating, but why do you want to have a cultural officer in a political job?" I'll never forget her reply. Her reply was, "Well, because the UN is really all about political theater." That was not meant to be – I'm sure many remarks were meant to be very cutting to the United Nations, but that was really not one. It was that she believed the United Nations was basically a world stage, and as Shakespeare would have said, "All the world's a stage." How do you put it across? How do you win the points in the debates? How do you work with the United Nations as a political body, in which there are factions, as much as there are in national legislatures, and key players and debates that have to be won and votes that have to be counted, and how would we do that. She saw that as an important quality.

Q: Yes.

COWAL: So, anyway, I went to New York and I met the people she wanted me to meet and the job offer was forthcoming. I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity, not only to learn about the United Nations and multilateral diplomacy, but to work with the State Department and to work in New York and to say – I was never very interested in working in sort of headquarters operations. So, for me, being able to do a U.S. stint in the thing we had in the United States which most resembled a foreign mission, seemed to me to be a great opportunity.

Q: Well, also, there's another thing here at play, and correct me if I'm wrong, but USIA, its Washington operation, it was mostly nuts and bolts and it didn't have the same flavor of, say, a geographic bureau here like the State Department. There wasn't sort of a policy content.

COWAL: Well, it was meant to be, but it was never very successful. I mean, the East Asia department at USIA was meant to be formulating information policy and so on, but mostly, you're right. Mostly, it was nuts and bolts and it was a personnel operation and it was "They need 150 copies of this video. Can you get it to them." And so on, and that wasn't very interesting.

Q: So the big game was really overseas in USIA.

COWAL: Right, that's where you were really on the front line, and I always thought the Washington end of it was – particularly at USIA – was being on the wrong end of the bucket. I mean, somebody did have to fill those buckets so there was somebody to throw the water on the fire, but I wasn't very interested in filling the buckets. I had been very interested in the youth exchange job, but it had sort of, by now, been established. I mean, I was a year into it, and it was evolving into having a lot more to do with the nitty-gritty also of "Well, my 16-year-old is in Paris and she doesn't ..." Really, it wasn't that level. The exchange organizations dealt with that level, but it certainly was getting down to being the nitty-gritty of working with the exchange community and I wasn't particularly fascinated by that, I must say. Yet, having started on a very rocky footing with Charlie Wick, by the end of the year, it was just a success story. It was the thing he most cared about. Although I would have chosen to get back to the field as soon as I could as CAO in some country, I knew that wouldn't happen for another two years, because there was no way he would break that assignment and let me go. I also knew that one of the few people who could trump Charlie Wick was Jeane Kirkpatrick, so it worked out very nicely for me. I must say, again, it was a wonderful assignment, because it was such a terrific learning experience.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COWAL: I was there for almost three years, from mid-'83, from May or June of '83, until December of '85, so two-and-a-half years.

Q: How would you describe when you got there, first, the culture of the mission, as a strange country, and then the culture of the UN?

COWAL: That was a lot about what I learned, as well as learning a whole of cultural things, because the deputy political counselor, among other things, was sort of the gatekeeper, the approver of all cables, actually does some of the policy stuff, some of the reporting, some of your own responsibilities. I carried some things that the reporting officer said to the Security Council, but then the signer-off on the cables produced by all of my colleagues, cables and policy papers and so on. At the UN, you do a lot of work on

resolutions and all, but you also do a lot of reporting. A lot of reporting comes out of the UN mission about what your bilateral colleagues, what their governments think about various going on in the UN and sometimes about issues that aren't at the UN. Simply because you're on the front lines of dealing with your colleagues from 100 and some other missions, a lot of reporting is generated by the UN political section. So I was a clearer, an editor, of all this reporting. I must say, I learned a lot about a lot of issues, from Antarctica to Zimbabwe, I guess, because they would come up on the UN agenda. And for somebody who had not had a broad experience in foreign affairs, it was a terrific learning experience.

The culture of the mission, in a way, changed a bit over time. My time there included the leaving of Jeane Kirkpatrick and the coming of Vernon Walters, which changed things glaringly. But as we got closer to the midterm election, the second Reagan election, it was pretty clear that Ambassador Kirkpatrick wanted to be the Secretary of State, or wanted to be the vice presidential candidate, or wanted to use the UN position, as Madeleine Albright managed to do 10 years later. But I think that was very much in Jeane's mind. The group of people who were closest to her, who were her deputy ambassadors – and I don't meant to say that they didn't do their jobs at the UN. They did their jobs at the UN. They weren't running an illegal or illicit political campaign, but I think they were trying to position their principal out there as somebody who should be considered for higher responsibility. It carved, I think, the career people at the mission off from the political appointee people at the mission. I think that particularly Ambassador Kirkpatrick and her deputy people, Jose Sorzano were considered an anti-Communist Cuban American political appointee, although he had been a Peace Corps director in Colombia, and I had known him in Colombia 10 years before. He was a very Reagan political appointee in his philosophy.

I think their strategy for getting Jeane what she wanted was that the worse the United Nations could appear as an organization, potentially worse for us, with most nations opposed to the United States on most issues, the more our ambassador could be seen as the only person speaking sense in this pool of insanity. It was to show that on UN votes she counts for something and countries who voted against us should be penalized on foreign aid. So she turned it, or they turned it, into a very domestic political agenda. That caused, I think, a great split between the career mission and the political mission. Because, after all, people like me, and I think most of my colleagues, but maybe particularly someone who came from a USIA background, saw their essential job as winning friends for the United States, winning adherents to our file, having people sign on, having people voting. Sometimes, I used to think that their essential job was not winning friends and influencing people, but doing the opposite – in other words, how could we make it all look worse? How could we take positions that no one would support. I don't want to over exaggerate. That wasn't true of everything that we did, but it certainly made a difference.

About the UN, there was so much of it that was ridiculously bloated and overblown. They were right, these Reagan people, about a lot of it, and I suppose more right about the UN

as a political body than the UN as a specialized agency. Even Jeane, in her rants and raves against UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), for instance, which we got out of during her ambassadorship and at her instigation, would say, "Well, WHO (World Health Organization) has wiped out smallpox." She would find some good things, "UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) is responsible for a lot of the drop in infant mortality around the world." I mean, she would say some good things, but that she felt the UN, both as a debating body, and as a political mechanism, was simply anti-U.S. And it costs money, because the United States was 25 percent – I think it's down to 20 now, but 25 percent of all the costs of the United Nations by UN statute was borne by the United States. We were spending money, literally billions of dollars, to ramp up a machine which was essentially going to attack us. That didn't make any kind of sense with her kind of conservatism. So I think we found ourselves, we agreed with her on many things, but disagreed that the best way for success in the UN was to stay out of it.

Q: Did you find yourself in a situation – I've seen it in the State Department two times, it probably happened before – but a coterie around the principal. I'm thinking of particularly with Jim Baker and also with Madeleine Albright, sort of protecting or promoting their principal, and they end up guarding the principal, sort of getting the work done. I mean, they're trying to position them, and it's the principal's thing. But in Jim Baker's case, he was surrounded by extremely good people, and Madeleine Albright, from what I gather, these weren't very good people. For that case, Baker had real success, and Madeleine Albright has sort of, with great expectations, sort of disappeared.

COWAL: I agree with that.

Q: Did you find that happening around Kirkpatrick?

COWAL: Yes, I think so, although remember Jeane's background. Whereas Baker's background, let's say, he had been a lawyer, I think, in his daddy's law firm.

Q: Yes.

COWAL: He's kind of always been the chief executive or something. I suppose he didn't start there. Anyway, contrasting that with Jeane's background, which was academic, and her academic background meant that in many ways she was extremely non-hierarchical and very egalitarian. And, of course, it's different to run the State Department than to run the UN mission. The UN mission had maybe 50 Foreign Service professionals assigned to you. It's probably larger now, but in her day and in my day, I would say it was about 50. There were 10 political officers, and of course during the General Assembly I think it was 12. I had these junior reporting officers and a bunch of ambassadors come and line up and work. But the normal, when she would have her little staff meetings a couple of times a week, I would say it was 50 people. What she most cared about was the political issues, I think, and she delegated. The very important economic and social issues were sort of run by another ambassador. She didn't get very involved in those things.

So she really cared about what these 10 political officers, particularly, including the more junior ones, could tell her about what she wanted to know. So, if Cyprus was coming up on the Security Council agenda and she wanted to know everything about the root causes of the problem in Cyprus, she would invite the 26-year-old political officer who covered Cyprus to her office, not necessarily with his or her boss also, at 5:00 in the afternoon and offer her a glass of sherry and say, "Now, tell me everything you know about Cyprus." She would listen. She really would. She would make her own positions on it, but she would politely listen and she would ask us questions, and then she would, as an academic, as a professor, be the let-me-learn from this bright graduate student what he has to tell me. That was the best of it, and there were many moments like that. I remember her very fondly for many things. She could be very intimidating, and that was partly because of he relationship with Reagan, and so I think she terrified a lot of people, and she and Jose would come down on certain things. I think people who knew that this wasn't very smart nonetheless were intimidated and didn't always speak up. I must say, sometimes, me included.

They got off into dubious areas of social science, I think. For instance, they were the ones who came up with the system that all the countries in the United Nations ought to be ranked on their adherence to voting with the United States. I think the Marshall Islands maybe got UN membership at that time, and that was during the Central American crisis, which I'm sure we'll talk more about. It was one of those issues. We could get a few Central American votes on most things, but the United States takes – and it's purely this way – it's one of the few countries in the United Nations, I suppose, that votes on the basis of not so much interest and principle. Most countries do see the United Nations as a political body, and this is not a Congress trade vote. I mean, the only thing they care about, as a member of Congress, is that the funds for aircraft, to make new aircraft, because they represent the district where Boeing comes from. So, they only cast, what, a couple thousand votes a year. As far as they're concerned, for their constituency, there's one important vote, and it's about Boeing. So they'll trade lots of those thousands of votes to the guy who only cares about the vote for highway concerns, and the vote for something that's going to be good for the voters of North Carolina, a lot of votes they trade. The United Nations isn't any different, so most countries approach it and say, the bigger the country the more the issues, but they've got one issue or two issues. They've got one or two, or five issues, or 10 issues, but the United States feels that it has 250 of these, so it doesn't have very many votes to trade, and besides, it's not going to vote for things it doesn't believe in, even if it doesn't really care about the issue.

Q: There's strong ideology.

COWAL: Strong ideology, and in many ways, that's good, but it's also difficult. It's a lot easier to be an ambassador from Lichtenstein than to be the ambassador from the United States. I think that's always been the case. It remains the case. But what if you have a very ideological government and president?

Q: I might point out that at this point in the Reagan administration, as with other administrations, ideology was driving it more than practicality, which usually happens toward the end of the administration.

COWAL: Right, he came in for a different purpose, so they were not going to go along. Particularly, they were not going to go along with anything, because they were on such a budget-cutting mode. So any resolution which said there would be any cost to the United Nations with this, we vetoed it or voted against it, whatever it was. So the United Nations thinks that it's important to have a peace conference on Central America, and there will be a cost to it. Nope, the United States won't support it. So we ended up being terrifically isolated and in the minority position on most issues. I mean, we had our instructions as political officers to vote against anything which had financial implications, and that wasn't just devised by Jeane. She had her guidance, and maybe she got the guidance she wanted, but that was the guidance coming from Washington.

Then they devised this report card system, and we would go through the votes of the General Assembly, which it's sort of doubtful whether those votes really mean a hell of a lot anyway, but we would go through the votes after a General Assembly session. We would say, "Well, the United States voted "yes" on Resolution 123. Egypt voted no. The Philippines abstained. Nonetheless, neither the Philippines nor Egypt voted with the United States, so they get a zero for that vote." Well, abstentions are a big deal in the United Nations. It does make a difference whether you abstain or whether you vote for or you vote against.

My contention was that if you were going to do this, you should at least do it honestly and say, "Okay, if you want to do this, silly as it is, if you vote with us, if you vote the same way we vote, you get a one. If you vote absolutely opposite from the way we vote, you get a zero. If you vote in the middle, you get a 0.5." Then you would – sort of all of this, it's worth nothing. It's pseudoscience.

Q: The immediate image that comes back is body count in Vietnam.

COWAL: But you came up at the end of it with a report like this, a 20-page report, a 50-page report, because then these things are analyzed. And she got the Congress to mandate this report, and then the next step was to condition aid based on this report, which never quite happened, because the aid missions were usually able to find some reason why the children shouldn't starve despite the fact that Zambia had a horrible voting record in the United Nations. But for me it moved it into a real political aspect, and not such a very nice one. But a lot of what she had to say about the UN, if we ever finish this whole thing – I feel that I'm probably dragging on.

Q: No, this is very good. You're giving us solid insight into the situation.

COWAL: Certainly for me, and for my later work when I came to work for the United Nations some years later, it gave me an excellent and fundamental grounding in how the

United Nations work, and what are some of the many downsides in trying to work with the United Nations. Being a United Nations employee, and how they get their jobs, and how those payrolls are feather-bedded by we have to have an X number of Indians and X number of Russians and X number of everything else out there. It was probably why I got the latest job as the deputy of a UN agency, was partly because I did understand the United Nations. I didn't come out with as negative a view about it as the Kirkpatrick administration did, but I learned about it, warts and all.

Q: All I can think about in the Kirkpatrick administration, one of these little sound bytes that gets played back and forth was a man named, I want to say, Lichtenberg or something.

COWAL: Lichtenstein, Chuck Lichtenstein.

Q: Lichtenstein, saying that if the United Nations wants to leave, well, I'll stand on the dock and wave bye-bye, which sort of encapsulated the feeling. This must have just alienated the hell out of ...

COWAL: It was unbelievable. I was with Chuck, who subsequently died. He died a couple of years ago, who was a personal friend of Jeane's and her husband. Jeane's husband was very important, behind the scenes ...

Q: What was his background?

COWAL: He was a professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, quite belligerent. I mean, probably was one of the first neocons, probably moved – I think he started out as Farmer-Labor Party and I think gradually moved. He was key to her political thinking.

Q: She started out as a democrat.

COWAL: Right, and he was her first boss. I think he probably started during the war, but right after the war, as the Iron Curtain came down, he was in charge of the program at the State Department of refugees. He hired Jeane, who was right out of Columbia graduate school, as an interviewer. Or not as an interviewer, because she had no Eastern European languages. But these refugees would all be interviewed as they escaped or walked across, or however they got the West, they would be interviewed. Then those interviews would be translated, and then it must have been in I&R (immigration and refugee) post, and then there were these great stacks of information. Jeane was hired as a grade-seven analyst or something, to write up and to make analytical judgments about what was going on in these countries of the Soviet Union, or of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in the '60s. She was hired by Evron Kirkpatrick to do that job, and they both out of that experience became profoundly anti-Communist, whereas I don't think they had started that way. I mean, they were anti-Fascists, and they were liberal democrats and so on. But then, I think, the bulwark of their philosophy became anti-Communist, and then that was

the "Evil Empire" and their closeness to Reagan and so on. At any rate, professor Kirkpatrick was in New York most of the time and was actually very important in all of this, and I don't know how I digressed.

At any rate, the whole Lichtenstein thing was not particularly captivating. I was with him that day, and I was probably acting political counselor. I'm sure I was, because it was summertime and most everybody was off, including my boss.

Q: Warren Clark?

COWAL: Warren Clark.

Q: Whom I am interviewing.

COWAL: Have you interviewed him? So, as acting political counselor, if there were any meetings – and this was slow. This is before the UN became a 12-month operation – and I don't mean we slept for three months. There always seemed to be something to do, but now I think the Security Council meets every day. In my day, you would have maybe one or two meetings a week with the Security Council, but now with Iraq and all the rest of this stuff, it's a daily job.

Anyway, so certainly in July or August, it was one of those two months when most UN diplomats had gone home for home leave, and most meetings weren't scheduled, and the Security Council would meet only if there was a crisis. Of course, the General Assembly and its committees weren't in session at all, and there were probably six of us rattling around the mission. One of the committees that continued to meet, which is a subcommittee of the UN, is something that's called the Host Country Committee. The Host Country Committee basically is set up in order for there to be a functioning liaison between the United States as the host country for the United Nations and the problems of the organization itself and the missions who are there. So Chuck was probably the acting permanent representative, because Jeane was out of town, probably on vacation, and the Host Country Committee was called into session. I don't remember whether it was a regular meeting or something that was called, but I think they met monthly, and so it was probably a regular meeting. It was often handled by somebody lower than an ambassador, but I think Chuck had time on his hands and he decided that he would show up. He would usually be accompanied by somebody from the political section, and so I accompanied him.

The Soviet delegate got up and started to make a really horrible speech about something in the domain of garbage collection – he accused the authorities of New York of deliberately not picking up the garbage at the Soviet mission. It might have been after the KAL (Korean Airlines) shoot down, one of those really important issues where we were virtually at the point of war. So he started, and of course it didn't just stay to the garbage collection, it immediately stepped right over into some pretty nasty political stuff. So Chuck just, without any notes, of course, without any guidance from the State

Department, without any anything, he reacted the way most Americans would react, and that was part of the secret of it. He said, "If you guys don't want to be here, it's okay with me. In fact, I'll be down on the dock, waving goodbye as you sail off into the sunset." Of course, you don't sail off into the sunset in New York anyway, it's the wrong geography, because the sun sets in the west and you sail east from New York. But at any rate, we walked out. That sort of ended the meeting.

Q: But it was filmed, I think.

COWAL: Sure, there were always video cameras in the UN. I mean, television was always there, and this was a slow day. It was probably a slow news day in the United States, and certainly a slow day at the UN. At any rate, it was done, and as we walked out, I said, "Chuck, you'll be an instant folk hero." He said, "Oh, why?" I said, "Well, because you gave it right back, and it would be on the basis that most Americans would understand that they had made some completely irrelevant and truly insulting remarks and you've said – gave it back to them."

Q: You're flipping your hand under your chin in an Italian thing of "screw you."

COWAL: "Screw you," exactly, "screw you." The Spanish would say *namola*, which is essentially the same thing. "Give me a break." So I don't think we had gotten – if you know the geography there – from the UN to the UN mission. The U.S. mission to the UN, you walk across First Avenue. I think it's about a five-minute trip back to your office. By the time we got back to Chuck's office, the phone started to ring and the press officer was getting called and the White House was calling and the State Department was saying, "What in the hell?" It was on all of the newscasts. I mean, I was right, of course, essentially people sent flowers. They were just so overjoyed that somebody had stood up to this, and New Yorkers, in particularly, who have a love/hate relationship with having the UN.

You're right, it typified their approach, which was not in any means all bad. It wasn't all good either, but the approach was, "We've been taking it on the chin for too long. We've laid down and in the interest of 'Oh, they're all these nice little emerging nations, we'll let them walk all over us. And it doesn't matter, we'll let these votes go on and we won't say anything.'" And these folks got there and they said, "No, we're not taking that." That sort of typified it. I mostly remember a call that the report of this call was passed to us by the White House, because somebody had called the White House and said this was magnificent, and why didn't the United States have representatives like that nice man from Lichtenstein would actually tell people where to get off. Of course, his name is Chuck Lichtenstein. Anyway, there were more important events than that. I guess the two that stand out most in my mind were the invasion of Grenada and the shootdown of the KAL, and maybe we should talk about those the next time.

Q: Just one thing before we move to the next time. Was sort of the Reagan/Kirkpatrick/Lichtenstein change of course more confrontation, and being

essentially very patronizing, did this have any effect? Was it all of a sudden the people were beginning to take a look at their vote in doing this, or could you use this as an instrument?

COWAL: Not very well, not very successfully. I don't think so. Sometimes. You began to get the countries that were really our lackeys or really scared or really dependent on our aid, and that became the Central Americans, who were in the middle. I guess that was the leitmotif with Grenada and KAL sort of being punctuations. This whole Central America, the countries and all of that, became pretty big and continuing issues. It was bipolar. There was very little that was going to get really decided at the United Nations, because what characterized it was the two blocks of votes. I mean, on the big issues, not on a bunch of the silly little issues in the General Assembly and in the committees, but on the big issues, most of NATO was going to vote with us. We would have the Western Europe and others block, and that sort of includes Australia, like minded, so Canada, Australia, Western Europe and the United States. For most issues, we were going to have 14 votes or 16 votes, or however many countries are in that group, I mean, many more now that Europe has sort of changed so fundamentally, but in those days it was those votes. The non-aligned was not really non-aligned. The non-aligned more or less followed what the Soviet Union did, so they had the Soviet Union and East Europe and then the non-aligned, which was 100 countries. I think that they felt that there was a certain security in numbers.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick this up the next time, when you were at the United Nations, '83 to end of '85, and we want to talk about Grenada, we want to talk about the shootdown of the KAL plane over the Kamchatka Peninsula. We'd also like to talk about Central America and the situation there and how you dealt with it. Also, could we talk about, since you were knowledgeable about Israel and all, the Israeli connection in the United Nations emerging.

COWAL: Yes, we've got to talk about that. And you remember who the permanent representative was. It was Bibi Netanyahu.

Q: So we'll talk about that and American influence.

COWAL: Yes, I'd very much like to talk about that.

*Q: And Japan defense, that thing, and also the Soviet influence in the United Nations, because it seemed like every other employee of the United Nations was on the payroll of the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*), so how this happened. So we'll pick it up there.*

Today is June 23rd, 2003, and this is sort of a make-up. We had lost the tape, so we started one back when you were principal assistant secretary of state.

COWAL: Or I think in Mexico before that, or sort of deputy assistant, but saying how I got there.

Q: So you covered part of it.

COWAL: So I think I covered a lot of Mexico.

Q: I think you did.

COWAL: And I went to Mexico from the UN.

Q: We might cover a little of that.

COWAL: There are obviously some things, I guess, that we left out of what we were talking about on the UN side.

Q: Well, anyway, 1983, '85, what was your position then?

COWAL: I was the deputy political counselor, and then the acting political counselor, and my tenure there spanned the last two years of Jeane Kirkpatrick's tenure of permanent representative and the coming to New York of Vernon "Dick" Walters to replace her in the second Reagan administration. I was there a total of about three years.

Q: Well, we've picked up, here are some things. I think we talked about the principals and all that, but let's talk about Grenada. Did you find yourself carrying a special brief for Latin America, in a way?

COWAL: Latin America, and the Middle East, I guess were my two special briefs, and that was based on where I had served, and the languages that I spoke, which were Spanish and Hebrew. The job of the deputy political counselor was to provide the overview and do the supervision of I think nine political officers. So during the three and a half months of every General Assembly, I would supervise a rather large political staff. But because of my interests and my languages and my background, I probably did more with respect to Latin America and the Middle East than anything else. I think the principal reason why I was recruited by Jeane for this position was because of my strong Israeli connections. We came to our biggest disagreements over Central America.

Q: Before we get to Central America, let's pick up some of the blips on the diplomatic radar that happened. Our going into Grenada was one of those. How did that hit you all?

COWAL: Well, if you recall, we had gotten the approval of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, who were our allies and partners in this. They requested the United States to take some action in Grenada, but it was not a UN sanctioned affair, and there was immediately a Security Council meeting called to discuss the situation in Grenada. Our move was primarily defensive, to prevent a resolution against the U.S. action. Of

course we could take care of that with our veto power, but we wanted to have as good a show as we could produce of all the reasons why the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States had asked the United States to intervene. Of course, all of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, as you know, are mini-states, all of them former British colonies, all of them pretty much dependent, in the modern age, on the United States for whatever aid and trade and commerce is provided.

Even before this action, because of course they were all sovereign nations, meaning they all had one vote in the United Nations, one of our jobs in the political section was to cultivate those votes, because they were votes that we could generally count on getting. We talked before about the overwhelming power, in the sense of numbers, of the Soviet Union, because they were able to get most of the non-aligned in a knee-jerk way to vote with them on most things. We were always out there looking for the poor guys who would indeed vote with us, and making sure that they were facilitated in every way to do that. I'm not implying exchange of money or bribes in return for votes, but I am implying that our Latin American person, and to a certain extent myself, every time there was an important vote coming up in the General Assembly, we would make sure that all the troops got there in time to vote, were aware of the vote and would show up for it. Because most of the eastern Caribbean states had representatives in New York who could best be described as sort of freelance, part time. For instance, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was in fact a taxi driver from Brooklyn. And that was very convenient, because if you could get him mobilized, then he would stop by and pick up the representative from Saint Lucia, and I think at least one other, typically, on his way down to the United Nations. So if you got that one worked right, you could get three votes, instead of just one.

So, needless to say, when it came time, defending this action or presenting this action in the Security Council, it was an orchestrated-from-Washington affair, but we were extremely lucky in that the spokesperson for the Organization for Eastern Caribbean States was Eugenia Charles, who was the prime minister of Dominica.

Q: A very impressive person.

COWAL: A very impressive woman, the way many people in the Caribbean are, extremely well spoken and very well educated, but also with this sort of a bedrock common sense underlying it. I think Jeane Kirkpatrick and Eugenia Charles were quite a formidable team as they laid forth this action and documented a small country, Grenada, sort of running out of control, a radical sort of state. I tend to think, and I think I thought at the time that in terms of the threat to the region, it was exaggerated. But in terms of the threat to the people of Grenada, it was not exaggerated. All of these little mini-states had been set up to be parliamentary democracies running under the sort of British Westminster systems of government, and with having clearly defined roles for the legislature and the executive. Clearly, in Grenada, that had gotten off the tracks. How much the Cubans were really a part of that is unclear to me. It was unclear to me at the time. Certainly the fact that Cuba was a client state of the Soviet Union in those days,

receiving I think something like $6 million a day in Soviet subsidies and Soviet aid, they hadn't done very well in many of the larger countries in South America in terms of fomenting the kind of revolution which they would have wanted to see. I mean, after all, Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia trying to get a peasant uprising started.

They hadn't really been very successful anywhere. Central America, in terms of Nicaragua, was still sort of being fought out, but the fact that the Cubans were able to use their relative wealth and power to do things such as build an airport in Grenada was, I think, cause for concern. More positively, and something that the United States has never particularly wanted to give Cuba credit for, was the fact that Cuba provided enormous amounts of medical assistance and technical assistance all over the region. And I think, like any country that has a foreign aid program, does so for a mixture of humanitarian and political aims, and I don't think Cuba was any different. But we became very concerned at the sort of violence that was going on in Grenada, although, I say, violence in these tiny little states is a relative term. Violence is a couple of people getting shot or whatever. Nonetheless, there was an attempt to take over a democratically elected government, and we stood very firmly to say that should not happen, and I think that was absolutely right.

Q: How did it come out in the UN, from your point of view?

COWAL: Well, I think it probably came out all right, but not spectacularly, and I think we at the end overplayed our hand. Because some months after the whole thing was over, we had obtained a copy of – this movement in Grenada was called the New Jewel Movement. And we obtained a copy of the secret deliberations of the New Jewel Party, indicating their goal of takeover and so on. We insisted on publishing this, which was 300 or 500 pages of documentation, and having the UN send it around as a document to every mission and translate it in various languages. If you read it, it read more like the annals of some high school sophomores having had their first beer. In other words, I think it made the whole thing look somewhat trivial. So I think at the end of the day, we overplayed our hand. I think to restore a democratic government in Grenada was the right thing; to overblow it was the wrong thing.

It took about three days, I guess, and if you recall the ostensible excuse was the American medical students who were studying at St. George's University in Grenada, and that they had to be rescued. In retrospect, it said that that ended the sort of Vietnam syndrome, the fact that the U.S. military could stage a successful operation. I kind of wonder, given the amount of force that was there, the amount of force that the Americans brought in, which was overwhelming. I think it taught some lessons to people like Colin Powell, for instance, who said he never wanted to go anywhere again where there wasn't overwhelming American force. That certainly carried us through into Desert Storm. So I think the antecedents for some of these things, not so much on a diplomatic level, even, but on a military level, were probably laid by the Grenada affair. But for me, we blew it all out of proportion and probably could have solved the problem some other way.

I think the British probably would have solved it another way. We, I think, chose to act in a very strong and somewhat unilateral way, which was characteristic of the Reagan administration. We had some high-minded rhetoric, and I think the extent to which we had a triumph was really the impressive character of Eugenia Charles.

Q: Did you get involved when the Soviets shot down a Korean Airlines plane over the Kamchatka Peninsula.

COWAL: Right.

Q: It was a full passenger plane, including a congressman on board, but it didn't seem like a spy mission. It seemed to me, this thing really enraged us. Did it have a UN effect, or not?

COWAL: Oh, yes, it very much did. It had a UN effect. We could, after all the times where we felt that the United States had been unfairly targeted or beat up on or accused of using its power in a way not becoming the conduct of a nation of the 20th century, it gave us a great cause celebre to go after the Soviets, who were certainly number one enemy. So we decided to play it to the hilt. I think that was also part of the – we talked about this before – Jeane Kirkpatrick's strategy to get herself selected as the secretary of state in the second Bush administration. It came along at a time when, again, it allowed Jeane, who had a great following in the party, to get some national publicity and national notoriety. So we chose to play it very much the way Adlai Stevenson had played the Cuban missile crisis, that is, by bringing evidence to the UN, by using the UN as our sort of soapbox to the world.

We had intercepts of the pilots from the Soviet Air Force plane talking to each other and locking onto this target of the KAL plane, and getting it in its sights and then pushing the button. It was about a minute-and-a-half tape or something, but it was extremely dramatic, as played in the Security Council. If, as Jeane had said to me when she hired me, oh, I want a cultural officer in this role because the UN is really all about political theater anyway, it was Jeane understanding that the UN was about political theater, and that was how she used it. It was very effective. What the real Soviet motivation was, whether they knew this was a passenger airline or not, I think history will probably pretty well record that they didn't understand that at the time, that it was a terrible and grievous action. It certainly was.

Q: The Soviet Air Force had had some really embarrassing things happen to it, of foreign planes going through their radar system. So, we, living in a bureaucracy, know how these pressures can build up: "Well, by God, it's not going to happen again."

COWAL: Right. I do think that's what happened, but it was a godsend for us in a way. If you were Jeane Kirkpatrick and you wanted to get a more prominent role, and you wanted to sort of have a good platform to counter the Soviet influence in the world, or at the United Nations, they left the barn door open. They gave us an opening a mile wide, and

we walked through it very nicely. I think insofar as it was a performance, it was a very well-done performance. Did it change any minds permanently at the UN? Probably not. But did it cause some temporary dislocation and embarrassment for the Soviets? It certainly did. Did it make the United States look like a hero? Maybe. Our real connection to it was somewhat tenuous. The plane had left from San Francisco or from New York or whatever. It was a daily KAL flight that flew from the United States to Seoul, and it was clearly off course, and why it was off course, who knows, and whether the Soviets knew it was a passenger plane, I doubt it. It was a dramatic effect. I think that some of these things set the stage for what we see currently. We watched just a few weeks ago Colin Powell's presentation at the UN about the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, bringing in intelligence information and demonstrating it in a very vivid manner at a Security Council meeting. You had the foreign ministers of France and the UK and the United States debating one another. It does remain the world's only high-level debating forum, open to being watched by the whole world. That is something that didn't begin with KAL, but was certainly ratcheted up to a new level.

Q: Well, one of the main focuses of the Reagan administration was Central America, El Salvador, the guerilla war going on, Nicaragua being taken over by the Sandinistas, and their close ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union. How did that play when you were there?

COWAL: Well, it took a tremendous amount of time and energy, some of it well placed and some not so well placed. Jeane had, I think, not really much understanding of Latin America, although she had done her PhD dissertation on the *Peronistas* (Peron supporters), and she spoke Spanish. Her whole orientation and her whole academic focus and her whole professional focus had really been on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Her first job was working for her husband, Evron Kirkpatrick, who was a very liberal professor from the University of Minnesota. She worked for him reading the translated interviews of refugees coming out of Eastern Europe as the Soviet Union cracked down the Iron Curtain and began to transform those societies against their will into a Communist state.

That was Jeane's formation, so I think that Jeane wanted to see Central America played out against that canvas, and, looking at it from that perspective, saw it that way. Her chief deputy was a man named Jose Sorzano. Jose Sorzano was a Cuban American, born in Cuba, who wanted to see everything the same way. He wanted to see the domino theory in effect in our region and that it would go from Cuba to Nicaragua and suddenly there would be Communism, Soviet Communism, sort of raising up the isthmus and ending up in Mexico, where it would threaten the United States. So their cause celebre became defeating the Sandinistas on the diplomatic front. We would take a stand against Cuban and Nicaraguan Communism in the hemisphere, trying to strengthen client states, which by and large were not democracies, which by and large were committing some pretty egregious human rights violations of their own. Nonetheless, looking at it in a fairly simplistic way and saying, "Well, the enemy of my enemy is my friend," and therefore I think in many ways becoming much too much of an apologist for the goon squads in

Guatemala and in El Salvador and in Honduras, who were very anxious to allow us to put bases there, to put American military there.

The whole Contra stuff was certainly playing out, our funding of these enterprises to ...

Q: This is tape seven, side one, with Sally Cowal. Yes?

COWAL: I think, as I said, I got hired, I think, because essentially my political views were consonant with theirs when it came to the Middle East. I must say, they've been somewhat modified over time, but I was coming right out of a four-year experience in Israel. My experience before that, of course, had been in Latin America, not in Central America, but in Colombia. I spoke Spanish and I read a lot and I thought I knew a lot. My views on Central America were not the views of the Reagan administration. I think it became increasingly difficult for me to do what they wanted done, which was in some ways very adolescent. It took the form of trying to harass and pick on the Nicaraguans, wherever we could, who were no match in many ways. However, they had a couple of clever people, and they also saw the UN as the place where they could carry forward their political message. They were determined to do that by sending some pretty articulate people, who would take every opportunity to make scandalous and scurrilous remarks about the United States, which of course I didn't like and I didn't appreciate.

It became sort of a mud fight between the United States and Cuba and Nicaragua, and, to a certain extent, Mexico, which was one of the reasons why we had such a bad relationship with Mexico. The United States was very much of the mind that the Monroe Doctrine was still what counted, and that the United States was the sovereign power in Latin America, that things should not happen in Latin America which did not happen with the advice and consent of the United States. That was certainly true of Central America.

The French and the Mexicans tried to have a peace plan and have some arrangements so that there would be some settlements in Nicaragua and in El Salvador and other places where there were active guerilla movements fighting the largely military, non-democratic regimes. This was something that the United States was just not going to stand for. Playing around in our backyard, as we would call it. So, fine enough, but sometimes the tactics were kind of adolescent in there.

Q: Did you get any feel for, his name escapes me, Lieutenant Colonel ...

COWAL: North, Ollie North.

Q: Ollie North. Did he ever come on your radar?

COWAL: No, not then. Later, yes, but not then.

Q: Did the mining of the Nicaraguan ports come up when you were in the UN?

COWAL: Yes, it did.

Q: This of course was international law and all. How did this go? Was it sort of the hell with international law?

COWAL: I think it was pretty much, "The hell with international law. It's Latin America, it's Central America, it's our backyard. It doesn't matter what international law is, this is important to the United States, and we're just going to do it." Those things were not particularly easy to defend, and I don't think we defended them very well.

Q: I mean, I'm trying to get a little feel for the interaction. I understand the delegates' lounge is where a lot of work gets done. Were people coming up to you and saying, "Sally, what the hell are you doing?" I'm talking about other representatives.

COWAL: The people I became closest to, my real colleagues were the 14 other countries on the Security Council. Those were the people that you saw all the time, and so they were the ones who became friends and colleagues, and you spent sometimes a lot of time with them. Because these Security Council consultations would go on for hour after hour after hour – not public meetings, but sort of behind-the-scenes consultations. So you got to know people pretty well, and, yes, you got, I suppose, an awful lot of people saying, "What's that all about?" I don't think we covered ourselves with glory there.

Q: Well, it did seem that we over exaggerated the thing. President Reagan was saying, "Well, Nicaragua is only 800 miles from Brownsville, Texas." Well, I found myself terribly unmoved. Was it difficult for you at points to work ...

COWAL: Yes, it was difficult for me to work. Two things became difficult for me. One was that Jeane saw her rising star as connected to how bad the UN was, and how she was this tough woman out there on the front lines, battling the UN, which would seek to destroy our way of life. Anything that we could do to make the UN look silly, to make UN countries look like they were opposed to the United States, all of that was grist for the mill. So, unlike a typical diplomatic assignment, where your job is, insofar as possible, to explain and defend your position, but it's to win friends and influence people. We were happiest when the vote was 159 to three, and that would be Israel and the Marshall Islands or something voting with the United States, maybe in those days you'd get El Salvador and Honduras. Our friends in the Eastern Caribbean would abstain, and everybody else would vote against, and we could say, once again, "There we are, the only people in the world who understand freedom and democracy, trying to defend it."

The pseudoscience to show that that was the case bothered me. The other thing that really bothered me was I became increasingly distant from the Central America policy, from the "Managua's 800 miles from Brownsville, Texas; and we must hold the line here, and we don't accept the legitimacy of the Sandinista government," even though as far as I can tell it was a legitimately elected government. Perhaps misguided from our point of view, it was, as a Communist system, probably going to be an economy which didn't survive and

didn't prosper and didn't do well. I certainly don't think we had any obligation to provide aid or anything else to a government with which we did not agree, with which we had fundamental disagreements. But I also didn't think that we had any business arming the Contras and arming forces in that country to overthrow a legitimately elected government.

Q: On the other side, they were doing guerilla movement designed to overthrow the Salvadorians.

COWAL: Which they were no doubt doing funded by the Soviet Union and by Cuba and by others.

Q: So, in a way, this was a backfire or whatever you want to call it. Well, back to Israel. Israel, at this point, more or less where was it vis-à-vis its troops in Lebanon?

COWAL: Well, they were occupying Lebanon.

Q: It was for all intents and purposes a pretty illegal invasion of Lebanon by Sharon, leading as defense minister, and I guess backing from others, and there had been some pretty despicable things done by the time you got to the ...

COWAL: Yes.

Q: So what were we doing in the UN vis-à-vis Israel?

COWAL: Well, defending Israel at every turn, of course.

Q: I mean, here is the thing within this policy. You can understand our political leaders, they're scared to death of the Jewish vote and Jewish money, and, not as much then probably as they are now, of the Christian right.

COWAL: That's a new factor.

Q: I mean, politically, issuing any opposition to whatever Israel was doing was not politically ...

COWAL: The most interesting thing I think I actually got involved in was after Jeane left. Jeane and the Israeli permanent representative, Bibi Netanyahu, were close friends, and of course he later became prime minister. They shared inclinations about things that weren't really my inclinations. Although I was a great supporter of Israel – was and am a great supporter of Israel – my Israeli friends and contacts are, generally speaking, not in the Likud. They're generally speaking people who believe it would have been smarter for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank early on, and that it was not smart to invade Lebanon, and would have been smarter to get out right away. Again, I guess I wasn't particularly in sync with that administration. I think after Jeane left, and I guess Netanyahu was still there, I was able to get Ambassador Walters to get Secretary Shultz

to agree, for the first time, not to veto a resolution which condemned Israel. I think it was the first resolution that ever passed the Security Council in condemnation of Israel. The United States did not vote for it, but we didn't veto it. That was when the Israelis bombed the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) camps in Tunis. An immediate human cry went up about this Israeli action, obviously inflicting grave suffering not only on the target, which was the PLO, but on a perfectly, if not neutral, at least perfectly innocent, third country, which had nothing to do with it at all except having agreed to allow the Palestinians to come there when the Israelis wanted the Palestinians out of Lebanon.

Q: It had taken quite a bit of arm-twisting on our part to get the Tunisians to allow them to come in. They didn't welcome them.

COWAL: No, nobody welcomed the Palestinians. They've been, like the Kurds I guess, a difficult force to be reckoned with in many Middle Eastern countries over very much time. But the argument that I used, and I'm convinced to this day that it was the right argument, in that it was true, because of what I'd picked up. As you point out, you start running around places like the delegates' lounge, you pick up an awful lot of what's going on, what people are thinking about and what people are talking about. This resolution, or this action of the Israelis, came in the fall of 1985. Every year, one of the big battles in the early months of the General Assembly was whether Israel's credentials would be accepted, because every year there was a challenge mounted to the seating of the Israeli delegation by the Arab countries. They would get themselves voting for it and whoever else they could manage to get to vote for it.

There's a part of the UN rules of order that says if something is vetoed in the Security Council, it can be taken to the General Assembly and voted on in the General Assembly. So the two are connected, although the Security Council generally stands alone and is the only part of the UN which has the force of law. There is a tie between these two bodies, and I was picking up the fact that if the United States vetoed this resolution, then it would go to the General Assembly. But more than that going to the General Assembly, that would sort of stimulate the troops in the General Assembly to really go out and get enough votes against Israel that the Israeli delegation would not be seated, and therefore Israel would not be a member of the United Nations. The United States had long had a policy saying if Israel is ever kicked out of the UN, we will leave. So I was very concerned that that was a logical path that we were on.

I was able to convince Walters of that, who convinced Shultz, and we got the instructions to abstain on this resolution, and inside this little conclave to the east of First Avenue which is the UN, its own little world, it was an amazing decision. Nobody thought we would ever do it, particularly not in a Reagan administration.

Q: Well, did you find you became the focal point?

COWAL: Well, no, because I don't think it was terribly well known that it was I who had manipulated this; but I must say, because I thought it was the right thing to do, I felt a

personal sort of triumph. I was I think happier to leave the U.S. mission to the UN on that note of feeling as if I had had an influence on what I thought – of course, we'll never know. You can never prove the negative. But what I could see laid out in front of us as a dark prophecy that I have no way of knowing, but I think could well have come true. The world would be a very different place, I think. If as with the League of Nations, if the United States had pulled out of the United Nations, the United Nations could not have survived. A lot was riding on that, and we were able to defuse what could have been a pretty tricky situation. I'm pretty convinced that if Jeane had been there, we would not have been able to do it.

Walters was terribly gifted in many ways: a brilliant linguist, for instance, a raconteur bar none. He could charm the cats down from the trees. He was really adept in nine languages. The good part was he was not so ideologically motivated as Jeane. He didn't have quite the same ambition as she did.

Q: He wasn't a political figure. I mean, he was more a professional. People kept calling him from all administrations.

COWAL: Right, he was a soldier, and he was a professional figure. I mean, he had a huge ego, but he would sometimes be somewhat self deprecating. When people would comment on his languages, he would say, "Oh, only in America. If I had been born in Europe, I would be a concierge in a middle-size hotel." To a certain extent, that might be true, because his tremendous facility for foreign languages was not, I think, matched by every other phase of his intelligence. He was a curiosity. He was a magnificent linguist. He was not a university graduate. He got a field commission in the Army in the Second World War, and from that became general and so on, so he was not a terrifically well-educated man. So I could put this over on him, if you like.

I remember convincing him of this, and he was very heavy, as you know, so he kind of huffed and puffed when he did things. So he huffed and puffed his way into his office and said to his secretary, "Get me the secretary on the phone." As she picked up the phone to dial this, he said, "Now, what do I tell the secretary." I said, well, A, B, C, D, E. Shultz was also a pragmatist, and I think it was Shultz who was one of Kirkpatrick's biggest foes; not that he didn't think she was competent, but he thought she was simply too ideological and that she was pushing the president beyond where the president really wanted to be, or beyond what was good for American foreign policy. I think that was a choice that was made by Shultz, basically.

Q: How did you feel about the Soviet influence in the UN?

COWAL: Well, it was there. It was said that there were, and I assume there were, an awful lot of Soviet KGB people who were serving as officers in their mission. I think we knew most of them, and then probably they had a lot of people on the UN staff in key positions who were also KGB. That becomes a little harder. Whether they were KGB or whether they were directly and indirectly influenced by their government, which I must

say, by the rules of the United Nations, international civil servants are not to be co-opted or to take instructions from their countries. But you can talk to a number of U.S. officials and other officials who have felt pressure from time to time to do something which their country wanted. It's not only that they feel a loyalty to their country, because after all we're all Americans or we're all Russians, but because in many cases, and I know it's particularly true in terms of the totalitarian state, you're there because you are their puppet. The day you're not following the rules of the game is the day they'll yank you out of there and put somebody who's more suitable.

I think there were a lot of not-very-effective people who were from the Soviet Union. For a lot of people, I think it was sort of a resting place. Then I think there were some people who were effective and who definitely worked against the United States and may also have worked against the United Nations. After all, it's too tempting. Here you are, it's your way to put somebody into the middle of New York City. Wouldn't you take advantage of it? Wouldn't we do the same thing if the UN headquarters were in Moscow? I'm sure we would have.

Q: One almost has a certain thing looking back on the whole thing, this great intelligence effort didn't seem to amount to an awful lot.

COWAL: I think that it didn't amount to an awful lot in some ways because the United States was not relying on the UN to a great extent, so what were you going to find out from having infiltrated the secretary general's deepest counsels about the United States? Probably not a hell of a lot, actually, but it was part of the great Cold War battles, the battlefields, which spanned the globe, and certainly New York was one of the most active of them. Obviously, we had within the U.S. mission, also, a component of the mission who were intelligence officers and who were essentially undercover as political officers or economic officers, or meant to be doing something else. And we would try to put them, or the CIA would try to put them, in committees where there was somebody on the committee whom they wanted to get to know better or to watch or to cultivate or to recruit.

So it was sometimes very awkward, actually, because they had these assignments to be members of the Fourth Committee or members of the Third Committee or members of the Second Committee, but that implies that you really know the work of the Fourth Committee and the work of the Second Committee and what each does. You spend as much time doing that as somebody whose job it really is to be the member of the Second Committee. Sometimes we couldn't have two members of the Second Committee, so if it was the CIA person who was going to be the Second Committee and you needed to know what was going on there, you had to rely on this person who didn't give a damn about the Second Committee. Their job was obviously other, and they were reporting to Langley and not to Foggy Bottom.

I guess it was the first time in my career, since it was the first time that I had ever worked for the State Department, and USIA had always had a very strong prohibition on "no

intelligence officers." That had arisen early on, "Were these student affairs officers really CIA, and therefore could USIA be trusted?" As far as I know, that was a deal struck early on and was pretty much adhered to, that USIA people weren't CIA. But suddenly I had the supervision over some of these people who in fact didn't work for me at all, and who were told that they were supposed to, indeed, report to me, and do what it was that I needed to be done in these various commissions, but who some of them took it very seriously and some of them didn't.

Q: This brings up a somewhat broader question. When we're dealing with matters in the UN, did you find that the intelligence side of our government gave you timely and useful information?

COWAL: Yes.

Q: Well, I suppose you really needed somebody from outside, didn't you, to give you, as you were saying, a reality check, because I imagine that the UN – I think of you all sort of cooped together in the delegates' lounge, exchanging the same information back and forth.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: It gets a little precious.

COWAL: I think they played a very important role there. Stu, I'm probably going to want to leave about now.

Q: Okay, we can pick this up the next time. I'm not sure how much we covered the time before when we got all fouled up in our schedule, but where'd you go from the UN.

COWAL: I went to Mexico.

Q: So we might talk a bit about going to Mexico, because we sort of treated it somewhat lightly, so let's talk a bit about that, and then we'll pick up your time in ARA (American Republic Affairs) again.

COWAL: Great, and then we're almost done.

Q: We're never done. Today is the 24th of July, 2003. Sally, let's just do it very briefly again. How did you get the job in ARA? You went to Mexico as what?

COWAL: I went to Mexico as the public affairs officer, as the minister counselor for public affairs, which was at that time a USIA post, rather than a State Department post. Having come from being political counselor in New York at the State Department, I then couldn't resist the offer to go to Mexico, which is a country I had long been interested in. So I was in the embassy in Mexico as the public affairs officer for nearly four years.

Q: Between when and when?

COWAL: Between 1985 and 1989. As I got ready to leave Mexico, I was supposed to go as the public affairs officer to Spain, not something that I particularly wanted to do, since I didn't think what was happening in Spain was nearly as interesting as what was happening in Mexico. But for somebody who had Spanish as a language, it was supposed to be the ultimate reward, that you could get to Madrid. I just wasn't particularly interested in the ultimate reward, although I must say I wasn't politicking for anything else. There are lots of times in the State Department when you're actively working behind the scenes to see what else you can do, but I had gracefully accepted the fact, actually, that living in Europe might be a wonderful experience. And if Spain was what would get me there, then that would be interesting. Spain was going to have the presidency of the EU (European Union) once during the contemplated four years that I would be there. I think the Barcelona Olympics were going to be on, and there was going to be a big trade fair in Seville. So I was being persuaded that this was going to be a very interesting job.

I got as far as Washington, DC, coming through on the normal consultations. Then I was persuaded by Bernie Aronson, assistant secretary for Latin America, that instead of going as PAO to Spain, I should stay in Washington and be a deputy assistant secretary for Mexico and the Caribbean. I think the reason I was asked was because of the experience I had in Mexico. This was at a time when really for the first time in 30 or 40 years, there was perceived to be on the part of both governments, this being the beginning of the Bush administration and the beginning of the Carlos Salinas administration in Mexico – there was a desire to end this relationship of sort of distant neighbors: countries which shared a 2,000-mile-long border, but which, symbolically, were standing along the border with our backs to each other.

It had begun when I as there, and I was seen to be a part of helping it to occur. The two new presidents, George Bush Sr. and Salinas, who were elected about the same time – elections in Mexico are in July and the President takes office in December. Of course, here they're in November and he takes office in January. But because Mexico has a six-year election cycle and the U.S. has a four-year election cycle, it's only every 12 years or so that we actually have presidential elections the same year. So these two new guys were getting elected, and I'm not sure really whether the push came from – I think it really came from the Mexican side, but it was responded to very favorably by the new Bush administration, the pre-administration. But of course he was vice president to Reagan, so he was already very involved in things.

The idea was that we could use this time when they were both presidents-elect to really form a new relationship, look at this relationship in a new way. I had helped to set up the first visit between Bush and Salinas, which came to be known as the Spirit of Houston, because they met in Houston. Originally, there were going to be two visits. Bush was also going to be going to Mexico, but it's a very short time between our election and inauguration, and they really only had time to do one. Nonetheless, it was seen as "Let's

begin anew." I had excellent relations with a lot of people in the Salinas government, mostly because many of them had been exchange students in the United States. Especially in Boston, they had gone to Harvard and they had gone to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and they had gone to other places like that. Since the person from USIA/USIS really runs our exchange programs and keeps track of those alumni, I had met them before they were selected.

So, since they wanted to have a new kind of relationship, they decided they wanted to have somebody who was the point person on it who knew a lot about it and had a rather sympathetic view toward it, whereas many State Department people had avoided serving in Mexico. It was considered to be a difficult country. Especially through the prior maybe 10 years of great turmoil that we talked about last time in Central America, we in Mexico were on opposite sides of that in many ways.

Q: Let's go back to the time you went to Mexico, because we really didn't touch this too closely. Who was the ambassador when you arrived there in '85?

COWAL: John Gavin.

Q: Now, John Gavin, former movie star and all, was considered a very difficult person by many people who have served there, and could you talk about that?

COWAL: First of all, I only served with him for about six months, I think. He had been about five years, so he had been there for almost all of it. I think he was Reagan's first ambassador and stayed on, probably before they were so affixed on rotating, even political people, every three years. So the political appointees tended to stay on longer, and it was actually the Reagan administration that put that plan into effect, because Reagan was such a nice guy that he could never say no to his friends. When he would appoint these people to London or Paris or Mexico or wherever they were appointed, and then they wanted to stay on, and sometimes that was a good idea and sometimes that was not such a good idea, but it was very hard for him to tell somebody that, no, they couldn't stay any longer. They decided that the way to mitigate that problem was simply to say, "Okay, all ambassadors serve for three years, whether you're career or whether you're political. It's three-year appointments." It's really difficult to extend that, so at any rate, John Gavin had been there five years at least, I think, when I got there, was considered both by the Mexicans and by many of his staff to be an extremely difficult person to work around.

I think the Mexicans considered him difficult for good reasons and for not such good reasons. He was extremely critical of Mexico, and he was critical about some things that he should have been critical of, such as corruption, which was fairly endemic, such as the rule by one political party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which was at that point still very much cast in concrete. Those were things that he was right to be critical of, but he probably expressed his criticism in ways which the Mexicans, who are extremely sensitive with respect to their sovereignty and their dignity, particularly vis-à-vis the

United States, found enormously offensive. And I think because he was a movie star – he was also nobody's dummy. He was much better educated, for instance, than Reagan. He was a movie star who had gone to Stanford University, and his mother was Mexican, who had lived in the United States for many years, from Sonora, a northern Mexican state. I sense that she was very critical of Mexico, also, so I think he probably grew up in a way in a love/hate relationship, wanting it to be better than it was, but disliking many things about it.

Because he was a movie star, of course, he had enormous presence. He was well known in Mexico by the time he got there as ambassador. He had made a couple of movies there. He was bilingual in Spanish. It was something that he had gotten from his mother. They had always spoken Spanish, as well as English, at home. So you couldn't pull the wool over his eyes terribly easily. If there is a typical political appointee, and I don't think there is, but if it's a typical political appointee who goes to a country where he or she has no real knowledge of the country and no real language schools, and the press and the public don't much care who it is, it's just some other political hack who's come down from someplace to sit in this job for a few years, Gavin was not that. He was bilingual, he was knowledgeable about Mexico, and he had a following and a presence.

I wasn't there when he arrived, but I think from the time he arrived the press were after him and interested in quoting him and doing things with him. The more he did, the more trouble he got himself into, in many ways. So it was a difficult time. I think for his staff, he was extremely courteous in many ways, but he had enormously high standards, I must say, and he had some strange likes and dislikes, not only about people, but about how things should be done. If you got on his wrong side, he was not inclined to treat that so kindly. He, for some reason, decided that he had heard about me and he really wanted me to come, although I had not met him personally. So he actually had to engage in a sort of tug-of-war with Vernon Walters who was my boss in New York about when I would be able to leave New York and come to Mexico. I just stepped aside and said, "Let the elephants fight it out and I'll come when they get this thing settled." But I came in with him very much wanting me to be there, and I think therefore I had a relatively easy time of it, although I remember him – let's say he expressed his anger easily, and sometimes over things over which you had no control.

I can recall his last speech in the country was to the American Chamber of Commerce, of which he was, as all ambassadors are, the honorary chair. But the American chamber in Mexico is a big organization, 2,000 or 3,000 members, Mexican companies, as well as American companies, and 1,000 at least had turned out for his farewell address. People also turned out for his speeches because they figured he would say something controversial and they wanted to be there. The waiters started, I think, serving coffee while he was speaking, so you could hear the sort of click of the china cups being put on the china plates, and he was absolutely livid at both me and the head of the chamber of commerce, whom he thought should have and could have prevented this from happening. I must say, that's the only time where personally I felt that I was – again, not without reason. It was certainly distracting to him and it was distracting to the audience. I guess I

didn't think I was in charge of the waiters, but if we were in charge of the event, from his point of view, we should have been in charge of the waiters.

So that was the kind of person he was. I think the most controversial thing that he did, at least in my time there, happened just before I arrived. There was a very large earthquake in September of 1985. One of the first things that he did, he was very concerned and he was very interested and he wanted to make sure that appropriate assistance came from the United States. He got the military to get him a helicopter, and he wanted to personally survey the damage in Mexico City, not without reason, again. He got a helicopter and he flew over and counted the number of buildings down, and many of them were apartment buildings. Fortunately, the quake was early enough in the morning that people weren't yet in their offices. Otherwise I think it would have been much greater, because a lot of people were still out of the city or in small buildings and so on, not in these huge office towers.

At any rate, he counted the number of buildings down and he made two observations to the press as he got off the helicopter. One is that 20,000 people had died, because he counted the number of buildings times what he assumed was the occupancy of each building, and it was clear that most people in those buildings would not survive. They pulled a few survivors out of the rubble, but mostly these buildings just came right down. And, secondly, he observed that the pattern of destruction was very uneven, so while it was worse in some sections of the city than others, it was not uniform. So you'd look on a block and three buildings would be standing, and two buildings, like collapsed teeth, would be down between the three standing buildings. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that those were buildings that were probably built not to the standards which were in print, but not always observed, of how buildings ought to be built in a seismic zone. And that a lot of that probably had to do with corruption, that maybe it was paid for that there should be 50 bags of sand and cement or whatever it was, but 15 bags went in, because it was more expensive to build things to code.

Of course, both of those facts, and they probably were facts, that he announced, were things that the Mexican government didn't want to hear. Actually, that earthquake, and I think perhaps Gavin's taking a very out-front role and really expressing the damage and so on, the follow up to that by the Mexican citizenry I think really led in some interesting and strange way to the ultimate defeat of the PRI several years later.

Assistance was just not flowing and not flowing fast enough, and people were without electricity and they were without water and they were without homes, and they began for the first time to organize themselves, in neighborhood groups and community groups, to do something about this. That was maybe for the first time really since the Aztecs, a questioning of the central authority and of the power structure, by individuals and by groups of nongovernmental organizations, civil society, that really began to emerge. That quickly spread from earthquake-related things to environmentally related things, the fact that Mexico City was such a polluted city. Again, groups began to form to do something about the pollution or to speak about what was happening to the city, and I think all of

that great foment in civil society is what led to a reform in the political system in Mexico. It was very interesting, and Gavin was not without his role in all of that.

Q: What was the Mexican media like?

COWAL: Pretty difficult, pretty impossible. We had two sets of media. First of all, we had 45 foreign correspondents in Mexico City, some of whom had been there for a long, long time and others of whom had come with the earthquake, and then I think because of these sort of quasi-political developments emerging out of the earthquake, stayed on. So 45 American correspondents is a huge foreign press corps, or 45 foreign correspondents, most of whom were Americans – obviously AFP (Agence France Presse), The Times of London, and a few of the Europeans had bureaus. The Brazilians had a couple of newspapers and so on, but I would say of the 45, 35 at least were from Dallas and from Houston and from New York and from Washington, from Boston, from Chicago and from Los Angeles, all the major media in the United States, television and radio, as well as print media, all the wire services, satellite correspondents. That was part of the press corps that we dealt with, and then we had the Mexican press, which tended to be, at that point, totally captive to the government.

Mexico was a democracy in sort of name only. There was no organized criticism of the government by the press. There was one weekly magazine called Processo, which sort of attempted to report the news. There were a couple of newspapers – Massuno was one and La Jornada was another, who were more to the left in the political spectrum. But I think the typical pattern was the government pretty much controlled it, because they controlled newsprint. They had a monopoly on the newsprint, so in order to buy paper to print a newspaper, you had to buy that from the government, and if they didn't like what you were printing, you didn't get enough newsprint.

The other way they controlled it was because they had so much money, and the primary advertising in all the newspapers was for things of the government, and those were not only government announcements and so on. At the time I got there, I think there were 1,100 or 1,200 parastatal companies, so the government dominated the economy. They owned everything from chains of supermarkets – there were also some private supermarkets, but there was a whole government supermarket chain, and of course the oil industry, which they continue to own. Since 1936, there's been no outside investment, no private investment, allowed in the Mexican petroleum industry. It was something that Cárdenas took over and determined to be the case.

The government ran enormous numbers of things and had terrific economic power. So both through the punitive restricting of the paper to print on and the hours of broadcast, radio broadcast or television broadcast, which they also controlled for the electronic media, and the incentives that they could give, and finally there was a well-known system of bribes called *embute*. An *embute,* in Mexican slang, is a little envelope that can be flipped under something and given to a journalist to either not write the story or to write

the story. So I think our belief was that the Mexican media was a pretty corrupt institution.

Q: Well, then, if Gavin would make these statements, like obviously there was a problem of corruption which led to deaths, could the media mention that?

COWAL: Well, they would sometimes mention it, and that would cause problems, or they wouldn't mention it, and that would cause problems, of course, with the embassy. The foreign media would always cover these things, and then report it, and then sometimes the Mexican media would be able to report on what the foreign media had presented. Yes, it was not the Soviet Union. It was not totally closed. The leading newspaper of the day was called Excélsior, and it was truly an awful newspaper. It was just awfully difficult to try to read it. For instance, the front page would probably have – if you look at the front page of an American newspaper, there are maybe six or seven stories on the front page, which then get carried over to the inside. Excélsior would probably have 30 stories on the front page. So they would have everything on the front page with about three lines of type, and then every story would continue in a different part of the paper, section C, section F, section D, page 35, page 39, and about half the time it didn't continue on page 39, it continued on some other page, because it was all loused up. It made it extremely difficult to read these stories anyway.

Or they would turn the story around. There was also not much of a line between editorial opinion of the newspaper and the reporting on the news. So a lot of what we did in USIS, we would also sponsor seminars for journalists and so on. We were trying to make them more professional, but they would editorialize right through that Gavin might have said there were 20,000 dead, but that couldn't be the case because of whatever or whatever. So they wouldn't just report the facts and then put their editorial opinion on the editorial page, saying he shouldn't have spoken this way or he didn't have the facts corrected, it would all be interwoven in the same story. They would sometimes report his criticisms, but you would sort of lose the train of it before you got done. Nonetheless, I mean, it came across to the Mexican people that he was someone who was not their friend.

Q: Well, to the Mexican people or to the Mexican government?

COWAL: Well, to the Mexican government. I think some people – obviously, some people thought he was great and some people thought he was awful. I recall when he left his successor was a Goodyear Tire executive, who had never been in Mexico, who had had some experience in Brazil but not much in Mexico. He came and immediately there was an outpouring in the press about this wonderful person and how great was, and this was still under Reagan. It was still when Reagan was president, so he was Reagan's named successor.

I can remember, his name was Charles Pilliod. I can remember saying to him once – he was getting pretty puffed up about this great press that he was receiving. I mean, it really was nice, after taking all of these brick-bats, and I said, "Well, with all due respect, they

just like you because you aren't John Gavin, and that's all you have to do at this point, is just not be John Gavin." And that was indeed true. They were by then trying to show they were discerning. They were certainly not anti-American. They just had found this person to be offensive, although, I must say, they never declared him persona non grata. In that sense, they never took any steps, because I think they had no basis on which to do that.

Q: Well, were you getting things from the government press office or from other sources saying, "Can't you do something?" We're talking about Gavin. I mean, were you getting heat, sort of, from the government sources of one kind or another?

COWAL: I think, actually, our press officer and some people were. Personally, it didn't come to me because I probably wasn't there long enough during his time to have made good enough acquaintances or friends or contacts in the media that that was coming to me, at least I don't recall that happening. The embassy was also divided on whether he was good for the United States or not good for the United States. That was both from people who had been personally, perhaps in some way or another, wounded by this guy, or a lot of people who just thought, "Hey, we're all supposed to be here to win friends and influence people, and this guy certainly is not doing that," and who therefore were quite critical of him.

Q: Well, I've heard sort of the word was around the corridors at the Department of State that Gavin and Mexico have, what do you call this, temple dogs? These were people he brought in from outside who kind of served as sort of DCMs or something, but sort of kept him away, and they were not exactly ...

COWAL: Well, he had a DCM named Morris Busby, who went on to become our drug chief for a while and our ambassador in Colombia, I believe, who was from the State Department. He wasn't quite considered to be a full career person, although I think by the rules he was. But he had been sort of a lateral entry into the State Department, I think from one of the law enforcement agencies.

Q: I think so.

COWAL: From the Coast Guard or the military in some way or another. I don't think that was actually done by Gavin, but he was not ...

Q: Assistants, I heard they were sort of – maybe that was earlier on.

COWAL: Then he had also some assistants who again I think were Foreign Service officers but who, shall we say, I think were picked by Gavin because they were very loyal to him, and not because they were necessarily the people that the system would have spewed out as being the best people for these particular jobs. He was somewhat suspicious. He was as conservative, politically, as Reagan was, and therefore I think he regarded most of the career people in the State Department as being hopelessly liberal. I would say, very definitely, again, because of his relationship with the president, not so

much with the secretary, as I recall. Shultz was the secretary, and I don't think he and Shultz had a particularly close relationship. But he clearly had one with both the president and with Nancy Reagan. I think the State Department actually exercised very little control over him, either in terms of what he said or did, or in terms of the people who filled the jobs.

By the book, as you know, an ambassador is able to more or less pick his own or her own DCMs, and more or less able to pick his or her own secretary, and beyond that, all jobs are supposed to be competitive, and Foreign Service officers apply for the job of DCM to Mexico or political counselor to Mexico. And the ambassador doesn't decide that. That's decided by the Bureau of Personnel and the office that's responsible for it, in this case, the ARA, the American Republics office, make a decision on who goes as the political officer to Mexico or to Guyana or to Chile or anywhere else. I think because people were afraid of Gavin's relationship with the president, he was able to influence the selection of career officials to the embassy Mexico to an extent that was not generally the case. I think once he got a couple of people, Busby probably being one of them, who he thought reflected more his political or personal point of view than the typical State Department officer did, then he relied – he didn't bring in all these people from the outside, but he brought in people from places in the State Department where they would not necessarily have gotten to those jobs. He relied on this network of people within the State Department whom he did have more trust in to pick other people in whom he also thought he could have trust. So he was in no way a passive ambassador. He was not waiting for these people to simply be assigned.

Now, those of us who've been in the Foreign Service for a long time know that career people are also not uniformly good, and that if you are totally passive, you sometimes end up with those whom nobody else wants to take. Those who are more active than you are manage to fight them off. So whether he was just trying to get the best damn staff he could get, or he wanted a staff that would march to his tune, I think is debatable. But he was playing an active role.

Q: Going to the media again, I've been told, and you can correct me on this, that the Foreign Ministry of Mexico has always been sort of a playground of the left-wing intellectuals, who don't like the United States as such, whereas other agencies, departments, have longstanding relationships. How about the media? And we'll talk about the Foreign Ministry, but how about the media at this time? Did they come from any particular ...

COWAL: Well, I think mostly what they tended to be was sold out to the government. And, therefore, if the government wanted to be with the United States on something, they were with, and if the government wanted to be against the United States on something, they were against. The PRI and the government were not separable at that point. The party and the government, it was a one-party state, and they pretty much controlled everything, so that I think we sometimes made the mistake in the United States of assuming that things that have the same name mean the same thing. A labor union means

something to us, and it's often anti-government in our context. They want rights for the working men, or more salaries, or higher minimum wage, or whatever it is. In Mexico, the labor unions were completely a part of the PRI, and sold out to the PRI. So you sometimes got something that appeared to be a labor union protest, but it was all staged. At the end of the day, the PRI decided what the minimum wage was going to be.

The same was true about the business sector. You survived in Mexico in the business sense – I mean, as a Mexican company, maybe not so much as an American company or a French company, although I think there was great influence there also because of the dominant position of the Mexican government in the economy. But as Mexican business, there were all these confederations of employers and various business groups, the group for the transformation of da-da-da, which would be a business group. And we would say, "Oh, this is the Mexican equivalent of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or the National Association of Manufacturers," and it might have that name, but it was all a part of the PRI and of the government. We would tend to want to see these things as mirrors of the United States when they weren't all. All of the shots were controlled by the PRI, whether it was the agriculture sector, so the farmers and the land given to peasants in the revolution, or the labor unions, or the press, or the industry, they all had orchestrated roles, and the bandleader was the party and the president. It was an imperial presidency and there is no question about that.

I think people who went into the press maybe tended to be rather more intellectual or rather more liberal than some others, but I think you kept your job in the press because you pretty much toed a line, whatever your private opinions might have been.

Q: How did our operation, your operation, work? We had a number of consulates there, consular posts. Did they operate differently? Did where they were make any difference, from your particular point of view?

COWAL: Well, we had USIS operations in Guadalajara, which is the second-largest city, and Monterey, which is the industrial center of the country, which is actually where the opposition, the organized political opposition, began to come from. The PAN (National Action Party) party, which is currently – President Fox is a member of the PAN, came to power originally regionally by having the governor of Nuevo León, which is where Monterey is, and the governor of Chihuahua, which is a border state, somehow those got away from the PRI. I think because there, it was just away from the central government enough that it began to fray around the edges. So you had a press there, a newspaper called El Norte, which was somewhat independent from the government, and they were constantly having problems with getting their newsprint supply and so on.

You had some industrialists who were wealthy enough that they could actually be a counterpoint to the government, and you didn't have that in Mexico City. Then we opened an additional post in Tijuana, because I became convinced that the whole border – it was a Tijuana post, but it was meant to cover the border. It was before NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), but anticipating that border things and cross-border

relations would become increasingly important as we went forward. Particularly the Monterey position and the people that we could reach in Monterey through our programs I think was important to the whole changes that were taking place in Mexico. I don't think there were any consulates in the south.

Q: Well, there were in the Yucatan.

COWAL: Well, yes, I guess, the Yucatan.

Q: But that's not ...

COWAL: It's not Chiapas, where I don't think we had a consulate, and I don't think we had one in Oaxaca. I guess there were actually eight or nine consulates, so they were probably a more extensive network, and they did some political reporting, as well as mostly they were there to handle consular affairs. But they did do some political reporting, and sometimes what they reported and the things that were going on outside of Mexico City were very interesting.

Q: Well, while you were there, what were the issues that dominated your time? I mean, were you trying to get a point of view across?

COWAL: Well, I think we were very much in the issues of sort of free trade, or open trade, and trying to encourage openings in the Mexican government. We were certainly trying to encourage better observance of human rights, less corruption, more open government, selling off of this enormous parastatal structure which had been created, starting in the '30s, which totally dominated it. Then I would say that, certainly, dominating all of those issues was really drug trafficking and the increasing concern by the United States that Mexico was a center of production, but more importantly, of transiting. There was a DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency, agent killed in 1985, Enrique Camarena, who was kidnapped, tortured and eventually killed by one of the drug cartels.

I think that even heightened our awareness more. It has always been said that the soft underbelly to the United States is Mexico. Mexico is a dagger pointed at the heart of the United States. We think of ourselves, and we are, a continent or an island, but we're an island with an umbilical cord, and that umbilical cord is Mexico. It attaches us to another continent out there, which is one that produced increasing numbers of illegal immigrants. Migration was a big issue. I would say migration and drugs were probably the two most contentious issues, and the others were trade and corruption and political and economic opening.

Q: Well, during this '85-'89 period, where stood the Nicaragua, El Salvador business?

COWAL: There were active conflicts going on in the Central American region. People like, I think, Reagan himself, who certainly tried to see all of this – or saw all of this. I shouldn't say tried to see, because I think it was genuine on his part. He regarded with

great fear the possibility of a domino effect such as we had seen in Southeast Asia of a growing number of states on our border who were hostile to us. That started with the Nicaragua election, leading to the Sandinista government. Clearly, the influence of the Cubans and the Nicaraguans, then, in the internal wars in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala was a source of great concern. Of course, the ultimate domino was Mexico, and the ultimate fear was Mexico.

I must also say that I think that was without foundation. There was no way that Mexico was going to become a Communist country, in my opinion. But Mexico always wanted to hedge its bets with the United States, which it clearly did. From 1847 when we took over half of the Mexican territory, we weren't out there as a friend, necessarily, so they wanted to always have some power to equal the United States. Of course, in the days when the bipolar system was based on the United States on one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, the Mexicans wanted to have good relations with the Soviet Union, and basically did. That included allowing the Soviet Union to use Mexico as a place to put many spies, in fact whose operations were aimed at the United States, and to give them listening posts closer to the United States, and ways to infiltrate the United States. So that was not without foundation.

I mean, it was not an easy relationship. I think it was Reagan who said, actually, the United States had two really important relationships in the world. One was with the Soviet Union because we possessed the ability to blow each other up, and the other was with Mexico, because we seemed to possess the ability to annoy each other to death. He sensed that. It was never an enemy, but there were irritants, enormous irritants, in this relationship.

Q: Did you find, in your job, that one of your things was to apply ointment to the irritants?

COWAL: Yes, I think it was not only to apply ointment to the irritants. I think we had a role to play in both how to make Mexico understand the United States better, but also in trying to help the United States understand Mexico better, trying to get beyond the headlines, trying to get to having a real understanding of our history and our relationship. And, more pragmatically, the fact that this was a marriage without the possibility of divorce, that history was one thing, and maybe you could change the future, but you couldn't change geography, and therefore wasn't it in both of our best interests to try to figure out a way where we could take advantage of each other's strengths, for the good of all of us. I think that's what the significance, really, of NAFTA is. It's much more than a trading agreement. It's really trying to understand that we have a common destiny, and whereas the Mexicans used to say things like, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States," the United States had its equivalent of that message, which was basically, "We're willing to do anything for Mexico except think about it."

We wanted to pretend like it really wasn't there. We did turn our back. If you asked in those days, I mean, probably until today, but certainly in the mid-'80s, I used to do some

speaking in the United States. If I would be speaking to a group, an academic audience or any kind of an audience, and I would say, "Well, who are the United States' three largest trading partners," people would say, "Oh, France, England, Japan." Well, it's actually Canada was number one and Mexico was number two, even before NAFTA. It was an enormous trading partner because an automobile that's assembled in Mexico is probably sold here. A television set that's assembled in Mexico is sold here, but the picture tube comes from here, or the engine comes from here, exported to Mexico, it's assembled in Mexico and back, so that two-way trade was already very big. But we didn't even have to think about that. Mexico wasn't our largest trading partner, or even in particular our ally. Who are our allies? England, France, Germany and things far away, not things close at hand. We tried to change the context of that.

Q: Well, did you find the equivalent to the intellectual think tanks, that sort of thing, people with whom you could sit down and sort of say, "We've got this difficult relationship that's going to continue forever, but let's figure out what today we can get done?

COWAL: I think that's what we were all about, and I think that's really what so-called public diplomacy is all about, is to try to foster the functioning sort of intellectual connection between one society and another. That's obviously something that nine-tenths of the people in any country are not going to understand or respond to. I don't think we were really out there, although occasionally we would do something like bring a popular music group or dance group or something, because you want to try to reach a large number of people. But basically you're trying to direct your attention and your outreach and your programs, whether it's sending people to the United States or bringing Americans to Mexico who can speak at the Colegio de Mexico or in a certain faculty, a certain university, where you believe there are people who are in turn influential in their own societies, intellectually or politically. And to reach those people with something that they wouldn't get simply by watching U.S. television, which they might have seen.

I mean, 50 percent of Mexicans have a close relative in the United States, so there are these enormous connections that bind us, because Uncle Jose lives in Chicago and goes back every few years, but maybe in a marginalized, immigrant community. So that's providing a very narrow slice of the American picture. So we were certainly trying to broaden that, and could we find people to talk to? Of course we could, and partly because we had invested over all the years in these programs, like the Fulbright Program, and in sending people to the United States for undergraduate school, for graduate school, on the International Visitor Program, to expose media leaders, political leaders and young people whom we believed would be one or the other of those in the future to something about the United States. I think it's one of the greatest – and we're jumping way ahead – but I think one of the greatest, maybe it's too strong a word to say tragedy, but mistakes, of the Clinton Administration and the Albright secretary of state-ship was to allow USIA to be swept away in her attempt to have a deal with Jesse Helms.

There was this feeling that, "Oh, the Cold War doesn't exist anymore. We don't need to have a specific program which tries to explain our values and our people and our society to others," and I think we're paying that price horrendously now, in terms of the Middle East and other places in the world. But that's the one, of course, that comes to mind.

Q: With this group, were we differentiating, or were we looking at the PAN as well as the PRI and others, and exchange programs, and trying to sort of foster the opposition?

COWAL: Yes, we were, and we had to do it very delicately. Again, maybe you always try to interfere in the internal affairs of others, but you try to do it in a correct and subtle enough way that you don't get vilified for doing so. So, yes, I would say we were very conscious of trying to help these opposition parties survive, because we thought it was for the good of the whole country that there be a multi-party system with some political opposition. We did that in a variety of ways. We identified leaders in those parties, and I suppose more in the PAN than the PRD (Democratic Revolution Party). The PRD tended to be so anti-American, it was difficult to find people that you would work with. And to give international visitor grants to those people, which the Mexican government would allow us to do, would allow to happen. It was not Cuba in that sense, it was not the Soviet Union in that sense. We were allowed to invite people of our choosing to visit the United States, and I think that that had a tremendous impact.

We would also do things like, with the ambassador, we would go and visit states. We had a little military plane, and we would take the country team, essentially, and we'd go out. Because Mexico is so centralized, it's hard to get away from the central power, but we'd take the plane and we'd go to Querétaro or Guanajuato or Sonora or to another state for a day. The economic counselor would have meetings with the business sector, and I would have meetings with the press, and the political officer would meet with all the political parties that were in the state, and the ambassador would spend the day with the governor and then we'd have a big lunch with all these people. I think it was a wonderfully successful way of sort of reaching out beyond the power controlled by Mexico City.

Then we had a whole thing set up by border governors. There are six Mexican states that are border states, and four U.S. states that are border states. Again, as a way of trying to get away from the central power of Mexico City, there would be an annual meeting of the border governors, and they would bring along their directors of environment and their directors of education, their police chiefs. They were very practical. They would try to get away from the ideology, which has so dominated the relationship between Washington and Mexico City, to talk about, "Well, what do we really need in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez to be a better-functioning society, and to try to get exchanges going across the border. I think all of those things were somewhat successful and somewhat paved the way for getting where we are today, which I think was more on the way to being an ideal relationship before we got dominated by the other issues beginning on September 11th, 2001.

After all, the first state visit for Bush, for this President Bush, was President Fox, so a real acknowledgement for the first time that who's really our number-one trading partner and one of our closest allies? It's our neighbor Mexico. That's an amazing change in these 15 years.

Stu, I've got to back off now and go to work.

Q: Well, we'll pick this up the next time, and essentially we've sort of finished Mexico, don't you think?

COWAL: I guess so. These poor people have got to be bored by now.

Q: We'll pick this up. Really, we'll go right back to how you went to Trinidad and Tobago last time. If we notice any problems later on, you'll fill it in.

We're with Sally Cowal, but we're going to start here when you became deputy assistant secretary, where?

COWAL: Latin America, in the ARA.

Q: Latin American affairs. You were that from when to when?

COWAL: I was deputy assistant secretary for ARA from 1989 to 1991, which was the beginning of the Bush administration, or at least early on in the Bush administration.

Q: Bush I.

COWAL: Bush I, early Bush I.

Q: Was this unusual for somebody coming out of USIS to move into this?

COWAL: Yes, it was unusual. Although I had been assigned to the State Department before when I was political counselor to the U.S. mission to the UN in New York. Then, and sort of my choice and against the advice of some of my colleagues in the State Department, I went back to USIA to take the assignment in Mexico as public affairs officer. I did that because I had, first of all, always wanted to live in Mexico. I had transited Mexico a number of times on my travels and assignments in Latin America, but I had never been posted in Mexico. It was a country which had fascinated me from childhood, really. I had an aunt, my mother's sister, who lived in Mexico for a number of years, and I think it was my first window on the outside world, that there was a world outside. I grew up in Chicago, pretty far from any border. As I think I've described earlier, I didn't have an international family or one that even traveled outside of the United States, except for this one aunt who had married a Mexican whom she had met in Chicago where there was a long-established Mexican community.

Q: It continues to be.

COWAL: It continues to be, but everybody thinks of the Mexicans historically being in Los Angeles or in the Southwest, and there was always this Mexican community in the United States. So my aunt had married a barber, and at some point, I think in the Depression, or the war, decided that they should return to Mexico. When I was born in 1944, she was living in Mexico, and lived there for probably the first six or seven years of my life. One of the exciting things was to go to Midway Airport and meet Aunt Harriet on her annual visits home. She would come home loaded down with little burros and dolls, and little painted chairs and things from Mexico that gave some color to our otherwise drab middle class, middle Western experience. She would call me my *mu charteta*. She spoke Spanish fluently and I think I was always fascinated by her tales of Mexico.

She lived in a little town called Pátzcuaro in the Mexican state of Michoacán. She lived in Mexico City for a while, and then they went back to where his family lived, which happened to be in the state of Michoacán. That is where Cardenas came from, who was the president who nationalized the oil industry. All of that was happening contemporary to her being there. I don't remember, actually. I was seven years old and she was not very political, so I don't actually remember having political discussions, but I certainly remember the whole aura of Mexico being an exciting place. So I took the assignment in Mexico against the advice of some of my colleagues in the State Department that if you finally got to the State Department, that's where you wanted to be.

I took the assignment of public affairs officer, because within the structure of USIA you wanted to be a public affairs officer. That was our top post and it was what I had aspired to be. It was a big an important post, and when they offered me that job, I jumped at it. I got to be, then, deputy assistant secretary for ARA from being PAO in Mexico.

One reason was that Mexico suddenly became more important to the United States, and I had had something to do with the first encounters of that type. As public affairs officer, I had arranged the first meeting. I'd arranged a couple of meetings of Reagan and Mexico's President de la Madrid. Then I helped set up the first Bush and Salinas meeting, which took place while the two were presidents elect. Because of Mexico's six-year electoral cycle and our four years, it's only once every 12 years that we actually elect a president at the same time. So the Mexicans were anxious at this point, especially with Salinas, and I'll get into that in a second, for a different and better relationship with the United States.

They were interested in this because Salinas and most of his cabinet were products of the U.S. education system. Many of them had had Fulbright grants and other grants, and they had studied at Harvard and Yale and MIT and Princeton and the very good schools in the United States. They had come back to Mexico and they were still relatively young people. I think Salinas was under 40 when he was elected, so he perhaps had been back in Mexico maybe 10 years after his post-graduate education.

This predated me, but I became the sort of continuer of the tradition. USIS had established a good rapport with these return grantees in most countries around the world, and certainly Mexico was one of those countries. Even before Salinas's election, we would call them, in slang, the *guapo brillantes,* the handsome bright young men, or the handsome, brilliant young men. That included Pedro Aspe, who became the finance minister, and Salinas, who became the president, and Angel Gurria, who was later the finance minister, and a whole cadre of sort of 38-year-olds who had studied in the United States.

Being the PAO at the time when these people became the inheritors of the Mexican presidency, within the sort of country team, put me into a very special position of being the person who really knew them the best, who knew them before they were in office. In many ways, this was the first time – they were PRIistas, they were part of the PRI. And they certainly, as it turned out, were not all of them free from corruption in terms of financial and political corruption. They were nonetheless much more technocratic than anything that had preceded them in the Mexican presidency. In some ways, it was the beginning of the transition which went from Salinas to Zedillo, who was actually chosen in a much more open electoral process than Salinas had been. Then that led to a really free election in which the opposition was chosen for the first time. But I think that was already beginning to be evident. They were different kinds of people.

I became, I would say, in Mexico, kind of de facto behind the DCM in the pecking order, which wouldn't be the usual position in a country team order for a PAO.

Q: Though sometimes a PAO can be a very powerful figure.

COWAL: And I was in the Mexico sense that when the DCM went away, I was usually acting DCM, and I was occasionally chargé and so on, which was unusual for a USIA person, to be named chargé. That was partly because of who had become the Mexican government, and therefore the relationship with USIA. It certainly wasn't just me. It was my team. We had a very good USIS post at that time, so we got some ascendancy, and it was because of that ascendancy, the fact that I had become quite well known to people in Washington, was one of the reasons why I was selected for the DAS job in ARA.

Also, this was Jim Baker's State Department and Bush's presidency. They had gotten into this whole what came to be known as the Spirit of Houston, this fact that we should turn a problem into an opportunity. I think that was Baker's language. And try to do something about the distant neighbor relationship, which had been sort of accurately spelled out in a very good book written by a couple of journalists, that Mexico and the United States were distant neighbors. I mean, they shared a 2,000-mile-long border, but essentially this position of one or another along the border was their backs were turned to one another and each was looking inward.

Also, one of the people that I knew well in Mexico had been the Mexican ambassador to the UN, a guy named Jorge Montano, and he became very important in the Salinas

government. He was the deputy foreign secretary and then he was briefly the foreign secretary. He and I were helping to shape this thing, and again, that was a preexisting relationship. When I went to Mexico, I already had the relationship with him. He became more important. So all these things played together quite well. When similar feelings were recognized in the United States, if we wanted to see an evolving relationship with our closest neighbor, which would eventually of course lead to NAFTA and so on, there were really not very many State Department senior Foreign Service officers who had well-known relationships with the Mexicans.

The relationship until the two or three years preceding that had been traditionally one of either indifference or hostility. They were not our friends. We'd gone through this whole Central America bit in which Mexico and France, if you remember, it sort of reminds me a bit of the Iraq stuff these days. There was a whole UN battle and it was kind of a French-Mexican initiative.

Q: Well, sort of traditionally, I understand that the Mexican Foreign Ministry is the place where you put all the leftists.

COWAL: That's right.

Q: Then the businesspeople and the intelligence people and military and all, they get along fine, but sort of the intellectual left ends up in the Foreign Ministry, because for most of the time, it's a place you could put them and they didn't cause too much trouble.

COWAL: Right, and some of those people then, actually, in the years to follow left the PRI and became the PRD, became the party to the left of the PRI, people like Muñoz Ledo, who had been the Mexican ambassador to the UN, and who in fact was Jeane Kirkpatrick's sort of bête noire. It was people like this, and actually I just misspoke. Montano went to the UN after I knew him. I must have met him in Mexico. At any rate, we were trying to change this relationship, and they were looking for a deputy assistant secretary who would do Mexico and something else. The idea was that Mexico was important enough that the primary qualification for the job should be somebody who knew Mexico well and who understood it well and who got along well with Mexicans and who could shepherd this relationship through its transition. I was supposed to go to Spain being now firmly back on the USIS track, and I wasn't very happy about going to Spain, really.

Q: Well, second rater when you consider Mexico.

COWAL: Well, I thought so, and I actually had gotten engineered out of Mexico before I wanted to be out of Mexico. Again, we talked about Charlie Wick earlier. He had a special assistant who decided that he wanted to go to Mexico, and they pretty much forced me out. I wasn't happy, of course, about being forced out. I didn't mind the idea of going to Spain, and they were trying to inflate Spain. Important things were going to happen there and there was going to be some kind of international fair, and there was

going to be this, that or the other thing. So I left Mexico and got ready to go to Spain, and got as far as Washington. I had a courtesy call with Bernie Aronson, who had just been named as the assistant secretary, might not have even been confirmed yet. Bernie was an interesting figure in his own right. He was a Democrat in a Republican administration, named, I guess, because he was one of the early sort of neoconservatives, and he had been in the labor movement. He had worked for this very charismatic young guy who had taken over the United Mine Workers, and Bernie was sort of his speechwriter and political manipulator and so on.

Somehow in the course of that he had traveled to Nicaragua. He came back and did a piece for the New Republic, about how the Contras, who were of course what Reagan was supporting, were genuine democrats and that we should be supporting the Contras. He was the first Democrat to say that. So the payoff, or whatever – it wasn't the payoff for having said that. Baker wanted, and maybe Bush, too – I'm not sure – but Baker really wanted an end to the Central American conflict. They wanted an end to the conflict and they wanted an end to the domestic political hassle about the conflict. If you recall, the Contra funding and so on had led to indictments in the U.S. So they saw this person who had good Democratic Party connections, but who nonetheless believed that the Contras were the true democrats in Nicaragua, that he would be the perfect assistant secretary of state for Latin America.

From a political point of view, I guess that was perhaps true. From a pragmatic point of view, I don't think other than this trip to Central America he had ever been in Latin America. He spoke no Spanish. He really didn't understand very much at all about the reality of Latin America. I must say, he's a very quick study and he learned a lot. He did bring off a Central American peace agreement. I think that was his major focus, and he should be credited with having done that. At any rate, I think I went to see him as the sort of exiting PAO in Mexico. By the end of the interview, he decided that I shouldn't go to Spain as PAO, that I should become the deputy assistant secretary for Mexico, and then they added on the Caribbean, so that's how I got the job.

Q: Did you find that the Bush-Baker combination, both in Texas, did this give a particular cast to the approach towards Mexico?

COWAL: Yes, I think it did. I think they were genuinely interested in it. They saw it as strategic, and I think, in a sense, had they not been from Texas, that probably wouldn't have happened. Especially Baker, I think, who was more generally a Texan than Bush papa ever was. So they saw it as important. As NAFTA got started, the first person who ever mentioned NAFTA was Salinas's adviser, a guy named Pepe Cordoba, a very interesting little *eminence grise* (gray eminence) about – Salinas was quite small, and Pepe was even smaller. A little, bright, French-born, of Spanish parents, who then exiled themselves to Mexico during the Spanish Civil War, so he still had quite a strong Spanish accent. He became very associated with Mexico and with the government of Salinas. He came, I think it must have been four or five months into my tenure as deputy assistant secretary. He came up to Washington and came up to see me and said, "What do you

think the reaction of the United States would be if we said we wanted a free trade agreement?"

I remembered long conversations on the country team in Mexico, talking about how we would gradually make some progress on trade issues, moving sector by sector. One year, maybe try to do something in automobile parts. And the next year we would try to do something else, and then finally we'd take on tough stuff like agriculture. This would be a 30-year process, mainly because of Mexican heightened awareness of sovereignty and independence. A lot of fact and a lot of fiction in all of that. I knew from the point of view of the United States that we never thought we would hear something like free trade, so my reaction was to say, "Well, I think Jim Baker would like to hear about that." I got him an appointment the next day with Baker, who of course not only was the Secretary of State, but the former Treasury secretary, and therefore very attuned to Mexico and to the economic parts of his portfolio. He and Bob Zoellick, who is the current trade negotiator, (USTR) in this Bush II administration, was his undersecretary, not for economic stuff, but for something that involved him very much in all of the deals. The next day, Cordoba and I went to see the secretary and Zoellick, and that was really the very beginning of when our government started to talk about NAFTA.

Q: How did the meeting go? What was the secretary ...

COWAL: Well, the secretary was extremely interested, from the beginning. He saw that this would have tremendous benefits for both countries, and I don't think he ever wavered from that. Although it was under the Clinton administration that finally got the NAFTA votes – it took about four years to actually get it in play – certainly it was something to which Bush and Baker were personally and professionally committed.

Q: Well, looking back on this thing, this is not the sort of thing that could come almost out of the State Department, because it was such a political factor in a way, wasn't it?

COWAL: Yes.

Q: It really needed almost from the beginning the engagement of the secretary and the president.

COWAL: It did, and I remember the first thing that happened. I'm sure it was before there was any formal announcement. After this first couple of meetings, and as they began to talk a little bit, the first thing that happened was a full court press by the Canadians that they wouldn't have an agreement in which they were not a part. Which was quite interesting, because it was not something that any of us had really anticipated. I literally remember a visit. And at that time ARA and Canada were separate. It wasn't Western Hemisphere Affairs, which now includes Canada and Mexico and the rest of the countries, but it was American Republics, and Canada was part of the European Bureau, so we didn't normally see Canadian diplomats or anything. But I remember the first thing

happening was the Canadian foreign minister came to see Baker about – they were going to do this. We convinced the Mexicans, I think, that that would have to be the way it was.

These were some of the early steps. I left before NAFTA was actually concluded, but came back during my tenure as ambassador, was asked to come on a couple of different trips to the United States, lobbying for NAFTA. We weren't calling it lobbying, but addressing trade groups and agricultural groups in a number of places around the United States talking about what the benefits for NAFTA would be.

Q: This is the first time you were sort of in the head office of ARA. What was the atmosphere towards Mexico over there? I'm talking about within the professional ...

COWAL: Obviously, the fact that they couldn't find anybody that they thought was qualified in the senior ranks of the State Department Foreign Service to be Deputy Assistant Secretary meant that there was either hostility or indifference, I would say. First of all, ARA was a little bit of a backwater bureau, probably always was in a way, and within that bureau, the only thing that anybody ever really focused on was Central America. That was in the Reagan years. This is now after the Reagan years, but in the Reagan years, that was the hot thing. They had all the money. People who wanted to make a career in the State Department and wanted to be on the fast track wanted to work in Central America. They didn't want to work in Southern Cone or Brazil or Mexico or the Caribbean or these other parts of bureau, because they weren't affected, they weren't exciting.

I would say it was a pretty lackluster affair, and over the time, once you begin to put the political will and the political interest of somebody like Baker and Bush – it might have been Bush's first state dinner was with Salinas. Bush II's first state dinner was with Fox, and I think that was following the tradition. It was October of '89, and it might have been his first one. He was elected in the fall of '88, took office in January of '89. I think it was his first state dinner. Then once you began to shift that, obviously, the caliber of people who wanted to work on Mexico, either in the embassy in Mexico or on Mexican things in the State Department began to go up, but at the beginning it wasn't very good.

Q: We'll turn to the Caribbean a little later, but did you find, dealing with Mexican affairs, I would think for the State Department it would be so complicated, because like Canada, you get all these connections. New Mexico, Arizona and Texas, they've got their own foreign policy.

COWAL: You're very, very perceptive. Not only the 10 border states have their own foreign policies, which we would try to sort of organize into border governors' conferences every year, but every federal agency has its own policy. When I was part of the country team in Mexico, I think we had 28 or 29 separate federal agencies who were members of the country team, everything from the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), which you would expect, to the Battlefield Monuments Commission, which is a separate federal office, to of course all the law enforcement people. It's the law

enforcement people where you really get into the hairy issues, because they don't at all – this is DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) and FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and so on. They aren't particularly acculturated. The FBI has more bureaus, and the DEA now does too, but back then, they were cops, and they weren't diplomats. They didn't understand or believe in, or follow, the lead of the State Department. Of course, making that even more difficult, they were doing their own deals with Mexico whenever they could and however they could, but they were also doing their own deals on the Hill whenever they could and however they could.

Trying to run Mexican relations from the State Department is like having a bunch of cats without leashes, and they're all over the place. It's an extremely active, sometimes frustrating, job. One of the things that began, I actually think it was under Reagan, but it developed and blossomed under Bush and Baker, was the notion of having I think we called it the Binational Commission Meeting. That was expanded at least to be 12 federal departments meeting annually, or semiannually, with their counterparts in Mexico, and chaired by the State Department. You would have a meeting in Mexico in which they would all fly down to Mexico, and an alternating meeting in Washington, or in the United States. All of that took immense amounts of coordination, unlike, I think – maybe Canada is the same way, but the relationship tends to be less contentious and less political, although it can get that way.

It was good preparation, later, I guess, for working at the United Nations and discovering UN agencies don't want to coordinate, but the federal government agencies, all of whom work for the same government, don't want to coordinate either. State has very little to bring to the table in terms of money, for instance, so it's sort of trying to coordinate a bunch of cats who don't want to be coordinated. It took a lot of time and a lot of energy, and you were only partially successful at it.

Q: Did you find that on some things, you'd look at it and see you had a contentious issue, say, with DEA, and then sort of analyze and say, "It ain't worth the trouble to fight this battle?"

COWAL: Well, sometimes you would do that, of course, and sometimes it would sneak up on you, and sometimes it would threaten the entire relationship. One time that I remember extremely well was getting a call at home one night, about midnight, I suppose. These were grueling days, a DAS (deputy assistant secretary) job in those days, and I suppose that continues, in many ways where the rubber meets the road. It's not quite political, although some DASes are political appointees. You have very much contact with the high levels. I met the president on a number of occasions, I saw the secretary once a week, I suppose, on one thing or another, especially if you're working on something that becomes a high point of interest for them.

All of this stuff pours into you and you've got to sort it out and pass it on up, what you think needs to go on up and what you think needs to not go on up, and they're really exhausting jobs – exhilarating in some ways, but exhausting. You get home at, routinely,

8:30, 9:00 at night, and then if you get in bed and fall asleep and the phone rings at midnight, and it's some guy, the deputy director, actually, of the DEA at the time, who was somebody I had probably seen at interagency meetings. It must have been he had my name as someone you called about Mexico. He said, "Well, we've got Humberto Alvarez Machain." I was just kind of like, A, fast asleep, and, B, I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "Oh, who is Alvarez Machain and how did you get him." He said, "Well, he's the sleaze ball doctor who kept Kiki Camarena alive." Kiki Camarena was the DEA agent who had been caught by Mexican *narco trafficantes* (drug traffickers) and tortured and later killed.

Q: It was a horrible case.

COWAL: So, Alvarez Machain was the doctor, a gynecologist from Guadalajara, I believe, who had been in the employ, obviously, of these drug traffickers and who had administered some sort of drugs to Camarena so that he could remain conscious longer, so they could beat him more, so they could try to get more information out of him, a truly awful and reprehensible and terrible thing. So that was who Alvarez Machain was. I mean, I knew probably the names of the 10 most prominent drug dealers or something, but he wasn't on that list. "Well, how did you get him?" I said. "Well, we got a tip that he was coming to El Paso, and when the plane landed, we were there to arrest him, so we've arrested him."

"Fine, thanks for the call." Of course, I discovered in the morning that they had kidnapped him; the DEA had kidnapped him on the street in Guadalajara, drugged him, gotten him on a plane. It flew to El Paso, and when it landed in El Paso, indeed there was Alvarez Machain. Well, you can't imagine how you feel, of course, when you realize that they've just executed their own foreign policy, and you had absolutely no knowledge or foresight of this, and there was actually a lie in telling it to you afterwards. The Mexican ambassador, of course, is on the phone before your feet have touched the carpet in your office. He's on the phone, and this terrible thing has happened, and he wants to come in on the instructions of his government and make a protest immediately. He's coming in an hour, and you don't even really know the story. So that was what it was like dealing with people who had their own agendas, some of them for the right reasons, gone about in the wrong way.

Q: Well, how did that particular one play out?

COWAL: Well, I guess because both countries were at that point very interested in not – and I think to a certain extent still are. I think we see the current U.S.-Mexican relationship as not being great, but we nonetheless see both Fox and Bush try to continue to make progress on the relationship. It's very important to both of our countries, and I think everybody at a senior political level in both countries understands that and has always understood that. We understand that financially. Look at '94, when we bailed out Mexico. That's in our self interest, obviously. The worse thing to us is really chaos on our

border. How does chaos develop? Well, it develops over a weakened political and economic situation, which unleashes millions of migrants and so on.

At any rate, I think that eventually we were able to put it aside, so relations were never broken or anything, although in other situations in other times in the Mexican-American relationship, certainly they would have been. This was a clear violation of Mexican sovereignty in the most offensive way. I suppose there was some sort of a dressing down by Baker of the DEA chief, but from the DEA's point of view, they had accomplished their mission. They had personally sort of avenged the death of one of their agents. I don't know whether you ever saw that movie Traffic, which is in some ways quite real about the interwoven complexities about that situation, and the sort of difficulties of knowing what the right thing to do is and who the good guys really are. It's a very complicated thing, but, I must say, it remains a fascinating country to me.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were in the DAS job?

COWAL: When I was in the DAS job, it was John Negroponte, who came to Mexico as I left, was ambassador as I left. I had not worked for him directly in Mexico. I think he came in July and I had left in June or July. We didn't overlap at all. Then I ended up working quite closely with him while he was ambassador in Mexico. I think he did a superb job, and he's a true professional.

Negroponte didn't hesitate to speak out where he thought he needed to speak out, but he certainly knew what was within the realm of proper conduct for a U.S. envoy. I thought he did a magnificent job through some very difficult situations, of which this sort of DEA incident was one of many, many, many which happened.

Q: Were we interested at that time in sort of our agenda of trying to do something about "bringing democracy" to Mexico? The PRI had been in for about 50 years.

COWAL: Fifty-plus years. I think we were much more focused on the economic stuff than we were on this bringing democracy. We said, and to a certain extent I do believe this, I think it played out as we said it would, that economic openings would lead to political openings, and that you would start there and we would watch it evolve. But at the same time, I must say, because we were interested in having a good relationship with Mexico, because we were interested in promoting something like a NAFTA, we were less censorious of political shenanigans and human rights violations than we should have been. I remember testifying once on the Hill about human rights in Mexico. Mostly it had to do with the human rights of the accused in criminal trials. We had both from State Department, from Human Rights Watch and other groups, evidence that most confessions in Mexican trials – the chief way to convict somebody, because police work was terrible – were obtained by torture. When asked the question directly, I said something like 75 percent or whatever the figure was that we had, and that was probably less than it actually was, 75 percent of the confessions were obtained through the use of either mild or severe coercion or torture. We probably turned a blind eye to a lot of that stuff because we

wanted to focus on the positive. I do remember testifying about it and then going to Mexico, and it got big headlines in Mexico.

Q: Oh, I'm sure it would.

COWAL: Going to Mexico two or three days later, and of course I had lived there for four years, so I had a lot of friends and a lot of people knew who I was, and being at some luncheon just with friends that Saturday and expecting that everybody was going to kind of ... [End Side].

Q: Saying what?

COWAL: We were very cautious. We tread very lightly. There was a very good piece written in those years by Morton Kondracke. I don't even know where he published it, probably the New Republic or something, comparing the PRI and Richard J. Daley's Chicago, and saying that this was a natural evolution. After all, the United States not 30 years before had – and I grew up in Chicago, so I knew what he was saying was correct – we have our mayor, and his name is Daley. It was nowhere near being a free and fair election. You voted for the Democratic Party and Daley, and that was true maybe more in Chicago, but in most of the big cities in the United States, because they picked up your garbage and public services sort of functioned, and there was a feeling that if you didn't vote for those folks, then your public services wouldn't function for you at all. So everybody would go along to get along, or whatever the phrase was, and that it was not particularly democratic. It was sort of a benign autocracy, and we knew that. Certainly, I was personally aware of the fact that the election of Salinas was less clean than it should have been, and I think we were in the embassy all aware of that, and essentially decided to ignore the fact and declare that he had been elected in a democratic election.

Of course, because it was Mexico and everybody had sort of bought into this over the years, even those who were against Salinas – the election of Salinas in '88, it was the PAN on the right and the PRD on the left. It was the three parties contending for the presidency, and two days after the election, in the middle of reporting the election returns – I remember listening to it on the radio, and they suspended the broadcast and said they had lost their connection from Monterey or some such thing, and of course they wanted to stop announcing. The computers had broken down, and they were stopping announcing it until they got those results the way they wanted those results to be.

Within two days, my late husband at a business breakfast happened to be in a hotel where the two losing candidates came in and sat down together, and he recognized them. I mean, everyone recognized them. They had been in the newspapers ever day. He had actually gone over and said, "Congratulations on a good fight," or something, and while reading his newspaper, leaning over, listening to this conversation, waiting for his guest to arrive, and the two of them discussed how much of the vote each would be said to have received, that one 34, and the other 17 percent. He came back from breakfast, reported that to me. I reported that to the ambassador, and within two days the Mexicans had announced the

election results, and those were exactly the percentages. Salinas had 49 percent or something and Cardenas 34, and Coutie 17 or vice versa. I don't remember. They had all agreed. They had all gotten pay off with something.

That was the Mexican way. People were bought off or bought in or got something, whether that was monetary or a position in he community or a new assignment, or whatever, or some combination of all those things. I think the United States pretty much went along with that. In many ways, I think, in a lot of Latin America, we always have gone along with a lot of that. We talk about "they're all democracies, save Cuba," and certainly it's great progress from the days when they all were clearly and overtly military dictatorships, with a few exceptions. There's something resembling an open electoral process in most countries now in Latin America, but I would be careful to say "something resembling an open electoral process," with still, I think, in most countries, a long way to go toward what we would call full and representative democracies. But we more or less choose to ignore that.

Q: One of the problems, always, when you're in a country such as Mexico, and there is a corruption going on, was there much of this reported, or at a certain point, you almost don't like to have it come in, because everything leaks and it just screws things up?

COWAL: It's tricky. Yes, sure, some of it is reported. Some of the drug stuff was reported, and some of it probably was not reported, and the feeling of leaking, I think that's a perpetual problem of wondering who's going to get this information and what will they use it for. I don't know if Mexico is particularly tough.

Q: How about immigration? This must have been a major issue, wasn't it?

COWAL: Major issue. We did during those years revise things called the SAW (seasonal agricultural workers) agreement, allowing for more agricultural laborers. But the whole idea of NAFTA, and I can remember this first trip of Salinas to the United States as president, when he had the state dinner and so on in '89, he said very clearly then to the Congress and to the president and everybody else, "Mexico can either export products, or it will export people. Those are the choices. We either have a free trade agreement and we're able to send goods and we're able to improve the economic life of ordinary Mexicans, or we're going to continue to have this tremendous fleeing north of the border."

Q: Also, California, what role did that play? I can't remember, did you have a Republican governor then?

COWAL: I don't remember. Was it Wilson? I think it was Wilson, who was pretty tough.

Q: He was pretty tough.

COWAL: And you had a congressman like Duncan Hunter, who was on the border with San Diego, who was particularly tough and obnoxious. Quite difficult, quite difficult, and the politics, it was difficult and challenging and exciting to try to be managing U.S.-Mexican relations through all of these many poles of everybody else thought they were running U.S.-Mexican relations.

Q: How about on foreign affairs? Does Mexico from your perspective play much of a role in dealing with ...

COWAL: I think they became very much more constructive at the United Nations than they had been in the days when Munoz Ledo was the ambassador. We entered into the kind of relationship that we have with our European allies and other friends – or had. I don't know what the current state of play is, but which we had then, which was before each General Assembly session sit down and talk about what our common positions would be and where we would support each other, and where we would part ways. That became a much more open and constructive relationship with Mexico than it had ever been in the past. They got some people in the Foreign Ministry who probably still could be described, as you would say, the leftist intellectuals, but who were by then under some political control. I think the Mexicans, like me, were submerging a whole lot of things to the goal of having NAFTA and having the economic agreement. That certainly became the number one foreign policy priority for Mexico. Therefore, they didn't allow the sort of freelancing, free-wheeling foreign policy that Mexico had engaged in in years past, where Mexico thought its goal was always to oppose the United States. I mean, if the United States said it's black, Mexico said it's white.

That was how they got there, again, essentially was by being the counterpart to the U.S. I think those years, and to a certain extent, although they didn't support us in our latest moves in the UN, they were certainly in the majority, and I don't think took an out front role in trying to persuade others.

Q: We're talking about during the Iraq war.

COWAL: Yes, I'm talking about during the Iraq war. Although I understand there's been certainly a cooling of U.S.-Mexican relations, in part because of that, there is still a feeling of restraint, a feeling that Mexico wants to have a good relationship with the United States and therefore will not allow cowboys in its Foreign Ministry to do anything they want to do.

Q: While you were there, how'd you find the role of Congress?

COWAL: Very involved – extremely involved. Certainly, because there are so many issues that are maybe issues with Canada as well, but they're not typical foreign policy issues, but they do affect many, many, many congressional districts. So a great deal of interest and a great deal of involvement, some of it positive and some of it not so positive.

The other thing is that you could have these agencies like DEA play the Congress for their own ends.

Maybe we ought to wrap this up for today.

Q: Well, we'll stop here, and next time we'll pick it up, I'll ask you – we've talked about immigration, we've talked about the DEA and NAFTA. Were there any other major issues?

COWAL: I think that's about it. I think immigration, drugs and NAFTA were certainly the big issues, and how they played off.

Q: Okay, well, then we'll pick this up the next time about the Caribbean. Did Cuba fall in the Caribbean, or was that off to one side?

COWAL: No, Cuba was off to one side, and so was Panama. If you remember, we had Operation Just Cause during my time.

Q: Well, we might talk about the impact of the Panamanian attack or whatever you want to call it, and also did Cuba, although you didn't deal with it, what kind of role, as you saw it, and then we'll talk about the rest of the Caribbean, and then move onto the rest.

COWAL: We had Haiti and Guyana, the Caribbean Basin Initiative in Congress, so it was an active part of the portfolio, also.

Q: Okay, today is the 15th of July, the ides of July 2003. Sally, we're moving to the Caribbean. You went to ARA, and what was your portfolio?

COWAL: I think is what we talked about last time. I was hired into that job because I had Mexico experience. Although I was not a State Department officer, I had Mexico experience that was considered important as Baker and Bush tried to change around the relationship, or strengthen the relationship, improve the bilateral relationship with Mexico for the first time in 20 or 30 years, I suppose. Although I think later a DAS was picked just for Mexico. At that time, they were not so rich in DASes, so they needed to add something onto the portfolio, and the Caribbean was kind of a stepchild. I must say, I didn't know anything about the Caribbean when I began there. I had maybe been there a couple of times, probably on vacation. I don't think I ever did any work there in all of my years in Latin America, so I got the Caribbean portfolio added onto the Mexican portfolio for no particular expertise on my part. Of course, the way the State Department works, when you're at the DAS level, you have office directors who report to you. They are usually always people who have served pretty extensively in the region, although, I must say, the Caribbean for ARA, or now, I assume, WHA (Western Hemisphere Affairs) – maybe this has changed with Canada in the mix – has always been sort of apart, because it's not Spanish or Portuguese speaking.

Q: Also, I suspect this is a place where they put a relatively junior officer to get some DAS experience, too.

COWAL: I think so, although we were fortunate in having a gentleman named Joe Vasilia, who had a good, rich, I don't know, 20-year career in the State Department, but as I recall, he had never served in the Caribbean either, and he was the office director. Then you add on to that the problem that most of the ambassadors in the Caribbean are political appointees, because it's considered a safe and nice place to send somebody who's been a friend of the president or a contributor to the party, but who doesn't in fact know one hand from the other when it comes to foreign affairs. The thought is, "Oh, send him to Barbados, or send her to Jamaica."

Q: This is when sort of the second rank or third rank of political ...

COWAL: So you get second or third rank political ambassadors, most of whom are disappointed that they're there versus someplace that they've heard of, unless they're sort of California real estate agents and then they think the weather's nice and it'll probably be all right. But most of them are probably trying to get somewhere else, if they have any ambition, and they're a strange bunch, by and large, and they don't know anything about the Caribbean. Then you get Foreign Service officers and the ARA types don't really know anything about the Caribbean, because they've learned Spanish and Portuguese and they've spent most of their careers in Mexico and Argentina and Bolivia, and even Honduras and El Salvador, which are quite different than the reality of either Haiti, Cuba or the Dominican Republic, or the whole English-speaking Caribbean.

So, for Haiti, you usually get a bunch of West African experts who try to make Haiti into West Africa. They recruit them because they have French language skills and they've served in countries where there are black people, so that makes them certainly ready to go to Haiti. Then the English-speaking Caribbean just gets a lot of odds and sods, I would say, people who can't get another job or would prefer to be close to home for one reason or another – aging parents in Florida or something – and obviously, as with all State Department posts, some of them are excellent. Some of them who know nothing about the Caribbean when they come catch it very quickly, learn it extremely well, and that goes for some of the political ambassadors as well. And some of them just stride like colossuses through the landscape, breaking it up as they go, and you run along as the desk or as the DAS trying to pick up the pieces. Generally, I would say, my experience with political ambassadors in the Caribbean was not outstanding, with some exceptions.

Then you try to give them strong DCMs, but you have a problem because the stronger DCM candidates don't really want to go there either. I would say it's, in my experience, one of the least-professionally managed parts of the State Department, given the fact that it has only one real high-priority interest to the United States, and that's proximity. But proximity, as we know, and I talked about Mexico, I think has become much more salient and much more important in the last 15 years than ever before. We have drugs and immigration, and now, I suppose, terrorism, although I've been somewhat removed from

the State Department since that became the huge issue that it is. But certainly, as we have, and promote, I must say, through free trade agreements and other things, a much more open border and open flow of commerce, we also inadvertently promote a more open flow of illegal immigrants and illegal drugs.

The other thing of significance to the region is Cuba, which although it was not a part of my portfolio at the time, I suppose watching it and knowing something about it led me some years later to a much more active role in Cuba. Cuba affects the rest of the region in many ways. I think the English-speaking Caribbean is not very well equipped to deal with it. It was either forbidden fruit and there should be something terribly fascinating about dealing with Cuba, and they should do it, and they must get on with it, the way they've never felt about Haiti or the Dominican Republic, which are perfectly willing to have closer relations with the English-speaking Caribbean than Cuba really was, or at least openness in terms of dialog. Or it's the sort of monster in the closet. They worry about it not so much that Communism is going to engulf them, but more that if we come to a political settlement with Cuba, then the United States' interests, once again as they were pre-Castro, would focus on Cuba. Cuba would get the sugar quota back and that would hurt the rest of the Caribbean. They would get all the tourism that began to spring up in places all around the Caribbean really in the '60s and '70s when Cuba got cut off as the tourist destination. So they love and hate it, and that affects the rest of the region.

That was '89 to '91, and then I went as ambassador to Trinidad in '91. So, really, for those five years of being intensely involved in the Caribbean, you learn that they're all sort of sui generis little rocks out there, that it's hard to put them into one category. That's one of their problems, also, the fact that they have tried through several attempts, starting pre-independence, when they were all British colonies and the British were obviously trying to unload them, and there was certainly interest on the part of most of the Caribbean on being unloaded. It was the age of great independence movements, all of the African countries and so on, and the Caribbean was picking up that wind and wanted to do that. The British tried, I think, very hard to make the whole enterprise more sustainable by making it more united, by having one West Indian Federation, which was to seek independence as a single country, with one prime minister and one cabinet, and elections in which anybody from any country could be the prime minister, but they wouldn't each have their own legislative assemblies and so on.

In fact, that fell apart at the beginning, I think largely because the Jamaicans decided if the capital wasn't going to be in Kingston, which it wasn't – I think the capital was going to in Port of Spain – and the prime minister was going to be a Barbadian, the initial prime minister, then they weren't going to play cricket on that team. So they took their balls and bats and went home, and the other 12 countries – well, it was at that time 10. A couple became independent subsequently in joining CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market), but the others decided, as the great calypso song has it, 10 minus one equals zero. So if they didn't have Jamaica, which was the largest-population country, and the most resources, then it was not going to make it as a West Indian Federation. I think that's been one of the tragedies of that region. So they all pursued their separate

courses at great cost. There are great inefficiencies which would not be altogether overcome if you had them together, but it would certainly be ameliorated.

As it is, you have Jamaica with a couple of million people, Trinidad with just over a million, and it drops off radically after that to countries with 200,000, 100,000 citizens. You've got these, as I call them, sui generis little rocks, each with its own mechanisms of government, its own full three branches – an executive, a legislative and a judiciary. Tremendous waste and inefficiency.

Q: When you got there in '89, did we have a policy to try to do anything about this?

COWAL: Well, not really to rewrite history. I think we were encouraging and helpful. There had been some original Caribbean basin legislation passed, which was essentially giving them trade preferences, mainly for assembly industry, for the textile industry, which is important in the Caribbean. We sought to have all of them sort of hang together enough to do one trade agreement with the United States, and then to renew that trade agreement. That was somewhat helpful, then. As drugs became a bigger issue, we certainly tried to provide some of the fiber optic network that would allow the Jamaicans to talk to the Trinidadians or the Barbadians or the St. Kittians by radio and by fax and by phone.

All roads lead to Miami, but the roads aren't very good that lead between Jamaica and Barbados. To sort of foster and to provide the infrastructure for a better law enforcement network, in our own interest – I think it was in our own interest – but I think what we've discovered with the drug business all over the world is it can't be just coming through you. The beginning, I think, of the whole war on drugs, going back to Nixon, probably, and certainly through Reagan, there was a tremendous dialog of the deaf, where the United States of course – still does, to a certain extent – blames the producer countries. The producer countries say, "Hey, it's not our problem. If your young people didn't want to consume it, we wouldn't be growing it, would we? And besides, we don't have drug addicts. It doesn't affect us."

I think the shortsightedness of that point of view began to be addressed in the years that I was there. The Caribbean are not producers, but there are two ways for drugs to get to the United States. One is through Mexico and the other is through the Caribbean, so I was really handling both sides of that portfolio, therefore very drug related. I think that the transit countries, as well as the producer countries, began to understand the terrible effects, how distorting that amount of money to the Caribbean economies. Suddenly somebody is getting paid enormous amounts of money to close your eye when the boat goes through, or as paid mules and shippers.

They began to catch some of the really low-level folks, the poor Jamaican women who would take a few kilos in their suitcases and go to the United States. Of course, it's much harder to catch the real traffickers, because they're much more clever at what they do. At any rate, I think through our working with all of the countries of the Caribbean, both on

trade issues and on law enforcement issues, we have done something to encourage a better dialog between us.

Q: Who was your assistant secretary?

COWAL: Bernie Aronson, who I must say – I don't suppose there's ever really been an assistant secretary for Latin America who spent a lot of time focusing on the Caribbean. There are always more important issues, except Cuba. They spent a lot of time focusing on Cuba, because at least until very recently, and to a certain extent it continues until today, the importance of the Cuban American lobby. That remains important, and it was important in the last presidential election.

Q: It was vital.

COWAL: As we know, it was vital, and therefore was one of the reasons I got more involved in Cuba when I was free from the State Department. It was the sort of negative residual of watching the extent to which U.S.-Cuba policy was manipulated and dominated by the Cuban American lobby in Miami, to the point of doing truly stupid things from the perspective of U.S. vital interests. Although I was not dealing with Cuba, my colleague, Mike Kozak, was, who had the pariah states. His portfolio was to be the principal DAS, and then to have Cuba and Panama, only two countries.

Q: Who was that?

COWAL: Mike Kozak, who is now ambassador in Belarus, I think, who actually was not a career Foreign Service officer, but he was not a political appointment, either. He was a State Department Legal Bureau person, a lawyer, and a very smart lawyer, a very smart guy. He didn't speak Spanish, I don't think, but had these two countries. His job, I think, on the Panama side, was mainly to try to keep SOUTHCOM (U.S. Southern Command) and the military in some sort of box. And on the Cuban side, it was to try to keep the Cuban Americans in some kind of box. So I didn't envy Mike his job, because I thought he had two impossible tasks. If the soldiers weren't marching into his office in a very purposeful way on Monday morning with their brass buttons all shined, heads of SOUTHCOM and so on, especially as we geared up for Operation Just Cause, then Jorge Mas Canosa, the head of the Cuban American National Foundation, was striding in, followed by his minions, not in brass buttons, but in mafia-style suits and ties, right off the plane from Miami. And Bernie Aronson, who was assistant secretary, generally wouldn't see him, or would eventually see them, but Bernie liked four of the five visits to be deflected by Mike.

So I would watch these guys march in. That's the old part of the building that's got walls three feet thick. Nonetheless, through my office wall, I could hear Mas Canosa berating the State Department either for sins of omission or commission, things that we had done that we shouldn't have done and things that we had left undone that we should have done. It was never quite enough, and we got told about it. In many ways because of

congressional interests and, I must say, the administration's interest, we had to pay a lot more attention to it than in a rational world we would have had to pay. It didn't directly relate to me but made a very distinct impression on me and did affect other parts of my work.

Q: Let's talk about the other problem child you haven't mentioned, Haiti.

COWAL: Well, that was a real problem child, too. It provided some really exciting moments. Haiti was pretty much the exception to the rule of political appointments in the Caribbean, because, A, it was problematic, and, B, the million-dollar contributors didn't really want to go to Haiti. We sent a number of good career people. The one I worked with most closely was Al Adams. Adams was kind of a cowboy in some ways. He didn't really fit State Department molds very well. He replaced a guy named Brunson McKinley. He had been very status quo, very State Department, very buttoned-down and buttoned-up. He was in the mold, at a time when there was a military dictator in Haiti and a lot of ferment, but not a lot of progress.

Adams got there and first of all learned some Creole. He was as fluent as his predecessors had been in French, generally, but he learned enough Creole to become a sort of important public figure, because he could go out and make speeches, or throw Creole words into his speeches. More importantly was that behind the scenes he put together a very interesting alliance of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) representative, who generally, at least in those days, was considered to be the UN representative in the country. He ran UNDP but he also was the sort of doyen of the UN diplomatic corps. Al added the German ambassador, the French ambassador, and papal nuncio, I believe. The five of them became a little rump group on Haiti, meeting I wouldn't say secretly, but certainly not publicly. They would meet up at the U.S. ambassador's residence, which was one of these grand things built in the days of the proconsuls. I think it's the twin of the residence in Cuba, actually, one of these massively "let's show everyone how important we are and build ourselves a 50-room mansion in the hills overlooking the city."

These five guys, and they were all guys, would go up there, I don't know, once a week, twice a week, three times a week. I don't know that it's ever been written about – not to my knowledge, but I haven't stayed tuned in, and you may have interviewed Adams or somebody else. Adams retired, I think, after Haiti.

Q: He's in Hawaii now.

COWAL: That would not surprise me, but I don't know that. Al had a very interesting State Department career. He had been a deputy executive secretary at the Department, and he hadn't had a very traditional career. He'd been in Djibouti. He'd done tough jobs, not particularly tied to a regional bureau, just sort of a troubleshooter. I don't know whose idea it was to send him to Haiti, certainly not mine. He went to Haiti about the time I

went to Washington, and he put together this rump group, and I think they really engineered the military dictator who was in power at the time.

Q: What was his name?

COWAL: His name was Avril, A-V-R-I-L, General Avril. Not having been a longtime specialist on Haiti or the Caribbean, I don't remember exactly how Avril got there, probably because somebody else got exiled. They were stacked up in the Dominican Republic like cards, all of the ex-dictators of Haiti, sort of waiting to be called back. I think by the time I got there they had enough for a bridge game, certainly, and maybe a poker game. But they all sat over there. Avril was the man of the moment, and we had all aid and so on suspended, as did the French, as did others, giving aid to nongovernmental organizations, but not through the government. But we didn't spend it all with the nongovernmental organizations, either, so we had $60 million or $70 million sort of in a reserve fund that we were sitting on.

These guys essentially, I would say, jawboned Avril out of a job, very peacefully. As they got their own coherence – I would say this is about a year into my tenure, so maybe '90, maybe somewhat late into 1990. They finally had a few sessions with Avril, and they persuaded him that whether in his own best interest – and maybe they offered him a deal. I suspect there was some sweetener in it for Avril. Exactly what that was, I wasn't party to. But one fine night, around 2:00 in the morning, he decided that he would leave, and we got the call. If we could send a plane, he was prepared to go to the United States. Indeed, the next morning at sort of first light, we dispatched a plane and flew him back to the United States, and quite how all of that happened, I don't know, although I went to Haiti two or three times and was always invited to join this group in their little discussions. I think that was a very fascinating little episode in U.S.-Haitian relations. That paved the way for an interim government, and then a preparation for elections. The elections took place in early '91. To everyone's surprise, at least to the United States' surprise, they delivered not Marc Bazin, who was a World Bank economist and who had very good relations with us and the French and everyone else, and was quite the man around town and represented I can't remember which political party, but sort of a very good, well-established political party. Those elections delivered Father Aristide, affectionately known as Titi, and his Lavalas movement, which in Haitian Creole essentially means the unwashed.

So it was a real populist movement, and Aristide was elected and Jimmy Carter went for those elections, under the Carter Center's election surveying project.

Q: He monitored a lot of – a very positive force in this business.

COWAL: Right, and he and his people certified that the election was free and fair, and walked over that night to tell Aristide that they considered him to be the legitimate winner of these elections. Then that put us in a period, which I was very involved in, which was essentially trying to establish a working relationship with this government, which had no

people of experience whatsoever. The person I most dealt with was another priest, who was kind of a minister without portfolio, a very smart guy.

Q: Eminence grise?

COWAL: Sort of an *eminence grise*. He was older than Aristide. There was something wonderful about it, and then there was also something very disturbing about it. What was wonderful about it was the people who never thought that this would happen, and never thought, really, that they would be in power, who had been either in the opposition, formed or unformed, for their whole lives, suddenly found themselves talking about "us" and meaning the government of Haiti, and being quite delighted and thrilled and overwhelmed by that.

The disturbing thing about it was there were a lot of things they just didn't have the expertise to do. Yet they were extremely reluctant, and for some good reasons, and some, I suppose in retrospect, not so good reasons to take advice or help from anybody: from the French, from us, from the UN, from anybody, because they were so worried that it would once again turn into the kind of government they didn't want. So the sad history of it is that after six or eight or 10 months – well, things began to happen much sooner than that. The boats stopped. One of the big aggravating causes for the United States to want to see this military dictatorship – and this gets back to how illegal immigration affects our policy in the Caribbean. In the days of Avril, the end of Avril, and of course we were providing no aid and assistance, because we wanted to give some pressure on this military government. But the unintended consequence from our point of view was these refugees were pouring out in boatloads, just pouring out, in unseaworthy craft, obviously, and U.S. policy was for the Coast Guard to stop them. But then under the international laws of refugees and so on, they all had to be interviewed, and if they were considered to be seeking political asylum ...

Q: If they're economic refugees or political refugees.

COWAL: They were either economic or they were political, *refoulement* I think is the term. So they all had to be interviewed, and then the question was where they would be interviewed. They were taken either to Guantanamo Bay, where the Navy did not want them, they were interviewed onboard the Coast Guard cutters.

There were three options of what to do with these people who were found floating and heading for the United States. You could put them onboard a Coast Guard cutter, but you would often have 200, 300, 400 people crammed into one of these little boats, and Coast Guard cutters, as you know, aren't very big. Both from the point of view of practicality and logistics, and from the point of view that they looked like slave trading ships once you got 400 Haitians on them, it wasn't a very good option. And they all had to be interviewed, and you had to get INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) agents to interview them, to seek from them what their cause for migrating was, or you had to take them to Guantanamo Bay, where the Navy did not want them. This is of course way pre-

the Taliban, before we had wonderful caged facilities for such people. Then we had no facilities, really. Or you had to take them to Miami and put them in, I think it's called the Chrome Detention Center in Miami, which first of all was overloaded, and secondly, just by taking them to Miami put in process a judicial process in which they immediately gain rights to a certain number of immigration hearings. In other words, once they came to Miami, even if in detention, which they were, as compared to the Cubans, who of course once they touch their foot on the soil are paroled in and on the way to becoming American citizens, which is another issue of great annoyance in the Caribbean. But even though they didn't get that kind of preferential Cuban treatment, at a minimum they become guests of the federal system for at least 18 months to two years, as the process wends its way through the administrative and judicial proceedings and it's decided whether they have a legitimate claim to stay in the United States or not.

None of these was a good option, and that's certainly one of the reasons we were wanting to see democracy come to Haiti. And after Aristide was elected, for about, I suppose, a month or two, there were no boats. There was some great optimism, and of course it was misguided optimism, as it always is. If he had been Talleyrand, I don't think he could have turned around Haiti in two months. And, certainly, as Jean-Bertrand Aristide, with an inexperienced government, he couldn't turn it around in two months. So, within two months, the boats were out on the water again, but this time, the first couple of boats we said, "Well, obviously, all these people have to be escorted back to Haiti immediately, because they couldn't be fleeing an oppressive government. They've got a democracy, this guy has been elected."

So the first couple of things, it gave us quick answers. By about the third or fourth month, the bush telegraph going around said, "Oh, you've got to say it's a political reason, and the political reason is that you voted for Marc Bazin, and you are now being discriminated against or persecuted or something." So people got these tee-shirts printed up, and they said, "I voted for Marc Bazin," and they would get on the boats with these tee-shirts. After about the second or third one, I said, "If that many people had voted for Marc Bazin, he probably would have won." But it was much harder, then, for them to sustain this claim to a well-founded fear of persecution.

At any rate, the economic problems continued, and, in fact, deepened after Aristide got in office, and that led to his first overthrow, which came in September of 1991, after about six months.

Q: Were you still in ...

COWAL: I had just gone to Trinidad, but it was very sad to me that Aristide blamed a lot of that on the United States, and what he blamed on the United States was we had never unblocked this aid. Of course, from our point of view, we never unblocked this aid because we never got a reasonable plan for how he would spend the money, try as we did, and we really did. We offered to send people to write the plan, and that was not acceptable, and so then we offered to send their plan writers to plan-writing school, and

that was not acceptable. In the six months that I was there after he was in office, despite good will, and I must say it was good will on our side, and I'm sure it was good will on their side, we simply couldn't get to the point of dispersing any money, and that was a factor.

If we had turned over the whole 60 million or 100 million or whatever it was, dollars, as a check, they probably could have sustained this enterprise a little bit longer, but we weren't doing it. Except for a limited amount of economic support funds, we weren't writing those kind of checks. We were doing project assistance.

Q: First place, when Aristide first came in, what was sort of the reaction within the State Department, the experts, "Oh my God, who is this guy," the stuff you were getting?

COWAL: Well, essentially, "Oh my God, who is this guy?" I think the CIA was sort of caught flat-footed. I was told three weeks before the election by a good friend of mine who was at the time the foreign minister in the Dominican Republic, who had become a friend because he was very active in Caribbean business affairs and I had worked with him on trade stuff. He had been to Haiti. They were always trying to get some kind of arrangements with Haiti, because there was a lot of illegal migration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. There's a lot of illegal migration from Haiti everywhere else in the Caribbean. That was a problem in the Bahamas. It wasn't just a problem for the United States. It was the Haitians who were desperately poor and needing to go anywhere else they could find a better life, cutting cane in the Dominican Republic, or working in a hotel in the Bahamas or whatever. They did it.

At any rate, my friend, Carlos Morales, had been to Haiti and told me two or three weeks before the election with absolute certainty that Titi was going to win this election. I said, "Carlos, you can't be right. I've got all the intelligence estimates in the world and it says Marc Bazin is going to win by 10 points or five points or whatever it was." He said, "It's not going to happen," and of course he was right and they were wrong. So I think whenever they get sort of a black eye like that, there's a certain amount of resentment.

Q: A little dog in the manger type.

COWAL: So they weren't particularly happy about it, and then I think the military became sort of distraught. They had had at least in the military dictators a good working relationship with the Haitian military, and they didn't have any relationship with this. At the same time, it could honestly be said that Aristide was pretty flaky and not much of a democrat. But I do remember a very high military official ...

Q: On our side.

COWAL: On our side, saying to me, after meeting with him once or twice, that the man's elevator doesn't go all the way to the top. In many ways, that's true, certainly, in the ways of thinking and behaving as we would assume somebody in the modern world needs to

think and behave in order to run a government. I remain in Haiti in my present job now 13 years later. We run as an NGO some healthcare projects in Haiti, so I have been to Haiti twice in the last four months or so, and Aristide is still limping along. There is still no real government. The opposition refuses to join in the parliament, because there has never been any modus operandi worked out. So whereas some limited USAID funds are going to the government, most of them are going to organizations like mine and many, many, many other NGOs who provide much of the social services and the healthcare services to Haiti. Aristide has been there now, on and off, for more than a decade, and I think to great cost.

Q: Well, let's turn to the other sort of powerhouse of a place, Jamaica, while you were there.

COWAL: These are all very interesting countries. It's just that they're so in miniature, and despite the fact that they're so close to the United States, we tend not to think about them at all. Jamaica had, I would say, one of the good political appointees of my time, a fellow named Glen Holden, who was a polo player and a very big insurance man from California who made gazillions of dollars and gave significant parts of it to the Republican Party and got Jamaica. He took it very seriously and did a pretty good job. That was through the election of the sort of new Michael Manley. Michael Manley had been the prime minister of Jamaica, not a friend of the United States. He was not a Communist and never a Communist, but certainly firmly in the maybe Francois Mitterrand camp, I mean, a socialist, defined in many ways by his opposition to the United States.

Then we had gone through this period of Eddie Seaga, who was basically a thug, I think, but politics in Jamaica are a homegrown sport. It's such a vital democracy that it risks being a dangerous vital democracy, with two parties, the PNC (People's National Congress) and the JLP (Jamaica Labor Party), who go back to before independence. The JLP was always considered to be more pro-Republican, pro-United States, pro-business, but at the same time has a populist element to it in a quite interesting way. The PNC, which is Manley's party, was socialist but British socialist, run on the rules of we have to operate a government, we have to collect tax revenues, and therefore we have to have private industries which function. And we want to have a tourist industry, and we want to have an export textile industry, and we need to provide some flexibility for business to operate.

What makes politics in Jamaica dangerous is that each of these quite respectable – I think Seaga ranged on being a Godfather type – nonetheless, all the people in his party did not. Quite respectable politicians are each identified with much less respectable elements who will seek in moments of local elections or national elections, to intimidate the followers of the other party by violence in the streets. So street gangs are associated with both of these parties. That all got worse with the drug trafficking also, because drug money inevitably tried to find its way into where it could have some influence. Convicted drug traffickers who spent some time in U.S. jails then got repatriated. When their jail terms

are over, they get repatriated back to their country of origin. That's often Jamaica, and they come to little old Kingston, which may have been fighting it out on the streets with rocks and clubs, and introduce real weapons of mass destruction in the neighborhood way – heavy armaments. So the level of violence escalated dramatically.

Jamaica was a dicey situation, but we, I think, stayed out of the election properly. Manley was elected. Bush 41 had a certain knowledge of the Caribbean, and a certain affection for it. I don't know whether this was from his days in offshore oil or his UN days or whatever, but he had some kind of residual warm feelings for the Caribbean. So one of the things that he agreed to do was a state visit for Manley, and also because his friend Glen Holden was ambassador. That's one of the things a political appointee can do in a place that doesn't matter otherwise. He's got the ear of the president, at least for five minutes at the Christmas party, whatever it is, and he can sometimes get done. I'm sure the State Department could never have brought that off, because it wouldn't have even gotten through the State Department. He's only going to do five state visits this year, or 25 state visits this year, it doesn't matter, Jamaica's not going to be on the list. It's not going to be on the list of five, and it's not going to be on the list of 25, so they're not going to get any hearing.

Instead, and I think because of Holden, they got Manley on the list, so we had a state visit by Manley, and that was a rather positive affair, I thought. It was one of the highlights of my time as deputy assistant secretary. Because you get very involved with the White House and with the higher levels of government, which two or three ranks down, as you are in State, you don't get all that much opportunity to do. Suddenly your guy's coming to town, and so you get to go to Andrews Air Force Base and fly in with him on the helicopter and do all these things that are part of what makes getting to that level of government fun, I suppose. Manley, who's died now, recently, was I think one of these magnificent sort of larger-than-life Caribbean figures. There are a number of them in the Caribbean, who are really the products, largely, of British educations. The new generation is more American educated, but Manley's generation, they were pre-independence, and they went to – I don't remember whether he went to Oxford or Cambridge, but I'm quite sure it was one of the two. His father had been a Jamaican politician. He came to it almost from boyhood. Norman Manley had been a great leader and so on in Jamaica. So he was Caribbean aristocracy all the way through. It was just a pleasure to know somebody like that.

Q: From what you'd heard of Manley before, had he changed, or was he still sort of a Fabian socialist ...

COWAL: No, he had changed quite a lot. He certainly at that point had seemed to make a complete transformation: to believing that, whether it was the Caribbean Basin Initiative or later, the Free Trade of the Americas, an attempt to put NAFTA and the Andean and the Caribbean and all of these various free trade agreements together in a hemisphere-wide agreement, minus Cuba, of course. But he spoke glowingly about those, and he got on quite well in his second term with the private sector.

I once had the opportunity, we were sitting together at a dinner or something, to ask him what had changed his mind on so many of these things, and he looked me square in the eye and said, "Defeat."

Q: What?

COWAL: Defeat. He had been prime minister. He had been defeated. He had analyzed for four years why he had been defeated, decided that he would rather be prime minister than be right, maybe, and that Fabian socialism was not the way of the latter half of the 20th century and wasn't sustainable. He changed. Whether he really changed or whether he changed the rhetoric I would never have the opportunity to know, but indeed he changed.

Q: We're stopping here, in '89 to '91, when you were DAS, dealing with the Caribbean and Mexico. We have covered Haiti and Jamaica, and we'll come to the rest ...

COWAL: And I would say the only other country that we really need to cover, is interesting to talk about, is Guyana.

Q: We'll talk about Guyana, and then we'll also talk about Mexico.

COWAL: Right.

Q: We talked about Mexico before, but we'll talk about Mexico during this period.

COWAL: Good, thanks, Stu.

Q: All right, today is the 23rd of October, 2003. Sally, Guyana.

COWAL: Well, it's not a terribly important country to U.S. policy in any meaningful sense. I think the United States had a not very positive intervention in the political process in Guyana in the early '60s, as part of its general anti-Communism around the world. This succeeded in having a person of East Indian origin, Cheddi Jagan, essentially eliminated from consideration. We decided that Cheddi Jagan was not a true nationalist leader, but was in fact a Communist leader. And his wife was an American, Janet Jagan, who was from Chicago and had been a dentist, I think, in Chicago, from the part of American Jewish intellectual tradition that certainly in the years of the Depression had been very sympathetic with the left, and even perhaps with parts of the Communist left.

I would say a lot of that is pre-Roosevelt. I think most of the people who were able to get onboard with the New Deal saw it as really being a new deal, and eliminating some of the rampant capitalism which had led to the stock market crash and the Depression and so on. But at any rate, be that as it may, the United States had decided that Cheddi Jagan could not be allowed to be the leader of Guyana. So we had given, I think, pretty unconditional

backing to the other political party. As in Trinidad and other countries in the region, there are two major ethnic groups: the Afro-Caribbeans and the East Indian Caribbeans. The political parties essentially represent those ethnic groups. So, in turning our back on Jagan, we also turned in favor of the Afro-Caribbean party, the PNP, which led to Forbes Burnham being elected as prime minister and remaining in power for many years. I think, essentially, all of the excesses of a one-party rule in this very small, former-British colony played themselves out, with a considerable degree of corruption. All of this on a minor scale, because there's not a whole lot in Guyana other than bauxite that anybody really wants to have, or any basis for a real economy. But it is strategically perched there on the shoulder of the continent, above Brazil and next to Suriname, another problem country.

It had gone on for some time. During my time as deputy assistant secretary, we began to achieve a more balanced look at Guyana, in part because our views on who was a nationalist and who was a Communist began to change. The PNP had simply been there for so many years and it was obvious that they were stealing elections and bankrupting the country of whatever little it had. The jobs were for the boys, and the boys were party members. During my time we took a more balanced look at Guyana. And through the efforts of non-governmental organizations, like the Carter Center, preventing the ballot boxes from being whisked away with no supervision, there was finally an election in which Jagan came to power.

I never followed it very closely before that period and I never followed it very closely after that period, and we're now in my current work at PSI (Population Services International). I'm getting involved again in Guyana because it's one of the places in the Caribbean that has a pretty alarming HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection rate, and pretty dismal statistics on poverty and so on. But it has, at least, become a better democracy, more open, with competing parties. Since the '89, '91 time period, there have been three or four elections, and the leadership, the prime ministership, has gone back and forth from one party to the other. That's happened without the kind of ethnic and political violence which had always been feared would happen if finally the Indians got in power. I think that, in that sense, I feel fairly satisfied about that little role that we played there.

Q: Well, did you run into the problem within our own bureaucracy of the true believers? For years, we've been hearing about Jagan.

COWAL: Right.

Q: I pay scant attention to Latin American politics, but, boy, his name came up and his wife's name came up all the time. So I would have thought entrenched in our bureaucracy would be people who had been fighting this battle.

COWAL: Yes, I think that was probably true. Maybe it was more of an accomplishment than I thought at the time to simply say, "Let's give up on that. Let's look at reality today and not get ourselves caught in this time warp." I must say, Jagan gave me personal credit for it more than I probably deserved, years afterwards, when I was ambassador in

Trinidad and there would be some regional meetings, and he had been elected prime minister after I was already in Trinidad. But those elections came about, and his party got the votes and he was chosen prime minister, and from whatever podium he was at, he would say, "Oh, I see Ambassador Cowal is in the audience, and she's responsible for the fact that I got elected, because the United States stopped being in opposition."

I don't know that he was ever received at the White House. He had been received by Kennedy, and then immediately that was sort of reversed. I don't know whether Cheddi, who is now dead, ever got another meeting at the White House. He did come to Washington and was received by the secretary of state and by appropriate American officials and was accorded the honors of a legitimately elected head of government, which he was. I suppose this is much more true of places like Cuba, but Guyana also has a vigorous expat community living in the United States, particularly in and around New York, and another one in Canada. And like many people from the English-speaking Caribbean who emigrate to Canada or Britain or the United States, I think because their educational systems at home are pretty good, they arrive here as reasonably skilled people, as quite skilled individuals, who on top of it are very articulate in the English language. Therefore, I think, compared to immigrants coming from Nicaragua or El Salvador, or places where the educational system is not as good, and of course the native language is not English, they are able to mobilize themselves politically as expat groups quite effectively.

I think that's more true in Canada, which of course they're a bigger part of the population, it being a smaller population. But there are several Guyanese and Trinidadian and Jamaican Canadian members of parliament, for instance, who are elected by those constituencies, and who therefore have a real influence on Canadian national life. That's less true of our national political scene, but it is true that in places like New York, they have some tremendous influence. I remember, for instance, one instance in which Desmond Hoyte was still prime minister, who was one of these reforming leaders, actually. Although he was a product of the Forbes Burnham system, it was Hoyte who, like Gorbachev or somebody, like Salinas, for that matter, and this is partly good pressure from the United States, "I guess we just can't go on in the same way we've gone on before, stealing elections time after time. The world: read the United States, is demanding more of us in terms of openness and so on.

I think Desmond Hoyte was the one who opened the door, which allowed Jagan to walk through it. So there was an occasion in New York, and actually it's the only time I'd ever been to the top of the World Trade Center, the late, lamented World Trade Center. The Guyanese community had – Hoyte must have been in New York for a UN General Assembly or something, so they had organized a dinner for Hoyte to come and speak to the Guyanese community in New York. It took place at Windows on the World, or one of the private dining rooms up there on the top floor of the World Trade Center, and I was invited to attend as the State Department representative, and I decided that indeed I should do that. We obviously had an embassy in Guyana, and despite the fact that we

were critical of their lack of political openness, we were supportive of the fact that he seemed to be a reformer, and so I decided that I would attend the dinner.

I attended the dinner and arrived at the plaza of the World Trade Center to find at least 100 protesters, all with signs, who were protesting my attendance at the dinner, and they were Jagan proponents. Because by my attending the dinner, they saw this as the United States giving its support to the continuation in power of the PNP, which they regarded as a corrupt leadership. These are the things which never make national attention, but count within these little immigrant groups. I think that's something that probably all American representatives in Latin America are more conscious of. Maybe now with some of the big Asian immigration on the west coast and other places, that's equally true, but certainly, many of these countries – the Jamaicans, the Trinidadians, the Guyanese, some of the Latin Americans – have their strong nationalistic groups in the United States, and they care about U.S. policy, which most people don't, to those places.

Anyway, I'm pretty proud of how Guyana came out, despite the fact that it remains a terribly poor country. I have not followed it closely enough to know what economic opportunities they should have been exploiting that they haven't been exploiting. I expect to make a trip there early in the new year, when we will launch a new condom brand in Guyana. I told our representative in Guyana that I'd be happy to go and launch their new condom brand, but that the last time I visited Guyana, it was to open a new U.S. embassy in Georgetown, so I wasn't sure they were quite equivalent.

Q: I have to ask. What's different about a new condom brand?

COWAL: Well, what we do is sort of socially market products. First of all, we try to make condoms more widely available, and more easily accessible, particularly to the people who most need them, which are often young people, who obviously have higher sex drives than most of us. Yet, in many countries around the world, and it's also a way true in the United States, you'll go into a CVS drugstore and the condoms are under glass. So you have to ask for a condom, and a 16-year-old or an 18-year-old, and particularly if he's not at the CVS drugstore on M Street, but in the corner pharmacy in Georgetown, Guyana, where his mother also shops, he may be unwilling to ask the pharmacist for this condom.

So we put a product on the market, which we advertise widely, we make it attractive to young people, and then we try to also have it in places where young people go and where they can buy these things. It's a matter of marketing. Why does Coca-Cola launch a new brand? It's probably the same condom in a new wrapper, which you could have bought yesterday, but it's a jazzy wrapper.

Q: Well, Sally, where were you back in the 1940s when I was a young squirt? I just couldn't get up my nerve most of the time, because there was usually a female clerk there, elderly female clerk. I just couldn't do it.

COWAL: Now put this into the context – or I suppose that may have been the case in your town, too, if it was a small enough town, that you couldn't get away from the neighborhood where someone knew this was young Mr. Kennedy. Then it was terribly hard to do. That may not be true in Mexico City, although we all still live in neighborhoods, and we all still go to corner stores, but it's certainly true in these little places in the Caribbean. So just as in my USIA days, I tried to make sure that the librarians unlocked the books, that they actually wanted people to come in and borrow these books. Because every librarian in the world actually wants to lock up the books, because she looks at the books rather than looking at the people, and that's the same thing we try to do with condoms. We try to say, "These have no value at all as long as they're on the shelf. They only have value if you buy one and you use it at the appropriate time," so that's what we try to do. So I will go to Guyana in January and launch a new condom brand.

Q: You pushed democracy once and now you're pushing condoms.

COWAL: And I'll go by and I'll look at that embassy. I've still got the photograph somewhere of the new embassy building, which is quite nice, and the invitation to the opening, showing me as the featured speaker.

Q: We've already talked a lot about Mexico, because you were there.

COWAL: In those years, we really saw the beginning of NAFTA and we saw the beginnings of some coordination on drug affairs. And I think we saw an encouragement of political openness in Mexico in a way which was not rejected by the Mexicans, done with a deft enough touch that it was not totally rejected, as every overture to the Mexicans had been rejected, as an interference in their internal affairs. I think we've seen now a very different Mexico. Mexico had always stood for many things, but one of them was, "Nobody will interfere in our internal affairs." If you look into their history, this is natural. They were totally laissez faire with respect to anybody else's internal affairs. In other words, Mexico would never play a strong role in human rights in any way, because they always believe that the principle of non-interference and total sovereignty within the borders took precedence over any universal right.

I think that has begun to change in Mexico, and you see Mexican diplomats and Mexican presidents and officials now with a great deal more wariness than the United States would do it, but nonetheless going to Cuba, for instance, and saying that political prisoners should be released. That would have never happened in the Mexico of 20 years ago. So I think '89 to '91 were critical years for a lot of things happening.

Q: Sally, did you see a change in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico?

COWAL: *Secretaria.*

Q: Secretaria. We've talked about this before, but I'm talking about the specific time you were at DAS. It's been traditionally that this was where you put the anti-Americans, the intellectual left and all, because the Mexicans really don't give too much of a damn about ...

COWAL: Well, I think they did begin to change, and that's because it became something that had a cost to it. As long as you didn't care about anything, then taking potshots at U.S. policy was fine. Once you began to want to negotiate something like a NAFTA agreement, that became for them a higher priority. They were much more willing to either name different kinds of individuals to those posts or make sure that the individuals they did name acted under the guidance or the direction of somebody who had the goals of the whole national policy more in mind. We had lived with these days of Porfirio Muñoz Ledo at the UN, and Bernardo Sepulveda as minister of foreign relations, or chancellor of foreign relations, who had been just enormously anti-American, and I think that changed. Well, in more recent times, even more so.

Q: But during this time, there was a different outlook.

COWAL: There was, and they sent a person as ambassador to the United States named Gustavo Petricioli, who had been a treasury secretary, a minister with the hacienda. It was clear he was not a traditional diplomat. He had never been in he diplomatic corps. He was a pragmatist, an economist, a treasury minister, not a foreign relations minister, and yet he had a lot of political clout in Mexico, and a lot of respect. He had done a good job as the treasury secretary, and they sent him as the ambassador to the United States.

I worked very closely with him, and he remained extremely pragmatic. He would seek out U.S. officials. He wanted to have relations with faces in the United States. He and Carla Hills were very good friends. He would cultivate these people. He would do the same kind of thing to U.S. officials as U.S. ambassadors would traditionally have done with Mexican officials, but which had not been the posture of the Mexican government before.

Once you get to know somebody, it's much harder to then pop off at them in a very unthoughtful way. Once he had had Carla Hills to dinner the night before, it was harder to dump all over the United States than if you hadn't, and Petricioli and Baker were terribly good friends, very good friends. So, by putting somebody in this position who wanted to have better relations, and I think we had John Negroponte in Mexico, and we've already talked about him. He has his supporters and his detractors also, but I thought he was a wonderful ambassador to Mexico. [End Side]

Q: You were saying that John Negroponte is a person ...

COWAL: Who works for people. John Negroponte is not an uninstructed ambassador, so if John Negroponte worked for George Bush and Jim Baker, who wanted better relations with Mexico, John took it upon himself to cultivate all the Mexicans. I think a real new element in that was Gustavo Petricioli took it upon himself to cultivate all the important

Americans and to really make friends with them. He traveled extensively in the country, so he knew governors of important states. I think he was a tremendously important figure in this, and when something was about to absolutely blow up, Petricioli had the creditability and the relationship to pick up the phone and call Baker and say, "Jim, my friend Jim, we have a problem here," and then it could sometimes not be a problem.

I was blessed to have worked in Mexico with these two creative ambassadors. I think I was, more than anything else, somebody who had both of their confidences and who could work things behind the scenes. I could sometimes be the early warning system to one or the other or both that things might be about to go off the track, and to use their power and influence, which they both had, to prevent the problem from being a problem, or to capitalize on the opportunity to use Baker's work. It was a good thing.

Q: You point out something that I think anybody who studies foreign policy should understand, that an ambassador to the United States, or a mission to the United States, that there are two ways of operating. One is you come down very formally. You've got a problem, you deal in a formal way with the State Department. The other one is you get out there. You cultivate the State Department, and particularly the secretary of state. If you come from an important country like Mexico, you can do it. If you're from Guyana, you can't. But anyway, but also to get out into Congress, to get with the media, to get out and meet the governors, get ahold of the chattering class. Our government is not, the State Department is not, the be all and end all. Everybody's got a piece of the action, and you've got to get out there and move around.

COWAL: Absolutely, and the Mexicans began to see that that was very important to them, and therefore they began to do it, and to put enough of a staff in Washington to really support being able to have a presence at this level. They had several people who worked Congress, they had a good press office. That was really the beginning of the change of the distant neighbor relationship. They suddenly decided that they wanted to engage, and that was clearly during that period of time. So, in that sense, everything else has been defined by that period of time.

Q: You must have felt sort of like at the creation in a way, didn't you?

COWAL: And I say, watching somebody like Gus Petricioli, who was not a diplomat by training, but he was a consummate diplomat. He spoke English well, very accented, but he spoke it, and understood it, and understood the nuances. We had some bad moments, also. I remember the day he was traveling, I think, to Switzerland. His daughter was in a boarding school in Switzerland, and so he was leaving from Dulles Airport. He was a very short little man, who was always sort of impeccably dressed, but sort of dressed in a way that might make a law enforcement wonder who the hell this guy was. In other words, he would have heavy gold cufflinks and a Rolex watch and a striped suit, and an Hermes tie. He looked very Italian, rather than Mexican, and was probably about 5'5", and had a beautiful leather briefcase.

So, one day, he was getting ready to board a flight to Zurich at Dulles Airport, and they just pulled him over as one of these random checks to say, "Well, what are you carrying in your briefcase" and so on. He at that point said, "Well, excuse me, but I'm the Mexican ambassador to the United States, and I really have diplomatic immunity and you really can't ask me what I have in my briefcase," whereupon they said, "Oh, yeah?" And he said, "I know your boss." Her name somehow escapes me, but Carol, the director of Customs. And they said, "Carol who?" And, "I know Sally Cowal. She's the deputy assistant secretary." And he missed his flight in this process, and then they finally realized who he was, and of course he was not asked to do these things, but I must say we had a pretty mad Gus Petricioli. If we hadn't had the good relationship that we had with him – it was just a little example of the fact that 10 years previously, or five years previously, they could have created out of that an incredible incident, with the Mexican papers all over it, of the Mexican ambassador is subject to search and missed his flight. Although he was pretty damn mad, he didn't immediately call Televisa or Noumex on the phone and say, "Put this in the papers." We were able to handle it so that other than the five people who knew about it, nobody ever knew about it.

Q: Sally, we're coming to the point in '91, I guess, that the new administration is coming in, and what happened to you? We're talking about the Clinton administration.

COWAL: Well, actually, that didn't come until '92.

Q: Yes, that's right. Actually, '93.

COWAL: Well, actually, they came in in January '93, elected in '92. I was already out of harm's way, as ambassador to Trinidad.

Q: How did that appointment come about?

COWAL: You know this, because you've talked to 2,500 people who have done the same thing, but there's always a certain jockeying for which positions will be political and which positions will be career, and how does the State Department decide among the career positions who is going to fill them? I must say, I was pretty anxious to get out of Washington for very personal reasons, so was anxious to get the first job that came along, actually, and that was Trinidad. I had been to Trinidad, and I liked Trinidad. Although it had been mostly a political post, there had been, I guess, Sheldon Krys, who was a couple before me, had been ...

Q: I've interviewed Sheldon.

COWAL: The only other career ambassador to Trinidad that I know of.

Q: I've talked to people. They've had a few political appointees who were sort of disastrous.

COWAL: They have, indeed. Some before me and some after me. But for some reason, Trinidad at that point in time bubbled up to the top of the list, and I guess in part because it was late in the Bush administration, because there had been 12 years of Republicans, and I guess most people who wanted to get embassies already had them. Although why Bush wasn't out raising money for his next campaign, I don't know, and therefore rewarding somebody, but at any rate, there were no takers, and I held up my hand and it went through the process and I got the job.

Q: Well, you were ambassador to Trinidad from when to when?

COWAL: I was ambassador from '91 to '94.

Q: What was the situation like in Trinidad?

COWAL: Well, I said what we needed to talk about in the Caribbean was Haiti and Guyana and so on, but Trinidad had its moment also, because in 1990 there was a takeover, a coup attempt that initially succeeded. I don't know that it was a coup attempt so much as a hostage taking. A group of radical black Muslims took over the parliament house and held the prime minister and, I can't remember now, I think it was 26 members of parliament. I think about 24 of them were there, a couple had missed the session, but the 26 members of the lower house of parliament were held hostage for about a week, and a couple of people were killed in the process. It was with the help of the United States – we sent a team of FBI and people who specialized in hostage negotiation, and it was ended peacefully, in the sense of the hostage takers walking out and surrendering and being arrested and then put on trial. This is now many years ago, but they were finally amnestied after some period of time in jail.

But Trinidad had its little political moment. That was just about the time of the Gulf War. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which led to Operation Desert Storm, was taking place about the same time, so not that Trinidad would have gotten much notice anyway, but it got none, because it was totally overtaken by events. I went down, and the ambassador before me had been a political appointee, and I must say, a real mixed bag, good in some ways, not good in other ways. Good in the sense that there had been for the first time in Trinidad, they had also, like Guyana, had these rigidly defined ethnic political parties, the country being about 45 percent Afro, 45 percent East Indian, and the other 10 percent being Chinese, Lebanese, Portuguese, some sort of leftover English colonists. But it was sort of equally divided between the two major ethnic groups, and suddenly in about '89, '88 or '89, a sort of middle way political party called the NAR (National Alliance for Reconstruction) had sprung up, with an Afro-Caribbean leader who had defected from the major African party, a guy named A.N.R. Robinson.

A.N.R. Robinson led the first sort of mixed government in Trinidad. He was actually from Tobago. I think he was also the first and only prime minister from Tobago, which is the smaller sister island of Trinidad. The two principal parties sort of divided and he was able to make a coalition. His party didn't hold all that many seats, but in the

parliamentary system, they were able to get the government together. They were more open to reform in the economic system. Trinidad, since its beginning, like Guyana, had been governed always by the African party, because that's sort of who the British left in charge. They left the Africans in charge because they were easier to run than the Indians, as far as I can tell. The Indians, they were more rural, they were more commercial, they were more entrepreneurial. The Africans were more the civil servants and the sort of political leaders, so government after government after government after government, not so corrupt in Trinidad as in Guyana, but they were able to mobilize their forces better, and they continued to get elected.

Trinidad has another important difference with Guyana, and that's that it has oil money. Now it has natural gas money, and it has a lot of money. At one point shortly after independence, which was 1962 for that whole region, Trinidad had the highest per capita income in the region, after the United States and Canada. So it was the third-highest per capita income, and this was a country that at that time was probably under 1 million people. Now it's probably 1.5 million, but nonetheless had a very high per capita income. There were always stories like even the ice was imported from Miami, and a higher per capita consumption of Johnnie Walker Black Label than anyplace in the world.

Q: Whiskey.

COWAL: Whiskey, of premium whiskey. So they lived high on the hog. They decided to, in this way of being, they were this African party, although they were very rich, their philosophy was more or less socialist. They saw government as the answer to most problems and the government should run most things. They pretty much squeezed out any opportunity for the private sector to do very much in Trinidad, and also they protected the little bit that there was by establishing very high tariff rates and non-tariff barriers to the importation of foreign goods. I think with the election of Robinson, who actually is quite a distinguished figure. He's now the president of the country, which is an appointed position, but he's I think best known for being the intellectual author of this International Criminal Court, which the Clinton administration signed onto and the Bush administration is signing out of. But this idea that there should be an International Criminal Court for drug dealers and terrorists and people like this is really an A.N.R. Robinson idea. He was quite a distinguished scholar and jurist and economist.

Gargano was my predecessor, and he paid almost no attention to the running of an embassy whatsoever, or doing the traditional things that ambassadors do. Still he had a pretty good relationship with that government, and he was quite supportive. I think they were unusual enough and not tied so much to the past that he was able to establish a pretty good relationship with them. The highest point of criticism might be that when this coup attempt took place, he wasn't anywhere around, and nobody knew he wasn't anywhere around.

He never understood that if you're the U.S. ambassador, you're supposed to be in charge, and if you're not there, then your DCM is supposed to be the chargé and is supposed to be

in charge. He didn't play the social game. He just sort of disappeared on weekends, and people assumed he disappeared to the quiet of his lovely residence, but in fact, I guess most weekends he went back to his family and friends in suburban New York, which is from whence he came, from Long Island. At the time the coup took place, he was actually in Long Island, and nobody knew that.

He was certainly not traditional, but I think in his time we began to see that there were potentially some real problems in the drug trafficking arena, and that there were some real opportunities to have Trinidad become more open to the international trading system, and particularly trade relations with the United States, and a more open economy. So I was the inheritor of that little bit of opening, and then new elections came along very soon. The African party reestablished its hold on the country, and my time was with them in office, with Patrick Manning as prime minister. But I think I was able to play quite well on the beginnings that Gargano had established.

Q: All right, well, we'll pick it up the next time there and obviously we'll talk about the drug business.

COWAL: So the drugs and the economy being the two major issues.

Q: And whether there were any roots of anti-Americanism there, because the first prime minister – what was his name?

COWAL: Eric Williams.

Q: He really kept us at a considerable distance.

COWAL: Yes, indeed. I must say that I was regarded as being, I don't know, you either loved me or hated me. I became sort of a big figure there, and the people who didn't like it were those who thought that since Eric Williams always kept the Americans at a distance, that was the way it ought to continue to run. The fact that I had pretty good relations, certainly with certain people in the Manning government, and indeed with Manning himself, was a point of criticism for both them and for me. And yet, I think the trend was exceedingly good for Trinidad. I think that, particularly on the economic side, they made a lot of the right decisions. I like to think that I had a background role in terms of, not just me, but presenting to some individuals and to some materials that made them take certain decisions that have been enormously good for the country. So where they had been very rich, as I described, soon after independence, their oil reserves lessened and their way of trying to mastermind the economy from the top down was a colossal failure, and the country got poorer and poorer.

That has now, from about the time I was there, again reversed itself, through some luck since there's a lot of natural gas – more than North America has, actually, so that's enormously important. But, also, I am a great believer that if you make certain mistakes and you continue to operate the same way, you'll probably end up in the same place. So if

they had continued to operate in the same way in the 1990s as they had in the 1960s, the natural gas boom wouldn't be any more sustaining to them than the oil boom was in the '60s. But they have made certain course corrections in the economy, which have survived the change from the NAR, which was a coalition government, to PNP, a Manning government, to then the leader of the opposition, the Indian party, taking over, which happened also when I was there, and now back to the Manning government, but continuing on the same broad economic thrust, which is doing very well.

Q: Okay, so, we'll pick this up the next time. We're ready to talk about your arriving, your relationship with the various governments, the economic side, and you'll talk about maybe the disassembly, which I think the curse of all the British colonies, former British colonies, is that damn London School of Economics approach.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: They've done more damage than the Marxist movement.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: Today is the 17th of November, 2003. Sally, first place, again, you were in Trinidad and Tobago from when to when?

COWAL: From August 1991 to August 1994.

Q: Okay, well, we talked about when you arrived, but let's talk about dealing with the government, and what was your observation at that time of sort of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago?

COWAL: The economy had suffered tremendously, both from forces outside of its control and from things that were within its control. It had gone from a position at the time of independence, which was '62, or in the late '60s and early '70s, from being in per capita income terms the third highest in the Western Hemisphere after the United States and Canada, based on a petroleum income, to being one in which – gross national product had fallen tremendously. Per capita income had fallen tremendously, still not to the levels of poverty and deprivation that you see in many countries around the world, and including in Central America and in South America, but nonetheless there had been real economic hardship experienced by the country. And it wasn't a very well-managed economy. At the time of independence, the leader of Trinidad was a guy named Eric Williams, who was one of a series, like Manley's father and other outstanding leaders in the Caribbean, who had been British educated. I'm not sure in his case it was LSE (London School of Economics) or not. It might well have been. It might have been somewhere else, I don't remember.

Eric Williams was one of a generation of independence leaders, and he had very strong ideas on things. One of them was of basically a socialist point of view. He thought it was

better for the people of Trinidad that the government have the commanding heights of the economy, I think they called it. He also had made a clear decision that because Trinidad and Tobago had this oil reserve, had had oil – I can't remember what the height of it was. When I got there, they were still pumping about 500 barrels of oil a day, which compared to Saudi Arabia is nothing.

Q: It was 500,000, I think I saw.

COWAL: Right. But made them a little niche sort of producer, with several foreign oil companies, several of which were then nationalized, or they took over their oilfields, not to the extent that PEMEX (*Petróleos Mexicanos*) had, for instance, of nationalizing everything, but still making it an unwelcome climate for foreign investment and deciding that it would be to the best interest of people of Trinidad and Tobago for the government to exploit this facility itself. And he had also made a decision that because they had another source of revenue, they wouldn't become a tourist destination. Both of those things had legacies, not all bad, but certainly not all good. I mean, tourist economies are notoriously bad for trickling down wealth, and they can tend to make people somewhat subservient and so on, or feeling that they are. The jobs are mostly low-wage jobs. You can see the bad effects of things like that in places like Barbados and Jamaica and other countries which have relied much more than Trinidad ever did on tourism.

On the other hand, a tourist economy, or at least having a tourism sector, does, A, provide a lot of jobs, and, B, it provides sort of an opening on the world. It provides access to people from other cultures, and Trinidad sort of shut itself off from that. So way down there at the bottom of the Caribbean basin, seven miles from Venezuela, it was kind of out there floating by itself, not really very well connected to anyone else in the world. Obviously, linguistically not a part of Venezuela or a part of the Latin American continent, not having many visitors from Europe or the United States, because they had no tourist industry, nothing that tourists particularly wanted to visit.

The decision to do it on their own in the oil business also limited the exposure to new ideas and new technology and an expat community. That also had its isolating phase, so that I don't think Trinidadians very much lived in the world. The oil industry soon became noncompetitive as a nationalized industry, because the oil – and natural gas then actually began to come on in a very big way. But most of it was offshore, and a lot of it was deepwater located, and so the amount of capital infrastructure and capital investment needed to reach this oil was just beyond the reach of a single little national oil company, or oil companies. So I think after 20 years or so of running on that tack, it was kind of running out of gas by the time I got there. Yet, the fact that there had been a lot of wealth meant there had been a lot of national pride, which is both good and not so good. It's mostly good, unless it puts you in a position, as I think it did with a lot of people in Trinidad, of believing the saying that was very common there, but which people really believed, and that was that God was a Trini, a Trinidadian.

God must have been a Trini, because alone of all these Caribbean countries, they had this enormous resource. Therefore, they could afford to be isolated, they could afford to be running their own little two-bit society for themselves, with a lot of rules and regulations. The foreign investment laws were extremely complicated, lots of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, so in this still-relatively wealthy country, you would go to the supermarket, and there were two supermarket chains, as I recall, and the shelves would be virtually empty. What they had on the shelves were overpriced light bulbs produced in the country, and overpriced breakfast cereals produced in Trinidad, and almost no foreign products. Of course, a lot of things you can't produce in Trinidad. It's not a big enough territory, for instance, to have a beef industry, or even much of a dairy industry. There's not enough land for that, so you ate pretty much chicken and fish, because that's what you could grow and what was available. There were, of course, some wonderful fruits and vegetables that were produced, but in terms of anything that had to come from abroad, it was a pretty meager existence.

Q: Coming to this, did we have any interest in wanting to see it open up or not?

COWAL: Well, we did. If you recall, the time for this was midpoint in the Bush administration, and certainly there was interest. We talked on earlier things about NAFTA, but then there was always interest in sort of having a Free Trade of the Americas thing, which still may or may not now come into being in 2005. So they take a long time, particularly when you're talking about smaller and more fragile economies. We had had the Caribbean Basin Initiative Acts, two of them by then, which were meant to stimulate at least a sort of a *maquiladora* sector in the Caribbean.

Q: You might explain what a maquiladora is.

COWAL: A maquiladora is an offshore manufacturing facility in which the raw materials are exported from the United States, labor is performed in the foreign country, and then the finished product is exported back to the United States, and the only tax on it is the value added by the labor. So this, for a while, and certainly it was in its heyday in those years, seemed to be the answer to everything. It was going to provide a source of jobs for countries in the Caribbean and Mexico, and it was going to provide less expensive goods for the American consumer.

In the Caribbean, it was mostly textiles, although Dominican Republic had, I think, a Black & Decker plant and some small appliance manufacturing. Haiti was famous for producing soccer balls, I think. Most of the soccer balls in the world were, for a while, produced in Haiti. Trinidad never had any of that, either.

Q: It didn't subscribe to the plan?

COWAL: No, it didn't subscribe to the plan, and that was mostly because it didn't have a lot of low-wage labor, because the labor had, both through the oil industry, which provided higher-wage jobs, and then the fact that for good or for bad, and I think it turned

out to be for bad, but at any rate, they were behind these high-tariff barriers, doing a lot of their own manufacturing of the bad light bulbs and the bad breakfast cereals. At least they had jobs available. They still exported some sugar cane. That was mostly an East Indian thing. The East Indians had been brought to Trinidad starting in 1836, when the British Empire outlawed slavery and the black slaves from Africa were no longer brought. Indentured labor from India and China was brought to Trinidad so that the population base still includes Indians and Chinese. And the Indians, who are much more numerous than the Chinese – in fact, they're about half of the population – were both the shop owners and the business owners, but also still the laborers in the sugar fields. So there remained a sugar industry, and a sugar quota for Trinidad, with the United States sugar quota. It was there like almost everywhere else also a failing industry, kept alive only by the small quota, but with a large price. The U.S. sugar policy, which is a whole different story that I'm sure a lot of people you've talked to know more about than I do, which seems one of those remnants of a bygone era that nonetheless continues to be our agricultural policy.

At any rate, yes, the United States had interests in Trinidad, not for any particular reason except as part of the grand scheme of things. We believed that the best government was that which interfered the least in the economy, that free trade was an idea whose time had come, that if widgets were better produced somewhere else, they ought to be produced somewhere else, and that every country would find its own thing that it could do best. Certainly I went, A, believing this myself, and, B, as U.S. ambassador, believing that this was the path that should be followed. I must say, when I first got to Trinidad, and I think we talked about this a little bit the last time, but the first racially mixed political party had managed to get enough seats in the parliament to have the prime minister, a guy named A.N.R. Robinson, from the National Alliance for Reconstruction, I think it was called, was the prime minister. He was kind of like a Ross Perot, I guess. I mean, it was a third way, a different political party, and not really so much of a political party as defectors from the two main political parties, therefore creating sort of a middle way, and something which was certainly mixed race.

I think that was terribly important in Trinidad's development, because following his government, although the majority party was once again reelected, in the elections following that, the Indian party was elected. So I think that Robinson himself was, and he's still alive, is an African Trinidadian, but it paves the way for there to be ministers who were Indians. I think that set the stage that in fact Indians could govern this country. Economically, they were more or less onboard with this program, although they didn't take dramatic steps. I think one of the things that was true about Trinidad is although the situation was not good economically, it was never bad enough to promote dramatic change.

It's an ego trip to be an ambassador and think anybody cares about your ideas, or ought to care about your ideas. I think you're there to be a faithful presenter and interpreter of the administration for which you're working.

Q: But there is a certain point where you are looking at the situation in place and taking the policy and trying to meld the two.

COWAL: Right, and I think ambassadors play a tremendously important role, don't get me wrong. But I became enormously high profile there, partly out of design and partly I think it just happened. But, at any rate, I would always be asked by the press whether I was representing the views of my government and so on, and I would say, "I'm not an uninstructed ambassador. I'm not out here on my own brief, because I think that would be doing a disservice."

Q: Had their been, essentially, a series of almost uninstructed ambassadors?

COWAL: There had.

Q: I won't say uninstructed, but you know what I mean, people who weren't really policy tuned. They were given a payoff to go out to ...

COWAL: Yes, there was, certainly with the exception of Sheldon Krys, who was a career ambassador, and I might have been only the second. I'm still only the second, as far as I know. In fact, I know that since me there has not been another career person. Sheldon, first of all, came out of the sort of security field. He was not particularly, I don't think, politically attuned. I think he did a fine job and I think some of the non-career people did a fine job, also.

Q: I've interviewed Sheldon.

COWAL: And it would be interesting. Part of what's interesting about this would be looking at his view of Trinidad versus my view of Trinidad. But Sheldon was followed by this guy named Charles Gargano, who was not career, and who had some of the right instincts, and a lot of the wrong instincts, but who was an Al D'Amato. He was put there essentially by Al D'Amato, who was then the senator from New York, and he was part of this sort of Italian American mafia in New York state.

Q: You're not referring to the criminal element. We're just talking about a cohesive ethnic group.

COWAL: A cohesive ethnic group that was very important in New York politics and in Republican Party politics, and which had been part of the election of Reagan and of Bush, and therefore got its normal payoffs. So Charles, now, I think is part of the Pataki administration, but he made a lot of money being a paving contractor or a road contractor on Long Island, so he had a lot of money. He remained very interested in politics and business in Long Island, or in New York state, so he devoted some of his time to Trinidad, but he wasn't like me. I was a 47-year-old. I had just been a deputy assistant secretary of state. I was filled with vim and vigor and beans, and this was now my new little playground, and there were things that I wanted to do.

I believed that both an opening of the economy and doing something about taking the drug problem seriously, which was becoming an increasing problem in Trinidad, were priorities of the Bush administration. And I believed they should also be priorities for Trinidad, so I determined fairly early on that that would be what I devoted especially my public efforts toward. Of course, I was not only full of sort of vim and vigor, but I had grown up in the diplomatic service as a public affairs officer. That's what I was, so I didn't see my job as having the best-organized GSO (general services officer) section. I wanted the consular stuff to run well, and when it doesn't run well, it can always be a pain in the ass, and you needed qualified people to do those jobs. I had a pretty good team, considering that I think one of the liabilities of these small posts is also that good people generally don't find them very exciting and therefore don't want to serve in them.

I always said, also, that I never invited myself to give a speech. I was always asked to do things, and that starts out with the sort of softballs. You're invited by the Rotary Club, or you're invited by American Women's Club, or whatever it is, and so I think you build these things gradually, while you're learning what the country is all about. Also, it was a time of great change. Whereas Sheldon Krys entered into a period of time where things had been with the same political party since independence, I was there after this dramatic change had taken place, and shortly after I got there, I think it was about three or four months.

I would say the other thing I had to deal with, almost immediately, was the fallout from the fall of Aristide, and the question as to whether or not other countries in the Caribbean would accept Haitian migrants. Once again there was this tremendous outpouring, or fear of an outpouring, of waves of refugees and migrants coming from Haiti. Of course, they weren't naturally going to come south. The question was, would countries take them? One of the things I had to deal with, one of the only things I really had to deal with the Robinson government on, because it didn't last long after my arrival, was the question of whether they would take Haitians or not. The government agreed that they would. I don't think any ever came, but they went through a long debate in parliament and so on.

I guess that was probably the first time I was noticed by the press, except of course as an American ambassador in a very small place, which has close relations with the United States, or close and sometimes difficult relations with the United States. You can't not be noticed from the day you arrive. The first time that what I was proposing on behalf of my government was controversial in the country was this proposition of whether or not Trinidad would, not as we presented it do a favor for the United States, but express a certain Caribbean solidarity and extend an open welcome to people from Haiti who needed or felt they needed to leave Haiti. And they agreed to do that, but it was clearly at a time when unemployment was rising in Trinidad.

This oil boom was over, it was more than over, it was running on empty. Exports were dropping in oil. Nothing had really replaced oil as an export. The government was trying to do things like make breakfast cereal and run a steel mill, none of which it was doing

very well. Then, in the middle of it, you come along and ask them to take, I think it was 500 or something, not a huge number of Haitian refugees, of whom there was every expectation they might never go home. After all, the countries that are sort of Haiti's more immediate neighbors, and certainly between Haiti and the United States, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, mostly, and Jamaica, had had large influxes, particularly the Bahamas, of Haitian refugees.

I seem to recall at the time I was deputy assistant secretary that the total of Haitian migrants in the Bahamas was something like 40,000. If you think of the size of the Bahamas, the 30 little islands or whatever they are, but most of them the size of this room, you had a large number. And they were somewhat destabilizing. I mean, if you had an economy like the Bahamas that was a tourist economy, and mostly a tourist economy catering to the European, Canadian and U.S., who wanted only a place to get a cheap beer on the beach and fun in the sun when the climate is cold in New York or Toronto, they're looking to offer the lowest common denominator and the lowest price in tourism. So if you can hire a Haitian for 40 cents a day to make the beds, rather than a Bahamian for $4.00 or something, you're obviously offering a lower-cost product.

It was somewhat controversial that Trinidad said they would take migrants, whom I don't believe ever came. That moment passed, things went on, it evolved. But the first thing I remember having to go to the government of Robinson about, the first time I ever had to deliver a demarche as an ambassador was the question of Haitian refugees.

Q: What was our proposal? What was in it for them?

COWAL: I suppose better relations with the United States. I don't know that there was anything. In Trinidad, we were missing one of the levers that many of my fellow ambassadors had, and that was aid. We had no aid to Trinidad, no bilateral assistance, because they had passed some point of the per capita income having been $2,500 or something, and that put them out of range for getting any aid money. So we couldn't offer anything very direct, but certainly in the Robinson government wanted a good relationship with the United States. I think we were also able to sell it on – that the Caribbean ought to somewhat shoulder the burden, take responsibility for its own defense. They couldn't totally take responsibility for their own defense, but step up to the plate, some of these things, so they agreed they would do it.

At any rate, I spent the first, I suppose, four or six months talking to people, learning, deciding what I would do, as I think all ambassadors do. I had an advantage, because I had been deputy assistant secretary for the region, so I had visited Trinidad a couple of times in that capacity. I had met several of the business leaders, as well as government leaders, on my prior visits there. I knew the issues, of course, because I had been working the portfolio. I must say, it was not terribly difficult, and I felt I had something to say and a lot of time on my hands, actually.

So I tried to learn something about the culture. One of the first things we did was take a course at the University of the West Indies on carnival judging, and carnival is a very big deal for Trinidad and Tobago. It's sort of an expression of the national culture, and it rival's Brazil's carnival in terms of the amount of money invested on it. It's a real industry, the number of people who participate in it, the fact that it sort of is a real uniting factor for the country. It provides an artistic expression. So there was a course at the University of the West Indies, a credit course, an evening course, on carnival judging that was actually one of the best things I did, because it went through really the whole history of the country, in a way, how this had come to be a phenomenon, and the great musical leaders, who were legendary in the country.

Q: As a high school kid, I think of Lord Defender and Roaring Lion. I used to have all those records.

COWAL: The Roaring Lion.

Q: It was the only time I think Trinidad ever really crossed my radar.

COWAL: And the Andrews Sisters, who made popular a song called, "Looking for the Yankee Dollar," or "Drinking Rum and Coca-Cola," which was in fact about prostitutes. There was a large Navy base at Chaguaramas, which is out on one of the points in Trinidad, because it was where we in World War II ran the net sort of on the bottom of the Caribbean, trying to catch submarines passing from the Caribbean to the Atlantic, or actually passing from the Atlantic to the Caribbean, where we were afraid that German submarines would come. So we had two big bases in Trinidad in the war, Waller Air Force Base, because it was a good jumping-off point to North Africa. So we'd fly planes from east or west coast U.S., refuel at Waller Air Force Base and then take off.

Q: I think they went to the tip of Brazil or something like that, and then onto Liberia and on their way. I mean, it was quite a network.

COWAL: It was quite a network. So there was a large Air Force base in the middle of the country, and then this Navy base out at the end. So the Andrews Sisters' song, which was actually stolen from a Trinidadian, was the "Drinking Rum and Coca-Cola," and "Looking for the Yankee Dollar." There was a lot to be learned about the whole history of the country, and in a way, the history of the relations with the United States, through learning about the carnival. But that was also something that the press found very interesting, that this American ambassador would actually want to know something about the country.

So I began to be invited a lot, and it's a very joining kind of country, I think the way a lot of small countries are, and particularly those that have had a long British tradition. People are joiners. They volunteer for the Boy Scouts, they're Rotarians, they belong to the Kiwanis Club. They have the Sophomores, or whatever they're called. There are all kinds of little organizations, the Red Cross of this, and so on. They all have monthly meetings,

and they're all looking for somebody to come and talk to them about something, so I began to be invited to do this a lot.

I accepted a lot of those invitations. It was a way to see the country. They were in various locations, including in Tobago. It was a way to meet people who were not necessarily in Port of Spain, get to know the civic society, the business leaders. Then I would need to stay something, of course, and I would say, well, you have a couple of choices here. You're invited to do something. You can accept or you can not accept. That's the first choice. So you decide you'll accept, and then you can say something or you can say nothing. If you're going to accept and you're going to give up your time, and you're going to make everybody sit there for 20 minutes and listen to you, you might as well have something to say, so I had something to say.

I was very lucky, because I had a great speechwriter, and he was not the public affairs officer. He was the political officer.

Q: Who was that?

COWAL: His name was Norm – it will come to me in a moment. Anyway, he was a political officer who was not in all ways a brilliant political officer, but he was a very good speechwriter. He could take these ideas about why it was useful to have a more open economy, why the country needed to do something about drugs. And those became the sort of recurring themes of what I talked about, mostly. People liked it, and the newspapers would cover it, and the newspapers would sometimes cover it positively and sometimes not so positively, and when they covered it not very positively, that got more people interested in it.

Mostly, when they covered it not positively was because it was believed to be an interference in the internal affairs of this country, that I would come and I would opine that the economy ought to be more open, or the fact that if you looked at the statistics, there were more hospital admissions for drugs. There were more crimes, there was more of every factor. Although there had not been large-scale drug shipments found, if it walked like a duck and it quacked like a duck, it was probably a duck. So all of the things that we saw were indications that more drugs were coming through the country, and that some of them were staying in the country, and some of them were causing corruption and some of them were causing drug addiction.

At any rate, I had an interesting three-year run. One of the sort of most controversial speeches I ever made that people quoted ever after was the same speech, basically, but it was right after the new prime minister was elected, Patrick Manning. There was a big event, and I think it was November or so a year after I'd been there. So I'd been there maybe a year and a half when he had been elected a few months before. One of the newspapers had decided to call him the man of the year, like a Time magazine "Man of the Year." So this was the Express newspaper, which also had a television station. They

made him man of the year, but they asked me to give the feature address at this banquet, at which he would be honored.

So, using my wonderful political officer, whose name I still can't remember, but I will – Antical, Norm Antical. So Norm wrote a speech called, "Now is the Time," and it was all about what a wonderful man Manning was, I was honoring him, but that now was the time to do something he had been elected to the leadership role. Now was the time to get on with addressing the problems that had in fact been challenging the country for a number of years, such as the fact that the economy was running on empty. It was a praise of him, but it was at the same time a strong speech, indicating that now was the time, that there was not much time to waste, that the indicators were all in the wrong direction.

I think it was expected that what you would say in a speech like that was, "What a wonderful man he is, how fantastic it's been that he came back." His party had been defeated, this NAR had come in, and he had completely sort of reorganized the party, became its leader, challenged the elections, been elected, and that you were just supposed to say what a wonderful thing that was, period. I said, "What a wonderful thing that was, now do something with it." I think that's what really sort of launched my career in Trinidad and made me a very controversial figure.

Q: How did you relate to the new Manning government?

COWAL: Well, I got along well with some people and not with all. Those who didn't want to hear about these things, or if they wanted to hear about them, didn't want to hear about them from any foreigner, let alone the American ambassador, did not have very good relations with me. The people who believed what I believed, of course, I think I got along with extremely well. Basically, I had no problems with Manning, although I don't think he was one of my greatest boosters. It's a difficult role. I think I did what needed to be done. I think the country changed in part because of that, or in part because that lit a spark. Obviously all you could do as the outsider was light that spark, and then see whether or not there was material there to make a fire. And there was material to make a fire, and there were enough people who wanted to do that.

There were substantive things that happened. I got an American Chamber of Commerce started. It's something I think Sheldon Krys had tried to start, and the only companies that had enough money were the oil companies, and they were not interested. Somehow, we got a little coalition going. There was a small AIG office there, there was a small IBM offices. The oil company personnel had changed and the Texaco guy had been part of an American Chamber of Commerce somewhere else and understood the role it could play. Around my breakfast table, we got these business leaders to come and to talk about that. They started an American Chamber, and I think there were 12 founding members. Last year, they asked me to go back and make the 10th anniversary speech to the American Chamber of Commerce, and it now has 200 members. All the Trinidadian companies also belong to it, and they have become a strong voice for supporting these changes and a more open economy.

The government did the changes, but it if it had not had a strong business community behind it, if it had still been the old protectionists holding onto their lousy light bulbs, it wouldn't have happened. So I think forming an American Chamber that just got associated – there's an association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America. Again, it helped break Trinidad out of this isolation of where they had really been.

Q: Have they felt the isolation?

COWAL: Well, no, because they had been in their little – you don't know you're isolated unless you know there's something else out there, I think. I'm sure some people did. Some people went away to study, and it's like people who can go away to study and then come home to their little town of 250 people and be very content that Sam is the druggist and Bob is the gas station owner and Phil runs a grocery store, and it's always been that way. And it will be their children who inherit these things, and we all have our little role, and it all functions and everyone has enough to eat.

The outside currents of a much more global economy and drug trafficking made that continuing isolation impossible. Trinidad was being dragged into the 21st century, whether it liked it or not. At least by having a group of people in the country who didn't just want to put their heads down anymore and hope it would go away, but who were willing to take it forward, to confront these challenges, I think has made a tremendous amount of difference. I give this American Chamber of Commerce, which became the leading business group in the country – it totally became many more non-American companies than American companies.

Q: Which usually happens if it's successful.

COWAL: So it became enormously successful, and they began to attract foreign investment, and so to work on the laws of the country that were inhibitors to foreign investment, to look for foreign capital. I think the last year I was there they actually had something like $5 billion in foreign investment. Now, that's tremendous for an economy of that size, and that included some pretty high-tech companies who were looking at the processes that needed to be done in an industry that could benefit by the fact that there was a cheap and ready supply of natural gas. As they began to bring the natural gas on stream, they did put a plant to liquefy natural gas and send it to the United States. They also were able to harness a lot of it at home, and therefore to do – for instance, they had an iron carbide plant. Iron carbide takes iron ore, which was coming out of Brazil, and through some kind of a heat process reduces iron ore to iron carbide, which is a sand-like thing, and therefore shipping that forward to the United States. First of all, it's not flammable, which iron ore is, and secondly, of course, its weight is much reduced. So they used their natural gas in a way to have a successful iron carbide plant.

Nucor Steel came in, which is one of the only successful steel companies in the United States, out of North Carolina, and they began to produce a competitively priced steel in Trinidad. So things with foreign investment began to work as sort of cutting-edge, or if not cutting-edge, at least modern, technology, and Trinidad did very well at attracting those kinds of companies. Now, I say, God still is a Trini, because it's enormously blessed by having these huge natural resources, but it also began to do a better job at exploiting them.

I think in the long run, again, the economy is doing quite well. I don't think it's the third-largest per capita income, but it's not bad, and even though the government no longer runs all of this stuff, the benefits, because the tax base is higher, are in fact in some meaningful degree, I think, helping the people. They also began to do a little bit of tourist exploitation, tourist industry, not on Trinidad, but on Tobago, which is a beautiful Caribbean island. Trinidad has some pretty things, but wouldn't compete with the rest of the Caribbean, but Tobago certainly does compete. It's got those beautiful reefs where it's wonderful for scuba diving and snorkeling, and gorgeous beaches. When I arrived, there wasn't one international resort on Tobago, and now there's a Hilton and there are several others. Again, there was just no incentive to do it. Nobody wanted to do it, and the opening up and the changing of the foreign investment regime meant that that changed.

Q: Was there a Trinidadian immigrant establishment in the United States, and did this play any particular role?

COWAL: Very small. I used to say, "There's poverty here, but there's no misery," and that was pretty much true. More or less, everybody could find enough to eat, and there were not wonderful schools, but some schooling available, primary and secondary schooling. There was primary healthcare available. So I think compared to poorer countries like Guyana or Jamaica, there were some Trinidadian expats, but that was not a huge factor. There were more, I think, in Canada and the UK than there ever were in the United States. There were a couple of very famous ones, of course, V.S. Naipaul being one.

Q: Tell me, did he win the Nobel Prize or not?

COWAL: He won the Nobel Prize. Another, not a Trinidadian by birth, but by longtime residence until he went to England also, was Derek Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize a couple of years before Naipaul, an Afro Trinidadian who writes magnificent lyric poetry, absolutely astounding. He won the Nobel Prize in 1992, and then Naipaul in 2001.

Q: Did you have any connection with these people?

COWAL: I met Naipaul. I never met Walcott. They were both living outside the country. I was quite close to Naipaul's family. He had two sisters who remained in the country, and now one of his nephews, who is in Canada, who is the son of one of these sisters whom I know, is becoming a very well-known Canadian writer. So it runs in the family.

One of the sisters whom I knew wrote absolutely magnificently – never published, as far as I know, but wrote a family memoir that is truly an amazing piece of writing. Shiva Naipaul was their brother, who wrote extensively and was published a lot by The New Yorker and he died at a very early age. But four children, two boys and two girls, and amazingly talented as writers.

Of course, Naipaul was a caustic observer of this society, and of all societies, really. It's just whether it's the American South or the Muslim world or India.

Q: He went back to India and did not go there in a rosy mood.

COWAL: No, actually, his first book on India was called An Area of Darkness, and it was one of the first things I read before going to India. Somebody recommended it to me and said, "Well, if you take this to India, take it in a brown paper wrapper." I thought he had a lot of things right about India, particularly India of the '50s and '60s, which was what he was writing about. His Bend in the River is magnificent, essentially African colonial societies. What he's really talking about, I think more than anything else, is these colonial and post-colonial societies, whether he's talking about the Southern United States or Africa or the Caribbean. He's a very sharp observer of these little societies, sometimes humorous, sometimes less so, but he's got the characters down quite well, I think.

Q: What were you doing? You keep mentioning the drug trafficking. What was the situation, and where did Trinidad fit in, and where did you fit in?

COWAL: Well, if you look at it, there are two ways for drugs to get to the United States from South America, where they are produced. One is through Mexico and the other is through the Caribbean. At the time I was there, we were in a better period with Mexico. This was still in the Salinas government. We were getting along pretty well with Salinas on a number of things, and one of them is not a crackdown, per se, but certainly I think it was more difficult for drug traffickers to use Mexico than before – Colombia, mostly.

So we began to see evidence of increasing drug trafficking through the Caribbean, not particularly through Trinidad, not Trinidad more than the others. I think the tendency was to come from Colombia and sort of come up the chain, or hit places that seemed to be more open. In some ways, Trinidad was a better place than a lot of the Eastern Caribbean because it was bigger. If you're trying to run drugs through Saint Christopher and Nevis, with a population of 100,000, or 70,000, whatever it is. At least Port of Spain has a population of a half a million to a million, I suppose.

Q: So you don't stick out.

COWAL: You don't stick out quite as much. As we promoted more openness and more trade, we were also aware of the fact that that very opening of things could lead to more openness for drug trafficking. We began to look at the statistics of what was happening.

We had various ways we intersected with it. First of all, using a lot of mules, drug traffickers, and they would often be young American women, many of them African American, not always African American. They would meet a guy in Brooklyn or a guy somewhere who said, "Gee, a free vacation in the Caribbean if you'll only carry back this suitcase." I think some of them knew what they were doing, and some of them probably didn't, but they were the easy targets. They were the easy pickings, and the drug traffickers didn't care whether four of them got caught, because one of them got through.

We had something like 30 or 40 Americans in jail in Trinidad on pretty long sentences, so that was a consular function for us, and we wanted to generally keep that from happening. The defense forces of Trinidad consisted of a coast guard and a regiment, an army regiment, neither of which was particularly well trained, nor numerous. You had a police force, a totally unarmed police force, in which there was also a lot of petty corruption. You had a British system of judiciary, so there was the Department of Public Prosecutions, and a DPP who had to prosecute all these things, and they were years behind on the cases. I think some of it was corruption and a lot of it was just inefficiency, just horrendously inefficient.

So, despite the fact that we didn't give bilateral assistance, we did begin to help out with assistance to the military and to the judicial system to try to become more efficient at catching criminals and at prosecuting, hoping that that would be a disincentive to using Trinidad as a jumping-off place for the drug trafficking. We worked a lot with the British on that, and there was a whole Scotland Yard report on why the whole system was broken and why it didn't work and what would need to be done in order to fix it. Then I think the British and the American governments – and the Canadian government, to a certain extent – I was very close to my British and my Canadian counterparts, both the high commissioners. I think the three of us, more so than most of the diplomatic corps – there were 18, I think, representatives in Trinidad. So it was a very tiny diplomatic corps, and you saw each other sort of all the time, because there was always some function to which you would always have to go and stand in line and stand in order. I think I had the French guy on one side and I don't remember who was on the other, because you were always in the order in which you had presented credentials.

A whole lot of them were there just to sort of stand around, or because they had one particular thing. There was an Indian high commissioner, for instance, because there was such a huge Indian community, but he didn't really have any other interest. There was a Japanese ambassador because I think there was a little Nissan assembly plant in Trinidad. They were assembling cars for the local market. Again, this is where this silly little economy of 1 million had gotten themselves to, is they were manufacturing cars for the local market. They were also importing a lot of Toyotas and so on, so he was there in a commercial function. There was a Nigerian, for what reason, I never figured out. There was a papal nuncio, because the largest number of Christians were Catholic. There was a Venezuelan because that was the next-door country. There was a Brazilian whom I never figured out why he was there.

At any rate, I would say the three most active countries were Canada, the UK and the U.S. and I think the three of us were a pretty good team in terms of we would often meet together and we would discuss how we saw the situation. I think we would reinforce each other's positions with the government, and just provide good intelligence sharing, and I don't even mean of such classified intelligence. Just information sharing, "How do you see what's going on? How do you see what's going on? What do you think of so and so or such and such?"

So we were active. Again, that was in the drug-trafficking thing. That was very controversial. There were some people who wanted to deny that there was a drug problem at all. There were probably some people in the U.S. government who were too ready to see more happening than might have been happening.

I think the fear was always that there was enough big stuff in Trinidad that if they ever figured out a way to get in, it could become a big transshipment point. I mean, for instance, I think the biggest shipment we ever helped to bring down, a pretty good-sized cocaine shipment, was loaded aboard a methane tanker. When you get into stuff like methane tankers, those are big ships. Trinidad produced methane and various other – natural gas derivatives were produced there, and I was encouraging that all this stuff be done. But if the drug traffickers had ever been able to corrupt enough of that industry, then Trinidad could have really become a significant drug trafficking point. They produced a little marijuana, which was pretty much consumed at home, and there was some marijuana shipment through there and some cocaine.

Q: What about the Clinton changeover in – it would have been '93. Did that have any effect on you all?

COWAL: Not much. You submit your resignation and then they decide whether or not they want to accept it. In the case of most career people, they decide not to accept it unless they have, I guess, some political appointee who's really dying to go there, or some particular point of disagreement with the career ambassador who happens to be in place. In my case, they didn't, so it didn't much affect my life in terms of Trinidad. It meant a change in personnel in ARA and a change in personnel in the State Department, and I think that was a little difficult for me. Since I had been part of the team when I went to Trinidad, of course, I knew everybody quite well. When they all changed over, I didn't know them anymore. And when you're not a friend of the president's, but you're also not particularly well connected with your bureau or with the State Department, you feel a little bit like you're out at the end of a long rope that nobody's much tugging on.

Q: Well, the whole time you were there, how did you find the role of sort of the explosion of easy communications and all this with Washington. Did that make much of a change?

COWAL: Yes, I think it does. I think the role of the ambassador remains extremely important. It's not just that people know about things maybe before you do, know about what's happening in the country as soon as you do, because CNN or something picks it

up. I must say, when you're in a place where it doesn't have big news coverage, that's probably less so. But, certainly, coming from the United States, again, when I was there there was not yet much satellite TV or even cable TV. There was some, but I suppose I didn't see the real impact. I certainly was there before the Internet, so I suppose it's harder all the time to say, "Wait a minute, you may not understand what you're looking at."

I think the ambassador is in a position – or the whole team, not just the ambassador – the whole embassy is in a position to be the interpreter of one to the other. The more there's on the airwaves, the more you really need to do that. The Trinidadians were generally enthusiastic about the election of Clinton, more than I was. I think he might have even visited some time long after I left. I'm not sure he did, but he may have. Certainly Madeleine Albright did, and I never had the visit of a secretary of state, so maybe that was justified, that they were more enthusiastic about it.

I think we could end today there, maybe. And we're about done, aren't we?

Q: Well, let's see. You left there in '94. What did you do?

COWAL: I left there in '94 without a job. A year before I was due to leave, sort of as Clinton came in and as the new team came in, they had initially thought maybe I should go to El Salvador. In other words, I think the reaction was that I was probably, and I don't mean to be an egotist, but I had more to offer than Trinidad, that I had sort of done my thing in Trinidad. I'd been an ambassador for a couple of years. I had obviously been a pretty good ambassador for a couple of years. We had managed to get a lot accomplished, and I think there was some desire that it was probably too easy a job for me. By then I was 49, I guess, that I should go to a bigger post, something that was more challenging. Although I loved Trinidad, I thought that was fine.

Q: You were saying the first thing that ...

COWAL: They had sort of said, "What about El Salvador," and I said, "That's fine," although I thought El Salvador was a very difficult post. Then Alex Watson had become the assistant secretary, replacing Bernie Aronson. There had been a chiefs of mission conference or something, and I had known him slightly, not well, but he was career and everybody kind of knew him. So the first thing was, "Well, here are the posts that we expect to be available for career people. Which one are you interested in?"

I don't remember what they were. They were Colombia and Chile and something – Argentina, maybe, so I had actually said, "Colombia." I had served in Colombia, and although I thought it was also a very tough job, it was a place I was very interested in going back to. Before anything really happened on that, Bob Gelbard called me back, who was then I think the principal DAS and said, "Well, what we really want you to do is go to Panama, because we don't have" – I don't remember who had been there, Deane Hinton maybe. We'd had an ambassador, he'd left. The vacuum is being filled by Barry McCaffrey, who's the head of SOUTHCOM. Barry McCaffrey thinks that he's the State

Department, and he's running all over this region, trying to tell governments what to do. And the drug thing became a bigger and bigger issue. The military had a larger role to play, and as we now know from the McCaffrey who went on to become the drug czar and so on, he saw his role enormously expansively. The State Department felt that not to its liking, particularly, or to its advantage. So they had decided in one way or another that I would be able to handle McCaffrey, and so they wanted me to go to Panama. I said, "Fine," I would do that.

Then it was about at three years. It was about then time that I should have left anyway. It was about the early summer, maybe spring, of 1994, and I was set to go to Panama. The D Committee, which is the committee of the deputy secretary that decides on whether bureaus' candidates for ambassadorial positions are going to be okayed by the Department, so that they're submitted to the White House, had approved me to be the ambassador to Panama. About then, a political appointee of the Clinton administration who was slated to go to Costa Rica decided that it would be more interesting to go to Panama. During the time that that ambassador would have been the incumbent, the Panama Canal Treaty, which called for giving back the canal, there were going to be some things that happened in Panama. At least it's thought that nothing interesting ever happens in Costa Rica, and I guess that's pretty much the case.

The White House had sort of checked this with Watson, essentially asking whether this person, and I suppose he ought to remain nameless. I'm not sure we should get into all this kind of stuff on things that people could check on later. At any rate, the person who was going to be named, or who expressed his interest in this job, was someone who would be a political appointee. The person had been well known in Latin America and things since the Carter administration. The question by somebody in White House personnel to Alex Watson was whether or not this person could get confirmed. Watson, in my opinion, erroneously and foolishly said, "Oh, gee, I don't know," whereas in fact this person couldn't get confirmed. That was well known to anyone who followed Latin American affairs. This person was heartily disliked by both Jesse Helms and Chris Dodd, who pretty much in those days decided on who was going to be an ambassador to Latin America and who wasn't.

You remember, through the whole Clinton years, they were dogged by Jesse Helms holding ambassadors hostage. They would do either because they didn't like the person, or some other policy having nothing to do with that person was something they didn't want the Clinton administration to do. It was tough to get ambassadors confirmed. When you knew you had something like Panama, which was going to be controversial because of the Canal Treaty, and you knew how Jesse felt about the Canal Treaty, and then you knew that this was a person who had run afoul of Jesse on many occasions, for many different reasons, over the course of the last 20 years, it was a foolish ting to say, "Oh, I don't know." The answer should have been, "Cannot get confirmed."

They would have been lucky to confirm him for Costa Rica, which maybe they could have done. I tend to think not, but maybe they could have done it. They could not confirm

him for Panama. So I was essentially put into a long limbo, because in taking over Panama, the White House didn't give up Costa Rica. Costa Rica being the kind of assignment to which you can send somebody who doesn't have a whole lot of diplomatic experience. They had a number of people lined up, ready to do that one. I don't know that I would have wanted to go to Costa Rica anyway, but that never became an option. "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine, too," and that's the way they looked at those appointments.

I got offered a bunch of different alternatives, all of which had to do, essentially, with coming back to Washington and being a deputy assistant secretary in another bureau, or going to the Carter Center for a year, or going to some university for a year, or doing this, that or the other thing for a year. None of which at that – I think I was pretty pissed off by it, to tell you the truth. I had then just turned 50, and none of those things became particularly interesting. None of those things was particularly interesting or appealing to me. I was married at the time to a husband who had left a business and a career in Mexico. He was willing to do that as long as he thought and I thought that my diplomatic career was important, both to me and maybe even in some larger sense to somebody besides me. But he was not particularly patient with the thought that we were going to go off here for a year and then see what happened. I was also, having been DAS, aware that the whole thing was a crapshoot.

Q: Sure.

COWAL: It was always a crapshoot. Your number came up or it didn't come up. As I look back on this, as one of the early women, and thought to have been very effective in Trinidad and a good DAS, and pretty much no question in my mind now that my number would have come up again, that if I had taken their exile for a year, I could have certainly gotten back in those stakes. But it just didn't appeal to me, and it just didn't interest me, so I retired.

Q: All right. I think we should have one more session, because you've been involved in very interesting work, both in Cuba, dealing with Cuba, and with population studies. Would you like to do that?

COWAL: Sure. If you'd like to do it, I'd be happy to do it.

Q: Okay, it's the 2nd of December, 2003. Sally, something I didn't ask before. How was it being an ambassador and being married, because you were still at a relatively early stage of this. I think it's getting more routine, but in your case?

COWAL: Well, it worked well in my case, for a number of environmental factors, one of which, based on conventions. As anybody who knows anything about the country or carnival or calypso knows it's let-it-all-hang-out, so unconventional things are fine for Trinidad. Then I had a husband who was remarkably open, was confident enough in his own abilities and his own personality that it simply didn't bother him. He took it for what

it was worth, and he thought it was worth a lot to be in Trinidad and to have a special role there. And when people would ask him, because it was still new in Trinidad and I guess most anyplace else, and they would say, "Well, what does it feel like to be married to the U.S. ambassador?" And he would confidently say, "I always get a seat in the front row."

I always knew he was in the front row, clapping and being very supportive. So, I had a good environment on the outside and a good husband on the inside, so for me it worked very nicely.

Q: Well, did you find – in my career, having been married all through this, I always found that the wife was able to bring in information, often a hell of a lot better information than we were getting, because they were talking to other wives, and ....

COWAL: Right, and that was also absolutely true for my husband, who didn't do wifely things. He did not join the American Women's Club, but he established a little business office. He got permission from Trinidad, if he brought in some investment, which he did, to get a visa which would allow him to work. He set up a little import/export company, which really frankly didn't do anything or go anywhere, but it sort of made him a part of the downtown business group, which was very good. And, secondly, out of I think those contacts, and ones that we made in other ways, he was invited to teach at the University of the West Indies at a program that they had set up, an International Business Institute. It was modeled on the Harvard Business School, where my husband had attended. They asked him to teach the course in international marketing. He had been in international marketing for many years, and so in collaboration with Harvard, he got all the case studies that he was interested in teaching. He was very happily ensconced at the university, teaching most days. That of course gave us a link into another part of the community we wouldn't have known about nearly as much if he hadn't been out there every day, or three times a week or whatever it was, on the university campus.

When he died, I had several notes from students and professors at the university about how he had brought just a totally new perspective to it, a private sector, private enterprise perspective. As we described in some of these former conversations, Trinidad was just emerging from these years of a centrally planned economy and so on. So I think Tony actually played a key role in that with some of the younger businesspeople and the business professors. The third thing he did was that – and again, we mentioned this earlier, but I probably didn't give him proper credit – I'm sure I didn't – for getting an American Chamber of Commerce off the ground. We sat around the breakfast table at the residence with a key group of American businessmen. He was also there, and being a businessman himself, he was able to span these worlds more easily than somebody like myself. I had had at that point a career in nothing but the diplomatic service for the past 25 years.

I know that's true for spouses. Altogether that's true for spouses, whether they're female spouses or male spouses, that they certainly give you different insights on the world where you are. And I think the U.S. State Department in the last few years has done a

very good job, or a much better job, than when I started in 1966 at recognizing this and encouraging this and trying to pave the way for it. They've done it as a self-preservation thing, as a survival thing. They see that, as I used to say when people would ask me whether this was a problem for female diplomats, women diplomats, I would say, "Well, nobody marries dummies anymore. Men don't marry dummies anymore, either." Whereas 30 or 35 years ago, many women might have been content with going along for the ride, that has become much less likely to be the kind of career for a man. A man also has to think about what it is his spouse does if this is going to be something he does for the next 25 years of his life. The fact that he will or won't stay in the Foreign Service may well be dependent on how fruitful a life it is for both of them. So nobody marries dummies anymore. This isn't just a problem for women married to males who want to do something. It's the problem of everybody, and my impression is that the U.S. Foreign Service has done quite well at addressing the problem – not at finding the answers to all of it, but at least confronting it head on. They see that all spouses don't want to confine their activities to baking cookies, that some have other talents and other roles and other interests. And so long as they are able to do those things, then it's more likely that the State Department spouse, if there's only one of them who's State Department, will stay with it. That obviously has a great payoff for the American diplomatic service.

We learned a lot about it, and it had changed a lot from my first experience at taking my first husband to India, where I think he was the first male dependent in the U.S. Foreign Service, to 25 years later going to Trinidad, also with a spouse, a different spouse, but a different male spouse, this time not as the junior officer, but as the ambassador. And that was one of the things that as I look back on my years at the State Department, I look back with a great deal of pride.

Q: When did you retire?

COWAL: I retired April 30th, I think, 1995.

Q: Then what?

COWAL: Well, just prior to my retirement, and while we were trying to decide what to do with the rest of our lives, and whether or not I would hang around for a second chance at a foreign mission, Madeleine Albright had asked me to go to Geneva with Geraldine Ferraro, who was heading the delegation to the Human Rights Commission.

Q: She is a former representative and had run on the vice presidential ticket with Walter Mondale.

COWAL: With Walter Mondale in 1984. I think she had been the human rights commissioner for a couple of years. Suddenly in that January 1995 session of the Human Rights Commission, the United States decided for the first time that they wanted to bring forth a resolution, on the human rights situation in China, which is a very difficult, very needed thing. Clearly, the human rights situation was, and I think to a certain extent

remains, far from what you would consider ideal. When I was political counselor at the UN, I had gone and helped the Human Rights delegation I think twice. It's a subset of UN things. If you understand how the UN works as a political body, and I understood that, plus I had been at the Human Rights Commission, you understand that it's much, much harder to bring actions against countries that have some power and influence than against countries that don't.

It's kind of an easy deal to condemn the human rights abuses in Myanmar, for instance, because Myanmar has very little influence and very few friends.

Q: That's Burma.

COWAL: Burma. It's a much bigger deal to try to do that in China. Most countries, whether you're talking about the UN Human Rights Commission or the UN General Assembly, they only have two or three issues that really matter to them. Therefore they're willing to trade votes on everything else in return for a favorable vote on the one or two or three things that matter to them. I think one reason the U.S. is often so isolated in the UN is really because we do play politics also, but first of all we care about a lot of issues in a lot of places in the world. And, secondly, we're usually unwilling to trade votes on things that matter to us. We have policy positions on most things, and therefore we're not very flexible in terms of trading these votes.

I think many countries, just think, "Win the few you care about and nobody at home or elsewhere will ever know how you voted on the rest of the stuff." We have this much more rigid system, much more scrutinized by the press. If we simply gave away votes on various items, that would not go unnoticed, so it's a very different thing. But in 1995 the Clinton administration and Madeline, who was about to become secretary of state but at that time was the ambassador to the United Nations, knew that it was going to be difficult to bring up anything on China. In the Clinton administration way of doing these things, they had put together a delegation to the Human Rights Commission which they thought reflected human rights, some of the good things they believed about human rights. So the delegation was large, but not very professional. In other words, they had picked a Native American and they had picked an African American, but not people who had UN political experience. They had picked someone who was handicapped, and they had picked someone who was homosexual.

You get the picture. They had put together this sort of rainbow delegation because they liked the fact that the United States stood for equality of opportunity, and that was human rights to them. But, suddenly, as the days grew shorter to the beginning of this six-week session of the Human Rights Commission, they realized they had some political issues, and really a delegation that didn't know how to work the UN as a political body. So they asked if as my last hurrah I would go and be the political adviser to Geraldine and the delegation, and I agreed. So we went off to Geneva for what was my last State Department assignment. While in Geneva, the United States was, of course, as it always is, working on several things at the same time. One of them was to be very actively

involved in the organization of a new UN program that was to be called the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS.

The United States, of course, had fought hard to establish this organization. We, like many of our counterparts from Europe and Canada and other places, had felt that there was a growing AIDS crisis. I think, A, there was a growing crisis, B, the perception and the reality was that the UN wasn't taking it on very successfully, that the UN was very fragmented in its approach to this. UN agencies didn't coordinate their work, that at country level they often were either right on top of each other or leaving huge gaps. They never sat down together, so UNICEF didn't know what UNVP (United Nations Volunteer Programme) was doing, which didn't know what the World Health Organization was doing. It had been kind of relegated as a health issue, but it was becoming obvious it was more than just a health issue. And, of course, neither the United States nor these Western European countries wanted too much to take on AIDS as a bilateral issue, because it was so controversial.

It was thought to be mostly homosexually transmitted, it was all about public policy about private behaviors, and those are very difficult things for governments to deal with. I think 10 years later, nine years later, we still see some of these difficulties, this being the day after World AIDS Day, but we've come a long way, certainly. So, the United States had taken an active role in saying that there ought to be a new UN approach. It ought to be well financed and it ought to deal with the developing world, and that it ought to do this not just from the perspective of the World Health Organization, but as a joint program of the UN. It had been agreed that this program would be established. Then the United States, as its wont, of course, decided that the candidate to run this, since it was going to have initially more American funds than funds from any other government – again, it was going to be at least 25 percent American, which at the time was the percentage we paid of all UN agencies, because we were thought to be 25 percent of the gross national product of the world. So, since we were going to be 25 percent paying for this thing, we wanted the leadership of this organization to be American, and had proposed a candidate, a qualified candidate who was at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Suddenly the Europeans all got together, and they got together behind a different candidate. That candidate was a brilliant, young – in his early 40s, I guess – Belgian scientist and researcher and virologist and immunologist, who had discovered the Ebola virus in Africa, and who had done some of the first work on AIDS in Africa, proving conclusively that AIDS was not just a homosexual-transmitted disease, that AIDS was transmitted from a vehicle for transmission, usually sexual or blood or other means of transmission, bodily fluids, and it found a happy receptor in whatever part of the body it happened to go.

Therefore, he was beginning to see as early as the late '80s that in Africa it was not a homosexual disease, it was a heterosexual disease. So he had a lot more prominence, and he was already at the World Health Organization, working on the Global Program on AIDS, and so he got the job. The United States eventually supported his election, and this was all done via a new governing body that was set up to run this new organization. The

United States was one member and I think there were 17 or 18 or 20 international members from the developing world and from the donor community.

So since we weren't going to have the director role, we decided that it would be nice to have an American deputy director, and I just sort of floated on the scene at that moment. Someone who obviously had worked for a long time with the U.S. government, who had some UN experience, who had a lot of developing country experience, who had no particular public health experience. So the U.S. ambassador in Geneva, Dan Spiegel, a Clinton appointee who had been very involved in setting up this new organization, arranged a meeting between me and Peter Piot, the Belgian who had been selected to run UNAIDS. He offered me the job as the director for external relations. I later became the deputy director, but this was to be one of the three or four senior positions in the organization.

It didn't happen quite so easily. First, because I was not USAID's candidate. Since they were going to put in the $15 million that we were going to pledge as an initial contribution, they wanted to it to be somebody who came out of USAID, and that was not me. Secondly, my husband was still alive and he looked at Geneva and said, "You know what? I don't think after Trinidad I'm not so sure I want to be in cold and gray and dark Geneva, and besides," he said, "I know you. You'll work 14 hours a day and you'll travel 50 percent of the time." Because this is not only AIDS, which we could see was going to be galloping along. This agency was not going to be out of business in six months when we had discovered how to handle the AIDS crisis. It was also this whole ambitious task of going about doing the UN's work in a very different way. So I think he was very clear about seeing this for what it was, that this was going to be an incredible challenge, and said, "If you want to do that, great, fine, do it, but I'm not going to stay in Geneva, I'm going to go to Mexico and sort of pick up my business and my life. And when you can get to Mexico, great."

I thought about that long and hard. I had sacrificed a lot of things also to make this marriage work and so on, and so I turned the offer down and we went to Mexico. About a month after that, my husband died of a heart attack, very suddenly. This was within three weeks of my retiring from the State Department, so it was a very tough period of time. I didn't know what I was going to do, but it certainly didn't occur to me to go back and try to rethink some of these things. Anyway, making a very long story short, about six months went by. Meanwhile, Peter Piot had rejected all of these AID candidates who had been presented as possible deputy directors, because he just didn't feel it was the right mix. He just didn't feel they were the right people.

Along about August, he was visiting Washington, and they were kind of on his case about why he hadn't picked anybody, and he said, "Well, the only person I've interviewed for the job that I thought was the right person was Sally Cowal, and she turned it down." The person he was talking to said, "Well, a lot of things have happened in her life. Maybe you ought to try to get in touch with her again." By then, AID was convinced that they were not going to be able to provide the candidate, so he got in touch with me again. By then I

was sort of over the shock, and I was absolutely ready for a challenge, to go and live in a different place and to do something different and to pick up a very active professional career again. So I went to Geneva for a week and looked around. I decided that it would be a challenge and an exciting thing to be a part of this new agency, which hadn't yet started – 1995 was its planning year, and it was due to start work on January 1st, 1996.

In October I accepted the job and moved to Geneva in November of 1995. My late husband was exactly right. I worked 14 hours a day and I traveled 50 percent of the time. The difference was, I didn't feel torn about this. That was exactly what I wanted to be doing, was immersing myself in a global issue and in a crisis. My own thought, as I got more mature in my State Department days, was that the world had changed a lot since I had begun. After all, you and I, Stu, are of the same generation. We began in the Cold War, and we knew where the enemy was and the enemy was the Soviet Union or it was Godless Communism, or it was a threat. I'm not a McCarthyist, but it was a threat to society and values as we saw them, and as I still believe them. I joined the State Department shortly after the assassination of Kennedy. I had been very moved and motivated by the Kennedy aura and mystique, so for years we ran in Latin America and other places on this.

This was a struggle against a country, or a group of countries – China, Russia. I came to believe, as the Berlin Wall fell and as the Soviet Union fell, that that was no longer the principal battle in the world. It was no longer Communism. That struggle had been won. The upcoming struggles were so much more for me multilateral in nature. You couldn't fight the drug problem alone, you couldn't fight the AIDS problem alone. There were a whole lot of things in the world that the United States could only do if it did it in conjunction with others. Until all of us are safe, none of us is safe. Certainly, I saw AIDS in that context. It was very interesting to me, because it was so many things. I don't think I would have gone to work for a program on tuberculosis, although I come to understand that it's also a huge challenge to human development and progress. But AIDS interested me because it was so economic and it was so political and we were losing schoolteachers by the scores in places in Africa. Who would teach the children? So I was interested in this and interested in pursuing something at which we looked at things as countries together against poverty, disease, underdevelopment, all of the things which were part of this AIDS crisis. That's why I went to work for the UN Programme on HIV and AIDS, and it was a wonderful experience.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

COWAL: Nineteen-ninety-five to 1999. So I spent a formative four years for the organization, and four years for myself, from when I was 50 until I was 54, still geared up. I think what we were able to do, really, in those years was to put AIDS on the political map, to overcome denial, which is what was happening in the developing world. They were denying that AIDS was a problem. And then overcome complacency, which was the issue in the United States and in Western Europe and in Japan. There had been this little blip on the radar screen 10 years earlier, when we first heard about HIV. It seemed like it

was going to be on everybody's doorstep, and then it became fairly obvious it wasn't going to be on everybody's doorstep. We all went back to sleep. Not quite, but, I mean, there was a lot of complacency and a lot of denial.

I think that at UNAIDS we got the world together behind a common set of statistics. You see them again. They just came out for this World AIDS Day. 40 million people are infected and 3 million people died last year. At that time, there were no agreed-upon set of statistics. There was no agreed-upon approach. There was no treatment, of course, at that point. What was good prevention? Well, important to prevention, we began to discover, more important maybe than anything else, was political commitment: leaders of a country and business leaders and political leaders had to be open about this. They had to acknowledge it, they had to put funds for it. They had to work with groups who were clearly the sort of drivers of the epidemic, but were not normally parts of society – stigmatized communities, such as homosexuals and commercial sex workers and drug users. It's very hard for governments to get their hands around. Will they work with them? Do they run into all kinds of political opposition if they try to work with them? If they decide to work with them, how will they do that?

My job was director of external relations. At first we thought that was just raising the funds for this organization and sort of having a little press campaign which said, "Oh, there is a new agency out there and it's called UNAIDS, and here's what it does." It became obvious that really this was all about getting the political commitment necessary to really address this, with the money needed and with the political will needed, and doing things like getting it on the agenda of the UN Security Council. There had never been a disease taken up by the Security Council before, but getting Al Gore to go and sit in the U.S. chair for this debate at the Security Council, to make it part of the agenda when President Bush goes to Africa to visit, to talk about AIDS. Clinton went to Africa twice and never talked about AIDS, and so we made U.S. ambassadors aware of it. We made it part of this agenda, and I think that was an important contribution to making the world ready to deal with an unprecedented epidemic.

Q: How did you find the response of the ambassadorial or diplomatic services of Western Europe and the United States and Japan and all that?

COWAL: Well, it was very difficult to penetrate, and I think the fact that I came from that world helped a lot. I used to say I was the non-lawyer in the law firm. Pretty much everybody else in this organization was a public health physician, and damn good ones, some of the best in the world. Peter, who still heads it, is brilliant and actually is a pretty savvy politician, but was not a diplomat. The person who headed our clinical studies was a Senegalese physician and public health person and very knowledgeable. And the person who headed our country programs was an Australian physician and public health physician, worked with aboriginal communities, was a wonderful guy. They were all wonderful doctors, but they didn't necessarily know how to either work the UN or work the foreign ministries of these countries of Japan and of Western Europe. I think that was something that I was able to do, because I had not only been in the U.S. diplomatic

service for so long, but having had these stints in sort of the multilateral organizations, I just knew a lot about it. I think it added a strength.

Here we are now, 10 years later, and I'm in a public health organization. To me, it added a whole dimension about international relations, international public health, that I had only had a very distant relationship with in the past. I felt it was a wonderful opportunity to learn something. It also showed how difficult it was to work in the UN system. It remains difficult. I think it's improved somewhat over the last decade, but it's still a pretty difficult environment. We used to joke in UNAIDS that we didn't know if the behavior change we needed to bring about to make the world safe from AIDS, or the behavior change to get the UN to work together was more difficult, but they were both extremely difficult.

Q: Was the problem AIDS itself? Because when you say AIDS, you're talking about sex, or was it just that this was something new?

COWAL: Well, I think it was all those things. It's basically public policy about private behaviors. It's what people do when they're in their own bedrooms or when they're shooting drugs in their own back alleys. These are very difficult things for governments to come to grips with.

Q: You were there from sort of the American side. You had a real clash between the Clinton administration and a Republican Congress. It was just plain nasty. It was probably as nasty as you ever can have. It ended up with an impeachment and all that stuff, and much of it was – well, anyway. And I would think that particularly since much of the nastiness came from the Republican right, which tends to be rather biblical and all that, was that a problem?

COWAL: Yes. Of course, we were a very small agency, also, and located in Geneva, with me having a staff of three or four people who were supposed to get the U.S. government and Congress on our side. It was a lot of work. We eventually hired a consultant in Washington who at least delivered materials to congressional offices and so on. My boss and I would come into town about four times a year, and we would have lined up meetings with the conservatives as well as the more liberal Democrats. We worked the Congress very hard, and I think with some degree of effect. At least we never got our budget cut. We were a line item in USAID's budget, which was something that we also wanted to achieve, because USAID, being a bilateral aid agency, would always prefer to do things bilaterally. At the beginning, they had stuck all this money into the UN agency because they didn't know what to do bilaterally. I mean, it was so new for them. It was new, it was controversial, it dealt with sex, it dealt with drugs, it dealt with whole lots of things that bilateral aid missions didn't really want to deal with. But, of course, over time, and particularly as we raised the political profile and got ambassadors onboard and everything, then they wanted to do more.

To this day, USAID is a very large funder in the whole AIDS arena. But as that became more the case, then they wanted to do less with the UN agencies and more themselves. So then we had to fight, of course, to maintain our budget share, which was a $15 million contribution, and we were always able to do that, in part by building allies on the Hill. If you watch it, even Jesse Helms ended up coming around to saying he thought – and he should have done more about AIDS. Everybody kind of got there a little late, but they finally got there. Bill Clinton got there a little late, too, but now as ex president he's got a Clinton Foundation which is going all around the world doing very good things in AIDS. It wasn't something he wanted to touch as president, I must say. He left that to Donna Shalala, and Sandy Thurman and people out there. It wasn't something he wanted to touch.

We did get Madeleine Albright onboard, through Wendy Sherman, really, it was the key there. Frank Loy and Wendy Sherman, and they got Madeleine involved, and that meant that we were able to bring things like briefings on AIDS to chiefs of mission conferences. Again, that was very new, to say, "Oh, we're going to discuss malaria or something? We're chiefs of mission. We're here to discuss politics and economics." So those are some of the things we did, and to a degree we also did that with European foreign ministries and with the Japanese.

One of the things I remember doing was going to Japan, and convincing them to fund UNAIDS and AIDS activities in other UN agencies. The Japanese didn't have much of an HIV problem at home for interesting reasons, including that birth control pills were not allowed in Japan until the last couple of years. Therefore, most birth control was really done with condoms, and condoms also prevented the transmission of the HIV virus. So that served to keep HIV extremely low in Japan, or one of the reasons.

We went to Japan armed with some very interesting and good economic data. This showed that as the AIDS crisis got out of hand in Southeast Asia, in places like Thailand, where it was rapidly growing, and also in Cambodia and Laos and other places, but particularly Thailand and Malaysia, in the strong economies, the tiger economies of Southeast Asia, it would cause the Japanese gross national product to drop by 2 percent. Because the Thais wouldn't be buying Honda cars and Toshiba computers and all of the things which Japan was selling to Southeast Asia. We had a meeting with someone in the Japanese Diet. We wouldn't usually approach it as discussing the behaviors about this. We would approach it discussing the impact for the countries themselves and also the impact, then, on the countries which had trading, economic relationships with them. And this member of the Diet just sprang out of his chair, became just really bowled over by this information and said, "You must go right away and see the Ministry of Finance, because they have to give you more money."

He immediately picked up the phone and called. It wasn't the minister of finance, but somebody who handled development cooperation for Japan – picked up the phone and said, "I'm sending over these people from Geneva and you must see them right away, and look at the statistics which they are bringing, and do something about this." So like a

gangland chase, he sent us in his car, because we only had 15 minutes because they were closing the books on this budget or something. We arrived at this Ministry of Finance building, which is one of the fascist sort of buildings in Japan, old, and 29-foot ceilings. We went flying through these corridors of the Ministry of Finance to arrive at this guy's little office.

The guy who had all the finances for Japanese development cooperation in his hands had an office about the size of this four-foot table that we're sitting at. We sat down and we gave him the pitch and it was all fixed. They poured us onto a plane at the airport and we went back to Geneva. Those were the kinds of things that we did. We also talked a lot to the U.S. Congress about what the economic impacts were going to be of this disease, because you could see that some way out.

You knew that all the pilots of Zambia Airlines had died. They couldn't fly the airline anymore, because all the pilots had died. Up to 60 and 70 percent of the militaries of Sub-Saharan African countries were HIV positive. And what were the implications for national defense of those countries, or for them participating in peacekeeping missions, and all of these implications, the schoolteachers, the health workers themselves? You could just see countries at the brink of disaster. That was the message, I think, that worked even for conservative Republicans, the fact that, like it or not, and agreeing or not on means of prevention, still you couldn't be an ostrich with your head in the sand. You had to deal with the fact that these were real numbers and this was actually happening.

Q: Did you find the West Europeans got onboard rather quickly or not?

COWAL: Yes, the West Europeans I would say got onboard more quickly. They're just more socially liberal, basically. It was just easier, I think. We had good cooperation, certainly, from the Dutch and certainly from the Scandinavians and from the British, and from the French, who were, as the French always are, difficult to work with. In fact, the French were the first ones who got onto the idea that we needed to do something about treatment. It was after my second year at UNAIDS that the Vancouver International AIDS Conference was held. That was when Dr. Ho from New York, David Ho, had the first findings on the effect of these protease inhibitors on halting the HIV virus.

It was just an incredible moment, because then you also realized that something was possible, but the cost was incredible. The cost still is incredible, and therefore the ethical concerns became even more difficult to deal with – who was going to live, and who was going to die, and were you from a rich country or a not rich country? And within about a year or so after that, I think Chirac went to an AIDS conference in Africa and said, "Well, we have to do something about the treatment."

Now, it's been a long time in coming, this $15 billion from the Bush administration and so on. I think that finally the world is saying we have to do something about treatment, and we have to make treatment affordable, we have to make treatment possible. It's still a long way from being universal, and I worry that we'll drop prevention efforts. The real

emphasis has to be on prevention. The experts say you won't have good prevention unless you also have care and treatment. I'm persuaded that that's somewhat the case, but I would like to see more emphasis on prevention.

Q: Did the drug industry play any role while you were in this thing?

COWAL: Yes, they played a role, and they were often the target of demonstrations at AIDS conferences and other things. Drugs were considered to be too expensive and not accessible. You get into the whole issue of patents for these drugs, and can you override a patent if you're in a country which has developed an alternative to this patented drug and it's going to save millions of lives? It's a huge political issue. It's just one more of the things that makes AIDS such an interesting disease to work on. But, yes, and I would say that the drug companies have had a great role in the Bush initiatives. Like drugs for senior citizens under Medicare, this is something that's going to have implications for the pharmaceutical industry, and therefore they're interested in doing it.

In a way, we tried to get them, and to some success, very involved in prevention activities. We were able to make a pitch and we got a Global Business Council on AIDS going with Glaxo's help, actually, because it made them look more humanitarian.

Q: Glaxo is ...

COWAL: A British pharmaceutical company, and U.S. companies have subsequently joined. The guilt trip we sort of put them on was, "If you don't do anything, if you aren't seen as being in the forefront of efforts on prevention, it looks like you just want the world to get infected so that they can then take your expensive drugs. So you've got to show that it would be best if we could stop this epidemic, but if we can't stop this epidemic, at least we can now do something to prolong life." But the political issues were incredible around the whole thing, which is what made it such an interesting place to be – the political issues about the fact that breast milk transmits HIV.

Q: It does?

COWAL: Yes, we've had this feeling, which was also a political issue, not only a health issue, that breastfeeding was best and that every mother should breastfeed.

Q: Nestle back in the '70s ...

COWAL: In the '70s and '80s had been supporting formula ...

Q: And Nestles and all this, and it was "Breast milk is best and all that ..."

COWAL: Right, "breast is best," and for natural immunities of children, that's really true, but if that's going to transmit the HIV virus, would you encourage a woman to breastfeed? Well, if she's not going to breastfeed, what's she going to use? One of these

horrible Nestle products? I mean, the fights with UNICEF were incredible. I used to say I thought they had lacto-Nazis there. They were such advocates for what they believed in, what they genuinely believed in.

There wasn't an issue that wasn't interesting, and difficult. After four years, I decided, I think I was still a Foreign Service officer at heart, and I thought every four years you move, and suddenly no one was handing me my travel orders. I began to think that maybe it was time to come back to the United States. Maybe it was time to stop working 14 hours a day and traveling 50 percent of the time. Maybe there was a burnout in AIDS, too, and I had some of that burnout, and I'd say, "Maybe I would be more encouraged now that treatment is more available."

I remember going to a clinic in Haiti, and it was the only clinic that did HIV testing. At that time there weren't rapid test kits, it took about a week to get your results back. I sat there and observed one morning, when people came back for their HIV test results, from the test they had had a week earlier, and you could see the system in operation. You went up to the window to get your test results, and they either handed you sort of a green slip or a red slip. If you had a green slip you were negative, and if you had a red slip you were positive, and you were to go upstairs and see a counselor, and on the second floor of this building they had some counselors set up. So then you went into another waiting room and you went with a counselor who would explain the test results, but essentially, it was a death penalty. I watched mothers come in with little children in arms, and toddlers in their hands, getting these red slips, and knowing that they would be dead in two years.

I knew we were doing many things that were making it a better world. It was also obvious to me that we couldn't make it a perfect world, and that became very tough. I think you can't work in that field for a long time and not be affected by the human tragedy of it.

Right in the middle of one of these quite down periods, I got approached by a headhunter who was looking for a new president for Youth for Understanding. This is a high school exchange program based in Washington, DC, which I had worked with years before in my USIA days. President Reagan had set up a program to do something about the successor generation, and our economic summit partners, and to have high school exchange be a bigger thing. Kids would go abroad at age 15 and 16 and learn another language and live with a family, and understand our common values, and so on.

So they had approached me about becoming the president of this organization. I accepted, and I thought how hopeful this will be, and how different it will be: to be working with 15 year olds who are not infected with HIV and AIDS, and who are looking forward to the rest of their lives, and doing something to also make it a better world, one kid at a time. About six months after that, I came back to Washington to head this organization. It was my first foray into the nongovernmental world, which is a whole other exploratory phase. Something else that good Foreign Service officers do, after they retire from the Foreign Service, is work for an NGO. I guess the first thing you have to do is learn NGO-speak, and I don't think I ever got a 4/4 in it; I'm still working on it. They also have, of

course, their own lingo, to be a "mission-driven organization." This one was an old one, been in existence for about 50 years, absolutely grassroots-based. All of these kids were recruited and families were recruited from the heartland of America, so we had ten districts around the United States, each of them run by a small professional office, but about 3,000 volunteers organized these networks.

I spent quite a lot of time on the road, talking to these people and visiting them. It was a great opportunity for me to get to know something about the United States, which I had mostly not lived in for my adult life. I went to Los Angeles, and Seattle, and Dallas, and Indianapolis, and Michigan, and every place we had chapters of this organization to meet volunteers and to participate in their training exercises, and to give them a sense of the fact this wasn't just about finding kids and finding families, but it had a larger international perspective. They liked the idea there was an ambassador they could call "Sally" out there. So it was quite a positive thing. It was an organization that also had, sort of unbeknownst to me, when I took the job, some pretty serious financial problems. I think the heyday of these international student exchange programs was really in the '50s and '60s. With the Reagan administration we had put a new little lease on life there, in the '80s, but that was pretty much petering out by 1999, when I took over this organization.

It had been used to living in a different way, it had an international board of 26 members who came for meetings three times a year, flying business class from Brazil, or Japan, or Holland, or wherever they came from, so it was a costly organization. There was less market in the United States, because of the change in American families, the demographics had changed.

Q: Women weren't – wives weren't at home.

COWAL: Wives weren't at home, just what we talked about earlier. They weren't at home making cookies, they were being brain surgeons and didn't think they could take on another teenager from abroad. It was very hard. We found, I would say, more and more marginal families, farther and farther out into the boondocks, and interestingly, more marginal economically. Although, it's costly to have a teenager visit you for a year, there were some folks in double-wide trailers who wanted this to happen, and did make it happen, but sometimes with great preoccupation on my part. Sometimes the experiences were wonderful, of the kids who went to these double-wide trailer families. They learned a reality of America that most of us, as sort upper middle class Americans don't know much about.

I remember once, talking to a young woman in Germany, who was a great success story. She was then 27 or 28, she was on the board of a German organization, she was a judge by then, she was a lawyer and a judge. She'd been in the United States 10 or 12 years previously, and she had been assigned to a family in Oregon, in rural Oregon, and in a little bitty town of something like 1,000 or 2,000 people. Turned out that the family that took her had taken her because one of their own children had been killed in an automobile

accident – it was a family of 6 children – and the other kids had gone to school, and they had said something about, "Why don't you have an exchange student?" Somebody was giving a little speech about this and they said, "Let's have an exchange student," because they were missing their sister who had died. So she came to live there, and during the time she was there, one of the other girls got pregnant, in the family, and had to drop out of school. One of the boys got arrested for drug-taking or drug-trafficking, and the father was very marginal. I don't know that anybody actually got beaten up at home, but it was a pretty tough environment. And she stuck it out for the whole year, she stuck it out.

Then for a while she had no contact with this family at all. I mean, often, families stay very much – these children become like their children, but she had had a pretty rough experience, and so she hadn't had any contact. Then suddenly, the year before I met her, she was going on business to somewhere near this town, and she decided that she would call these people and ask if she could come out and visit. It was just before Christmas, and oh, yes, they wanted to see her, and her host father met her at the bus and said, "Oh, let's go to the coffee shop and have a coffee." They sat there for some hours and she kept saying, "Well, don't you think we should go home and see Mom and so on?" "Oh, we'll get there, we'll get there."

Well, it soon became clear to her that he wanted everyone in town to know that she had come back to visit. He would say, "My daughter the judge." It was obvious that one of the most significant things, he felt, in terms of accomplishment, in his life, was this girl, who cared enough about them to want to come back and visit. It gave, somehow, value to them as people. Anyway, there were wonderful stories.

Q: I've been interviewing a man whose name, unfortunately, I can't remember, but back in the '60s wanted to go to Germany, to study German, and the German thing fell through and they sent him to I think, Cordoba, or someplace in Argentina. He knew nothing about Argentina. So he went there for a year, and quite a few years later returned as ambassador to Argentina.

COWAL: Right, right. Exactly. It's a wonderful experience, and difficult. So, we need to wrap this up, but …

Q: I think we still need one more session.

COWAL: You're kidding! I will tell you all about the Cuba thing if we have another session.

Q: The Cuba thing is so important.

COWAL: Because I got into the Cuba thing, of course, out of this experience.

Q: Why don't you finish up how you finished here, and then we'll come to Cuba and what you're doing now. So what happened with this Youth for Understanding?

COWAL: Nothing happened with it. I did become convinced that a lot of things needed to change if the organization was going to survive. It was losing about a million dollars a year, and there were no particular subsidies. We did a few programs for companies, for instance, Japanese companies that wanted to have the children of their Japanese employees have a summer, a year, in the United States and one of the American employees to send their children to Japan. So we got a few – but you know, we had to do program in order to get that money. In other words, we got very little unrestricted money.

We did a few government programs in eastern Europe and other places. We did a couple of things with the Soros Foundation in eastern Europe, but basically this was a fee for service organization. In order to continue to be one, it was going to have to learn to do its business very differently. I became increasingly aware that I was probably not the person to do that. What they might have needed was a business genius from Wall Street, because it was really a financial issue, and not a diplomatic who understood the international significance of this.

However, my getting out of it was serendipitous. I think most things in life are push-pull – you're pulled in other directions and you're somewhat pushed and I was pushing myself out of this, thinking that it was not – I had been there about a year and a half. I didn't feel that I was really the best person to deal with the problems as they now found themselves. We had to sell the building, which was up by the cathedral, I recognized that. We had six acres of land, we were in Cleveland Park, you can imagine what that's worth, and yet we were not using it for students or anything else. We had crumbling buildings. They had bought this campus from the National Cathedral Girls' School 20 years before and had never had a penny to invest in it, so it was literally falling in around their heads. We had no money to keep it going. We had one big dinner there for the Japanese, for some anniversary of the Japanese thing. They had 100 people for lunch, and the air conditioning went out, and it was a day in June, when the temperature was over 100 degrees. We just had no money.

I thought that they ought to hire somebody who could really just get it on a sound financial basis, and I was not the best person to do that. In the middle of all of that came what I saw as maybe a way for the organization to get more publicity and therefore to get more money. I was approached one Sunday afternoon by one of our neighbors up there in Cleveland Park. I knew all the neighbors. Among other things, I used to take my dog to work with me. This was all in a big park and all the neighborhood dogs would come and I would let my dog out. I used to say he was the director of community affairs, because we'd sort of meet everybody out on the lawn through this dog.

So one of the people I had met, out on the lawn, with this dog, was Greg Craig, who had been one of Clinton's lawyers in the impeachment trial, from Williams and Connolly. He was a very well known Washington attorney who was a neighbor in Cleveland Park. One Sunday afternoon he called me and said, "I know I go out there with my dog all the time, and I know you've got a big campus and a big farmhouse up there. Would that farmhouse

be available for, I don't know how long, a few weeks? We've got a very big problem on our hands and I need some help. I need a place for Elian Gonzalez and his father to have their reuniting."

Q: You might explain who's this …

COWAL: Well, Elian Gonzalez was a little Cuban boy who had been taken by his mother on a small craft to leave Cuba, to go to Miami, in November of 2000, when he was about six years old. The boat capsized and Elian's mother drowned, but Elian and a couple of other people survived. They were rescued by the Coast Guard and were brought to Miami. Then his relatives, his father's uncle in Miami, thought that he should not be repatriated to Cuba, where his father, of course, wanted to have him back. They said Cuba was not a free country and he would grow up free in the United States. They said he would grow up as a little Communist puppet of Fidel Castro if he went back to Cuba. So they launched a large battle about the future of Elian Gonzalez, which eventually went all the way to the Supreme Court.

But at one point it was decided that he should no longer stay with his Miami family, which refused to give him up. There was a raid by the immigration authorities to capture this child from the family against their will, making it an enormously prominent case in the United States and abroad. The Cubans had retained Greg Craig as the attorney for the father, to argue his case before the Court, and it became obvious that the child was going to be, one way or another, taken from the Miami family and put back with his father. The father agreed to stay in the United States until the issues had worked themselves through the Court. They needed a place for this family, this child and this family, to stay. The Cubans insisted that Elian should be back in the Cuban school system as soon as possible. They would send his first grade class, or parts of it, to be with him. Suddenly it was not just Elian and his father, and his stepmother, but Elian, his father, his stepmother, seven of his first grade classmates, the schoolteacher, the psychologist, I believe, and the parents of these children. The United States said, "Well, it's not Fidel's little *finca* (farm), he can't just send off children who are age six. If the children are going to travel they'd better come with a parent." So each child came with a parent.

So when Greg called me that day, he said, "We really need a place for this to happen, and would the farmhouse be available?" and I saw it as a way to really get some attention, not only to Elian, who had all the attention, but to deeper understanding of family issues and international issues and children as peacemakers and how would we see this play itself out. So I, that Sunday afternoon, got my board on the phone, or at least my executive committee of six or eight people and said, "Well, we've been approached to do this. Now we approach three thousand American families every year and say, 'Will you take kids from abroad? Will you play a role in something larger than yourself, will you have a teenager from Ecuador or Germany or Russia come and live with you?' We're now being asked to take a child from Cuba, a country with which we don't have a good relationship, into our organization's home. How can we say no?" The board said, "OK, go for it," and that's how my phase with Cuba began.

Q: All right, well, we'll pick it up at that point.

Today is the 17th of December 2003, the 100th anniversary of flight, manned flight. Sally, might not talk about manned flight, but talk about the – in the first place, what happened with the – did you find yourself deluged with Cubans trying to break into the quarters and all that?

COWAL: Well, first of all, a comment on flight. We didn't go back a hundred years in my family history, but actually the Wright brothers were related to my grandfather. He was related to them. He had come from -- my mother's father – had come from Dayton, Ohio. His mother's name was Sobie, and her mother's maiden name was Wright, and they were somehow connected in this whole thing. If you ever saw a picture of my brother, now deceased, he looks a lot like the Wright brothers. So I guess there really is somewhat of a family connection there. I had been reading up on this anniversary thing and remembering a little bit of our own history.

Anyway, to the topic of Cuba. Yes, I think we found ourselves in the middle of a an interesting moment, I guess, in U.S. history, and also a circus involved in this event of Elian. He had been picked up at sea, in a remarkable rescue, which seemed to many of the Cuban-Americans living in Miami as almost a religious experience. They tried to put that spin on the whole thing, most of them strong Catholics as well as strong patriots. They wanted to see the modern Elian as sort of a parable for the Christ story. He had been out there at sea, by himself, for three days, and three nights, when suddenly he was discovered, and everyone around him had already died, including his mother. I don't think, since the principals in this are already dead – the truth will ever be known. They certainly believed that his mother was deliberately taking him to win freedom for herself and for her child, and that Elian's father, Juan Miguel, knew this, and approved of it.

This he certainly then disputed, and the truth about Elizabeth Brotons, who was his mother, is somewhat unclear to me. It would appear that she left Cuba more for personal reasons of having taken up with a man who had moved to the United States and then come back, than for real ideological reasons. I'm sure that many people who leave Cuba do so for ideological reasons as well as for personal reasons. I think that's also true about immigrants coming to the United States from many other countries. It's primarily driven by poverty and restrictions on their own liberty, whether that's imposed by the government or something imposed by the poverty in which they lived. We see millions of people arriving here both legally and illegally, from all over Central America and the Caribbean.

We have enacted many strange and sui generic laws in the United States with respect to Cuba. There is this ordered migration of 20,000 a year based on a lottery system in Cuba. Much over subscribed, obviously. Unlike our policy with other countries, an illegal Cuban immigrant seeking to stay in the United States has only to get his or her foot on dry land. So it's called the "wet foot, dry foot" policy. If you are found at sea, then you

can be repatriated to Cuba, and that is now being done more routinely than in the past. But if you should happen to evade the Coast Guard or anybody else who is out there protecting the shores of the United States, and you manage to get your inner tube or your raft or your piece of wood or your little motor craft or your airplane to land on Key West, or any other place of U.S. soil, you are immediately paroled into the United States. You avoid being confined in the detention center, which is what happens, for instance, to Haitian immigrants who are similarly motivated and almost as convenient geographically as the Cubans, to be able to take unseaworthy craft and try to come to the United States.

A Haitian who gets his foot on the soil of Key West is immediately – and this applies for refugee status – put into a detention center. Then the refugee status is adjudicated, which usually takes about 18 months. With Haiti's rise and fall in political stability and political freedoms that somewhat varies with the times, but I would say most of those claims are unsuccessful. People are found not to be fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution, which is the reason for which you can legitimately claim asylum, but they're founded in people who are fleeing poor and desperate circumstances in Haiti, of which there are obviously many. The contrast between that and our policy on Cuba is simply one of the anomalies that exists.

Q: There's an accusation of racism, which …

COWAL: There is an accusation of racism, although it's also true that now, I suppose, 50 percent of the Cuban population has, at least, mixed African heritage and ancestry. I think most of the Cubans who came early on were certainly of Spanish heritage, or at least looking Caucasian. That's probably no longer true, but it certainly is a discriminatory policy. That gets into why I got involved in the Cuba Policy Foundation, which comes a little later in this story. It's one of those anomalies in U.S. policy that I think is not particularly a healthy one.

At any rate, back to the child, Elian. He never, himself, in this inner-tube, reached the United States. He was rescued by a fisherman, I believe, who brought him to the United States. He was, of course, a minor child. That is what the whole, essentially, crisis was about: who had the right to determine for a minor child whether he should stay in the United States or should go back to Cuba. His father, who was living in Cuba, made it clear from the beginning that he had no intention of leaving Cuba, and that he was the sole remaining legal guardian of this child, and requested that he be sent back.

I think it would have been smarter for the Clinton administration to have put him on the first plane and sent back to Cuba. Instead, we allowed the whole thing to be thrown into a long and protracted court adjudication causing passions to rise on both sides of the Straits of Florida. These passions were very cleverly manipulated by Castro, who was in many ways running out of steam. He was able to use Elian as a rallying point. No one, any normally even semi-patriotic or loyal citizen of a country, wants to believe that another country feels its very way of life and system of government are so evil that a child brought up there could not possibly have a normal life or turn out to be a well-balanced

human being. When your own way of life is attacked, it's a rallying point to say, "Wait a minute, look at all those other countries. And at the United States, things aren't so great there, either, if you happen to be poor, or black, or an immigrant."

So by the very delay in the thing and the fact that it was also leading up to the presidential election time, it became, in a way, symbolic of the struggle over U.S. policy toward Cuba, which had been going on for 35, the last 40 years. We didn't become the center of that firestorm. Our organization was involved only in a purely humanitarian phase of trying to provide a place of sanity and refuge for this little extended family from Cuba. Cuba agreed to allow the U.S. courts to adjudicate the case, but requested that father and son be together while this process played out. We immediately had not only the little extended family, we had a lot of news people who were interested in what was going on behind these wooden fences. We had 54, I think, U.S. Marshals around the clock, who were sent there in order to protect the family, particularly the father. There had been some credible intelligence that some of the more radical people in Miami would find it very convenient if the father were no longer in the picture. In other words, if he were assassinated, then, once again, to whom does this child belong? It would become a real question. And by the way, I think initially, when Juan Miguel received the call from the authorities in Miami, that his son had been found and was all right and was alive, but was in the hospital for observation, he asked that his uncle be called. There had been relations between these families.

This is a civil war which has been going on for 40 years, and personal relationships remain strong between people who have immigrated and people who have stayed. So his first thought was to call his uncle and ask his uncle to go and receive Elian from the hospital, and they would talk later and sort out how he would come home, and so on. I don't know, never having met the uncle, whether the uncle went and picked him up always with the idea that they would petition for him to stay, or whether there was a subsequent you might call it manipulation. You might just call it persuasion of the more political elements of the Miami community, that this child had to stay in the United States. At any rate, yes, we had demonstrators coming from Miami, we had the ordinary curiosity-seekers who wanted to know who had seen this child. Of course, one of the things that made this case more interesting was that this was such a cute kid. The U.S. media loves to play around with symbols. I think if he hadn't been as cute as Mickey Mouse the story wouldn't have had the length that it had. Here was this cute, six-year-old boy and the story simply wouldn't go away even though not very much happened in the period of time that they actually stayed with us.

We had some demonstrations, lots of security, lots of curiosity-seekers, and lots of news media.

Q: That area is close to – there's a very large Hispanic, not necessarily Cuban, but Hispanic community, isn't there?

COWAL: Not particularly. This organization was located right next to the National Cathedral. Over in Cleveland Park. Northwest.

Q: Oh, I see. That's right. There wasn't much of Cuban community in Washington …

COWAL: No, the Cuban community that we had an interaction with was the official Cuban community. We haven't had an embassy there for 40 years, but since the Carter administration twenty-some, 25 years ago, I guess, there was an agreement negotiated between Cuba and the United States that we would each maintain an interest section in the other's country. Both of them are managed under the auspices of the Swiss embassy. So there's a Cuban interest section on Columbia Road, up in the more Hispanic part of Washington. It's up near where the old Mexican embassy was, and several of the embassies from an early period of time were located up there. I think this is a building that dates back to the early 20th century, when Cuba became independent from Spain with a lot of help from the United States. The United States maintains a large interest section in Cuba. In fact, I think there are more people assigned to the U.S. interest section in Cuba than to almost any foreign embassy in Cuba. It's a big, tall, modern embassy that was built in the 1950s, on the Malecon near the sea-front. It provides a great rallying point for Cubans who wish to demonstrate their opposition, or at least their trumped-up opposition, to U.S. policy.

The Cubans that we had most contact with over this period of time were the representatives of the Cuban interest section. This was a very interesting experience for me. Throughout my whole Foreign Service career, and remaining probably until this time, any contact with official Cubans was an action which warranted a report to the FBI. I knew a couple of Cubans in my time in New York, or at the Cuban mission to the United Nations, but had certainly no social contact with them, and really no professional contact with them. That was not supposed to happen, and it was something that required a little bit of inconvenience on your part if it did happen, because you had to sit down and document it. I think the FBI was always looking for possible defectors, and looking for possible sources of information, but I didn't have any real contact with Cuban diplomats. I found the group of Cuban diplomats assigned to the interest section in Washington to be very professional and good representatives of their country, perhaps because it's such a difficult posting for them. It seemed to me that they were as talented a group of people as the diplomats I had met from any other Latin American country, including Mexico, and Brazil, important countries.

I think that also began to, somewhat, shape my own transformation and views about Cuba. Maybe I'm getting ahead of where you want to be in the story …

Q: No, not at all.

COWAL: I had daily contact with the family, Elian's family, primarily his father, and stepmother. His father is just a lovely, dignified and honest person, and that comes across.

Q: He was a waiter, wasn't he?

COWAL: He was sort of a cashier in a middle class, Cuban resort in Varadero Beach, which is a famous resort. In addition to the luxury hotel – into which Cuban citizens are not allowed – there are some day resorts for people coming out from Havana. Pesos are the currency used, and not U.S. dollars. They're kind of water-sports parks, where families can come and have a little lunch and picnic on the beach. So he works as the kind of cashier, assistant cashier, in such and establishment, and continues, as far as I know, continues to this day to do this.

He was very clear that all he really wanted was his son. We had, in our many, many lunches and dinners, sometimes including members of the interests section, and sometimes not, we had a lot of conversations about life, and raising children and goals for what we wanted out of our lives. I thought he was just a remarkable human being. He kept his cool throughout. At one point we had to change all the phone numbers because some of the far right elements in Miami had discovered the phone number in this house where they were and began to call and harass at moments of the day and night. So I think he stayed pretty cool and withstood this pressure and was very clear that he didn't want anything out of it other than the right to raise his son as he wished to raise him.

Q: What happened to you? You talked about you realizing you weren't the fundraiser that you needed for the …

COWAL: I had realized – it wasn't even so much the fundraiser. I was pretty good at raising funds. I wasn't particularly either talented or interested in establishing systems of financial management and accounting, and it's not only the organization wasn't raising money, it also wasn't administering it very well. Some of the ways of doing business clearly needed to be changed. Systems were coming into play that could have been very effective, I mean, computerized systems. The need to have an integrated, relational database between our program information and our financial information was a huge challenge. This was nothing that I had any particular talent for or interest in.

I felt I had a board that was sort of locked in the past, didn't understand how much, really, the world had changed in the 50 years since this organization had been founded. If it was going to continue to be successful, it needed to make some radical changes in the way it did its business. It was a very unwieldy board of about 25 people who had no particular interest in wanting to hear bad news, and I kept bringing bad news. In other words, I think that they had been left pretty much in the dark and thought everything was going along swimmingly. It became obvious to me that things were not going along swimmingly.

In fact, I think the first six months I was there, every time I opened the closet door some other skeleton fell out, something that had been kept from their view. I didn't think I was doing myself or the organization a great favor by staying around. They needed to come to grips with their own situation, and weren't doing it, and I wasn't able to persuade them to do it. Subsequently, they were sort of persuaded by, in fact, hitting bottom. They're now

reconstructing themselves, and I think there is a role for international exchange, but not for a 1950s organization in, at that time, the year 2000 or 2001.

So I had some real push factors. Then the pull factors were that out of this experience – at the same time that the Elian experience was going on, it was really opening up, in a way, a lot of Americans' eyes to what was this Cuba thing all about? What was our Cuba policy all about? It was kind of a grassroots feeling. Suddenly this child opened eyes and minds, maybe, in a way that other things hadn't, because they weren't the stuff of *telenovelas*, or soap operas, and Elian was the stuff of a soap opera. So you had this groundswell coming up from underneath. At the same time, just by coincidence, you had a Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force going on about U.S. policy toward Cuba. It presented a report, which issued no sweeping finding on whether we should have an embargo or not, but did point out that many things in the U.S. policy toward Cuba were not really in the United States' best national or economic interest. This was an independent task force of people from all political stripes, the Council on Foreign Relations, which remains probably the most prestigious of these kinds of organizations in the United States.

So there was suddenly, from the top, a willingness, or really, a recommendation that this policy be re-looked at in the terms of a new century and not a 50 year old argument. From the bottom up was this whole hoopla about Elian. My organization, a youth exchange organization, had played a small role, but nonetheless a role. Elian went home, when the Supreme Court decided it would not reverse the decision of the 11th Circuit Court, that he was a six-year-old child and he belonged with his father. His father had the right to take him wherever he wanted to. That was immediately appealed to the Supreme Court, and then the Supreme Court refused to take the case, and so it was all over in a moment.

But we had played a small role in that, and the organization, where they had stayed, felt very passionately by the end of their stay that U.S. policy toward Cuba needed to have some revision. In many other situations in the world, we'd seen a little bit of it. There were efforts to have an end to the Israeli-Palestinian problems through grassroots exchange organizations, primarily working with newer generations, the successor generation, the young generation. There is a program between Israel and Palestine called The Seeds of Peace, which had been quite successful in bringing teenagers from both countries to the United States each summer to see whether, outside of the communities in which they are so boxed in, they can find that there are commonalities between them.

Youth for Understanding, this organization, had been involved with USAID money in a couple of projects to do the same thing with teenagers from Georgia and Abkhazia, for instance, and Armenia and Azerbaijan. A six week program in the summer, in the United States, in which you'd bring equal numbers of these kids. Not anticipating that these were peacemakers, but that these were peace builders. If you picked the right kids, 30 years from now, or 20 years from now, or 10 years from now, because these are quickly emerging societies, and a 16 year old at 26 or 28, may well be in a significant position as a leader. Their attitudes about these other people will be very different, because they've

had a chance to know these people in a different context. So Youth for Understanding decided that it wanted to continue to be involved in Cuba after Elian, by designing and running a program for Cubans and Americans. That quickly modified to being – because we thought that it was probably too tense – to have this be a special program for some teenagers from key countries in the Americas including Canadians and Mexicans and others. And we realized it couldn't be an academic year program because the academic systems are too different. We would try to do a summer program of six weeks of bringing these kids together, in Havana and in Washington. They could discuss how each of their societies is dealing with common problems, such as aging, and the environment and AIDS, and other problems which we all face. In a dispassionate way they might show different approaches and whether they were successful or not, and which were successful in which way.

I had participated in this and learned something about it in my days serving in Israel. After the signing of the Camp David agreement, we began to find ways to have Israelis – not teenagers, but professionals, in professional groups – be in professional groups with their counterparts from Jordan or Iraq or other places in the Middle East. Ostensibly, and really, this was to learn something about city management, or electric power plants, or cleaning up river resources. But underneath that, to say, here's a chance to know the other as a human being and as a professional, and not as the enemy.

So we put together a proposal and we began to raise money for the proposal, realizing that, unlike our programs in eastern Europe, or the Balkans, we would not seek or want or receive U.S. government funds for such a program. I knew enough after having spent my six weeks with the Cuban diplomats that they felt all USAID money, which comes under something for Cuba, which comes under a special agreement called Section 109 of the Helms-Burton Act, is really meant to bring about regime change in Cuba. In other words, they spend a lot of money and the Cuban-American community is having people invent scenarios for what happens after we get Fidel Castro out of power. So the Cubans naturally regard any money coming that way as being tainted and something that they would not prefer to deal with. We set out to raise money from the Ford Foundation and from the Arca Foundation, and from anyone else whom we thought would give us money.

Anyway, making a very long story short, we were quite successful with getting together money for this project. I was recruited away from Youth for Understanding by a group of people who had been involved in the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on Cuba. They thought, instead of another study group on saying what's wrong with U.S. policy, that you take the task force as a starting point, and begin to try to implement some of the recommendations of the task force toward normalizing relations with Cuba. That would clearly need to be something that brought about a shift in public opinion in the United States and also a shift in Congressional opinion, and administration opinion.

So a foundation, called the Arca Foundation, decided that they would give the first …

Q: Arca is spelled how?

COWAL: A-R-C-A.

Q: Does it mean anything?

COWAL: No, it's a family foundation of a gentleman named Smith Bagley who had been involved in …

Q: I've interviewed Elizabeth Bagley, who was ambassador …

COWAL: Right, to Portugal. Well, the Bagley family, as you probably know Smith, is the heir to the Reynolds tobacco money, or at least to some part of it, there were two or three. His mother was a Reynolds, and she was, I think, of a generation where there were three of them. There's another foundation in New York called the Christopher Reynolds Foundation which is his uncle, and he's long dead, but at any rate, his mother began the Arca Foundation with some of her money out of the Reynolds, and Christopher Reynolds began one called the Christopher Reynolds Foundation. And they have been around for 25 years or so, and had been interested in Cuba for a long time, for a great deal of those 25 years. They had been interested in Cuba as a foreign policy issue, and then many domestic issues in the United States having to do with voting rights, and campaign financing and so on, and certainly known – I would say known as a very liberal foundation.

They had given some money over the years to some very leftist, I would say, or at least left-leaning, or at least very liberal groups who had sought to bring about a change in our relations with Cuba. Now they had decided, I think, after Elian, and after the Council on Foreign Relations, that it would be useful to have a reorientation of this debate. So they essentially recruited me to set up a new foundation, to begin to reorient the debate in the United States at large, and particularly in the United States Congress. They looked for a pragmatic approach, and people who would be not perceived as necessarily supporters of Fidel Castro, certainly not Communists or Communist-supporters, but just people who said, "Hey, after 40 years of failure isn't it time to look at this again? Do we have the right policy?"

Q: Well, I think, too, that the Elian case really became – the anti-Castro forces in Miami became rather repugnant.

COWAL: Yes.

Q: They were so extreme, most Americans said well, we're talking about a six year old kid.

COWAL: Right.

Q: His father wants to go back. His father's not a monster

COWAL: Right.

Q: These people are fanatics.

COWAL: Right. And they revealed themselves as fanatics. I think you're absolutely right. That cast them in a different light than simply as patriotic freedom fighters. So with a little bit of persuading I decided that it was something that could be done and should be done. So we put together a board of directors of some very distinguished individuals. Bill Rogers was the chairman of the board was a former assistant secretary of state and undersecretary of state for economic affairs in the time of Kissinger and Nixon; so certainly good, Republican, credentials. Diego Asencio who was an ambassador to Brazil and ambassador to Columbia; Harry Shlaudeman who had been ambassador in a dozen places; Martha Muse who is the head of the Tinker Foundation which has been giving grants in Latin America for 25 years and well known, distinguished; Paul Simon, who recently died, ex U.S. senator from Illinois. That type of people, not known as left-leaning, Fidel loving part of American society which has always been there. It just has never been very big or very powerful other than in its own community. We set up a little office in Washington and began to try to reconstruct this debate.

Q: When did you set it up?

COWAL: We set it up in April of 2001. I must say it was a somewhat painful experience. There were some exciting moments in it. We managed to set up a bi-partisan working group on the Hill of 25 Republicans and 25 Democrats, member of Congress who have been responsible for these changes in voting on the Hill. Now fairly regularly there are votes on Capitol Hill in favor of changes in this policy which today have always been, never been able to really take effect either through fear of vetoes or through manipulation by the Cuban American members of Congress. You know, all of this having to do with a lot of electoral politics in Florida particularly but elsewhere. I think it's clear that the will of the majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate is really being frustrated, is really being held hostage to this small group. I think we brought that debate out more into public. We debated the members of the Cuban American National Foundation who are the group that Jorge Mas Canosa founded in the 70s and which has been very powerful.

Q: When did he die?

COWAL: He died about 5 or 6 years ago.

Q: So this is THE major power.

COWAL: The major power. I must say when they founded the Cuban American National Foundation which I think was early in the 80s, they did so based on the model of AIPAC which is the America-Israel Lobbying organization. And Mas Canosa was really taken

under the wing of the Israelis and taught how you do effective lobbying work on Capitol Hill and how you support that by supporting campaign contributions to the members of Congress whose vote you would like to influence. After he died it is currently run by his son. It's never had quite the same power but nonetheless remained the most important voice on the subject until perhaps things like Elian and the discrediting and the Cuban community I think split over that also. Many more Cuban-Americans were willing to express their opposition to that kind of extremism than had been willing to express it before. And generationally it changes. Those who came in the 60s are still around, but they are now probably a minority in the Cuban-American community. Many of their children born in the United States or brought here as very small children feel quite differently than their parents. Much of that has not yet expressed itself because their parents are still alive. Within the sanctity and the close relationship that a Cuban family has, their children are unwilling to be on the record about this. But I think on its own time is beginning to change this. At any rate, we challenged the Cuban American National Foundation to a series of five debates around the country, public debates, on-the-record debates about policy. Much to my surprise they accepted this challenge. They had not ever before been willing to come out in daylight about it. But, I think, realizing they were under some stress and that things were changing, they agreed to this.

We did the debates at Harvard University, George Washington University, the Carter Center in Atlanta, and the Council on Foreign Relations in Los Angeles and were able to get quite a lot in the press about this changing feeling in the majority of Americans about our policy toward Cuba based on the question of "what do you think is in the U.S. best national interest?" Then appealing to groups such as rice farmers in Texas who wanted to sell their product, we would support our advocacy by sponsoring studies showing what would the potential be for the rice farmers to sell. For instance we did a state by state survey of which states would sell what to Cuba. It was a computerized model but based on the commodities they produced and what the Cubans needed and where the Cubans were currently buying and what they were buying for and what they buy from the United States. At the same time the legislation was proceeding to finally allow the sale of agricultural products to Cuba which is now legal. So we came up with the fact, for instance, that Arkansas would be the top beneficiary because of chicken farms and rice farms and things that the Cubans wanted. We were able to get the governor of Arkansas who is a conservative Republican and a friend of Bush to write a letter and say "this policy should be changed." We had a press conference in Little Rock and the four Representatives and two Senators from Arkansas showed up for this press conference to say, some Republicans and some Democrats, how they were all in favor. The press conference was to announce the findings of this survey. I can't remember the dollar amounts anymore, but in aggregate about a billion dollars for U.S. agricultural products of which Arkansas would be in the number one position with 300 million. All in favor of that.

What happened? I think a bunch of things happened, but one of them was I again got a new reflection on Cuba out of this. That was that whereas I had been persuaded that many people also wanted a change in this relationship. I think it's now fairly clear to me that

among those is not included Fidel Castro who continues to run Cuba without any doubt. So, I think, the final and the reason the Foundation decided that this was not a time to pursue its activities was after a Congressional trip to Cuba in April 2003, two years after we had begun this. Six members of Congress went down and as has become the custom for these visits, they saw many people in the Castro government but then they also asked to see a group of dissidents. They saw six or seven dissidents, four or five of whom are now in prison. As the government in April of this year decided to crack down once again and put about 75 people in jail for up to 25 years for crimes such as trying to publish an article, or use the internet, or meet with members of Congress. So obviously, I think, there have been examples in the past where it is arguable that the Helms-Burton Law which was passed in 1996, which is a rather Draconian measure further strengthening the embargo which has been in place since the 60s. But there was a lot of initial opposition to it on Capitol Hill and it probably would not have been enacted except days before the vote was to be taken the Cuban government shot down two little planes, killing four people, who had been admittedly provocatively, nonetheless, benignly using these little planes to fly over Havana and drop leaflets on the streets about you have "nothing to loose but your chains" "revolt" and so on. They shot down the planes. Why did they pick that time to shoot down the planes? The planes had been flying for some time. I must say the Cuban government had been protesting to the U.S. government these flights and the United States government didn't do anything to stop them. Nonetheless the decision to shoot down those planes right before this legislation was to be voted on guaranteed that the legislation was passed and that the President, who was Clinton at the time, said "I have no choice but to sign this." Everyone was outraged about the shooting down of the Brothers to the Rescue.

I think in April of this year we saw the same thing. They executed three people who had taken a ferry and tried to go to Cuba with the ferry. Now, admittedly, they were hijackers and we take a very dim view of hijackers. Nonetheless, what seemed to many people in the United States a summary execution, the three people were tried, sentenced, convicted and shot within a week after the incident took place. The 75 people were put in jail. So we came to believe that first of all, these were repugnant acts, that the organization, the Cuba Policy Foundation, could not support and that we saw them as symbolic of the lack of desire on the part of the Castro government to see any real reforms in the policy. Most of us, including myself, felt that as people much closer to the end of their careers than to the beginning of them, that we had other things to do with our time than be very frustrated. I have to say, that that was the cause celebre for the ceasing of activity on the part of the Foundation. I also came to believe that the Bush administration and I think we've seen this in many ways, has absolutely no willingness or desire to reexamine the relationship either. And in fact has done many things to tighten the travel ban against the will of Congress and the American people who vote. In public opinion surveys overwhelmingly that they don't think their freedom to travel should be restricted in such a way that they can't go to Cuba. Not per se they can't go to Cuba, but they can't spend money in Cuba; it's a Treasury Department restriction. But in fact if you can't spend money, you can't go unless somebody is willing to pay your way.

Under the Clinton administration things were eased quite significantly to allow educational exchange of many kinds. That's how I was trying to do this program under the Clinton administration rules. Now the only educational exchange which is allowed is degree students, in other words, people in formal academic programs. Whereas in the past that had extended to a National Geographic group to look at the sea reef and an historic preservation group to look at the buildings of Old Havana and a Hemmingway studies group and the alumni association of the University of Wisconsin. Anything could be quote unquote academically orientated in which people didn't just go to the beach but sought to have person-to-person contacts with Cubans was licensable, now it's not. Now they are prosecuting people much more who are going to ride bicycles or sell bibles or whatever they are going to do. It was clear to us that despite the opening which was presented in the end of 2000 by the Elian case and the Council on Foreign Relations study which gave the opening of the window, we decided by April of 2003 that that no longer existed.

Q: Were you getting from people who had been following Cuba for some time a reading on Castro that was saying, "look you can do what you want but you really have to wait for the demise or decrepitated Castro"?

COWAL: I think most of us felt that we shouldn't allow Castro to be the only point of this policy. There were many reasons to suggest that the United States ought to be reaching out in any way that it could to establish good working relations in areas like drugs. We have narcotics agreements with every country in the Caribbean save one and that's Cuba. Therefore, if you were a drug trafficker wouldn't you seek to use the one place that doesn't have an agreement with the United States to ship drugs? We felt that by flooding Cuba with American tourists we would send out lots of ambassadors for America who could present their own stories to Cubans in ways that they are not able to receive because their media is so censored and they are fed a constant line of propaganda about what the United States is all about. These kinds of things would begin to establish the basis for a new relationship whether that happened before Castro's demise or not until after his demise. That American commercial companies being involved in Cuba and having agreements and selling things, and receiving money would begin to pave the way for a new kind of future. But it would be like oxygen spreading around the planet, these things would be "not containable." As the Cubans to began to -- much as has happened in Mexico which began with NAFTA, very commercially orientated agreement, but which most people would say was the beginning and end of the Pri, an authoritarian rather than a communist regime, but that economic freedom does lead to political freedom. We have President Bush out there preaching that all the time as he sponsors and supports the growth of the Free Trade Agreement for all of the Americas. These are lines which he would use: "that economic freedom leads to political freedom". It is very clear that the reason we don't use that litany with Cuba is because there are important interests in Florida who don't wish this relationship to change.

Q: And that was cemented by the election of the George Bush.

COWAL: Absolutely.

Q: You can say that if he hadn't had a strong Cuba policy that vote was vital to his election. Really vital!

COWAL: Really vital to his election when it came down to a very few votes in Florida and the Cuban American community in Florida voting overwhelmingly in favor of him. Although I must say, Gore tried to get the votes of that community which of course was livid because of Janet Reno making the decision about Elian. At least Janet Reno's Justice Department removing Elian from the home of the Miami relatives really grated, this really offended the Cuban American community. I think Gore saying he supported continued embargo and isolation; he probably could have saved his breath and maybe have won more votes by saying at least he was principled than he was able to win in the Cuban American community, which was virtually nothing. So you could certainly say that Bush owed his election to that community. I'm sure others could make that case. But it was a vital part and therefore unlikely to see any change which he would support. I think before that became known there was a feeling that maybe Bush would be good for this, that maybe Bush could be like Nixon going to China; that a Republican could do this more easily than a Democrat. Let's see what happens in this election, if he is reelected and in a position where he then can't be reelected again maybe we'll see a change. But I must say, people thought and expected and wanted a change in the second Clinton administration and never got it. He was never willing to repudiate that policy.

Q: Well when did you shut down, was the whole organization shut down?

COWAL: We had been realizing increasingly over a period of months that this was not likely to lend itself to either doing extensive fundraising which was needed to support the organization because the hope began to die, I must say. So in October of 2002 I made a recommendation to the board that I cease being paid as a full-time employee, which I was. I was the president and a salaried employee. That I remain on the board, and that the board hire Brian Alexander who was a young man who I had hired to be my side-kick, my policy officer, to be the executive director. That we step back a little bit, stay in existence, follow legislation, do what we could to continue to be helpful, but sort of a watching brief. So it was in October of 2002 that I came to work at PSI, still remaining on the board. Then with these arrests and executions in Cuba earlier this year, the entire board resigned en-mass, in protest over these actions and feeling that this might be seen in Cuba as an important step because the Policy Foundation was actually regarded very well by the Cuban government as a group that was sane and logical and important and prestigious and was accomplishing something. I don't know because I haven't been to Cuba since then whether or not it had the desired effect. So there were two stages, the first one being a stepping back and the second one being a dissolution.

Q: Well, we might just talk a bit about what you're doing now.

COWAL: I came to Population Services International about a year ago, a little bit more than a year ago. An organization that I had know about since my time working at UN AID because it's an organization which is very much involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS in the developing world. It's quite a unique non-governmental organization. Unique in the sense that its principle activity is something called social marketing which involves using the commercial networks around the world to make health care products and services available to low income people at places where they shop and at a price which they can afford. This began in the 1970s as a way to offer family planning information, contraceptive information to Indians. When the Indian government was essentially urging family planning but presenting only the option of sterilization this organization believes that through the use of oral contraception and IUDs and condoms, there were less permanent methods to help people space their family and achieve the size family that they wanted to have. So that's how we began and grew extremely rapidly during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s because of the expansion in the worldwide HIV epidemic and the realization that as a sexually transmitted disease HIV could be stopped or prevented or curtailed or whatever by the correct and consistent use of condoms. So as people who understood distribution systems and who had products available in many countries of the world, now we're working in 70 countries. I suppose in the 1980s it was probably 30 countries, many of them countries where the HIV epidemic, in Africa for instance, was getting off to a fast start, that we could play a role. The approach also involved not only the selling of a product but the using of the product as a way to encourage behavior change. So that better than simply telling people to use a condom or not to have sex, but having no condoms available to them is likely to be hot air and not producing very much of a change in behavior. So it's the association of a message and a behavior with a product that we find an effective approach. We also sell products, really for two reasons. First of all, is because that allows us to be in the commercial network. [end of tape]

So whether it's selling pan-bimbo in Mexico, or Coca-Cola somewhere else, the commercial network motivated by profit is very effective in reaching all communities, that's how they exist. A public health community may be restricted by bureaucracy or lack of funding, to be an awkward and not very accessible system. So this is based on the fact that nothing is more accessible than the corner store. We will try to get our products through the wholesaler making a penny, and the retailer making a penny, however modest the cost of the product, that will cause it to be sold at corner stores all over the country.

The second reason we sell a product, rather than giving it away, is that we feel that it's a product which is much more likely to be used if somebody has spent, however modestly, a part of their disposable income on buying it. We used the commercial sector to make our products attractive as well as affordable. We brand a product, and we brand it after doing extensive focus group work within the community that we would hope would use the product. So we might have three different condom brands in the same country, one of which is named for, branded, advertised, as the condom that young men might use. Another might be the same condom, but branded in a different package, and being promoted to couples who wish to use it as a family-planning method. A third might be

made available to commercial sex workers. So you would brand this same product in very different ways.

When they asked me to come, to PSI (Population Services International), it was essentially to be the head of maternal and child health, to focus on our non-HIV and non-family-planning business. This was small but the organization's board felt it had a potential for growing, that the same social marketing approach could also make mosquito nets available in malaria areas, for instance. It could make safe drinking water available where's it's not available. So I work mainly on those areas, although I also head our Latin American/Caribbean programs, which are primarily focused on HIV and AIDS.

The though was also that we should be changing our image from a condom company, which is basically what it is, to a full-service health company, which also sells a lot of condoms, and buys a lot of condoms. In this year of 2003, we will sell about a billion condoms around the world. In many places we're the largest selling brand, and most people know us not by our name, PSI, but by the brands that we promote. A condom called 'Trust' in Kenya, a condom called 'Pante' in Haiti, a condom called 'Number One,' in Cambodia, are all the leading brands.

Q: Do you set up local condom factories? How does this work?

COWAL: We set up local organizations, which are local non-profits registered in their own countries, with boards of directors – who have local people on the boards of directors. We have a staff now of about 4,500 people, 95 percent of whom are nationals of the countries where they're working. Then there is an expat, sort of a Foreign Service, staff of about 120, which rotates among these countries. Usually the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Operating Officer, of the company is, in fact, an expat, American or British. We have some Indian staff, we have a Canadian, an international Dutch staff from around the world, a lot of Brits, but expat staff. And then about 120 people in Washington, who give back-stopping to these programs and seek out new money from USAID and others.

Q: How have you found you relate your Foreign Service skills, being both in public diplomacy and running an embassy, and political officer and all, in the UN and all, has this paid off for you?

COWAL: Well, I think so. First of all, I think you get enormous experience, just about a lot of different countries and how things work. Therefore, you know pretty quickly what you're looking at, even if it's a fairly new experience for you, or relates to a country that you're operating. I do Latin America, which is a continent I know very well, so first of all I know a lot of people in these places. I understand, I think, basically what the countries are all about and what their political systems are all about.

From my years at UNAIDS I understand something about public health, and that certainly has helped me enormously in this job. My own feeling is that, in the United States, in

terms of our development assistance, we're gradually shifting an awful lot of that, actually, from USAID to the State Department. The president's program, for instance, a $15 billion program to assist 14 countries with HIV and AIDS, Guyana and Haiti and then 12 African countries, is being run from the State Department, not from USAID. So obviously, having a very good understanding of the State Department and how it works is very helpful to me in this job.

Also, I think it's all about a matter of fundamental understanding of the world that I certainly wouldn't have achieved without having been a Foreign Service officer. Many of my colleagues here are public health people by background. Many others are MBAs and have MBA-backgrounds, because we are, we do operate in the commercial sector, although we're non-profit. I think I'm really the only one who has a diplomatic background. So, with a senior management team, just as I think I added that to the UN organization I was a part of, I add that here. After all, we are about 50 percent USAID funded, or U.S. government funded. Now I say State Department, Centers for Disease Control, USAID, but having somebody who understand the political process in this country, I think it's also very helpful to understand the role the Congress plays in the allocation of resources. HIV and AIDS is a very political issue, continues to be in this country, and how you prevent it, and how you treat it, remain enormously political issues. The Congress has a lot to say about them, so it helps to have that kind of background.

Q: Has the Catholic Church been a factor in what you're doing?

COWAL: We are now, I think, understanding more and more that there are ways to work with faith-based organizations, including the Catholic Church. I think that was something I began to understand at UNAIDS. We really did reach out and have some interesting dialogue and agreements with the Catholic Church, with some important Muslims, with other faith organizations. They can certainly, in some countries, be an obstacle to what we're trying to do. I think over the course of the years of the AIDS crisis, we understand a couple of things. First of all, that condoms alone are not enough, and that what they say about abstinence and fidelity are important messages. Certainly if you had a delay in the sexual debut of all young people around the world, if they didn't begin to engage in sexual activities at 15 but at 16 it would have a huge impact on the AIDS epidemic. If people only had one partner, it would have a huge impact on the AIDS epidemic. So I think, we, as sort of the people who have been most responsible for the condom part of this, are also genuinely understanding that the other parts are important.

Secondly, in many places in the world, Africa, Latin America, 25 or more percent of all the care given to HIV-positive people or AIDS people in hospitals, and hospices and homes and so on, is provided by a church-run organization. So churches and religious organizations are tremendously important in the preventing of stigmatization, to accept HIV-positive people as part of our society.

Finally, I think what we've learned is that HIV and AIDS – and that's now carrying over into other aspects of public health, I think – is about empowering people, individuals.

Maybe we can't wipe out HIV tomorrow, but we can help individuals change their own behavior so they are not at risk. Maybe we can't wipe out malaria tomorrow, but we can empower individuals to get a net for their bed, or for their children's beds. I think social marketing is really very much about empowering the individual to go beyond the government, or not simply waiting for there to be a vaccine or a wiping-out of this disease, but going about and realizing that we live in a world in which these are present factors. We need to, collectively, protect our societies, but do that one net at a time, or one condom at a time, or one behavior change at a time.

Q: Before we finish, one of the things I notice here on this table, we sit here, we've got condoms of all size and pills, and female condoms and all these – it's a unique experience for me. But something you were pointing to – could you explain about this little thing here?

COWAL: This is a little packet, it's about the size of a package of Equal, or non-dairy creamer that you put in your coffee. We call it "sprinkles." It's an iron encapsulated micronutrient, primarily containing iron. It's meant to be sprinkled, hence the name sprinkles, on the food of a just-weaned child. In other words, a period of time from about six months of age until about a year of age, as families begin to introduce complimentary goods to breastfeeding. In many countries in the world, the foods that they introduce, because they're the foods that the families eat, are not very rich in iron. They're root vegetables, or they're grains, and children at that age have a particular necessity to have an iron-rich diet, to not be anemic. It's the period of time when almost all brain growth takes place. So for cognitive development, it's very important that a child of six to 18 months not be anemic. An anemic child will lose from eight to 13 IQ points, and so we're trying to introduce sprinkles to the world, through this same commercial marketing scheme, and to encourage mothers to buy this product to put on their children's food.

The donor is very important, because we want to provide this product at a price that people can afford it, and will therefore use it, and will use it consistently. We think it could be a very, very important part of an attempt, really, to have a more literate, better-educated world.

Q: Well, Sally, I think this has been quite an adventure for me.

COWAL: Well, Stu, it has been for me, too. This has now being going on since the Cuba Policy Foundation, more than two years, and I've enjoyed every one of our sessions.

Q: I have to point out one of our sessions was interrupted because I appeared at 10 o'clock in the morning of September 11th, 2001, and needless to say we decided not to have it, right?

COWAL: Right.

End of interview