

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

AMBASSADOR KENNETH C. BRILL

Interviewed by Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: We are beginning conversation with Ambassador Ken Brill about his experience with Ambassador Shirley Temple Black and Mother Teresa and it is April 11.

BRILL: It's a pleasure to do this and to remember these two personalities. Shirley Temple was my first ambassador. When I tell people that they go "Oooooo!" She wasn't my ambassador long, but I had a chance to interact with her because of some unique circumstances. I arrived in Ghana -- her first ambassadorial assignment; she subsequently had a second one in the Czech Republic -- a month or so before Secretary Henry Kissinger was supposed to arrive at post. The post was really focused on preparing for Kissinger. As the junior most officer in that embassy, I was given the really fabulous job of organizing the Secretary's motorcade. As it turns out, that would have been a career killer because his staff requested more vehicles for the visit than were available either in our embassy or any friendly embassies. . And, there were no rental car companies.

Q: And this was which year?

BRILL: This would have been 1976. I had really limited dealings with Ambassador Black in my initial time in the embassy. She was focused on getting things organized for the Secretary. I was doing my part running around desperately trying to find cars, while also trying to track down my missing air freight shipment. I had a brief courtesy call with her and she was very pleasant in welcoming me to the embassy. I never saw her outside the office in those early days and was never at the residence or anything like that, for example. She was well liked in the embassy. She had a very nice way with people and she also let her DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) Jack Linehan, who was a very experienced Africanist, run the embassy on a day-to-day basis. There was a very clear

line; she was the CEO (chief executive officer), he was the COO (chief operations officer). It seemed to me as a brand new person that embassy was running well.

Ambassador Black was also very popular in Ghana. She had been made an honorary chief in a village near Accra, Ghana's capital. She seemed to receive positive press coverage, which in Ghana at that time, for the U.S., was not easy. The Ghanaian press in those days tended to be pretty stridently anti-American. And when it was not attacking the U.S. it featured sensational stories that were only loosely tied to reality. But despite all that, Ambassador Black always seemed to be treated well in the press and always got a photograph. Every time I remember seeing any article that related to her in The Ghanaian Times or some of the other more scurrilous newspapers there was always a photograph, because she photographed well and people liked her. In many ways she was an ideal ambassador for a country like that because she arrived with a very positive persona. People would "Oh! Shirley Temple!" And she had the skills to use that opening with her direct interlocutors and the larger public when delivering a positive message about the U.S. and U.S.-Ghanaian relations.

Q: OK, so the Ghanaians were aware of her as a child actress?

BRILL: Yes; her films had a truly global audience and reach. That might not seem remarkable in today's wired world, but her films were made and distributed many decades before the internet. Because she had been so well known for so long, she was a private person. When she was working, my impression was that she was very focused and professionally outgoing. That was certainly the impression I got from all of my colleagues in the embassy. She took her work seriously; she was focused on it when she was doing it. When she was in the office she was personable, charming, and she had a smile that literally would light up a room -- and she smiled relatively easily. She was not a sour kind of person by any means. But when she was off the job, she kept to her family. The residence pool was not open to the embassy staff, something that changed when another ambassador came. But that was just the way she was; she was private. Given her background, one can understand why she would value her privacy; she hadn't had much from the time she was probably four years old or five years old.

Q: Who was with her in her family at the time?

BRILL: Ambassador Black was accompanied by her family. Her husband Charles "Charlie" Black came and went. He was a scion of a wealthy family in the San Francisco bay area and he had business interests in the Persian Gulf and other places, so he was away on business a good deal, but spent time in Ghana when not traveling on business. She had a daughter with her, whose name I believe was Susan, who married an Italian diplomat assigned to the Italian embassy in Accra. I believe Ambassador Black had another child with her, but I do not remember anything specifically about him/her.

Shirley Temple Black was charismatic. She was a very short person, perhaps five feet all (or an inch or two more). But carried herself with great confidence. She had great posture and always wore boots that had stacked heels to add a couple of inches. What set her

apart was her smile., which when I knew her in Ghana did not appear to have changed at all from when she was a much younger actress. If you saw her smile as an ambassador when she was probably in her 50s, and compared that with the smile that you would see in one of her films, it was the same delightful smile.

Ambassador Black did a good job and had a successful assignment in Ghana, but it ended abruptly because of complications related to Secretary Kissinger's visit.. Secretary Kissinger was making his one trip to Africa and he'd given an important policy speech in Lusaka on the situation in southern Africa and U.S. policy for the region. That would be Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia, then Southwest Africa, all of which were resisting the call for (and indigenous political movements dedicated to) black majority rule. The head of the Ghanaian government, a very undistinguished army colonel named Acheampong, who was neither terribly bright, nor accomplished in any way, withdrew the invitation for Kissinger to visit at the last minute, claiming diplomatic illness. I always thought, frankly, that he got cold feet because he finally came to the realization that he was going to sit across the table from Henry Kissinger and he didn't know what the hell to say to him. Kissinger had the well-earned reputation as a world class intellect; Acheampong did not. He didn't take advice from the foreign ministry very well and was surrounded by a coterie of essentially military people. I think he just didn't see that there was any benefit for him to have Kissinger visit, so he called it off.

Kissinger didn't take things like that well and as he flew over Ghana on his way to a scheduled stop in Liberia he sent a cable to Ambassador Black saying, "Come home". So he pulled her out as a mark of his displeasure. It wasn't a break in relations, but she was being called back to Washington for consultations. She was back in Washington for at least a few of months and was named Chief of Protocol (U.S. Department of State). She had started her new job, but she wanted to go back and say her farewells in Ghana. She was pulled out preemptively and very specifically told, "don't pay any farewell calls, we're showing our displeasure, just return home."

Ambassador Black lobbied in Washington to go back to Ghana to pay her farewell calls and finally wore down Kissinger or Kissinger's staff. She received permission to return to Ghana, along with her husband, to pay her farewell calls and pack up her belongings without leaving it for the GSO (general services officer) to do. As the junior most person in the embassy I went along on her farewell calls outside the capital as sort of an *aide-de-camp*. She received permission to use the C-12 (military designation for Beechcraft Huron aircraft) DAO (defense *attaché* office) airplane to make her farewell calls in Ghana's regional capitols. Those trips around the country were a good opportunity for me to see her in action and also get to talk to her.

There were three of us in her party on the plane: Ambassador Black, her husband, and me; there was also a pilot and co-pilot. Mr. Black spent a good deal of time reading and doing work on the flights. Ambassador Black also did some work on the plane, but she was also open to conversation, which I took advantage of. so I started some

Ambassador Black really showed her people skills on the trip and also a sense of what it meant to be the U.S. ambassador. She carried herself very well, knew her brief and was skilled at delivering it.. The U.S. relationship with Ghana was not one of our vital relationships by any means, but we had AID (Agency for International Development) projects, we had a variety of interests in the country and, of course, it was the Cold War and so everybody was trying to make sure we were one up on the Soviets. She delivered really effective messages about U.S.-Ghanaian relations, about whatever the AID project or other commercial activities that might be in the area to the regional governor and to his staff, but also wove into that her happiness with the time she had spent in Ghana, her love of the Ghanaian people, how much she respected Ghana. She was really very skillful.

Also, beyond being just an effective ambassador, presenting her points effectively, she was skilled at relating to people and she really made the people she was talking to feel like she was taking them into her confidence, that they were friends. She was very warm to them; she smiled easily and nicely. The photographs -- “Can we have a photograph?” “Of course you can do the photograph.” Whether it was the senior person she was meeting or other staff on the way, or just people standing around outside, or even at the little airports where we would land. She was very, very skilled at that. Occasionally there would be a journalist or two and she would handle those encounters very well. Gifts were always exchanged. She was given little gifts, like a Kente shawl, nothing terribly big, but little things because people liked her and wanted her to have some memory of Ghana or their part of Ghana.

I remember we were in Bolgatanga, which is the northernmost city in Ghana , near the border with what was then called Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, and the governor gave a gift to Charlie, not just to Ambassador Black. The gift for Charlie was a cotton shirt in the style worn in northern Ghana. Mr. Black was delighted to be involved in the gift exchange, so he took off his shirt to put on the Governor’s gift. This was the ceremonial part of the meeting, so there was some press in the room with us and once Mr. Black took off his shirt, camera flashbulbs lit up the room. As everyone in the room and anyone who would see those photos would see, he was a tanned and very fit person. Ambassador Black, who had a very disciplined approach to public occasions and knew from her time in Hollywood what could go wrong with unplanned photographs said, “Charlie! Put your shirt back on!” Mr. Black quickly put on the gift shirt and did not take it off again until we were back on the plane. The press did not seem that interested in him fully clothed so the cameras stopped. It was very clear that she was much more used to dealing with the press, being in the public eye, and knowing what you do and don’t do with the press on a public occasion than he was. But he was enthusiastic and happy to go along with the spirit of the Governor’s gift giving. He got caught up in the occasion; Ambassador Black, on the other hand, was disciplined and very professional when she was in the public eye.

During another leg of the trip, I was talking to her about one thing or another and Charlie leaned over and pointed to a story in the Wall Street Journal. It was a story about her. It just noted that she had acquired the last of the copyrights to her films that she didn’t have. She apparently owned the rights to the full library of her films. She had, over time, bought them. I congratulated her and I said, “I think that’s a very shrewd business move

because I saw your films on TV when I was a kid and clearly they're still generating cash flow." I asked her, "This may be an indiscreet question, but do you ever watch the films, for example, with your kids?" I don't think she had grandchildren at that point. She looked at me, gave me this kind of little pout she could do, you would see it in her films, and said, "Ken, I don't really care to see myself as a spunky little six or eight year old anymore." OK. I got that.

I found in my discussions with Ambassador Black during our time on the plane that she was a very shrewd political analyst, particularly of California politics, and we talked a lot about California politics, since I had joined the Foreign Service while living in California and was very interested in the state's politics. She'd run for Congress and lost and had been close to Ronald Reagan both professionally and politically. I found her to be really well informed on the politics of California and on the U.S. politics as well -- very thoughtful, not doctrinaire, but pragmatic and interesting. She had some nice things to say about Governor Jerry Brown's father. She was more of a contemporary with him than with Jerry.

Q: And of the opposite party.

BRILL: Yes, but that at that time California politics weren't as polarized as they are now, or, as the rest of the country is. During that whole time, as we traveled around the country, and also at a farewell ceremony in a village outside of Accra that had made her a chief, Ambassador Black was always very gracious to me and to everybody she encountered. She was just really pleasant and nice, never a sense of being a *prima donna*, or of being star from Hollywood. She carried herself very well and was a really pleasant, down-to-earth person. She had a job to do and she did it very well. She left good feelings in her wake. That's a nice set of skills to have for an ambassador. After she left, we got a career ambassador, --Robert P. Smith, who died about two years ago -- a very experienced and skillful diplomat. ,

I'd been engaged when I was assigned to Ghana and I went back to the U.S. to be married after I had been there about a year. My wife, Mary, and I were married near Milwaukee, where her eldest sister lived. My wife had been running the Baltimore office of a large international shipping company, but she took a leave from that to come live with me in Ghana. On the way to Ghana, we had to get her a diplomatic passport and complete a bunch of other paperwork so she could be authorized to travel to Ghana as my wife. ... Pat Kennedy (Patrick F. Kennedy, currently the Under Secretary of State for Management) was then the post management officer for West Africa and Pat got everything done quickly and well as he always did, and still does today. I popped down to the Chief of Protocol's office, which, as you know, is on the first floor, with Mary, and asked, "Is Ambassador Black here? I'd just like to say hello." And they said, "Well, who are you?" And I replied, "I was in Ghana with her." "Oh! Come on in, come on in! She likes to see people from Ghana." So we went in and I introduced Ambassador Black to Mary and she came across the room and gave Mary a big hug. Mary will never forget she got a big hug from Shirley Temple. Ambassador Black was very happy to see us and

asked , “What’s happening in Ghana? You’re married! You’re going to love it there, people are so nice.” It was just another indication she was a nice person.

Q: Were you involved or was there any feeling in the embassy when 60 Minutes (American TV weekly news program) did the profile on her while she was ambassador in Ghana?

BRILL: That came either before my time there or after my time there. I’m not aware of it. I’ve never seen that show.

Q: Having worked for her... I’m sure you can find it on YouTube, especially since she died so recently. I saw it as a high schooler. It was a very positive presentation.

BRILL: It should have been. It should have been because did a fine job there.

Q: It was Mike Wallace.

BRILL: It must have hurt him to say nice things about people. If she had been temperamental, if she’d been a *prima donna*, it would have been known immediately at a post like that, a small post, a small diplomatic corps. She was liked in the diplomatic corps, but she was a private person, so she didn’t go out of her way to really cultivate the diplomatic corps. She did what she needed to do and she did it very well, but her family was her priority. But if there had been any hint of other than being a really collegial, nice person, it would have been not only well known, but talked about a lot. And the show *60 Minutes* would have been very different. I think it was an accurate reflection of the way she did things.

Q: There was one other. It was the moment when Frank Zappa arrived.

BRILL: I wasn’t there when Frank Zappa arrived.

Q: She wasn’t comfortable with Frank Zappa.

BRILL: Frank Zappa came to Ghana?

Q: Yes, to do a concert. No, she was not comfortable with him. It was just a very brief moment recorded by the local press. He had arrived at the airport with this huge group of people to greet him. The idea that an American rock star was coming to do a concert... She happened to be there not for him, but because she was transiting or leaving or going somewhere and the press saw her and immediately put microphones in her face and said, “What do you think? Frank Zappa’s here!” Apparently, according to the article that I read, she put her face in her hands and then said, “I really don’t know Mr. Zappa very well.”

BRILL: I'm sure she didn't. They could have interviewed her daughter and might have gotten more. That's all I have. I'm sure you've talked to people in the Prague embassy when she was there.

Q: There are many other accounts from her service in Prague.

BRILL: Did anybody talk about her time as Chief of Protocol?

Q: That I don't know.

BRILL: I don't know if you've ever talked to Tim Towell. Tim was Deputy Chief of Protocol well after that time. He's still around. I haven't seen him for a while, but I used to bump into him. T-O-W-E-L-L. If he hasn't done an oral history he ought to, particularly from his time in protocol. He's a very social guy too and he's kind of plugged into the social network of Washington. Because of his time in protocol, he might be able to give you ideas about who might be around from the time she was... That was a long time about, but there still might be people. It's a heavily civil service -- it's either civil service or political (political appointees). Tim was an FSO (Foreign Service Officer), which was an unusual assignment, but he was put there to help sort of shape things up and stayed for quite a while.

Turning to Mother Teresa...

Q: The year here is?

BRILL: I dealt with Mother Teresa when I was CG (Consul General) in Calcutta from 1986 to '89. But I also had an unexpected meeting with her when I was Chargé d'affaires, a.i., in New Delhi in 1993.

Mother Teresa was a real presence in Calcutta when we were there. We lived across the street from Naresh and Sunita Kumar. Naresh was a businessman, most of whose family's interests had been nationalized when India became independent. But he'd built things back up. He was also a world class tennis player. He played at Wimbledon, represented India in the Davis Cup, and some years after we left he was asked to become the Captain of the Indian Davis Cup team to straighten out a mess created by his immediate predecessor. His wife, Sunita, had been a patron of Mother Teresa's for some time. The Kumar's were very good Hindus, but they really admired Mother Teresa and what she was doing. They also supported her and were a link between Mother Teresa and the moneyed classes of Calcutta, of which there were more people than you would think. Everybody thinks about the black hole of Calcutta and Mother Teresa, but there's actually a lot well off people in Calcutta and an even bigger middle class -- but also a lot of poor people. Sunita Kumar was a key part of an annual fund raising event in Calcutta to support Mother Teresa's work in the city. The Kumars were also patrons of a very important Indian painter, Hussein, to whom they also introduced Mother Teresa. He did a series of paintings and mixed media pieces with Mother Teresa and her work as a theme.

We'd seen some of this work when my wife and I had been invited to a dinner at their house.

I met Mother Teresa for the first time in either late 1986 or early 1987. My wife and my daughter -- my son was at that time only about two months old, so he wasn't going around making calls much -- but my daughter was at that point almost four, so we took her along. We went over just to pay a brief courtesy call and to see the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity. She was very sweet. We probably met with her for 15 or 20 minutes and chit-chatted about one thing or another. She blessed my wife and my daughter. She gave a little medal to my daughter and one for my son, who wasn't there. So they've got a straight shot to heaven. (Laughter)

After our first meeting, she would call on me once or twice a year. It usually had to do with a trip she was making to the United States and she was taking someone with her who didn't have a visa, so she'd come in to get a visa. I would offer her tea while the consul interviewed the nun who would be accompanying her. The main consulate compound consisted of the CG's residence, the consulate office building, and an apartment house, which housed some of the senior staff, such as the Branch Public Affairs Officer.

The staff from the CG's residence would bring us tea and they delighted in being able to serve her and did so with great care and formality. We would chat about things while we had tea and a sweet of some sort. I said to her once or twice, "It is always nice to see you, but you don't need to call on me. The consul will always interview your people and we know your travelers always return, so you don't have to trouble yourself to come to my office." Whenever I would say that, she would look at me with a twinkle in her eye and reply, "No, no, it's always nice to see you and it is pleasant to talk over your nice tea and cookies."

Mother Teresa was very small, probably about five feet tall, and at that point in her life she was also a little hunched, and she got more hunched as time went on, so she looked even smaller. Of course, she always wore her habit, which had the effect of making her look smaller still. But she almost always had a twinkle in her eye, which I think reflected her general joie de vivre. She could look stern when the occasion warranted, but she was generally very warm and open to people, particularly when she was dealing with them one-on-one. She didn't have a Shirley Temple smile, but she had a nice smile and a quiet voice.

During the course of the almost three years I was in Calcutta I probably had five or six of these sessions with her. I will relate three stories from that time.

She came in one time and while we're talking over tea she said, "You may have seen a story in the paper today about staff in the Calcutta post office intercepting cash donations that were being sent to the Missionaries of Charity by mail from abroad. I told her I had seen the article and was saddened by it. She noted she was working with postal officials to put a stop to the problem, but then added, " If anybody ever asks you how to can

contribute to our work, can you tell them not to send anything to me here, but send it to our Mother House in New York?"

Then without referring to any note she proceeded to give me her address in New York right down to the zip code. I said I would do that, but also added, "Mother Teresa, it's pretty impressive that you can give me an address that includes the postal code without referring to any notes!" Earlier in the conversation we had been discussing her recent trip to Africa. We were talking a little bit about all the places she had operations around the world and it was clear she had nearly as big a network of operating offices as the United States had embassies. So, I linked those two parts of our conversation and I asked, "Mother Teresa, could you give me the address of all your places around the world like you just did for the one in New York?" She smiled and replied, "Not all, but many." She was clearly very much in charge of day-to-day operations of her global network. From that conversation and others, and also from talking to people around her, it was pretty clear she was a detail-oriented manager. She was very much on top of things in her order.

On another visit, Mother Teresa said she was going to the United States, and was planning to stop in Washington. I asked whether I could help with any appointments with officials in Washington, saying, "I'd be happy to send a note to the India Desk, which would be delighted to be helpful." She thought for a moment and replied, "I don't want to trouble you. The last time I was in Washington I realized I needed to see the President, so I called the White House from a phone booth and I saw him that afternoon." I thought to myself, she's going to be canonized someday because that's a true miracle. I had been the head of Egyptian affairs in an earlier assignment in the Department and at one point spent the better part of two months convincing the White House the President should meet with Hosni Mubarak, the then President of Egypt. The relationship with Egypt was important to the U.S. and the Administration. Egypt was at peace with Israel because of the Camp David Agreement and we provided over a billion dollars in economic assistance and an additional billion plus dollars in military assistance. Nonetheless, it took me weeks to get an appointment for the President of Egypt with President Reagan. Mother Teresa, on the other hand, picks up the phone and -- BOOM! -- she is in that afternoon. Can you imagine the White House operator who took her call initially? Just think of all the steps the White House staff had to go through to get the two of them together -- and in such a short time. It was definitely a miracle! I said, "You know, Mother Teresa, it's really kind of hard to see the President, so I think you're probably going to do better than I could do; I'll leave your appointments to you." She smile and said, "Thank you, for offering."

Mother Teresa was a really nice person, but she put people to work. I only had one CODEL (Congressional Delegation visit) my whole time in Calcutta. It was led by Congressman Mike Synar (Michael L. Synar), who's now dead, who was a Democrat from Muskogee, Oklahoma. He liked to present himself as "a redneck, an Okie from Muskogee," but he was a very, very bright guy, with a sly sense of humor. He was also as Protestant as they came. Congressman Dick Durbin (Richard Joseph "Dick" Durbin), a Democrat from Illinois, was his partner in the CODEL; they traveled without any staffers. Durbin was an urban Catholic. They had been in Bangladesh and were on their way to New Delhi, but Durbin insisted on a stop in Calcutta to meet t Mother Teresa and spend a day working in one of her facilities. But as their staffs were planning the trip, I

made clear that they would need to meet with some officials and visit a USAID project, not just meet with Mother Teresa. In other words, they had to have a proper CODEL schedule. We had some cables back and forth on the subject and worked it out.

Congressmen Synar and Durbin spent a day with me making official calls and visits. I also hosted them for a representational dinner with some local businessmen and other movers and shakers. The next day they went off to work with Mother Teresa. We'd arranged it so they'd come back to my place for a family dinner afterwards. They went to the hotel after they spent the day working at Mother Teresa's, cleaned up and came to the residence for dinner. They were kind of shell-shocked when they arrived; clearly emotionally drained from the experiences they had that day. Synar said, "I guess I've seen dead people, but I've never carried one before." Durbin said, "Yeah, me too. She doesn't care who you are; if you're there to work, you're there to work." I think it is fair to say both congressmen found the experience of working in one of Mother Teresa's homes for the sick and dying to be humbling and rewarding and when I took them to the plane the next morning, they said it would be the highlight of the trip.

Jerry Brown, who was then a former governor of California and a former presidential candidate was subsequently in Calcutta. I heard that he was around and tracked him down to Mother Teresa's. I sent him a note and asked if I could meet with him. He agreed and stopped by my office in the Consulate General. When he came in and my secretary swooned and was quite nervous in bringing us tea.

Q: And a former monk?

BRILL: He had been student in a Jesuit seminary for a time. The reason I wanted to see him was to ask him if he would give a talk at the USIS library on U.S. presidential elections and the primary process. The primaries for the 1988 election were then underway and I thought having him speak would be a useful counterpoint to the constant anti-American rhetoric of the elected, but hard line Communist, government of West Bengal, and much of the Calcutta press. After I made the pitch, he replied, "I'm here to work with Mother Teresa." He'd already been in town for a week or ten days. "And I really don't want to do anything like that." I talked about all the reasons why it would be a good thing to do and he finally said, "OK, I'll do this one thing for you." So, a few days later he gave a talk, we had huge turnout. He was brilliant speaker, connected with his audience, and spoke extemporaneously for some 45 minutes and then answered questions for another half-hour or so. He had competed relatively well in the presidential primary process, so knew what he was talking about and was both candid and self-deprecating. , He clearly was a very skillful politician, a very smart guy, and he did a really great job explaining the American presidential selection process to an audience that had arrived with a lot of negative pre-conceptions. Afterwards I said, "Maybe we could do a lunch or a dinner with a few people?" He said, "No! That's it! I'm here to work with Mother Teresa. She doesn't want me running around. She's got work for me and that's what I am going to do." She attracted people like that. When they came they didn't get a photo op (photo opportunity) with her. They were put to work. She was very good about that. She was happy to take help from anybody, but it had to be real work.

During my assignment in Calcutta, I had to go to New Delhi from time to time for meetings at the embassy. On one such trip to New Delhi, I arrived at the airport for my return to Calcutta just as an official looking car pulled up, and out popped Mother Teresa and one or two nuns. I walked into the domestic terminal, while she was ushered off to the VVIP (very, very important person) lounge. She didn't like VVIP lounges, but the Government of India people who were helping her classified her as a VVIP and so they took her to the VVIP lounge. I checked in for my flight and went to the decidedly un-VIP area where everybody's waiting for their flights. This took place in the 1980s before economic reforms had begun India. There was just one domestic airline, India Airlines and it was always late, so I had a lot of time to sit in the waiting area. Eventually, Mother Teresa and the nuns accompanying her came in to the regular waiting area. She'd broken out of the VVIP lounge. She sat down maybe 40 feet from me. Then, over the next hour or so, as we all waited for delayed flights, every person in that waiting area, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, it didn't matter, all went up to Mother Teresa. Most tried to touch her feet, as a sign of deep respect, as they said, "*Namaste*" (a Hindi greeting). Everyone showed such great respect. She would always try to stop people from touching her feet, but would greet them in return in Hindi and add "Oh, thank you."

I took two things away from that experience. First, she wasn't just well known in Calcutta, she was well known throughout India and people respected her, they liked her, they weren't "Oh, that woman coming from the West, that foreigner coming in here telling us we don't know how to deal with our problems..." The people of India respected her. There might be some politicians who would occasionally go after her, but the general public respected her for what she was doing and the way she did it, not just what she was doing, but how she did it. The second take away, which reflects the more cynical side of me, was that while everyone who greeted her did so as a sign of respect, they were also hedging their bets. India Airlines did not have a good safety record and it did not hurt people waiting to get on one of its flights to show respect to such a sainted person just in case their Indian Airline flight did not have a happy ending.

I returned to India two years after leaving Calcutta to be the DCM and ultimately the long-term CDA in the embassy in New Delhi. I did not expect to meet Mother Teresa again after I left Calcutta so I was surprised to receive a call late one morning in December 1993 saying Mother Teresa is in New Delhi and would like to stop by the embassy for a brief meeting few that afternoon. I agreed, had my schedule shifted around a bit, and arranged for tea to be ready when she arrived.

We were into the Christmas season and that afternoon I was going to light the embassy Christmas tree. The embassy in Delhi was designed by the same architect as the Kennedy Center and looks like it but the embassy was built first. The Chancery is built around a rectangular fountain and pool and then there's two stories of offices around it -- charming to look at, not that charming to work in because everybody was behind a closed door, making informal interaction difficult. The Christmas tree was going to be set up and lighted on the first floor, right by the pool and below the stairs that came down from the front office on the one side and the economic section on the other. The plan was for me to

say a few words, push a button to light the tree and then some kids from the American school would sing some carols.

Mother Teresa arrived about 2:30 p.m.. I can't really remember the substance of her call, but she wanted to relay something that came out of a meeting she had attended in New Delhi.

Of course, I gave her tea and we chit-chatted a little bit. She didn't know that I was there, but she remembered me from Calcutta and we talked a little bit about Calcutta and she asked about my family. I told her we planned to have a ceremonial lighting of the embassy Christmas tree later that afternoon, but that I would be pleased to do it earlier if she would be willing to participate in the ceremony and actually light the tree. "Oh!" she replied, "That would be so nice. Yes, I'd like to do that." She added, "You know there are more Christmas trees in Calcutta than there are in New Delhi." And that's true, although there were Christmas trees in New Delhi, but Calcutta went in for Christmas in a pretty big way. In Calcutta they like a party, so any *puja* (from Sanskrit, *puja* is the act of showing reverence to the divine through invocations, prayers, songs, and rituals) is good and Christmas is definitely a *puja* a lot of people in Calcutta enjoy. The Community Liaison Officer sent an e-mail announcement to the embassy staff that we were going to do the Christmas tree lighting ceremony just a few minutes early with a special guest.

As the time for the tree lighting approached, my secretary looked out of the glass wall in the front office that overlooked the pool and the ground floor to see if people were gathering. She reported there were enough people there for us to start. As Mother Teresa and I came onto the second floor landing to walk down the stairs and came into view of people gathered on one side of the building there was this "Ahhh!" sort of gasp, along with quiet exclamations of "Mother Teresa!" Suddenly people were dashing back in their offices to let people know who weren't there who the special guest at the tree lighting was.

Mother Teresa and I came down the stairs and went to the microphone that was set up for the ceremony. I introduced Mother Teresa, mentioned we had known each other a little bit in Calcutta, noted she had dropped by the embassy for a short-notice meeting and thanked her for graciously agreeing to help with our Christmas tree lighting ceremony. I then asked if she would please light the embassy Christmas tree. Mother Teresa stepped up near the microphone and said a few words about the joy of Christmas and how nice it was to be able to help the embassy with its Christmas tree ceremony. There was a real hush among those who were there, which was good because Mother Teresa spoke very quietly and not directly into the microphone, so people strained to hear her. I then walked her to the ceremonial button that was to be pushed to light the Christmas tree, but when she pushed the button nothing happened. I gave a look to the embassy electrician who was mortified. Mother Teresa just smiled. She'd been living in India for a long time at that point and Calcutta had more load-shedding, which is what power blackouts were called in India, than even New Delhi did. And then pushed the button again and another miracle occurred. It worked and the tree was lit!

Everybody applauded and Mother Teresa beamed and some people came down and the USIS photographer took photographs of them with her. Then I escorted her out of the embassy to her car and she left. They have a saying in India that no good deed goes unpunished. After the tree lighting ceremony, I received some complaints, Principally, “Why didn’t you let us know Mother Teresa was coming? We’d have been there if we had known Mother Teresa was coming.” My reply was, “You never know in New Delhi what’s going to happen; it pays to show up.” It was very sweet and generous of Mother Teresa to attend our very modest Christmas season opener and the people who were there came away with some really nice memories.

I was in Cyprus when Mother Teresa died. Princess Di died a few days before. It was striking to me that Princess Di’s death and the circumstances around it received so much more press attention than did Mother Teresa’s. Princess Di’s story and face were everywhere. There was extensive coverage in the international media, particularly CNN and BBC, as well as the electronic and print media on Cyprus. Mother Teresa’s death seemed like it was relegated to being almost a footnote. Every life has value, but the juxtaposition of those two death made it clear the media and the public were more attracted to youth, beauty and flash, than they were to a quiet life of giving to others on a global scale.

Nonetheless, CNN’s and BBC’s international services did a nice job of covering Mother Teresa’s funeral in Calcutta. The level and caliber of the international delegations in Calcutta for the funeral reflected ultimately the global impact Mother Teresa’s life and example had. Hillary Clinton led the U.S. delegation, I believe, and other governments sent a variety of eminent people to demonstrate their respect. She didn’t leave in a blaze of media, but she left with people in all walks of life paying tribute to her and the good in humanity that she represented. She led an exemplary life, accomplished a great deal in the day-to-day world and set a positive spiritual example that was, in essence, non-sectarian in its relevance. And she met with American diplomats, in Calcutta and elsewhere.

If you don’t have any questions, I’ll give you the names of some CGs you might check with.

Q: That would be great. As you were speaking, the only other thing was, at the time that she was working was there talk about miracles? Had you heard things about miracles? I was just curious because, of course, to be canonized, there has to be a demonstration and so on.

BRILL: No. The meeting with the President’s enough. Even the Vatican ought to recognize that. (Laughter)

End of interview