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

AMBASSADOR SUE MCCOURT COBB

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: September 8, 2011

INTRODUCTION

By: Sue McCourt Cobb, U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica (2001-2005)

As all those who knew ADST Master Interviewer, Charles Stuart Kennedy, knew that Stu liked to "set the stage" so he felt he knew you before his questions began. This was especially true for non-career ambassadors who had not for years been under the direct control of the State Department.

I have, therefore, made an attempt to identify sections of my ADST Oral History with the content contained therein to help find the area in which the reader may be interested. The lines are not clear-cut, but general.

The interview was done in stages over a period of four years as I would pass through Washington, D.C. on my travels.

Charles Stuart Kennedy died 1/2/2022. It is now May 1, 2025 as I submit these notes to the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training.

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is September 8, 2011. This is an interview with Ambassador Sue McCourt Cobb. This interview is under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

COBB: I was born in Los Angeles, California, August 18, 1937. Just had my 74th birthday.

Q: Well, let's talk a bit about your father's side first. Where did the McCourts come from?

COBB: My father, Benjamin Arnold McCourt, was from a family of Irish-Catholic Democrats from Armagh, Northern Ireland. Ben was among the fourth generation Armagh County immigrants to be born in the United States. He was born in 1896 in a New Mexico Territory mining town called White Oaks. He moved to Redondo Beach, California at a young age. He went to the University of California at Berkeley and was a volunteer in World War I. He actually dropped out of Cal in 1917, joined the U.S. Army and was shipped off to France. He came back and met my mother, whose name was Ruth Griffin. She had no middle name because her parents intended that her last name become her middle name after marriage, which is also why I was given no middle name until I got married and became Sue McCourt Cobb. My mother and father met as young professionals in Los Angeles, California. In those days jobs were a matter of what you could find to do. My mom was a graduate of the University of Oregon and worked at the Los Angeles County Department of Health.

Q: It was the height of the Depression, yes.

COBB: Yes, my dad did different things. He was a door-to-door salesman for a grocery chain, in real estate for a while, sold used cars and traded in a little illegal liquor.

My mother was born near Houston, Texas. Her father, Edmund Burke Griffin, was in the first graduating law school class of the University of Texas. He practiced law but he didn't enjoy it so he decided to be a sea captain. He left his family and went to sea as a whaler captain capturing what were then known as "monsters of the deep" (whales).

He was quite successful at whaling and learned a method of preserving whale meat, before there was really a method for embalming people. He deduced that people in the Midwest had never seen these giant monsters from the deep so he used whatever his formula was to preserve a whale in Long Beach, California, put it on a railroad car, and took it to small cities across the country. My father and mother went ahead of the train to advertise and sell tickets to the "Monster of the Deep". The tickets were 10 cents each. It was very entrepreneurial, somewhat like a traveling carnival show. So that's how they

supported themselves through a part of those difficult days of the Depression. I didn't know any of my grandparents, except for Ed Griffin. He was exceedingly strict and I was very afraid of him.

I have one brother who is 15 months older than I am. Peter Edmund McCourt was born in 1936 in a Christian Science Rest Home (as a year later I was) in Los Angeles. My mother was working for the county health department; my dad was selling real estate in Palos Verdes, California, and they decided when I was born that with two children they needed to move to get out of Los Angeles. We moved to Pomona, California when I was about three and rented a house. My dad got a job as a gas station attendant, but they were looking for a small ranch to buy to establish a home and business. They found 5 acres in nearby Chino, California, ranching country, and borrowed money from Ed Griffin to buy it. My recollection is the total 5 acres was $2,000. Quite a lot of money in the 1940s, but not very much now for 5 acres in Southern California. They set about trying to figure out how to make a living on this small farm, how to make the land produce something that would provide income. We had oranges, peaches, grapes, nectarines, lemons, and avocados to sell in our small local markets. We also had walnuts and I remember specifically helping pick up walnuts and bagging them to sell when I was not yet four-year-old.

Q: Sounds like a truck farm in a way.

COBB: Yes, in a way. We had no trucks, however. Next we started with the livestock. We bought pigs, goats, cows, both milk cows and beef cows. We also had horses and chickens and turkeys. The product that turned out to be the best saleable product for my parents during those years, when I was in elementary school, junior high school, and high school, was turkeys; we became turkey farmers. We had a high-quality product and that was what supported me and my brother and my family. Eventually, the turkeys sent my brother and me to Stanford University.

Q: It meant an awful lot of work on the kids' part as well as—

COBB: Yes, all of us worked. That's the way it was on the farms in those days, all of us worked. And I think it really helps make a person pretty grounded, if you have to start working at such young ages.

We had very little money, never had a television set, no frivolities, and certainly had no luxuries. The one thing my parents were really focused on was education. They insisted that we were going to go to college and when it got to be that time they would figure out how they were going to pay for it. They were saving a little bit each year. There were few scholarships at that time. Peter graduated from a small public high school, Chino High School, in 1954 and I graduated from the same high school in 1955.

My brother, fortunately, was a very good student and had gotten almost perfect grades. He was Valedictorian of his class. This benefited me enormously because people thought that I would be the same. I was a year behind him at school and the high expectations of

the teachers were always really helpful to me. I think I got good grades because of Peter's good performances. Peter got a full scholarship to Stanford so he was set. Off he went to study nuclear engineering and eventually became a nuclear engineer on the NASA space program – a "rocket scientist."

In those years I had a very close friend whose name was Suzanne Mutuberria. Her parents were first generation French Basque. They rented a sheep farm not far from our ranch. Suzanne and I were great friends since we met in second grade and went through high school and college together. She was a very smart young lady. She was also a very good athlete so we together dominated the sports teams and got good grades.

Q: What sports were you into?

COBB: Well you know, girls sports in those days were nothing. I mean, they were virtually non-existent. We had Physical Education classes (P.E.) which everyone hated. It was probably in my late high school years when we were first allowed to wear shorts rather than long skirts. But in P.E. we played soccer, softball, field hockey, basketball and tennis. I was always well coordinated so I was good at all those sports. They were fun for me and that was actually an important dimension for me for the same reasons it was for boys: we learned teamwork and discipline, how to win and how to lose, how to keep trying. And while it wasn't my best sport, tennis was one that was socially acceptable for girls, so I did well in tennis and later played on the Stanford Varsity team.

Suzanne and I were great friends and we wanted to go to college together but we didn't think either one of us would get into Stanford. Nevertheless my mother decided that I would apply to Stanford, and I got it in my mind that I was going to go to Stanford so I didn't apply anywhere else. Fortunately, I was accepted. My parents with Ed Griffin's help had been able to save enough money to scrape along. Suzanne later got into Stanford and in her junior year married my brother Peter. Thereafter they were mostly far away, but we all remained close.

While I was actually class of 1959. I graduated in 1958 because I finished all required courses in three years. That was only because I got interested in a lot of things and took lots of classes. Peter was class of 1958 so we graduated together.

Q: In high school, did you become interested in movies?

COBB: You know, yes, we liked to go to the movies but we lived about five miles from any movie theater and of course, as I mentioned, we didn't have any money. So my brother and I would get up on Saturday morning about 7:00 am and we would mop the floors in the house and polish the furniture. Then when my mom got up a little later, she'd give us a quarter each and we walked to the movie theater. We did that every Saturday before high school. Finally in high school we could ride our bicycles.

I loved the Westerns; I was really into horses and I had a specific horse that I loved like many young girls did in our farming communities. I took care of her and learned to calf

rope and barrel race, so I loved the Western movies, Roy Roberts and Gene Autry. However films were just a high school thing. I was never important after I went to Stanford.

Q: Let's go back to your adolescence. Were you much of a reader?

COBB: Yes, yes. My parents read, both read a lot and I read a lot.

Q: Do you recall any of the books that particularly struck you at that time?

COBB: We had girls' series like Nancy Drew mysteries. I remember that I loved "Black Beauty." I did a lot of reading about animals and horses and zoos and related matters because I was interested in animals and had the animals on the farm. I read a lot of books that were 'too old for me' but I can't tell you the names.

Q: Was religion important to you?

COBB: Well that's an interesting question. As it turned out in life, yes, religion was and is very important but I didn't understand that for a very long time. My mother was a Christian Scientist; my father was a non-practicing Catholic. My mother was a strong Christian Scientist. She had a very difficult and traumatic life before settling down with my father and that was the time of Mary Baker Eddy and *Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures*. It was a little bit of an outlier in the Christian world but it is a Christian religion with devoted strong minds. It was important to see my mother's faith, and have an understanding of the famous 'mind-over-matter' concept. Christian Scientists at the time generally did not believe in doctors.

Mother deviated from her firm beliefs only when there was something so serious she couldn't avoid it, which included the California public school requirement that all children be vaccinated. I had only two experiences with doctors until I went to college and one was the school vaccinations. It wasn't a good experience. Then when I was about seven or eight my father had some kind of very, very serious illness and became delirious and unmanageable. My brother and I were petrified and begged my mother to call a doctor. Finally she gave in and called a doctor. My father was rushed off to a hospital, where he stayed for three months. They had to remove a large part of his stomach. We were not allowed to see him. I was scared to death. It was another terrible experience for a young child already afraid of doctors.

Three things stuck with me over time from those early experiences. One was the faith component of religion and how that can be so helpful; one was the mind-over-matter concept. The mind really can control a great deal of how you're feeling and what you're doing. A really simple example is if you wake up in the morning and you have to go to school, but you have a hard test and you have the sniffles, you feel really bad, those sniffles really bother you, and you really don't want to get out of bed. By contrast, if you wake up on a morning in which you're going to an exciting party or going to play with your best friend who's been gone for two weeks, those sniffles don't mean a darn thing.

You hop out of bed and just move on. That concept stuck with me throughout my life and helped me adjust when necessary. The third fact was the need for me to adjust mentally to the medical sciences or the art of medicine and the usefulness of medicine in our lifetime. There are many, many things that have been helpful to me in the medical world that I've relied on because we've made such advancements. So those were the lessons of religion and I suppose really the most critical one is the faith component.

Q: You are a regular churchgoer then?

COBB: I went to the Christian Science Church until I was about 14. My mother felt that we had been given the Christian Science inoculation and we didn't regularly go to church after that. When I got to Stanford I would occasionally go to Stanford chapel just because it was pretty and some of my friends attended. My husband Chuck was originally an Episcopalian and a church attendee. Over time, the Christian church became more important to both of us. We moved more towards the Congregational type of church. We tested a lot of churches over time, all of them highly respected, including the Catholic Church, and of course the Jewish faith. But we are people who believe in faith as a guide in one's life. We go to a church in Coconut Grove, Florida, which is part of the Church of Christ. It's called Plymouth Congregational Church. I still go maybe once a month, my husband goes maybe three times a month if we're in town. So, we have a lot of faith in our God, but we don't necessarily demonstrate it by going to church every week.

Q: What about other factors when you were growing up? Where did your parents fit politically?

COBB: As I mentioned, my father went to Cal, my mother went to the University of Oregon. They were older than our friends' parents. My father was born in 1896, my mother was born in 1904. Naturally they were older when my brother and I were born, but they were both well-educated which wasn't exactly the norm. When we were growing up the majority of adults still did not have college degrees.

Even though we had no money, they had their education and my grandparents did too. So my parents were well-educated, they read the newspaper every day, they listened to the radio. We did not have television in our house until after I went to Stanford. But they were current and we'd discuss world affairs, the farm bills and taxes and things of that nature. Now one would consider both of them Centrist Republicans, somewhat conservative. We lived on a farm, we made our own living very independently, and that was the nature of things in the 1940s and 1950s when I was growing up.

Q: Any impression of World War II?

COBB: Yes, definitely. Because we were in California and we were aware. In the *Los Angeles Times* every morning I would see the pictures from the front lines of the war. When my brother and I went to our Saturday matinees they would have these short newsreels on the war and also the radio would talk about the war. In California, we presumably had to protect California against attacks coming from the Orient and my

father was an air raid warden for our area. This meant that any time he got the word we pulled down every shade in the house so that no lights could be seen from our area and he would check other houses in the region. Within about three miles of our house was a Japanese internment camp. I learned later the immigrants from Japan who were living in the United States who had not caused any trouble whatsoever, had nothing on their records and had done nothing to cause being incarcerated, were picked up and put in this internment camp, essentially jailed. We used to drive by there. I'll never forget it. I was afraid of those inmates. I also had bad dreams about trains because of the news reels and the Los Angeles Times. I knew the German trains would come and pick us all up and we'd be all jammed into a box car. I remember that really distinctly. It made a big impression on a young child.

Q: Through high school, what sort of courses did you particularly like and particularly didn't like?

COBB: They were just the general public-school courses, math and science and chemistry and algebra. I don't want to brag but the courses were easy for me; it was not a tough curriculum and without much work I got very good grades. I didn't get straight As like my brother but pretty darn close.

I'll tell you what was weird in my small public school—it was probably 40 percent Mexican children. Chino, California, is relatively close to the Mexican border and this was a farming area. The State of California had decided that there would be no Spanish spoken on the playgrounds in public schools. I took Spanish but could not go out and talk to friends in Spanish to practice. It was ridiculous; I took French at Stanford but because I had little opportunity to speak I never became totally fluent in either.

Q: So you went to Stanford and you were there from when to when?

Q: How would you describe, from the point of a hands-on farm girl, going to Stanford?

COBB: A shock. A total shock. I stood on the corner of Stanford's quad and listened to all the different languages being spoken and it was a totally different world. However, one thing that really helped me become integrated quickly was due to my high school athletics. The first day of college, I flew from Los Angeles to San Francisco and got in a cab and went to the campus. When I walked into my freshman dorm—I was sort of late, everybody else had checked in and the girls were putting things in their rooms and chatting in the hallways. When I came up the stairway I heard somebody yell, "Sue McCourt's here, Sue McCourt's here." Everybody stopped and wanted to meet me. It was because of my over blown Southern California high school athletic reputation. There was another girl from Southern California in our dorm who knew of me and she had been "bragging" about me. So I didn't know anyone, but they all knew me. It gave me a great deal of confidence – probably too much!

While that gave me confidence, when I started going to the classes and met some of the people around me who were totally brilliant, I got humbled and scared. I remember very well one of my first dates. I went on a double date with a girlfriend with these two guys, both of whom had gone to Andover and were also freshmen at Stanford. We had just had our first big test in a one-year course called the History of Western Civilization. It was a mid-quarter exam and I had no idea what to expect on the exam. When I took it, it seemed very hard. I was petrified as to what kind of grade I was going to get. So, we went on this double date that night and both of the guys were joking and laughing and one said "Boy, if Stanford is this easy it's going to be a real snap. That test just was absolutely nothing. We learned all that when we were juniors in high school." I'm thinking "uh oh, this is really bad." So I recognized then that my high school background was very different from many of the people at Stanford. Of course, I learned as time went by that there were a lot of people more like me than the Andover grads.

Q: I remember the same feeling at Harvard around that time, that the prep school kids did much better than the public-school high school kids for the first two years, but like Stanford, the high school kids would come up and usually surpassed them.

COBB: Well in my view that is true. I not only heard that; I observed that. It took us a couple of years to catch up but, you know, I guess there's just some innate intelligence that you rely on and we all got through those years successfully.

Q: You mentioned the Japanese internment camps; it's a very black spot on America during World War II.

COBB: Yes, it was something that was uncommon in this nation's history.

Q: This also raises a question; what was the attitude of the Anglo farmers towards the Mexicans when you were in high school and before.

COBB: You know, I don't remember any prejudicial comments at all from our family or our small circle of friends. However, there was no real social intermingling. First of all, none of us, none of this farming community, was really social as we know it now. You didn't go out in the evening and maybe once in a while you'd go to somebody's home for a small dinner, usually if the family had children the same age. But it was uncommon for us to have guests at the house or for us to go to somebody's house. So the way in which I would hear adult conversation would be when my mother took us to a public place like dog shows. She was very interested in dogs and dog shows. She had some dogs that she showed and she later became an international judge. When we went to dog shows my brother and I would be there and hear adult conversation, some of which was prejudicial about the Mexicans or other laborers. At school, there were a couple of Mexican girls that were real good athletes and I liked them because they were good athletes. We didn't socialize after school but I'd sure pick them for my team and play with them and talk with them. So we were, in a way, socially engaged, but not really because when you left

school you went home, you went to your own neighborhood. I never thought of this as prejudice, it was normal.

Q: At Stanford, what was your experience as a woman at Stanford?

COBB: Well, it was one of the wonderful reasons for a woman to go to Stanford in the mid-1950s, the ratio of males to females was five to one. There were many more men than women. I never saw that as an obstacle; I always saw that as an advantage. The more men around, the better. And in fact that's the way it was. I think because I grew up, my brother and I were so close, and we had no other children in the neighborhood to play with except his male friends; I was extremely comfortable around boys and young men and have been all my life. The more the better.

Q: Well how did you find Stanford academically? What interested you, what didn't interest you?

COBB: After I got settled in and figured out how I was going to manage the studying, the workload, pretty early on, I thought it was just a wonderful place to be, especially with all these guys. I liked the sports, so I joined what we then called the Rally Committee, which was kind of, at that point, a little exclusive group that went around and supported our important male varsity sports teams. We got to go in and lead cheers at Stanford Stadium! Important stuff! And I discovered parties, which we never had in high school. We didn't do anything in the way of parties in high school, but at Stanford I discovered parties and I liked those. So I made sure to get my work done so I could go to any good sports event or party that came along. I was very socially active when I was a freshman and sophomore at Stanford. You know, it was a whole new world.

Q: Were there any movements, political movements on the campus that interested you?

COBB: Not in the slightest. I was not interested in any of that at all. I was interested in me and my friends at that time (quite an immature approach). The only political movement that I recall at all was in my junior year (my brother's senior year), my brother managed the campaign for president of the student body for the young man who became president of the Stanford student body. I wasn't interested in politics or governance. I'm not sure why that was, because shortly after I graduated I was interested and I was quickly immersed in it.

Q: Then still very much the Eisenhower period. It wasn't a period of great partisan intensity.

COBB: Right. I do recall in 1945, as an eight year old, our president, FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) dying, and what a big deal that was. I recall discussion of his policies while I was very young. And I recall my great admiration for the military, our armed forces, and for people like General Eisenhower and General MacArthur. Those were my heroes, the generals (except, of course, I adored those Western cowboy stars).

Q: How about General MacArthur? In the early 1950s he became quite controversial.

COBB: Oh yes, he became quite controversial but at the time that didn't matter to me. He was a leader. He looked like my grandfather, he waded through the Pacific Ocean, and he had a lot of stars. That was the extent of my in-depth thinking as a very unsophisticated twelve year old.

Q: Did you have a major at Stanford?

COBB: Not the first year. The first year there were basic courses that the school required we take. The two most influential were the world history courses, primarily the history of western civilization, and a year-long course that I could elect, called the history of art, starting in the 14th century and coming up through the then-present time, the 1950s, describing how art reflected society at the times. It was fascinating and very influential to me. Every time I go anywhere in the world and see a piece of artwork I can put it to the time that it was created because of the social and governmental influence of that era. We had to take language or math of some kind, we had English, we had the history, and then a couple of electives. I was very active in Rally Committee and I played on the Stanford Varsity tennis team. During our sophomore year we had to name a major. I chose political science with an executive and management minor. I was always interested in leadership and governance, how you manage people and organizations. From elementary school on I was a leader of some kind in whatever we were doing but I didn't think of it in a structural sense until later.

It served me very well. It was really more about organizational skills and management at different levels, and yes, some financial and economic features.

Q: Something of course that was very important, you met your husband at Stanford. How did that come about?

COBB: Well in a way it was sort of fixed up by mutual friends. I did not know him when I was a sophomore but I knew of him because he was a varsity athlete. He was a big track star and he was a big man on campus. His friends were telling him that he would really like me and my friends were telling me that I would really like him and you know when friends try to fix you up, you always say no. But enough of that went on that he called me to invite me to the biggest party of the year; it was three fraternities from Stanford and three fraternities from Cal meeting together for one big black tie dance at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco.

Q: What fraternities are these?

COBB: It was Phi Delta Theta, which my husband became president of; Beta Theta Pi; and Sigma Chi. They were athletes and born leaders. So, everybody wanted to go to this big formal party in the fall and I wanted to go too. Fortunately Chuck Cobb called me and invited me. I still had very little money, and no job. I was living on a small amount of money—$65 a month—but I managed to save a little bit and go out and buy a new dress

for the formal. It was the first strapless evening gown that I had ever worn. And I felt very sophisticated. The problem was that my date was actually in charge of organizing all six fraternities and the whole party so he didn't pay any attention to me at all, and it was just a first date, it was the most important party of the year. I was in my little white organza dress with a red rose in the center of my bosom, and my date spent the evening with his frat brothers. I thought to myself, no reason to stick with him. So I left the hotel and went home with friends. He was very embarrassed and he called to apologize and said, you know, he'd been so busy and working so hard on this event, and could we go out and get a cup of coffee so he could properly apologize. I said "no, people do what they want to do and the fact is, I don't want to waste any more time with you."

People do say I'm fairly direct. I just said no every time he called. So he, being a competitor, commenced calling me in the evening every single night. He would call and I'm pretty direct but I'm not routinely rude, so I would answer the phone and I'd talk to him a little bit and then move on. He called me every night for four months, and I got to know him. Of course I was following his career, his track career, and I'd see him around campus now and then, but I got to know him over the telephone, who he was, what he was like, what his parents were like, what his goals and aspirations were, how he responded to the good things and the bad things that happen, and the important things and unimportant things. I really got to know him. So by the end of my sophomore year when he called, as always, he said, "Let's go get a cup of coffee" and I said "yes." We got "pinned" (a college acknowledgement of 'going steady'). In my junior year, after he came back from his summer ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) midshipman cruise we were inseparable and thereafter became engaged. I graduated in three years in December 1958 and in February 1959 we got married.

Q: Did the politics of California engage you at all?

COBB: I certainly remember Pat Brown being the governor. His son Jerry Brown became governor. I remember them as the leading Democrats in California politics and my parents not approving of their farm policies.

Q: I was wondering whether, well, Richard Nixon was a Californian.

COBB: Yes, he was a congressman and his home in Whittier was not far from where we lived. Most of us viewed him as a "hometown boy made good." But mother absolutely hated Richard Nixon because she was a great fan of then Congressman and Democrat Jerry Voorhis as were many Republicans in that campaign of 1946. At nine, I was old enough to understand some of the debates. Maybe that's where I got a little bipartisan training.

Q: Well, you're getting engaged and all; were you pointed towards anything outside of getting married?

COBB: Only five women in my Stanford class went on to pursue a higher degree. Most of us still were unsure of what would become of us. Mostly, in that era when I grew up, it

was go to college, meet the guy you were going to marry, marry him, have children, and then figure out what we were going to do in life. Chuck was commissioned as an officer in the Navy and he had to do his two years of service. First he was stationed on an aircraft carrier based in San Diego. He was deployed for three months on that carrier, but because he was a world class athlete and the Olympics were scheduled in 1960 in Rome, Italy, the Navy reassigned him to their Olympic training program and he was returned to his ROTC unit at Stanford to train under the famous track coach, Payton Jordan. So he spent three months at sea and then to fulfill his two years he was stationed at Stanford. We lived on campus. Chuck won the Armed Forces Championship in the 110-meter-high hurdles race in what was, at the time, world record time. The following year Chuck was ranked as the fifth best high hurdler in the world. Unfortunately, three of the four, other top five were Americans, so at the Olympic games he was the alternate on the U.S. Olympic Team. As soon as he finished his Navy service he went to the Graduate School of Business at Stanford, a two year program, so we lived basically on the Stanford campus for eight years. I didn't have to plan ahead on anything.

Q: What were you doing during this?

COBB: As you know, I get bored very quickly so I did have to find something to do. First I traveled with Chuck and the U.S. Olympic team; traveling around the United States and then over to Europe in the summer of 1960. At the Olympics in Rome, the three American hurdlers were healthy. Some of the best alternates were invited to a tour of the Scandinavian countries. So we toured the Scandinavian countries and the boys would run in a track meet every four or five days in different cities. That was exciting and a great education.

We came back to Palo Alto in the fall of 1960 and I started teaching school at a private girls' school in Hillsborough south of San Francisco, called Crystal Springs School for Girls. It was on the old Crocker estate [a prominent California family]. It was purely a girls' school, grades seven through twelve. Without the requisite degree in education, I was not eligible to be a teacher in California public schools, but the private schools liked to hire what they called well rounded or well-educated young men and women. So I was hired and I taught physical education and a senior seminar in world affairs. Being totally immodest, I was good at both.

I had a couple of other part-time jobs. When I walked into a shoe store one day in Palo Alto while I was at Stanford, I saw a clerk who just quit and walked out the door. I said to the manager "I can do that job," so I worked as a shoe salesperson part time the rest of that year. Later I worked as a clerk at a men's store.

I was pretty practical. I needed to earn a little bit of money so I'd do whatever popped up in front of me. It was easy for me to get jobs, but it was hard for me to stay with them because they were pretty menial. When I got the teaching job I was happy and I did that full-time the two years that Chuck was in business school. When he graduated he got a job with a company by the name of Dodge and Cox, an investment banking firm in San Francisco (still going strong, very sophisticated, and a well-respected investment

management firm). We moved to the Presidio area of San Francisco, which was a fabulous place for a young couple. We lived on Lyon Street, at the corner of Union and the Presidio Wall. Life was golden. I lived in a fabulous city and had friends from Pacific Heights to Haight-Ashbury. I had a successful husband. I negotiated part-time work at Crystal Springs School and that was also rewarding. After four years of marriage we started our family. Our two sons were born in San Francisco at Children's Hospital and life began to revolve around the two little boys. I'd take them to the many beautiful parks to play and we'd walk the two or three blocks down to the marina to watch the boats and bay front activity, with the Golden Gate on the immediate horizon. The families from Crystal Springs took me to their homes in the Sierras and I learned to ski, which became a passion of my life.

Q: Well during this time, one of the elections that engaged a lot of people, particularly young people, was Kennedy/Nixon 1960. Did that engage you at all?

COBB: We were tied up with the Olympics and other matters in 1960. I got engaged in the Republican Convention held in San Francisco in 1964 at which Barry Goldwater was the Republican nominee. I had joined the Young Republicans and for the convention I was in charge of arranging hotel rooms in San Francisco for all the Young Republicans coming from around the country. I accomplished my job, but the United States was not ready for a Barry Goldwater.

When I went to the convention, it was sort of the beginning of a process of being engaged with the machinery of politics. Probably from my mother and probably without any intent, I did gain a kind of a conservative nature that began to emerge when we had access to political activities such as that convention in San Francisco the summer of 1964.

Q: Was your husband also involved?

COBB: I don't remember him being involved specifically like I was in a job relating to the convention but he was always a student of politics. As a college student he was following politics and paying close attention. I wasn't as interested then, but I remember discussions on many occasions. When he started his job with the investment banking firm he was exposed to quite a lot of political discussion (and more than likely on the Republican side, given the nature of their business). I have to say that Chuck has always had a big influence on my thinking, whatever the subject matter, so while I didn't exactly mean to, I was getting a political and policy education over dinner. To the extent that one of us was not off traveling somewhere, we have talked over dinner together – at this point - for 54 years, so I learned quite a lot right at home. We both have these associations on the outside and then we'd come together and we'd always talk about what the problems and the interesting ideas were. We've always had relatively serious discussions and challenged each other's thought processes.

Q: Did you find, as a wife of a junior member of an investment bank, that you had social responsibility?

COBB: Yes. Obviously Chuck's career was important to both of us. I was happy to make the extra effort to make sure that I was put together properly for various occasions. In those days we still wore hats and gloves in San Francisco. I did my best to act properly and keep quiet. One of my best means of on-going education my entire life is just to keep quiet and listen. Chuck is inquisitive and can be provocative. He asks lots and lots of questions. I don't have to say a word. I just listen and absorb everyone's thoughts and positions. All go into my mental filing cabinet.

Q: Did the outside world, even the East Coast but beyond that Europe and Asia, intrude at all in your thinking?

COBB: We were fortunate to be able to do quite a lot of travel all our lives. During the Scandinavian trip we were in our early twenties. Then we spent time in Europe and returned periodically. It was more in the sense of learning about the world than strictly in the context of politics or governance, though we studied each country, its governance, key political figures and financial matters.

Q: When did you move into law?

COBB: Chuck got his MBA in 1962 and we spent about 10 years in the San Francisco Bay area. We moved out to Orinda in the East Bay when he left the banking firm and became lead analyst of real estate for Kaiser Aluminum Company, which was based in Oakland. The aluminum companies in those days (early to mid-1960s) were quite wealthy so they started investing in real estate, but they didn't have people who knew how to manage real estate. Chuck was asked to serve in Kaiser's treasurer's office and learn real estate and real estate finance. This was really the beginning of his lifelong career: large scale real estate development. From Orinda he was overseeing several Kaiser (then Kaiser Aetna) projects, including a 90,000-acre new development in Southern California, now known as Rancho California. We moved to Laguna Beach for two years, then moved back to Kaiser headquarters and lived in Lafayette. During that time I was 100% mom. I was paying attention to my young children; I was a faithful Cub Scout leader and Boy Scout leader. I met the teachers and went to the school's activities. 100% mom. But the politics began to seep in and when my husband took over a new job in Florida—we really became big time involved in Florida political matters. I continued taking care of my two boys. They were growing and so much fun playing with and to teach tennis and beach volleyball. But life was about to change again.

In 1970 Chuck got a call that took us to Miami, Florida. He moved to Coral Gables in 1971 and the boys and I came in 1972. We've remained, now over 40 years.

When we came to Florida our boys had grown to the age that they would soon be going to junior high school. I knew they were going to be staying after school for sports and I started paying more attention to what I really wanted to do for the rest of my life. I went to a great college but I knew that a BA from Stanford was not enough to get a decent job.

Q: Women in general were beginning to realize there's more than being just a mother.

COBB: Yes. In the sixties there began to be choices for women and, of course, those were the original years of the "counterculture" movement.

I remember in the 1960s when we were still living in San Francisco. The hippie movement started. We lived close to Haight-Ashbury and one of my teacher friends from Crystal Springs lived in Haight-Ashbury. She was totally a part of the beat generation. I went to visit her in an apartment house where she lived in Haight-Ashbury. There were maybe ten to twelve people living in a three-room apartment. When I visited, some were lying on the floor in the middle of the day, others on overstuffed couches puffing away on something. I couldn't believe it. I was so turned off about how, in my mind, it was un-American. It was un-American not to be working for your livelihood. In the middle of the day they were dyeing T-shirts and puffing their own types of cigarettes. It was the stereotype turned into reality. That had a big influence on me. And it was also, about the time of Goldwater—kind of a conservative backlash. I firmly believed all should all straighten up and pay attention to our lives and jobs.

Q: In 1971 when you went to Florida, did you find it was a different society? Was business and social life different from the San Francisco area?

COBB: First, the boys and I did not get to Miami until June of 1972 because they had to finish 1st and 2nd grades. I capped off my California life by winning several major ski races. I did not want to go to Miami. I remember the discussion very clearly. Chuck came home and said he had a fantastic job offer and laid out all the parameters and what the opportunity was and what this company could do in the future and how exciting it was and on and on until it finally occurred to me to ask him just where this job was. He said Miami, Florida, and I said, "Nope, we're not going; not going to do that, no thank you, I'm keeping the boys, good-bye." And he said "look, let's just go try it for a year." It will be a new experience because it is so different, we'll go there, and we'll see what living there is like. Of course, that was 1972 and we never left. When we got to South Florida it was still really the old South. Only Miami Beach was more like New York. We lived in a gentile, quiet, southern outpost at the end of the world. I disliked it totally.

In Miami I was a typical corporate housewife. We started getting involved deeply in the Miami community. There were only Democrat governors at that time but because of my husband's business we became active in statewide affairs. Chuck was a very young CEO and a very dynamic one and we became good friends with both Reubin Askew and Bob Graham. These two Democratic governors remained lifelong friends although we were Republicans. That was really the start of our serious political involvement, and once you get involved at the state level you're in it for life. Governor Askew, after his two terms, became a law partner of mine and the Graham family lived in the Miami area, so we all remained very good friends. Chuck and I got continually more and more involved in politics and policy issues in the state.

I decided I needed to get an advanced degree to be credible in our social circle and in the job market. I wanted to go to business school but the only place I could go to was University of Miami because we lived in Coral Gables. But the business school was not strong at that time. Then a new woman dean came to the law school. Her name was Soia Mentschikoff and she and her husband, Karl Llewellyn, had just formalized the entire Uniform Commercial Code of the United States (first published in 1952), which was largely adopted by every state. This uniform application of commercial law solidified interstate commercial rules throughout the United States. Soia, who was Russian, came from the University of Chicago to be the dean at University of Miami Law School in 1974. I thought she was an amazing intellect, so I decided I might go to law school.

I went kicking and screaming to Miami. I had become an avid alpine skier and downhill racer. I had just won the U.S. national championship for women over 27; I was number one in the United States in this slice of international sports. Now I would give my skiing up for law school.

Q: What business was your husband then in?

COBB: Chuck continued the business of large-scale community development, largely resorts, which were just sort of taking off in Florida at that time, where you have, an amenity like a golf centerpiece, with homes built around it. Which also became a ski resort model. Planning communities also involved planning the cities. He did a lot of thoughtful work throughout Florida after he became CEO of Arvida. In Broward County, he built much of Boca Raton, built the new communities of Weston, and Boca West and Sarasota, what is now the TPC Golf Course in Sawgrass outside Jacksonville. Subsequently Arvida built in Arizona, Texas, and California. These are projects that take 10 to 20 years to become cities. So that was his business in his early career. Chuck was involved in governance issues throughout these years. We knew a lot about government and elected officials and how local, state, and federal government worked. The Walt Disney Company acquired Arvida and Chuck's job expanded to international challenges.

However, having found the business school at the University of Miami, not to be a good fit for me, I was unsure of my path forward. One day I came across a newspaper article that talked about the LSAT, the law school admission test, that was going to be held in the next month or so, and I thought to myself, I just might see if I can get into law school. But I was afraid that I wouldn't pass the LSAT. I did not study for it. I just decided I'd sneak out and take the LSAT without telling anybody because I was afraid I'd be so bad. It would certainly tell me if law was a possibility.

It's an eight-hour exam, five different components of general topics. Your score is submitted to any law school you apply to and if you're within their particular range then you might be accepted. But I didn't want to tell anybody. I took this eight hour exam and lo and behold my grade was really quite good. I was completely shocked. I had no idea, I had absolutely no idea. So of course the University of Miami accepted me. I went back in 1975. I was 38 years old when I started law school in 1975. And as I got into my senior

year, I began to think who in the world is going to hire me? You know, I'm a 41-year-old neophyte attorney.

I decided the best way for me to clear my head was to go skiing in South America so, in the summertime of course, it's their winter there. I talked my husband into giving me a graduation from law school present of a week in Chile skiing; we had a fabulous time. But in the meantime all the other kids, and they were kids, in my law school graduating class were madly seeking jobs or had already secured their jobs. I came back in October of that year with no job and no prospect of a job but I wasn't worried about it. I just knew I was going to be able to do something, I didn't know what it was yet.

Q: Okay. Today is December 1, 2011, Ambassador Sue Cobb and I left our last conversation when she was just going on to get a law degree.

COBB: While I was in law school I did focus quite a bit on law and economics. I was always kind of drawn to the economic commercial side and I focused on that. I wasn't really political at that time but I won the 'Book Award' in constitutional law. I was interested in the overarching themes of policy and how we, the United States, had framed our governance.

We went to dinner one night with some trustees from the University of Miami. There was a man named Mel Greenberg sitting at my table and we began talking, and he asked what I was going to do with my law degree? And I said I hadn't decided. He said, why didn't you come and talk to him? So I said okay, what do you do? He said well, I have a law firm and the name of my firm is Greenberg Traurig and we have about 30 people, and we have different departments. You can come and see if you would be interested in the kinds of things we do. Well it turned out—I mean, in some ways this is just a charmed life story because it turned out that Greenberg Traurig at the time, which had only 30 attorneys, is now, today, in 2011, one of the largest law firms in the world, international, a zillion offices, and that's where I started when I didn't even know the name of the firm. I started because I had this competitive nature all my life. I'd done well in the sports. I liked to win. I did well in moot court when there was something on the line to win, then I would perform well. So I decided I'd be a litigator. But in commercial practice you really do not litigate. Nobody wants to be in litigation, whether you're a plaintiff or a defendant, you don't want to be there. It is costly and you don't know where it's coming out, you don't want to spend your money and all your time doing that so everything would get settled, so I rarely got into court to have the chance to show my debating skills.

And the firm, meantime, was saying to me, you should be on the deal structure side, not wasting your time taking depositions and going to motion hearings and trying to argue in trial court and of course it's not going to happen. You should be doing some deals. And they said by the way, what we think you should do is help us get into the field of public finance, the bond world.

At that point in time, now we're up through the early 1980s, all the lucrative bond work in the state of Florida was being done by out of state lawyers. What is bond work? If a

state or a city or a county borrows money from the public, the purchaser is given evidence of the bond debt, which is payable by the public entity involved. It's called either public finance or municipal finance or bond work—when I would tell people I became a bond attorney they thought I meant bail bonds but it is in fact a highly structured financial transaction to fund public objectives, like roads, bridges, hospitals and so forth. But all the legal work at that point on bond deals, because they were highly structured financial deals, was being done out of New York and some Chicago firms that had attorneys who had practiced in the public finance arena for many years. So to use Miami Dade County as an example, Florida was growing at that time by 1,000 people a day, so a governing entity, whether it was a city or a county or the state, needed money to build infrastructure. These public entities began to issue a lot more bonds than they had in the past. Such bonds require the analysis of a municipal bond attorney who must sign off on the structure of the transaction after going through all these different processes with the issuer, who would be often, in our case, Dade County. Let's say Dade County wanted to build a new hospital and they needed $300 million and they wanted to go to the public and borrow the money. Well, Dade County then had to assure the public in every way where this stream of revenue was coming from in the future, how they would get their money back. Then you'd get an underwriter, like Merrill Lynch or somebody would come in with the money and then attorneys had to do the documentation on how that underwriting was going to work when the underwriter gives the money to the county who gets the money from the citizens. These complicated financial matters require a nationally rated bond counsel to sign off on the entire structure.

One of the things that attracted me to the job was you could not be a nationally rated bond attorney unless you were in this little book called "The Red Book." (*The Bond Buyer's Municipal Marketplace)* However, you could not get into "The Red Book" unless you had signed off on- a bond deal. It was totally circular. It was a little group that had captured this business and wasn't letting anybody in. So my law firm, now asking me to lead this effort, went to our county elected officials and said look, we have as many smart attorneys here as they have at whatever law firm in New York, we just need a chance to be able to work on these transactions. We talked the county into passing a resolution that said any bonds issued in Dade County must include one of three Miami law firms, one being Greenberg Traurig, working alongside a nationally ranked bond counsel firm. The resolution was implemented, so the very first bond deal that we did in that dual capacity with a relationship with a New York bond counsel, I immediately became qualified as a national bond attorney. We began hiring experienced bond attorneys out of New York and the bond practice grew. It was a great financial success for my law firm.

Q: You must have, I mean you were breaking a very big rice bowl of people up in New York.

COBB: Yes. Well it's like everything, you know. If there's competition everybody who's involved wants a piece of the pie. They didn't want to lose all the Dade County bond work, which they were going to do unless they had some of our firms join with them, so they went along with it. And then we were just another competitor. And then we grew, we got very big, so in that way I got a lot of experience in some fairly sophisticated financial

stuff and was enjoying that. My boys were growing and doing fine in their schools and we had a real good relationship with the governors and other state leaders.

Q: Now let's talk, just stop, about this time what—how would you describe the politics of Florida?

COBB: Florida had long been a Democratic state; all the Southern states were. You might remember in those years, part of the Solid South. And Miami was interesting because Miami really was, when we got here, in 1971, the city of Miami really was the Old South, and so was the rest of Florida - just north of the city of Miami was Miami Beach and the Miami Beach area going up to Palm Beach, that strip had been populated by Northeasterners. They were starting to come down and they were—it was a very—a much more sophisticated group of people living in the northern part of Miami who had been exposed to Washington, New York, Connecticut and all the leaders involved in those states. It became a little bit more mixed North of town, but it was still a Democratic state. As I said before, my husband and I had very good relations with the two Democratic governors. We spent the most time with Bob Graham, who later became our senator and head of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and Reubin Askew. They were middle of the road Democrats. We did not have the kind of fringe groups in either party that we have now. It just didn't exist; you were sort of middle of the road. And then Miami got more influences from the Northeast and people began to get a little bit more conservative, I guess you would say. Lawton Chiles became governor for eight years before Jeb Bush won. There had been one Republican governor prior to our entering the scene, Governor Kirk, who lasted four years but it was still a Democratic environment.

Q: What about, say, the Cuban group?

COBB: Well remember the Cubans started coming— the initial influx was 1959 and 1960, so they had only been there about 10 years when we got here and they were simply struggling to survive. I mean, there were so many stories of someone who was a physician or a dentist or an attorney in Cuba, who came to Miami and, of course, they had none of the requisite licenses or degrees so they would become taxi drivers or they'd open a little shop; they'd do anything to survive. There's another really kind of good lesson in working hard and taking care of yourself.

The Cubans were not a political factor until about the 1980s because they were simply trying to figure out life. Plus they thought they were going back to Cuba; they all thought they were going back to Cuba. So what they were doing was to just take care of themselves, and they were worried about their kids. They were trying to get their children out first, which most of them did. They had a big operation that the Catholic Church put together called Pedro Pan in which all the young boys, essentially aged 12 to 16, were moved out of Cuba to avoid conscription into the Cuban army. So the influx of 1959 and 1960 and during the 1960s to the extent that it was allowed, as Castro began cutting back on emigration, was a well-educated, professional class that came to Miami. But they couldn't operate in that capacity in Miami; that came later. By the 1980s they became

organized and began to be an influence on politics. But up to that time they still thought, in the 1980s, that they were all going back home.

Also in the 1980s, we had the Mariel boatlift, which is when Castro released his prisoners, people in his jails and in his mental institutions and told relatives in Florida they could come pick them up, so there was a giant flotilla of boats that went down and picked up all the illegals—they were illegal in Cuba and the people that were in the mental institutions which turned out to then be a huge problem when they got to Miami. We had hundreds of government tent cities under the overpasses; we had a tent city at the Orange Bowl football stadium, and we had, we the county, had the burden of caring for these hundreds of people, some of whom truly were mentally incapacitated, some of whom truly were bad guys. During the Mariel boatlift, which lasted from April 15 to October 31, 1980, approximately 125,000 Cubans arrived at the United States' shores in about 1,700 boats. Some refugees were discovered to be undesirables; for example, criminals who had been released from Cuban prisons or other institutions (such as people with mental illness). The exact number of 'undesirables' that arrived in the boatlift is disputed, with estimates ranging from as low as 7,500 to as high as 40,000. The majority of refugees were ordinary Cubans. The Mariel boatlift was the subject of a 1981 PBS documentary film *Against Wind and Tide: A Cuban Odyssey*, which was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

The okay ones got sort of distributed out among Cuban communities. Many went to the Orlando area. Now there's a big Cuban community in Orlando and across the central part of the state. But it was a transformational time in Miami. Eventually we received assistance from the federal government. We finally got everybody settled in one way or another, some other states agreed to take part, take some of these people off Florida's hands, so it was a very emotional and very transformational time.

As it happened at that point in time one of our friends from Stanford, Victor Palmieri, was the Ambassador for the White House Refugee Affairs. We had good insights in Miami and Chuck and I both got really heavily involved in this international immigration issue. We helped to lead and manage a very serious problem for the city, the state and the federal government.

While Chuck was still growing his company, I was still building a public finance department at Greenberg Traurig. We were working hard, we have children, we're helping the city and the county. We were just fully occupied doing the things at hand. We were also very, very active in community charitable organizations, such as the United Way, the Red Cross, Goodwill Industries, and all those things people do to build communities, be involved as leaders. I went on to the Federal Reserve Bank Board in 1982. I served seven years on the Miami Branch of the Fed and was interviewed twice for the D.C. board. In each case, a PhD economist got that job. The Miami Board job involved once a month writing an economic report on what was happening in South Florida on the economic and commercial front. I was learning a lot about our entire economic system, learning a lot about monetary policy. We were very actively engaged with the Atlanta Reserve Bank and Fed Board in Washington. We at our board level

would supply information for the "Beige Book" and we'd have meetings in Atlanta and in Washington. I got to know many Fed leaders. I was told from the beginning that once you accept a Fed position, while it is a fascinating experience, you have to understand that once you're in-you never get out, you're part of the Fed family forever. I have found that to be true. You never become totally detached from the Fed.

Q: How did you find working on the Federal Reserve Board?

COBB: It was pretty straightforward but everyone learned a great deal. Our Board was just providing factual information as we found it through our sources, no political or rumored information. Paul Volcker was the chairman when I joined and then Alan Greenspan came during my time. The Fed Chairs are appointed by the president and to that extent could be political influence, but the Fed has always tried to stay removed from political influence. After 2000, it has become more political in my judgment but it really tries to avoid politics. Decisions were made on monetary policy and macroeconomic policy at the Federal Reserve Board level, and then the financial conditions of the country, of course, were made and manipulated by the processes of Congress. I was learning good governance and fiscal responsibility and long-term strategic planning, monetary policy in all its different forms, but all the time I was learning things at the Fed that I had not before known the importance of. I was flattered to have been interviewed twice for a seat on the 'big board' (Washington). In the end my lack of formal economic training blocked the path.

So now I've gone through most of the 1980s. By 1987, my husband sold his company. He actually sold it in 1984, merged it with The Walt Disney Company and we went into a whole different business environment. He went onto the Disney board with a three year commitment to stay with Disney. So now we're flying back and forth to Los Angeles and to Orlando for these different Disney things. I'm still at the law firm. When his three years on the Disney board was up in 1987, Ronald Reagan—whom we had known from California when he was governor—asked Chuck if he would come to manage some issues at the Commerce Department. Chuck was very much interested in the job and he became assistant secretary of commerce and soon thereafter undersecretary of Commerce.

At that point in time I thought to myself—I've really been working hard at my law firm, my boys were ready to go to college and I thought you know, I'm going to take a timeout, take a leave of absence from the law firm, because I want to go to Washington and be part of what my husband was doing. So in 1987 I took a leave of absence from Greenberg Traurig.

One influence was that, the prior year I had been invited to go to South America to climb the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere. I was not a mountain climber. I was, however, very comfortable in the mountains because of my skiing activity and the manner in which I grew up scrambling around the Sierras. This group from Wyoming asked me to join them and go to Aconcagua, on the border between Argentina and Chile for a three week time. It came at a time when I could actually do it due to the fall in bond

activity that January. So I said to my husband, "I have an invitation to join a team that's going to Aconcagua, it will be three weeks. Would you like to go to South America with me and go to the Andes?" And he said "Frankly, no, I wouldn't, I don't want any part of it. However, if you really want to do that you go do it, it's a good break from the firm." So, I did.

By 1987 my husband sold his company and joined the Ronald Reagan administration. I'd built Greenberg Traurig bond practice to a formidable group and I'd served five-years on the Fed. I was getting a little bored and decided to take a 'leave of absence' from the law firm to take a break and an appealing excursion to South America for a long hike and an attempt to Aconcagua, 22,837'.

The group that I went with turned out to be led by some well-known Wyoming ranchers and mountaineers. They were a really interesting group, very much involved in Republican politics and they held the second permit given by the Chinese government to climb Mount Everest from the north side (Tibet). In the 1980s the only way you could climb Mount Everest was from the Nepal side and the permit cost lots of money. To get a permit took years. So now I'm climbing in South America with these guys that have a permit to climb Mount Everest in 1988 through Tibet. When we finished our journey in South America they said look, you should come with us to Everest. We're going to China, it's going to take three months and you would have the opportunity to be the first woman from the United States to summit Mount Everest. I immediately said no. I was a partner at my law firm in Miami and I wanted to spend some time with Chuck in Washington for that experience.

I took a leave of absence and went to Washington. It was a wonderful experience, but it was not long before I was bored. I had now left my firm. Chuck was totally engaged in all the new issues he encountered at the Commerce Department. We would occasionally go to the White House or to Vice President Bush's house, which was fun, but during the day it was just so unlike the frantic life that I'd been leading. After I visited the many DC museums, I was completely bored.

So I called the guys in Wyoming and I said "are you still going to Everest?" And they said yes. I said, "okay, am I still welcome to come?" They said "you bet you are." That night's dinner conversation with my husband was quite different. I sat down and said do you mind if I leave for three months? He said well what are you planning now? Then I explained Everest. Of course no husband or wife could possibly want their spouse to do that. That was not a nice thing to do to somebody. But Chuck is a competitor and he recognized what an unusual opportunity it was and while he didn't like it, he didn't say I really don't want you to do that. So I started training in D.C. for Everest departure in the summer of 1988.

Q: How do you train for it?

COBB: The fact is that you really can't train for this kind of high altitude climbing in the United States because there's just nowhere to do it. Absent a real accident, while

climbing mountains the two most relevant factors that you always face are weather and health. Acclimatization, how your body acclimatizes to high altitude as the pressures change in your body is individual. I knew that I acclimatized easily to the extent you could understand it in the United States, because I could fly from Miami to our home in Telluride, Colorado, which is 9,000 feet, and go skiing the same day. I had no problem adjusting to that degree of change while a lot of people do. It's very common to experience stomach upset, nausea, headaches and so forth when you change altitude that much but I felt pretty comfortable that I would be able to acclimatize. And these climbs take a long time so it's not like you're going from, say, 10,000 feet to 20,000 feet in a day. You're doing that over a period of weeks. The whole trip was three months. Four weeks of that time was crossing China and that was an adventure in itself.

I was sort of now part of the social scene in Washington only because my husband was a pretty high-level officer in the Reagan Administration. We went to the embassies and the parties and the events. So somehow or other people heard that I was going to go join this team and go off to China, which was an adventure in and of itself. In the 1980s not that many people had been there; climbing Mount Everest was out of the question. *People* magazine called me and asked if I would let them come out to Colorado and do a photo shoot and an article on this woman, who was now 50-years old (in the summer of 1988, I turned 51 in Sichuan, China). So at the time of their offer I was 50 years old. They thought this was quite a story so they flew to Telluride and did several pages in *People* magazine. A book publisher saw *People* and they called. They said we'd like you to do a book about your climb of Mount Everest. I said, no, I don't want to do that. I said it's serious business, I'm going to have to pay attention to the preparations and I'm not a writer, really. They countered, by offering an advance on the book of several thousand dollars, which was quite a big amount of money for an enterprise like ours. Mountain climbers don't have money to cover a project like this. The rest of the team was begging friends and selling T-shirts. The advance from this book company was simply too good to turn down because, of course, it would go to the team. So I told them I would do a kind of a diary. I'd take a Dictaphone with me and at night if I was in a safe place I would relate what was happening. Of course, the publisher thought the odds were (and they were right about this), I would either be the first woman from the United States to reach the summit of Mount Everest or I would die. Those were the two biggest possibilities.

Q: A win/win situation.

COBB: For a book publisher, yes, I disappointed them. I did not get to the top by a very short margin, 900 meters, which is like two laps around a high school track, and it was because of a weather incident, but I did not tag the top and I did live. The book was published and I saw it as an interesting tale for my grandkids. But it got a lot more publicity than I expected. I think my head swelled to a large pumpkin size.

Q: Well, how did you find dealing with things in China?

COBB: With respect to the Chinese everything was very, very difficult. It was an interesting series of things. Remember I said that the climbing group that asked me to go

with them to Aconcagua was from Wyoming. Wyoming had two senators and one congressman at the time. They were Senator Alan Simpson and Senator Malcolm Wallop and Congressman Dick Cheney. They knew me, I knew them. They knew the leader of our expedition from Wyoming. So there were three powerful, influential, Wyoming advocates for our team and out of that came the opportunity to fly on a military air transport training mission. We started in California at Travis Air Force Base. We had a very big team, by the way. There were 34 climbers, five of whom were women and some additional support people, so we had a big group. Arranging for them to travel to China, land in Beijing, cross China to Lhasa, Tibet was a huge challenge. But with the help of our connections to the Wyoming elected leaders, we managed to get a free ride on an C-5A, at the time the largest cargo plane in the U.S. Air Force. The C-5A through military channels were charged with delivering a U.S. high altitude helicopter to Lhasa, Tibet, for testing at altitude. The Chinese government was paying the tab. So we thought we were going to be able to go all the way from California to Tibet with this plane, but then the Chinese got in the way.

We met the plane at Travis Air Force Base, just north of San Francisco. We all gathered, got on this huge, cavernous plane. They had seats put in for us on a platform near the top of the cavern. When we were seated, our team leader, Courtney Skinner, got up and addressed the climbers. He said, “I just want to remind you again to be cognizant of the fact that at least three of you are not coming back, maybe six of you are not coming back, because those are the odds this fall season on Everest.” A sobering start.

We flew from Travis Air Force Base in California to Dover, Delaware, because that was where the Air Force was going to pick up the helicopter. Next step: Anchorage. This is just such an amazing adventure. From Anchorage we flew to Okinawa. We were to stay at this huge U.S. Air Force base, Kadena.

Then we got word that the Chinese were not going to allow the mountain climbing team to land in Beijing. The plan (and we thought agreement) was Okinawa, Beijing, Lhasa, where we rest, pick up our trucks and all our equipment and drive to the Rongbuk base camp.

The Chinese said nope, you can’t land in Beijing. Now we have over 30 travelers, no money left, and we’re stuck in Okinawa. As it would happen my husband had, in his role as under secretary of Commerce, needed to visit China. He was, the very next day, going to meet with the tourist minister of China because he was in charge of United States tourism worldwide. Chuck had made arrangements to be in Beijing because he knew we were going to fly through. So I called him and I said they’re not letting us come. Can you talk to the tourism minister and to the foreign minister and see if you can get this cleared up? So there was a day of phone calls and trying to get the problem worked out. In the end my husband put up $25,000 for the Chinese to say yes – basic extortion by the government. Then we thought great, once we get to Beijing we’ll be able to talk them into letting us go to Lhasa by helicopter.

We arrived in Beijing and they wouldn't let us go to Lhasa and we couldn't get around this new obstacle. That was impossible. So we all split up and we went on various flights of what was then known as the worst airline in the world, CAAC (the Civil Aviation Administration of China). They had small planes which carried 20 or 30 people with no fixed schedule. They went at different times and in different directions. Team members agreed in Beijing, to do the best possible to get to Chengdu in Sichuan Province and meet at a particular hotel. By this point, Chuck and my two sons had joined me. We were able to arrange to get flights to Chengdu. The extra cost was not too much of a burden for me, but it was very hard for several of the rest of the team, who had to wire home to get money. So we got to Chengdu, which was a great adventure for my two now college age sons, and for us. We saw the giant pandas and we did the limited things that tourists could do. At that time there simply was no such thing as tourism in China. Our team leaders were trying to figure out how they could help get everyone from Chengdu to Lhasa. We decided finally we would have to again split up and get to Lhasa in any way we could and meet at the Chinese owned Holiday Inn in Lhasa. The Chinese officials were completely unhelpful. With a little U.S. currency that everybody had, we were able to get to Lhasa. However, due to the delays—all three of my family members decided to leave. Each had made other plans in Asia. It was a very emotional parting because no one was sure if I was going to get back alive. None of us acknowledged that as a fact.

I can't go into the whole story on the climb, but as you can imagine, there was more drama to come. I wrote and published a book called *The Edge of Everest: A Woman Challenges The Mountain* (Stackpole Books, October 1989) Anybody who is interested in mountain climbing can read the book, if they care to. But I will say that it prepared me for a lot of things in life that were very, very hard. And the way in which it was hard was a surprise to me. In addition to the physicality, it was hard psychologically and emotionally very difficult. Physically, of course, it was very hard but we knew that; we knew what the physical strains were going to be, but we didn't really understand the degree to which we were all exposed to extreme risk and none of us had any support systems. This was a team that was drawn from around the United States, who didn't know each other when we started, with the exception of the leaders. We were selected because they deemed us qualified to climb a mountain. Most of the team had much more climbing experience than I did, but I was just strong, I was always strong. So when you get to those life and death situations and there's nobody there that you really know and really know you can trust, really know that they care about you surviving, then it becomes a psychological hurdle that's truly unbelievable. We had no communications. We couldn't call home. Of course, my family was worried the whole time and I worried about them worrying.

Our base camp was in the Rongbuk Glacier Valley at 16,500 feet. We had an expensive satellite radio that we could use once a week. Three Chinese control officers joined us and also used this radio communication system. My husband could call to the base camp and find out where I was, if I was still alive, and what was going on. I talked to him once or twice, but you just don't chat. You're isolated, totally isolated under severe physical pressure and in constant life and death situations. This would be absolutely nothing to a soldier who'd been in Afghanistan, for example, but for the rest of us, unaccustomed to

living day to day in a life threatening environment without any kind of emotional support was a big hurdle. In the end, it made us all stronger, including me.

At the end of the climb in October, I was one of the last climbers up on the mountain when the jet stream descended on us. I was above 24,000 feet, moving to 26,000, to make our final ascent. We really thought we were going to make the top – or some of us would. We had eight climbers, who were strong enough (we thought) to do it. We had a camp set in at 27,500 (a tent) for protection. And then we got a message that the Fall monsoon was coming. In the opinion of our leaders, at the time, we climbers were too wasted for a summit attempt. We'd been on that mountain for six weeks climbing mostly in the 16,000 to 24,000 altitudes. I had lost 20 percent of my body weight and was starting to lose the ability to judge what was safe and what wasn't. I did not know it at the time, but our high-altitude doctor had already told my teammates that he thought that ultimately I would not get out alive. To our good fortune and to our credit we did not lose anybody on our team. We lost availability of several climbers because they had to retreat due to various ailments. They had to get to lower elevations and a couple of them had to be evacuated because they got so ill, but we didn't lose anybody to the mountain. Nineteen people were killed during our time on Everest on other teams on both the Nepal and Tibet sides of the mountain. We had hand held radios so we knew when somebody had been caught in an avalanche, or caught in a crevasse, or died from exposure. Some would pass us on the trail bringing a body down or we'd pass the bodies they had to leave on the mountain. We knew that a team of four Czechoslovakian climbers on an adjacent ridge route not far from us, with whom we were in radio contact, decided not to evacuate when we passed along the news of the monsoon descending. They were all blown off the mountain that night while we evacuated. Four deaths.

So it was really a heck of an experience and to get that close was just—it was an incredible experience. I remember standing on my highest ridge after we'd gotten the word from our leaders saying that we had to evacuate-everybody had to get off the mountain. For days, weeks I'd been climbing up, looking up. When I turned around and I looked at the mountains down below me, I was stunned. Below were 25, 26,000 foot mountains. They were under my feet. I could see all the way into Tibet and China. I could see into Nepal and India. I was awe struck. I felt like an insect. I could see clearly how small and dispensable I was. It was a life changing moment. I lived and all those other insects died.

Q: Let me ask, were there any advantages or disadvantages to being a woman climbing Everest?

COBB: Yes, I think there are disadvantages simply by physical characteristics. Women are typically a little bit smaller and not as strong as men. That's just a fact of life. There are no courtesies extended on the mountain, like opening the door for the lady who's accompanying you; it just doesn't happen. You have to take care of yourself. The hygienic circumstances are more difficult for women. One of the interesting things that I noticed was that in our base camp where all of us could survive relatively easily (16,500 feet) with a camp of like 20 small tents and a big dining tent; I mean, good sized camp

layout—the difference between that and being up higher was obvious and significant. As we got higher in the mountain a climber was lucky to have a two-person tent. But at the base camp it was almost civilized. We had dug latrines, maybe 100-150 yards away from the camp itself where the Chinese had told us that we could use it as a bathroom area.

Our three Chinese minders never left our sides, ever, except when we got up high on the mountain. They just stayed there and watched what we did.

In the area where we dug latrines, everybody had the duty one day or another to go out and dig a new latrine. I got that duty too, being a woman doesn't set you apart. We had a flag system. So we walked down a little trail and if you saw that the arm of the flag was down that meant somebody was using the latrine; if the flag was up it meant you could walk through and use it. That was fine, we had toilet paper and everyone was very polite.

Climbers are scrupulous about the hygiene, the cleanliness, the care, the observance of the flag routine; very careful to maintain normal decorum at 16,500 feet. However, when we started going higher there were basically no choices. You had to just step off the trail somewhere. For the men that turned out to be not too difficult; for the women it's a more difficult set of circumstances. However, people who make mountain climbing gear, designed suits of substantial quality and quantity, with a flap in the rear to let down. Of course men also need that apparel provision.

In one serious but humorous case, one of our climbers, a man, had gone off for a more serious purpose than just a quick liquid release. A rockslide suddenly came thundering down. We heard this huge, huge rumbling and while we were not actually in danger, we didn't know that. The earth shifts and it's either an avalanche or rock fall and this was a rock fall heading to within about 30 yards of where we were. We knew a Japanese climber was killed earlier that week by a rock fall. It was unlikely we were going to get hurt but you couldn't tell for sure and this poor teammate had his pants down, struggling to run away from the rock fall with his pants around his knees. It was serious, but we can laugh now about how awkward he looked. Of course we teased him mercilessly.

Q: I was wondering whether, we're talking about strength and all, does a woman have any advantages? For example, the fact that you are normally lighter than a man? Could that be turned into an advantage?

COBB: Not enough, not enough; particularly in our case. We did not have money to have guides and Sherpas. When we were at the base camp we were able to hire a handful of yaks to take some of our gear to the next higher level camp, but we really didn't have money to spend so we couldn't hire Sherpas. I can't remember any time in the 1980s or 1990s after Everest started commercializing climbs where you could buy a position on a team. It wasn't until the 1990s that Sherpas, (a local indigenous person) to carry the loads came into common use. In our team's case we all carried all of our own and all team gear, including the women.

It doesn't sound like very much but if you're carrying 40 pounds at high altitude and going up the side of a mountain it is a lot and for me it was really hard. I mean, there were times that I just sat down and started crying, it was so hard. I mean, it was just so hard. But I would never let any of the men see me crying.

Gradually, we got into shape on the mountain and we did it for a long, long time to be acclimated. We set up these camps and it's kind of a hopscotch thing where you take a load of food, for example, to the camp that's 1,000 feet higher and you drop it there and you go back to the lower elevation and to sleep. The next day you take a sleeping bag or blankets or something and you go 2,000 feet, leave the sleeping bags and blankets, and drop back to the 1,000 foot camp. So you kind of hopscotch your way up the mountain.

Q: There has been considerable negative commentary lately about the trashing of Mount Everest?

COBB: It's pathetic. It's highly unfortunate. I have never been at the base camp on the Nepal side, I've just seen pictures. Within two or three years of our being on the Tibet side, on the south side, the Nepal routes were open, commonly used, and there were nearly 500 people in the Nepal base camp. Five hundred people. So the trash is awful. And what happens is, as you might imagine, if you're carrying all this gear up the mountain to protect the team as the climbers come back down you are supposed to take the trash off the mountain. But the environment is so harsh that a lot of people just don't do it. And that's why trash accumulates and that's why bodies are left. You become physically incapable of carrying weight after four or five weeks of being above 16,000 ft. It's a very sad thing.

When we all got out (after we all knew we were going to live - a pretty exhilarating thought) one of my teammates was just generally talking about the climb. She was one of the women climbers who was 31 years old and I by then 51, turned to me and ask "well Sue," said she, it's really disappointing not to get to the top but we were very, very close and maybe just putting your foot on the last rock doesn't matter so much; we really basically climbed the whole mountain. We can always come back next year." And I looked at her and said "Julie, you're nuts. Who's going to come back here? I've done this, this is it, this is over." Unfortunately she was killed two years later in an avalanche in Canada.

Everest is really hard to explain because nobody has a common experience, but I guess that's one of the themes of our life, Chuck's and mine: the willingness to assess what the opportunity value is versus the negatives. When a job came up for Chuck in Florida in the 1970s I desperately didn't want to go. He, in fact, didn't want to move either. He's a fifth generation California, I'm fourth generation California, all of our family, all of our friends, our college life, everything that we knew was in California. But we decided we'd go see what this particular opportunity was all about. Everest is another example of that. No woman from the United States had ever made it to the top, I had a unique chance to travel across China and Tibet and try to climb the highest mountain in the world. Both decisions changed our lives. A lot of people are afraid to take even marginal chances. All

great adventures start with a "yes." Chuck and I have looked at many things and often said yes.

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Q: Today is April 12, 2012; interview with Ambassador Sue Cobb. Okay Sue, we left off in 1988. We've got you down off Everest.

COBB: Yes. It's now 1988 and we have the election going on, Bush/Dukakis; that's where we left off. I'm home alive from Everest. Now we start to get into real political stuff.

Q: How attuned were you to the political process at this point when you're mountaineering?

COBB: Well I was very attuned to it and during the three months that I was gone, traveling in China and Tibet, we got very little news. I would occasionally have the opportunity to talk to my husband via satellite who was very involved and went to the convention in New Orleans when George Herbert Walker Bush was nominated and had selected Dan Quayle as the vice-presidential candidate. I had a few side bets going on with my climbing friends who were probably a little bit more on the liberal side than I was; they were supporting Michael Dukakis. I certainly didn't want to make those bets too serious because they might have to save my life at some point.

I believe I mentioned earlier that my husband, Chuck Cobb, who then became Ambassador Charles Cobb, had been in the last two years of the Reagan Administration assistant secretary and then under secretary of Commerce and we had been living in Washington, DC, from 1987 and then I left in 1988 for this China trip and I came back to D.C. When George H.W. Bush was elected President, he asked my husband to be the U.S. ambassador to Iceland. Chuck had a Navy background and we were still in the Cold War, when Russia could only access the Atlantic with its subs by passing Iceland.

Q: And Iceland was the choke point for submarines.

COBB: Definitely. And this was very much a fascinating part of our life. We lived in Reykjavík for three years and became very familiar with the circumstances of the Russian submarine fleet. Their only warm water port was Murmansk north of Iceland. So to get out into the Atlantic they had to pass Iceland. Iceland sits on top of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge which comes up from the ocean floor as foothills and mountains do. So the ocean sides around Iceland were sloping and pretty shallow, which meant that we could monitor all the subs that came into the Atlantic from Icelandic's Nato base in Keflavík. When we got there, I remember this specifically, there were 88 KGB officers living nearby. The KGB, was of course, the main intelligence agency for the Soviet Union from 1954 until its collapse in 1991. The Russian embassy was also just a couple of blocks from where we lived. So we went through the period of the fall of the Berlin Wall. After several weeks of civil unrest and the erosion of its political power, the East German government

(GDR) announced on 9 November 1989 that all GDR citizens could visit West Germany and West Berlin.

At that time this was just one of the amazing experiences that I had, I was just the spouse, of course, I was not a principal in the whole drama but I paid close attention to all Embassy matters. November 9th we were at the Swedish embassy for a diplomatic dinner for all the diplomats accredited to Iceland. During the evening, seated at the formal dinner, guests began getting news that the East Germans were allowing people to move through areas of the wall into West Germany. As we were sitting at our table we could start to see the phones of other diplomats ringing and they would get up and remove themselves from the table, then come back and excuse themselves; they were going to their posts, which we all quickly did. That was our exposure to the beginning of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a huge political turning point.

Because all accredited diplomats were in town, the next day the U.S. admiral in charge of the NATO base at Keflavík, had invited all the diplomats and spouses to a lunch at the base. Of course, we attended that lunch. As is diplomatic custom, the American admiral, the host, got up and gave a toast to welcome all of the diplomats and thanked them for their collaboration with the U.S. and with NATO. We had lunch. At the end of the lunch the Dean of the diplomatic corps typically stands up and thanks the host in a very formal diplomatic manner. I happened to be sitting next to the Dean of the diplomatic corps, with whom we played tennis almost every weekend. He was the West German ambassador to Iceland Herve Haverkamp. He got up to give his toast and very warmly and politely and correctly thanked the admiral for the lunch, thanked the United States and all the NATO nations. He mentioned each one and each ambassador by name for their support during this long Cold War. Of course nobody knew what the future would bring but he was very eloquent. He sat down next to me and immediately started crying. He leaned over to me to get a little protection from the fact that he was totally in tears, and he said "Sue, you have no idea what this means to us in Germany." And of course I didn't truly, but intellectually I did. He was sobbing. I'll never forget that day.

Chuck and I had the opportunity shortly thereafter, within about two or three weeks, to go to Berlin and of course it was an incredible experience to see the Berlin Wall as the East and West Germans were still tearing it down. To this day I have the piece that an East German soldier, stopping his hammering, handed to me. We had the opportunity to see what East Germany looked like at that time. It was a very, very dramatic period.

I took the opportunity (of course) to climb the highest mountain in Iceland and while it's only about 8,000 feet high, it is the highest point on an island in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean and the winds and the weather conditions are extremely changeable. But I met two Icelanders who were adventurers and knew the territory and we decided that we would use skis and skins and ski up Eyjafjallajökull and then free ski down after we got to the top. We fortunately had decent weather. We started at 2:00 a.m. and we skied up diagonal in each direction to within about 400 feet of the peak. Then we had to take off our skis because it got so steep. It was impossible to ski at that point. We roped up with me in the middle, and I hadn't taken five steps before stepping directly into a crevasse.

The lead climber and the climber behind me did exactly the right things. They fell to the snow in opposite directions jamming their ice axes as firmly and deeply as they could into the mountain. This maneuver pops the climber up who has fallen in the middle. I had only gone about head deep into the crevasse, so my shoulders popped over the entry and I was extracted. We summited on a bright, sunny Atlantic day. It had taken us 16 hours to ski up.

We down climbed to our skis, removed the skins, and put on our skis to ski down. My Icelandic friend said the only thing you have to do is be sure as you ski down that your skis are perpendicular to crevasses, not parallel, don't ever let your skis get parallel to the crevasses. So we took off. It had taken us 16 hours to go up; skiing, we were down and back at the car in 45 minutes.

Q: I've talked to people that served in Iceland during the Cold War period and they remarked that while Iceland hosted an important base there, they were almost aloof from the whole East-West competition. But how did you find reception by Icelanders? I mean, as the wife of the ambassador.

COBB: It's an interesting thing and it's an interesting question because of course we dealt with the diplomats and the higher-level government officials and everything was very properly done. I personally, because I have these outdoor experiences, got along with the Icelanders who love all the outdoor activities as well. So I would go alpine skiing, cross country skiing, running, and playing tennis. They liked that. So we had, from a personal perspective, a very nice relationship. However, the government of Iceland was concerned about a huge U.S. presence at this NATO base. There were, of course, other nations there but it was essentially 5,000 U.S. military people and this was of considerable concern for a lot of different reasons, as anybody who has a base in their backyard knows.

But you know, I'm going to jump ahead and say, while they wished NATO was not there when it was there, when NATO decided to leave Iceland really wanted us to stay due to the big economic component.

One of the things that State Department personnel would know and remember, but I think the average person would not, is the manner in which we ended up being at the NATO base in Iceland in the first place. Hitler had worked his way up into the Scandinavian countries and was in Denmark and the Brits had troops protecting Iceland. Great Britain had a lot of troops in Iceland for the reasons we've previously discussed, including its military significance. It was a very important little island. So they had a large number of troops there. Churchill called Roosevelt when the siege in London began and Great Britain was trying to defend London, its capital city, with everything that they had. Churchill asked Roosevelt if he would send troops into Iceland to protect the strategic location so he, Churchill, could withdraw his troops and take them back to defend London. That's how we ended up being the primary security force in the Atlantic.

Q: Greenland was also included in that deal.

COBB: Yes. Greenland at that time was a dependent territory of Denmark and the two retain a special relationship, so it was included. The U.S. has military facilities in Greenland.

So all of that was fascinating for us. We spent a fair amount of time in Europe because the State Department gathered various meetings for all the European ambassadors. Iceland was in State's Europe geographical alignment. Odd but literally true–the European tectonic plate meets the American tectonic plate in Iceland.

Just outside of Reykjavík, you could see where the two plates are parting at a rate of about a centimeter a year. So one can, in fact, stand with one foot in Europe and one on American soil (although of course it was Iceland's sovereignty).

In any event that whole series of things – in the war, the history, the geology was all fascinating to us. Clearly the Iceland exposure contributed greatly to my understanding of the manner in which our diplomatic corps works, how other diplomatic corps work, and what an American diplomat and his/her team do. I learned a great deal about diplomacy as the ambassador's spouse.

Q: I suppose in Iceland there were unique domestic constituencies you paid attention to.

COBB: There were several domestic constituencies. In fact there was a weak Communist Party in Iceland led by a long-time strong Parliamentarian. He immediately charged on fairly whimsical grounds that the U.S. ambassador was interfering with Iceland's internal affairs and therefore was *persona non grata* in Iceland. So we went through those kinds of political shenanigans, but you know, from the perspective of a life experience our term was impactful on us, certainly for my husband, but also for me.

Q: What was your impression of the Icelanders that you met?

COBB: They are remarkable people to have survived in a harsh environment living very independently and developing a high level of culture. Most people know Iceland was first settled in the year 900, so they have this over 1,000-year history of literature and of thinking. What does one do on the cold winter nights when there is dim or no light. There was a tremendous amount of reading and writing, prose, and song developed in Iceland over the years, much of which was recorded in the books called the *Sagas*.

They also had a pure genetic pool. As we around the world became interested in genetics Iceland was one of the countries that was most studied because in other countries people inter-mixed and inter-marry and ethnic backgrounds and cultures get all scrambled up. That wasn't true in Iceland; it was very pure because there was no immigration. Their language also remained unique and is almost impossible to speak. So Iceland came under a great deal of scrutiny as we in the Western world and elsewhere began to study genetics. Icelanders, I would say, were a little suspicious of outsiders. They didn't want outsiders around and in fact while we were there, there were almost no outsiders. I mean, people could visit but there was no tourist industry yet and no one settled there. It was

just when we were leaving in 1991 that Iceland agreed to take five Vietnamese refugee families. Iceland now is much more culturally diverse but there also is a high percentage of the population that would not even consider marrying someone who is not Icelandic.

Q: With an American base close at hand was there a problem with the young soldiers from the base?

COBB: Well yes. But, it was pretty well controlled. I mean the military was not going to let that get out of hand, the base was too important to us. So the rules, the restrictions on these young, both American and other NATO country men, were relatively strict. They were only allowed in the town of Reykjavík during certain hours, on certain days, and under certain conditions. So I think there was more of a fear of what might happen than what actually did happen. There were some incidents but they were handled by the military and did not take a great deal of time of the U.S. ambassador.

Q: What was your impression of the role of women there? Because it was different than in the other places.

COBB: That's an interesting question also; quite different from the way we grew up or understood women's roles in the Western world. Women were actually quite powerful in business, civic, and cultural activities. The families were tight knit and it was not uncommon at all for a 16 year old to have a child but stay with the family so the baby would grow up with the mother and the mother's family. It was considered perfectly normal. That could have come from, you know, years in the past when there were only farming communities spread around the island, almost no travel nine months of the year and the need for child labor on the farms. There was nowhere else to go, so you stayed in the heart of the family. And as the girls grew up they would also be needed for work on the farms as well as usual matronly duties.

And then there is the great story of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, who was the president of Iceland while we were there and was president for 15 years. Vigdís—and by the way, the Icelanders always go by first names, which I will tell you about because it's interesting. So the president was called "Vigdís," which was her first name. Vigdís became head of the National Theater Company. Theater was very important to the Icelanders. Music, dance, acting, all very important and you can see why; it's not dissimilar from the reading culture as things that you can do in a cold and/or dark environment.

Vigdís was the powerful head of the National Theater Company (Reykjavík Theatre Company) and she felt that the Icelandic women, while they were working and taking care of the family, were not getting the credit from the men in the country that they deserved, that the men in her view did not recognize the value women added. So Vigdís, prior to her Presidency, organized a strike of all women in Iceland and simply said don't go to work today, whether it's in your home or in a business or on the farm; just simply don't do anything. The result was a complete stop of the economy. Vigdís then was immediately elected president of the country, and was president for 15 years. Since then, she has been one of the leaders in a worldwide movement of women leader organizations.

Another interesting thing is that the Icelanders use a patronymic system of naming. The child always takes the father's first name and adds either son or daughter. So my father's name is "Benjamin" so his son would be named "Benjaminsson" and then he could choose from an approved list of first names. It would often be a relative's first name. If he had a daughter, I would be called "Benjaminsdottir," that would be my last name and then I would have a first name that was from the approved Icelandic list. A common name such as Gudrun. It might have been "Guderein Benjaminsdottir." Also a bride would never take the name of her spouse, she would always keep her last name. But the child's father would name the child after himself with an approved first name. So what ended up happening is there are many, many names that are the same. There could be 10 "Bjorn Hendidricksons", so the Icelandic phone book would list everybody by their first name and then they would list the occupation of the person with his address. So if someone was looking for a particular Bjorn he could distinguish from the nine others of the same name. But it was certainly unusual to me, having spent time in diplomatic circles in Washington to have someone walk in the door and say "Good evening, Sue." "Good evening, Charles."

Then, in the diplomatic receiving lines, several people would have the same name. You could never tell who was married to whom, if in fact they were married because they never took each other's names. And the names were hard. So we just struggled with figuring out who was who and how to pronounce the name and fearfully uttering the first name to the prime minister. It was daunting.

Q: I assume one of the officers at the embassy was the protocol officer and was a great help.

COBB: Yes, yes. Of course, the protocol officer would have been a career Foreign Service Officer who had studied for the job. We, as you know, are plucked out of the private sector, which, it is safe to say, rarely deals with the Icelandic language.

Of course, having been prepped at State, one does figure out fairly quickly who the important contacts are. The prime minister that was elected while we were there was a man named Davíð Oddsson and he and his wife, Astridur, became very, very good friends of ours. We have kept in touch also with some other ministers in the Icelandic government during our tenure. We visit together when we go to Iceland about every second or third year. So while it was all business when we were in Reykjavík, pretty formal, when that was over, not unlike my experience in Jamaica, not unlike other ambassadors' experiences, you relate to people of common values and common interests. We have several friends that we're very, very fond of from our Iceland days and we do keep in touch.

Q: How did you find representing the United States, particularly in a Republican administration, in Iceland which had such a different and long, 1,000-years history?

COBB: Well, that's sort of right in an institutional sense, but you know the fact is that people are people and some of the barriers that might seem to be there because of institutional structure or historical practices, are there, but can be crossed. Iceland at the time when we got there, I can't remember exactly what the króna was worth, but they were not doing well economically. They became more conservative in the fiscal sense, and they became more prosperous over the course of the years that followed and then of course as we know, they got too heavily into financial risk without support and some of the banks failed. But the Icelanders are worldly. Upper-class children are mostly educated in Great Britain and the United States. Some sons and daughters of older leaders were educated in Russia. Graduate degrees are often at the University of Iceland, a very, very fine university that provides a superb health education. They produce many truly outstanding physicians. Although they were totally isolated for so many years until World War II. They are proud of how they survived. There are lots of museums and certainly lots of history. As World War II ended and we went into the Cold War, Icelanders became more involved with the rest of the world. They are very fine talented people, well-educated and very enjoyable company.

Q: Were any fish wars going on while you were there?

COBB: Yes, there were fish wars but, I don't remember all the details. It was not our fight. But Iceland depended on fish and the fishing industry and thought the ban on whale fishing was unfair. I believe they eventually joined with Japan against the rest of the world in hunting whales. They argued the whales caught around Iceland were the minke whales, which weren't endangered.

Speaking of fishing, from my perspective, the most fun was to go salmon fishing in the Icelandic rivers. It is just unbelievably exciting to hook and work to pull in a nice big salmon, then release it. Salmon fishing is a very big sport in Iceland. In fact that was one of the ways that Iceland became known, certainly to the outdoor world. Americans and Brits, princes and kings, would fly to Iceland to go salmon fishing at astronomical prices. It's just a superior location for a superior sport.

Q: Today as I was coming to this interview, I passed by a bus which had a picture of a young man and a young woman in what looked like a hot pond with ice around it. The ad said, "Iceland, only five hours away."

COBB: Yes, yes. There are many natural hot springs. Iceland is a volcanic region and there were natural hot places in the rivers and the marshes, you could go bathing. I mean it was quite unusual because it could be very chilly outside and you go into this hot pond. But they have one that's quite famous called the Blue Lagoon near Keflavík where the NATO military base used to be and where the international airport is. This is about roughly 30 or 40 minutes from the town of Reykjavík between Keflavík and Reykjavík. The Blue Lagoon is a hot sulfur spring and they've fixed it up as a big tourist attraction. In fact, last time I was there the Icelandic highlight for one of my guests was to go to the Blue Lagoon. So it's a big deal and it's different and it's, you know, unusual and it's fun, one of the things Iceland offers tourists.

Q: What was your reaction to the career Foreign Service? This was your first exposure to it and sometimes people coming out of the political, non-career, side come in with some hesitation. What were your initial impressions?

COBB: I would like to go into that in a little more depth when we get further along in the Sue Cobb career because I spent a lot of time on this subject and with the Department of State in different ways.

But, as to initial impressions, what I had heard were a fair amount of complaints, not just from non-career people like ourselves but from the career Foreign Service people whose spouses would accompany them. It was the position itself, ambassador, that was sold as a team position, where at that time, the husband and wife would go together and the wife was expected to manage the social side of the embassy relations and be a hostess and take care of the necessities and the food and this and that, with some help, of course, from some staff. In a sort of an admission against interest, I never learned to cook. My mother didn't cook so I never learned to cook. I did not know how to cook. I certainly wasn't going to start in Iceland nor could I give very good directions to a chef. We did have a chef and most embassies do have a chef. I could not tell her what to buy and what to fix. I could tell her what we liked, that was about it.

Moreover, I have never been someone who as a preference does entertaining. Many of my friends love to think about the color combinations for the table and the flowers and the whole picture of the entertainment concern. It's an art. And some of my friends are just fabulous at it. That is not a strength of mine. I didn't want to be in the awkward position of trying to act like I could do that. So I told my husband when we prepared to go to Reykjavík, that yes, I wanted to be there, I wanted to be a part of his tour, but he was to tell his staff that he was an unaccompanied ambassador, he didn't have a spouse coming along so that they would make plans to handle the embassy rituals in the same manner they would for an ambassador who in fact had no spouse. Now, I had seen that model in Greece. We had visited Greece prior to going to Iceland and the U.S. ambassador there had a spouse who was a surgeon. She could not leave the United States and practice surgery so she didn't go with this U.S. ambassador. At that time, we got into a conversation about how you get along without having your spouse on-site to handle all the details of the residence and entertaining. This was a top-level career Foreign Service person who told me that it really is very easy because the embassy personnel will take care of all requirements. You have an administrative officer, and you have the protocol officer, and you have people who will manage all events. That conversation gave me the idea to say I really would like them to approach this tour the way they would as if Ambassador Cobb was unaccompanied. That worked beautifully for me and I don't think it harmed our bilateral relationship. Obviously I helped my husband whenever I could, but I did not do housework!

I took a leave of absence from my law firm and took over a lot of the business activities which my husband was precluded from being involved in. So I worked during the day on our personal business matters and my own trailing activities, and I allowed time for

considerable recreation. I've always been a runner and I would run one or two hours a day just around town or up in the hills or wherever I wanted or I would go skiing or I'd go hiking. The embassy and the residence thrived without me being a very good hostess.

Q: In the diplomatic world, much is asked of the women, the spouses, and some resent the intrusion. Others say I don't really like doing it but say oh gee, I'd better do this. But that isn't the path to a good job.

COBB: Yes. Well that is part of the dissatisfaction. Then there are those who can do it and do it but resent the fact that they are actually doing as much work in some cases or at some times as their spouses and there is no recognition and no compensation.

So that was a big issue and there were incessant discussions with the State Department about it. This is about the time that women started to sort of "come of age" in the United States in terms of working. Women started going to or going back to law schools, to architectural schools and business schools and women were beginning to feel that if they were putting in time they should be paid.

Q: Who is the new dean of Leadership and Management?

COBB: Carol Rodley is her name. She had most recently been ambassador to Cambodia (January 2009 to September 2011). We got into a conversation about the women's roles and she said it worries her that more and more women are simply saying no, they're not going with their spouses because so many more have careers of their own. And sometimes it's a necessity. You can't give up your job when you have kids in high school and college, you can't do it, and in some cases you can't give up your job and expect to come back to the same job because those jobs aren't there anymore. So it's a completely different environment. Some have said it takes two incomes to send your children to university.

Q: Of course, some of those places would have competent staff.

COBB: Exactly. I always come back to the point that people are people whether they're sitting in the U.S. residence as ambassador and spouse or they're in New York or Washington or Miami; people are people and if allowed they will do the things that they know and like.

Q: Did you get much in the way of official visits there?

COBB: No. We didn't and in some ways it would have made sense if we had real problems going on there because it's easy to get to. It is really just four and a half hours from New York and once again, it's en route to Europe, so you would think there were more opportunities but there was never a need.

Now, however, that has changed. It's a huge tourist market now; they've done quite a good job of marketing that and so it's a very different set of circumstances.

Q: Was there much in the way of any terrorism threats or anything of that nature?

COBB: No, not really at that time. As I mentioned there were—we had many KGB agents around until after the wall fell.

One cute story though, when you think about it you recognize that in December and January Iceland only has two hours of daylight and during the summertime, June and July about 22 hours of daylight. It was kind of unusual to get used to that kind of change. So our first summer there with all this daylight we asked people what they do and well, they would have dinner at the same time but then they'd go out and play tennis, take a walk, go to one of the many swimming pools, or do other things. One becomes accustomed to it relatively easily.

So one night my husband and I, (we always have dinner together, just the two of us), said, it was maybe 9:30 pm or 10:00 pm, "well, let's just go take a walk." The harbor was about five city blocks or less from our residence. We walked toward the harbor and saw two large Russian vessels in port. He knew, I suppose from the embassy, what they were, but I recognized them as large vessels that do ocean floor mapping. We had no guards with us at that time as I later always did in Jamaica, so we could walk and talk freely. We walked down to the harbor and we looked at the ships and Chuck said "Let's go over and talk to them." There was a young officer standing at the foot of the gangplank and we went directly to him. My husband said, "I am the United States ambassador and we'd like to see your ship." The young man was somewhat flustered but knew enough English to say, "wait a moment please." He went up the gangplank and he came back with a high-level officer who spoke English. The officer said he'd be pleased to welcome us aboard. So we went up into this large vessel and they showed us everything including their mapping room. They were indeed mapping the ocean floor.

Obviously mapping is of interest to Russians who have submarines, but they certainly were not trying to hide it. The machines were spitting out numerous graphs. The graphs were showing the bottom of the ocean floor and the elevations and distances. They were done in color and they were really, I thought, quite pretty in a modernistic art sort of way. I said something like that to the Russian officer and he said "Well here, why don't you take these as a souvenir?" He ripped off two and gave them to me. I rolled them up thinking this is a good souvenir of Iceland. Chuck and I left the ship and walked around the docks and back home.

The next morning, at 7:00 am, my bedside phone rang. The political officer was looking for me. He calls me, and says "Mrs. Cobb, some of our people noticed that you went aboard the Russian ship last night." They had been watching us; our people were watching us! He continued, "We noticed that you came out with some papers in your hand and we're interested in seeing what the papers are." And I said, "oh?" And he said, "What do you think they are?" I said, "Well they are maps of the ocean floor that the Russians are doing." He said, "We must see those." And I said, "You can see them, but here in the house, I'm not giving them to you." Finally he talked me into letting

somebody come over and get them and take them to the embassy. Though I repeatedly begged that they be returned. That was the end of it, I never saw them again.

The odd part to me was our people were watching us, not the KGB. The KGB, let us aboard the ship and treated us very politely. Strange in my mind at that time.

Q: Since I'm probably not going to get your husband under my microphones, how did he find the ambassadorship?

COBB: You know, no one, well almost no one that I know who is plucked from the business world to represent our country abroad has come back and said that was a terrible experience, I would never do it again. What most of us feel is it is a huge honor, it's extremely educational and most of us really try our best to do a good job in representing the policies of the administration in which we are engaged. I know that there are many not very good non-career stories, some of them well earned, about politically appointed ambassadors who go off and play golf or get involved in things that they should not get involved in.

Many of my career Foreign Service officer friends tell me, we know that we, the career people, have some very good ambassadors and we have some bad ones, and we say the same thing on the career side. But we think the non-careers have a worse reputation and we are not sure whether it's deserved or not. At this point in time, and again jumping ahead of my own story, I financially support an annual State Department award that selects the most effective non-career ambassador in the world every single year. And the reason that I started that award about six years ago was because I was the co-chair of about 20 ambassador seminars over the course of eight years of the Bush Administration and I saw so many good people come in, leave their jobs, leave their family, leave their home, go off to serve their country, who do outstanding jobs. A lot of them were people who had very strong business experience and financial experiences and knew how to run organizations. They did just a superb job. The State Department would recognize them orally but of the awards that the State Department gives every year, there were like 25 for everything from FSN (Foreign Service National) of the year to, GSO (General Service Officer) of the year to DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) of the year and so on, but there were zero awards of recognition for the non-career people who provide superior service.

Q: Well right now I'm interviewing a retired British Foreign Service officer who is married to an American Foreign Service woman. He was talking about when he was in Ghana, Shirley Temple Black was appointed to that country. He characterized her as one tough cookie. He said she really knew the rule book and did a first-rate job.

COBB: Speaking of Shirley Temple Black, she came to visit us in Iceland with Václav Havel on his first visit to the United States after he got out of prison and was elected president of Czechoslovakia. They stopped in Iceland for one night and flew to the United States at the invitation of George Herbert Walker Bush. So we had a chance to meet and get to know her. Yes, she was very well informed and I would also say "one tough cookie."

Q: Alright, is there anything else? Should we move on from—?

COBB: Yes, I think we can move on. I think just in the final responses—the question about my husband's experience, I think no one goes through that experience without learning a great deal and being honored to do it. But an ambassador is not a CEO, as elements of control are missing.

Q: Well this is what presidents learn too. You can order but things don't happen because there are other actors, other variables, which you don't control.

COBB: Right. Yes, that part is a little frustrating but when I then went into an ambassadorship I was kind of prepared for that, partially because of our experience in Iceland and partially because I served in state government.

Q: Tell me something. This is sort of covering the waterfront and all, but did you and your husband find at, say, dinner parties, there are always people who lectured, well we should do this or that and all, and carry on without understanding the complexities of diplomacy. I mean not just diplomacy, but how governments work and what you can and can't accomplish.

COBB: Yes, I think that was true both in his service and my service. People in general, whether you're talking about any of these countries including our own, are not really well informed about how governments operate nor very much about their own governments, let alone other governments. That is kind of sad, but it is true.

So we left Iceland in January 1992. While we were in Iceland we were building a house in Coral Gables, Florida. That house was basically finished a few months after we returned to South Florida and we moved into it in time to encounter Hurricane Andrew, August 1992, which you will recall was one of the most devastating hurricanes in United States history.

Homestead Air Force Base was practically demolished. There was tremendous damage in South Florida. Our home was on the water so we had extensive damage and we had to move out of that house for almost a year to redo work that had just been finished. Fortunately insurance was good at the time, but it was a big trauma for South Florida. Some people didn't have insurance and some people had such terrible experiences that there was migration out of South Florida. Chuck and I and others led by Andy Card, worked to get federal funds to help with the cleanup. We were successful in our efforts.

We spent the next couple of years doing some of our private sector business activities before getting re-engaged in politics and government. We were always engaged in sort of the local and state level, usually behind the scenes. The next thing of interest, I suppose, is that Jeb Bush ran for governor in 1994 and he lost to Lawton Chiles by, I think it was 75,000 votes, a very small margin, but he lost. That was the year Jeb Bush was running in Florida and George Bush was running in Texas. George won his election. Barbara and

George H.W. were in Miami, Florida and Chuck and I were sitting with them in a small hotel room as the returns came in from both of those elections. It was a very interesting night because, of course, the Bush's were elated to have George elected in Texas but depressed by having Jeb lose by a small margin in Florida. Many people feel that that was the turning point with respect to what happened in the future presidential election...and maybe so.

Chuck and I continued with our various business activities. Jeb made it clear that he was going to run again so we started to get a little bit more engaged in Florida politics. The governor candidates have to pick their lieutenant governor prior to the election and it's typically seen as the first statement from a candidate about what kind of leader he will be. So everybody watches that choice very closely. In 1997 Jeb called me and asked if he could come over and talk to me? I said sure. I mean, it seemed kind of unusual to me and what he should have said is "Can you come to my office?" But he came to my house and he had an assignment for me which essentially was to do a critical vetting on the list of his final 10 potential lieutenant governor candidates. They had already filled out 10 years of tax returns and an 88-page questionnaire provided to Jeb by his dad.

Someone had to sit down in the final analysis with each one of those people who have gotten to the finals and have a serious, down to earth questioning on what's going to come out once the press starts to dig into their backgrounds. This makes all kinds of sense to me; if you tell us now what issues might be - everybody has some kind of issue—if you tell us now what potential there is, we can handle it when the press begins to dig into something and tries to use this against you. So that was the job, to sit down with each candidate and see where there was a little fuzziness in the backgrounds and where they might be flat out exposed. It was a fascinating and intriguing job. Jeb called me "Secret Squirrel". Jeb ended up selecting as his lieutenant governor, Frank Brogan, former Florida Secretary of Education.

Q: Now, this vetting process. How extensive is it? Anything? Did you really cheat on your third-grade math exam or something like that? So this requires both political savvy and very close review of what is politically sensitive.

COBB: It is very serious and focuses more on adult transgressions. It's quite true that if it is known ahead of time what's going to come out by the people around the candidate, there are ways to manage most everything. Bad acts are not hard to find. Everybody has something...admit and be prepared.

If it's a criminal act it's hard. But people are also embarrassed to say: I had an extramarital affair. I didn't file my federal tax return for 10 years. I cheated on my LSAT. Whatever it is, they don't want it to be known. They're embarrassed to say it, so it was a delicate job of talking to these folks. The job was completed. Jeb won the election in 1998, I went back to Miami.

As soon as I got back home to Miami, Jeb's people called. They wanted me to be on the gubernatorial transition team. I said fine and flew back to Tallahassee for the period

between the election in November and the swearing in in January. I decided to spend November and December in Tallahassee. My assignment was with two other people, Charlie Crist, a later Florida Governor, and Ana Navarro, later a television commentator. Our job was to look at the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. The Department of Management Services, (the supplies of stuff that all government agencies have), thirdly, the Department of the Lottery. In our investigation the three of us were going around speaking to the career people in those agencies who desperately wanted to keep their jobs even though the administration was changing. Most of them did.

We soon learned that there was a fairly serious problem that had developed over the course of the eight-year prior administration; a pretty serious problem in the Department of the Lottery. It was essentially a legal problem but a potentially very, very costly legal problem. The lottery at the time in Florida raised about $2 million annually for education and to have anything go wrong in that area was going to be a big embarrassment for Jeb Bush who has always had a strong focus on education. The Governor did not favor the lottery, but he liked the $2 million for education. So I relayed the basic bad information to his people as he was gathering together his cabinet and those who would work in Tallahassee under his leadership. In mid-December I reported what we had learned about the three assigned departments, including the specific legal problem at the lottery. I then went back to Miami for Christmas with my family, returned to Tallahassee for the swearing in on January 3 or 4; I saw Jeb's chief of staff and I mentioned that I had seen agency heads named for all the different state agencies but I had not seen who was named for the lottery. He bluntly said we haven't been able to find anybody to run the lottery. I said, "You cannot let Jeb Bush put his hand on the Bible and take the oath of office without having someone over there watching this issue we've talked about. You've got to have somebody there." He replied, "Well we just don't have anybody."

He then said "You're the only one that understands it; you have to do it." I told him I would not do it. "No way I'm moving to Tallahassee. I don't know anything about running lotteries. Simply not going to do it." He pleaded. Saying you're the only one; you're the only one that can. He then asked if I would be willing to do it for six months? I flatly said no, I would not. He then was begging, 90 days? He got down on his knees and asked if I would do it for 60 days? So I'm thinking, two months, "Okay, I'll try to help, we'll try to find the right person quickly."

So I moved back to Tallahassee in January 1999 and became secretary of the lottery on an interim basis because we would soon find somebody who knew how to run a lottery. It took several months, but it was an experience in which I learned a great deal about state government, about how state bureaucracies work, how governors try to govern. It is not dissimilar at all to the national level where you have people who are professionals in their field in agencies doing the day-to-day jobs and changing leadership when administrations change. In any event, prior to my late summer departure, we resolved the legal problem. A new Lottery head emerged and I happily went home. It was a very interesting time to be in the cabinet of Jeb Bush.

Q: While we're doing this, why not pick up a little of this? What were some of the elements that you found particularly interesting in state government?

COBB: You learn and this is true in business, it's true in the federal government; the chief executive officer, whether he's a governor or a president, is where everything begins and ends. It is the leader of the organization that sets the strategic plan and descending policies and the critical tone at the top. And the tone at the top, hopefully, is one, first of high level integrity, transparency and working for the people. I believe that Jeb Bush was a superb leader in the foregoing. But each of the departments or agencies has a head who reports to the chief executive officer and as with our federal government their level of ability and knowledge differs from person to person. Some are good leaders, some are good managers, some are good people persons, and some aren't any of those things. So it was an opportunity to observe how individuals led or managed certain kinds of problems that would arise. Managing the press is always a big issue in both public and private endeavors. Florida is a "government in the sunshine state." Governor Reubin Askew got the legislature to pass the sunshine law in the early 80's. It means that you can't have two or three (or more) politicians going off into a room by themselves and discussing how they are going to collude on a bill or manage a process. The law is taken extremely seriously by the media and also by citizens. So if you sit on a board that is a public board of any kind or gets any kind of financial support from State of Florida sources, it falls under the government in the sunshine rules.

If you and I are on a board and there are 10 other people on the board, you and I cannot have a conversation that does not include other board members on a subject relating to our board. We just can't do it because it leads to collusion. For example: I talk to you privately and I say we're going to do "X" and then you talk to another board member and say, Sue's agreed, we're going to do "X"; do you agree with us? And pretty soon we've got the votes all lined up. Because of the Sunshine Law it's almost impossible in Florida to do that: you've got to talk about irritating problems out in the open so citizens can hear the arguments. Reubin Askew and his wife Donna Lou became very close friends of ours. Reubin was the progenitor of "Government" in the Sunshine Law and he was very proud of it. After government service, Reuben joined the law firm where I worked, and our offices were side by side.

The state government experience for me, although at that time it only was about a year of my life, was positive. I was favorably disposed to the chief executive officer and we solved the problem that I was sent to Tallahassee to solve. It was a good experience and I learned more about organizations and how you run them successfully (or don't) and how you manage agency teams (or not).

Q: What about something that somebody like myself on the outside hears so much about, lobby groups, the Cuban-American lobby, or whatever, did you experience such influences during your time in state government?

COBB: Well, that's a very interesting subject. As everyone knows there were a very large number of Cubans who came to Florida when Castro took over the island; the most

skilled and educated were basically forced to leave. So a large number came to South Florida; some went to Puerto Rico, some to New York but the highest concentration at that time was in Florida. It was fascinating to all of us because you would have a physician or a veterinarian or some high-level professional who had to take a job as a waiter or a waitress or sell vegetables on the street just to survive. Although most did not speak our language, they were smart and capable. They figured out how to make a living and become successful again, sometimes in a different field, sometimes in the same field. It was hard for them and so of course they banded together. They learned very early in this process that to get anything done in the United States, you had to have a unified voice. So they gathered together socially and politically. At that time in the mid and late 80's the Cubans all thought that they would be going back to Cuba in a short period of time. Everybody did. Then they had children and the children began getting educated in the United States and the Castro regime drug on. The Cubans did not forget that to have a voice they had to be united. So from the very beginning they had this sense of unity. They would get a spokesperson and then they began getting their political candidates elected.

Naturally those who came in 1959, 1960, 1961, remained angry beyond words. It's hard to describe, you have to think about soldiers coming into your house and saying leave now and you're never coming back and there's no choice. You walk out the door at gunpoint and leave forever.

I remember one of my Cuban friends saying, "I asked the man with the machine gun if I could just get my boots and put them on." He said, "No, you're going barefoot." He lost everything. Everything. The families were born there, had worked there, and their grandparents had too. So they are to this day very emotional about the subject. Their children were, in many cases, sort of indoctrinated with these feelings, but nonetheless grew up in an American society where not everybody felt the same way. Gradually over the years the depth of the hurt was attenuated in the younger generations; nonetheless it was the older ones that had the power. They did elect congressmen and women and senators who responded to their constituents with some very tough legislation relating to Cuba, which is still in existence and still is a matter of discussion. Cuba will be something of an issue in upcoming elections, but what people don't realize is, despite the influence that is held by two or three members of Congress of Cuban descent, Cubans are only five percent of the Hispanic population in the United States. So their influence gets considerably exaggerated. The Cubans have a high profile but there are far more Mexicans in the United States and then groups of all the other Latin American countries who add up to much more than the Cubans. Nonetheless, Cubans have a loud voice and can affect elected officials.

Q: Well, your experience with the lottery; did the sunshine law play a role? I assume the issue wasn't a matter of corruption within the Florida government.

COBB: No evident corruption. It was a legal issue relating to a major contract which would be going on for many years that was a legal contract but done in a questionable manner by those who might profit. No need to go into the details on that but no, it was not really corruption. At the end of any eight-year administration, a fairly lax atmosphere

develops among some state employees. One of the lessons that I learned over time is if there's any administration that's in place for eight years, people get used to their jobs and figure out how to do a little less incrementally – less and less. Some are more creative than others and in state government we had a lot of creativity.

Q: You need a government turnover every certain number of years just to keep people on their toes.

COBB: There have to be new challenges and/or changes in the environment. You don't have to leave the department, for example, but you might be transferred to a new area where you would have to learn new things and report to different people.

Q: Well then what did you do after?

COBB: Well I went back to Miami again. My poor husband; I was like a little yoyo going in and out of there. Now we're up to the year 2000, so most of 1999 I was in Tallahassee.

I got home but I quickly got bored sitting in my office, which was at my house by this time. I would sometimes go into our corporate office, in downtown Coral Gables, but mostly I worked from my office at my house so that I could wear my shorts and walk on the beach when I wanted to. But I was really, right away, bored. So I began thinking: I don't want to go back into law, I don't want to sit in a corporate office in Coral Gables; what shall I do next?

Of course, I knew Jeb's brother, George, was running for president. I did not know George but I thought there has to be some way that I can help him in Florida. I am a Florida attorney and my impression was that in the State of Florida there were a number of attorneys who were politically active, but most were Democrats. I figured that perhaps there were 40 or 50 attorneys in the state of Florida that were Republican but had never really expressed themselves. We didn't have an active, effective Florida Republican attorneys group in the state as far as I knew. So I thought I'm going to go around and find a dozen or two dozen or however many Republican attorneys I can find and I'm going to put together a small group and call it "Lawyers for Bush." We would study Bush's policy recommendations and we would write position papers to editors and when it got time for the election we would send the attorneys that we have to the hot polling spots and make sure that everybody followed all the laws. Florida had many rules about elections and polling places and people and distances and this and that. I didn't know all those rules but I figured I'd find some attorneys that did. Chuck, of course, was supporting George W. Bush as well. We'd been friendly with George H.W. and Barbara and the family, although I really personally didn't know George at the time I started this little project.

Well it seemed that Republican lawyers came out of the woodwork. George Bush's campaign was being run out of his campaign headquarters in Austin. Austin did not want any outside groups using their own ideas and doing independent activities so they were quite discouraging to my meager little effort to get some op-eds placed and to be helpful in any way. Meanwhile I began to find there were so many Republican attorneys

interested in this project that I began to think to myself: this is more than I bargained for. I didn't expect to work this hard organizing my now nearly 300 attorneys. So, our state has a specific geographic organization of thirteen geographic districts, which had never been used for anything but I knew that existed statutorily. I decided that I would pick the person I thought was the best attorney on my Republican list in each of those thirteen geographical districts and make him or her a "district captain" then I'd only have to talk to 13 people. Each had to have a good reputation and a lot of energy. I would talk to them about being a district captain of their district and what we would do. We ended up with about 400 attorneys. I would send my thirteen captains weekly messages. They were all enthusiastic and thinking of new things, spreading the word, fighting for tort reform, and other Bush platforms. So I was happy with this plan and construction, but we were still being rebuffed by Austin. When I had so many Florida attorneys put together, I said I needed some bumper stickers or something that said "Lawyers for Bush" or "Lawyers for Bush-Cheney." Austin said: no bumper stickers for you, we don't want to do that. But our group just kept moving forward doing its promotions.

By the time we got to the election, I had met the president-elect, but he didn't know anything at all about my Florida Lawyers for Bush and I didn't tell him. The election arrived and butterfly ballots made worldwide headlines. Everybody remembers that election of 2000...Bush v. Gore.

Q: Oh yes. The counted, re-recounted ballot election.

COBB: That's right. Thirty-six days of counting. But that election night, November 7, 1994 I was at home, I didn't even go to Tallahassee, I was sitting at home, Chuck and I, watching the returns dragging on and on. Al Gore conceded and then he came back and said that no, he changed his mind and he hadn't conceded. Finally, while I was desperately interested in the outcome, about 4:30 a.m. I just had to go to bed. I got to bed at about 4:45 a.m. at 5:00 a.m. my phone rang. It's one of their head guys in Austin calling me. He said, "We've heard about your lawyers group; can you have Republican attorneys in all sixty-seven electoral offices in the State of Florida by 8:00 this morning?" I said: "Yes, that's no problem at all." So I got up, called my thirteen captains and said, get over to your county's electoral office, start reading the electoral code and be ready, we're going to see what happens here.

I personally got to the Miami electoral office, Miami Dade County by 8:00 a.m. The county clerk was surprised to see me with some other attorney friends. The brilliant thing that I did that morning, the absolutely brilliant thing I did had nothing to do with our group plans; it had to do with me bringing the power cord for my telephone, which nobody else thought to do. So I had power all day! By 10:30 or 11:00 in the morning the Austin troops had flown into Florida. The Democrat teams had come to electoral offices. The head guys from Austin began setting up their headquarters in Tallahassee, I stayed in Miami, providing information and counsel. We went through those thirty-six days of counting and recounting and challenging and defending the laws. While I was heavily involved throughout Florida. I did not go to the Supreme Court hearing, which, as we

know, resulted in the five-four decision for George W. Bush and that was that. It was over. I know Lawyers for Bush was helpful–it may, in fact, have been dispositive.

At Christmas of 1994, I went to Telluride, Colorado where we go every Christmas for our family ski trips. Not long into our trip there, my Telluride phone rang. It was a political/insider who asked me what I wanted to do in the George W. Bush Administration. I said "nothing." I hadn't even given it a thought. I did not organize the Florida attorneys because I wanted some position. I wasn't seeking anything. I wanted GWB to be President. I said I'm not interested at all. I'm perfectly happy being in Miami....but I didn't forget how easily I get bored. I said nothing, but no thank you. Then White House Presidential Personnel called Chuck so we talked about what we would do if anything. Chuck had already been an ambassador. We didn't really need any new titles, but they called me repeatedly from a little higher-level each time. The hook was: "We're going to have 300,000 applications for jobs in our administration and we'd like you to be involved, so we need to know what you want to do." I repeated that I really was not interested. But the caller pressed. I said, if I did anything at all it would have to be something where I had a close relationship with the president. I would not go off to some agency and sit around talking to bureaucrats in Washington; I have no interest at all. He said fine, we'll make you an ambassador. That surprised me. It was a compelling idea. My husband was an ambassador; we'd be the only non-career ambassador couple who lived together at two embassies. Humm. Suddenly, I was interested. Chuck and I talked about it. It was actually not an easy decision, but it was a flattering set of circumstances and Chuck encouraged me to go ahead and send in the personal papers to the personnel office, which I did. I still did not believe it! It was not sought after and not anticipated, but maybe we should think about where we should go? What's going to work?

We had the OAG, the Official Airline Guide, in those days to learn flight information. I had been carrying my OAG religiously because there were only one or two flights a day between Miami and Tallahassee. I had to do that all the time so I had to know when those flights were. So I thought to myself, you know, I better stay pretty close to home. We did the Europe thing; I would not really want to go to Asia or Africa. They are a long way away. I would not really be comfortable in a huge embassy like Paris, London or Rome, it just wouldn't be me. I concluded that I should look to the Western Hemisphere. That's when I learned that Tallahassee and Montego Bay, Jamaica were equidistant to Miami – about 650 miles each. The OAG revealed that there were 12 flights a day to/from Florida and Jamaica's International Airports in Montego Bay and the capital, Kingston.

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Q: Today is April 12, 2012, with Sue Cobb. We've just had lunch and now we're back at this Oral History again. George W. Bush has been elected and Jamaica has sort of come up on your horizon. Were you talking to people about Jamaica?

COBB: Well no, not really. Logic was setting in, but not reality. I was concerned about my family. My two sons had a couple of children each. I had grandchildren. I wanted to see them grow up. Since I had been in Iceland with my husband during his service, I was

really focused on the job requirement and not on the location other than it had to make sense for the family. Thus I was looking at the Western Hemisphere. But when you actually understand the geography of the Western Hemisphere you find that almost every country is just about as far away as Iceland or further.

When Chuck was with the Commerce Department in 1988, Jamaica had a really disastrous hurricane named Gilbert. Gilbert wreaked havoc in the Caribbean and Mexico for nearly nine days. In total, it killed 433 people and caused about $7.1 billion (1988 USD) in damages over the course of its path. Hurricane Gilbert had decimated the Northern portion of the island. The United States, as always, was looking to see what needed to be done and how the United States would help in the recovery of Jamaica. Those in charge in the U.S. wanted somebody from the Commerce Department to actually go there and look at the situation, make an independent assessment from the other sources from which they were getting information. Chuck was designated. He and I flew to Jamaica for that purpose. We stayed at the Kingston residence of the then U.S. ambassador, Ambassador Michael Sotirhos, a non-career appointee who served from November 1985 to July 1989. We were flown around the island by a Jamaica Defense Force helicopter to see the damaged areas. Although they were clearly in a disaster scenario, the Jamaicans that we met while there struck me as very smart, very capable, very caring. I had a positive impression of the people and their leaders that I did not forget. When I learned that Jamaica was as close to Miami as it was, I became very interested. Also I had another non-career friend who had served there as ambassador, who had had an exceptionally good experience. Ambassador Glen Holden served from November 1989 to March 1993 during the same time Chuck and I were in Reykjavík. He and his wife Gloria and Chuck and I had been in the same ambassador class and we had gotten to know them very well. They remain very good friends. Glen and Gloria had had a very positive experience in Jamaica so I had all positive things going on. I liked the people, it was a beautiful island, it was close to home and two non-career friends who served as U.S. ambassadors to Jamaica were enthusiastically positive.

Q: Once you decided your preference, what were the next steps? Did you just say okay, I'll do that and then—?

COBB: Well no, to be fair, the White House Office of Presidential Personnel thoroughly reviews the resumes and background of anybody who submits the proper letters to be a United States ambassador. As you know, the president would usually be appointing about thirty-five non-career individuals. FSOs would have all the rest of the slots, so there are really not very many choices. Some juggling ensues and the State Department participates vigorously with White House suggestions. It's really pretty much the Secretary of State and the President's office getting together and making assessments but the president obviously has the final choice.

At this point in time, you know, I may have had a little bit of an edge. The only people who knew what I had done in Florida with respect to organizing all the attorneys, which turned out to be so critical in the final thirty-six days, the only people that knew were my husband, Jeb, Jim Baker, a couple of people who came down and helped the president;

very, very few people knew that I was responsible because I was purposely never upfront. —but Jeb Bush knew and that was important.

Q: Well tell me, what, at that time, was your impression of the relationship between Jeb and George, the two governors?

COBB: You know how they say blood's thicker than water? I'm not sure exactly what that means but they are two brothers in a classic family and they love each other. They don't necessarily always agree on political points, for example, or style points or other points, but it is a close knit family. And so there was a set of circumstances where my husband had served in GWB's father's administration, I had served with Jeb in Florida. I had done some things that were difficult to accomplish when I was in Governor Bush's Cabinet, and I had come up independently with this idea of putting the Florida Republican lawyers together. With all those factors, they knew who I was at the White House.

Q: Well, how did things play out after that? I mean, was there a point where they said okay, we're going for you for Jamaica, your name is going to be submitted?

COBB: You know I probably don't know exactly how it would normally work out but the White House Office of Presidential Personnel, of which there's usually a lead person, is the office which communicates with potential presidential appointees. I had an odd feeling that my appointment was a done deal as soon as I chose my country. In this case a close friend of the president told me before the formal word came. He actually told me in January at the swearing in that I would get what country I wanted. He confirmed that decision had been made. Of course I could say nothing to anyone as it hadn't been announced. Chuck and I were the only ones that had the slightest clue. The actual announcement was made along with five or six others in the first 'class' of ambassadors, around the end of February. Then we signed up for the first ambassador seminar class, so our group came up in April for the ambassador seminar. I had done my first seminar as spouse of Chuck; now he was doing this first as spouse. We just didn't know when I would be going to Jamaica but that's when I began seriously studying the Western Hemisphere, all the policies of the president on the Western Hemisphere, his goals, what his plans would be in this administration, what was going to happen in the entire Western Hemisphere, in the Caribbean, in Jamaica. I did not take these things lightly, I moved to Washington, took an apartment, went to the State Department every single day, read all the relevant cables, all the background materials, all our policies, so that I would understand the history of everything that could affect my post.

Q: Now the Jamaica desk is part of the Office of Caribbean Affairs (WHA/CAR). Usually the desk officer does these briefings; how did you find the desk officer?

COBB: My first desk officer, Carl Cockburn, was terrific, very, very helpful. There were several people in the Caribbean desk area of course because of the number of countries in the region. They found a little desk for me and would bring me materials to read. They were surprised I came every day and were as supportive as they could be. Later I had

other desk officers, all whom I found very capable and very helpful. I probably was an ambassador who was much more into detail and knew more about my subject matter than many of their new-designees.

I was told 'the Desk' would make my Washington appointments, but I knew how to make appointments with important people and set up the calendars the way I wanted to do it. They cautioned in the ambassador seminars and also at the Desk on how you had to follow these rules and do these things and see this person and that person and not that other person, but I had lived here, I stayed in Washington after the ambassador seminar, which was April and I was there part of April, May and June. I was in D.C. for three months and I set up a whole lot of appointments with other U.S. government agencies and departments beyond what the desk had in mind for me. My choices really turned out to be beneficial. I mean, I went to see people like the head of the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration), which certainly wasn't on the Desk's list, but I knew there were two International airports in Jamaica - something could go wrong, and it did. I didn't accept meetings that were not with the top person, I met the head of every single agency that was going to be at my post, affected by my post activities, or possibly affect my post.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the ambassadorial seminar. This was I understand set up by Shirley Temple Black. She went out to Ghana without much preparation and recommended some training, not just for political appointees but also for career officers. How did you find it? And what did it cover?

COBB: Yes, I thought it was very valuable for everybody. At that time the Department contracted with two former Foreign Service Officers who put on this seminar and they led it for quite a few years, maybe a decade. They had, in fact, been running the ambassador seminar when I went to it with Chuck, so I knew them and I knew what to expect. They try to cover too much material. I mean, I had a huge advantage because I'd lived in an embassy and I understood quite a lot, but for the new people it was daunting.

The acronyms alone are a huge challenge when you come out of the private sector. Non-careers couldn't understand much of what the career officers were saying for several days. But the course covered many practical matters —very, very little on policy, quite a lot on ethics, of course, and reporting relating to the residence expenditures and reporting by your officers and managing your country team and what the inspector general would expect from an ambassador and what the different officers and the different agencies did, and how you melded the team together so to work as one. They would heavily go over the ambassadorial authorities and communications with the Department and communications with your post's foreign ministry. Some protocol, some intelligence, and in our case quite a bit of transiting information. There's a ton of reading material so you're force-fed with a hose during the day for eight hours at FSI and then there's more reading at night.

I happened to think it was very useful, maybe even more for the contacts that you make among the career officers. To me, the career people whom I met at this level were very important. And also the non-career people who were coming and were very accomplished

by anyone's standards. Everybody is excited about what they're going to be doing. We would go to dinner with others and talk about what was said in the class and how you might handle this or that. The leaders would pass out several different scenarios of things that could possibly happen at an embassy that you wouldn't even have thought about, like internal fights between a tandem couple at your embassy. You get a call late one evening that a wife has stabbed her husband, they're both on your payroll; what do you do? And the call about somebody taking photographs of your embassy entrances and the question of whether or not they were for covert purposes. There were several different unusual scenarios presented. During my tour, every single scenario they gave us happened. A lady who worked in administration and her husband who was in GSO (General Services Office) stabbed him. We had a major team member go completely berserk. I had to call the medical people to airlift him out. You know, just different events like—the guy who got drunk in a public bar. You know, with plenty of publicity, including photos. These are people you're dealing with.

Q: Both the military and the State Department use simulation gaming as a teaching tool and run through situations before they happen. Was that helpful?

COBB: Yes. It does help, particularly in the areas to which you're not normally exposed. Also, the Ops Center (Operations Center, S/S-O) conversations and the tour and discussion of when and how you need to call them. The manner in which some of our intelligence units work, in my case, the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) was very important as was the U.S. Marshals office. We were one of three posts in the world that had a Marshal's office. To get familiar with who they are, where they are, who the top people are, who you call if you really need them, who do you leave alone unless you really must reach them. All those things come out to some degree in the ambassador seminar. The books are also valuable because they involve a lot of different experiences. One book I remember well, which I think they still are using, is called *This Worked for Me*.

Q: Okay now, you're going out to Jamaica. What were you reading about Jamaica before you went there?

COBB: Well, I read a lot of the history just to get that part, you know, get the basics, and then I was reading all the cables, everything that came in so that I would begin to understand what was going on there. I read quite a lot about each of the different agencies that were going to be posted at my—we had like fifteen different agencies and I wanted to know what they were doing and why. And I read the cultural stuff and anything that I could get my hands on. And I was also very big on really understanding what the United States was trying to do in the hemisphere, in my assigned country, and around the world. To do that I read the National Security Strategy first, then I read the State Department memos, and its strategic performance plan for my years. I read what the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs assistant secretary was putting out and read what our Caribbean Desk was putting out, what the president wanted, how the State Department was implementing policy. Career people would have kind of grown up with it but not non-career people. I know that other designated ambassadors didn't take the time to do

what I did in most cases because they were working. At the time I wasn't working, it was a luxury.

Also I happen to be quite compulsive in that sense, understand everything you can about the circumstances that you're getting into. It was really useful as I believe I demonstrated in my first interviews in Jamaica. It was the media that wasn't prepared for me. I was the first woman to be a U.S. ambassador in Jamaica. I was definitely white, I was 64, so I think to them I was the little old white lady who had never been in government service before. They were ready to chew up the representative of the big dog to the North. Surprise, the new ambassador was well prepared.

In any event, we'll come back to the ambassador seminars too, because they happen to play an important part in the rest of my State Department service. But I do think that they're beneficial and I think one of the key things is that the career and non-career ambassadors are put together. So by July most of us were still waiting. It was around July 18 that I had the obligatory Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing regarding my appointment and of course everybody gets very nervous about that and going before the murder board in your own bureau.

Q: You might explain what the "murder board" is.

COBB: Well a group of State Department experts in the area, some from the desk, some from other parts of State, grill you on current issues. It's tough because no one knows what senators are going to ask. But they do know that senators are prepared by their staffs and they have prepared questions and they're going to be on some tough subjects. I had a lot of luck on my side. I was paired, when we went to the Senate, with Roger Noriega, who was being assessed to be the assistant secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Roger had worked in the Senate for Jesse Helms and Roger was—and is—a real hawk about Cuba. He is the one that drafted legislation that made visits unacceptable by Americans and really kind of clamped down during the George W. Bush years. Roger was fairly controversial to the senators—all of whom knew him because he'd been on the Hill a good part of his career. Nobody knew me so all the questions were directed to Roger. I got one or two questions. After my U.S. senators from Florida walked me down the aisle and introduced me to the Committee with Bob Graham, a Democrat, and a lifelong friend leading the way. The other was Bill Nelson, also a Democrat, and someone that we had known for many years. So I was introduced by the opposition, so to speak with the warmest of compliments. And that was it, the feared SFR committee was over and done.

I was voted out of the Committee on August 1. The family had already planned about a month's vacation with grandchildren in Colorado, so I left DC at the end of July and I spent most of August contemplating this next big step, packing, putting together what I thought I might need, clothes and other necessities.

Q: When the murder board was assembled, were there particularly difficult issues that could have been raised, perhaps some things that at the time were controversial?

COBB: No, that really didn't happen to me. I mean, we knew what the issues were with Jamaica. A lot of immigration issues, as you can imagine. The island is close offshore, so there are all types of transmission issues, people, drugs, criminals, forgery, etc. There was a lot of visa fraud and then there are the criminals who do bad acts here in the United States and then go to Jamaica; that's why we had the U.S. Marshals Service. Also, Jamaica has always been a transit region for drugs. The trade now has apparently moved back to Central America and Mexico, but whenever the authorities crack down where the drug running is going on the bad guys move their operations. They might well move back to the Caribbean.

Our Embassy had a very big USAID presence. (Agency for International Development) and we had a large Peace Corps presence because we want Jamaica to do well economically and in development, health and education as my president favored. We, the United States, have always favored this kind of progress for these small islands that have a tough time with keeping their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) at a level that they can maintain a sustainable economy. So I didn't have any questions at the murder board or the SFR Committee that were really difficult or hard to answer. So mine was not difficult other than the fact that it's just innately scary to sit down with eight people who are going to question your capability. But remember at one point in my life I was a trial attorney so I had stood before a lot of judges.

Q: Okay. Well then you served in Jamaica from when to when?

COBB: Well my first day on the job in my ambassador career, going into the embassy to introduce myself to the country team and to seek to gain their confidence, an important entry point for which I thought I was prepared was September 11, 2001, the attack on New York World Trade Towers.

Q: Ouch.

COBB: Yes. And when I watched the planes hit the World Trade Center, I knew immediately that it was an act of terrorism and I knew immediately that there would not be one single person in Washington in the next four years that would care one single bit about what happened in Jamaica. Or, for the most part, the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Our Embassy Team was simply on its own. I knew it immediately.

At the country team meeting I introduced myself. The first order of business was this tragedy that just happened in the United States, and discussing with the team the means by which they could get in touch with family members and friends and what we needed to do, how we were going to do it in Kingston. How we were going to do it and what kind of information we would be receiving.

It definitely was not a normal start in any American embassy in the world. Our military and law enforcement people, of whom we had many, obviously were concerned immediately about the embassy itself and our own security procedures. We spent a lot of

time on our exposure. We were in an office building on the fifth, sixth and seventh floors of a commercial office building with all glass windows on the busiest intersection in Kingston. We had no setbacks from the streets whatsoever. Our Embassy was extremely exposed. So our folks right away began working on the means and the logistics on what could be done for structural and personal safety. We had several unidentified surveillance people on the outside but that's all we had. They were locals hired by us, not known to be associated with the American embassy. They looked like the normal Jamaican going about their business. We went through our processes and of course part of that was the ambassador making statements and having a public presence. Of course, I had not yet presented my credentials to the Governor General, but that did not stop both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister from calling with deep sympathy. It was a tough start, September 11, 2001.

Q: Returning to our conversation. September 11 was your first day on the job. What was your reaction to the task before you, if everybody was fixed on this tragedy.

COBB: My job at that moment, I felt, was that I had to know who I could really rely on. Who in that country team room was a thoughtful, knowledgeable person that I could really depend on. We had already had the lessons about the DEA agent that doesn't want to listen to the ambassador because he doesn't report to the ambassador in terms of his salary, performance and career path. We'd already had the horror stories of different agencies. I used DEA as an example and I don't mean in my particular case. They all do care about reporting to the ambassador, who's totally in charge of everything on the one hand, but on the other hand their career path is with a different agency.

Q: Were you able to develop some background information on your DCM and on others? I mean, did you know who they were, where they came from?

COBB: A little bit. I had met my DCM because one of the benefits of this Jamaican post, which I did consider prior to taking it, was every meeting that any country in the Western Hemisphere was going to have of consequence was either in Miami or Washington, DC. And if it was in Washington, DC, they had to come through Miami and that was true for the Caribbean as well. So I knew that I'd be coming to the States for meetings, which was really simple for me, harder for others. My DCM had been the Chargé for a year. He came to Miami for a White House meeting and I made arrangements to meet with him. I did not know him from Adam; I read what I was given on his background, which was helpful but not a full dossier. I didn't know much. I met with him and he seemed like a capable man. I said look, I know this is always difficult because frequently an ambassador wants to bring in his or her own DCM or make a change and that doesn't necessarily fit in the career officer's plans. He or she is kind of on tenterhooks when a new ambassador is named. I said look, I think a lot of this relationship is chemistry. I know you know your job and you don't know if I know my job, but we're going to figure that out and we're going to figure it out within six months so consider yourself fully employed for six months and then we'll sit down and talk about the future.

This was another case where I had a ton of luck. I came to love my DCM Richard Smyth. He was no cookie cutter FSO. He was very smart and a really good steady hand. Rich had come up through the Department but he was more of an Afghanistan area expert. I think Rich had applied for the job in Kingston because he needed to be close to the United States for some period of time (possibly medical, but I'm not sure). I knew he didn't want to be in Kingston–he wanted to be in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but he was whole heartedly serving in Jamaica. He had been the "acting" ambassador, the chargé d'affaires for a year, so I knew that he knew all the issues. It was just a matter of whether he would be able to step back and accept a new person, a non-career ambassador, as the boss, or he would have his own little hidden agendas. He obviously had very good contacts in the Jamaican government; I had none.

Rich Smyth turned out to be an individual of enormous integrity, very, very smart, totally dedicated to do the right thing. He completely submerged his ego to the fact that there was a new ambassador in town. He did everything he could to help me in the beginning to understand everything and to get to know others on the country team. He was confident that he could tell me when I was kind of heading in the wrong direction or why I might want to think about an issue in a different way. I had said "chemistry" counts in any relationship where you work together every single day. We had excellent, useful, appropriate chemistry.

Q: The situation you describe where somebody's been chargé for a long time and knows the territory and the new ambassador obviously doesn't can turn into a trap and often causes problems; even with the wife of the DCM/chargé. They can't let go.

COBB: I can see how that could easily happen, but in this case Rich's wife, Janice, was one of the most helpful people that I could have had at the Embassy. She was the one who handled the American Women's Group, for example, and she was the one that would go to a school if I couldn't do it to hand out books or whatever it was. She took a load off the ambassador's shoulder. We had an extremely pleasant and productive relationship. Rich and I had an extremely positive mutually supportive role. We met every single morning and went over everything from the day before and what was coming up. Every day. I don't think we ever missed a day. We just worked well together.

Q: Okay, today is May 16, 2012. This is an interview with Ambassador Sue Cobb. In our last session you had just arrived in Jamaica and you were talking about how well you found you were supported by your DCM and his wife. What else did you do to prepare for this position?

COBB: I had, as every other appointee has, the process of going through the ambassador seminar, which was only two weeks, but incredibly useful. I had key appointments with officials around town whose agencies were represented at my post. As mentioned earlier, I had the luxury of not having a private sector job at that time so I moved to Washington and for three months I studied everything I could about Jamaica, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, the whole Western Hemisphere, so that I would really understand where we were in each country and what United States policy was going to

be. I made a point, of course, to read the National Security Directive and every proclamation relating to the Western Hemisphere that either the White House or the State Department produced.

I met with all the agency heads. DEA for example had a big presence in Kingston. We had a big USAID mission, the Peace Corps was large and important. FBI, the FAA, SOUTHCOM, every agency that works in that region I would go to the top person and inquire about their priorities. I had plenty of time to get on the agenda of each of these agency heads and I didn't settle for number two; I just waited until I could meet with the top person. This worked out quite well because I actually had to reach out on a couple of occasions to the top person to make something happen that Washington wasn't understanding.

As I think I said, I moved into a small office in the Western Hemisphere division of the bureau at the State Department, the Caribbean desk, and I read every cable for that three months' period that was coming through to Western Hemisphere. I got my clearance and all that, of course, and I read what was being reported from the field so I felt that I had a good understanding. I did know what George Bush's policies were, I understood them very clearly, I understood how he wanted them implemented, and I understood how he wanted to align policies and available resources.

And then I spent quite a bit of time—I was a big fan, as a lot of people are—studying Colin Powell (Retired American Army General and Secretary of State from January 20, 2001, to January 26, 2005), and his leadership principles. Secretary Powell's first book, *My American Journey*, has many of the leadership lessons he felt that he had learned over all of his career in the military and public service. I studied that and I picked out the ones that I thought were applicable to my management style and prepared scenarios in my head. I had a concern about pulling the country team together because here I was, a woman, with some government experience at the state level but not the federal level, coming in to tell all these career pros how they were going to be accountable to me and how we were all going to work together. I spent quite a bit of time because I wanted the tone to be right from the beginning—to be informed but humble, to look to their leadership in their specialties and to be clear in my directions and expectations.

When September 11 unfolded as it did, I thought to myself, I'm not going to sit down here and spin my wheels; I have to figure out ways to make this a constructive, positive experience, both for me and for my country, for the Jamaicans, and we all knew that everything had changed.

With that country team, for whatever reason, maybe it's because we were in crisis, maybe it was because they could see that I had prepared myself well, I don't know, but we very quickly had an excellent relationship. I think they felt they could trust me and I felt that I could trust them. They knew I needed their help and they wanted to be players in whatever was going to happen. So we had a good start, which turned out to be important for my entire term.

Embassy Kingston, had had an OIG (Office of the Inspector General) report from the previous year. The Office of the Inspector General had been in Jamaica the year before on their five-year rounds. I had the report and was responsible for implementing its recommendations. So I knew from the IG's perspective where the problems were within the embassy and Richard did too. We found that to be beneficial.

We had to prepare and submit what was then called the MPP, the Mission Performance Plan (MPP) which was essentially the mission strategic plan. It was based on your budget which was already set for two years out. I arrived in 2001 and my budget through 2003 has already been set by my predecessors, so we would be working on the Embassy's 2004 to 2006 budget. It's an interesting thing to try to project so far ahead. In any event, the pros-in the department at the time, and at my embassy, really kind of brushed off this strategic planning process. They said look, ambassador, you don't have to spend any time on this. We'll check the boxes like we have every year. Nothing's going to change because it is what it is. To them it was just a pro forma thing, but to me it wasn't, because I was in a new administration with different ideas. I was not going to check off on the boxes that the previous administration had. Plus I felt that if we really went through each of these areas, whether it was public affairs or consular services or USAID or DEA or whatever, if we went through every single department, we could set our own priorities for what we wanted to accomplish within the upcoming two or three years. I told our team we were actually going to really think through the priorities for this mission.

This is in the first few months of my tenure and the product is due in February. The plan is an inch thick, in language that State Department people know by heart, but I don't. Richard said usually we just have the section heads do their part and we put it together and send it in. I said this time we're going to talk with the section heads, we're going to interview them, you and I, and we're going to go over this plan really thoughtfully.

The Bush Administration was very focused on fiscal accountability at the beginning of the administration. We knew as everybody knows towards the end of an eight year administration some of fiscal tightness had become loosened. In any event I really wanted to make sure that our priorities were aligned with the administration and we were putting the right resources into the right areas. State's Management Department had decided they were going to do a worldwide competition for the best Mission Performance Plan in the world. I didn't even know about it – Surprise! Kingston won. Colin Powell put our MPP on the internal State Department worldwide web as an example for all other embassies to use. So I was really pleased with that, as were my team members, and it was yet another way my DCM and I bonded.

The Department had an award of $300,000 for the post that won the MPP award. Now, had that been London or Paris that would have been a drop in the bucket, but for a post like Jamaica it was really big money and it was one of the few times, one of the only times in my experience, where there was money allotted to a post that wasn't pre-designated by how it was going to be spent. I was in a job where I knew Washington wasn't going to be looking at what we're doing, and suddenly I had money to exercise creative diplomacy.

But before I go with that, the next thing that happened that turned out to be extremely fortuitous to me was that Ambassador Pru Bushnell called. Pru Bushnell was the U.S. Ambassador in Nairobi when the terrible Nairobi-Tanzania embassies were bombed. On August 7, 1998, suicide bombers in trucks attacked Embassy Nairobi and Embassy Dar es Salaam, killing over 200 people. Ambassador Bushnell was the U.S. Ambassador in Kenya at the time. She was an accomplished diplomat and strong person. She was wounded in the attacks, but carried on managing the injuries and overall disaster prior to help arriving for the U.S. and other posts. She was an outstanding U.S. representative.

But I did not know her at that time in early 2002. She called me and told me that she was the new Dean of the Leadership and Management School at FSI and that she had a lot of ideas about how she would like to run the seminars that FSI does and particularly the ambassador seminars. She knew, and it's still true, that I am the only woman in the United States who is both an ambassador and the spouse of an ambassador, both non-career. Of course there are career couples but my husband and I are the only, non-career couples of that status, in the history of the country.

Ambassador Bushnell knew that. I hadn't really given that much thought, but she said because we do ambassador seminars, where both husband and wives attend, you could be the perfect person to help me. Please come to talk to me the next time you come to D.C. Pru wanted to talk about how to better structure both the Leadership and Management sides of the ambassador seminar. So we met and hit it off. Then FSI began inviting me to come and be the non-career co-chair with Pru as the career chair. At first Pru was head of FSI then it became Michael Guest, and then it became Tom Stevenson, and then it became Chuck English, and now it's Carol Rodley and none of them 'fired' me. So in the course of my tenure in Jamaica and my subsequent four Bush years, I would leave at least once a quarter, sometimes twice a quarter when there was a heavy series of ambassadors going to posts, and go to FSI to co-chair the ambassador seminars. And through that process I probably did 25-30 seminars during the Bush Administrations. What a bonus to meet so many of our career FSO's who made ambassador.

Q: I do want to come back to that but looking at the inspector's reports, I have a loaded question because I have heard one horror story after another about the consular side in Jamaica and ambassadors not paying much attention to it, the workload there, the pressures, that people carried out on a stretcher practically. What were the inspectors saying about the consular work there?

COBB: The two areas that concerned me after I read the inspector general's report were in what we then called admin, now called management. But it was in the administrative details and management of the financial resources that we did have problems. Certainly it was solved by my last two years, but in the beginning there were lots of things we had to straighten out. People just weren't being as careful as they should, just not really paying attention, kind of doing the job routinely like the approach I mentioned to the MPP: just checking off the boxes as easily as they could without doing the underlying work.

But with the consular section you were exactly right. There were continual criticisms of the management of that section and all the things that you identified. However, we had a new consul general. His name was Donald Wells and he was a superb officer. We had a lot of challenges and they started with two basic facts: Jamaica is one of the largest visa issuing posts in the world, a small country but huge visa loads. We of course had the new young officers on their first tours of duty, some of whom were inclined to be extraordinarily strict because they just didn't have the experience to have developed refined judgments.

We were always just a little bit shorthanded so the work hours were long. That was compounded by the fact that our consular section actually was about four blocks away from the embassy in a different building. So we were segregated. I knew what the inspector general had said and what others had said in the past, so I made a habit of regularly going over to the consular section and of having conversations. I've always had a little bit of a teacher in me, and I wanted these young officers to have the best access to the ambassador that we could arrange. Donald Wells and one other officer agreed to set up programs and lead the junior officers. The programs were designed to be able to meet with me and other senior officers. We also rotated a junior officer through the ambassador's office on eight-week assignments. They really loved that, because they could then see what embassies really do and what kind of policies we were trying to adhere to and why we were there in the first place. You can't really see that when you're just looking at the consular side issuing visas. Donald Wells did a great job.

So I would like to think that we did a really good job during the time I was there, not because of me but because we had a very good officer in charge, a very experienced officer who then went on to be consul general in Paris. I was blessed with these terrific senior officers, Rich and Don, in critical positions.

Q: Did you find yourself in that uncomfortable position of thinking, yes, I want to make the prime minister happy by giving his nephew a visa and you find that the consular officer would say no, and you can't order him to issue the visa?

COBB: No, never. I had people ask me, for sure, but I never advanced anybody to the consul general. I just knew that was a path to certain disaster because if one Jamaican knew that the ambassador interceded or tried to intercede they were going to continue to ask and ask and ask. To this day people still call me to ask if I would help and the answer is no. Our processes are such that the consular section makes the decision and the ambassador is charged with oversight, but not interference.

Q: Sometimes, there is the other side of the coin. Sometimes the officers get overly strict?

COBB: Yes. There were, I think, maybe two times that I asked the consul general if he would look at what this particular officer's decision was and why it was made. In other words, take a relook at it. There were a couple of times that I did that, but I never wanted to intercede, I mean that would be deadly. Deadly. But it's interesting to me that people in other countries think that the ambassador can do anything and they truly believe the

ambassador can just stamp that visa and send them on their way. But the Jamaicans were pretty savvy. And as I said, I was favored with a good leader in the consular section so it worked as well as it could with our volume and structural separation.

Going back to our first year MPP, I thought one of the highest priorities was to get us all together in one embassy. The Consular section was blocks away. USAID was in the third building and the embassy itself was in an office building, which fronted on two sides on the two busiest streets in Kingston. Anybody could have—with windows this close to the road - anybody could come and blow us up easily. We also had underground parking in which there was only one entry/exit for the ambassador to enter and exit the building. My car got turned around in the garage. Anybody could have blocked the car. For the ambassador it was dangerous; for the officers in the embassy itself, it was dangerous. We were not anywhere near physical proximity to USAID, the consular section or the Peace Corps office. So Kingston had been on the list for some time to get a new embassy and even before the bombing in New York. When the Bush Administration came in, along came a very active head of OBO, the Office of Overseas Buildings Operations. General Chuck Williams, former head of U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers, headed OBO. He built quite a number of new embassies, but one of the very first ones he oversaw and built was in Kingston. I believe it was because we had one of the worst security situations and had been on the list for a long time. He greatly admired our Secretary of State and wished to do things that he thought the Secretary might like to see happen. Of course Secretary Colin Powell was from Jamaica, so the General acted quickly.

Both the Secretary of State and the President of the United States had told me early on that they would be down to visit me, but given the 2001 turn of events that never happened. Neither was ever able to come. Over the course of time, I saw both reasonably frequently in Washington, which was always a satisfying experience.

Q: What was the potential for Islamic terrorism in Jamaica? I know there are a good number of people, particularly of Lebanese descent, who are merchants in much of Latin America.

COBB: Obviously terrorism did become a very, very big concern more so because of the drug trafficking. If you can smuggle drugs into the United States through the Caribbean and Central America you can smuggle other things. So the routes were a real concern. But we'd been watching those for a long time because of the drug trafficking.

The Lebanese in Jamaica were highly respected, very strong business leadership group, with no affiliation with any groups that would be harmful to us. They did have friends and relatives in Lebanon. Some of them would go back and forth but these were highly respected businesspeople.

There was a group of black Jamaicans who had adopted the Islamic faith, some of which had happened while they were in prison in the United States. They had gotten into the States, gotten involved with something, got tossed in the slammer, met some radial types, and there was a small group of specific people we watched. There was also a small group

of Islamic faith, mostly black, but we knew we didn't need to watch them. They were just normal, everyday people and that was their religion. And there were very few that we really had to watch. We had one person who was also Islamic who informed us regularly of what was going on. He was high in the Islamic hierarchy but he wanted to see nothing bad happen in Jamaica or in the United States. We had sources that were useful to us in this regard. And I mean, fundamentally the answer to your question was there was not a terrorist problem there for us. But, you know, the United States has to watch everywhere; we just do.

Q: Also you had a major problem there with criminals, didn't you?

COBB: They had a very high crime rate, which they now have reduced. But it's not as bad as people think. I don't remember the numbers exactly but people think that you can't walk down the street or you'll get robbed and that's just not true. It's a lower crime rate than people realize. But, it's a very high murder rate. So, you don't want to be confronted by any controversy, even a petty thing, because the guy might pull out a gun and kill you. It seems the meaning of life to some Jamaicans is simply not important. The murder rate has remained high. Like Honduras and El Salvador and some of the other countries, much of it is related to the drug trade, the protecting of turf and taking care of those who are encroaching. That whole subject is complicated because these things are in certain geographic areas while other areas of Jamaica are so quiet and so peaceful, nothing ever happens. And then there's the whole economically important tourist side, the north and the west, where the Jamaicans are extremely careful to make sure that no tourists are harmed. Sometimes they get hassled a bit but the authorities pretty much control that too. And I never had a problem. I could walk down the street, most anywhere. It would drive my guards crazy, but I could walk down the street and people would yell out, "Ambassador Sue, Ambassador Sue," and they'd wave their hands. They were really friendly to me, very, very, friendly.

Q: Well now, what—you know, I go back to people talking about the times of Manley, which was pretty confrontational with the United States. How stood things when you were there?

COBB: My view is that Manley was an extremely charismatic man. He led Jamaica in the wrong direction for long enough that many lost the understanding and/or skills to work and produce and create capital. Manley created a socialist society and I personally believe to this day that had there been a different kind of leader at the time of independence of Jamaica in 1963 Jamaica would be doing economically as well as Trinidad and Barbados but they're not and they haven't because Manley's socialist patterns were deep in their bones.

When I arrived the leadership party was the PNP, People's National Party, and the PNP was Michael Manley's party. Now, of course they had come a long way in their thinking about how they had to approach the world, but remember in 2001 just after the turn of the century, was just when globalization was coming into full force and effect. Of course we had trade around the world prior to that time but the creation of new devices and the

telecommunications and GPSs and means of dealing with foreign countries expanded exponentially in those early years of the twenty-first century. Jamaica did not go with the flow. It was a long time before Jamaica had the same kind of internet connectivity that advanced countries had. The communications systems were a mess and they did not move forward with other countries, they remained an agrarian society without the infrastructure in the country that would allow them to join the new global trading environment. That was a big problem for Jamaica and still is because it's very hard if you're not creating capital and your country is greatly in debt as Jamaica has always been, you can't be building highways and roads and communications systems and tankers and railroads and moving the country to a modern state.

Now, I don't want to be overly critical of the PNP. They had a very intelligent prime minister, whose name was P.J. Patterson, who was seeking to lead the country in the best direction that he thought was possible. He gave me the nickname that stuck when he introduced me one day to a few hundred people early in my tenure. He said, "ladies and gentlemen, I want you to meet the lady of silk and steel." So that was the moniker the papers picked up and I secretly thought it was actually pretty accurate because I can be as tough as nails if I have to be, but I prefer to be more on the silky side if given the choice.

Anyway, the PNP administration lasted for 15 years. Now, we in the United States have seen many examples of long/lasting administrations where things like enthusiastic direction and energy deteriorate. It's just human nature. So it seemed to me like not much was happening – no new innovations, no new ideas.

We've seen that time after time in different states and in the federal government. So here in Jamaica I found the PNP who was in its twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth year of governing. When I got there their modus operandi wasn't as crisp and disciplined. Subsequently, after I left, the opposition party, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) won the election and that became a whole different story.

Q: Was there any U.S. Navy-Air Force connection to Jamaica while you were there?

COBB: Yes. You know, SOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command), our military command that deals with the Southern Hemisphere, a huge area of operation all over the southern part of our globe, would come about every two or three years to build a humanitarian facility, a school component, a dental clinic, or other need. For this and other activities, we had a Status of Forces Agreement with Jamaica.

In any event, SOUTHCOM of course, as a military operation, wasn't in charge of the drug side of things because that's not their job, but they do help the U.S. Coast Guard, which has a big presence in Florida with its Seventh District. But they would do these humanitarian operations, they would do emergency operations in earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and SOUTHCOM would do a number of multi-country training missions.

Jamaica had two authoritative operations. One was the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), modeled on the British system of policing. Also the Jamaican Defense Force

(JDF), which was the nation's military. During my tenure they didn't really need the military, but they wanted to be prepared. The JCF (Constabulary) was thought to be quite corrupt and not trained at the highest standards. The JDF, (the Defence Force), was known to be extremely stable and extremely well disciplined. The brightest of the brightest would be in the Defence Force. The JDF joined the multi-country training exercises organized by SOUTHCOM, usually with other countries of the Caribbean and/or Central America. This would be the U.S. military training these forces just for potential needs of the future. I went on two of their full missions, once to El Salvador and once to Honduras.

Q: Oh yes. And to keep them on the straight and narrow.

COBB: The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), was also in Kingston with its deep analyst kind of operation. Our military felt that we needed additional eyes from a U.S. military perspective. Yes we had clandestine operations at certain times in certain areas.

Q: Was the Treasury Department active in Jamaica, looking at the Jamaicans playing with offshore business?

COBB: Not at that time. We were involved with Treasury on a domestic matter. Jamaica had a loan from the World Bank for a nature conservancy project, which Treasury had decided to forgive. I don't remember the details of that but it was a debt for nature swap and Treasury was involved in that as they did it in several countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Debt forgiveness was a pretty big deal for Jamaica as they were off the hook for something like $20 million, which these days doesn't sound like much money-but everything counts. The Jamaicans planted trees in a certain conservancy for the forgiveness of the original loan. But, frankly, Treasury wasn't a big player for us.

Q: I imagine though that the Drug Enforcement Agency was a big player, wasn't it?

COBB: The Drug Enforcement Agency, yes, they were a very big player, and we also were one of only two other embassies in the world that had a visa fraud agent attached to the Department of Justice. Then we had, as mentioned previously, one of the only two or three embassies in the world with in-country agents from the U.S. Marshals Service. The U.S. Marshals Service got involved because one of the big issues in Jamaica and in some of the other nearby offshore countries, revolved around the deportees, those people who either got a visa and overstayed it, or got to America illegally, or who had committed an illegal act and were deported. Deportees were sent back by the thousands to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica. If there are convicted U.S. felons who had escaped justice in the U.S., the U.S. Marshals would go after them in Jamaica. We had so many deportees and/or escapees that we actually had several Marshal's stationed in Jamaica to pick up those due for jail time or for trial in the U.S.

Q: Well what about the local crop of ganja, was that pretty much for home consumption?

COBB: No, it was a profit making operation. It was farming for sale products. There was an awful lot of traffic when I was first down there in the marijuana trade. A lot of stuff was coming up from Colombia. Jamaica grew its own marijuana but it was hard for them to do because the U.S. had a big eradication program. Most stuff was coming as bulk shipments out of Colombia. In Jamaica they'd break it up and put it in smaller containers and put it in these fast small ships to send into the Bahamas or to the United States or whatever location they could find. When we, mostly the U.S. Coast Guard, figured out ways to finally stop the go-fast traffic and the small airplanes that came from the hidden short airstrips in Jamaica's mountainous terrain, the traffic slowed. In Jamaica it was pretty easy to hide a 1,000 foot runway, but we'd eventually find them. As with Colombia and other places the United States tried to get crop substitution programs going but drugs were simply more profitable. The drugs have gotten harder, coke and meth and many things that are worse. It's a tough problem that hasn't been solved.

Q: How cooperative did you find the Jamaican authorities?

COBB: The Jamaican authorities were extremely cooperative for the most part, particularly on things related to illegal drugs and potential terrorism. They were very cooperative. However, as I mentioned earlier, in the Constabulary Force, not everybody was 100 percent honest and that made it harder to figure out who to trust on the domestic corruption side of the equation.

There were other things where the Jamaicans were somewhat cooperative, but they definitely were not cooperative with us in the United Nations. They considered themselves to be part of the independent group calling themselves the non-aligned movement. The largest members of the non-aligned movement were India and Brazil. Jamaica definitely considered themselves to be a part of that group and therefore anytime a vote came up in the United Nations that the non-aligned movement had decided to vote against, Jamaica voted with them. They very rarely would break and vote with us. I talked to them about it endlessly. How can you ask us for money and aid on this or that and then come to the United Nations and vote against the things that we're asking you to do? How can you do that? And basically, they didn't say this, but basically the answer was because they could. We kept giving them the aid; it didn't matter that they were voting against us. It was just because they could do it and feel good about being members of the non-aligned group and still get our loans and aid.

Q: Did you find flogging the annual shopping list of UN resolutions that came from the UN mission sort of an onerous task to call on the Jamaicans?

COBB: The foreign minister was usually the person to address these things. This world of diplomacy is a funny place because only a couple of times did I have serious confrontations. Mostly we'd talk and it was: "I'm going to go tell you what our government would like for you to do and here are the reasons why we think it's important and because we think it's important you should think it's important." And my colleague would sit in the chair across and say, "We understand your arguments and we're always willing to listen and we love the United States, we just can't assure you that we're going

to be able to vote with you on this. As you know our close colleagues in the non-aligned movement have a different view." And it was always so cordial and so friendly and so repetitive. I actually didn't find that frustrating; it just was what it was.

I did have a real run-in with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on some statements that they made in 2004 when Aristide was being overrun by the gangs in Haiti and went to our embassy for protection, and then asked us to get him out of the country because the gangs were moving on the presidential palace and they were intent on killing Aristide. We got a plane in there and took him out. The primary mover in Port au Prince was the U.S. DCM posted to Haiti at the time, who later became Ambassador to Jamaica, Luis G. Moreno (2014-2017).

The Jamaican Prime Minister and Foreign Minister said the Americans kidnapped Aristide and Secretary Powell is lying about this and President Bush is lying about this. I went on the air and on the TV and I just blasted them. They didn't have any knowledge of what was going on and here were the real facts, and it's extremely inappropriate to call the President and Secretary of State of a neighboring country liars, that's just not acceptable, blah, blah blah. I mean, I really took after them. So the Prime Minister called me in for a meeting. My political officers thought they were going to eject me, that I was going to be declared *persona non grata* for taking them on in the papers and airwaves. When I went into this meeting, I had my political officer with me. He sat back in a corner averting his eyes the whole time. The Prime Minister was seated on one side of a long table with his entire cabinet, about twelve of them. I was sitting by myself, alone, opposite the Prime Minister and all these other ministers. My political consul was just dying in the back of the room. The Prime Minister started and what he was trying to do was to show me what evidence they had that we had kidnapped Aristide. They did have some information that could lead one to believe that Aristide was kidnapped. I didn't know if it was true and I sure wasn't going to let them get away with reaching the conclusion that I believed them. Meanwhile the Prime Minister had a folder and he was reading through it and said they had intercepted some communications between people in the Western Hemisphere department at State and the embassy in Port au Prince and some information from our sources and they just kind of put it all together to find their own conclusions. The Prime Minister spent about 40 minutes going through his book, showing me that they had all this knowledge. A lot of stuff we knew had come from Cuba. The Cubans were helping Jamaica's intel side.

So at the end of the meeting I said, "Prime Minister Patterson, I really appreciate you taking the time to inform me of your views." I was almost laughing to myself because two of the ministers, the Foreign Minister and one of the other ministers who I thought was really a smart person, knowledgeable and a straight hard worker, who were sort of my friends, never looked up from papers they were devotedly reading this whole time the Prime Minister was reading his collected intelligence. They were embarrassed and I could see that. So I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to explain your views. It doesn't change my mind but thank you for the opportunity to be here." Got up and walked out. No handshakes. That was the end.

When we got back in the car, the political officer said, "God, you're going to be PNG'd out of here." I said, "No, I'm not. The PM had to do this." I was not PNG'd and the next time the Prime Minister and I saw each other it was a slightly icy, but cordial meeting.

Q: You were there when we went into Iraq. Did you find the argument of why we should go into Iraq persuasive, and what was the Jamaican reaction?

COBB: Well number one, I sure did. And the reason I did was the same reason that Colin Powell did. We were duped. We turned out to be wrong.

Q: Yes, Colin Powell was really pushed into it.

COBB: Yes, yes, yes he was. That's really sad. In fact I know a little of the story; it's not appropriate for this record, but his record will have a taint. Not sullied really, but a taint. Because most everybody that knows anything about it knows that he was pushed into that role, and that the evidence was simply bad and believes that CIA Director George Tenet is the one who should have been exposed and hung out to dry.

In any event, yes, I believed it at the time and Jamaicans were of mixed feelings. First of all, they were extraordinarily sympathetic over 9/11. I hadn't even presented my credentials yet; as I told you that was my first day on the job and both the prime minister and the foreign minister called me and offered great sympathy and condolences and wanted to know how they could be helpful and then they had a massive candlelight memorial service for our losses. There were about twenty Jamaicans killed in the Twin Towers as well. They were very sympathetic. The hardcore socialists' non-aligned guys didn't want to be there, but they were scared about terrorism too. They were scared. So at that time they were both sympathetic and appreciative of the fact that America was going to go take care of this problem. Then as things dragged along, their attitudes changed a bit and hardened like a lot of people about that invasion. But you know, they reacted like most human beings, shocked and appalled, and sorry about the losses, and then scared for themselves. That's what most people felt. So the sentiments were quite similar to those of Americans.

The interesting thing, I think, is watching the evolution of the relationship because there are so many Jamaicans in the U.S. There are close to a million in New York, and there are maybe half a million in South Florida. They love their lives in the United States and they stay but as I told you earlier when I was talking about Father Ho Lung they're very family oriented. They remain with tight, close ties to the island and they go back and forth but they're making their living in this country, they see the benefits, they know that not all Americans are either a George Bush or a Barack Obama, I found the Jamaicans to be highly intelligent with this one crop of really, really bad guys that traffic in drugs and kill people. On the whole they're a good group of people.

Q: Yes, one could point to two products of Jamaica here: one was Barbara Watson, head of consular affairs, and the other is Colin Powell. I mean, they turn out a class product.

By the way, what did you do with the money you received for winning the best performance plan?

COBB: Well, one of the things that I wanted to be sure, to go back to, that mission performance plan was that it was a big deal for a first year amateur ambassador to win $300,000 for the embassy. The amount was eventually cut in half by the State Department, so I really only had $150,000. M asked me if I knew Kristie Kenney. She was ambassador to Ecuador at the time. They said, "Look she wrote a really good MPP, we're going to give her half the money because of the size of your two embassies." So I wrote them back and said, "Fine, just send me our check."

So I knew, as I told you, there was going to be no supervision or real interest in Jamaica from Washington. That was clear to me. They didn't care what I was doing. What I decided to do was to create my own useful program. Since I live in Florida I had gotten to know a lot of the Jamaicans who have settled largely in Broward County and West Palm Beach, just north of Miami, many also in Miami. There are quite a number who were very successful business people. They keep a pretty low profile, particularly the ones who have really made a lot of money, but I knew they were there. So I decided to do a program that I was going to call "Building Bridges - The Florida of Common Interest and Jamaican Connection." The "Building Bridges" program was designed to have one event every month for a year. I decided to do twelve events in the calendar year 2004. Three of those events were going to be big events that I was going to get my junior officers to work on. I brought in my local Jamaican colleagues, mostly on the business side, and I announced this "Building Bridges" program. I publicized the program with the embassy, and later to the public, this is what I used our money for: I hired an eligible family member to be my assistant to help make this happen, because while I had a junior officer who was very interested in it and did a great job managing various parts, he had his own job to do as well, so I used some of the money to hire this eligible family member. We focused on projects that fit in with our strategic plan. Essentially our strategic plan, like most of the countries in the region, related to health, education, economic development, trade and of course, defense and security. So I'd pick a topic and then I'd figure out what kind of forum I would use on each. I'd bring down academics and we'd meet with the top academic people and we'd talk about early childhood education, we brought in experts in AIDS, which was a big problem for Jamaica, brought in people who really were heavily into that field and got everybody talking. It was like putting together networks of people together sharing knowledge and sharing ideas.

Our biggest project was a trade show. It was a trade mission between Fort Lauderdale in Broward County, South Florida really, and Jamaica. I got Fort Lauderdale to give us the convention center at no cost. And you know, I just went around getting things given to me. The trade mission was a huge success. We had about 300 Jamaican companies go to Ft. Lauderdale and make sales and contacts with U.S. businesses.

My favorite story was about an artist who wanted to take his body of work to the trade show. At first I said, well I don't know that we would sell art; usually you're talking about business promotion of some kind and putting together this manufacturer and that

distributor, or whatever. But we decided okay, he could come. He had paintings that were small, about eight to ten inches. They were essentially framed tropical landscapes and bright colors. He brought 500 for the opening day. He sold all of them the first day. He then met a businessman from Florida who had a chain of restaurants around the United States and that man ordered 10,000 more. So the Jamaican artist went back to Jamaica for help. He was a paraplegic, and he hired about ten artists, put people to work and they made all these paintings and frames for this restaurant chain all around the United States. It's a great story.

Then there were other connections and other projects. We did a law enforcement month. I got Jeb Bush and the military guys to agree to let a vetted Jamaican intelligence officer come into JIATF South (Joint Interagency Task Force South, based at Naval Air Station Key West, Key West, Florida), which is a joint operation of our military and intelligence groups that looks out over the Caribbean, watches for bad stuff. So an agreement was signed where a well vetted Jamaican intelligence officer got to go into JIATF. They brought in officers from other countries in the Central and South American region so Jamaica got into that program.

I did this whole series of things and then at the end the Governor General came and we had a big celebration. The people of Jamaica really appreciated it. It wasn't so much actual direct results like the artist, we had some of those, but it was the trying, it was the working at it, it was putting people together, it was taking the time to do it. It wasn't a normal ambassadorial thing because normally the ambassadors don't do programs unless the Department's telling them to, and would have no money to do anything outside the normal course of events. The Jamaicans really appreciated it and ultimately they gave me the highest honor that they can give to a non-Jamaican citizen, the Order of Jamaica. Besides Colin Powell, in the twenty-seven year history of their national honors, I'm the only other American who has received an OJ.

Q: Congratulations.

COBB: Thank you. I felt very honored. This was after I left of course, 2010. The Jamaican leaders pointed to that "Building Bridges" program and all the work our embassy had put in on that unusual yearlong effort.

Q: Did you get much in the way of sort of political-type visitors? Politicians from New York or Florida? I mean, a lot of Jamaicans were registered voters in the United States.

COBB: No, not really. We had some come down. George Bush did not come but his daughters came and Jeb's sons came at different points. They came on private vacation visits and while the embassy knew about it, we were asked not to contact them and not to do anything. They just wanted private vacations. We had a couple of Black Caucus members from Congress. They were offered the opportunity to speak at events but we had very little of that. Charlie Rangel came down early in my tour and he basically told me that elected officials really couldn't afford to come to the Caribbean because most

taxpayers see such visits as boondoggles. They don't see it as somebody trying to work through whatever issues exist. And so they carefully avoided travel to the Caribbean.

Q: Was Jamaica a hangout for celebrities? I always think of Claudette Colbert, a movie actress who had a place there, it may be before your time.

COBB: You know, that's an interesting question. I became friends with Errol Flynn's wife, who still owns a very large ranch on the eastern end of Jamaica. Almost nobody came to Kingston while I was there. That didn't happen. They went to Montego Bay and Ocho Rios and they went to the really nice hotels in the nice resorts. I probably am one of the only American ambassadors in Jamaican history that did not spend a lot of time in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay. Most of the ambassadors did, but I just wasn't interested in the social activities. I just wasn't. I did go to Port Anthony some weekends to go diving.

I just was serious about the job and that really is all I did. I rarely would leave Kingston on the weekend unless there was an important event that I had to go to in another town. I would stay at the Residence and read cables about the Western Hemisphere. I'd read cables; I'd sit by my swimming pool and I'd go run. I've always been a runner and much to the surprise of my guards, they had to figure out how to deal with that. Sometimes we'd go out in the country and I would run down some country lane and they would drive behind me in the car. But the only way I could run in Kingston was at a large reservoir served by a service road running around the side. The service road was around this big reservoir but it wasn't like a track. When I first suggested that we go there, they arranged to get a cart so that one of the guards could go in a golf cart behind me while I would run around. Then they were getting kind of embarrassed so one of them started running but he could only go halfway. He would run around halfway with me and the other guard would drive the golf cart halfway the other way so that then they could meet me in the middle and change and the driving guard would become the running guard. Gradually they got into shape. One of them, who is probably fifteen years younger than me, mid to late forties, had put on some weight and he lost fifteen pounds when on my tour. He told me at the end of my tour that I was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Q: Okay tell me, how was life for the American staff at the embassy?

COBB: It's hard. Although everybody that I talked to, while they're serving there, finds it kind of difficult for reasons I'll explain, but when they look back on it they think of it as a great tour. I guess that could be true on most first tours because memories are formulated.

Well, when I was there, my predecessor had just purchased a tower that at the time was an old hotel called the Crown Plaza, which had gone into bankruptcy. The United States purchased it and thought they were going to do staff housing with the embassy on the lower levels. It had a swimming pool and tennis court and was in a fairly nice neighborhood. When we got approval to build a new embassy (one of the first after 9/11), the head of OBO came down and looked at everything and decided that that tower could be successfully used for staff but not for an embassy. There just wasn't enough room or there wasn't any way to protect it because of certain topographical features. So we

decided to build the embassy on a separate piece of property that the United States had owned for many years. It was across the city and became the site of what would become our new Embassy.

OBO decided that the tower would be staff housing. It accommodated about half the staff. While the tower was being remodeled the staff were living in various small gated condominium complexes, all of which had guards. They were pretty secure and the units were pretty nice, but it's not like you could go out of your condominium where you were living and walk down to the park, go to the shops, things that Americans are used to. You just can't do that in Kingston except in one or two pretty nice commercial areas. So our staff was somewhat confined. On the other hand, several as a group could go to the market or go to the movies, but they just couldn't have a really normal social life. They enjoyed the weekends, there were many places to go in Jamaica that are very beautiful and safe. And obviously it's an island, many learned to dive. Once you were out of Kingston or out of any urban kind of environment, Jamaica was very beautiful and safe.

Now the DCM had a very nice house and our RSO (Regional Security Officer) had a nice house, although he lost his roof in the hurricane. When the Consul General came, he had a nice house. Within two or three months after I left, the new embassy was finished, OBO sold the lovely old embassy compound where I had lived and purchased a new modern residence closer to the new embassy, eliminating an hour to two hours of driving. My residence was only nine miles from the old Embassy. It was a beautiful ten acre spot, trees and grass, separate guest quarters, and swimming pool. The house was relatively modest but it was comfortable and adequate. Driving in normal working hours was tricky. If I left the house at 7:00 a.m., the traffic on the two lane road going down to my embassy would already be so heavy it would take at least an hour and a half to go nine miles. So I always left by 6:30 a.m., no later, 6:00 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. and I'd be at work in thirty minutes. My guys were never late to pick me up and we'd beat the traffic. Coming home I would never go home at 5:00 p.m. because it was the same thing in reverse. So usually I would leave the embassy around 6:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. unless there was a function I had to go to, which of course, was pretty often.

I do remember that when I was preparing to leave Post in 2005 staff members would stop by and say something (usually nice). One of our IT staff members came in and he said to me, "Ambassador Cobb, I just want to tell you that I really admire you." And I said, "Well now Robert, why?" And he said, "because I had to come to work at 5:00 a.m. every morning and I saw when you came in every morning and it was always between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. You were the first person there and I saw when you left at night." So he said, "I knew you were really paying attention to the job." That I really appreciated, but, I thought to myself...oh my God, what else have I done that they've seen that I didn't know about!

Q: Today is March 15, 2013, the Ides of March, with Susan Cobb. Sue, unless you have something else about your time as ambassador to Jamaica, we were going to talk about what you did afterwards?

COBB: The only thing I wanted to add was a family tradition. When someone has been off on an exciting trip, like traveling in Africa or Asia or wherever, all questions end with. What was the best and what was the worst?

I thought about that. This is with respect to my service in Jamaica. I wanted to say what those were in a very summary way.

The worst was September 11, 2001, which we talked about and for all the reasons and ramifications thereof. Another bad time was the turmoil about Aristide's departure from Haiti, given the fact that Jamaica and Haiti are so close and the United States is involved diplomatically with both countries.

The best part, what stays with me, is the hundreds of times that I stood beside the American flag representing 330 million American people. It was always a moving experience and just the highest privilege imaginable. I could also delve into what I learned from the ambassadorial position but it was extremely positive and clearly personally educational and lessons learned useful for the rest of my life.

Q: And what were your impressions over time of the school for ambassadors.

COBB: Yes, I have lots of impressions on that. I'm quite active in the Council of American Ambassadors, which is composed of non-career retirees. We had a meeting here this week that drew me back to DC. John Negroponte spoke and Tom Shannon was up from Brazil and he spoke and so my old pals were around. We discussed the good and the bad about Ambassador seminars. I come out very positive but recommend that more than two weeks be demanded of our new designees before completion of nominations.

Q: As you left Jamaica, what did you see for the future of Jamaica?

COBB: The recurrent problem that Jamaica has had over the years, which they have been basically really unable to solve despite help from a number of countries, a number of multilateral organizations, specifically the World Bank and the IMF, is the huge debt that the country has carried for many years ranging up and down certainly above 100, 150 such heavy debt means that what resources that were available had to be put into paying interest on debt and not into improving the infrastructure and other social aspects such as education, and healthcare and infrastructure being perhaps the best examples.

After I left Jamaica I read a study that the World Bank had done on the wealth of nations. It was about 250 pages analyzing what comprises the wealth of nations. I condensed it to about three pages for an article that was published in the *Ambassadors' Review,* a magazine that the Council of American Ambassadors sponsors. Because it is so revealing how extremely critical infrastructure and education are, primarily education and strong institutions, how critical those two elements are for building the wealth of nations. Jamaica has hampered itself with this deep debt. I would hope that the country's leader will address and work hard on that until they get to a better balanced financial situation.

The other strong take away is how really terrific the people of Jamaica are. They have some super smart and well educated leaders at their universities and in their businesses and in government. They are not only extremely capable individuals, they are just and humane. One doesn't get that impression if you read about Jamaica in the newspaper. Print media has two focuses, tourism and violence.

Q: Yes, that's the impression I have always had.

COBB: I found the people to be warm and caring, helpful and deep down inside, most loved the United States. The media always uses the anti-U.S. comments.

Q: You have maintained generous ties with Jamaica since you left it. Could you talk a bit about what you have been doing?

COBB: Yes. A predecessor of mine, Ambassador Glen Holden, who was posted to Jamaica at the time Chuck and I were in Iceland, and his wife, Gloria, had something of a similar feeling that we did: these are terrific nearby neighbors and terrific people. Glen was instrumental in starting and maintaining a charitable organization called The American Friends of Jamaica (AFJ) for those who had an interest in financially supporting various aspects of Jamaican society and the country's development.

Glen jumped into the American Friends of Jamaica and was president for fifteen years. When he stepped down, I took over as president (in 2007). Of course it was a fundraising organization, but by living there we knew that they had good leadership, good accounting policies and great potential. We focused on three areas: health, education and economic development. The organization is now thirty years old, and Glen energized it mightily. I continue to do my best as president. We have grown AFJ and it has been rewarding.

Q: How important is Jamaica to the United States?

COBB: I believe most analysts would say that the importance in the last maybe thirty years has been in cooperation in identifying and reducing drug trafficking out of Central and South America into the United States. For some time there was quite a lot of traffic going through Jamaica on planes and go fast boats. We know that if we clamp down in one area, the dealers move to another area, which we call is the bubble effect. Push the balloon and the bubble will move from side to side. The Caribbean has a tremendous number of islands, not just the 700 of the Bahamian nation and the many around the edges of Cuba and Jamaica and in the eastern Caribbean. There are just a lot of places people can go to hide out and where it's in many cases to the advantage of the local population to help facilitate the traffic.

In the last fifteen or twenty years Jamaica has been extremely cooperative with the United States in the prevention of transit of drugs.

When 9/11 came along, we were concerned about how else these smuggler routes could be used. Much of the drug trading started to move to Central America and Mexico

because the United States put a lot of money and a lot of pressure on the Caribbean countries to stop the activity. Nonetheless, it was very apparent to everybody that there are routes that avoid the presence of law enforcement. Naturally, at least from my perspective sitting in Kingston, there was concern about what else could be smuggled into the United States through this region.

Jamaica has a very limited but quite professional military group. The JDF is small but they are honest and they are capable within the limit of their structural capacity. They have cooperated over the years extremely positively with the United States. Domestic law enforcement was not helpful, and took advantage of various opportunities that arose for personal benefit, but the military has always been close to SOUTHCOM and useful in dealing with the Central American, South American, and Caribbean region.

Q: There is this movement that has been going on with Chavez and Escobar and others in Latin America which has a strong tinge of anti-Americanism. Do you see Jamaica falling under the sway? Do you see that catching?

COBB: No longer being ambassador, I would say this speaking from personal observation.

Jamaica has a history of what they refer to as a social democratic government and at various periods in time the social becomes more pronounced than the democratic, although overall, they have a strong democracy. One of the things I believe that will preclude Jamaica falling within the grasp of the left leaning Chavez types is that they are extremely independent people, with a vigorous press. Their spirit, I believe, and their partnership with the U.S., including their large diaspora in the U.S. would not allow them to fall under direct dominion of a socialist or communist. Working in favor of succumbing to an extension of Chavez or Fidel type is the burdensome debt to GDP ratio and heavy energy demands.

Having said that, the current government leaders make a point of retaining very friendly ties with both Cuba and Venezuela, in particular. The latter developed when the authoritarian Chavez came into power. Remember there was a military coup against Chavez in 2002 and the United States demonstrated quite openly that we wanted him out of there and we didn't want U.S. allies supporting him.

More importantly, Chavez started his campaign to garner Caribbean support for his alpha type oligarian revolution was PetroCaribe. He set up a program whereby Jamaica was able to get sufficient fuel for their energy needs at a very much diminished cost. They have to import something, so Chavez helped with that and therefore created a certain kind of dependency. The PetroCaribe story is still unfolding in Jamaica due to Chavez's death and due to the Venezuelans' desire of the citizens to keep more of their wealth at home. The issue is under discussion in Venezuela and certainly under discussion in the other countries that benefit from PetroCaribe.

Q: What about students? Are they coming to the United States or are visas a problem?

COBB: I would say that a legitimate student coming out of Jamaica to the United States does not really have a visa problem, although it takes a little longer to process because one of the things in Jamaica is, you just can't tell much by looking at level one. You've got to go beneath the surface, look a little closer. Also, students simply can't afford, for the most part, to spend a year in the United States. Good students would like to come here but have obstacles. Many go to Great Britain, which has for a long time made access much easier for the Jamaicans, which is a Commonwealth country.

Q: What about the Miami connections, Florida? Is this sort of the second capital?

COBB: There is a bigger population of Jamaicans in and around New York City. One of the prime examples I use is Colin Powell who grew up in the Bronx, and went to the City College of New York. That was the original sort of settling in the States by Jamaican parents. Who could find jobs and get their children into good schools.

There has been a fair amount of a migration from Jamaica to south Florida. Many of the Jamaicans who were coming here looking for jobs and opportunities for education for their children, actually could not afford Miami and began moving a little bit north and a little bit west. So the second largest congregation of Jamaicans is currently in Broward County, the county immediately north of Miami Dade and in the south of Palm Beach County. The Jamaican population is not along the coast because of the cost but in the western part of Broward County where there were opportunities and a little less cost to travel to jobs in Fort Lauderdale or Palm Beach or down to Miami. At this point, there are probably something like 400,000 Jamaicans that have come to Florida. They do make a difference. They learned from the Cubans, to group themselves together and determine what was in the group's best interests and have become something of a political force. The Jamaicans are not as effective as the Cubans partially because of sheer numbers and partially due to their independent nature.

The number of Jamaicans here in Florida made it worthwhile for us, both Florida and the U.S. administration, to pay attention. I did a number of programs to try to help in creating business contacts and trade, for example. To help get both Jamaican and United States laws aligned so if there were nurses available in Jamaica they could come to work in the United States. We had cultural exchanges, educational exchanges, trade exchanges, military exchanges, and arranged law enforcement communications networks. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement had somebody from Jamaica who was working with them and with people inside Jamaica that previously had not had the ability to do so. There were a lot of connections, a lot of experience. Some worked well, some didn't.

Q: Do Jamaicans have much clout? Do you sense Americans of Jamaican origin voting as a bloc or is this just not done.

COBB: Not so much. The Jamaicans will tend to get together for social purposes and for charitable purposes. There are several organizations of Jamaican Americans, including

the one I mentioned, the American Friends of Jamaica. There are a number of second generation Jamaicans in the United States who really want to help their country. Jamaicans have a deep, deep love and loyalty to Jamaica and they do get together for purposes of trying to raise money. They usually don't raise vast amounts because most of them are still making their own way in the States. At this time, to my knowledge, they don't gather for political purposes. But I have no doubt that will come.

Q: I know, for example, a person to whom I have the highest regard was Barbara Watson who came from a family closely allied to the Powell family. She is now deceased but she was assistant secretary for consular affairs and ambassador to Malaysia and an absolutely first rate person.

COBB: Understand. Some people say that with the character of the Jamaicans, you will see the best of humanity. As we mentioned before, you will also see the worst of the worst-who pull out a gun and shoot you if you cross them.
I would also mention on this subject, the Dean of New York University's Stern School of Business, which is one of the top ten in the United States, who is a relatively young Jamaican who came up through the academic channels here in the United States. Being Dean of the NYU business school is a major, major academic position. You see stories like this often. They don't come to light if somebody does good work but they don't have a high level title. You don't see it. But if you have lived in Jamaica you are attuned to it.

Q: You mentioned the Jamaican gangs. For a long time the media extensively covered the ruthless Jamaican gangs in the United States. These were really very scary people.

COBB: That is true. There is no question gangs still exist in Jamaica and gangs can make more money if they can get themselves operating in the United States. It is a very bad element, so it is a problem for us. The Jamaican gangs are notorious, rightly, because they have earned their reputation. They are bad guys. It is a problem for Jamaica and a problem for the United States.

Q: Did you run across Jamaican gangs? Were they a problem in the relations with gangs in New York and gangs in Jamaica?

COBB: I can't say I personally got too deeply involved in that because the United States has its various agencies at each mission around the world that are charged with managing law enforcement. We had some very good people. They would only report to me on gang activity if it was a threat to the United States in a way more than normal or if it were a threat to an American in Jamaica. I would definitely be in the loop.

I am talking about our intelligence agencies, our various law enforcement people, whether they are Marshals Service or the DEA. We had people who were specialized in knowing intimately about these things and they are directed to bring it to the ambassador's attention if it is something unusual or of a serious nature.

Did I have direct contact with them? Not that I really knew, but I know there were a couple of occasions where I would be somewhere in the country with the assigned drivers and guards and there were areas that they just didn't want me to go near. They would simply say that or just make sure it didn't happen. I know I met, in the normal course of socializing, some of the leaders of the gangs who when they get prosperous enough pass themselves off as successful businessmen.

Q: Oh boy. Other than Jamaica, have you kept up with international politics in the political arena?

COBB: I absolutely keep up from both the political perspective and the policy perspective. I have been for a long time a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. I have been very involved here in Miami with the University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Study. I am a member of the Council of American Ambassadors. From my perspective, the best bi-partisan policy institute is the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). I was honored to be asked onto their board, and find it totally fascinating. I read a lot. I really care about U.S. policy and I care about governance.

I really don't want to go into the political side because once you are sworn in as a United States ambassador, you are representing all our citizens. You darn well better have your head screwed on straight.

Q: Again, you can duck this question but being there in Florida, do you see a change in the Cuban American situation? It has always sort of been portrayed and I think quite rightly so, as an extremely cohesive, not really anti-Castro but a very conservative government. Do you see this beginning to split or not?

COBB: Those Cubans who came to the United States early on, and suffered in the process, with guys out in the farm lands with guns to get them off their property and force them to leave, couldn't even let them go back in their houses and pick up a pair of shoes. They were ruthlessly sent off their ranches and homes and of course had no choice but to leave the island extremely resentful. They are definitely anti-Castro.

That would be about your and my generation; middle age, business people or homeowners, or farmers who had their lives taken away for them. They cannot deny being very resentful. They are, of course, older now and there is not only a second generation, there is a third generation of Cubans coming along who don't have the level of attachment to Cuba or the experiences that their elders had. Therefore, they tend to look at things differently, so a lot has changed. The Cuban immigrants that are let's say second or third generation, are like everybody else in the United States. They want what is good for them from our government under our current laws. People like to get things from the government and they are among them. That means they are not necessarily thinking about going back and getting the ancestral land back in Cuba, nor are they

thinking about the consequences of everybody receiving everything they want from our government.

Is there a split? There certainly is. There are voices that would not have existed fifteen years ago articulating concepts that are foreign to the first generation. Is it monolithic? The answer is no, it is not. I think early on it was but even within the Cuban community in Miami now there are differences of opinion about United States policy, about Cuban policy. It is not monolithic. People look at some of the elected officials and think Cubans must all be conservative, must be from the whole genre that existed fifteen years ago and it is not true.

The Mexicans at this point in time, in my judgment, have much more influence in United States politics than people recognize and probably than the Cubans do. It is true that the Cuban representatives that are in our Congress are very strong people. They carry weight based on their own intellectual capacity, but the truth is, it is the voters who have made a difference here and in national elections, and most are not from the Chavez period.

Look at Miami. This place is made up of Nicaraguans, Salvadorians, Haitians, Venezuelans, Colombians, Brazilians, Cubans and others. At this point in time with Venezuela going through its upheavals, we probably have as many Venezuelans here as Cubans but they don't accumulate, they're not loud in the same way. Most of them don't want to be identified as being Latin, Caribbean and different. It is very complicated as you can well imagine. The melting pot here and in states along our Southern borders gets complicated.

Q: What do you see yourself doing now?

COBB: I would start with the fact I am an officer and director of the companies Cobb Partners run, but I really don't have to spend a great deal of time on that because it is what my husband has done all of his life. It is the first time in my life since my two sons started junior high school that I haven't had either a job teaching, in the legal field, or in an appointed position. I am filling the need for myself with the organization such as I just spoke of, CSIS in particular. It is a very, very important bipartisan group, as you know. Trustees are extremely thoughtful, high intellect, a careful balance and I really love the organization. I try to go to Washington whenever there is, not only a Trustee meeting, but for some of the programs because I just think they are valuable advisors, not only to the government but to those who want depth and details. So CSIS is very important to me at the moment.

I am on a bank board, I think it is the largest homegrown bank in the state of Florida. We have over 100 branches here in Florida and we are expanding here and in New York. It is a very exciting, intellectually stimulating board. I continue with my charitable activities, not only in Jamaica but my husband and I have for many, many years been involved with the organizations that we feel add value here in our state like United Way and Goodwill Industries. Chuck continues with his businesses and his focus on trade initiatives of various kinds and his long service as a Trustee of the University of Miami.

I guess I can answer that basically my focus is on the boards, whether it's a public company like my bank or a private company like some of our own personal companies or charitable organizations.

In this kind of thing you can spend as much or as little time as you want, but I have never been able to be in an organization at one of the higher levels and not really work at it. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Q: I can see that you are obviously not a person that's going to just sit there and bask in the sun.

COBB: That doesn't seem to happen.

I also happen to love skiing. I cut out time at Christmas, in the spring, and in the summer to get out to the mountains to take any one of my seven grandchildren who might be available to go play with me in the mountains. I really enjoy that, although I am not as strong or as fast as I used to be. I still love it and I get out there and just do it.

Q: That's great. I appreciate the time you have given ADST for this interview. It's been fun.

COBB: It was an honor and privilege to serve in the challenging roles I inherited throughout my life, particularly the role of United States Ambassador. I worked hard in each job and I'd like to think I added value along the way.

End of interview